



A Comparative Study of the Implementation of the Waldorf Approach Model and Art Learning in Developing Early Childhood Creativity

Syahrani Hidayat Putri¹, Ira Anggraeni², Yasothai A/P Paramasivam³, Haidir Abdurrasyi⁴

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, Indonesia

² Institut Agama Islam Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

³ Dimension International College, Singapore

⁴ Universitas Al-Azhar Mesir, Mesir

Correspondence: syahranihidayatputri409@gmail.com, iraanggraeni643@gmail.com,
Yasothaiparamasivam@yahoo.com, haidiradzka36@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines differences in learning approaches between Waldorf education and art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien Tasikmalaya and their influence on early childhood creativity development. Using a qualitative comparative design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings based on observation, interviews, and comparative analysis show that art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien supports children's creativity through activities such as drawing, coloring, and using recycled materials. However, the Waldorf approach provides deeper and more holistic stimulation of creativity because art is more fully integrated into daily learning. Therefore, integrating Waldorf-inspired artistic practices can enrich art learning and support more comprehensive creativity development in early childhood education. Theoretically, this study reinforces the importance of free exploration, direct experience, and the use of natural materials in fostering children's creativity; practically, it recommends integrating selected Waldorf principles into art learning to enrich holistic learning experiences in early childhood education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a fundamental stage in building the foundation of children's holistic development, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, language, and moral aspects (Hura & Mawikere, 2020). Learning models implemented during the golden age must align with children's developmental needs (Arini & Roesminingsih, 2021). Early Childhood Education (ECE) practices are currently still dominated by conventional approaches that emphasize academic and cognitive aspects, thereby neglecting children's social-emotional development, creativity, and character building. This condition indicates a mismatch between the holistic principles of ECE and the actual practices implemented in the field (Jayawardana, 2025), which may create pressure and limit the development of children's creativity and imagination (Anggraini et al., 2025). As an alternative, the Waldorf approach developed by Rudolf Steiner emphasizes holistic development through the integration of arts, life rhythms, free play, and authentic sensory experiences in the learning process (Aljabreen, 2020). In this approach, art is not positioned as a separate subject but is embedded in daily activities such as painting, drawing, singing, rhythmic movement, and exploration of natural materials, which stimulate creativity, fine motor skills, concentration, emotional regulation, and imagination (Rahma & Maemonah, 2021). This experiential art integration makes learning more meaningful, harmonious, and supportive of holistic early childhood development (Dini, 2024).

Previous studies consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of the Waldorf approach in supporting early childhood development across various educational contexts. Dini (2024), found that Several studies indicate that Waldorf-based learning can enhance children's creativity through direct experiences and structured artistic activities; however, these studies have limitations, such as small sample sizes and a lack of investigation within local ECE contexts. Furthermore, few studies have examined its implementation holistically in accordance with local cultural and curricular conditions.

Fahmi & Ningsih (2020) emphasize that the Waldorf approach is a relevant early childhood curriculum model for creating a healthy and holistic learning environment aligned with children's developmental stages. However, the study has several limitations, as it primarily focuses on conceptual and descriptive analysis without providing in-depth empirical evidence regarding its impact on specific developmental aspects, such as children's creativity. Furthermore, the research does not directly compare the implementation of the Waldorf approach with contextual practices in early childhood institutions, leaving room for more applied and field-based comparative studies (Fahmi & Ningsih, 2020).

Meanwhile, Kamila (2024) have shown that Waldorf-based educational practices effectively stimulate children's creativity, analytical skills, independence, and imagination through activities such as cutting, drawing, coloring, storytelling, and warm, consistent daily routines. These findings highlight the significant contribution of the Waldorf approach to children's holistic development. However, many of these studies are limited to specific contexts and samples, and few have examined its implementation in depth within diverse cultural and curricular settings of early childhood education. These limitations indicate a research needs further exploration; therefore, the present study aims to provide a more contextual and comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the Waldorf approach in early childhood education (Kamila, 2024).

Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on the effectiveness of the Waldorf approach alone in enhancing children's creativity in Dini (2024), positioned Waldorf as one of the early childhood education curriculum models in Fahmi & Ningsih (2020) or examined its implementation within learning guidance contexts in Kamila (2024), this study introduces conducting a comparative analysis between the Waldorf approach and art learning in developing early childhood creativity. This research does not merely describe the outcomes of a single model's implementation but directly compares the strengths, characteristics, and impacts of both approaches on children's creativity. Therefore, this study offers a new contribution by providing a comparative understanding that has not been extensively explored in previous research, while also presenting a richer perspective for the development of creative learning models in early childhood education.

2. METHODS

This study employs a comparative method with a qualitative approach to examine the implementation of the Waldorf learning model and art-based learning in fostering early childhood creativity at RA Al-Muttaqien, Tasikmalaya Regency, involving Class B students and focusing on the art learning practices implemented by the school. The selection of a single class was conducted purposively, considering the relative homogeneity of the children's age and developmental stage, thereby enabling a more in-depth, contextual, and focused analysis of the learning process without being influenced by differences in developmental levels across classes.

Data were collected through direct the measurement of children's creativity in this study employed a structured observation sheet developed based on early childhood creativity indicators, such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. This observation sheet was used during the learning process to systematically record children's creative behaviors and responses. In addition, supporting data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and documentation in the form of photographs of learning activities and instructional materials to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages, beginning with data reduction by selecting, focusing, and categorizing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation in accordance with early childhood creativity indicators. This was followed by data display in the form of narrative descriptions and comparative matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and differences between the approaches. The process concluded with drawing conclusions through in-depth interpretation of the characteristics of implementation, the instructional strategies employed, and their impact on children's creativity development, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and differences of each approach.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The Waldorf approach, developed by Rudolf Steiner, is an educational model oriented toward children's holistic development. This approach views education as a process that must address three fundamental human capacities: thinking, feeling, and willing (Rawson, 2021). In early childhood education, learning emphasizes direct experiences, structured daily rhythms, and a warm, calming environment. Creativity in early childhood develops optimally through meaningful artistic activities and direct sensory experiences, which allow children to

explore ideas freely and express themselves authentically (Rachmawati et al., 2024). Teachers function as role models who guide children through meaningful actions, while the learning environment is designed to resemble a home setting characterized by natural materials, soft colors, and purposeful daily activities such as cooking, tidying, and gardening (Rahman et al., 2024). Children learn through imitation and concrete experiences appropriate to their developmental stages (Andayani, 2021).

A defining characteristic of the Waldorf approach is the integration of arts throughout the entire learning process. Art is not treated as a separate subject but is embedded in daily activities such as wet-on-wet painting, drawing, beeswax modeling, singing, rhythmic movement, and storytelling. These artistic experiences aim to nurture imagination, creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and children's sensory and emotional development. The use of natural materials provides rich sensory stimulation and fosters a sense of connection with nature, while rhythmic and repetitive activities support emotional stability and concentration. The results of the children's art activity observations can be seen in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Observation of children's art activities at RA Al-Mutaqien

No	Child Initial	Ability to Use Tools	Creativity (Ideas and Imagination)	Neatness of Artwork	Expression and Enthusiasm	Teacher's Notes
1	A.R	Good	Creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Drew a house and sun with details
2	A.S	Fair	Quite creative	Fairly neat	Enthusiastic	Still needs guidance when coloring
3	C.N	Good	Very creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Used various color combinations
4	D.F	Fair	Creative	Less neat	Enthusiastic	Coloring still goes outside the lines
5	F.P	Good	Creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Drew trees and flowers
6	F.A	Fair	Quite creative	Fairly neat	Enthusiastic	Sometimes stops and observes friends
7	F.M	Good	Very creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Drew a picture of family members
8	H.K	Fair	Creative	Fairly neat	Enthusiastic	Still needs direction in choosing colors
9	I.T	Good	Creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Drew a landscape picture
10	I.L	Fair	Quite creative	Less neat	Enthusiastic	Tends to rush when coloring
11	K.R	Good	Very creative	Neat	Very enthusiastic	Combined several objects in the drawing
12	K.D	Fair	Creative	Fairly neat	Enthusiastic	Needs practice controlling hand movements

Based on the observation table of 12 children during the art activity, most children demonstrated good ability in using drawing tools. Some children were able to hold and use the tools skillfully, while others were still in the fair category and required guidance from the teacher, especially in the coloring process and in controlling their hand movements.

In terms of creativity, the majority of children showed good ideas and imagination. This can be seen from the variety of drawings produced, such as houses, landscapes, trees, flowers, and family members. Some children were also able to combine different colors and

objects in one drawing, indicating a fairly developed ability to explore ideas. Regarding the neatness of the artwork, most children produced neat drawings, although some children still colored outside the lines or produced less neat results due to rushing to finish their drawings. This indicates that children's fine motor skills are still developing and need to be continuously trained through art activities.

In terms of expression and enthusiasm, almost all children showed a very enthusiastic attitude during the activity. The children appeared to enjoy the drawing process, actively expressed their ideas, and participated positively in the activity. Some children were also seen occasionally observing their friends before continuing their work, indicating a learning process through observation.

Overall, art activities provide opportunities for children to develop creativity, fine motor skills, and the ability to express themselves through drawing. Although some children still require guidance in technical aspects such as neatness and tool control, the level of participation and enthusiasm during the activity was generally high.

In line with these principles, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien, Tasikmalaya Regency, is designed as an integral part of children's daily activities rather than merely as an additional program. Teachers create a warm and stimulating learning environment through the use of natural and simple materials such as recycled paper, dried leaves, watercolor paints, and modelling wax. Art activities are conducted gradually and enjoyably, ranging from free drawing and coloring to wet-on-wet painting and simple collage work. Through this approach, children are provided with opportunities to express themselves, recognize colors, shapes, and patterns, and develop emotional regulation through gentle and structured creative activities.

Based on the interview results, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien is implemented regularly as part of daily learning activities. Children are given opportunities to express their creativity through various activities such as drawing, coloring, collage, and creating artworks using different materials.

The main objective of these activities is to develop children's creativity, improve their fine motor skills, and help them express ideas and feelings through artistic expression. In the learning process, teachers use various media such as crayons, colored pencils, watercolor paints, colored paper, and also natural or recycled materials like leaves, cardboard, and plastic bottles.

Children generally show very positive responses to art learning activities. They appear enthusiastic, active, and enjoy the process of creating their artwork. Art activities are also integrated with learning themes such as environment, family, and nature so that the activities become more meaningful for children.

In addition, teachers observe several benefits after children participate in art activities, including increased confidence, creativity, and better hand-eye coordination. Although there are some challenges, such as limited time and materials, teachers try to overcome them by utilizing materials that are easily found in the surrounding environment. In this process, the teacher plays an important role as a facilitator who provides guidance, examples, and motivation so that children can explore their creativity freely.

Furthermore, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien is integrated with thematic learning closely related to children's everyday lives. For example, nature-themed lessons are implemented through activities such as painting rain, creating leaf prints, or drawing animals found in the school environment. Children are encouraged to collect dried leaves and seeds to create collages, enabling them to directly experience the relationship between nature and artistic creation. Teachers provide warm guidance while allowing children the freedom to choose colors, shapes, and arrangements, thereby fostering creativity and independence. Storytelling

and singing are intentionally incorporated to enrich artistic experiences and support language and social development. The children's art activities can be seen in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Children creating artwork from recycled materials during art learning activities

Comparative findings indicate that both the Waldorf approach and art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien share a similar philosophical foundation: fostering children's enjoyment of artistic processes in a natural and meaningful way. Children's creativity is reflected in their ability to select diverse natural materials, arrange collage patterns according to their imagination, and experiment without fear of making mistakes. However, differences exist in the level of exploratory freedom and instructional structure. In the Waldorf model, children are given extensive imaginative freedom with minimal instruction, whereas art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien follows a thematic curriculum framework, resulting in more structured teacher guidance. The results of the comparative analysis between the integration of art education at RA Al-Mutaqien and the Waldorf approach can be seen in **Table 2**. This comparison aims to analyze the alignment of art learning practices with the principles of the Waldorf educational approach.

Table 2. A comparative analysis between the integration of art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien and the Waldorf approach.

No	Aspect	Art Integration at RA Al-Mutaqien	Waldorf Approach
1	Learning Objectives	Art activities aim to develop children's creativity, fine motor skills, and self-expression.	Art is used as a central element to support holistic child development including emotional, cognitive, and spiritual aspects.
2	Role of Art in Learning	Art is integrated into certain learning activities and themes in the curriculum.	Art is deeply integrated into daily learning and becomes a core part of the educational process.
3	Types of Art Activities	Drawing, coloring, collage, and creating crafts using recycled or natural materials.	Activities include painting with watercolor, storytelling through art, music, movement, handcrafts, and creative expression.
4	Learning Media	Uses common learning tools such as crayons, colored pencils, paper, natural materials, and recycled items.	Emphasizes the use of natural materials such as wood, wool, beeswax, natural dyes, and handmade learning tools.
5	Teacher's Role	Teachers act as facilitators who guide and support children's creativity during art activities.	Teachers serve as role models and guides who encourage imagination and creativity through artistic processes.
6	Learning Environment	Classroom environment supports learning activities with available educational materials.	The learning environment is designed to be warm, natural, and aesthetically pleasing to stimulate children's imagination and creativity.
7	Learning Focus	Focuses on developing creativity and basic artistic skills in children.	Focuses on nurturing imagination, creativity, emotional development, and holistic growth through art.

Overall, RA Al-Mutaqien has incorporated many elements consistent with the Waldorf approach, particularly in creating a warm and creative learning environment. Strengthening key Waldorf principles such as consistent daily rhythms, greater freedom of exploration, and more intensive use of natural materials could further enrich children's artistic experiences. Thus, the Waldorf approach may serve as a valuable inspiration for enhancing art learning to better support holistic development, imagination, and positive character formation in early childhood.

3.2 Discussion

The Waldorf approach, developed by Rudolf Steiner, is an educational model oriented toward children's holistic development (Rawson, 2021). This approach views education as a process that should address three fundamental human capacities: thinking, feeling, and willing (Rahma & Maemonah, 2021). In early childhood education, learning emphasizes direct experiences, structured daily rhythms, and a warm, calming environment (Romini, 2021). Teachers function as role models who guide children primarily through actions rather than verbal instruction (Hamide et al., 2021). The learning environment is designed to resemble a home setting, characterized by natural materials, soft colors, and meaningful daily activities such as cooking, tidying, and gardening, allowing children to learn through imitation and concrete experiences aligned with their developmental stages.

A defining characteristic of the Waldorf approach is the integration of arts throughout the entire learning process (Dini, 2024). Art is not treated as a separate subject but is embedded in daily activities, including wet-on-wet painting, drawing, coloring, beeswax modeling, singing, rhythmic movement, and illustrated storytelling. These artistic experiences aim to nurture imagination, creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and children's sensory and emotional development (Mwariko & Kurniati, 2024). The use of natural materials provides rich sensory experiences while fostering a sense of connectedness with nature (Yunaeni & Nuraeni, 2023). Rhythmic and repetitive activities support emotional stability, concentration, and the foundation for more complex cognitive abilities in later stages (Fajriati & Nikmah, 2025). Art plays an important role in children's development because artistic development is closely related to children's physical and emotional growth (Hidayah & Furnamasari, 2025).

The Waldorf approach is closely connected to child development theories, particularly those of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Steiner himself. During early childhood, children learn most effectively through symbolic play, imaginative activities, and concrete experiences, all of which are central to the Waldorf curriculum. Social interaction within rhythmic and collaborative activities supports language and social development in line with Vygotsky's theory, while the use of natural materials and sensory experiences strengthens motor development in accordance with Montessori principles. Thus, the Waldorf approach not only provides aesthetically rich and enjoyable learning experiences but also addresses children's developmental needs holistically, encompassing physical, cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that both the Waldorf approach and art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien contribute significantly to the development of early childhood creativity. The similarity in philosophical orientation emphasizing meaningful artistic processes rather than product oriented outcomes indicates that creativity flourishes when children are provided with a warm, supportive, and experiential learning environment. The learning environment is one of the most important factors in maintaining creativity because it determines whether creative potential will be supported (Mukhlis & Amalia, 2023). This supports the view that

early childhood creativity is best nurtured through process based learning, where exploration and imagination are valued over standardized results.

The integration of art into daily routines in both approaches reflects the importance of experiential and sensory-based learning in early childhood. In line with Steiner's educational philosophy, artistic activities such as wet-on-wet painting, rhythmic movement, and storytelling stimulate imagination and emotional balance. Similarly, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien incorporates natural materials and thematic activities connected to children's real-life experiences. This contextual integration strengthens children's engagement and aligns with constructivist perspectives, particularly Piaget's theory that young children learn most effectively through concrete and symbolic experiences. Furthermore, collaborative artistic activities observed in both settings support Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction as a foundation for cognitive and language development.

Despite these similarities, notable differences were identified in instructional structure and the degree of exploratory freedom. The Waldorf approach provides broader opportunities for open-ended exploration with minimal direct instruction, thereby allowing children's imagination to unfold organically. In contrast, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien remains influenced by thematic curricular objectives, resulting in more structured teacher guidance. While this structure ensures alignment with educational standards, it may slightly limit spontaneous experimentation. However, structured guidance also offers developmental scaffolding that supports children who may require direction to engage meaningfully in creative tasks.

The findings suggest that the strength of RA Al-Mutaqien lies in its balanced integration of creativity within an organized curriculum framework. Nevertheless, incorporating selected Waldorf principles such as stronger consistency in daily rhythms, expanded freedom of exploration, and more intensive use of natural materials could further enhance creativity stimulation. This integration would not replace existing practices but rather enrich them, fostering a more holistic learning experience that addresses cognitive, emotional, social, and sensory dimensions simultaneously.

However, this study is limited to a single institution and one class group, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The qualitative design provides in-depth contextual insights but does not measure creativity development quantitatively. Future research is therefore recommended to involve multiple institutions, apply mixed-method approaches, and explore the long-term effects of integrating Waldorf-inspired principles into diverse early childhood education contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the comparative study, both the Waldorf approach and art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien play significant roles in developing early childhood creativity. The Waldorf approach demonstrates stronger characteristics in providing open-ended exploration, natural sensory experiences, and calm, consistent learning rhythms, allowing children to express imagination and original ideas without academic pressure. In contrast, art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien offers adequate creative stimulation through activities such as drawing, painting, cutting, and collage, but remains more structured due to thematic and curricular objectives.

Overall, Waldorf tends to provide deeper and more holistic creativity stimulation, while art learning at RA Al-Mutaqien remains effective yet could benefit from expanded opportunities for free experimentation. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single class and institution, a relatively small number of participants, and its reliance on qualitative data within a specific cultural and curricular context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, apply mixed-method or quantitative designs, and explore the long-term impact of integrating Waldorf principles into various early childhood education settings.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The author is affiliated with the Early Childhood Education program. This research was conducted at RA Al-Mutaqien with the involvement of teachers and children of Class B. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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