

Accelerating Curriculum Transformation: Integrating Stakeholder Commitment into Lewin's Change Management Model in Kindergartens

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze curriculum change management in kindergartens, including obstacles and solutions. The approach used was a descriptive qualitative one, with principals and school administrators as research subjects and teachers as informants. This study took place from February to June 2025, with data collected through interviews, document analysis, and triangulation. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results showed that the curriculum change management process in kindergartens followed the stages proposed by Lewin: the opening stage (planning), the change stage (implementation), and the refreezing stage (evaluation). A novelty found was the existence of accelerating factors in curriculum transformation that had not been specifically discussed in Lewin's theory. These accelerating factors include the competence and commitment of principals and teachers, as well as good collaboration between internal and external stakeholders. The implications of these findings are the importance of improving the competence of principals and teachers in managing curriculum change, as well as the need to build effective communication between all relevant parties to accelerate the change process. This can be used as a reference in developing a more responsive and sustainable curriculum in kindergartens, thereby supporting the improvement of the quality of education from an early age.

Keywords: *Change Management, Curriculum Transformation, Early Childhood Education*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis manajemen perubahan kurikulum di taman kanak-kanak, termasuk kendala dan solusinya. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan subjek penelitian kepala sekolah dan administrator sekolah, serta informan berupa guru. Penelitian ini berlangsung dari Februari hingga Juni 2025, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, analisis dokumen, dan triangulasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa proses manajemen perubahan kurikulum di taman kanak-kanak sudah sesuai dengan tahap-tahap yang diusulkan oleh Lewin, yakni tahap pembukaan (perencanaan), tahap perubahan (pelaksanaan), dan tahap pembekuan kembali (evaluasi). Kebaruan yang ditemukan adalah adanya faktor percepatan dalam transformasi kurikulum yang belum dibahas secara khusus dalam teori Lewin. Faktor-faktor akselerator tersebut antara lain kompetensi dan komitmen kepala sekolah dan guru, serta kolaborasi yang baik antara pemangku kepentingan internal dan eksternal. Implikasi dari temuan ini adalah pentingnya peningkatan kompetensi kepala sekolah dan guru dalam

mengelola perubahan kurikulum, serta perlunya membangun komunikasi yang efektif antara seluruh pihak terkait untuk mempercepat proses perubahan. Hal ini dapat dijadikan acuan dalam pengembangan kurikulum yang lebih responsif dan berkelanjutan di taman kanak-kanak, sehingga mendukung peningkatan kualitas pendidikan sejak dini.

Kunci: *Manajemen Perubahan, Transformasi Kurikulum, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a critical cornerstone in developing human capital capable of navigating an increasingly complex and competitive global landscape. Research into curriculum change management is of paramount importance to the broader society because educational quality must, ideally, advance more rapidly than other societal sectors to ensure the continued relevance of graduate competencies. Given that the most accelerated developments in the contemporary era occur within the technological domain, responsive curriculum adaptation has become an absolute necessity to prevent educational institutions from imparting obsolete skills that no longer meet societal demands (Kim, 2023; Mérida et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2024; Sabila et al., 2025). Consequently, educational frameworks must be strategically structured to foster the essential 21st-century competencies students need to thrive. A failure to manage curriculum transitions effectively not only diminishes institutional quality but also impedes broader social progress by failing to produce a generation proficient in digital literacy and critical thinking. Ultimately, scholarly inquiry into curriculum transformation is a vital instrument for safeguarding the long-term quality of national education amidst inevitable global shifts.

A pervasive challenge facing the educational community today is the profound misalignment between centralized curriculum policies and the actual readiness of stakeholders at the grassroots level. The transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum in Indonesia exemplifies a top-down transformation driven by central government mandates. This shift was formally codified in the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Permendikbudristek) Number 12 of 2024, which requires significant adjustments across all educational tiers, including ECE. However, a fundamental problem arises as not all schools possess the requisite agility to respond to these changes with the expected celerity. Curriculum overhauls frequently trigger systemic bottlenecks, ranging from the complexities of administrative documentation to technical hurdles in classroom implementation. The educational community often finds itself in a state of precarious uncertainty when national policy formulations are cascaded to the institutional level without commensurate capacity-building support. This condition fosters skepticism among parents and educators regarding the actual efficacy of the ongoing national curriculum transition.

The dynamics of curriculum reform within the Indonesian ECE sector are characterized by rapid fluctuations that impose significant adaptive pressures on both school principals and teachers. While these policies aim to enhance

educational quality by optimizing student potential, empirical reality often reveals significant resistance rooted in the comfort of established systems. The speed at which an educational system responds to the exigencies of the time is heavily dictated by the specific construction and substance of the curriculum developed at the unit level. Although robust curriculum planning should theoretically anticipate future developments, structural management models often overlook educators' psychological and professional readiness (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025). This issue is compounded by findings suggesting that curriculum shifts do not merely alter academic facets but also catalyze significant social changes within the ECE unit (Friman et al., 2024). Therefore, a sophisticated understanding of how change management can bridge the gap between government policy and school-level reality is essential to ensure that transitions transcend mere superficial adjustments to curriculum documents.

A synthesis of the existing literature indicates that previous scholarship has extensively documented impediments to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including teachers' struggles with lesson planning and assessment protocols. Deficiencies in technological pedagogical competence and anemic institutional resource support have been consistently identified as primary inhibitory factors ('Azah et al., 2024; Ndari et al., 2023; Yunitasari et al., 2023). Furthermore, empirical data suggested that during the initial rollout of this curriculum, only approximately 77% of teachers expressed readiness, highlighting a substantial gap in transition management. Other studies have underscored that teachers' perceptions and psychological readiness significantly influence their performance when implementing new curricular frameworks (Zaini, 2024). While effective curriculum management is recognized as a primary determinant of ECE quality, there remains a paucity of literature exploring specific success stories of pilot schools that have achieved rapid, high-fidelity adaptation. The limitation of prior research lies in its disproportionate focus on barriers, rather than in providing a replicable model for how an institution can systematically accelerate transformation despite resource constraints (Barokatin & Sukinah, 2025; Bosco et al., 2025; Neshteruk et al., 2025).

This study aims to address this lacuna by using Kurt Lewin's change management theory as a primary analytical lens applied to a distinguished pilot school. Lewin's framework, encompassing the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, is uniquely suited to reconfiguring the mindsets of educational stakeholders to mitigate resistance (Alsuwaidi, 2023; Vassel, 2025). Scholarly consensus suggests that successful organizational change is heavily contingent upon the managerial competence of the school principal and transformational leadership in optimizing school resources (Liu et al., 2025; Nordin et al., 2023). Moreover, the active involvement of national-level instructors within school management is posited as a critical variable in accelerating the socialization of new curricular concepts. The contribution of this research lies in synthesizing the "best practices" at Kindergarten, which has successfully navigated curriculum adaptation since 2022 through an innovative deep learning approach. By analyzing the unique attributes of this institution, this research intends to offer a

strategic benchmarking model for similar institutions facing the volatility of national educational policies.

The primary novelty, or state of the art, of this research lies in identifying "accelerator factors" in change management that have not been exhaustively explored in conventional educational management literature. While much of the existing scholarship stops at verifying general stages of change, this study goes further by dissecting the specific mechanisms of accelerated curriculum transformation in an institution that achieves high effectiveness despite moderate resource settings. The core of this novelty lies in exploring how strategic managerial competence and robust internal collaboration serve as catalysts that transcend administrative and structural hurdles. Addressing this is imperative because, without a clear acceleration model, schools in developing contexts will remain trapped in a cycle of slow, reactive adaptation to every governmental policy shift. By presenting a fresh perspective on the facilitators of systematic transformation, this research provides a more robust theoretical foundation for future school management policies. The integration of classical change management theory with the empirical realities of a pilot school is expected to alleviate educational practitioners' anxieties about the sustainable management of change.

The research problem central to this study concerns the systematic implementation of curriculum change strategies and the specific factors that facilitate effective implementation. The primary argument posited is that successful curriculum transformation is not merely a product of regulatory compliance but is instead driven by the school leader's ability to perform social engineering and reshape organizational culture through measurable, phased interventions. Preliminary answers to this problem suggest that the synergy between transformational leadership, collective educator commitment, and the active engagement of parents constitutes the primary key to overcoming resistance to change. The contribution of this research is expected to provide a practical framework for ECE administrators to orchestrate curriculum transitions that are smoother and less prone to conflict. Academically, this study aims to enrich the discourse on Islamic educational management within the context of national curriculum reform. Through an in-depth analysis of high-performing field practices, this research not only addresses the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum but also provides a strategic roadmap for the holistic, inclusive improvement of early childhood education quality for all segments of society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, framed within an analytical-descriptive field research paradigm (Miller et al., 2023; Mtisi, 2022). The case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth, multifaceted exploration of the "how" and "why" behind curriculum change management in its real-life context. This design is particularly well-suited for investigating complex organizational transitions in which the boundaries between the phenomenon (curriculum change) and the context (the educational institution) are not clearly evident. By utilizing an analytical-descriptive lens, the research moves beyond

mere reporting to provide a critical interpretation of the management strategies employed during the transition.

The research was conducted at Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten in Baki, Sukoharjo, from February to June 2025. The site selection was based on a purposive sampling strategy, driven by the institution's unique status as a designated pilot school for curriculum reform in the Sukoharjo Regency. A critical factor in this selection was the school's leadership: the institution is managed by a certified assessor from the National Accreditation Body (BAN PDM), a recognized speaker at regional workshops, and by a team with extensive expertise in both formal and non-formal preschool management. This "information-rich" environment provided a unique opportunity to benchmark best practices in rapid curriculum adaptation that are not typically found in standard educational units.

Data were gathered through a combination of semi-structured interviews and comprehensive documentation studies. The primary research subject was the school principal, supplemented by insights from the school manager and two teachers. The teachers were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a representative range of perspectives from both Class A and Class B levels. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, data validation was conducted through method and source triangulation, comparing interview transcripts with institutional documents and cross-referencing accounts between different stakeholders. This rigorous validation process minimizes individual bias and ensures a holistic understanding of the management process.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Asipi et al., 2022), which comprises four concurrent flows of activity: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Almusaed et al., 2025; Mbanaso et al., 2023). During the data condensation phase, the researchers systematically filtered and abstracted the raw field notes and interview transcripts, discarding irrelevant information to focus strictly on the core research questions. The remaining data were organized into structured displays to identify emerging patterns and themes. In the final stage, these patterns were contextualized through the lens of Lewin's change management theory to derive comprehensive meanings and formulate robust conclusions regarding the acceleration factors of curriculum transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Quick Profile of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten

Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten is one of the educational institutions in Sukoharjo Regency. This Islamic kindergarten is an institution managed by the Fatimah Preschool Foundation and offers both formal and non-formal education. This research focuses on formal education, with the kindergarten as the primary focus for deeper analysis. The profile of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten can be seen on the Basic Education Data (Dapodik) platform, General Director of Preschool Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education at this website: <https://dapo.kemendikbud.go.id/sekolah/CBDDBEADBDAD>. Based on the data

of the profile, which is confirmed by the interview with the Headmaster (Wcr 01, 10 May 2025) and the biodata documents of the managers, the excellence of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten is as follows:

This kindergarten holds an A-grade accreditation and an ISO certificate. Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten, under the Fatimah Preschool Foundation, has been chosen as the pilot school. According to the interview with the managers, the selection of the pilot school must follow a strict process. Out of the 500 educational institutions in the selection, Fatimah Preschool Foundation is chosen as one of the schools that passed. After it became the pilot school, it can be chosen as an internship site, for observation, and for national research. The manager of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten is a BAN PDM assessor, a speaker at various workshops, and has extensive experience in preschool management and in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Fatimah Preschool Foundation has become the location for the Teachers' Competency Exam (TUK). This school is also in partnership with P2 PAUD to develop educational models using Sipendi (Student Assessment System), serves as a venue for various workshops from the PAUD Directorate, is associated with the Central Java Language Center, and has many achievements locally, regionally, and nationally by the teachers and students.

The Curriculum Change Management in Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten

Based on the interview with the headmaster of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten, an inseparable part of Fatimah Preschool, the results show that the curriculum change process at this institution has been conducted systematically in accordance with the government program. This is, as the headmaster said: "The curriculum change in Fatimah Pilot Preschool is following the government regulation. However, if there is a curriculum change from each regulation in the first place, it is not that different in Fatimah Preschool because essentially, the implementation, especially in the teaching process, is in line with the principles. It only needs improvements." (Wcr 01, 10 May 2025)

The process of curriculum change at this institution is proceeding reasonably well, with few problems, thanks to the institution's experience and competence in implementing it. The data collected in the field show that the competence and readiness of the managers in conducting curriculum change have a big influence, as stated by the headmaster: "As it happens, Mr. Bambang, as the manager of Fatimah Pilot Preschool, is a part of the National Speakers team assigned to socialize that curriculum to all teachers in Indonesia." (Wcr 01, 10 May 2025).

This strategic role of the manager then becomes a key to the success of the curriculum change. After that, in conducting the curriculum change, the manager takes strategic steps as follows: "In conducting the curriculum change, we follow these steps: the manager studies what changes need to be made, understands the concept of the new curriculum that needs to be formulated, and later organizes socialization and internal meetings involving all managers and teachers to discuss and agree on the strategic steps to adjust to the changes." (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025).

The managers and teachers conduct intensive studies to understand what changes must be made and how the change process is carried out. Based on the

interview with the headmaster which were then corroborated by the manager (Wcr 01 and 02, 11 May 2025), it was found that the aspects that were changed basically adjusted to Permendikbudristek RI Number 12 Year 2024 about Curriculum of Preschool Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education which includes educational objective, curriculum content, learning method, assessment, teacher professional development, curriculum structure, inclusivity and diversity. Educational Objective marked with renewing the vision and mission of education to reflect today's needs and challenges. Curriculum Content marked with adaptations to learning content to incorporate the latest knowledge, new technologies, and 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, creativity, and critical thinking. Learning Method realized with the integration of more interactive and project-based teaching methods, as well as the use of technology and digital media. Assessment marked by reform of the evaluation system to measure students' understanding and skills more holistically, not just through written examinations. Teacher Professional Development is implemented through training and continuous development to ensure teachers are ready to implement the new curriculum and use modern teaching methods. Curriculum Structure implemented with a review of the distribution of school subjects and allocation of time for each subject to fit the contemporary education needs. Inclusivity and diversity ensure the curriculum is more inclusive and reflects the diversity of culture, language, and special needs.

To gain support and understanding for the curriculum change, the manager conducts socialization for the teachers and relevant parties. According to the manager's explanation, there are some primary steps in socialization, including creating a directory document, workshops and training, socialization for parents and the community, media and publications, trials and feedback, and assistance and supervision. The headmaster adds that those stages are done in a relatively systematic way. With those stages, all parties are involved in the curriculum change. The involved internal parties are the headmaster, teachers, and education staff. Meanwhile, the external parties involve the parents and community through meetings, seminars, and counseling. To support the socialization process, various media are used, such as the institution's website and social media. Subsequently, to make sure the new curriculum design is in accordance to the expectation, a trial is conducted to receive feedbacks from teachers, students, and parents (Wcr 01, 11 May 2025) From the interview, the teachers stated that the school involves the students' parents in the form of parenting at the awalussanah (a welcoming event at the beginning of the year) to uniformize the perception towards the teachings that will be received by the students (Wcr 03, 12 May 2025).

According to the field data, the curriculum profile is examined before and after the change. The description of the curriculum before the change and after the change, as explained by the manager (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025), can be summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of ECE Curriculum Profiles: Pre- and Post-Transformation

Before the Change	After the Change
Children-development-based: focusing on the development of	Primarily More flexible learning: The Merdeka curriculum gives teachers the freedom to

cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social aspects of the children through various playing and studying activities.	adjust teaching materials and methods according to the interests and needs of each child.
Central theme: The teachings often focus on certain themes designed to introduce the children to basic concepts such as colors, shapes, numbers, and letters through daily activities.	Project-based approach: Prioritize project-based learning to allow children to explore and learn through direct experience.
Integrated approach: Use a multidisciplinary approach to provide a holistic learning experience.	21st-century skill improvement: Focus on developing essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication from an early age.
Playing activity: Play is one of the primary methods of learning, with activities designed to stimulate motor and cognitive development.	The use of technology: Integrating technology into the learning process to support a more interactive teaching method that attracts children.
Structured teaching: A curriculum, although flexible, still has a structure and a regular schedule, including time for free and directed play.	Focus on children's independence: Encourage children to take greater initiative in their studies and exploration, building confidence and responsibility.
Emphasis on moral and social values: The formation of character, moral values, and social skills also becomes the focus by teaching children about cooperation, discipline, and empathy.	Holistic evaluation: A more holistic and thorough assessment, including various aspects of children's development according to the student competencies element.
Collaboration with parents: Involve parents in the educational process through communication and shared activities to support children's development at home.	Inclusivity and diversity: A more inclusive curriculum that pays more attention to diverse children's needs, including children with special needs.

The informan also conveyed the same thing from the element of teachers or education who stated in the interview ther, "The description of Preschool Education curriculum in our institution before the change is to use a curriculum that encourages child-centered learning with three aspects of assessment, namely knowledge, skill, and behavioral attitude" (Wcr 03, 12 May 2025)

A similar explanation was given by a teacher, who stated that after the curriculum changed, the learning system became more flexible, and teachers have the freedom to adjust their teaching to children's interests. Through the project to strengthen Pancasila students' profiles, children develop positive character traits, such as helping one another and being creative. The children are also happier and more motivated to study. Parents are also seen as more involved in children's learning (Wcr 03, 12 May 2025).

The interview data are in accordance with the formulated curriculum document. This can be found in the School Operational Curriculum (KOS) of Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten, which was legalized in 2022. This means the new curriculum was formulated shortly after the establishment of the Merdeka curriculum that year. After the new curriculum is formulated and established, the next stage is to implement it. This stage, according to the headmaster, is carried out carefully to ensure a smooth and effective process. The steps taken are: arranging the schedule and implementing the curriculum, providing intensive workshops for teachers, maintaining continuous, transparent communication with

all parties, providing the resources needed for teaching, and conducting trials and evaluations, along with assistance and supervision (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025).

Obstacles and solutions to curriculum changes

In the process of curriculum change in this institution, although generally going well, there are also some challenges and obstacles. This dynamic interplay between institutional obstacles and the corresponding strategic interventions is systematically detailed in the problem-solution mapping illustrated in Figure 2. Among the challenges are; the limited resources of both physical and teaching materials, not all of the teachers have the needed competence to immediately apply the new curriculum, and the diversity of students needs because there are children with special needs who become one of the big challenges (Wcr 01, 10 May 2025). The explanation is supported by the manager who later added that there is resistance coming from the students and teachers who are still comfortable with 2013 curriculum that has been long implemented, making them reluctant and hesitant with the soon-to-be established curriculum (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025). However, according to the information from the teachers, there is no rejection coming from the parents. They all support the change of curriculum after hearing the explanation from the teachers (Wcr 03, 12 May 2025).

The strategic interaction between institutional challenges and corresponding managerial interventions is thoroughly outlined in the problem-solution mapping. To address the identified issues, such as resource constraints and gaps in teacher pedagogy, the school leadership implemented a multi-faceted mitigation strategy. This strategy involved meticulous planning, intensive professional development workshops, and clear communication protocols (Wcr 01, 11 May 2025). This proactive and organized approach, reinforced by continuous support and high-quality supervision, effectively facilitated the transformation process by overcoming teacher resistance and fostering adaptability among all stakeholders (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025). As a result, the mapping illustrates that the success of the curriculum transition was not solely based on regulatory compliance, but also on cohesive crisis management that integrated institutional resources with capacity-building for adaptation.

To overcome the emerging obstacles, the manager, along with the headmaster, took the following steps, as stated by the headmaster: "to overcome the emerging obstacles, we arranged a sophisticated plan, effective workshops, continuous support, and proper communication between all parties" (Wcr 01, 11 May 2025). Additionally, there is continuous assistance and supervision, especially at the beginning of the curriculum implementation. According to the manager, this can ensure all parties eventually adapt well to the change (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025).

Setting aside the challenges and obstacles, there are supporting factors that accelerate the process of curriculum change at Kindergarten. According to the manager, during the interview, one of the supporting factors was the teachers' commitment. Even though some of them lack adequate competence, they can adapt quickly with a strong commitment. Another factor would be the splendid collaboration between the school, teachers, parents, and society. With this collaboration, the curriculum transformation process can be completed more quickly. Moreover, there is adequate infrastructure, including access to technology

and information (Wcr 02, 11 May 2025). This is also supported by the teacher's explanation stating that "the key to the success of curriculum change implementation is the cooperation among teachers, parents, and society" (Wcr 03, 12 May 2025).

The convergence of these internal and external supporting elements creates a synergistic effect that functions as an "acceleration nexus" for curriculum transformation, as conceptualized in the matrix model. This model illustrates that the rapid adaptation observed at Kanita Tiara Islamic Kindergarten is not the result of a single variable, but rather the mutual reinforcement between leadership competence, unwavering teacher commitment, robust infrastructure, and excellent stakeholder collaboration. Theoretically, these interconnected quadrants explain how the institution compressed the transition timeline, moving from policy awareness to stable implementation more efficiently than conventional models suggest. In practice, the matrix emphasizes that while infrastructure provides the necessary tools, it is the synergy between human capital and strategic leadership that ultimately drives the sustainability and speed of educational reform in a pilot school setting.

Discussion

The management of curriculum transformation at the Kindergarten demonstrates a highly competent and systematic response to the constitutional mandate to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. By utilizing Lewin's change management framework, this research confirms that the transition from the 2013 Curriculum was effectively structured into three distinct phases: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (Bentayao et al., 2024; McMahon et al., 2024). The institution's swift adaptation, evidenced by its School Operational Curriculum established in 2022, aligns with the theoretical necessity for organizations to promptly adjust to centralistic government mandates. Theoretically, this highlights that curriculum change is a structured process that directs human capital toward desired outcomes (Burke & Morley, 2023; Zerrad & Schechter, 2025). In practice, it suggests that early institutional responsiveness is a critical predictor of successful policy integration, offering a viable blueprint for other ECE centers to navigate top-down educational reforms.

During the unfreezing stage, the kindergarten leadership prioritized comprehensive planning and potential mapping to mitigate organizational resistance. This phase successfully fostered an awareness among all stakeholders regarding the necessity of change, effectively addressing initial dilemmas or disconfirmation (Islam, 2023; Weick & Quinn, 2026). These findings reinforce the strategic role of school principals in managing institutional resources to catalyze transformation (Abbaspour et al., 2024). By employing a robust change management strategy, the institution turned initial resistance into sustainable adoption (Mouazen et al., 2024; Veseli et al., 2025). Furthermore, the principal's competence and situational leadership style proved instrumental in enhancing educational quality and teacher performance (Lismeni et al., 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2023). This underscores the theoretical implication that transformational leadership is a primary determinant of teacher competence during periods of systemic transition (Toprak et al., 2023).

The implementation or "changing" stage focused on a systematic transition encompassing six key organizational variables: human, culture, job, technology, design, and strategy (Jaafar et al., 2026; Pacheco-Cubillos et al., 2024). The leadership assisted this transition by enhancing human resources through intensive workshops and preparing the necessary technological infrastructure (Al-Asfour, 2025; Vong et al., 2025). A critical element of this success was the principal's ability to observe and reshape the school's "lifeworld" or organizational culture (Macharia et al., 2023; Walker, 2024). The application of transformational leadership in this context was essential for fostering a competitive culture and addressing educators' inherent limitations (Ahsan, 2025; Şahin & Bilir, 2024). Practically, the study demonstrates that the gradual integration of project-based learning and 21st-century skills ensures that a new curriculum becomes a lived educational reality rather than a mere administrative formality.

In the refreezing stage, periodic supervision and evaluation were used to solidify the new work culture and ensure optimal implementation of the curriculum (Silva et al., 2025). This process was further supported by the roles of transformational teachers and the principal, who served as national instructors and acted as catalysts for institutional excellence (Abbaspour et al., 2024). The findings indicate that the principal's transparent and accountable leadership style significantly improved teacher performance and commitment (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Mbarawi & Amabibi, 2024). Although minor uncertainties initially existed among stakeholders, persuasive and collaborative communication effectively resolved these issues, resulting in unified support for the new framework. This reinforces the theoretical premise that leader influence and high teacher commitment are indispensable factors in overcoming the complexities of organizational transformation (Kareem et al., 2025; Nassir & Benoliel, 2025).

Ultimately, this study identifies specific "accelerator factors" – comprising principal competence, teacher commitment, and stakeholder collaboration – that build on Lewin's classical theory by explaining the pace of curriculum adaptation in a pilot school context. The theoretical implication is that these factors function as catalysts that significantly compress the transition timeline, a nuance not explicitly detailed in standard change management models. In practice, this research provides a strategic roadmap for ECE administrators, emphasizing that the synergy between leadership and collective commitment is vital to achieving rapid and effective curriculum shifts. By analyzing these high-performing field practices, the study not only addresses the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum but also contributes a replicable framework for enhancing the quality and inclusivity of early childhood education in a dynamic policy environment.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the most critical determinant of successful curriculum transformation in Early Childhood Education lies not merely in regulatory compliance, but in the strategic orchestration of change management anchored in leadership competence, collective commitment, and stakeholder synergy. The key lesson derived from this research is that accelerated curriculum adaptation becomes feasible when institutions effectively operationalize change

through the integrated phases of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, while simultaneously activating “accelerator factors” such as principal expertise, teacher dedication, and collaborative engagement with parents and the community. These findings demonstrate that resistance to change can be constructively transformed into adaptive capacity when supported by systematic planning, continuous professional development, and transparent communication. The strength of this study lies in its contribution to the theoretical enrichment of educational management by extending Lewin’s classical framework with a contextualized model of acceleration, offering a nuanced understanding of how institutional transformation can be compressed without sacrificing implementation quality. Consequently, this research provides a practical and replicable benchmarking model for policymakers and practitioners navigating rapid curriculum reforms in dynamic educational environments.

However, this study is not without limitations. Its reliance on a single, high-performing pilot institution constrains the generalizability of the findings, particularly for schools operating under more limited resources or differing socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, the qualitative case study design, while rich in depth, does not allow for broad empirical validation of the identified accelerator factors across diverse educational settings. Future research should therefore expand this inquiry through comparative multi-site studies and mixed-method approaches to test the scalability and robustness of the proposed model. Further investigations are also needed to explore the long-term sustainability of accelerated curriculum change and its direct impact on student learning outcomes. By addressing these gaps, subsequent studies can refine and strengthen the theoretical and practical foundations of curriculum change management, ensuring its relevance across varied institutional landscapes.

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