UNDERSTANDING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS IN MALANG CITYABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT THE PAUD LEVEL

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to get an overview of how early childhood educators understand the merdeka curriculum and how educators were capable of implementing the curriculum in their respective classes. The research method used was descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. The research instruments used were field notes, interview guides, and documents related to the implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the early childhood education level. The research subjects were teachers and school principals in Malang City. Data analysis used was the Miles and Huberman technique. The results of the study showed that there were still many early childhood educators in Malang who did not fully understand the implementation of the merdeka curriculum yet.

Keywords: Early Childhood Teachers, Implementation, merdeka Curriculum, PAUD Level

INTRODUCTION

Designing and implementing the right curriculum has an important role in forming a solid foundation for children's development during the learning process. In Indonesia, the merdeka Curriculum policy at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level was introduced and implemented since 2020 as a framework that emphasizes the importance of child-centered learning (student center). The implementation of the merdeka Curriculum is based on the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia No. 56/M/2022 concerning the application of the curriculum in the context of learning recovery(Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022), who want curriculum development with the principle of diversification in accordance with the conditions of the education unit, regional potential, and children so that the education unit is able to recover from learning loss due to certain conditions. One

of the conditions referred to was the result of the Covid 19 pandemic which causes learning to be done online or study from home. Such learning turns out to have a number of impacts on educators, students, and parents. The results of the study showed that: (1) Educators have difficulty communicating with children in the process of learning and cultivating character, difficulty completing curriculum targets in one semester, unable to see actual child development achievements, as well as difficulties communicating with parents to monitor their children's learning progress. (2) In terms of students, it is difficult for children to focus on listening to information on learning material provided by the teacher, it is easier to feel bored following learning, and they prefer conventional learning, which of course has an impact on the child's social-emotional condition. (3) Parents find it difficult to accompany children while studying from home because they do not understand the learning material delivered by the teacher, as well as limited time accompanying children when studying from home (which of course has an impact on the social emotional condition of the child.

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The learning concept offered in the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level is to give teachers more freedom to design and carry out learning activities independently oriented towards the concept of differentiation, open ended play which is presented through problem-based learning and project-based learning. based learning). The goal is to give children a more engaging and personalized learning experience that fits their needs. The results of the research show that the application of open ended play in early childhood learning is able to stimulate the emergence of higher-order thinking skills, which include the ability to think imaginatively, think creatively, think critically, think symbolically and abstractly (Sutama, et al., 2021)(Sutama, Astuti, Pramono, Nur'Aini, & Sangadah, 2022) (Davies, 2019) (Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie, Moore, & Boyd, 2014)).

Meanwhile, problem- based learning helps children think critically and creatively to find the right solution to overcome the problems presented by the teacher through asking questions that can stimulate the emergence of answers that have never been studied before, and allows children to collaborate and communicate with friends. in their group or in their class about the chosen solution ((Sutama, Astuti, Pramono, Nur'Aini, & Sangadah, 2022) (Sutama, Gonadi, Astuti, & Anisa, 2022) (Sutama, Anisa, Astuti, Sukma, & Wahyudi, 2022)). The application of project learning implemented in the merdeka curriculum also allows children to work together in groups to make appropriate projects using the concept of open ended play as a form of implementing the problem solving they have chosen. When working with peers, children will interact and negotiate to choose and defend their respective arguments. Children were also obliged to convey the results of their projects to friends from different groups ((Sutama, Anisa, & Astuti, Improving Higher-Order Thinking Skills Through The Implementation of Open-Ended Play for Children Aged 5-6 Years, 2021)(Munawati, 2019)(Mulyaningsih & Itaristanti, 2018)). Such conditions indicate the emergence of several abilities that were expected to be possessed by children in the 4.0 era, namely the ability to collaborate and communicate, in addition to the ability to think critically and creatively (Septikasary & Frasandy, 2018) (Sani, 2019) (Zubaidah, 2016)).

The implementation of the merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level will work well if educators have adequate pedagogical competence regarding the implementation of the merdeka Curriculum. Pedagogic competence is the teacher's ability to manage learning which includes understanding students, designing and implementing learning, evaluating learning outcomes, and developing students to actualize their various potentials (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005). Based on the results of observations and initial interviews on the implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level in Malang City, the researcher wanted to do further research on "The Understanding of PAUD Teachers in Malang City in Implementing the merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level" with a research focus including: (1) Understanding of City PAUD Teachers Malang about the concept of the merdeka Curriculum at the Early Childhood Education Level. (2) Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in implementing the merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level. (3) The impact arising from the implementation of the merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new approach that is being implemented in schools in Indonesia. This curriculum is designed to improve the quality of learning, one of which is at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level which emphasizes the importance of giving freedom to teachers when designing and implementing learning according to children's needs and local wisdom. At the PAUD level, the merdeka curriculum has several objectives and benefits, namely:(1) Give children a more personalized learning experience. (2) Involve children to be active in learning. (3) Building connections with the local environment and culture. (4) Develop children's critical thinking skills (TrendGuru, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum currently implemented in Indonesia has flexible characteristics, is competency-based, and focuses on developing character and soft skills according to the profile of Pancasila students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). This is also in line with the curriculum applied to early childhood education, which has the following characteristics: (1) Flexibility: related to the autonomy possessed by teachers and students in controlling the learning process (Government, 2021). (2) Experience-based learning, children were given the opportunity to explore, experiment, and reflect on the experiences they experience so that learning becomes more relevant and meaningful for children or children as centers of learning. According to Pritchett and Beatty (2015), the merdeka Curriculum has the potential to encourage children to have control over their learning. To be competent, children need to have the opportunity to learn to regulate themselves in the learning process (Sahlberg, 2000). (3) The Merdeka Curriculum in PAUD emphasizes a comprehensive (holistic) learning approach, so that it can develop optimally in all aspects of life. (4) The merdeka Curriculum recognizes that every child has different uniqueness and intelligence. Therefore, in its implementation, This curriculum places an emphasis on a child-centered approach to learning. (5) Real Experience as a Learning Resource. (6) Collaboration and Social Interaction. (7) Local Wisdom and Culture.

The implementation of the merdeka Curriculum in PAUD will run well if it is supported by the mastery of pedagogic competencies. A professional educator needs competencies that can support his teaching activities. This is in line with the expert opinion which states that "Competencies were those tasks, skills, attitudes, values, and

appreciation that were deemed critical to successful employment"(Crunkilton, 1992). The competence of PAUD teachers includes pedagogic competence, professional competence, and personal competence. These three competencies were interrelated, so that in the learning process based on the merdeka curriculum the teacher also uses these three competencies when carrying out the learning process. One manifestation of pedagogic competence is the readiness of teachers to develop curricula and adapt them to the needs and development of children ((Eliza, Husna, Utami, & Putri, 2022) (Indarta, et al., 2022)). While the form of professional competence is having the ability to collaborate well with colleagues and parents in teaching and conducting research or good knowledge and policies (Bouckaert & Kools, 2018).

A distinctive feature of the implementation of the merdeka curriculum is the stimulation of the emergence of elements of religious values and character, identity, as well as literacy and STEAM which were reflected in intra-curricular learning and were also expected to stimulate the emergence of the Pancasila Student Profile which is packaged in project learning. Project learning is expected to stimulate high-level thinking skills and also facilitate differentiation in each student. Differentiated learning according to Breaux and Magee (2010); Fox & Hoffman (2011) & Tomlinson (2017) is a teaching and learning process in which students can learn subject matter according to their abilities, interests, and needs so as to minimize feelings of frustration and failure that can arise in their learning experiences.(Wahyuningsih, MMujiwati, Hilmiyah, Kusumawardani, & Sari, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to gain a deeper understanding of PAUD teachers' understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level in Malang City. Data collection techniques were carried out using observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Interviews would be conducted with selected PAUD teachers to explore their understanding and experience regarding the implementation of the merdeka Curriculum. Classroom observations were made to observe the implementation of the curriculum in the field and to assess the integration of the concepts of differentiated learning, project-based learning, and problem-based learning packaged in open ended play, the application of scaffolding in the learning process, and how the teacher's learning assessment was carried out. Related document,

such as teaching modules or Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), and teaching materials will be collected and analyzed. The data collection instrument is the researcher himself, because the researcher is directly involved in collecting data in the field. During the data collection process, researchers used observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documents related to the implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level. The observation sheet arrangement was as follows:

Table 1. Observation sheet grid

Variable	Sub Variable	Indicator	No. Item
Learning Planning	Teaching Module/RPPH	- Teaching Module Identity (School Name, Class Name,Semester, Week, Topic/Sub Topic - Learning Outcomes - Teaching Materials - Media/Sources/Tools and Materials - Learning methods - Sub Topic/ Activity - Concept Map - Assessment Plan - Project plans	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
Implementation of Learning	- Initial activity	- Regards - Prayer - Presence - Apperception - Introduction to Topics/Sub Topics	9,10,11,12,13
	- Core activities	- Scientific Process - Problem Based Learning - Project Based Learning - Scaffolding - Implementation of Open Ended Play - Differentiated Learning - Literacy, Numeracy and STEAM Concepts	14,15,16,17,18,19,20
	- End activities		21,22,23,24,25

Variable	Sub Variable	Indicator	No. Item
		- Recalling - Moral message - Follow-up - Prayer - Regards	
Implementation of Learning Assessment	- Formative Assessment	- Process Assessment - Final Assessment	26,27

Table 2. Interview Guidelines Grid

Variable	Sub Variable	Indicator	No. Item
Implementation of the merdeka Curriculum atthe PAUD level	- merdeka Curriculum Document - Implementation - Evaluation - Supporting and Inhibiting Factors - The Impact of Implementing the merdeka Curriculum	- Proof of Ownership ofmerdeka Curriculum documents - Evidence of the Implementati onof the merdeka Curriculum - Evidence ofmerdeka Curriculu m Assessme nt - Supportin gfactors - Obstacle factor - Impact of Implementin g Curriculum	1,2,3,4,5,6

The research subjects were teachers and principals of PAUD schools in Malang City. The research would be conducted in Malang City which is located in East Java, Indonesia. Malang City was chosen as the research location because of the diversity of PAUD and the availability of PAUD institutions that implement the merdeka Curriculum. The population of this research was PAUD teachers in Malang City who were involved in the implementation of the merdeka Curriculum, the research

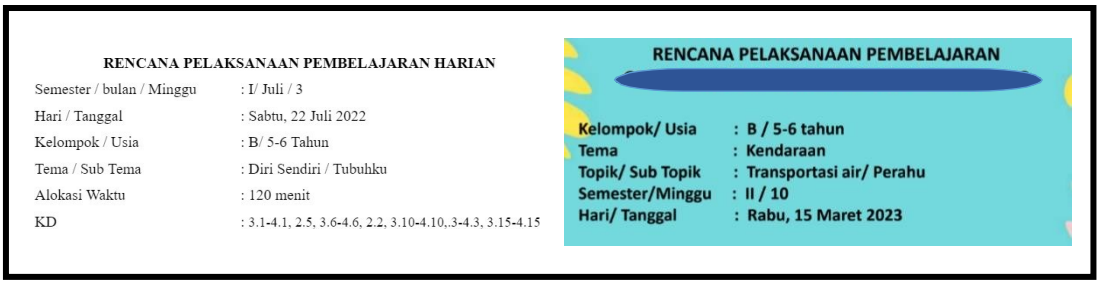
sample would be chosen randomly. The data collected in this study would be analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique which allows researchers to have flexibility during the analysis process and obtain field notes. Data would be analyzed and arranged systematically according to categories based on research focus so that connectivity between data and research objectives can be found. The data analysis process would involve several steps, namely data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The implementation of this research was carried out in all PAUD clusters in 5 sub-districts in Malang City. Based on data analysis on the understanding of PAUD teachers in Malang City in implementing the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level, it was described based on the aspects of lesson planning, implementation of learning, and learning assessment. If it related to aspects of lesson planning, it was analyzed from curriculum documents, especially in the teaching modules or RPPH used in each PAUD institution in 5 sub-districts in Malang City. If viewed from the identity indicators of the module or RPPH, most PAUD institutions have written the complete identity of the module or RPPH, but the selection of themes or topics and sub-themes or sub-topics has not changed from the concept of themes and sub-themes used in the 2013 curriculum for PAUD. (Figure 1). The learning objectives used also cannot accurately measure the learning achievements that can be achieved by children, only a small number of PAUD institutions have implemented Bloom's theory in formulating learning objectives (Figures 2a and 2b). In most of the module or RPPH documents, teaching materials were not included, but there were also module documents or RPPH that include a concept map of the material to be learned by children (Figure 3). There were also several modules or RPPHs that were appropriate for writing teaching materials, namely not using verbs as shown in Figure 4. Only a small number of Teaching modules or RPPHs did not include media, learning resources, or tools and materials. Teachers have used technology-based, nature-based media, and have also used loose parts. Of the 70 teaching module documents or RPPH analyzed, all of them did not include learning methods. There were still many who have not written down an assessment plan/assessment of child development achievements in teaching modules or

RPPH.



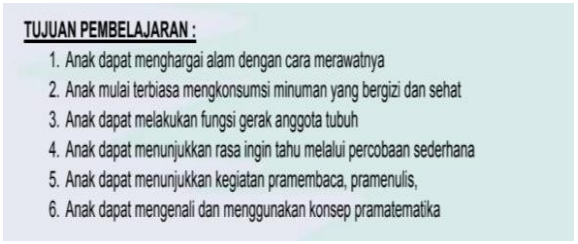
RENCANA PELAKSANAAN PEMBELAJARAN HARIAN

Semester / bulan / Minggu	: I/ Juli / 3
Hari / Tanggal	: Sabtu, 22 Juli 2022
Kelompok / Usia	: B/ 5-6 Tahun
Tema / Sub Tema	: Diri Sendiri / Tubuhku
Alokasi Waktu	: 120 menit
KD	: 3.1-4.1, 2.5, 3.6-4.6, 2.2, 3.10-4.10,.3-4.3, 3.15-4.15

RENCANA PELAKSANAAN PEMBELAJARAN

Kelompok/ Usia	: B / 5-6 tahun
Tema	: Kendaraan
Topik/ Sub Topik	: Transportasi air/ Perahu
Semester/Minggu	: II / 10
Hari/ Tanggal	: Rabu, 15 Maret 2023

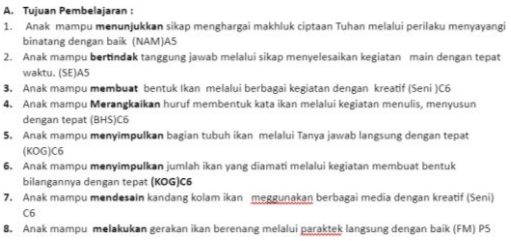
Figure 1. Teaching Modules or RPPH which themes/topics and sub-themes/sub-topics do not conform tothe concept of the Merdeka Curriculum (still using the 2013 Curriculum)



TUJUAN PEMBELAJARAN :

1. Anak dapat menghargai alam dengan cara merawatnya
2. Anak mulai terbiasa mengkonsumsi minuman yang bergizi dan sehat
3. Anak dapat melakukan fungsi gerak anggota tubuh
4. Anak dapat menunjukkan rasa ingin tahu melalui percobaan sederhana
5. Anak dapat menunjukkan kegiatan pramembaca, pramenulis,
6. Anak dapat mengenali dan menggunakan konsep pramatematika

Figure 2a. Learning Objectives that werenot yet based on Bloom's theory



A. Tujuan Pembelajaran :

1. Anak mampu **menunjukkan** sikap menghargai makhluk ciptaan Tuhan melalui perilaku menyayangi binatang dengan baik (NAM)A5
2. Anak mampu **bertindak** tanggung jawab melalui sikap menyelesaikan kegiatan main dengan tepat waktu. (SE)A5
3. Anak mampu **membuat** bentuk Ikan melalui berbagai kegiatan dengan kreatif (Seni)C6
4. Anak mampu **Merangkaikan** huruf membentuk kata ikan melalui kegiatan menulis, menyusun dengan tepat (BHS)C6
5. Anak mampu **menyimpulkan** bagian tubuh ikan melalui Tanya jawab langsung dengan tepat (KOG)C6
6. Anak mampu **menyimpulkan** jumlah ikan yang diamati melalui kegiatan membuat bentuk bilangannya dengan tepat **(KOG)C6**
7. Anak mampu **mendesain** kandang kolam ikan meggunakan berbagai media dengan kreatif (Seni) C6
8. Anak mampu **melakukan** gerakan ikan berenang melalui praktek langsung dengan baik (FM) P5

Figure 2b. Learning Objectives whichhave been based on Bloom's theory

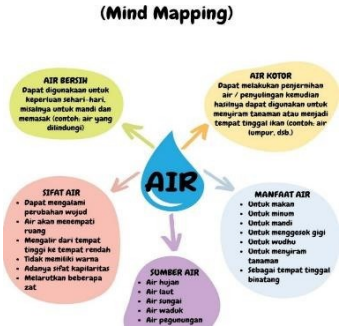


Figure 3. Concept Map/Mind MappingLearning Materials

B. Materi Pembelajaran

1. Ikan Mas
2. Warna ikan mas
3. Bagian tubuh ikan mas
   - Kepala
   - Sirip
   - Ekor
   - Insang
4. Cara bergerak Ikan mas : Berenang
5. Tempat hidup ikan mas : Kolam ikan, akuarium

Figure 4. Learning materials that wereappropriate

With regard to the implementation of learning, the completeness of the learning steps has been carried out by the teacher, starting from the opening activities, core activities, and closing activities. However, when examined in terms of the application of a scientific approach, the application of problem-based learning, the application of project learning through open ended play, the application of learning for literacy, numeracy and STEAM mastery, the application of differentiation learning, the application of scaffolding in the learning process and the application of process assessment the results were varied and will be described one by one in more detail.

(1) Application of a scientific approach, not all PAUD institutions in Malang City used a scientific approach in the merdeka curriculum-based learning process. In some PAUD institutions that have implemented this scientific approach, learning activities became more active, the teacher explained learning material by relating concrete situations in life and provides trigger questions with the 5W + 1H concept so that it could bring out children's high-level thinking skills through problem-exploring activities, because it raised various answers from children who were sometimes outside from the teacher's guess. (2) The application of problem learning was still not optimally implemented by PAUD teachers in Malang City, this could be seen that there were still many PAUD teachers when delivering learning material to children not based on problems that occur around the child, determining the problems raised in learning can basically be associated with a sub-theme or sub-topic that has been determined by the teacher, the use of problem-based learning could also be used as a teacher's reference in formulating what projects children can make. (3) The application of project learning through open ended play seems to be still not optimal because the teacher's understanding of project learning was still not comprehensive. This was supported by the results of interviews with several teachers and school principals who explained that "teachers still don't really understand the concept of project learning, whether individual projects were allowed, or group projects were allowed, and whether project activities and outcomes must always have different results". (4) The application of learning to master literacy, numeracy, and STEAM application, from the results of observations and interviews, it could be seen from the teacher's point of view in providing activities to stimulate literacy, numeracy, and STEAM must be separated from project learning activities, thus giving the impression that merdeka curriculum-based learning activities at the PAUD level were no different from learning activities atPAUD using the 2013 curriculum or even its predecessor curriculum. (5) The application of differentiation learning was still not well implemented. The observation results showed that the teacher only provides various play tools and materials as well as various activities that children could choose according to their interests, but these play tools and materials and activities were not related to each other to support project activities that were in accordance with the sub-themes or sub-topics at the time. That. This is also reinforced by the results of interviews with several teachers that according to him, differentiation learning is a variety of activities that children can choose according to their wishes. (6) The application of scaffolding in learning plays an important role in optimizing the ability to think critically and creatively in children, but unfortunately, based on observations of the implementation of learning in 70 PAUD clusters in Malang City, there were still not many teachers who understand the meaning of scaffolding, so there were still many who do not. apply it in the learning process. So when children were actively

completing their assignments or were focusing on making projects with their friends, not a few teachers just ask "what were you making, son" and then document it. Teachers didn't give a foothold to children so that the potential for higher order thinking is not explored. The implementation of scaffolding is actually related to the implementation of the learning process assessment. When the teacher did not carry out scaffolding, the teacher did not know how far the child's development has been achieved that day, it was very possible that many children's abilities could be observed when the teacher applies scaffolding. So the teacher could simultaneously carry out process assessment. If the overall assessment results the teacher has done it. it is very possible that many children's abilities can be observed when the teacher applies scaffolding. So the teacher could simultaneously carry out process assessment. If the overall assessment results the teacher has done it. it was very possible that many children's abilities could be observed when the teacher applies scaffolding. So the teacher could simultaneously carry out process assessment. If the overall assessment results the teacher has done it. According to the results of the interviews, the obstacles that became the inhibiting factor for PAUD teachers in Malang City in implementing the merdeka curriculum at their institutions were (1) Differences in the delivery of material about the merdeka curriculum every time they attended training on the merdeka curriculum, thus making the teachers still confused about understanding the right concepts about the curriculum independence at the early childhood level. (2) Did not fully understand problem-based learning, project-based learning, open ended play, scaffolding, and how to plan and carry out assessments. (3) Did not understand how effective techniques were for exploring the emergence of higher order thinking in children. (4) Lack of support for facilities and infrastructure from institutions and parents to implement this curriculum, because according to the teachers and principals the implementation of the merdeka curriculum requires careful preparation and a lot of funds. The factors that supported the implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level according to the interview results were (1) The teacher's desire to provide innovation in learning and the willingness to continue to develop themselves. (2) Support from the local education office to facilitate training on implementing the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level. (3) in several institutions parental support is a support system for the implementation of this curriculum. The impacts arising from the implementation of the merdeka curriculum at thePAUD level were: (1) Teachers were motivated to provide innovative learning for their students. (2) Children were actively involved in project activities implemented by the teacher, even children who were initially lacking enthusiasm in learning after learning with the concept of merdeka curriculum were applied the children became more active in asking questions, submitting their opinions and enjoying the learning process. (3) Children's social, emotional, and communication skills become more honed, they also often bring up ideas that were beyond the expectations of the teacher.

Discussions

The implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level provides a new nuance in the learning process at PAUD institutions in Malang City. This condition was felt not only by students but also by teachers. Children looked more active and enjoy project-based learning activities. Children also became more enthusiastic about participating in activities and begin to communicate a lot and were able

to work together with their friends. When the teacher presented problems in the learning process and follows up with 5W + 1H questions, children's answers vary, children's thinking develops according to their previous knowledge and experience and is also based on their children's critical and creative thinking abilities. When the teacher implemented open ended play by providing a variety of play materials, children were able to realize their imagination in the form of projects that were appropriate to the sub-topics discussed. Indirectly, children also learned literacy and numeracy concepts through reading stories, asking questions, or making projects. This condition was in line with some of the results of previous research that learning that uses the concept of open ended play, based on problems and projects can significantly improve the quality of learning, improve higher-order thinking skills in children, because children learned according to their characteristics and could explore tools and play materials. provided by the teacher, get concrete learning experiences, and activate the child (Indirectly, children also learn literacy and numeracy concepts through reading stories, asking questions, or making projects. This condition was in line with some of the results of previous research that learning that uses the concept of open ended play, based on problems and projects can significantly improve the quality of learning, improve higher-order thinking skills in children, because children learn according to their characteristics and can explore tools and play materials. provided by the teacher, get concrete learning experiences, and activate the child (Indirectly, children also learn literacy and numeracy concepts through reading stories, asking questions, or making projects. This condition was in line with some of the results of previous research that learning that uses the concept of open ended play, based on problems and projects can significantly improve the quality of learning, improve higher-order thinking skills in children, because children learned according to their characteristics and could explore tools and play materials. provided by the teacher, got concrete learning experiences, and activated the child ((Gularso, Suryantari, Rigianti, & Martono, 2021)).

In the learning process at PAUD institutions that have implemented the merdeka curriculum, there were still many teachers who have not been optimal in implementing scaffolding in learning. Teachers who have implemented scaffolding in learning were able to dig deeper into children's learning experiences, as well as being able to find out the extent to which learning outcomes were mastered by children. When the teacher implemented scaffolding, the teacher could find out the abilities of each of their students and could provide assistance changes to their students according to the developmental achievements that the children have, so as to minimize the potential for mistakes made by children in the learning process and receiving material. This was in accordance with the opinion explained that Scaffolding was a learning aid provided by the teacher to encourage children to achieve merdeka learning(Nurhayati, Mulyana, & Martadiputra, 2016). The results of other studies also explained that giving scaffolding can overcome mistakes made by children and giving scaffolding is effective in improving children's learning outcomes ((Nurhayati, Mulyana, & Martadiputra, 2016),(Sari & Surya, 2017)). Teachers could also link between learning concepts through scaffolding carried out on their students. Scaffolding could be done by the teacher by providing trigger questions that could help children to focus on solving their problems, also triggering the emergence of new ideas and the ability to think critically, logically and creatively. This was in accordance with the opinion of Bransford, Brown,

and Cocking (2000) that scaffolding could be done by providing activities such as providing interesting activities for children, simplifying tasks so that they were easily understood by children, providing some directions to restore children's focus in learning, showing clear standards for children's learning achievements, help reduce frustration and risks experienced by children,(Stuyf, 2000). Scaffolding can also trigger children's courage to convey their ideas, thoughts and feelings.

However, PAUD teachers in Malang City were still not optimal in developing merdeka curriculum-based learning plans that were packaged in modules or RPPH. Weaknesses of teachers can be seen from the selection of themes/topics and sub-themes/sub-topics that were not yet interesting and still refer to the selection of themes used in previous curricula. Even though determining interesting activity themes/topics could optimize children's learning outcomes, so that projects made by children become more creative and innovative, and children can explore their learning experiences in more depth. This was in accordance with several expert opinions which explain that thematic learning can help students make connections between old knowledge that has been previously possessed and newly acquired knowledge.(Brewer, 2007)(Zhbanova, Rule, Montgomery, & Nielsen, 2010)). Malang City PAUD teachers were also still not optimal in applying the concept of problem-based learning, project-based, and differentiated learning. Projects that the teacher understands more were individual projects not group projects, while for the differentiated learning concept the teacher understands more about providing a variety of play activities for children. Even though the concept of differentiation can also be seen from the point of view of the different learning processes that each child has, it could also be seen from the different products produced by children, or even can be seen from the different meanings or learning content that children understand. In differentiation learning the teacher teaches material by considering the level of readiness, interest,and learning styles of students, or can even change the content of the lesson (Tomlinson, 2017).

The success of implementing the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level, according to PAUD teachers, cannot be separated from the support of many parties, one of which is the support of parents and guardians of children. Support that could be provided by parents could be in the form of material and non-material support, such as good communication with teachers and children, involvement in providing a learning environment that suits children's needs (Epstein, et al., 2018). Such support could help children gain concrete and diverse experiences in learning a learning topic. Another factor that could support the successful implementation of the merdeka curriculum at the PAUD level was the awareness of teachers to always learn and improve their abilities and skills. Also support from agencies or stake holders.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level organized by PAUD institutions in Malang City is still not going well yet, because the PAUD teacher's understanding of the application of the curriculum is still not optimal when viewed from planning to implementation. The results of the study show that teachers still have different understandings of the essence of the merdeka curriculum, so that the form of learningpresented is still not in accordance with the merdeka curriculum

concept expected by the government. The teacher's ability to make teaching modules or RPPH is still not optimal, including how to package learning in the concept of open ended play, problem-based learning and projects using interesting topics. The teacher's understanding of the concept of differentiation learning is still not optimal because they still understand differentiation in the context of providing various play activities. The implementation of the assessment is also still not optimal, especially in the assessment process in which scaffolding can be applied for children. However, there has been a change in the child's response in the learning process, because it has begun to show the activeness of children in learning in several PAUD institutions that have implemented a merdeka curriculum as well as the ability to think at a high level in children. The advice that can be given to teachers, school principals and the Malang City education office is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAUDinstitutions in Malang City so that the implementation can be more optimal. The implementation of the assessment is also still not optimal, especially in the assessment process in which scaffolding can be applied for children. However, there has been a change in the child's response in the learning process, because it has begun to show the activeness of children in learning in several PAUD institutions that have implemented an merdeka curriculum aswell as the ability to think at a high level in children. The advice that can be given to teachers, school principals and the Malang City education office is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the merdeka curriculum inPAUD institutions in Malang City so that the implementation can be more optimal. The implementation of the assessment is also still not optimal, especially in the assessment process in which scaffolding can be applied for children. However, there has been a change in the child's response in the learning process, because it has begun to show the activeness of children in learning in several PAUD institutions that have implemented an merdeka curriculum as well as the ability to think at a high level in children. The advice that can be given to teachers, school principals and the Malang City education office is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAUD institutions in Malang City so that the implementation can be more optimal. However, there has been a change in the child's response in the learning process, because it has begun to show the activeness of children in learning in several PAUD institutions that have implemented an merdeka curriculum aswell as the ability to think at a high level in children. The advice that can be given to teachers, school principals and the Malang City education office is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the merdeka curriculum inPAUD institutions in Malang City so that the implementation can be more optimal. However, there has been a change in the child's response in the learning process, because it has begun to show the activeness of children in learning in several PAUD institutions that have implemented an merdeka curriculum as well as the ability to thinkat a high level in children. The advice that can be given to teachers, school principals and the Malang City education office is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAUD institutions in Malang City so that the implementation can be more optimal.

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