



Unpacking the Reggio Emilia approach: Innovative curriculum development in early childhood education

Tetin Nurfitri^{1*}

¹ STAI Al- Hidayah, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

*Correspondence: nurfitritetin@gmail.com

Received: June 24, 2025, *Revised:* August 22, 2025, *Accepted:* August 22, 2025, *Published:* August 22, 2025

Abstract: The Reggio Emilia approach is a progressive pedagogical model that positions children as active subjects in the learning process. This study is grounded in the need to gain a deeper understanding of the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach within the context of early childhood education, particularly in relation to curriculum development and the evolving roles of teachers. The purpose of this research is to systematically examine the key concepts of the Reggio Emilia approach, including how the curriculum is constructed and how interactions between children and teachers are framed. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, the researcher analyzed a range of relevant academic publications selected through established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings reveal that the Reggio-inspired curriculum is flexible, contextual, and project-based, shaped through documentation, observation, and collaboration among teachers, children, and the surrounding environment. Children are positioned as constructors of knowledge and young researchers who actively explore their world, while teachers act as facilitators, partners, and reflective researchers who support and interpret the learning process. This study concludes that the Reggio Emilia approach offers valuable contributions to the creation of participatory, meaningful, and child-centered educational practices. The findings are expected to serve as a theoretical foundation for curriculum development and pedagogical innovation in various local contexts, especially in Indonesia.

Keywords: curriculum development; early childhood education; educational approach; environmental exploration

Introduction

Early childhood education (PAUD) is the main foundation for the formation of character and basic abilities of children. During this period, children experience rapid development both cognitively, socially, emotionally, and morally. Therefore, the educational approach applied at the PAUD level must be able to respond to the developmental needs of children holistically (Arseven, 2014). In a global context, various pedagogical approaches have been developed to achieve this goal. One approach that has gained widespread recognition in various parts of the world is the Reggio Emilia approach, which originated in Italy and was pioneered by Loris Malaguzzi after World War II. This approach is not only a response to the moral and social destruction after the war, but also an expression of new hope for the future through children's education (Wortham, 2006).

Reggio Emilia is not just a pedagogical approach, but an educational philosophy that sees children as competent individuals, full of potential, and has the right to actively participate in their own learning process. Children are seen as subjects, not objects of learning, which means that they are not

passive recipients of knowledge, but active creators of meaning through social interaction, environmental exploration, and dialogue with teachers and peers (Coşkun, 2022). This approach is heavily influenced by social constructivism, especially Vygotsky's ideas about the zone of proximal development, as well as John Dewey's emphasis on the importance of experience in learning. In addition, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences also contributes greatly to the principles of this approach, emphasizing that each child has a unique and diverse way of learning (Wortham, 2006).

One of the most famous ideas of the Reggio Emilia approach is the concept of "The Hundred Languages of Children", which states that children have a hundred ways to express themselves—through art, language, music, movement, play, and various other media (Arseven, 2014). This philosophy provides space for children's creativity to develop freely and not be limited by just one form of communication. Thus, the learning process in this approach is not limited by a rigid curriculum, but is developed contextually and dynamically based on the child's interests, experiences, and interactions with their social environment.

The Reggio Emilia approach has attracted international attention since the 1980s. The exhibition "The Hundred Languages of Children", which was exhibited in various countries, became the gateway for the introduction of this approach globally. In the early 1990s, the magazine *Newsweek* even called Reggio Emilia schools one of the best educational models in the world for early childhood. Since then, this approach has been adopted and adapted by educational institutions in various countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and even several countries in Africa and the Middle East (Landi & Pintus, 2022).

However, it is important to note that the adoption of this approach outside Italy is often not done in its entirety, but rather only by adapting certain principles that are considered relevant. In the United States, for example, many PAUD institutions claim to use the Reggio Emilia approach, but in reality, only apply elements such as classroom layout, learning documentation, or child observation methods without integrating the overall pedagogical philosophy that underlies this approach (Nuraeni & Sharina, 2020). Similar things also happen in Australia and other Asian countries, where the Reggio Emilia approach is adapted by adjusting local cultural values, human resources, and applicable education policies.

This situation raises important questions: to what extent can the Reggio Emilia approach be implemented effectively outside its original context? How is a Reggio-based curriculum developed in a different cultural environment? And how are the roles of teachers and children positioned in the learning system? These questions are what drive the need for a more in-depth study of Reggio Emilia practices in a global context, especially in preschool education (Anggraeni & Listiana, 2023). Many previous studies have shown the positive impact of implementing this approach on child development, but not many have systematically studied how this approach translates into curriculum practices, teacher-student relationships, and the creation of appropriate learning environments (Coşkun, 2022).

The global recognition of the Reggio Emilia approach cannot be separated from the characteristics of the curriculum, which is open, flexible, and child-centered. Unlike pedagogical approaches, which are instructional and standardized, the curriculum in Reggio Emilia is *emergent*, meaning that the curriculum is not designed rigidly from the beginning by teachers or institutions, but rather develops based on children's interests, questions, and actual experiences in their daily lives (Edwards et al., 2011). This allows for more relevant, contextual, and meaningful learning because the substance of the curriculum emerges from the dynamics of interactions between children, teachers, and the environment.

The role of teachers in this approach undergoes a fundamental shift. Teachers are no longer positioned as the main authority in conveying knowledge, but rather as facilitators, researchers, and learning companions for children. Teachers become co-learners and co-researchers with children, creating a dialogic space that allows children to express ideas and build their own understanding (Edwards et al., 2011). In other words, teachers in the Reggio Emilia context not only observe, but also interpret and document children's learning processes, as part of an effort to create a reflective and continuously evolving curriculum. This documentation is not just an administrative record, but an important pedagogical instrument in understanding children's thinking processes and designing the next learning steps.

In this context, children are positioned as active subjects in learning, who have the right to choose, explore, and construct their own knowledge. The relationship between children and teachers is built on mutual trust and respect for the child's capacity as an individual with a high curiosity. Learning is not merely the transmission of information, but a collaborative process in building knowledge and meaning. This is what makes the Reggio Emilia approach very relevant to the 21st-century educational paradigm, which emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Craft, 2005).

In addition to teachers and children, the learning environment in the Reggio Emilia approach also plays a very important role. The environment is not only seen as a background or place of learning, but as a "third teacher" after parents and teachers. Therefore, classrooms and learning areas are designed very carefully to encourage exploration, interaction, and self-expression. Beauty, order, and diversity of materials are part of the pedagogical strategy to stimulate a rich and diverse learning process (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). In practice, spaces in Reggio schools are designed to be open and flexible, allowing children to move freely, interact spontaneously, and choose activities according to their interests. This space is also equipped with various natural and artificial materials that allow children to create, experiment, and imagine.

The curriculum development process in this approach is also always collaborative and reflective. Teachers do not work alone, but collaborate with colleagues, pedagogical coordinators, and parents in designing and reviewing learning. Learning projects that arise from children's interests are not only followed up in daily activities, but are also documented in the form of panels, journals, or portfolios that can be reread and used as evaluation materials. Thus, the curriculum in Reggio Emilia is not something final, but continues to develop in dialogue between children, teachers, parents, and the social context in which the school is located (Seager et al., 2010).

However, in the process of its implementation internationally, this approach faces serious challenges. Not all educational institutions have the readiness of human resources, especially teachers, to carry out the reflective and collaborative roles that are characteristic of Reggio Emilia. Many teachers are still trapped in the traditional instructional paradigm, where knowledge is considered something that must be transferred linearly from teacher to student. In addition, national education systems in various countries often set a highly standardized curriculum, making it difficult to implement a flexible and interest-based curriculum such as that adopted by Reggio Emilia (Anggraeni & Listiana, 2023). On the other hand, not all parents understand the importance of the exploration and documentation-based learning process, so communication between schools and families is crucial in the successful implementation of this approach.

The socio-cultural context also influences how the Reggio Emilia approach is adapted. In some Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, and even Indonesia, collective cultural values and respect for authority tend to strengthen the role of teachers as the center of learning. Adapting the Reggio approach in this context requires a redefinition of the role of teachers to be more democratic and a more equal relationship with children. Research conducted by (Coşkun, 2022) shows that the success of Reggio Emilia implementation is largely determined by the readiness of institutions to build a collaborative learning culture, not just changing teaching methods. Therefore, paradigm transformation is an important prerequisite so that this approach is not only a rhetorical inspiration, but can become a real practice in early childhood education.

Given this reality, it is important to examine more deeply how the Reggio Emilia approach can be adapted contextually, especially in an education system that is still very bureaucratic and results-oriented. This approach offers a pedagogical alternative that allows learning to be more humane, democratic, and relevant to children. To that end, this article not only examines the theory and principles of Reggio Emilia, but also explores real practices and challenges of its implementation in preschool education in various countries. This study aims to fill the literature gap related to the integration of Reggio Emilia in the development of a contextual, participatory, and needs-based PAUD curriculum.

Method

This Article uses the method *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) to examine the concept and process of curriculum development from the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood education units (PAUD). The SLR method is used to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scientific literature, so that it can provide a comprehensive picture of the topics discussed (Suhartono,

2017; Triandini et al., 2019). The initial stage in writing this article is to formulate a clear and specific research question, which is the main guide in the literature search process. In this study, the focus of the question is directed at the concept and process of curriculum development in the Reggio Emilia approach. Furthermore, the literature search process is carried out by applying the criteria inclusion and exclusion (Triandini et al., 2019). Inclusion criteria are set to ensure that the collected literature is relevant to the research topic, such as journal articles, books, and recent research reports. In contrast, exclusion criteria are used to select literature that is outside a certain time frame or does not fit the research context. In this article, the inclusion criteria include literature originating from *platform* trusted, discussing the concept of the Reggio Emilia approach and its curriculum development process, and published in the time period 2014 to 2025.

After that, a systematic search for relevant literature was conducted using various credible sources of information. The author utilized database Google Scholar, Scopus, and device software Mendeley to collect relevant literature while facilitating the citation process. Keywords relevant to the research topic are applied to ensure that the search results are in line with the focus of the study. The literature obtained is then selected based on the relevance of the research title, to meet the initial criteria. These articles are then evaluated in more depth by reviewing the abstracts and the research results presented. The evaluation process also includes an assessment of the quality of the literature, the research methods used, and the main results reported.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of an in-depth review of a number of established literature, the researcher identified six scientific works that were considered the most relevant in supporting the study of the Reggio Emilia approach in early childhood education. These six references not only present a strong theoretical framework, but also present a variety of complementary perspectives, both from international and local contexts in Indonesia. The first work reviewed was the writing (McNally & Slutsky, 2017) entitled *Key Elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach and How They are Interconnected to Create the Highly Regarded System of Early Childhood Education*. In an article published by *Routledge Taylor & Francis Group*, it is systematically explained how the main elements of the Reggio Emilia approach are interconnected to create a globally recognized early childhood education system. The thinking of both is an important foundation in understanding the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of this approach.

Furthermore, (Coşkun, 2022), through an article entitled *The Reggio Emilia Approach in Early Childhood Education* which is loaded in the *Journal of Muallim Rifat Faculty of Education*, offers further insight into the application of this approach in today's educational context. Coşkun highlights how Reggio Emilia principles can be adapted to the developmental needs of children and diverse socio-cultural dynamics. This perspective broadens the horizon of researchers' understanding of the flexibility and adaptability of the Reggio Emilia approach. Then, the article (Arseven, 2014) entitled "The Reggio Emilia Approach and Curriculum Development Process," in the *International Journal of Academic Research* emphasizes the curriculum aspect. Arseven explores how this approach directs the process of developing a curriculum that is more participatory and based on children's potential, and makes children active subjects in the learning process.

Meanwhile, studies from the local context are also an important part of this discussion. (Risnawati et al., 2021), in their article *Implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Developing Children's Creativity Through Playing with Plasticine at Aisyiyah Yosomulyo Kindergarten*, which is loaded in *Al-Muaddib Journal*, shows that the principles of Reggio Emilia can be implemented effectively through concrete activities such as playing with plasticine. This study shows how the Reggio Emilia approach encourages children's creativity through exploration and imagination in structured play activities. Furthermore, (Anggraeni & Listiana, 2023) in the journal *CERIA*, highlights the relevance of the Reggio Emilia approach in shaping the social-emotional competence of early childhood. With the title *Study of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Building Social-Emotional Competence in Early Childhood*, this article emphasizes the importance of a supportive learning environment, active involvement of children, and the role of teachers as facilitators in supporting children's emotional and social development.

The last reference comes from the writing (Sasmita et al., 2021) contained in *Obsession Journal: Early Childhood Education Journal*, titled, “The Reggio Emilia Approach to Addressing the Challenges of Early Childhood Skills in the 21st Century.” This study provides an important contribution in bridging the Reggio Emilia approach with the demands of 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. The author emphasizes that this approach is not only able to answer the needs of children's development, but also able to adapt to rapid and complex changes in the era.

Table 9. Selected References Relevant to the Research Topic

Name (Year)	Research Title	Journal/Publisher
McNally & Slutsky (2017)	<i>Key Elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach and How They are Interconnected to Create the Highly Regarded System of Early Childhood Education</i>	Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: <i>Early Child Development and Care</i>
Coşkun (2022)	<i>The Reggio Emilia Approach in Early Childhood Education</i>	<i>Journal of Muallim Rifat Faculty of Education</i>
Arseven (2014)	<i>The Reggio Emilia Approach and Curriculum Development Process</i>	<i>International Journal of Academic Research</i>
Risnawati et al., (2021)	Implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Developing Children's Creativity Through Playing with Plasticine at Aisyiyah Yosomulyo Kindergarten	Al-Muaddib Journal
Anggraeni & Listiana (2023)	Study of the Reggio Emilia approach in Building Social-Emotional Competence in Early Childhood	CERIA (Smart Energetic Responsive Innovative Adaptive)
Sasmita et al., (2021)	The Reggio Emilia Approach to Addressing the Challenges of Early Childhood Skills in the 21st Century	Obsession Journal: Early Childhood Education Journal

The six references were chosen by the researcher because the discussion in them is still continuous with what the researcher will study. So the researcher maintains the six references for further analysis. Although in general, research from McNally & Slutsky (2017) and Coşkun (2022) emphasizes that the Reggio Emilia approach integrates pedagogical principles such as social constructivism, spatial aesthetics, and authentic documentation that are interdependent in creating a reflective and participatory education system. Furthermore, Arseven (2014) explains how the results of his study related to the curriculum within the Reggio Emilia framework are emergent and responsive to the dynamics of children's interests and needs, which allows for a contextual, adaptive, and subject-centered learning process as an active learning agent.

Several studies from Indonesia also show the effectiveness of implementing this approach in accommodating various aspects of early childhood development. Risnawati et al., (2021) showed that through the plasticine media that she designed using the Reggio Emilia principle, she was able to significantly actualize children's creative potential and fine motor skills. Anggraeni & Listiana (2023) identified the contribution of this approach to strengthening children's social-emotional competence through the process of intersubjectivity in a supportive and democratic learning environment. Furthermore, Sasmita et al., (2021) emphasized that the Reggio Emilia approach has strategic relevance in facing the complexity of 21st century educational challenges, by emphasizing the development of critical, collaborative, and *problem-solving* from an early age, by comparing the Reggio Emilia approach with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept.

After reviewing the six sources of reference, the researcher separated the discussion into three core points to be used as analysis material. The three discussion points include the concept of the Reggio Emilia approach, the curriculum development process in the Reggio Emilia approach, and the role of children and teachers in the Reggio Emilia approach.

The Reggio Emilia Approach Concept

Based on the results of the analysis, the concept of the Reggio Emilia approach is inspired by John Dewey's progressive educational thinking, Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural development theory, and Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory (Arseven, 2014; Coşkun, 2022; Wortham, 2006). This approach is based on the philosophy of constructivism, which views children as active individuals who have the ability to build their own understanding of the world around them (Wortham, 2006). The essence of this approach is the belief that children are capable learners and are able to play an active role in the learning process.

One of the characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach is the use of an aesthetically designed and stimulating physical environment to stimulate children's curiosity and creativity in learning activities (McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Risnawati et al., 2021). Children are given the freedom to choose activities and projects according to their interests, while teachers act as facilitators and observers or researchers who accompany the child's learning process with full attention.

Moreover, according to Sasmita et al. (2021), this approach strongly emphasizes the importance of collaboration between children, teachers, parents, and the community in creating meaningful learning experiences. The learning environment is designed aesthetically to inspire and support children's exploration through various media and sources, such as art, technology, natural materials, and literacy. Not only focusing on cognitive aspects, the Reggio Emilia approach also pays great attention to the development of children's social and emotional skills (Nuraeni & Sharina, 2020; Setyowati et al., 2021). Every child is valued as a unique individual with different backgrounds and potentials. Thus, parental and community involvement are seen as an integral part of the educational process. Where these principles are in line with those put forward by Wortham (2006), including:

First, in the Reggio Emilia approach, the concept *child as protagonist* is the main principle that distinguishes this approach from traditional educational models. Children are positioned as the main characters in the learning process, not as passive recipients of information. This approach believes that every child since birth has the potential, curiosity, and internal drive to understand the world around them (Edwards et al., 2011). Children are believed to be able to form their own knowledge through active interaction with the environment, objects, adults, and peers.

In this framework, education is not a one-way process, but rather an open dialogue between children, teachers, and parents. Children are given space to express ideas, ask questions, and build meaning through exploration and negotiation. Teachers act as facilitators who listen, respond, and guide children in the process of searching for meaning (Xie, 2021). Teachers also create an environment that is rich in stimuli and open to children's initiatives. Rather than strictly directing children, teachers design learning situations that challenge and support children's ability to think critically, collaborate, and build understanding independently.

The role of parents in this approach is also very important. Parents are considered partners in the educational process, not just complements. They are involved in documentation, decision-making, and joint reflection on the child's learning process (Halimah et al., 2023). The relationship between school and family is established through open communication and active participation in learning activities.

Second, the Reggio Emilia approach also positions the child as *collaborator* in the educational process. This view emphasizes that learning does not only take place individually, but also grows through social relationships and collaboration with others. Children are encouraged to build shared meaning through interactions with peers, teachers, family, and the surrounding environment. In this context, the learning process becomes a social experience rooted in collaboration and dialogue (Edwards et al., 2011).

Reggio Emilia is based on the principle of social constructivism, especially referring to the thinking of (Vygotsky, 2018), which states that children's cognitive development is influenced by social and cultural interactions. Knowledge is not transferred directly, but is constructed through conversation, negotiation, and group work. Children learn to develop ideas and solve problems together, not only through teacher direction, but also through collective thinking that grows in small groups.

In practice, Reggio Emilia teachers often facilitate activities that require children to work in groups, where they share ideas, listen to each other, and respond to each other. Situations like this create a safe space for children to express their opinions, while learning to understand the perspectives of others. Collaboration not only supports social-emotional development but also enriches children's thinking processes as they encounter different perspectives in completing a task or project (Polat et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this collaborative principle also expands the boundaries of the learning space. Children are encouraged to realize that they are part of a wider community. Therefore, relationships with parents, school residents, and even the surrounding community become important. Through cross-role collaborative work, children learn that knowledge is socially constructed, and their identities develop in the context of reciprocal relationships with the outside world (Stewart & Brown, 2023).

By placing children as collaborators, the Reggio Emilia approach creates a democratic and open learning atmosphere. Collaboration is a way for children to learn to appreciate differences, build empathy, and understand that learning is a shared process, not just an individual achievement (Vettriselvan, 2025). This principle emphasizes that early childhood education should be rooted in healthy dialogue and social relationships, as a foundation for the growth of humans who are able to live together meaningfully in society.

Third, draft children as communicators is another fundamental principle in the Reggio Emilia approach. Here, children are understood as individuals who have many ways of expressing their thoughts, emotions, and ideas—not only through spoken language, but also through various forms of symbolic expression. This approach is known as *the hundred languages of children*, namely the idea that children have hundreds of ways to communicate and construct meaning (Edwards et al., 2011). Children are encouraged to use verbal and nonverbal language such as gestures, drawings, paintings, buildings, sculptures, collages, drama games, and music as a means of conveying their ideas and feelings.

Reggio Emilia views each form of expression as having equal value. No one medium is considered superior to another, as each provides different possibilities in articulating the child's experiences. Children are given the freedom to choose the medium that best suits their way of thinking, so that their thought processes become concretely visible and understandable to others. Teachers and adults play a role in observing, documenting, and taking these expressions seriously, as a form of respect for children's intelligence and creativity (Curtis & Carter, 2022).

Through this approach, communication is not only interpreted as a means of exchanging information, but as a rich and multidimensional process of constructing meaning. Children learn to think through creative actions, and at the same time learn that their ideas are important and worthy of being heard. This provides space for children to feel confident in expressing themselves and understanding the world, while increasing their ability to reflect and aesthetic sensitivity (Mureşan & Turda, 2022).

By valuing the diversity of ways of communicating, the Reggio Emilia approach not only supports children's language and cognitive development, but also recognizes the dignity and autonomy of children as active learners. Every child's work, expression, and question becomes a gateway to recognizing how they see and experience the world. This is what makes communication in Reggio Emilia not just a skill, but the heart of the learning process itself.

Fourth, in the Reggio Emilia approach, the learning environment is positioned not merely as a physical setting where activities take place, but as the third teacher—after children and teachers. This idea emphasizes that learning spaces and environments play an active role in shaping children's educational experiences. A carefully designed environment not only supports children's activities, but also becomes a living, meaningful learning resource that can stimulate children's natural curiosity and exploration (Edwards et al., 2011).

Every element in the learning space, from the lighting, wall colors, materials used, to the arrangement of tables and children's work, is seriously considered as part of the pedagogical process. The layout of the space is arranged in such a way that it is aesthetic, functional, and reflects the values of collaboration, openness, and respect for children's expression. The learning space is not just a "child-friendly" place, but becomes *dialogic space* where children can interact, explore ideas, and create meaning through direct experiences (Sudirman et al., 2022).

Each corner of the room has its own identity and educational value. For example, the art area encourages creative expression, the reading area invites silence and reflection, while open spaces such as the school garden support nature-based learning. Within this framework, the environment also serves as a living documentation—displaying children's work, thinking processes, and learning dynamics visually, which not only provides space for children to recognize their progress but also invites parents and teachers to be involved in the ongoing learning process (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007).

By treating the environment as a third teacher, Reggio Emilia invites educators to see space not just

as an accessory, but as an integral part of the curriculum itself. A lively, open and possible environment creates an inspiring learning atmosphere, sparking children's emotional and intellectual engagement, and strengthening the connection between space, children, and the ideas they develop. This principle proves that quality education depends not only on teaching materials or methods, but also on how we design and respect the spaces in which children grow and learn.

Fifth, teacher as partners, caregivers, and mentors in the child's learning process. Teachers act as facilitators who accompany children's exploration, create a meaningful environment, and foster children's self-confidence and curiosity through warm and reflective interactions (Edwards et al., 2011). The relationship between teachers and children is built on mutual respect, where teachers respect children's ideas as something valuable and worthy of being developed together.

Teachers in this approach are actively present but not dominant. They listen, observe, document, and respond to children's thoughts and actions as part of the learning process. The teacher's job is to create open and flexible learning situations, where children feel safe to try, fail, and try again. Teachers also act as designers of learning contexts that can trigger children's curiosity, as well as liaisons between children's ideas and the world outside the classroom (Scott-Barrett et al., 2023). In this way, teachers encourage dialogic learning, where children and teachers together build knowledge in a dynamic and meaningful process.

In addition, teachers also have a role as *babysitter* in an emotional and social sense. The presence of teachers who are sensitive to children's needs, both cognitively and affectively, creates a supportive and empathetic relationship. This relationship is an important foundation for children to develop self-confidence, independence, and social skills. Teachers not only pay attention to the end result of children's activities, but also the thought processes and feelings that accompany them. In this case, teachers become witnesses and companions to children's growth and development, who appreciate every small step in their learning journey (Kraus & Pemsel, 2023).

By positioning the teacher as a partner, caregiver, and guide, the Reggio Emilia approach offers an educational model that respects the child's right to learn in a loving, interactive, and participatory environment. The teacher is not the "owner of the answers," but someone who grows and learns with the child, in a spirit of mutually enriching collaboration.

Sixth, One of the characteristics of the Reggio Emilia approach that distinguishes it from other early childhood education models is the placement of the teacher as *researcher* in the context of learning. Teachers are not only tasked with teaching, but also function as active observers who systematically document, analyze, and reflect on children's learning processes. This approach is based on the belief that to truly understand children, teachers must engage in a process of in-depth observation of children's behavior, language, social interactions, and daily work (Blewitt et al., 2021).

By acting as researchers, teachers gain a deeper insight into how children think, their interests, and the strategies they use to solve challenges. These observations are not just recording activities, but part of the pedagogical interpretation process that forms the basis for designing contextual, personal, and meaningful learning activities (Edwards et al., 2011). Documentation in the form of photographs, recordings of conversations, drawings, and diaries are important tools used by teachers to understand the dynamics of learning and make them accessible to children, colleagues, and parents.

Moreover, this approach emphasizes the importance of teachers' ongoing reflection on their own teaching practices. Teachers are encouraged to focus not only on children's development, but also on their professional thinking processes as educators. This reflection can be done individually or collectively in discussions between teachers, which ultimately encourages a culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional development (Bendtsen et al., 2022). In other words, teachers do not only "teach children," but also continue to "learn from children."

Principle *teacher as researcher* creating an equal relationship between teacher and child, because both are in a position to explore, find out, and understand the world together. Teachers are not seen as figures who have all the answers, but as learning partners who are open to the process, change, and learning from everyday experiences. This approach strengthens educational practices that are reflective, contextual, and evidence-based, so that they are able to respond to children's learning needs more sensitively and deeply.

Seventh, documentation has a central role that goes beyond the mere evaluation function. It is seen as *communication media* which allows teachers, children, and parents to understand each other's ongoing

learning process. Documentation in this context includes various forms: photos of children's activities, teacher observation notes, quotes from children, visual works, and audio-visual recordings. All of these forms are used to capture, organize, and present children's thinking processes and learning dynamics in a concrete and narrative manner (Rinaldi, 2020).

Documentation in Reggio is not just a collection of data or archives, but a living reflective medium. Through documentation, the child's previously invisible learning process becomes visible, legible, and understandable to all parties involved in education. Teachers use documentation to analyze children's learning strategies, identify their interests and needs, and design subsequent learning in a more targeted and responsive manner (Edwards et al., 2011). This process helps teachers not to get caught up in a uniform approach, but to be able to design learning experiences that are personal and contextual.

Furthermore, documentation also plays an important role in bridging communication between schools and families. When parents see their children's documentation—whether in the form of artwork, photos of activities, or transcripts of conversations—they can understand their children's learning experiences more deeply. This strengthens their involvement in the educational process and creates meaningful dialogue between home and school (Abbas et al., 2023). Even among fellow teachers, documentation becomes a subject of professional discussion that triggers joint reflection and pedagogical innovation.

By making documentation an integral part of the learning process, the Reggio Emilia approach builds a transparent, collaborative and reflective educational culture. Documentation not only supports the development of children, but also develops teacher competence and strengthens the relationship between schools and families. In this context, documentation becomes a reflection of the Reggio philosophy: that learning is an open, evolving process, and worthy of being shared and celebrated together.

Eighth, parents are not positioned as outsiders, but as *equal partner* in the process of children's education. This concept is based on the belief that children's education does not only occur at school, but also takes place continuously at home and in everyday life. Therefore, the active involvement of parents is highly valued and considered essential in creating consistent and meaningful learning experiences for children (Edwards et al., 2011).

Partnerships between parents and teachers are not limited to attendance at school events or regular meetings, but include participation in planning activities, decision-making, and reflection on the learning process that occurs. Parents are invited to have open dialogue, sharing their views, values, and hopes for their children's education. This relationship is reciprocal and collaborative, where teachers do not patronize, and parents do not simply receive, but together form an educational ecosystem that supports children's holistic development (Ackah-Jnr, 2022).

Close interaction between school and family creates continuity between learning experiences at home and at school. Children do not see two separate worlds, but experience a unified learning process that supports each other. In addition to strengthening children's sense of security and self-confidence, this approach also encourages parents to understand more deeply how children think and learn through documentation and reflection shared by teachers (Al-Barakat et al., 2025).

The involvement of parents as true partners in education makes the learning process richer, contextual and relevant to the child's life. This approach also fosters a sense of belonging to the educational community, both for teachers and families. In the spirit of Reggio Emilia, a warm and open relationship between home and school is not simply a strategy for strengthening education, but part of a fundamental philosophy that respects the child as part of a wider social network.

Table 10
Key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach

No.	Prince Reggio Emilia	Short Description
1	Children as Protagonists	Children are positioned as the main characters in learning; have potential, curiosity, and the ability to build their own understanding through active interaction.
2	Children as Collaborators	Emphasizes children's social relationships in small groups, based on social constructivism; learning is formed through interaction with others.

3	Children as Communicators	Children express their thoughts and feelings through various symbols: pictures, movements, music, language, and others; each medium is their natural language.
4	Environment as the Third Teacher	The environment is designed as an active learning space that is both aesthetic and functional; sparking exploration, reflection, and meaning in every corner of the room.
5	Teachers as Partners, Caregivers, and Mentors	Teachers are not centers of knowledge, but rather sensitive and supportive companions; guiding children to find meaning independently and collaboratively.
6	Teacher as Researcher	Teachers conduct observations, documentation, and reflection to understand how children think; these practices support responsive and professional learning.
7	Documentation as a Communication Media	Documentation (photos, quotes, children's work) is not only an evaluation tool, but also a means of reflection and dialogue between children, teachers and parents.
8	Parents as Partners	Parents are actively involved in educational activities, planning, and reflection; close relationships strengthen the continuity of learning at home and school.

Curriculum Development Process in the Reggio Emilia Approach

Some sources define the curriculum in the Reggio Emilia approach as a curriculum that is *contextual* (Anggraeni & Listiana, 2023; Arseven, 2014; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Sasmita et al., 2021). This is because curriculum design is not carried out unilaterally by teachers or educational institutions, but is formed through dynamic dialogue between children, educators, and the environment. Learning content can come from various sources, such as student proposals, teacher ideas, natural phenomena, social events, or other external ideas. The subject matter is not rigid, but can be adjusted based on the child's aspirations, events in family life, or areas that are currently the child's main interests.

One of the main elements in this curriculum is the use of teaching team documentation and learning projects as the main foundation (Arseven, 2014). Teachers work collaboratively to formulate hypotheses that will be used as the basis for the project, organize the necessary materials, and even engage with families and communities to enrich the learning process. This is as stated by Sayekti (2016) who stated that the emphasis in the Reggio Emilia approach is not on individual test results, but on the collaborative and participatory group learning process.

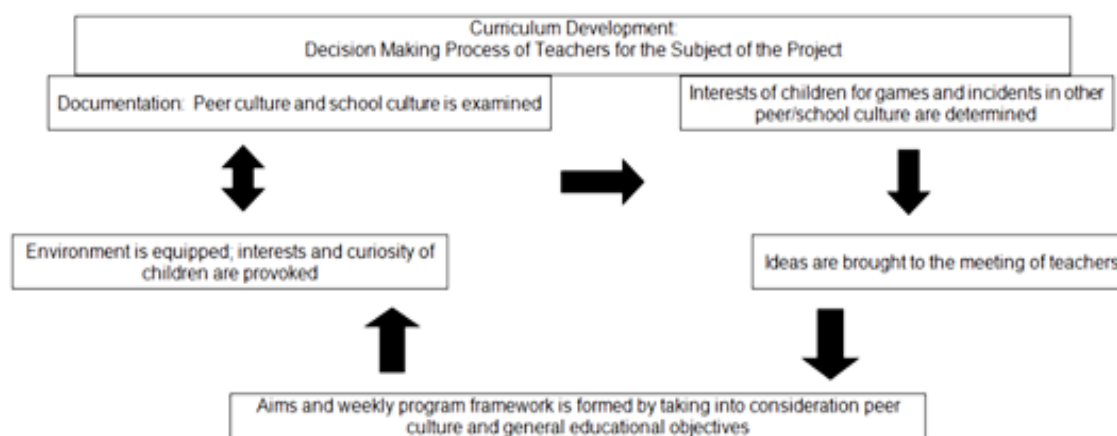
The curriculum in the Reggio Emilia approach is built on the basis of project-based approaches and small group-based learning. Two important terms used are *an emergent career*, namely a curriculum that develops naturally based on class dynamics and children's interests, and *projected curriculum*, namely a curriculum that is projected based on the potential of topics and possible learning directions (Arseven, 2014). The Reggio Emilia curriculum is flexible and organically formed based on time, context, and the active participation of all parties involved (Westhisi & Nuraeni, 2022). This emphasizes that the learning process can occur even through short or spontaneous experiences, not just from formal learning plans.

The project-based learning process in the Reggio Emilia approach encourages children to explore the reality around them in depth. Children are encouraged to make direct observations and be actively involved in the investigation process during the project (Westhisi & Nuraeni, 2022). This project can be done individually, in small groups, or by the whole class, depending on the nature and scope of the theme. The main goal is for children to be able to find answers to questions that arise, either from themselves, from friends, or from teachers, as well as develop skills in decision-making,

responsibility, initiative, and the ability to conduct independent research (Arseven, 2014). Thus, in the Reggio Emilia approach, every child is positioned as a young researcher. They are encouraged to hone critical thinking skills and use the scientific process as a tool to explore and understand the world. So, it is not entirely correct to say that the Reggio Emilia approach does not have a curriculum. Instead, this approach offers a living and adaptive curriculum model, in which children play an active role in creating and directing their own learning experiences.

To clarify the picture related to the curriculum development process in the Reggio Emilia approach, the researcher adopted the steps taken by several schools in the United States that use the Reggio Emilia approach.

Figure 10
Curriculum Development Process With Reggio Emilia Approach



The figure shows the flow of the decision-making process carried out by teachers in developing project-based curriculum, especially in determining topics that are relevant and meaningful to children. This process is centered on understanding peer culture and school culture, which is an important foundation in designing a curriculum that is contextual, participatory, and interesting for students.

The first step begins with documentation, where teachers carefully observe and record children's interactions in their daily lives in the school environment. The main focus at this stage is to identify communication patterns, games they are interested in, how children build social relationships, and the values that develop among them. This observation provides an initial picture of interests, needs, and potential topics that can be developed further.

Next, the teacher analyzes the documentation results to identify children's interests in games, events, or phenomena that appear in peer culture and school culture. At this stage, the teacher tries to find topics that trigger children's curiosity and enthusiasm, which can later become a starting point in compiling learning projects.

After a number of ideas have been formulated, teachers bring the findings into a discussion forum with colleagues. In teacher meetings, the ideas are discussed collaboratively to evaluate the appropriateness of the topic, relevance to the classroom context, and its relationship to broader educational goals.

Based on the discussion results, the teacher then designs learning objectives and a weekly program framework, which integrates aspects of peer culture with formal education standards. This plan is designed to remain flexible, allowing room for children to explore but still focused on achieving the expected competencies.

The next stage is the preparation of a learning environment that supports children's exploration. The classroom is arranged in such a way as to be able to trigger children's curiosity, active participation, and creativity. Teachers prepare game tools, learning media, and interaction spaces that are adjusted to the agreed theme, with the aim of provoking natural participation from children.

This process is cyclical, meaning that teachers will return to the documentation stage to observe the latest developments, evaluate children's responses to ongoing activities, and make adjustments to

the learning plan if necessary. Thus, the curriculum used is dynamic and continues to develop based on the interaction between children, teachers, and the environment.

The Role of Children and Teachers in the Reggio Emilia Approach

Based on the results of the review of primary reference sources, the roles of children and teachers in the Reggio Emilia approach have unique characteristics, complement each other, and have an impact on the formation of meaningful learning experiences. In the Reggio Emilia approach, children are positioned as active subjects in the learning process, namely as builders of their own knowledge (Coşkun, 2022; McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Sasmita et al., 2021). This view emphasizes that children have a natural capacity to understand the world around them through an exploratory process. As stated by Westhisi & Nuraeni (2022) that in the Reggio Emilia approach, children are encouraged to ask questions, make assumptions, try various solutions, and actively engage in investigative activities as part of a contextual learning process, including in developing an understanding of mathematics and other concepts.

More than just learners, children are also seen as young researchers who have the right to explore, experiment, and observe their environment freely (Arseven, 2014). The Reggio Emilia approach opens up space for children to form understanding through direct experiences that they encounter in everyday contexts. In addition, the Reggio Emilia approach places great emphasis on social learning through collaborative work (Anggraeni & Listiana, 2023). Children are invited to work together on group projects or activities, where they can exchange ideas, share knowledge, and build shared understanding. These social interactions play an important role in broadening their perspectives and deepening their understanding through dialogue and teamwork.

Meanwhile, the role of teachers in the Reggio Emilia approach is multifaceted and dynamic. Arseven (2014) explains that teachers act as facilitators and primary observers in the learning process. This role places teachers not as the main source of knowledge, but as learning partners who accompany children in exploring various experiences. Teachers also function as researchers, who actively listen, observe, and document the development and learning process of children in the classroom (McNally & Slutsky, 2017; Sayekti, 2016). In addition, teachers have a responsibility to spark and stimulate children's thinking. This is as stated by Nuraeni & Sharina (2020) that the role of teachers in the Reggio Emilia approach is expected to be able to provoke curiosity, build meaningful conversations, and create challenging learning situations that still support children's development. Teachers in this context are also required to continuously reflect on teaching practices and learning processes that occur (Coşkun, 2022; Westhisi & Nuraeni, 2022), to ensure that the approach used remains relevant, adaptive, and appropriate to the unique needs of each child.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis above, the Reggio Emilia approach represents an early childhood education paradigm that places children as active subjects in the learning process. Children are not viewed as passive recipients of information, but as individuals who have the innate potential to build knowledge through concrete experiences, environmental exploration, and rich social interactions. The curriculum in this approach is open, flexible, and dynamically developing, guided by children's interests, teacher documentation, and parent and community participation. In practice, teachers not only carry out instructional functions but also act as facilitators, observers, and researchers who continue to critically reflect on their teaching practices. With holistic, participatory, and experience-based principles, Reggio Emilia shows great potential in forming a contextual and meaningful learning ecosystem for early childhood, while opening up space for a more humane and responsive pedagogical approach to child development.

References

- Abbas, E. W., Syaharuddin, M., Mutiani, M., Susanto, H., & Jumriani, J. (2023). Strengthening Historical Thinking Skills Through Transcript-Based Lesson Analyses Model in the Lesson of History. *Kajian-Kajian Lokal Kalimantan Selatan*, 54.

- Ackah-Jnr, F. R. (2022). Enabling inclusive education: the leadership ecosystem in an early childhood-school-community context. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–19.
- Al-Barakat, A. A., Al-Hassan, O. M., AlAli, R. M., Bataineh, R. F., Aboud, Y. Z., & Ibrahim, N. A. (2025). Shaping Young Minds: How Teachers Foster Social Interaction, Psychological Security and Motivational Support in the Primary Language Classroom. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 24(1), 359–378.
- Anggraeni, S. N., & Listiana, A. (2023). Kajian Pendekatan Reggio Emilia Dalam Membangun Kompetensi Sosial-Emosional Anak Usia Dini. *CERIA (Cerdas Energik Responsif Inovatif Adaptif)*, 6(3), 297–306.
- Arseven, A. (2014). The Reggio Emilia Approach and Curriculum Development Process. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 6(1), 166–171. <https://doi.org/10.7813/2075-4124.2014/6-1/b.23>
- Bendtsen, M., Forsman, L., & Björklund, M. (2022). Exploring empowering practices for teachers' sustainable continuing professional development. *Educational Research*, 64(1), 60–76.
- Blewitt, C., O'Connor, A., Morris, H., Nolan, A., Mousa, A., Green, R., Ifanti, A., Jackson, K., & Skouteris, H. (2021). "It's embedded in what we do for every child": a qualitative exploration of early childhood educators' perspectives on supporting Children's social and emotional learning. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 1530.
- Coşkun, L. (2022). The Reggio Emilia Approach in Early Childhood Education. *Journal of Muallim Rifat Faculty of Education*, 4(1), 74–86.
- Craft, A. (2005). *Creativity in schools: Tensions and dilemmas*. Routledge.
- Curtis, D., & Carter, M. (2022). *The art of awareness: How observation can transform your teaching*. Redleaf Press.
- Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (2011). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Halimah, L., Yuliaratiningsih, M. S., & Mirawati. (2023). Strategies for optimizing partnership: workshop on teamwork for teachers and parents in early childhood education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 1–18.
- Kraus, A., & Pemsel, M. (2023). The Educational Journey: Bildningsresa (Swedish), Bildungsreise (German), and Personal Development. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 57(2), 16–35.
- Landi, L., & Pintus, A. (2022). A Critical Approach to the Reggio Emilia Approach. *Giornale Di Pedagogia Critica*, XI(2022), 107–125. <https://doi.org/10.14668/Educaz>
- McNally, S. A., & Slutsky, R. (2017). Key Elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach and How They are Interconnected to Create the Highly Regarded System of Early Childhood Education. *Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: Early Child Development and Care*, 187(12), 1925–1937. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1197920>
- Mureşan, L. E., & Turda, E. S. (2022). The Importance of Role Play and Artistic-Plastic Activities in the Preschoolers Self-Knowledge and Emotional Expressivity Development. *Educatia* 21, 23, 47–53.
- Nuraeni, L., & Sharina. (2020). Efektivitas Pembelajaran dengan Pendekatan Reggio Emilia untuk Meningkatkan Kreativitas Anaka dalam Konteks Merdeka Belajar di Taman Kanak-Kanak Kota Cimahi pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19. *Jurnal Tunas Siliwangi*, 6(2), 51–62.
- Polat, Ö., Sezer, T., & Akyol, N. A. (2022). Collaborative learning with mind mapping in the development of social skills of children. *Participatory Educational Research*, 9(1), 463–480.
- Rinaldi, A. (2020). Legal Pluralism and Indigenous Rights in Indonesia: Perspectives and Challenges. *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 62(1), 87–101.
- Risnawati, A., Hibana, & Surahman, S. (2021). Implementasi Pendektan Reggio Emiliia Dalam

- Pengembangn Kreatiivitas Anak Melalui Bermain Plastisin di TK Aisyiyah Yosomulyo. *Jurnal Al-Muaddib*, 3(2), 123–131.
- Sasmita, R. J., Tarwiyah, T., & Sumadi, T. (2021). Pendekatan Reggio Emilia dalam Menjawab Tantangan Kemampuan Anak Usia Dini Abad 21. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(1), 182–207. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i1.1217>
- Sayekti, T. (2016). Analisis Kurikulum Reggio Emilia. *JPP PAUD FKIP: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 3(8), 143–154.
- Scott-Barrett, J., Johnston, S.-K., Denton-Calabrese, T., McGrane, J. A., & Hopfenbeck, T. N. (2023). Nurturing curiosity and creativity in primary school classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 135, 104356.
- Seager, R., Naik, N., & Vecchi, G. A. (2010). Thermodynamic and dynamic mechanisms for large-scale changes in the hydrological cycle in response to global warming. *Journal of Climate*, 23(17), 4651–4668.
- Setyowati, R. I., Farantika, D., & Lutfia, Z. M. (2021). Perencanaan Pembelajaran Reggio Emilia Pada Anak Usia Dini. *Jurnal Sinda*, 1(3), 146–164.
- Stewart, D. L., & Brown, S. (2023). Social construction of identities. In *Rethinking college student development theory using critical frameworks* (pp. 110–125). Routledge.
- Strong-Wilson, T., & Ellis, J. (2007). Children and place: Reggio Emilia's environment as third teacher. *Theory into Practice*, 46(1), 40–47.
- Sudirman, A., Setiawan, E., & Septiani, E. (2022). Promoting Child-Friendly Education In The Digital Age: A Community Service Perspective. *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-Ilmu Agama*, 22(2), 137–150.
- Suhartono, E. (2017). Systematic Literatur Review (SLR): Metode , Manfaat , dan Tantangan Learning Analytics dengan Metode Data Mining di Dunia Pendidikan Tinggi. *Jurnal Ilmiah INFOKAM*, 13(1), 73–86.
- Triandini, E., Jayanatha, S., Indrawan, A., Werla Putra, G., & Iswara, B. (2019). Metode Systematic Literature Review untuk Identifikasi Platform dan Metode Pengembangan Sistem Informasi di Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Information Systems*, 1(2), 63–77. <https://doi.org/10.24002/ijis.v1i2.1916>
- Vettriselvan, R. (2025). Empowering Digital Education: The Future of Value-Based Learning in the Digital Era. In *Empowering Value Co-Creation in the Digital Era* (pp. 199–228). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Vygotsky, L. (2018). Lev Vygotsky. *La Psicología En La Revolución Rusa*. Colombia: Ediciones Desde Abajo.
- Westhisi, S. M., & Nuraeni, L. (2022). Penyuluhan Daring Pendekatan Reggio Emilia melalui Bermain Kreatif Berbasis Kecerdasan Jamak dalam Konteks Merdeka Belajar bagi Pendidik Kober di Desa Cilame Kabupaten Bandung Barat. *Abdimas Siliwangi*, 5(1), 25–34.
- Wortham, S. C. (2006). *Early Childhood Curriculum Developmental Bases fo Learning and Teaching*. Prentice Hall.
- Xie, R. (2021). The Effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) on Teaching English to Young Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 12(2).



© 2025 by the author. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).