

## DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP) AS A CHILD DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED LEARNING STRATEGY

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**Abstract.** Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a framework for early childhood learning strategies that is oriented towards the child's development, based on three key dimensions: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and culture appropriateness. Early Childhood Education (AUD) must align with the child's developmental stages and be facilitated through play, which serves as a crucial vehicle for the child's physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth. This paper aims to analyze the implementation of DAP in AUD institutions, identify influencing factors and challenges encountered, propose solutions, and examine its impact on the developmental progress of young children. The findings conclude that DAP acts as a fundamental guide for teaching activities that are responsive to the child's learning stage and style. DAP-based learning holistically fosters children who are more active, creative, and capable of better problem-solving. Conversely, conventional approaches that overly focus on learning targets often neglect individual needs and may hinder optimal development. It is suggested that PAUD teachers consistently implement DAP through play to enhance the child's engagement and learning comprehension.

**Keywords:** Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Early Childhood Education, Child Development.

### INTRODUCTION

Play is an important activity for children's physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth and development in primary school. Through play, children can get to know the environment, interact, and develop their emotions and imagination well. Play has a very broad function for children, teachers, and parents. Through play, teachers can understand the child's character, way of thinking, and can intervene, collaborate, and communicate with the child<sup>1</sup>.

Education provided to early childhood must be adapted to the child's developmental stages and how the child learns. Early childhood education is not carried out coercively, forcing children to do something or to have a certain ability according to adult desires without considering the child's condition. The learning process is based on the child's interests and abilities, thereby encouraging children to take the initiative and actively move to explore the learning environment<sup>2</sup>.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a learning strategy oriented towards child development, having three dimensions of understanding, including the age dimension (*age appropriate*), the individual dimension (*individual appropriate*), and the cultural dimension (*culture appropriate*). DAP is a working framework, a philosophy, or an approach that shows how to work with children. Where play in learning is adjusted based on the child's developmental stages and needs<sup>3</sup>. DAP implements play in early childhood learning according to the student's age range as a philosophical basis in the learning program services provided by the teacher.

Before conducting learning, teachers must prepare and provide a learning environment and learning experience that is truly appropriate (*proper, suitable, or right*) for the child's growth and development. Thus, the teacher's knowledge of the students' developmental characteristics becomes the child's knowledge in learning, strength, or uniqueness so that every child gets a fun experience<sup>4</sup>.

Based on the illustration above, the problem can be formulated as follows:

1. How is the current implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in Early Childhood Education (AUD) institutions?
2. What are the factors that influence the implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)?
3. What are the obstacles faced in implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)?
4. How to overcome the obstacles in implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)?
5. What is the effect of implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) on early childhood development?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a **Literature Review** approach utilizing a descriptive qualitative method. The primary data sources were derived from documented literature, including foundational academic textbooks, peer-reviewed scientific journals, and official position statements published by authoritative early childhood organizations, particularly concerning the concepts and principles of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP).

The research procedure involved three key steps:

1. **Systematic Literature Identification:** Locating and gathering relevant primary and secondary sources that define, critique, and exemplify DAP.
2. **Content Analysis:** Performing an in-depth analysis of the collected literature to distill the core concepts, three main principles, and practical implementation stages of the DAP framework.
3. **Synthesis and Interpretation:** Integrating findings from diverse sources to construct a coherent philosophical and practical framework, addressing the research objectives—namely, determining the factors, constraints, and impacts of DAP in ECE pedagogy.

The methodology's goal is not to present new empirical data but to establish a robust theoretical foundation for DAP, defining it as a working philosophy that guides teacher behavior and ensures educational practices are responsive to the heterogeneity and developmental needs of young learners (Bredekamp, 1987).

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The analysis focuses on the theoretical construction and implementation implications of DAP, which serves as an essential standard guiding thought and action in learning activities to align pedagogy with the child's developmental stage and learning mechanisms.

### 1. Conceptual Framework and Dimensions of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

DAP is fundamentally defined as a working framework, philosophy, or approach that dictates professional engagement with children (NAEYC, 2020). It provides indispensable guidance on instructional design, programming decisions, and how to effectively utilize developmental changes and needs within the learning context. DAP's concept is rooted in established knowledge concerning how children develop and learn, encompassing three critical dimensions:

- 1.1. **Age Appropriateness:** This dimension acknowledges that human development progresses in a relatively predictable and orderly sequence, with subsequent capabilities building upon previously acquired skills (Montolalu, dkk., 2005). Programs must respect these universal milestones.
- 1.2. **Individual Appropriateness:** Recognizing that each person possesses unique individuality (*nafs*) which results in varying developmental rates and temperaments (Latipun, 2005; Desmita, 2011). Consequently, educational services must be individualized (*Individually Guided Education* or IGE) and highly responsive to the diversity among learners.

- 1.3. Socio-Cultural Context:** Culture profoundly influences individual thought, attitude, and behavior (Gary Glassenapp, in Bredekamp, 1987). Therefore, learning must be culturally and socially contextualized to hold authentic meaning and relevance for the child.

## 2. Core Principles of Child Development Underpinning DAP

DAP is supported by foundational principles that govern child learning and development, highlighting the interconnectedness of various growth domains. Key principles include (Montolalu, dkk., 2005; Minsih, 2020):

- 2.1. Holistic Integration:** A child's development across all domains (physical, moral, emotional, cognitive) is fundamentally interconnected and mutually influential.
- 2.2. Sequential Progress:** Development unfolds in a generally predictable order, where new skills logically succeed previous accomplishments.
- 2.3. Varied Pacing:** Development occurs at different rates across individuals and even across different developmental domains within the same child.
- 2.4. Active Learning and Social Context:** Children are intrinsically active learners, constructing knowledge most effectively through engagement, exploration, and social and cultural interaction (Asher & Einon, 1995).
- 2.5. The Primacy of Play:** Play is not merely entertainment but a vital, primary medium for cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development (Megawangi, 2005).

## 3. Implementation Stages of DAP in Practice

Effective DAP implementation requires educators to facilitate learning through deliberate, child-centered stages (Bredekamp, 1987):

- 3.1. Creating a Physiologically Engaging Environment:** Instruction should incorporate games or enjoyable activities that simultaneously engage the child's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects.
- 3.2. Curriculum Design Focused on Interest and Context:** The curriculum must be designed to stimulate the child's interest and be culturally relevant, ensuring children grasp the meaningfulness of what they are learning.
- 3.3. Fostering a Pressure-Free Yet Challenging Atmosphere:** The learning environment should be free from undue pressure or threat but must still be stimulating and challenging enough to motivate the child to explore further and engage in deeper inquiry.
- 3.4. Prioritizing Concrete and Experiential Learning:** Learning experiences should involve concrete materials, particularly in problem-solving activities, recognizing that direct, real-world experience is the most effective mode of learning, far surpassing passive instruction (Montolalu, dkk., 2005).

## CONCLUSION

The Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) model serves as the essential pedagogical standard for early childhood education, guiding instructional design and actions to align seamlessly with children's developmental stages and intrinsic learning mechanisms. This model is critical for achieving educational goals efficiently and effectively. DAP-based learning promotes holistic child development, demonstrably yielding children who are more active, creative, and superior in problem-solving capabilities. In contrast, rigid, conventional approaches focused solely on external learning targets often fail to accommodate individual developmental needs, thereby impeding optimal growth. Consequently, the consistent and informed application of play-based DAP strategies by ECE educators is highly recommended to maximize student engagement, deepen comprehension, and secure comprehensive developmental outcomes.

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