

THE MONTESSORI APPROACH TO IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD CREATIVITY AND INDEPENDENCE

Okta Sri Rahayu
PGRI Silampari University
oktasrirahayu701@gmail.com

Abstract: Education is a crucial process in developing students' potential, especially at an early age, when they are at a crucial stage of development. One approach, which emphasizes child-centered learning while allowing freedom within certain limits. This study aims to examine the role of the Montessori approach in fostering creativity and independence at an early age. The method used was a literature review analyzing various relevant sources. The results indicate that the Montessori approach can enhance children's creativity through exploratory activities. Furthermore, a well-prepared learning environment and the teacher's role as a facilitator are supporting factors for the successful implementation of this approach. Thus, the Montessori approach plays a crucial role in fostering creativity and independence at an early age, although its implementation still requires teacher preparedness and adequate supporting facilities.

Keywords: Montessori Approach, Creativity, Independence, Early Childhood, Child-Centered Learning.

Introduction

Education is a conscious and planned effort to create an atmosphere and learning process that allows students to actively develop their potential and possess spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills for themselves and society. Education is not only seen as an effort to provide information and develop skills, but also expanded, to include efforts to realize individual desires, needs, and abilities so as to create a good personal and social lifestyle. Education is not only a means to prepare for future life, but also for the lives of children to today who are developing towards their level of maturity. According to Sina et al., (2023) early childhood education is a key step in character development, including fostering independence. In this context, the Montessori approach is a proven method for fostering early independence. Montessori views children as individuals with great potential and a natural drive to learn, and therefore should be given freedom to develop their abilities independently in a structured environment.

The Montessori approach makes learning child-centered by giving children the freedom to choose learning activities according to their interests and development stage. In the Montessori approach, the learning environment is specifically designed to enable children to learn independently through authentic activities. The teacher's role is a facilitator, guiding and directing children throughout the learning process. This approach is believed to support the development of various aspects of a child's abilities, such as cognitive, social, and motor skills.

According to Irawati et al., (2023) child independence is always providing opportunities for children to learn and try new things. We as parents and educators only need to guide and direct so that children can do it well. The importance of instilling independence in children from an early age begins with small things. Children are given the opportunity to try do it themselves so that they learn to try new things so that children do not depend on others or even become lazy. By applying the Montessori approach to children, it can have a positive influence or a good influence on the development of children's creativity and independence. Through this approach, children are given the opportunity to learn freely but still within certain limits and can be supported by the use of tools that have been specifically created for each learning process. And in this way, children will be actively involved in learning activities so they are able to develop creative thinking skills and can practice skills in solving problems independently. In addition, Montessori learning also emphasizes daily life activities (practical life activities) which can help children develop a sense of responsibility and an independent attitude from an early age.

Based on this description, the Montessori approach can be seen as a highly effective learning approach that can support the development of creativity and independence in early childhood.

DISCUSSION

A. Description of the Montessori Approach

The Montessori approach is one of the most widely used learning approach in early childhood education due to its focus on child-centered learning activities. In this approach, children are typically given the opportunity to learn through various hands-on experiences, allowing them to develop their full potential. Learning focuses not only on the teacher's delivery of material but also on the child's active involvement in various activities that can enhance cognitive, social, and emotional development.

According to Nofianti et al., (2024) the Montessori approach is a play-while-learning method that gives children freedom to learn, making learning more enjoyable and active. Furthermore, Maris Montessori also emphasized that children have the power to develop and shape themselves. Here, educators act as guides and observe their students' development. This statement in the Montessori approach provides an indication that the child is the one who carries out more activities in developing the child's self, while educators provide guidance and make plans for all activities that will be carried out by their students.

The Montessori approach also emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that supports child development. The learning environment should be designed to allow children the freedom to choose the activities they wish to engage in. This freedom allows children to develop a sense of responsibility independence, and the ability to make decisions about their learning activities.

Based on these opinions, it can be concluded that the Montessori approach is a child- centered learning approach by providing opportunities for children to learn actively, independently, and exploratively through various activities designed to support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development as a whole.

B. Principles of the Montessori Approach

The five basic principles that Montessori educators apply in a variety of programs include:

1) Respect for the Child

This is the foundation of all Montessori principles. Teachers respect children when they help them do things and learn for themselves. When children choose, they can develop the skills and abilities for independence, effective learning, and a positive self-concept.

2) Absorbing Children's Thoughts

Montessori believed that children are capable of educating themselves. Montessori's concept of absorbing children's thinking is intended to help teachers understand that children learn from their environment. Children learn based on their teachers, experiences, and environment.

3) Sensitive Period

Sensitive periods when children are more susceptible to certain behaviors and can learn specific skills more easily. Sensitive periods refer to special sensitivities acquired during infancy. While all children experience the same sensitive periods e.g., the sensitive period for writing), the order and

timing vary from child to child.

4) Prepared Environment

In Montessori's view, children are constant inquirers who "absorb their environment, take everything from it, and embody it within themselves." Therefore, the prepared Montessori learning environment is designed to be sequential and child-sized, aesthetically appealing and visually harmonious.

5) Autoeducation

Montessori instilled the concept that children are capable of educating themselves through autoeducation (also known as self-education). Children actively engage in an environment that provides them with the literal freedom to educate themselves. Teachers in the Montessori method prepare the classroom for children to be able to educate themselves.

The description and elaboration above make it clear that Maria Montessori placed great emphasis on principle in her teaching. Montessori believed that most important thing in education is not the educator or teacher, but the students, each with their own natural qualities. A child's natural qualities differ from those of an adult. Children's innate talents and abilities differ from one another, and their development also varies.

C. Children's Creativity in Learning

According to Irna (2024) creativity is a natural potential within children. Creativity is more dominantly fostered by the right brain, the part of the brain that specializes in thinking and processing data related to feelings, emotions, art, and music. Children are born with a creative nature, but to varying degrees. A child's creativity is influenced by two factors: genetics (innate) and environmental factors. Creativity will grow optimally if both factors are well combined.

Creativity is also known as an important ability that is essential for development in education, especially in early childhood. Creativity is typically associated with a person's ability to generate new ideas, find solutions to problems, and convey these ideas through various learning activities. Therefore, the learning process for children must be designed as optimally as possible to provide opportunities for them to learn from various learning experiences that can foster their creativity.

Meanwhile, the characteristics of creativity can be seen in a person's thought process when solving problems. According to Jamaris (2002:64, in Irna 2024) a person's thought process is characterized by the following characteristic:

- 1) Fluency, in giving answers or expressing opinions or ideas.

- 2) Flexibility, in the form of the ability to put forward various alternatives in solving problems.
- 3) Originality, in the form of the ability to produce various ideas or works that are original results of one's own thinking.
- 4) Elaboration, which is the ability to expand on ideas and aspects that others may not have thought of or seen.
- 5) Tenacity and patience, in facing an uncertain situation.

So, in this learning process, children's creativity can develop various activities that provide Opportunities for learning and free expression. Activities such as drawing, role-playing, creating artwork, and various other play activities can help children develop their imagination and creative thinking skills. Through these activities, children can learn to express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts more feely and confidently.

From the various descriptions above, children's creativity in learning can be understood as their ability to generate new ideas, express their thoughts freely, and find various ways to solve problems through various learning activities. Therefore, developing creativity needs to be a key focus in children's education so they can develop optimally in both cognitive and social aspects.

D. Children's Independence in Learning

According to Melinda and Suwardi (2021) independence is an attitude and behavior that does not easily depend on others to complete tasks. Independence is crucial for early childhood development, enabling children to become individuals capable of carrying out all activities independently without interference from others, taking initiative in problem-solving, persevering, and deriving satisfaction from their own efforts. Independence can develop through continuous, regular practice until it becomes a habit. Therefore, parents and other adults must provide guidance and direction to children to prepare them for life in the future.

Independence is also known as a child's ability to carry out various activities independently without asking for help or relying on others. In the learning process, independence is also an important goal because it helps children develop self-confidence, responsibility, and decision-making skills in various learning situations.

According to Wiyani (2013, in Melinda et al., 2021) the characteristics of early childhood independence are as follows:

- 1) Have self-confidence.
- 2) Have high intrinsic motivation.

- 3) Able and brave to make his own choices.
- 4) Creative and innovative.
- 5) Responsible for accepting the consequences that accompany his choices.
- 6) Able to adapt to the environment.
- 7) Don't depend on other people.

Thus, children's independence in learning can be understood as their ability to carry out various learning activities independently. Therefore, developing independence needs to be a key focus in early childhood education so that children can develop optimally and face various challenges in life.

E. The Role of the Montessori Approach in Enhancing Creativity and Independence in Early Childhood

In the Montessori approach, teachers play a crucial role in fostering creativity and independence in early childhood through learning activities that provide opportunities for children to actively engage in a variety of learning experiences. In this learning process, children are given the freedom to choose activities that align with their interests and needs. This freedom allows them to develop their imagination and generate new ideas through various learning activities.

The use of real-life props in Montessori learning provides a more meaningful learning experience for children. Through activities using these real-life props, children can try various methods to complete a task, thereby optimally developing creative thinking skills. The specially prepared learning environment in the Montessori approach also provides space for children to explore and develop creative ideas in learning activities.

The teacher's role in Montessori approach focuses more on being a facilitator, providing guidance and support to children. Teachers also provide a conducive, comfortable learning environment so children can learn actively, try various activities, and develop confidence in their abilities. Through this process, children can learn to make decisions and solve problems independently.

Therefore, the application of the Montessori approach to learning plays a crucial role in fostering creativity and independence in childhood. Experiential learning activities and a supportive learning environment enable children to develop creative thinking skills while fostering independence in various learning activities.

F. The Advantages of the Montessori Approach in Increasing Creativity and Independence in

Early Childhood

According to Syafril (2017) the Montessori approach has advantages, namely:

- 1) The concepts of the Montessori approach can be given to children from various backgrounds and conditions.
- 2) Successfully producing systematic and operational educational concepts and materials/tools in accordance with the developmental stages and abilities of children.
- 3) Having a school laboratory and a controlled system of implementation of the entire Montessori education system.
- 4) Issue guidelines regarding the learning system in Montessori schools.

Furthermore, the Montessori approach is also highly effective in developing independence in early childhood. During the learning process, children are trained to independently carry out various activities, such as selecting learning activities, using teaching aids, and putting away used equipment. These activities help children learn to take responsibility for their activities and develop the habit of completing tasks independently.

G. Weaknesses of the Montessori Approach in Enhancing Creativity and Independence in Early Childhood

According to Syafril (2007) the Montessori approach has the following disadvantages:

- 1) Too individual, so it requires a small teacher-student ratio.
- 2) It requires a wide variety of learning media, and the material prices are very expensive and difficult for public schools to afford.
- 3) Training in implementing the Montessori education concept is very expensive for teachers in public schools.

Another weakness is that the Montessori approach requires teachers to have specialized understanding and skills in managing learning. The teacher does not act as the center of learning, but rather as a facilitator who observes children's development and provides guidance when needed. Therefore, the freedom given to children to choose their own learning activities can also pose challenges in classroom management. Children who are not accustomed to independent learning may need time to adjust to a learning system that allows freedom to determine their own learning activities.

The Montessori approach also requires a specially designed learning environment that allows

children to move freely and use various learning tools independently. If the learning environment is not well-prepared, the Montessori learning process cannot optimally support the development of children's creativity and independence.

H. Comparison of the Montessori Approach with other Approach

The Montessori approach is a learning that emphasize independence, freedom of learning, and child activity in the learning process. In this approach, children are given the opportunity to learn through direct experience, exploration, and the use of specially designed teaching aids. This teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding and observing the child's development throughout the learning process.

When compared to conventional learning approaches, the Montessori approach offers significant differences. In conventional approach, the learning process is typically teacher-centered, with the teacher acting as the primary source of information and students tending to receive material directly. In contrast, the Montessori approach emphasizes student-centered learning, giving children greater opportunities to explore the learning environment and develop creative and independent thinking skills.

Furthermore, the Montessori approach differs from other learning approach that emphasize only academic achievement. In the Montessori approach, the learning process focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the child's social, emotional, and life skills development. Activities such as tidying up tools, working independently, and collaborating with peers are essential parts of the Montessori learning process.

CONCLUSION

The Montessori approach is a child-centered learning approach that provides freedom to learn according to their interests and development stage. This approach emphasizes the importance of a prepared learning environment and the role of the teacher as a facilitator who guides children through the learning process. The Montessori approach has been proven to support the development of children's creativity through various activities that provide opportunities for exploration, imagination, and the free expression of ideas. Furthermore, this approach also plays a crucial role in fostering children's independence. Because children are trained to carry out various activities independently, take responsibility, and make their own decisions. Despite its many advantages, the Montessori approach also has several drawbacks, such as requiring significant costs, requiring various learning media, and requiring specialized teacher skills. However, when

implemented correctly and supported by the right environment, the Montessori approach can be an effective solution for fostering creativity and independence in childhood.

Thus, the Montessori approach is very important to be applied in early childhood education as an effort to optimally develop children's potential, both in cognitive, social, and emotional aspects, so that children are able to become creative and independent individuals in their lives.

REFERENCES

- Rahman, A. B., Munandar, S. A., Fitriani, A., Karlina, Y., & Yumriani. (2022). *Definition of education, educational science, and elements of education*. AI Urwatul Wutqsa: Islamic Education Studies, 2(1).
- Irawati, L., Suryani, L., & Mulyanto, Y. (2023). A Critical Review of the Montessori Learning Model in Developing Children's Independence. *Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Education*.
- Nofianti, R., Harahap, A. S., & Yanti, N. (2024). *Improving Fine Motor Skills Through LoosPart with the Maria Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education*. Serasi Media Teknologi.
- Irna. (2024). Early Childhood Creativity. *Hospitality Scientific Journal*.
- Melinda, V., & Suwardi. (2021). Teachers' Efforts to Instill Children's Independence in Learning at Arts Centers. *AUDHI Journal (AUDHI Holistic Integrative Early Childhood)*.
- Sina, Ibnu, & Feby, Chansa Adhilia Dhia. (2023). The Montessori Method Approach as an Effort to Increase Independence in Early Childhood. *Journal of Early Childhood Education (Golden Age)* 5(2). Sebelas Maret University.
- Syafril, & Zen, Zelhendri. (2017). *Fundamentals of Educational Science* (First Edition, 1st Printing). Jakarta: Kencana (Prenadamedia Group).
- Hadrianti, E. R., & Ayundasari Poto, C. N. (2024). The Montessori Learning Model to Develop Children's Potential for Independence during the Golden Age. Pendas: *Scientific Journal of Elementary Education*.