

# Analysis of Guidebook: Belajar Dan Bermain For Preschool Children In Merdeka Curriculum Using Vygotsky's Zone Of Proximal Development (Zpd) Theory

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Published:</b> September, 25<sup>th</sup> 2024</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> PAUD, Merdeka, Vygotsky's, Zone of Proximal Development</p>	<p><i>This study discussed the content analysis of "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" that is used as a guidebook for teachers of Merdeka Curriculum to preschool children in Indonesia, using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as the evaluative framework. The research aims to determine to what extent the content of the "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" guidebook align with Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development, particularly focusing on the Zone of Proximal Development. The study offers actionable insights for educators and curriculum developers to refine guidebooks for teachers of early education in Indonesia. This literature research was conducted using content analysis in qualitative approach, where the ZPD was broken down into six learning activities performed in class, that is depicted in the guidebook through its chapters. In summary, the Merdeka Curriculum teacher's guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children seem to be well aligned with Vygotsky's theory of ZPD, and future researches could explore whether other guidebooks in the series also align with Vygotsky's theory of children's cognitive development, and whether the continuous application of the tasks and assignments as detailed in the guidebook and others in the series will help further implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia</i></p>

## INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced the Merdeka Curriculum in 2021 as an effort to improve the education system in Indonesia, to meet the demands of the globalization era that include students' abilities beyond academics, such as life skills, creativity, and innovation. The national curriculum in Indonesia has undergone several revisions and adjustments, and it was noted that there are still shortcomings in terms of skills beyond academics. Therefore, Merdeka Curriculum was brought to structurally enhance the previous national curriculum and provide a more holistic and relevant learning experience for students.

However, it is important to explore further how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in early childhood learning, which is the starting point in a child's learning process, particularly with the focus on how teachers teach the very young how by incorporating Merdeka Curriculum to the school's preexisting programs (Widiyanto, & Purnomo, 2023).

It is not easy to incorporate a new curriculum particularly for early year students, and as such, teachers were given handbooks to help guide them further in class. The handbook "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" is used as one of the guidebooks for teachers of Merdeka Curriculum to teach preschool

children in Indonesia. As a guidebook, it is important to know how the book align with one of the major theories that can be used to explain the learning process of children, which is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, to ensure that the curriculum can be implemented effectively while fostering the natural growth of children's learning with the assistance of teachers and peers.

In Vygotsky's theory, he explained that children learn most of what they know from the culture and social setting in which they live, indicating that one of the primary social mentoring tools is the use of language in social activities, because language gives children the essential stepping stones that will help them towards thinking and learning (Huang, 2021; Xiaochen, 2004). One of Vygotsky's central topic was the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which uses social interaction with more knowledgeable others to move development forward (Huang, 2021; Blake & Pope, 2008). Someone who is more skilled could act as an instructor to offer to help student, so they can finish the task with the provided support, because students within the ZPD needs active instructions. Instructors, be it a teacher or a peer, ought to be clarifying, modeling, and utilizing guided practice within the classroom. Students will complete their tasks better with the help of the instructors modeling what the students need to do (Blake & Pope, 2008).

Previous researches has been done on the subject of childhood education in relation to one of the major theories by Vygotsky, such as a study by Bourbour et al. (2020) which explored preschool teachers' actions to help develop preschool children's learning abilities with the usage of interactive whiteboard (IWB), revealing that various forms of scaffolding was used in the implementation of Vygotsky's theory, which suggested that teachers could benefit from knowing how to implement the theory creatively in accordance to the theory to help children in class.

A literature review by Xiaochen (2004) to see the impact of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the promotion of comprehensive engagement, personalized learning, and meaningful relationships in early childhood education in a post-pandemic era. Through sociocultural theory, the researcher suggested there can be a collaboration in the partnership between educator-student and family-school to help deal with challenges including the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has on early childhood education programs. The researcher found that sociocultural theory promotes education practices that emphasize inclusiveness to tackle the varying needs, characteristics, and learning styles of students, in the way that it fosters creativity in students along with how it improves problem-solving ability and a desire for socialization in early childhood education (Xiaochen, 2004). A collaboration between educators, students, family, and school could be crystallized in the form of guidebooks to help school develop a suitable curriculum, help educators with the class-wide and school-wide implementation, and both students and the family would benefit from the more comprehensive and inclusive education based on students' needs and abilities.

A phenomenology research in Turkey by Peker et al. (2024) studied the opinion, knowledge, and selfreported practices done by teachers of early childhood education in regards to how practical is the application of Vygotsky's theory in the classroom. The researchers found that while participants, who are all educators themselves, used some of the theory's implication, they have no explicit information regarding the parts of the theory the implication come from, especially about the scaffolding and peer learning, and as such the researchers suggest that teachers should be given training and support to be more familiar with how to apply the theory to very young learners.

A research by Wei (2004) described that Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a bridge that connects children's current level of skills and their untapped potential within the spectrum of their cognitive development. The research observed several teaching methodologies that incorporate the ZPD theory in English language teaching and found that the dynamic relationship between teacher's pedagogical strategies and the implementation of ZPD worked together to build a more effective student-centered teaching in class. Strategies should be compiled for the benefit of teachers and students as a part of a continuous observation and evaluation.

In light of these previous researches, this research aims to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the content of the Merdeka Curriculum teacher's guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children align with the theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky?

2. How is the of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky well distributed in the teacher's guidebook?

Considering the importance of Vygotsky's theories in early childhood education, and seeing that the previous researches highlighted how a teacher would need support to implement the theory in class, the current research aims to study the Merdeka Curriculum teacher's guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children, and see whether the content of this guidebook is in line with Vygotsky Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory. The study explores and analyzes the material and instructions described in the guidebook to see how much the guidebook supports teachers of Merdeka Curriculum for early education in fostering students natural growth according to Vygotsky's theory.

contains the background of the research, research problems, literature review, research aim, previous research, and research gap.

## METHOD

C This literature research was conducted using content analysis in qualitative approach. Qualitative approach is a method used in looking for understanding and meaning of the content such as social and human problem. This research also used the Zone of Proximal Development theory as the ground theory to explain the content of a guidebook used by early education teacher in Indonesia. Based on Sugiono theory in qualitative approach, it is utilized as a lens or a part of a perspective over a theory, it helps the writer to guide how to collect data and analyze said data (Sugiono, 2022).

Meanwhile, the general definition of content analysis is a systematic technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990, from Columbia University, Irving Medical Center, 2024).

The book whom the analysis was done in this research was the Merdeka Curriculum's teacher guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children in Indonesia. The guidebook was written by Arleen Amidjaja and her colleagues and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This research was focused on the content of the guidebook which the contents will be measured based on Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

As quoted from the book by Lev Vygotsky (1930), the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.

This statement consisted into two aspects, they are: first, the general connection between learning and developing; and second, special characteristics from the connection when they were in teenagers where learning activities started long before entering school. Therefore it can be concluded that learning activities were different between preschool and school. (Vygotsky, 1930) in the preschool children will study how to develop their characters and cognitive, but in the school children will study about assimilation the basic of knowledge. (Andrew, 2024) Learning activities and adaptation will push students' abilities in good cooperative. It also shows that ZPD utilized by effectively and efficiently. (Rahma & Memonah, 2023) therefore it will support leaning development. (Fania & Ghaibi, 2011).

Based on Vygotsky problems-solving of non independent is a media to build the level of cognitive function in children development, therefore it will shape ZPD in certain time. In pushing this, the teachers can measure what functions of ZPD presented from the students by four ways. They are:

1. Demonstrate the solution, the teachers observed the ability of students how they imitate their ways.

2. Observed the ability of problem-solving. Do the students solve their problems.
3. Ordering children to work together with their friends who has growing more. In this step make sure the children work together with some one who has the higher IQ.
4. The teacher explains about the principles of problem-solving, giving some questions that guide the children, analyze the children's problems etc. (Grebler, 2012).

To analyze data researches, the researcher used coding technique where the researcher create some codes according the theory and matched theory with the contents in the guidebook. in this process analyzing data was done where the researcher should read and understand first about all the text or notes as an object of research then the coding process can be carried out properly by using the words or part of the words at the transcript. (Sulistiyawati, 2023) As for analyzing and processing data can be done by steps below:

1. Data organization by creating and organizing file for data.
2. Close reading, the researcher read all contents in the guidebook, created notes and formed a symbol.
3. Described the data became symbol and themes. In this step the researcher described the category of coding.
4. Clarified data became code and theme. In this step the researcher will choose one category of coding dor central fenomena then the researcher will code the contents.
5. Meaning data. In this step. The researcher will do a selective coding and connect the category to build preposition.
6. The last step is the researcher serve that the researcher visualized data according the theory and made preposition. (Saleh, 2017)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" guidebook is a guidebook for applying Merdeka Curriculum for teachers of preschool children. This guidebook has flexible characteristics that allow teachers to design teaching and learning processes that fit students' needs, talent and local conditions. This book guides teachers in adjusting learning activities based on the interests and needs of children, such as selecting books that match the children's reading levels and adapting activities according to their developmental stages.

Children-centered learning is also a characteristic of Merdeka Curriculum, shown in several activities that highlight the importance developmental needs of children, and highlight students' emotional, social, and cognitive. The profil Pemuda Pancasila as one the characteristics of Merdeka Curriculum are also shown on this book. We can see that some activities are book-based that stimulate and support students' character development. It shows in some activities such as collaboration in group activities and discussion. Several social and physical activities are also highlight on this book in order to guide students to understand concept in a context that is related to their everyday lives. The activities are creating arts and role-playing from stories read (Supandi,et al 2023) .

Vygotsky (1978) said that imitation is one of children's many capability. By imitating actions under the direction of adults, children are capable of doing various activities that exceed their potential. The "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" guidebook adopts Lev Vygotsky theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to develop effective learning strategies for children. The ZPD theory emphasizes the importance of the social interaction and support in a child's learning process. Children can reach their higher levels of development with the help of adults.

This book expedites the application of ZPD through six categories of learning activities performed in class for preschool children, which are:

### 1. Group Storytelling

This activity involves children listening to and telling stories in group. Through this activity, children can learn from their peers and receive guidance from teachers, enriching their vocabularies and communication skills. We found 145 activities on this book that includes group storytelling activities. Most of the activities are about reading, re-storytelling, creating continuation of the story and sharing similar stories that students had experienced in the house. In this book, this category can be shown as group storytelling as we can see on page 27 where the students listen to a story and discuss together, with the teacher guiding the students' understanding and encouraging participation. In this situation, the teacher can encourage the students' imagination which is possible to be true.

### 2. Puzzle Solving

By solving puzzles, children are encouraged to think critically and solve problems. Teachers provide guidance when children face challenges. In line with ZPD principle, helping them develop logical and spatial skills. The category of Problem-Solving explained in the puzzle activity with teacher guidance on page 29. In this category, the teacher can help students to solve puzzles by offering hints and prompting them when they are stuck.

### 3. Independent Learning

This activity provides opportunities for children to explore learning independently after receiving advice from the teacher. It helps students develop their independence in learning, while teachers remain available to offer support if students need it. The independent learning can be applied in the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky, where the students can explore learning tools and concepts independently, with minimal teacher intervention. On pages 16-17 on this book, the students are asked to read books in the books corner so that the students can explore knowledge independently.

### 4. Role-Playing Activities

Children develop their imagination, social, emotional and thinking abilities through role-playing activities. Children strive to think beyond their normal thought pattern when they are placed in a role play situation. Here, their potentials are fully realized, Sadia Irshad (2021). In the context of ZPD, teachers provide guidance on scenarios and roles then expand their creativity and social understanding while playing. From the book, we can see on page 31, the teacher can invite the students to play a short drama, and the teacher can use puppets to make the learning activities more engaging (Sriyono, et al, 2022)

### 5. Peer-Assisted Games

Children learn through interaction with peers who are more experienced. W David Carr (2011) PeerAssisted learning program improves peer students' understanding of the material and gives a notable result on skill performance for peer students. Students are more confident in the learning process. Activity that shown on page 86 involves students working in pairs to find objects and count them, guided by the teacher. The teacher gives instructions, and the students work together to complete the task. This activity encourages children to cooperate with each other and learn counting with the help of their peers.

### 6. Guided Drawing with Teacher Support

The concept of ZPD refers to the gap between a child's current developmental level. It is shown through independent problem solving and potential development level. This can be reached through problemsolving with guidance from adults or in cooperation with more skilled peers. Guided Drawing with teacher support is one of practical examples of ZPD in activity. Teacher provides structured guidance to help students complete a drawing activity. The teacher might demonstrate the techniques and

give feedback. As one of the activities mentioned in the book on page 30, the teacher asks students to draw objects from a story. They are free to draw based on their own interpretations, it could be characters or interesting parts of the story.

From "Panduan Guru: Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" book, the total of data found is 145 instances of activities that can be categorized according to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory. The most frequent category is Puzzle Solving, with a percentage of 38% and data of 55 activities, where students work alongside the teacher to solve puzzles such as questions and discussion.

The second most common category is Independent Learning followed with a percentage 24% and the data of 35 activities, allowing students to explore and learn autonomously. Guided Drawing with Teacher Support has a percentage of 11% and data 16 activities which most activities are emphasizing teacher-led drawing activities. Role-Playing Activities are documented on a percentage of 10% and data of the book consist of 14 activities, promoting experiential learning through role-playing scenarios. Group Storytelling has 9% percentage data that consist of 13 activities. The activities encourage collaborative storytelling among students..

Finally, the least common category is Peer Assisted Games which only has a percentage of 8% or data of 12 activities. It shows that activities of this guidebook are indicating fewer opportunities for students to learn directly with peer support. It is because this guidebook is for preschool students which emphasizes direct instruction of the teacher.

Overall, the most common category which can be used by teachers to teach with Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development is Puzzle Solving. It means that the students are often involved to discuss together with the teacher to solve puzzles based on the book. On the other hand, the most rare category which can be found in this book is Peer Assisted Counting Games. It means the students are not often involved in learning together with peers directly.

## CONCLUSION

In accordance to Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development explained that social interaction with more knowledgeable others could help children in early educational programs to grow and develop their skills beyond what they already know and beyond what they can learn by themselves, this study found that the content of the Merdeka Curriculum teacher's guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children align very well with the teacher-assisted methods suggested in the theory. The guidebook itself, along with several other guidebooks for the preschool teachers of Merdeka Curriculum, gave teachers the practical tools they need and the ample examples that they can implement in class to foster the development of preschool children. There were few peer-assisted activities in the guidebook, which was understandable considering this guidebook was designed with very young learners in mind, but the guidebook still involved some activities which involve peer-assisted tasks.

In summary, the Merdeka Curriculum teacher's guidebook "Belajar dan Bermain Berbasis Buku" for preschool children seem to be well aligned with Vygotsky's theory of ZPD, and future researches could explore whether other guidebooks in the series also align with Vygotsky's theory of children's cognitive development, and whether the continuous application of the tasks and assignments as detailed in the guidebook and others in the series will help further implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The author of the book should work together with teachers and curriculum designers to provide more suitable materials that support the educational goals in Indonesia while developing the skills of children in early education programs to better prepare them for the future.

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