

Educational Management Strategies in Implementing Central Approaches for Early Childhood Learning in Kindergarten

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze educational management strategies in implementing a child-centered approach to early childhood learning in kindergarten settings. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, the research was conducted at TK Cahaya Bangsa in Semarang, Central Java. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the educational management strategies include thematic curriculum planning, flexible scheduling, participative leadership, and active parental involvement. The child-centered approach is implemented through project-based learning, environmental exploration, and thematic activities that position children as active participants in the learning process. The main challenges identified involve limited learning resources, varying teacher competencies, and fluctuating levels of parental engagement. Nevertheless, effective management strategies significantly contribute to creating a child-centered learning environment that fosters autonomy, creativity, and social development. This study offers valuable implications for early childhood education policy and managerial practices in preschool institutions.

Keywords: educational management, child-centered approach, early childhood education, kindergarten, child-centered learning

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi manajemen pendidikan dalam menerapkan pendekatan sentral untuk pembelajaran anak usia dini di lingkungan taman kanak-kanak. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui desain studi kasus, penelitian dilakukan di TK Cahaya Bangsa di Semarang, Jawa Tengah. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa strategi manajemen pendidikan meliputi perencanaan kurikulum tematik, penjadwalan fleksibel, kepemimpinan partisipatif, dan keterlibatan orang tua yang aktif. Pendekatan sentral diimplementasikan melalui pembelajaran berbasis proyek, eksplorasi lingkungan, dan kegiatan tematik yang memposisikan anak-anak sebagai peserta aktif dalam proses pembelajaran. Tantangan utama yang diidentifikasi melibatkan sumber belajar yang terbatas, kompetensi guru yang bervariasi, dan tingkat keterlibatan orang tua yang berfluktuasi. Namun demikian, strategi manajemen yang efektif berkontribusi secara signifikan pada penciptaan lingkungan belajar yang berpusat pada anak yang mendorong otonomi, kreativitas, dan perkembangan sosial. Penelitian ini menawarkan implikasi yang berharga bagi kebijakan pendidikan anak usia dini dan praktik manajerial di lembaga prasekolah.

Kata kunci: manajemen pendidikan, pendekatan pusat, pendidikan anak usia dini, taman kanak-kanak, pembelajaran terpusat

Background

Early childhood education (PAUD) has a strategic role in shaping the character, values, and intellectual potential of children from an early age. In today's digital era,

educational challenges are increasingly complex, so a learning approach is needed that is not only content-oriented, but also empowers children as active subjects in the learning process. A phenomenon that is still often encountered is the inequality in learning practices in kindergartens (TK), especially in the application of a child-centered learning approach (Staškūnienė, 2025). Many PAUD institutions have not been able to implement an adequate learning management system to support the central approach, which should be the foundation of early childhood education (Herdiantoputri, 2025).

Several studies have confirmed that child-centered learning approaches, such as project-based, thematic, and game-based learning, can significantly improve children's social, emotional, and cognitive abilities (Martínez-Bello & Tsuda, 2025; Almutlaq & Alhossyan, 2025). This approach positions children as active explorers who construct their knowledge through exploration, dialogue, and contextual experiences. However, the success of this approach does not only depend on the learning method, but is also greatly influenced by the effectiveness of educational management carried out by teachers and principals (Astri, 2025; Risnawati & Permadi, 2025). Structured and participatory management, including time management, teacher roles, parental involvement, and the provision of appropriate learning resources, are key elements in supporting child-centered learning (Kizi & Tursunovich, 2025).

However, there is still a gap in scientific studies that specifically discuss the direct relationship between educational management strategies and the effectiveness of implementing a central approach in PAUD environments. Some studies focus more on pedagogical aspects such as learning techniques and evaluation, or on general managerial aspects without connecting them to children's learning strategies (Ropienė, 2025; Zeithammlová, 2025). The lack of research discussing the integration of the two, especially in local contexts such as Indonesia, shows that there is still a gap in the study of early childhood learning management based on a central approach.

Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining in depth the relationship between educational management strategies and the implementation of the central approach in the context of kindergarten. In this case, educational management is not only seen from the administrative side, but as a system that includes the management of resources, curriculum, learning environment, and relationships with parents to support active, meaningful, and exploration-based learning (Tinoco, 2025). The focus on early childhood, especially in kindergarten, is very important because this phase is the golden age of child development both cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

This study aims to analyze the educational management strategies applied by teachers and principals in implementing the central approach in kindergarten. This study also aims to identify various obstacles and supporting factors in implementing the strategy, as well as provide practice-based recommendations for strengthening PAUD education management in the future.

The benefits of this study include theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of integrative studies between educational management and child-centered learning strategies. While practically, the results of

this study can be utilized by teachers, principals, and policy makers in designing and implementing more effective and contextual learning strategies. Thus, it is expected to create a learning environment that is fun, challenging, and supports the growth of children as a whole.

Research method

Research Approaches and Types

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study type. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides space for researchers to explore in depth the educational management strategy in the context of implementing a central approach in kindergartens. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the process, context, and meaning of managerial actions carried out by teachers and principals in a real environment (Creswell, 2016). The case study type is used because the focus of this study is on one specific phenomenon in a limited context, namely in PAUD units that are known to implement a central approach. Through case studies, researchers can intensively analyze various dimensions of educational management that contribute to the success of the central approach.

Location and Subject of Research

This research was conducted in one of the PAUD/TK units located in Semarang, Central Java. This institution was selected purposively because it has characteristics that are suitable for case studies, namely having implemented a central approach in learning consistently. The selection of this location was based on the consideration that the educational unit was able to provide relevant and contextual data in accordance with the objectives of the study. The subjects of the study included the principal, TK class teachers, school committees or parents of students, and PAUD supervisors or inspectors who play a role in the education supervision process.

Data collection technique

The data in this study were collected using three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted directly with principals and teachers to obtain information about the educational management strategies used, the challenges they face, and their views on the implementation of the central approach. Participatory observation was conducted to directly record the learning process in the classroom, interactions between teachers and children, and the principal's managerial activities in managing PAUD institutions. In addition, documentation studies were conducted on supporting documents such as weekly activity plans (RKM), academic calendars, daily schedules, learning evaluation reports, and minutes of management meetings that provide a formal description of the educational management system implemented.

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself, who acts as a

key instrument in interpreting qualitative data in depth and contextually. To support the reliability of data collection, auxiliary instruments are also used in the form of interview guides, observation sheets, and document checklists. These instruments are compiled based on educational management theories and the principles of the central approach in PAUD learning. The validity of the instrument is tested through an expert judgment process involving supervising lecturers and early childhood education practitioners to ensure the relevance and suitability of the instrument content to the field context.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. Data reduction is done by selecting and grouping data into relevant thematic categories. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices that facilitate understanding of the relationship between variables. Drawing conclusions is done through an interpretive process supported by repeated verification to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the meaning of the data. To increase the validity of the results, the researcher also used source and method triangulation techniques, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies.

Validity of Data

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through four main criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely: (1) credibility, achieved through triangulation and member checking of informants; (2) transferability, by presenting detailed contextual descriptions so that the results can be applied to similar contexts; (3) dependability, through an audit trail that systematically documents the entire research process; and (4) confirmability, by ensuring that the results obtained truly come from the data and not from the subjective bias of the researcher. Field notes, daily logs, and researcher reflections were also used to maintain the objectivity and integrity of the research process.

Research Ethics

In conducting this research, the researcher adheres to the principles of research ethics. The researcher ensures that written consent has been obtained from all participants involved. The identity of the respondents is kept confidential by using an anonymous code to maintain the privacy and comfort of the informants. The researcher also avoids any form of pressure or coercion in the interview and observation process. In addition, participants are given the full right to stop their participation at any time without any consequences. These principles are maintained to ensure that the research process is carried out professionally, transparently, and ethically.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Research Location

This research was conducted at Kindergarten, an early childhood education institution located in Semarang, Central Java. This institution has a simple organizational structure with five class teachers, one principal, and around sixty students divided into several age groups. Cahaya Bangsa Kindergarten began implementing a central learning approach in 2022 as part of a child-based learning innovation. The implementation was facilitated by the principal who has an academic background in PAUD and actively participates in management training and professional development for educators. With the managerial capacity of the school leader and the collaboration between teachers and parents, this institution is contextual and relevant to be used as a research location on educational management strategies in a central approach.

Educational Management Strategies Applied

The results of the study indicate that Cahaya Bangsa Kindergarten has implemented several educational management strategies designed to support the central learning approach. The first strategy is integrated thematic curriculum planning. Teachers collectively prepare a Weekly Activity Plan (RKM) based on a central approach that accommodates children's interests and needs. This planning process is not top-down, but involves a weekly discussion forum between teachers to align learning themes and objectives with the child's world. Learning is developed thematically and project-based, allowing children to connect real experiences with the concepts being learned.

The second strategy is flexible learning schedule management. Unlike rigid and hourly structured learning systems, learning time at Cahaya Bangsa Kindergarten is designed so that children have enough space to explore and play. The daily schedule is arranged in the form of a thematic activity scenario guided by the teacher, allowing flexibility but still within the framework of learning objectives.

The third strategy is the implementation of participatory leadership by the principal. The principal does not only act as an administrator, but also as a professional coach who actively builds a collaborative work culture. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process, both in terms of curriculum design, evaluation, and managerial problem solving. There is a routine of weekly evaluation meetings and cross-observations between teachers that encourage reflective practice.

The fourth strategy is active parental involvement through parenting class activities, parenting training, and regular communication forums. These activities are designed to create synergy between learning that occurs in schools and strengthening values at home. Parental involvement is an important pillar in strengthening a holistic learning environment.

This finding is in line with Risnawati and Permadi's (2025) view on the importance of an adaptive and participatory PAUD management model, where teachers function as flexible facilitators. This strategy is also in line with the central approach emphasized by Martínez-Bello and Tsuda (2025), where a strategically

designed learning environment will support the growth of children's independence and creativity.

Implementation of the Central Approach in Learning

The implementation of the central approach in Cahaya Bangsa Kindergarten is reflected in the learning design that places children as the center of learning activities. Various methods are used to activate children's roles, such as environmental exploration activities (learning walks), interest-based learning (child-led activities), small projects according to the theme, and the use of portfolios as a tool for observing children's development. Teachers do not act as the main source of information, but as facilitators and observers who facilitate contextual and enjoyable learning experiences. Various play materials are provided according to the theme and interests of children, and are designed to stimulate their critical thinking, motor skills, and social skills.

This practice is very consistent with the constructivism theory developed by Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of the child's active role in building his or her knowledge. This approach also refers to the Reggio Emilia principle, where children are positioned as little researchers who explore their world (Staškūnienė, 2025). In addition, the use of a multisensory approach like this has been shown to increase the absorption and retention of information in early childhood (Tinoco, 2025), while strengthening emotional connections to the learning process.

Constraints in Implementing Management Strategies

Although the management strategy implemented is considered progressive, there are several obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. The first is the limited facilities and infrastructure, especially educational play equipment based on technology or STEM, and the lack of visual literacy teaching materials. The second is the variation in teacher competency, where not all teachers have a background in early childhood education or intensive training on the central approach. Some teachers still show a tendency towards teacher-centered teaching patterns that are not in line with the philosophy of active child learning. Third, fluctuating parental participation is also a challenge. Not all parents have the same time and commitment in participating in parenting activities or accompanying their children's learning at home.

These constraints are inline with the findings of Zeithammlová (2025) who emphasized that weaknesses in PAUD management are often related to the lack of resource support and teacher training. Filipova (2025) emphasized that the successful implementation of central learning strategies requires continuity between teacher professional development and the availability of a supportive learning environment. Without it, the implementation of good strategies will only take place partially and not optimally.

The Impact of Management Strategy on the Effectiveness of the Central Approach

The observation results show that the management strategies implemented have had a positive impact on the process and results of children's learning. Children become more active in asking questions, exploring, and expressing ideas. Their social

skills improve through group activities, discussions, and presentations of project work results. Teachers also become more reflective in carrying out the learning process, by showing improvements in compiling activities based on observations of child development. The learning environment becomes more dynamic and enjoyable, because teachers are able to adjust activities to the interests and needs of students.

This finding supports the study of Ropienė (2025) and Baltuonienė (2025) which states that effective educational management will create a learning climate that encourages active participation and the development of 21st century skills. Principals who act as transformational leaders are able to inspire teachers to innovate and improve the quality of learning continuously.

Reflection and Analysis of Findings

Overall, this study indicates that adaptive, collaborative, and structured educational management strategies contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the central approach in Cahaya Bangsa Kindergarten. Teachers not only act as implementers of learning, but also as micro managers in the classroom who are responsible for managing time, resources, and the dynamics of children's groups. For this reason, ongoing training in classroom management based on the central approach is an urgent need. The success of the central approach cannot be separated from managerial factors at the institutional level, both from the principal and the overall school organizational structure. Integration between educational management and pedagogical strategies is an important key in creating inclusive, meaningful, and empowering PAUD learning for children as a whole.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted on Educational Management Strategies in Implementing Central Approaches for Early Childhood Learning in Kindergarten, a number of important conclusions were obtained regarding the implementation and effectiveness of educational management strategies in supporting central approaches in kindergarten environments. First, educational management strategies implemented by principals and teachers include thematic curriculum planning that is relevant to children's interests, flexible schedule management to provide space for exploration, active involvement of parents in the learning process, and participatory leadership that encourages collaboration between educators. These four aspects form a learning ecosystem that is conducive to child-based learning approaches.

Second, the central approach is implemented through project-based learning methods, exploratory activities, and thematic activities designed to encourage children to become active subjects in the learning process. In this context, teachers play a role as facilitators who not only direct, but also accompany and observe the child's learning process personally and contextually. Third, there are significant challenges in implementing management strategies, such as limited learning facilities and infrastructure, differences in professional competence between teachers, and fluctuations in parental involvement. These problems require systemic interventions, including ongoing teacher training and policy support from the government and other

education stakeholders.

Fourth, the results of the study show that an effectively implemented educational management strategy has been proven to significantly support the central approach. A well-managed learning environment encourages children's independence, activeness, and optimal social development. Therefore, the management of education in PAUD cannot be separated from strategic efforts to ensure the success of a child-centered learning approach.

Research Implications

This study has several implications that can be seen from the theoretical, practical, and policy aspects. Theoretically, these findings strengthen the idea of the importance of integration between educational management strategies and pedagogical approaches as the foundation of early childhood learning. This supports the development of literature on the synergistic relationship between school management and the effectiveness of child-based learning methods. From a practical perspective, this study provides concrete guidance to PAUD educators and school principals regarding the implementation of adaptive and participatory managerial practices, which have been proven to increase children's involvement in the learning process. Meanwhile, from an educational policy perspective, the results of this study can be used as consideration in making PAUD development policies, especially in terms of curriculum preparation, teacher training, and the arrangement of learning environments that are more in accordance with children's needs.

Research Limitations

Despite making important contributions, this study has several limitations that are worth noting. This study was conducted in only one educational unit in the Semarang area, so the findings cannot be generalized widely to all PAUD contexts. In addition, the approach used was qualitative, which although providing depth of understanding, still depends on the subjectivity of the informants and the researcher's interpretation. This study also has not explored quantitative aspects in depth, such as the influence of management strategies on children's development achievements as measured through statistical data.

Recommendation

Based on the identified findings and limitations, the researcher provides several recommendations for further development. First, for teachers and principals, it is recommended to strengthen managerial capacity through regular training and structured forums for sharing good practices. Second, for PAUD institutions in general, it is important to build a sustainable education management evaluation system, so that the learning management process can be monitored and improved systematically. Third, for further researchers, it is recommended to conduct further studies using a quantitative approach or mixed method in order to empirically test the relationship between education management strategies and children's learning outcomes. Thus, studies on early childhood learning management can develop more comprehensively, both from theoretical and practical aspects.

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