



## Assessing the Success of the Holistic Early Childhood Program in Semarang Merak's Cluster

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### Abstract

*The Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Development (PAUD HI) program addresses the multidimensional needs of young children, integrating education, health, nutrition, and protection. This study aims to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the PAUD HI program in the Merak Cluster, West Ungaran District, Semarang Regency. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving educators, parents, and institutional stakeholders. The study employed the Miles and Huberman framework for data analysis, focusing on data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation methods ensured the validity and reliability of findings. Results showed high parental engagement, effective health monitoring, and well-implemented nutrition programs, despite challenges in resource availability and educator training. The program successfully integrated multi-stakeholder collaboration to enhance child development. It concludes that the PAUD HI program serves as a replicable model for holistic early childhood education, with actionable insights for future policy and program improvement.*

**Keywords:** *Assessment, Holistic Program, Early Childhood, Integrative, Education*

### **A. Introduction**

Early childhood education is a fundamental cornerstone in shaping the character and intelligence of future generations (Ekaningtyas & Yasa, 2022). This stage of education goes beyond the classroom teaching and learning processes (Utaminingsih, Anwar, et al., 2024), encompassing a range of developmental aspects that must be holistically supported, such as health, nutrition, and protection (Utaminingsih & Hermasari, 2024). The importance of holistic support is underscored by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that early childhood education serves as a developmental effort aimed at fostering growth and development from birth until the age of six through structured educational stimulation (Gandana et al., 2021). The significance of early childhood education is also echoed in global and national frameworks addressing sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which highlights inclusive and equitable quality education (Zien et al., 2024). However, implementing these frameworks often reveals gaps in addressing comprehensive early childhood needs (Mavuru et al., 2024). Numerous studies, such as (Mahlomaholo et al., 2023), have supported this, emphasizing integrating nutrition, health, and education to enhance childhood developmental outcomes. Nevertheless, most early childhood institutions in Indonesia cannot fully adopt these integrative approaches due to limited resources and infrastructure (Su & Yang, 2022).

During the critical “golden age” a developmental period in which approximately 80% of a child’s brain capacity is formed adequate and sustained stimulation significantly impacts physical, cognitive, and emotional growth (Setyarini et al., 2021; Neldawati & Yaswinda, 2022). Three primary factors contribute to a child’s intellectual development: nutrition, health, and education provided even from the prenatal stages (Wong et al., 2022). Addressing these factors effectively requires a systematic, collaborative approach involving families, educators, and related institutions. The holistic, integrative model introduced through Indonesia’s Presidential Regulation No. 60 of 2013 aligns with these objectives by advocating for integrating health, nutrition, education, and child protection services within early childhood education frameworks (Trisnawati & Sugito, 2020).

However, although the PAUD HI program has been implemented in various regions, an in-depth evaluation of its local effectiveness still needs improvement. Previous research often focuses on conceptual aspects and general policies, with limited empirical evaluations of implementation in specific school clusters. For instance, studies such as those by Wong et al., (2022) highlight general challenges in integrative service consistency across regions due to resource disparities. Similarly, Ilyas (2019) underscore infrastructure constraints that hinder effective program execution. In contrast, successful localized implementations, like those discussed by Utaminingsih et al. (2023), demonstrate the potential of collaborative efforts to improve outcomes. This research addresses the gap by focusing on the Merak Cluster in West Ungaran District, Semarang Regency, which includes eight early childhood education units. Evaluating this specific implementation can clarify how institutional collaboration between education offices, health centers, and parents contributes to the program's effectiveness.

The urgency of this research lies in obtaining an accurate picture of the PAUD HI program's achievements in the Merak Cluster. This evaluation assesses whether the program adheres to expected standards and identifies challenges in its execution. By drawing on primary sources and theories such as those by Miles and Huberman (Baltaci, 2017), which emphasize systematic evaluation processes, this study offers recommendations for future improvements. Such insights ensure that children in the Merak Cluster and other regions receive optimal and sustainable services, contributing to the broader goals of holistic and integrative early childhood education. This research's urgency is underscored by the pressing need to ensure that early childhood education programs holistically meet children's developmental needs. It aims to contribute to the broader discourse on holistic early childhood education by offering a model that can be adapted and replicated in other regions while addressing resource and infrastructure challenges. Furthermore, it seeks to establish a foundation for policy recommendations and program refinements that align with both national and international goals of fostering inclusive, equitable, and comprehensive education for all young learners.

This study aims to evaluate the achievements of implementing the PAUD HI program in the Merak Cluster, focusing on input, process, and product aspects. Input aspects include the availability and quality of resources, such as qualified educators and adequate infrastructure. The process aspect refers to implementing the program, including teaching methods, health services, and collaborative activities with various parties. Meanwhile, the product aspect assesses the final results of the program, including improving the quality of education, health, and childcare. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the success of the program and areas that need improvement, as well as an example that can be adopted by other institutions that want to implement the integrative holistic early childhood education program effectively.

## **B. Methods**

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design grounded in the theoretical framework of Miles and Huberman (Baltaci, 2017). The choice of qualitative methods was motivated by the need to explore the nuanced and multifaceted aspects of the PAUD HI program's implementation in the Merak Cluster. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its capacity to explore complex and nuanced phenomena in real-world settings. Specifically, it enables an in-depth understanding of program implementation, considering various contextual factors such as institutional collaboration, resource availability, and community engagement. A qualitative design allows for an in-depth analysis of stakeholder perspectives and contextual factors influencing the program's success or challenges. The research was conducted at Gugus Merak, West Ungaran District, Semarang Regency, which comprises eight educational units (kindergartens and early childhood education centers). The subjects of this study include school principals, teachers, parents, and representatives from related institutions such as the Department of Education and community health centers (Puskesmas). and learning processes, health and nutrition services, and caregiving practices.

Observation: Direct observations were conducted to understand the real-time dynamics of program implementation, including classroom activities, health monitoring, and interactions between stakeholders. The methodology adheres to guidelines outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), ensuring systematic and unbiased documentation

of activities. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were held with key stakeholders such as school principals, teachers, parents, and representatives from health and educational institutions. The interviews were guided by validated protocols (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to ensure consistency and depth in responses. Document Analysis: Relevant documents, including policy guidelines, program reports, and children's developmental records, were analyzed to triangulate data collected from observations and interviews. This approach recommended for systematic document review. Data Collection: All data from observations, interviews, and documents were systematically recorded and transcribed. Data Reduction: The collected data were filtered and summarized to highlight key themes and patterns relevant to the research objectives. Data Display: Information was organized in tables, charts, and narrative formats to facilitate interpretation. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: To ensure validity and reliability, preliminary conclusions were derived and verified through iterative reviews and triangulation. Preparation: Research instruments, including interview guides and observation checklists, were developed and pilot-tested to ensure clarity and relevance. Data Collection: Fieldwork was conducted over three months, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the Merak Cluster's eight early childhood education units. Analysis: Data were analyzed concurrently with collection to identify emerging themes and refine focus areas. Validation: Triangulation of multiple data sources ensured robustness and credibility of findings, consistent with the principles outlined by Yin (2018). By incorporating these detailed methodologies and supporting references, this study provides a robust framework for evaluating the PAUD HI program in the Merak Cluster, contributing valuable insights for future policy and program development.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

The evaluation of the Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Development (PAUD HI) program in the Merak Cluster highlighted several achievements and challenges

across various dimensions, emphasizing its impact on early childhood education outcomes.

Parental engagement emerged as a strong aspect, with 87.5% of institutions successfully conducting structured parent classes, workshops, and consistent communication through digital platforms like WhatsApp. These activities supported parents in understanding and enhancing their children's developmental milestones. However, limited parental participation in 12.5% of institutions indicated challenges stemming from conflicting schedules and low program awareness. Addressing these barriers requires innovative outreach strategies, such as more flexible meeting schedules and interactive digital tools. In monitoring child growth and development, most institutions (92%) conducted regular measurements of height, weight, and head circumference in collaboration with Posyandu and Puskesmas. This partnership facilitated comprehensive health monitoring using the Deteksi Dini Tumbuh Kembang (DDTK) approach, ensuring early identification of developmental delays. However, the lack of advanced assessment tools and limited educator training in developmental evaluations highlighted the need for capacity building and resource enhancement. Parental involvement is a critical component of holistic education, directly influencing the home environment and child development outcomes, as supported by (Utaminingsih, Anwar, et al., 2024).

The monitoring of child growth and development in the PAUD HI program has shown considerable success, with 92% of institutions conducting regular measurements of height and weight, and 78% monitoring head circumference. These efforts were strengthened through collaborations with Posyandu and Puskesmas, ensuring comprehensive health checks to support early childhood development. Institutions also utilized the Deteksi Dini Tumbuh Kembang (DDTK) approach to identify potential developmental delays effectively. However, several challenges were noted, including a lack of tools for advanced developmental assessments and limited training for educators to conduct and interpret these evaluations. Growth and development monitoring ensures early identification of health or developmental concerns, aligning with findings by (Setyowati et al., 2022). The implementation of Clean and Healthy Living Behavior (PHBS) in the PAUD HI program has been commendable, with 95% of institutions maintaining clean toilets, 100% providing handwashing stations, and 90% ensuring access to clean water. Schools actively promoted hygiene practices such as handwashing

and personal cleanliness, fostering a healthier environment for children. However, schools in remote areas faced significant challenges in maintaining a consistent water supply and sanitation facilities due to budget constraints. These hygiene practices are fundamental in reducing illness among children and supporting their learning processes, emphasizing the need for improved funding and infrastructure in underserved areas to sustain these essential initiatives.

The implementation of Supplementary Feeding Programs (PMT) in the PAUD HI program has been effective in addressing nutritional needs, with 77% of institutions conducting PMT activities three to four times annually. These programs provided nutritious meals specifically tailored to support children's growth and development. However, 20% of institutions were unable to implement PMT due to budget limitations, and some institutions faced challenges with irregular feeding schedules. Despite these obstacles, PMT initiatives remain vital in combating nutritional deficiencies and promoting better health outcomes for children, underscoring the need for increased financial support to ensure consistent implementation across all institutions. Collaboration with stakeholders has been a critical component of the PAUD HI program, with 77% of institutions maintaining active partnerships with entities such as Puskesmas, the Education Office, and local government. These collaborations facilitated essential activities, including health monitoring, immunizations, and the provision of parenting resources, which collectively enhanced the program's holistic approach to early childhood development. However, communication gaps were identified in 23% of institutions, hindering the effectiveness of these partnerships. Strengthening communication channels and fostering consistent engagement among stakeholders are imperative to ensure the success and sustainability of the program's integrative efforts.

The infrastructure and resources of the PAUD HI program have been a notable strength for many institutions, with 77% reporting adequate sanitation and educational facilities that support the effective delivery of holistic education. However, 23% of schools, particularly in rural areas, cited significant infrastructure deficiencies, largely due to insufficient budgets for facility upgrades. These limitations present challenges in

providing consistent and quality services to children. Adequate infrastructure is critical for ensuring the successful implementation of holistic education programs, highlighting the urgent need for targeted investments and resource allocation to address disparities in underfunded regions.

The study on the implementation of the Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Education (PAUD HI) program in the Merak Cluster, West Ungaran, highlights several critical findings and offers insights into the success and challenges of achieving holistic early childhood education. The discussion delves into the implications of these findings, their alignment with previous studies, and the broader significance of the program for early childhood development. Alignment with Previous Studies, the results confirm the effectiveness of a holistic approach to early childhood education, consistent with the findings of Radja et al. (2022), who emphasized the necessity of multi-stakeholder collaboration for achieving comprehensive child development. The implementation in the Merak Cluster demonstrated strong partnerships between schools, parents, health centers (Puskesmas), and local governments. These collaborations facilitated the delivery of integrated services, including health monitoring, nutritional programs, and education, ensuring a well-rounded developmental environment for children.

However, this study identifies discrepancies compared to Sutarto et al. (2021), who noted inconsistencies in similar programs due to resource constraints. Unlike the general findings of resource shortages, the Merak Cluster succeeded in most areas, except for a few institutions facing infrastructure limitations. This contrast highlights the importance of targeted resource allocation and local adaptability in program implementation. Key Contributions and Novel Insights, the study provides detailed insights into the operational aspects of PAUD HI programs, particularly in the localized context of the Merak Cluster. Key contributions include: 1) **Parental Engagement**: The structured implementation of parent classes and digital communication platforms (e.g., WhatsApp) created a consistent feedback loop between educators and parents. These initiatives fostered parental involvement, directly impacting children's home environments and aligning with (Ohi et al., 2021), who emphasized the role of parental engagement in enhancing early childhood education, 2) **Health and Nutrition**: Collaborative efforts with The Integrated Service Post (Pos Pelayanan Terpadu) and Community Health Centers (Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat) ensured comprehensive health monitoring and nutritional support. This finding aligns with Huggins (2017), who



highlighted the importance of health services in supporting holistic education. However, challenges such as inconsistent feeding schedules and limited healthcare tools in certain institutions indicate the need for standardized practices (Utaminingsih, Ramadhani, et al., 2024), 3) **Education and Development Monitoring**: Using methods like Early Detection Growth and Development for developmental assessments showcased an innovative approach to identifying developmental delays early. This practice demonstrates alignment with the theoretical framework (Hechtman et al., 2016), emphasizing the role of systematic evaluation in improving program outcomes, 4) **Infrastructure and Resources**: Adequate sanitation facilities and educational tools in most institutions supported the effective delivery of PAUD HI programs. However, rural institutions reported budgetary constraints, underscoring the need for strategic infrastructure investment, a point not extensively discussed in prior studies (Mavuru et al., 2024).

Critical Gaps Identified despite the program's overall success, this study reveals several critical gaps that require attention: 1) **Training for Educators**: Limited training in advanced assessment techniques and developmental monitoring impacted the quality of program delivery in certain institutions. This gap highlights the need for capacity-building initiatives to empower educators with the necessary skills (Su & Zhong, 2022), 2) **Parental Participation**: While 87.5% of institutions successfully engaged parents, the remaining 12.5% faced challenges related to low awareness and conflicting schedules. Addressing this gap requires innovative strategies, such as flexible meeting schedules and digital outreach campaigns (Castro et al., 2019), 3) **Resource Allocation**: Variability in program success across institutions highlights disparities in resource availability. Institutions in remote areas, in particular, struggled with consistent access to clean water and educational tools (Owens & Hinshaw, 2020).

**Broader Implications** the findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice: 1) **Policy Recommendations**: Strategic resource allocation is crucial to address disparities in infrastructure and educator training. Policies should prioritize rural institutions to ensure equitable access to holistic education (Kretschmer et al.,

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2014), 2) **Collaborative Models:** The success of the Merak Cluster underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Future policies should incentivize partnerships between schools, health centers, and local governments to replicate this model in other regions (Lunga, 2024), 3) **Program Scalability:** The integrative strategies implemented in the Merak Cluster provide a replicable framework for scaling PAUD HI programs in diverse socio-economic contexts. However, scalability efforts must consider local resource availability and cultural adaptability (Jannah & Setiawan, 2022). This study enriches the existing literature by providing a granular analysis of PAUD HI implementation in a localized setting. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on conceptual frameworks or national policies, this research emphasizes practical insights into the operational challenges and successes of holistic education programs. By identifying actionable strategies and highlighting the program's impact on children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development, the study offers a robust foundation for future research and policy development (Akhlag & Allehyani, 2023).

Future research on the PAUD HI program should focus on several critical areas to deepen understanding and enhance its implementation. Longitudinal studies are essential to evaluate the long-term impact of the program on children's academic achievements and social development, providing insights into its sustained effectiveness. Comparative analyses across different regions can help identify best practices and develop scalable strategies tailored to diverse socio-economic contexts. Additionally, exploring innovative solutions, such as leveraging digital technologies, offers significant potential to improve parental engagement and educator training, particularly in remote and under-resourced areas. These research directions will contribute to refining the program and ensuring its adaptability and scalability for broader application.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Development (PAUD HI) program in the Merak Cluster, West Ungaran District, successfully addresses the comprehensive needs of early childhood education through strong collaboration between schools, parents, community health centers (Puskesmas), and local governments. The program effectively integrates health monitoring, nutrition, and education, contributing to children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Despite achievements such as parental

engagement, PHBS practices, and supplementary feeding programs, challenges remain, including limited resources, inconsistent participation, and educator training gaps. This study highlights the program's replicable model and underscores the importance of holistic and collaborative approaches in early childhood education, offering insights for scaling these practices while addressing local needs.

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