

## Teacher Strategies in the Center-Based Learning

### Model within the Merdeka Curriculum at TK

Bungong Seleupoek

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#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe teachers' strategies in implementing the center-based learning model at TK Bungong Seleupoek within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that teachers consistently use an everyday life approach in teaching by connecting center activities to children's real-life experiences. Teachers begin lessons with personal interactions such as greetings, asking about students' well-being, and using concrete teaching aids aligned with the learning theme. This approach emphasizes not only learning outcomes but also enjoyable and meaningful learning processes. Teachers routinely conduct evaluations and develop new strategies to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the learning process. These findings reinforce the importance of consistency in using everyday approaches in early childhood education aligned with the

*Merdeka Curriculum* philosophy.

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### Introduction

Teachers hold a fundamental and central role in education. In Islam, a teacher is understood as a *mu'allim*, *murabbi*, and *muaddib*—a figure who not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures and disciplines learners in moral and spiritual growth (Azmiya et al., 2022). Within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the teacher's primary responsibility is to serve as a facilitator. A good facilitator is one who provides all the necessary resources for the learning process, including learning media, tools, and materials used during classroom activities, as well as serving as a source of knowledge to ensure that learning objectives are achieved effectively (Samad et al., 2024). Learning in the *Merdeka Curriculum* is implemented according to the principles of *Merdeka Belajar*, which include learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, holism, relevance, and sustainability (Aminah & Nursikin, 2023).

The role of teachers in designing, evaluating, and implementing learning is of vital importance (Iskandar et al., 2023). Teachers are the main agents responsible for planning and executing the teaching and learning process. Therefore, they must be able to create a variety of learning strategies that do not merely rely on traditional methods but introduce innovative and enjoyable approaches to learning (Isya et al., 2024). In carrying out their duties, teachers are required to possess a comprehensive set of competencies—not only mastery of the subject matter to be delivered, but also the ability to communicate it in a way

that is easily understood by children, as well as skills in supervision, guidance, and the development of children's potential in personal, professional, and social dimensions (Sopian, 2016).

The learning strategies employed by teachers should be in accordance with the students' conditions and needs. Both the learning environment and the teacher's professionalism significantly influence the strategies and learning models applied to students. These strategies and techniques affect students' interest and motivation to learn (Amini et al., 2022). To implement a particular strategy, teachers must utilize various teaching methods and design programs to be applied in each face-to-face session (Yuliantina, 2021). In developing learning strategies, teachers need to prioritize approaches that make students feel joyful, creative, and free from pressure or burdensome atmospheres (Asmidar, 2020). Some of these approaches include: (1) active learning—learning that engages children positively; (2) attractive learning—learning that captures children's curiosity and interest; (3) joyful learning—learning that is enjoyable and stimulating; and (4) the multiple intelligence approach—learning based on the concept of multiple intelligences.

Learning in early childhood education is conducted through play in an interactive, inspiring, fun, contextual, and child-centered manner, enabling active participation and fostering creativity and independence according to each child's talents, interests, and physical and psychological development (Haryani & Qalbi, 2021). There are various models and methods of learning in early childhood education, such as

the Froebel model, Hill's learning concept, the Montessori method, calendar circle activities, storytelling, simple projects, large group work, field visits, and the *Beyond Center and Circle Time* (BCCT) model (Hamzah, 2016).

The BCCT model—center and circle time-based learning—is an early childhood education concept officially adopted by Indonesia's Ministry of National Education since 2004. This model emphasizes child-centered learning, implemented in learning centers and circle time sessions using four scaffolding elements to support children's development: (1) environmental scaffolding, (2) pre-play scaffolding, (3) during-play scaffolding, and (4) post-play scaffolding (Werdiningsih, 2022).

The *Merdeka Curriculum* grants early childhood teachers greater flexibility and creativity in teaching (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023). According to Suhandi and Robi'ah as well as Daga, this curriculum restores teachers' autonomy and professional freedom (Suhandi & Robi'ah, 2022; Daga, 2021). This freedom aligns with the true essence of *Merdeka Belajar*, which emphasizes liberated and meaningful learning processes. Another perception emerging among teachers concerns the collaborative nature of this curriculum, which allows teachers and students to jointly design learning objectives, methods, materials, and assessments in a more flexible and participatory manner (Indarta et al., 2022).

These insights indicate that the center-based learning model is

highly effective for early childhood education. At TK Bungong Seleupoek, this model has been implemented effectively and systematically. Teachers employ the center-based learning model while involving children in deciding what activities they will engage in the following day. The activities are conducted according to the children's choices and remain aligned with the predetermined learning procedures and themes. Within the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework, children are free to select activities offered by the teacher based on their interests, provided these are consistent with the main and sub-themes of learning.

This school was selected for study because it demonstrates a distinctive and consistent application of the everyday-life-based approach in implementing center-based learning. Additionally, teachers at TK Bungong Seleupoek actively participate in *Merdeka Curriculum* training, adapt their learning strategies to meet children's needs, and provide a safe, comfortable, and joyful learning environment.

Based on these considerations, this research seeks to explore the distinctive strategies used by teachers at TK Bungong Seleupoek in conducting center-based learning within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in implementing center-based learning under the *Merdeka Curriculum* at

TK Bungong Seleupoek. This approach was selected because it allows researchers to explore phenomena naturally and comprehensively (Sugiyono, 2020).

The research was conducted at TK Bungong Seleupoek, located on Inong Bale Street No. 5A, Kopelma Darussalam, Syiah Kuala District, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The study took place from May 26 to June 3, 2025. The site was chosen based on prior observations showing that the school actively and consistently applies the center-based learning model through an everyday-life approach. Moreover, the school's location is strategic and easily accessible.

The **research subjects** consisted of five teachers assigned to various learning centers. Among them, one art center teacher was selected as the **primary interview subject**, chosen based on criteria relevant to the research objectives—particularly, teachers who allow children to express creativity freely and confidently without fear of making mistakes.

**Data collection** was conducted using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation.

- **Observation** was carried out systematically to assess children's character development both inside and outside the classroom, focusing on the strategies employed by teachers.
- **Interviews** were conducted with teachers to gather their perceptions regarding the strategies used in implementing center-based learning within the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

- **Documentation** was utilized to collect visual records, including photos of classroom activities and relevant administrative data.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model consisting of three key stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Luthfiyah, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019).

- **Data reduction** involved selecting, simplifying, and focusing on information that was relevant to the research objectives, particularly regarding teacher strategies and the implementation of habituation methods.
- **Data presentation** was performed in descriptive narrative form, outlining the observable patterns in teachers' behavior and classroom management.
- **Conclusion drawing** involved interpreting the analyzed data to produce insights regarding how teachers at TK Bungong Seleupoek design and implement their learning strategies under the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework.

The research instruments included an observation sheet that detailed the teaching strategies applied by teachers and an interview guide designed to elicit comprehensive information about their implementation experiences. The qualitative analysis process emphasized understanding meaning rather than numerical measurement, allowing the researcher to interpret how teachers conceptualize and apply learning strategies effectively in center-based

learning.

This methodological approach is expected to generate valuable insights into how teachers' strategic practices contribute to effective, engaging, and meaningful early childhood learning aligned with the *Merdeka Curriculum* philosophy.

## Result and Discussions

### Implementation Stages of the Center-Based Learning Model at TK Bungong Seleupoek

Every morning at TK Bungong Seleupoek, teachers wait for the children at the school gate as they arrive and separate from their parents. On Mondays, children participate in the national flag ceremony, where they are not only taught to line up properly but are also involved in carrying the flag, reciting the Pancasila and the Constitution, and even serving as ceremony leaders. On other days, as class hours begin, children line up in front of their classrooms where their teachers are already waiting. Before entering, the children pray and wash their hands as part of their daily routine.

#### Opening Stage (Preliminary Activity)

Inside the classroom, the children sit in a circle. Before starting the day's activity, teachers ask about the children's feelings, provide examples or guidance when a child expresses discomfort, lead them in reciting short surahs and daily prayers, and conduct ice-breaking activities. After the ice-breaking session, the teacher again asks about how the children feel and continues by discussing the day, date, month,

year, and the activities they will carry out.

### **Core Stage (Main Learning Activity)**

When the core activity begins, the teacher provides explanations, instructions, and demonstrations using the available media, pictures, and concrete objects. These materials help children understand forms, functions, and names of objects through direct exploration. The children engage actively in play-based learning, exploring the tools and materials prepared by the teacher. These activities are collaboratively chosen by the children and teachers in advance.

For example, on June 3, the children conducted a P5 project on planting shallots (*Allium cepa*). The teacher first explained the parts and benefits of shallots and demonstrated how to plant them. During the activity, the teacher guided and provided hands-on examples to ensure each child understood the process. Once finished, each child labeled their planted shallot pot with their name, and the pots were arranged according to class.

**Figure 1.** Planting Shallots Following the Teacher's Instructions



### **Reflection Stage (Review and Evaluation)**

After completing the activities, children are taught to clean up and take responsibility for the materials they have used by returning them to their proper places. They are also encouraged to reflect on their experiences by storytelling, singing, or showcasing their work. Teachers ask about the children's feelings during and after the activities, provide praise and motivation, and discuss the planned activities for the next day. This reflection stage serves not only as an evaluation but also as a social and emotional reinforcement process that builds children's sense of responsibility and self-confidence.

### **Closing Stage**

At the end of the learning session, children are guided to wash their hands neatly and enjoy snacks together. Afterward, they tidy up their belongings, say prayers to conclude the learning session, and prepare to go home.

Teachers use four forms of assessment: anecdotal notes, checklists, photo series, and children's portfolios. Each child's works and assessment records are compiled into an individual folder, which is later shared with parents during the report distribution period. This systematic documentation helps parents monitor their children's learning progress comprehensively.

### **Teacher Strategies**

Learning strategies can be understood as specific ways, techniques, or methods employed by teachers to facilitate behavioral or attitudinal changes in students (Hayaturriyan & Harahap, 2022). The learning

process conducted by teachers cannot be separated from the application of strategies because these strategies determine how effectively learning objectives are achieved. Learning strategies refer to methods chosen to deliver material within a particular learning environment, encompassing the nature, scope, and sequence of activities designed to provide meaningful learning experiences (Harahap et al., 2024).

At TK Bungong Seleupoek, teachers consistently connect learning center activities to children's everyday experiences. This consistent application—ranging from planning to reflection—has become a hallmark of the school's pedagogical approach. The Merdeka Curriculum's learning objectives emphasize holistic integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Veryawan et al., 2023). Early childhood education institutions can utilize learning outcomes to set goals and assess progress while considering their vision, mission, and local cultural characteristics (Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022).

Teachers at TK Bungong Seleupoek apply habit formation and everyday-life approaches simultaneously. This is evident in children's routines such as washing hands before class, greeting teachers, and engaging in personal conversations at the start of lessons. Teachers link activities with real-life experiences; for example, during a theme on "communication tools," children were invited to make a model of a radio using clay and then draw it. After completing the activity, the children were guided to clean up the materials used and return them to their places.

This approach fosters a familiar and enjoyable learning atmosphere that aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's principle of child-centered education.

**Figure 2.** Creating a Communication Tool (Radio) from Clay



Interview results further revealed that teachers in the art center focus not only on the final products of children's work but also on the process. As expressed by Mrs. E, an art center teacher at TK Bungong Seleupoek:

"We begin the activity with light conversations about the children's feelings. These conversations serve as a bridge to reintroduce the day's theme and activities."

This statement reflects the teacher's commitment to maintaining consistency in daily interactions—a key factor in creating meaningful learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The personal experience strategy is another approach implemented by teachers, in which children are directly involved in learning based on their personal experiences (Muliadi et al., 2023). The aim is to actively engage children

from the beginning of the learning process, making learning more meaningful and motivating (Supandi et al., 2020).

Teachers also utilize instructional media and concrete objects relevant to the theme to support understanding. Concrete media help children visualize concepts, classify objects by color, shape, and size, and enhance sensory engagement (Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Tiara et al., 2023).

After class, teachers collaboratively design new strategies to make future lessons more engaging and enjoyable for children. In addition to developing new learning strategies, teachers also serve as reliable sources of information whenever children ask questions. Moreover, they continuously evaluate the learning process to track each child's development and adjust subsequent learning plans accordingly.

These continuous cycles of reflection, adaptation, and innovation demonstrate that the teachers at TK Bungong Seleupoek have successfully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum's principles through a consistent, meaningful, and child-centered approach.

### **Conclusion**

Learning activities at TK Bungong Seleupoek are designed systematically through clearly defined stages—opening, core, reflection, and closing—allowing children to learn actively, joyfully, and meaningfully. Teachers consistently implement habit-formation and everyday-life approaches, linking learning materials to children's real-life experiences while providing individualized guidance and support

according to each child's developmental needs.

The *Merdeka Curriculum* implemented at the school integrates the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills in a holistic manner, ensuring that learning not only focuses on outcomes but also on meaningful processes that foster independence, creativity, and curiosity.

Furthermore, the use of diverse assessment techniques—such as anecdotal records, checklists, sequential photo documentation, and children's creative portfolios—enables teachers to monitor children's progress comprehensively and share it transparently with parents. This documentation system also enhances parental involvement in the educational process.

TK Bungong Seleupoek has therefore succeeded in creating a supportive, safe, and stimulating learning environment that optimally nurtures children's growth and development. The teacher strategies applied—rooted in daily life experiences, reflective practices, and continuous innovation—embody the true spirit of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, preparing children to face subsequent stages of learning with confidence, enthusiasm, and autonomy.

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