

The Role of Photography in Strategies to Enhance the Development of Primary School Children in Merdeka Curriculum Education

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Abstract

Considering the current development of children, where technology plays an essential role in the learning process, this reinforces that integrated photography is an innovative tool that can be implemented in the independent curriculum to support the character development of primary school children in the 22nd century. Using a visual and creative approach, photography enables children to develop critical thinking skills, self-expression, and an appreciation of the environment. Photography-based education programs help students understand Pancasila values such as cooperation, responsibility, and love for the environment through practical activities that combine visual arts with value education. In addition, photography also encourages children to be more aware of environmental sustainability, while strengthening their ability to communicate and work together. With the integration of photography technology in learning, the independent curriculum can create a generation of learners who are creative, characterized, and ready to face global challenges

Keywords: Integrated Photography, Merdeka Curriculum, Pancasila Values

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that photography technology is a medium that has great potential in supporting the development of elementary school children, especially in Merdeka Curriculum Education. This curriculum emphasizes creativity, independence, and Project-Based Learning, which is in line with the benefits of photography as a learning medium. (Sari & Oktaviani, 2020)

Photography can help children to develop creativity by exploring new ideas and expressing themselves through images. It also paves the way for understanding abstract concepts and making them more concrete or visual. Photography activities encourage observation skills in children, increase interest in learning, and support character development in accordance with the Pancasila Learner Profile, such as cooperation, responsibility, and love for the environment.

The background of this research is the importance of innovation and learning methods to face the challenges of education in the 22nd century. Photography is a learning tool that can be integrated in various strategies, such as Project-Based Learning, Visual Storytelling, and Cross-Curricular Connections. With this approach, children are expected to not only learn academically, but also develop 21st century skills, namely critical thinking, creativity, and the ability for high technology.

This research uses a literature review-based research method, with several researchers who have a role in exploring the field of photography and children's education resulting in a discourse where photography is one of the effective and innovative tools that can support education to be more adaptive and relevant to the needs of the times.

Early Childhood Education

In the research of Sriandila et al. (2023) regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at PAUD Nurul Ikhlas, Kebalai District, Kerinci Regency, West Sumatra, emphasized that the curriculum influences early childhood teaching methods because it combines learning with a play-based system. Jayawardana et al. (2022)

discussed the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD (Early Childhood Education) level, stating that crucial components, including principal and teacher knowledge, learning achievements, and the successful implementation of the project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila Students have been achieved. This shows the effectiveness of the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in PAUD.

Rizka et al. (2023) in their research, regarding the implementation of Merdeka Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum in Kindergarten (TK), Karawang Regency, West Java. Stating that with research that focuses on further understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the kindergarten level, it is hoped that it can contribute to the development of an education system that is more adaptive and responsive to the needs and dynamics of Indonesian society.

The Role of Photography in the Learning Process

“Photographic images are increasingly present in everyday life as a medium of social interaction and commentary.” (Miles & Howes, 2015)

1. Photography has a significant role in supporting children's development, Jean Piaget (1964) in his theory states that the productive age of children is in four stages, namely:
2. Sensorimotor Stage (0-2 years), at this stage, children have begun to explore the world through senses and physical actions,
3. Preoperational Stage (2-7 years), in this stage, children begin to think symbolically and develop imagination,
4. Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years), children begin to understand logical concepts and see cause-and-effect relationships,
5. Formal Operational Stage (11 years and above), children begin to think abstractly and logically.

Here are some benefits of photography in the development process of elementary school children:

1. Photography allows children to explore a discovery and express themselves through images or visuals. This can help children to develop creative and innovative thinking skills.
2. Realistic images in photography can be used as an effective learning medium, especially in explaining abstract concepts to be more real so that it is easy for children to understand.
3. By learning photography, children are able to learn to pay attention to the details around them and improve their ability to observe and analyze an object.
4. Learning photography helps children in the learning process to be more interesting and interactive, so that children are more motivated to recognize teaching materials.

In Merdeka Curriculum education, photography can be used for projects that support character development and Pancasila values, such as cooperation in making photos or videos of school ads, responsibility in documenting community events, and also a form of love for the environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses the literature review method, which is a method to obtain data, information, and texts related to the role of photography in strategies to improve the development of elementary school children in Merdeka Curriculum education through scientific journals and other relevant research. This writing is descriptive. It aims to analyze the role of photography as a strategic tool in supporting the development of elementary school children through integrating photography in Merdeka Curriculum education, with a focus on strengthening character, creativity, and the values of the Pancasila Student profile.

It is needed because school-age children in Indonesia are considered to be experiencing a character crisis, creativity crisis, and national identity crisis in responding to the changing education. Research can also be a reference for other researchers to develop relevant studies in the future. To enrich the diversity and spirit of Indonesian researchers towards Pancasila values and hybridization.

DISCUSSION

"Photography belongs to visual research methods and its origins in education research are in the 1960s and 1970s." (Posser & Schwarz, 1998)

"Photography has strength as a methodology of representation and recognition." (Miles & Howes, 2015)

Based on Piaget's Theory of Child Development (1964), photography is believed to be a good medium to support learning at every stage of children's cognitive development.

"Photography would be special in "opening the way" rather than reducing the cognitive and semantic ambiguity." (Gardner, 2009)

"The potential of photography, rather than being related to the mere reproduction of reality, is closely related to its ambiguity and its excess of meaning (Ritchin, 2012), its ability to "sting" or "shake" (Barthes, 2003), to invoke deduction, speculation and fantasy." (Sontag, 2004)

"The use of photography as a research method with learners in compulsory education. Understood within the scope of 'visual,' 'participatory,' and 'art-based' research methods, many scholars have linked the increased use of the photographic method to greater awareness to the rights of the child and changing understandings of children as full 'human beings' with agency rather than simply vulnerable 'human becoming.'" (Hanna, 2020)

Based on the analysis of children's needs, which emphasizes health and integration of Pancasila values in children. Therefore, Merdeka Curriculum is organized into three categories: extracurricular, intra-curricular, and Pancasila Learner profile. These categories help distinguish between formal and non-formal activities. Play and learning methods are used to create learning plans, focusing on the individual needs of each child. (Prasetya et al., 2020) Purnawanto (2023) in their research stated that child-centered learning is relevant to the context reflected in the analysis of children's needs and characteristics through observation and integration of local materials.

Integrated Photography in children's education can be an interesting and impactful activity, here are some integrated learning strategies that can be used:

1. Project-Based Learning

In Project-Based Learning, students are assigned to work on a photography project together. Such as a project for a school magazine, which has a topic about exploring history, science, or social issues. Assignments are needed so that students can understand the role of community, documentation and cultural diversity, as well as current urgent environmental issues.



Picture 1. *Project-Based Learning in Classroom*
(source: www.detik.com, 2022)

2. Visual Storytelling

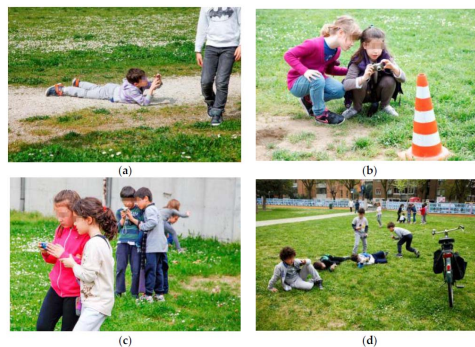
In visual storytelling, students are encouraged to create a visual essay or story in the form of photographs, which can express a perspective on a theme, such as "A Day in My Life" or "The Wonders of Nature." Themes such as community, culture, or personal identity can also be used in this project. This photography approach can foster creativity and critical thinking in children.



Picture 2. *Visual Storytelling*
(source: smktheresiana.sch.id, 2023)

3. Reflective Photography

In some educational settings, Reflective photography can be used to reflect on classroom learning experiences or also document school event field trips. This method, hopefully, helps students make connections between theoretical knowledge and current real-world applications.



Picture 3. *Reflective photographs (a-d)*
(source: Serena Triacca, 2017)

4. Cross-Curricular Activities

In Cross-Curricular Activities, photography has been used in subjects such as science, history, etc. This is necessary as students can photograph natural phenomena for biology or photograph historical buildings to deepen their understanding of the history of the place.



Picture 4. *Cross-Curricular Teaching*
(source: skmcendikiabatuajar.sch.id, 2019)

5. Mindfulness and Mental Health

In psychology, photography has been introduced as a tool to increase mindfulness and shown to support mental health. Photographing allows students to focus on the present and express emotions through images or photos.



Picture 5. *Developing Mindfulness in Kids*
(source: picture-power.com, 2025)

“Photographic images are ideally suited to inclusive research, as they have their own unique expression or language, and are highly accessible.” (Wang, 2006)

“Photographs can be a powerful tool in enhancing teaching and learning in a variety of subjects. They can help to engage student, provide visual aids to support learning, and encourage critical thinking and analysis. Photographs can illustrate historical events, cultures and landscapes at the same time.” (Oksanen, Hannula, & Laine, 2024)

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in school-age children is closely related to children's cooperation and teacher-child interaction. School efforts to incorporate the value of Pancasila can begin with the Pancasila Learner Profile project, as well as developing the theme “I Love Indonesia” with the sub-topic “Indonesia's 78th Anniversary, etc.” (Purnawanto, 2022) In his research on the Concept of Peaceful School: Harmonizing the Pancasila Student Profile in the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Istianah et al. (2023) emphasize that learning can be through direct experience and application of ideas in an authentic setting. So that students can gain greater insight into the values of Pancasila which can be achieved through interactive learning activities based on current educational projects.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrated photography has great potential as an innovation in supporting the development of elementary school children. Based on a visual and creative approach, photography can help students develop critical thinking skills, creativity, self-expression, and appreciation of the environment. Photography also encourages children to strengthen Pancasila values such as cooperation, responsibility, and love for the country.

In the context of Merdeka Curriculum, photography can be applied through several learning strategies, namely: Project-Based Learning where students can work together on photography projects that deepen understanding of community, culture and environment; in Visual Storytelling, students can express ideas or stories through visuals (photos); Reflective Photography is used to reflect on learning and connect theory and real applications; Cross-Curricular Activities can integrate photography with other subjects such as science and history, etc.; Mindfulness and Mental Health uses photography as a means to increase students' emotional awareness and expression.

Through this integration, it can be seen that Merdeka Curriculum is able to create a generation of learners who are creative, have strong character, and are ready to face global challenges. This is expressed in photography, which has proven itself as an effective medium to harmonize the education and academic development of elementary school children in Indonesia.

Based on the reviewed studies on early childhood development in Indonesia, future research directions can be determined, particularly as integrated photography has shown positive results in primary education. Key areas of research include the effectiveness of photography across diverse regions and cultures, its integration with digital literacy and technology education, and the emotional and mental impact of photographic activities on students in Indonesia or other countries.

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Table 1. Literature Picture

Picture Title	Years	Sources
Picture. 1 <i>Project-Based Learning in Classroom</i>	2022	https://www.detik.com/edu/edutainment/d-6413578/inovasi-guru-smk-di-sumsel-bikin-mini-bank-untuk-dikelola-siswa
Picture. 2 <i>Visual Storytelling</i>	2023	https://smktheresiana.sch.id/asesmen-menyenangkan-bagi-murid-dengan-pjbl/
Picture. 3 <i>Reflective photographs (a-d)</i>	2017	MDPI Journal: Proceedings Vol.1, 2017: 952
Picture. 4 <i>Cross-Curricular Teaching</i>	2019	https://smkcendekiabatujajar.sch.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/kabarSMK-1.jpg
Picture. 5 <i>Developing Mindfulness in Kids</i>	2025	https://www.picture-power.com/explaining-the-power-of-photography-to-kids.html

Table 2. Literature Research

Research Title	Researcher	Information
Utilization of Macro Photography as Learning Media in Natural Science	Maya Purnama Sari, & Hertanti Nova Oktaviani	Specta: Journal of Photography, Arts, and Media Vol. 4 No. 2, 2020: 93-100
Analysis of Independent Curriculum Development and Implementation	Kamila Mahabatillah, Erhamwilda, & Mubiar Agustin	Golden Age: Early Childhood Education Vol. 8 No.1, 2024: 195-202
Photography as a Research Method with Learners in Compulsory Education: A Research Review	Hellen Hanna	Beijing International Review of Education Vol.2, 2020:11-34
The Potential of Photography for Mathematics Education and Research-A Literature Review	Susanna Maria Oksanen, Markku S. Hannula, & Anu Leine	International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education Vol.19 No.3, 2024: 1-14
Teaching and Learning with Pictures the Use of Photography in Primary Schools	Serena Triacca	MDPI Journal: Proceedings Vol.1, 2017: 952