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Comparative Analysis of Montessori-Based Learning Management: Structural-Idealist and Creative-Adaptive Typologies in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract:

The transformation of learning management in the 21st century demands the adoption of innovative approaches that align a child's natural potential with national educational standards. This study examines the application of the Montessori method within the framework of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum), which emphasizes management flexibility and strong instructional leadership to enhance children's critical and creative thinking skills. The research focuses on describing Montessori-based learning management through the functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC). A qualitative approach with a comparative case study design was employed at TK Tamasya Syakira and RA Khalifa in Bandung Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and subsequently analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal two typologies of learning management: the "Structural-Idealist" approach and the "Creative-Adaptive" approach. In terms of planning, both institutions systematically integrate Montessori principles with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Regarding organization, the learning environment—or "prepared environment"—is designed to foster children's independence and exploration. Learning is implemented through a "work cycle" that encourages self-correction and strengthens concentration. Meanwhile, supervision is carried out through objective anecdotal records, which serve as a basis for evaluating children's development. This study confirms that the application of POAC-based learning management within a Montessori framework can establish a learning ecosystem conducive to the development of intellectual independence. Through structured yet adaptive management, children's critical and creative thinking abilities can flourish optimally, aligned with their developmental stages.

Keywords: comparative study; critical thinking; learning management; Merdeka curriculum; Montessori method.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of education in the 21st century necessitates a paradigm shift in learning from conventional patterns to strengthening higher-order thinking competencies, particularly critical and creative thinking skills. This shift is not merely a global discourse but has become an urgent need within

the national education system. At the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level, the development of these abilities holds a highly strategic position because it serves as the foundation for character formation, independence, and intellectual resilience in children in subsequent developmental phases. Early childhood is in a golden age that determines the direction of its cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral development (Adiputra & Hidayah, 2025). Therefore, the learning approach applied at this stage must be able to provide space for children to think, ask questions, explore, and discover meaning independently. However, empirical reality shows academic unease when examining learning practices in a number of PAUD institutions. Many institutions still maintain a one-way (teacher-centered) instructional approach, where the teacher is the center of information and the child plays a passive role. This learning pattern has the potential to limit children's exploration and initiative in constructing their own knowledge. As a result, children's innate potential for critical and creative thinking is not optimally stimulated. In this context, learning management issues become crucial, as the design and management of learning processes that are less adaptive to children's developmental needs are often contributing factors to the low quality of early cognitive stimulation (Morrison, 2018).

Initial findings from a study conducted at the study site from April 2–4, 2026, further corroborate this phenomenon. Observations showed that approximately 60% of children still displayed a high level of prompt-dependence on teacher direction in completing learning activities. Children tended to wait for instructions before acting and showed little initiative in selecting and developing activities independently. Regarding critical thinking, preliminary data indicated that only approximately 25% of children were able to self-correct or recognize errors when using teaching aids without adult intervention. This situation demonstrates that despite the relative availability of learning resources, daily activity management is still dominated by rigid and overly structured instructions. The learning environment does not fully provide opportunities for children to make decisions, solve problems, and reflect on their own learning process (Sistiarini & Napitupulu, 2025). This problem leads to a gap analysis in efforts to integrate international pedagogical methods with national curriculum policies. One approach widely adopted in early childhood education is the Montessori method. This method emphasizes the principle of freedom within limits, allowing children to choose activities independently within a systematically structured environment. However, in practice, Montessori implementation in Indonesia often faces challenges in aligning with national education standards and the administrative requirements of the Independent Curriculum. Some institution administrators view the Montessori method as an exclusive approach that requires high costs and complex environmental preparation (Patandean & Indrajit, 2021).

This gap becomes even more apparent when the principle of the prepared environment, which is at the heart of Montessori, is not fully understood as a learning environment management system, but rather perceived merely as the provision of specific teaching aids. In fact, the essence of a prepared environment lies not solely in the completeness of the equipment, but in the spatial management, activity flow, and interaction patterns that support children's independence and concentration. Managerial unpreparedness at the local level often results in Montessori implementation being merely symbolic and partial, resulting in its impact on improving critical and creative thinking skills not being systematically measured (Lillard dkk., 2017). In this context, educational management plays a crucial role as a supporting structure for the success of the pedagogical process. Without an effective management system, learning innovations have the potential to fail to achieve their intended goals (Bush, 2020). Several previous studies have examined the effectiveness of the Montessori method in various aspects of child development. For example, research conducted by Sari & Arifin showed that the Montessori approach can significantly increase children's independence. Another study by Shianny & Raharja also confirmed the method's contribution to strengthening emotional intelligence in early childhood. However, most of these studies focus more on learning outcomes or child development directly, rather than the managerial processes that underpin their implementation. In other words, the dimension of educational management as a determinant of the success of pedagogical innovation has received relatively little attention (Ratna Sari & Arifin, 2023; Shianny, 2024)..

The success of a learning approach is inseparable from the quality of the instructional leadership that manages it. Managerial functions such as planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling play a significant role in ensuring that the methods implemented are consistent and sustainable. From a modern management perspective, school effectiveness is greatly influenced by the leader's ability to build a vision, coordinate resources, and create a collaborative learning culture (P Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Therefore,

analyzing how the POAC function is implemented in the Montessori learning context is relevant to addressing the need to develop children's critical and creative thinking. This study offers novelty through a comparative managerial analysis approach to two institutions with different characteristics: Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten and RA Khalifa. Both institutions have different social, cultural, and managerial backgrounds, thus providing room to examine variations in Montessori learning management strategies in diverse contexts. This study not only evaluates pedagogical practices in the classroom, but also dissects how instructional leadership and management flexibility play a role in creating synchronization between the Montessori curriculum and the Pancasila student profile as the orientation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurniah & Sapri, 2025).

Initial findings indicate two management typologies emerging in the field: the Structural-Idealist and the Creative-Adaptive approaches. The Structural-Idealist approach emphasizes adherence to systematically designed standards and procedures, while the Creative-Adaptive approach emphasizes flexibility in modifying strategies according to limited resources and local contexts. These two typologies reflect the dynamics of modern educational management, which requires responsiveness to policy changes while maintaining the local and theological values that define the institution (Sanusi, 2023). Therefore, the integration of Montessori's global values and the local Indonesian context is not understood as a contradiction, but rather as an opportunity to create a resilient and contextual management model. Furthermore, this study positions the integration of the Six Value Systems as the foundation for institutional strengthening. These values serve as an ethical and philosophical framework that guides management practices, oriented not solely toward administrative achievement but also toward the development of children's character and spirituality. In the context of RA Khalifa, for example, the integration of theological values is a crucial element in aligning the Montessori method with religious-based education. Meanwhile, at Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten, adaptation was achieved through strengthening a collaborative and participatory school culture. These differing approaches demonstrate that the success of Montessori implementation is not a single factor, but rather is heavily influenced by the management strategies employed (Kurniah & Sapri, 2025).

Based on this description, this study aims to comprehensively analyze and describe the planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising processes in Montessori-based learning management. The analysis focuses on how each managerial function is implemented to support the development of critical and creative thinking skills in early childhood. It is hoped that the results of this study will produce an effective and applicable managerial framework for other early childhood education institutions. As stated by Bush, a robust management framework is a primary prerequisite for building a superior and sustainable school ecosystem. Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of early childhood education management in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study enriches the body of educational management studies by presenting an integrative perspective between global pedagogical methods and national curriculum policies (Bush, 2020). Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for school principals and educators in designing more structured, flexible, and meaningful learning management strategies. Ultimately, optimizing children's potential depends not only on the methods used but also on the quality of management that is visionary and adaptive.

Studies on learning management in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) show that the quality of educational management plays a fundamental role in achieving learning objectives, particularly in the context of character development and higher-order thinking skills such as critical and creative thinking. Qualitative descriptive studies on PAUD learning management reveal that thorough planning, targeted implementation, and ongoing evaluation are crucial factors in the success of the learning process at the PAUD level. Effective PAUD learning management must involve collaboration across stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and the learning environment to create an atmosphere conducive to child development (D. I. Sari, 2026). Focusing on pedagogical aspects, the implementation of the Montessori method in PAUD environments has become the object of extensive study due to its ability to stimulate children's independence, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. The article on Innovation and Learning Objectives of PAUD with the Montessori Approach comprehensively explains Montessori's basic concepts, history, the principle of freedom within limits, and how this method is designed to help develop children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual potential (Budiarti, 2024).

The implementation of Montessori principles is also widely discussed in other studies examining Maria Montessori's curriculum principles in early childhood education (PAUD) learning practices. In the article "Implementation of the Principles of Maria Montessori's Curriculum Ideas in Early Childhood Education (PAUD), researchers outline the basic concepts of Montessori philosophy and how these principles are applied to daily learning practices, including the role of educators as facilitators, the use of educational media that support children's exploration, and environmental arrangements that provide opportunities for independent learning (Suryani, 2025). Furthermore, a study on the Implementation of Montessori Learning Principles in Early Childhood Education Curriculum Development shows that the Montessori learning model not only increases children's engagement in the learning process but also creates a fun, creative, and meaningful learning environment. This article also emphasizes the importance of curriculum adaptation that takes into account the individual needs of children and the involvement of experts and educators in validating the learning model (Rofi'ah et al., 2025).

From the perspective of the curriculum and the general approach to early childhood education, an examination of Montessori's curriculum ideas provides a broader picture of the philosophical values underlying this approach. The article "Review of Maria Montessori's Curriculum Ideas and Approach to Early Childhood Education" states that this curriculum focuses not only on academic skills but also on children's cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, and sensorimotor development through a child-centered learning approach. This supports the concept of a prepared environment as an environment ready to facilitate the holistic development of students (Nurriza, Putri, & Wahab, 2024). A comparative study of alternative education models also provides important insights into the context of Montessori within the panorama of various approaches to early childhood education. The article "Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia: A Comparative Analysis of Alternative Models of Early Childhood Education" reviews globally various non-conventional approaches to early childhood education, including a comparison of the philosophical framework, implementation, and the advantages and limitations of each model. This discussion explains that the Montessori model has a strong focus on independent learning, environmental arrangements that support exploration, and the role of educators as facilitators rather than direct teachers (Aljabreen, 2020).

In the context of learning management, other literature emphasizes the importance of educational management principles in supporting the successful implementation of specific methodologies. For example, the article "Efficient management in the Montessori Educational environment for preschool children" discusses how efficient management principles in a Montessori environment can influence children's ability to think creatively and independently. This study covers aspects of human resource management, physical resources, and challenges in implementing the Montessori method, which require appropriate coordination and managerial strategies (Heriyono & Rus'an, 2025). There is a consensus in the literature that the implementation of the Montessori method in early childhood education (PAUD) cannot be separated from the quality of the underlying learning management. Systematic studies, such as those listed in "Integrating Strategic PAUD Management Approaches in Early Childhood Education," emphasize the need for a holistic and integrated management framework to ensure basic education services meet expected quality standards, including aspects of teacher empowerment, parental involvement, and optimal resource utilization (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Studies of early childhood education (PAUD) management within the context of local wisdom demonstrate that learning management must be adapted to cultural values and community needs to provide more contextual learning for children. The article "Paediatric Education Learning Management Based on Local Wisdom" provides an example of how the principle of independent learning based on local values can facilitate children's critical and creative thinking in accordance with local cultural conditions (Wiyani, 2022). These studies demonstrate a strong need to link educational management strategies with innovative pedagogical practices such as Montessori. This emphasizes that curriculum implementation is not simply the adoption of learning methods but also involves systemic management, from planning, organization, implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Comparative research, such as on Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia, also emphasizes the importance of considering cultural context and local adaptation when implementing the Montessori model abroad (Mugara & Ali, 2025). Specifically, in the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, the development of learning management must consider the integration of national education standards, such as the Independent Curriculum, with Montessori learning principles, which emphasize children's freedom within structured boundaries.

Literature reviewing both sides shows that the main challenge often lies in the readiness of educators and management to bridge global pedagogical values with the demands of specific national education policies (Dewi et al., 2021).

Scientific studies also show that successful Montessori implementation relies heavily on holistic learning environment design that aligns with Montessori principles. Research on Montessori-Based Early Childhood Education Classroom Design explains that the arrangement of activity zones, the selection of appropriate materials, and a structured atmosphere influence children's focus and responsibility in learning, which ultimately impacts the development of children's cognitive and creative abilities (Permatasari, Husain, & Parisu, 2025). Thus, the literature suggests that studies on Montessori-based learning management must encompass multiple dimensions of study, including pedagogical practices, managerial strategies, local adaptations, and the relationship between curriculum design and implementation. Comparative research identifying management typologies such as Structural-Idealist and Creative-Adaptive opens up opportunities to map the most effective management models in the diverse context of Indonesian Early Childhood Education. The existing literature supports the importance of this multidimensional approach in creating educational management models that are not only efficient but also adaptive to the needs of students and the institutional context (Sholeh et al., 2024).

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design. This design was chosen to examine in depth the differences between two management typologies in implementing the same method, thus identifying the most contextual and adaptive management model to the institution's needs (Yin, 2018). The comparative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct systematic cross-case analysis to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in managerial strategies developing in each institution. The research locus was determined to be TK Tamasya Syakira and RA Khalifa, located in Bandung Regency. The selection of these two institutions was done purposively, considering that both have different management characteristics, but both consistently apply the Montessori method as their primary learning approach. Differences in institutional background and leadership style served as the basis for exploring the variations in managerial practices that emerged. The research informants consisted of the principal as the holder of upper-level managerial authority, and the class teachers as the technical implementers of learning in the field (Creswell, 2018). The involvement of these two categories of informants aimed to obtain a comprehensive picture of the learning planning and evaluation process.

Data collection techniques employed several strategies. First, participant observation was used to directly observe the dynamics of children's work cycles in the Montessori learning environment. Through this technique, researchers were able to capture interaction patterns, children's independence, and the implementation of managerial functions in real-world practice. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives of principals and teachers regarding policies, strategies, and the managerial challenges faced. Third, a documentation study was conducted on various official documents, such as the School-Level Curriculum (KTSP), learning planning tools, and anecdotal notes on student development. The research procedure was implemented through several systematic stages. The pre-fieldwork stage focused on developing and synchronizing research instruments to suit the context of the study site. The next stage was fieldwork, which included primary data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. Afterward, a cross-site analysis was conducted to comprehensively compare findings from both institutions (Sugiyono, 2021).

Data validity was maintained through the application of source and technique triangulation. This strategy was used to ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings, ensuring a high level of trustworthiness in the resulting interpretations. Data analysis refers to the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To deepen the managerial analysis, this study integrated the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) management function-based instrument with Sanusi's Six Value Systems framework. This framework was used explicitly to examine how theological, ethical, logical, aesthetic, and other values were internalized in every planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring policy at both institutions. Through this integration, a comprehensive and contextual overview of management typology was obtained (Sanusi, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Montessori-Based Learning Planning

This study examines in-depth the learning management practices at two Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions in Bandung Regency that consistently implement the Montessori method within the context of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka). The two institutions exhibit distinct management characteristics, despite their shared efforts to maintain the essence of Montessori pedagogy within their learning systems. TK Tamasya Syakira represents the Structural-Idealist management typology, an approach that emphasizes consistency and fidelity to Montessori's original principles, primarily by providing comprehensive equipment and managing a systematic, standardized learning environment. Conversely, RA Khalifa exhibits the Creative-Adaptive management typology, which emphasizes flexibility in resource management. This institution modifies teaching aids and learning strategies according to conditions and available resources, without compromising the core values and philosophy of Montessori. This approach demonstrates that limited facilities are not always a barrier, as long as pedagogical principles are consistently maintained. In both institutions, integrating the value of independence into the structure of the Independent Curriculum serves as a strategic foundation for developing children's critical and creative thinking skills. These efforts are realized through strengthening managerial functions, including planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising learning. Through this comparative analysis, research seeks to identify the most effective management patterns for optimizing children's potential according to their developmental stage (R. Sari, Munastiwi, & Rohmah, 2025).

Learning planning at both institutions begins with efforts to align child development indicators according to the Montessori approach with Learning Outcomes (CP) in the Independent Curriculum. This process ensures that the method remains relevant to national standards without losing its distinctive Montessori characteristics. Based on field findings, planning is not solely directed at compiling academic materials, but rather emphasizes the design and preparation of a systematically organized learning environment as the foundation of children's learning experiences. At Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten, planning is oriented toward the consistent application of authentic Montessori principles, particularly through the use of internationally standardized teaching aids integrated into teaching modules based on apparatus work areas. Each activity is designed according to the structure of tool use, so that child development stimulation is directed and gradual. Meanwhile, RA Khalifa applies a more flexible approach. Learning planning at this institution integrates theological values into teaching modules and adapts teaching aids to suit the cultural context and local wisdom. Although more flexible, this approach still maintains the pedagogical essence of Montessori as the main foundation of learning (Aliyah, Qomariyah, Putri, Sumarni, & Rahmawati, 2026).

Conceptually, the function of planning is intended to formulate the direction and stages of education to be implemented within a specific timeframe. Planning serves as a kind of strategic map that guides all learning activities to align with predetermined objectives. This understanding aligns with the management cycle proposed by George R. Terry, who positions planning as the most fundamental stage in determining goals and strategies for achieving them (Terry, 1953). Without clear planning, implementation and supervision will lose their orientation. In the context of early childhood education, management serves as a structural framework that supports the continuity of the pedagogical process so that it proceeds systematically and effectively (Bush, 2020). Thus, planning serves not only as an administrative document but also as the operational foundation for the entire learning process. From a value system perspective, planning also has philosophical and spiritual dimensions. This activity is not solely directed at achieving formal indicators but is seen as a conscious effort to develop children's innate potential, a divine mandate. Within the framework of Theological Values, planning embodies the moral responsibility of educators in optimizing the gift of child development (Sanusi, 2023). This orientation places the planning process as part of an ethical and spiritual practice that goes beyond mere administrative compliance.

A planning design that allows for freedom of choice explains how children's critical thinking skills can develop optimally. When activities are designed with a measurable level of challenge and provide self-correction mechanisms within each teaching aid, children are encouraged to analyze, experiment, and correct their mistakes independently. This situation strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of Montessori education in developing higher-order cognitive abilities depends heavily on the accuracy and precision of the implementation of a pre-planned learning environment (Angeline S Lillard et al., 2017). Therefore, careful

planning from the initial stage is a crucial strategy to ensure that every learning element is ready to stimulate the development of children's critical thinking in a systematic and sustainable manner.

Organizing Montessori-Based Learning

The organization of learning at Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten and RA Khalifa is directed at creating a learning ecosystem that fosters children's independence, known in the Montessori approach as a prepared environment. This concept places the environment as a central element in the learning process, so that the management of space, tools, and the role of educators are designed to encourage children to learn independently. At Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten, resource organization is carried out systematically by dividing teacher responsibilities across the five main Montessori areas: practical life, sensory, language, mathematics, and culture. Each area is managed by prioritizing the use of standard teaching aids in accordance with original Montessori principles, thus creating a consistent learning experience for children (Widayanthi, Subhaktiyasa, Hariyono, Wulandari, & Andrini, 2024). Meanwhile, RA Khalifa developed a more dynamic and contextual organizational pattern. Teachers function not only as learning facilitators but also as developers and designers of Educational Teaching Aids (APE) modified to be relevant to theological-Islamic values and local conditions. This approach demonstrates managerial flexibility in addressing limited resources without abandoning the essence of Montessori teaching. In both institutions, classroom layouts are designed so that every tool is within direct reach of the children. This strategy is consciously designed to minimize children's dependence on teacher instructions (prompt-dependent) and strengthen their ability to take initiative (Rustiyana et al., 2025).

Theoretically, the function of organization explains how the structure of the physical and social environment contributes to the formation of children's mindsets. Terry emphasized that organization is the process of aligning people, resources, and tasks to achieve common goals. In the Montessori context, organization goes beyond the technical aspects of spatial arrangement, but rather presents the environment as a "third teacher" that guides children toward deep concentration and self-discipline (Davies, 2019). Although both institutions face challenges such as the unequal distribution of formal Montessori certification for educators, the management of facilities and infrastructure remains optimized through the instructional leadership of the principal who maintains the quality of curriculum implementation. A structured environmental arrangement is projected to naturally foster critical thinking skills. A well-organized and systematic environment trains children to classify, compare, and make decisions through interactions with apparatus that have self-correcting mechanisms. This perspective aligns with Sanusi's view that regular management of the physical environment reflects Physiological and Aesthetic Values. The order and beauty of space create a calm or peaceful atmosphere that is a prerequisite for the emergence of focus and clarity of thought. Therefore, organization in both institutions is not merely about classroom layout, but is a managerial strategy designed to build a foundation for logical and systematic thinking in early childhood (Sanusi, 2015).

Implementation of Montessori-Based Learning

Learning at Syakira Kindergarten and Khalifa Kindergarten is oriented towards the implementation of an independent work cycle that gives children the freedom to determine activities according to their interests, readiness, and developmental stage. This approach positions children as active subjects in the learning process. At Syakira Kindergarten, learning emphasizes procedural accuracy in the use of Montessori equipment. Children are guided to follow a sequential workflow, starting from taking equipment from the shelf, using it according to the correct steps, and returning it to its original place in a neat condition. This pattern builds discipline, order, and personal responsibility for the learning environment. In contrast, at Khalifa Kindergarten, learning is more flexible by incorporating theological values into each activity. Children are accustomed to beginning activities with the basmalah (recitation of the name of God) and are encouraged to reflect on the greatness of the Creator through exploration of equipment, particularly in the sensory and cultural areas. Although the approach is more contextual and spiritual, the essence of the Montessori method remains intact. In both institutions, teachers do not act as dominant instructors controlling the learning process, but rather as facilitators or directresses who intervene minimally. This role provides ample space for children to explore, experiment, and construct understanding independently (Wulandari, Saefuddin, & Muzakki, 2018).

Conceptually, the actuating function is intended to mobilize all planned components to achieve learning objectives. Terry explains that implementation is the process of actualizing plans through mobilizing available resources. In the Montessori context, this goal is directed at fostering intellectual independence. The self-

correcting apparatus allows children to identify and correct errors without direct correction from the teacher. This process fosters self-regulation and reflective skills, which form the basis of critical thinking. The state of deep focus or flow experienced by children during the work cycle is an indicator of developing analytical skills. Children engage in classification, comparison, measurement, and causal reasoning through concrete experiences (Isaacs, 2018; Terry, 1953). This situation demonstrates that consistent learning implementation with minimal external intervention can create a rich cognitive space for children.

Granting autonomy in the learning process has been shown to contribute significantly to the growth of children's creativity compared to a uniform learning pattern centered on direct teacher instruction. Creativity tends to develop naturally when children have mastered the basic functions of an apparatus and are then encouraged to explore various possibilities for its use in a rational and directed manner. At this stage, children no longer simply follow procedures but begin to develop a variety of strategies based on their conceptual understanding. Marshall emphasized that the development of critical and creative thinking skills can only occur optimally if there is managerial consistency in maintaining the quality and high-fidelity level of use of teaching aids. This means that freedom of exploration needs to be supported by a management system that ensures each apparatus is used according to its pedagogical principles, so that the exploration process remains within the corridor of learning objectives. From the perspective of Sanusi's value system, the freedom to learn given to children is not interpreted as absolute, unlimited freedom. Rather, it is freedom accompanied by responsibility. This principle reflects Ethical Values, namely the balance between respect for individual autonomy and procedural order (nizham). Through this balance, children not only develop intellectually, but are also formed as individuals who have strong character, internal discipline, and moral awareness in every learning activity (Marshall, 2017; Sanusi, 2015).

Montessori-Based Learning Supervision

Learning supervision at Syakira Kindergarten and Khalifa Kindergarten is not carried out through formal tests or rigid evaluations, but rather through continuous observation and objective anecdotal recording. This approach allows teachers to monitor children's development naturally within the context of daily activities. At Syakira Kindergarten, supervision focuses on the appropriate use of equipment according to each child's developmental stage. Teachers routinely document children's levels of independence, concentration, and self-correction skills as indicators of learning progress. Meanwhile, Khalifa Kindergarten implements a more personalized supervision pattern by incorporating theological values-based character development. Evaluations not only assess cognitive aspects but also ensure that critical thinking development is in harmony with manners and morals. This process is carried out subtly without disrupting the child's flow, allowing teachers to accurately identify learning potential and obstacles without disrupting their intrinsic concentration (Putra, 2025).

Theoretically, the function of supervision (controlling) is intended to assess the extent to which learning implementation aligns with planned objectives. From a Montessori management perspective, supervision serves as a quality assurance mechanism that ensures the learning environment remains conducive to children's intellectual and character growth. This aligns with Terry's view, which emphasizes that supervision is an effort to ensure alignment between plans and implementation in the field. In both institutions, instructional supervision carried out by the principal serves to maintain fidelity to Montessori principles, despite having to contend with the administrative demands of the Independent Curriculum (P Hallinger & Wang, 2015). An authentic and non-judgmental evaluation system has been shown to maintain children's intrinsic motivation to continue exploring. When children do not feel judged as right or wrong by an external authority, they are more willing to try, make mistakes, and correct themselves. This condition reinforces Sanusi's view that fair supervision reflects Ethical Values, while the use of evidence-based anecdotal notes reflects Logical Values. Thus, evaluation is not understood solely as a control tool, but rather as a means of professional reflection for educators to improve the quality of mentoring that fosters children's critical and creative thinking skills on an ongoing basis.

Managerial Challenges and Institutional Resilience Strategies

The implementation of Montessori-based learning management at Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten and RA Khalifa faces various challenges arising from both internal and external factors. One of the main issues lies in aligning the independence indicators in the Montessori approach with the administrative format established in the Independent Curriculum. This synchronization process is not always simple, because

Montessori emphasizes progressive and contextual individual development, while the national curriculum administration system demands structured and standardized reporting. Furthermore, the limited availability of internationally standardized Montessori equipment due to funding factors presents a challenge, particularly in maintaining the fidelity of the method. Another challenge is that not all educators have formal Montessori certification, requiring internal efforts to maintain consistency in pedagogical understanding and practice. Beyond institutional factors, resistance from some parents who are still oriented towards instant academic achievement through drill methods such as conventional reading, writing, and arithmetic also poses an obstacle to maintaining the essence of the Montessori approach in practice (Selegi, Murniviyanti, Irawan, & Tanzimah, 2025).

In response to these dynamics, both institutions demonstrated resilience through adaptive and visionary instructional leadership. Various strategic steps were taken to ensure the sustainability of the method's implementation. One such step was the development of an integrative teaching module designed to bridge national regulations with Montessori pedagogical values, eliminating the dichotomy between administrative demands and the learning philosophy. Furthermore, innovation was implemented through the development of modified Educational Teaching Aids (APE) that remained grounded in self-correcting principles, ensuring their pedagogical function was maintained even though their form was adapted to local conditions. Parental education was also conducted periodically to provide an understanding of the work cycle philosophy and the importance of the process in building children's independence. These strategies emphasized that successful learning management is not solely determined by the completeness of physical facilities, but rather by the principal's managerial competence in managing instructional programs and building a conducive learning climate (Li, Hallinger, & Walker, 2022). From a value system perspective, this managerial resilience reflects Teleological Values, an orientation that focuses on the ultimate goal of children's safety and natural happiness as the top priority. By strengthening collaboration between schools and families, it is expected that children will internalize a culture of independent learning more quickly. This allows for the development of critical and creative thinking skills, even when institutions operate with limited material resources (Hamim et al., 2026).

The practice of Montessori-based learning management in two early childhood education institutions in Bandung Regency not only demonstrates technical variations in management but also presents two different epistemological constructs regarding how the Montessori method is interpreted and implemented in the context of the Independent Curriculum. The Structural-Idealist typology represented by TK Tamasya Syakira and the Creative-Adaptive typology demonstrated by RA Khalifa are not simply differences in administrative style, but rather reflect managerial paradigms that depart from different philosophical assumptions about method fidelity, contextual flexibility, and the relationship between global standards and local values. This comparative analysis shows that the effectiveness of developing children's critical and creative thinking skills is not determined by a single model, but rather by the internal consistency between the vision, management system, and pedagogical practices in each institution (Zaenab, 2015).

In terms of planning, findings indicate that both institutions synchronize Montessori development indicators with Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum, but their approaches differ in their degree of rigidity and flexibility. TK Tamasya Syakira places fidelity to international standards as the primary foundation of planning. This approach demonstrates a strong structural orientation, where planning quality is measured by procedural accuracy and completeness of tools as prerequisites for systematic cognitive stimulation. From George R. Terry's classical management perspective, this type of planning reflects an effort to prescriptively set goals and strategies so that all elements of the organization move in the same direction. Meanwhile, RA Khalifa demonstrates that planning can maintain the essence of Montessori even through modifications to tools and the integration of theological values. This flexibility indicates that the essence of the method lies not solely in the material form of the apparatus, but rather in the structure of the learning experience that allows children to choose, experiment, and self-correct (Trisnawati, 2025).

The discussion of these findings suggests that effective planning in a Montessori context is not simply about adherence to international standards, but also about managerial skills in translating the principle of freedom within limits into measurable activity designs. Children's critical thinking skills develop when a planned environment provides gradual cognitive challenges and allows for autonomy. Lillard asserts that Montessori's effectiveness is greatly influenced by the precision of the implementation of the designed

environment (A S Lillard, 2017). In this study, this precision emerged in two forms: material precision at Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten and conceptual precision at RA Khalifa. Both demonstrate that thorough planning in the initial phase is a key determinant of the success of stimulating critical thinking. In terms of organization, both institutions demonstrate similarities in positioning the prepared environment as the core of the learning ecosystem, but differ in their resource distribution strategies. Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten systematically organizes the five main areas of Montessori with a clear division of teacher roles, so that the classroom structure resembles a stable and standardized system. This approach creates consistency in the learning experience and minimizes implementation deviations. In contrast, RA Khalifa developed a more organic organization, where teachers functioned not only as facilitators but also as innovators of teaching aids. This dual role demonstrated a more flexible and responsive management dynamic to constraints (Muslimin et al., 2025).

From an organizational theory perspective, organization is not simply a physical arrangement, but rather the formation of a structured relationship between people, tools, and goals. Terry defines organization as the process of aligning resources to achieve a common goal. In both institutions, this alignment is evident in efforts to reduce children's prompt dependency by ensuring that tools are independently accessible. In Montessori, the environment acts as a "third teacher" guiding children toward deep concentration. The findings of this study confirm that when spaces are systematically organized, children demonstrate increased ability to classify, compare, and analyze independently (Hartadi & Nasrip, 2025). From a value system perspective, spatial order reflects Physiological and Aesthetic Values that foster inner calm as a prerequisite for clear thinking. Thus, organization becomes an epistemological strategy for building logical thinking structures in early childhood. The implementation of learning through work cycles becomes a space for the actualization of all managerial designs that have been designed. In both institutions, teachers act as director with minimal intervention, so that children have the opportunity to experience flow in their activities. At Syakira Kindergarten, implementation emphasizes procedural accuracy in the use of equipment. This creates a consistent and hierarchical structure of experience. Meanwhile, at RA Khalifa, implementation is more contextual, integrating theological values that frame learning activities within a spiritual context. This distinction demonstrates that implementation serves not only as an operational stage but also as a medium for internalizing values (Suhifatullah, 2024).

In Terry's management framework, actuation is the process of moving all components to achieve a planned goal. Here, the primary goal is intellectual independence. Self-correcting apparatus allows children to recognize errors without external correction, thus fostering self-regulation. Isaacs emphasized that the flow state in Montessori learning correlates with the development of executive function and critical thinking. This research shows that when implementation management is consistent, children demonstrate the courage to take cognitive risks and explore alternative solutions. Marshall stated that creativity emerges when children master basic concepts and begin to discover variations in their use logically. This is evident in both institutions, despite the different managerial paths taken. In terms of supervision, both institutions avoid rigid formal evaluations and rely more on authentic observation through anecdotal records. This approach allows mapping of children's development without disrupting concentration. TK Tamasya Syakira emphasizes the appropriate use of apparatus according to developmental stages, while RA Khalifa integrates dimensions of character and etiquette in evaluations. Hallinger and Wang assert that effective instructional supervision relies on leadership that maintains a balance between accountability and pedagogical support (Philip Hallinger, 2011). In this study, the principal acts as a guardian of the fidelity of the method as well as a mediator between administrative demands and the essence of Montessori (Marshall, 2017; Terry & Rue, 2010).

Theoretically, according to Terry, controlling is the process of ensuring alignment between planning and implementation. However, in the Montessori context, supervision is not intended as repressive control, but rather as professional reflection. Authentic, non-judgmental evaluation maintains children's intrinsic motivation. From Sanusi's perspective, this mechanism reflects Ethical and Logical Values, as supervision is conducted fairly and evidence-based. This discussion demonstrates that a humanistic evaluation system directly contributes to children's courage to think creatively. The managerial challenges faced by both institutions demonstrate that implementing Montessori within the Independent Curriculum framework requires structural and cultural adaptations. The complexity of indicator synchronization, limited apparatus, and parental resistance to the non-drill approach are dynamics that must be managed strategically. However, findings indicate that institutional resilience is determined by visionary instructional leadership.

The development of integrative modules, innovative modified APE, and parent education are adaptive strategies that maintain the continuity of the method (Ekowati & Rahardjanto, 2025). From Sanusi's Teleological Value perspective, the orientation toward the ultimate goal of children's natural happiness and safety becomes the moral energy that drives institutions beyond limitations. This analysis confirms that the Structural-Idealist and Creative-Adaptive typologies are not antagonistic dichotomies, but rather two spectrums of strategies for managing fidelity and flexibility. Both can lead to increased critical and creative thinking skills when the POAC function is carried out consistently and in alignment with the institutional vision. Thus, the effectiveness of Montessori learning management is not determined solely by the completeness of facilities, but by the integration of structure, values, and leadership that are adaptive to the context (Sariwardani et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The Montessori-based learning management implemented at Tamasya Syakira Kindergarten and RA Khalifa has demonstrated significant effectiveness in developing critical and creative thinking skills in early childhood. This success was achieved through the implementation of the POAC management function (planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising), which is structured and adaptive to the dynamic needs of students. Planning is carried out by harmoniously integrating the Independent Curriculum and Montessori principles, creating continuity between national education standards and the development of children's innate potential. Organization is realized through the arrangement of a prepared environment that allows children to learn independently, exploratively, and responsibly for their choices. During the implementation stage, the implementation of a work cycle provides space for children to concentrate deeply, engage in self-correction, and build strong self-regulation. Meanwhile, supervision is carried out through authentic evaluation based on objective and process-oriented anecdotal records, so that children's intrinsic motivation is maintained without excessive academic pressure. The findings of this study crystallize into two management typologies: Structural-Idealist and Creative-Adaptive, reflecting variations in institutional strategies for integrating Montessori philosophical values with local contexts. The integration of the Six Value Systems has been shown to strengthen institutional resilience in the face of administrative challenges and limited resources. The principal's instructional leadership is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of innovation, including internalizing theological values and local wisdom into global pedagogical practices. Therefore, strengthening instructional leadership capacity in early childhood education (PAUD) units is essential for curriculum innovation to be adaptive without losing the essence of Montessori. Synergy between schools and families is also an important prerequisite for ensuring consistent stimulation of children's independence. Further research is recommended to explore the role of educators' managerial digital literacy in expanding the effectiveness of the Montessori management model in the era of digital transformation.

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