

## The Importance of Morning Exercise Habits for Early Childhood Concentration

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### Abstract

*This study aims to explore early childhood teachers' understanding of the importance of physical activity in supporting young children's concentration and learning readiness. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research was conducted from July to September in five kindergartens in Bekasi City, Indonesia. Data were collected through structured interviews with ten kindergarten teachers and direct classroom observations of physical activity practices. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning related to teachers' understanding, perceptions, and instructional practices. The findings reveal that teachers generally perceive physical activity primarily as a means to support children's physical health, while its pedagogical role in enhancing concentration and self-regulation is not yet fully understood. Although teachers observed that children tended to be calmer and more focused after engaging in physical activity, such perceptions were not consistently translated into planned and integrated classroom practices. The study also identified a gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and the actual implementation of regular physical activity, influenced by academic pressures, limited time, and the absence of clear institutional policies. These findings are consistent with previous international studies while highlighting contextual challenges within Indonesian early childhood education. Furthermore, the results demonstrate strong relevance to current national education policies in 2025, particularly the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children program, which emphasizes healthy and active lifestyles as a foundation for character development and learning readiness. The study concludes that strengthening teachers' pedagogical understanding and institutional support is essential for integrating meaningful physical activity into early childhood education practices.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Morning exercise is very important for early childhood because it plays a significant role in supporting physical development and learning readiness. Physical activity in the morning has been shown to increase blood flow and oxygen to the brain so that children's cognitive functions, including attention and concentration, become more optimal (Donnelly et al., 2016). Children who do morning exercise tend to be more alert and ready to participate in learning activities in the classroom (Mullender-Wijnsma et al., 2016). In addition, morning exercise helps reduce the drowsiness and fatigue that often appear at the beginning of the school day (Fedewa & Ahn, 2015). Active movement habits also improve the physical fitness and endurance of children (Carson et al., 2017). Children who are

physically healthy are less likely to experience learning attendance disorders due to illness (Tandon et al., 2015). Regular physical activity supports gross motor development such as balance and coordination (Logan et al., 2018). Good motor development contributes to increased children's confidence (Robinson et al., 2015). This confidence plays a role in the child's courage to be actively involved in learning activities. Thus, morning exercise is an important foundation for early childhood physical and cognitive readiness.

In addition to physical benefits, morning exercise also has a positive impact on children's emotional and behavioral regulation. Children who are accustomed to physical activity show lower levels of stress and better emotional stability (Zhou et al., 2022). Positive emotional states support children's ability to control themselves and maintain concentration while learning (Diamond & Ling, 2016). Morning exercise helps to channel children's energy constructively thereby reducing disturbing and hyperactive behavior in the classroom (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2015). Joint sports activities also train social skills such as cooperation and adherence to simple rules (Pellegrini et al., 2017). Healthy social interaction contributes to a conducive learning climate. Morning exercise routines form clear daily habits and structures for children (Pesce et al., 2016). A consistent structure helps the child adapt to learning activities. Children become more focused and follow the teacher's instructions. Therefore, morning exercise has a strategic role in supporting concentration, positive behavior, and early childhood learning readiness.

Morning exercise is very important for early childhood because it plays a significant role in supporting physical development and learning readiness. Physical activity in the morning has been shown to increase blood flow and oxygen to the brain so that children's cognitive functions, including attention and concentration, become more optimal (Donnelly et al., 2016). Children who do morning exercise tend to be more alert and ready to participate in learning activities in the classroom (Mullender-Wijnsma et al., 2016). In addition, morning exercise helps reduce the drowsiness and fatigue that often appear at the beginning of the school day (Fedewa & Ahn, 2015). Active movement habits also improve the physical fitness and endurance of children (Carson et al., 2017). Children who are physically healthy are less likely to experience learning attendance disorders due to illness (Tandon et al., 2015). Regular physical activity supports gross motor development such as balance and coordination (Logan et al., 2018). Good motor development contributes to increased children's confidence (Robinson et al., 2015). This confidence plays a role in the child's courage to be actively involved in learning activities. Thus, morning exercise is an important foundation for early childhood physical and cognitive readiness.

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This study aims to find out and analyze the understanding of Early Childhood Education teachers about the importance of exercise for early childhood. The main focus of the research is directed at the extent to which teachers understand the benefits of exercise

in supporting children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and concentration development. In addition, this study aims to identify teachers' perceptions of the role of sports, especially morning sports, in increasing children's learning readiness and positive behavior in the PAUD environment. This research also seeks to explore how this understanding is reflected in daily learning practices, especially in integrating sports activities into children's learning routines. In addition, this study aims to examine factors that affect teachers' level of understanding, such as educational background, teaching experience, and institutional support. Through this study, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture of the actual condition of PAUD teachers' understanding of the importance of sports for early childhood will be obtained. The results of the research are expected to be the basis for the preparation of recommendations to improve teachers' competence in designing and implementing sports activities in accordance with the child's developmental stage.

The novelty of this research lies in the emphasis on the analysis of early childhood teachers' understanding of the importance of sport as a pedagogical strategy to increase early childhood concentration, not just as physical activity or physical health. Previous studies at the international level have highlighted the direct impact of physical activity on children's executive function, attention, and learning achievement without in-depth examining the role of teachers' understanding as the main mediator of implementation in the classroom (Donnelly et al., 2016; Diamond & Ling, 2016; Pesce et al., 2016). In countries such as Finland, Japan, and Australia, morning exercise has been systemically integrated into the early childhood education curriculum and supported by robust teacher training, so teacher understanding is assumed to be well established and rarely the focus of primary studies (Mullender-Wijnsma et al., 2016; OECD, 2020). In contrast, in Indonesia, various studies show that early childhood learning practices still tend to be oriented towards early academic ability, while physical activity is often positioned as a complement rather than a core part of learning strategies (Suryana, 2018; Conscience & Property, 2021). Until now, there is limited research that specifically examines how early childhood teachers understand the relationship between exercise, concentration, and children's learning readiness, as well as how this understanding affects daily learning practices. This research also presents contextual novelty by comparing the condition of understanding of PAUD teachers in Indonesia with the practices of other countries that have been more advanced in integrating play-based morning sports. Thus, this study fills the research gap between international empirical findings on the benefits of sports for children's concentration and the pedagogical reality of PAUD in Indonesia, while making a practical contribution to strengthening the competence of PAUD teachers based on local contexts.

The research was formulated to explore in depth the understanding of Early Childhood Education teachers regarding the importance of sport for early childhood. The focus of the research is directed at how teachers interpret the role of exercise, especially morning exercise, in supporting concentration, physical health, and children's learning readiness. This research also explores the experiences, views, and beliefs of teachers related to the implementation of sports activities in PAUD units, including the forms of activities carried out and the pedagogical reasons behind them. In addition, this study aims to identify contextual factors that affect teachers' understanding, such as educational background, teaching experience, institutional policies, and school and family environmental support. Through a qualitative approach, this study seeks to understand the gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and the real practice of exercise habituation in daily learning. Thus, the formulation of this research is expected to be able to produce a comprehensive, contextual, and meaningful picture of early childhood teachers' understanding of the importance of sports for early childhood as the basis for strengthening more holistic pedagogical practices.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of phenomenological research. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study seeks to understand in depth the subjective experiences and meanings of kindergarten teachers on the importance of exercise for early childhood. The focus of the research is not directed at quantitative measurement, but rather at exploring the meaning, perception, and experience of teachers in the real context of learning in early childhood education units. Phenomenology allows researchers to capture the essence of teachers' experiences holistically and contextually. With this approach, teachers' understanding is seen as a social construct influenced by educational background, teaching experience, and school culture. Therefore, the phenomenological approach is considered the most relevant to answer the research objectives. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the issue of the importance of sport for early childhood is not only related to practice, but also to the way teachers interpret and understand the concept. Each teacher has different experiences and interpretations related to sports in early childhood learning. Phenomenological research allows researchers to explore teachers' lived experiences in depth. This approach helps uncover perceptions that may not be visible in surface observation. In addition, phenomenology is relevant for digging into the gap between conceptual understanding and real practice. Thus, the results of the research are expected to be able to represent the authentic voice of kindergarten teachers.

This research was carried out in five kindergartens (TK) in Bekasi City. The selection of the location is based on consideration of the diversity of institutional characteristics and the background of teachers. The city of Bekasi was chosen because it represents an urban area with quite complex dynamics of early childhood education. The research was carried out from July to September. This time span is considered sufficient to conduct in-depth and repeated data collection. The implementation of the research is adjusted to the kindergarten academic calendar. This is done so that research activities do not interfere with the learning process. The subjects of the study were 10 kindergarten teachers who taught in five kindergartens that were the location of the research. Teachers are selected purposively with the criteria of having at least two years of teaching experience. The selection of subjects is based on the consideration that teachers with teaching experience have a more reflective understanding of learning practices. Each kindergarten is represented by two teachers to obtain a variety of perspectives. The research subjects are considered to be able to provide rich and relevant information. The identity of the subject is kept confidential in accordance with research ethics. Teacher participation is voluntary.

In this qualitative research, the researcher plays the role of the main instrument. Researchers are directly involved in the process of data collection and analysis. Researchers function as data collectors, observers, and interpreters. To maintain objectivity, researchers conduct continuous self-reflection. Researchers also try to minimize bias by systematically recording research processes and decisions. The researcher's sensitivity to context is the key to the success of this research. Therefore, the researcher builds a good relationship with the research subject. The main data collection was carried out through structured interviews. Interviews were used to explore teachers' understanding of the importance of exercise for early childhood. The interview instrument is in the form of a list of questions that have been systematically compiled. The questions include the teacher's views on the benefits of exercise, implementation goals, as well as its relation to the child's concentration. Interviews are conducted in person and face-to-face. Each interview session lasts about 30–45 minutes. The interview process is recorded with the subject's consent. The interview was conducted in the school environment at a time agreed with the teacher. The researcher begins the interview with an explanation of the research objectives.

Teachers are given the opportunity to answer freely and reflectively. Even though it is structured, the researcher still provides room for clarification. This is done so that the answers obtained are more in-depth. All interview results were then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts are used as the main data of the analysis. In addition to interviews, this study uses direct observation as a supporting data collection technique. Observations were made to see the real practice of sports habituation in kindergarten. Researchers observed morning exercise activities and other physical activities. Observations are focused on the involvement of teachers and children in these activities. The researcher used the observation sheet as a guide. Observations were carried out on a non-participant basis. Field records are made in detail and systematically.

The observation aims to validate the data of the interview results. Through observation, researchers can compare teachers' understanding with real practices. Observations help identify gaps between concepts and implementation. The observational data also provides richer context to the interview results. In addition, observation allows researchers to capture the dynamics of teacher-child interaction. Observational findings are an important part of thematic analysis. Thus, the data obtained becomes more comprehensive. The validity of the data is maintained through the triangulation method. The interview data was compared with the observation data. The researcher also double-checked the interview transcript. Discussions with peers are conducted to increase the credibility of the analysis. The researcher recorded the research process in detail in the research journal. Process transparency is an effort to maintain legitimacy.

Thus, the results of the research can be scientifically accounted for. The data analysis in this study uses thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is appropriate to identify patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The analysis process is carried out inductively. The data was analyzed based on themes that emerged from the field. The analysis is carried out in a repetitive and reflective manner. The researcher seeks to understand the meaning behind the teacher's statement. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a thematic narrative. The first stage of analysis is to read the entire interview transcript and observation notes. The researcher then conducts initial encoding of the data. The code is given to the part of the data relevant to the focus of the research. Similar codes are grouped into categories. The category was then developed into the main theme. This process is carried out systematically and repeatedly. Each theme is reviewed to ensure consistency of meaning. After the theme is set, the researcher conducts an in-depth interpretation. Themes are analyzed based on the context of the teacher's experience. The researcher associated the findings with the purpose of the study. Interpretation is carried out while retaining the original voice of the subject. Direct quotes from teachers are used to reinforce the findings. The interpretive process is reflective and critical. This aims to gain meaningful understanding. This research pays attention to the ethical principles of research. Each subject is provided with complete information about the research objectives and process. Consent to participation is obtained prior to data collection. The identities of teachers and schools are kept confidential. Data is used only for academic purposes. The researcher ensured that no party was harmed. Research ethics is the main foundation for research implementation

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Research Results**

- **Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding of the Importance of Sport for Early Childhood**

Most kindergarten teachers understand exercise as an important activity for early childhood physical health. Teachers interpret sports mainly as a means for children to be healthy, strong, and not easily sick. This understanding arises from the teacher's daily experience in observing the condition of children in the classroom. Teachers tend to associate exercise with a child's biological need to move. The aspects of cognitive development and concentration have not been the main focus in the teacher's initial understanding. This shows that the teacher's understanding is still at a general and practical level.

Some teachers said that exercise is important because early childhood "cannot be still" and requires a lot of movement. Teachers see sports as a way to channel children's energy so as not to interfere with the learning process. This interpretation shows that sport is understood as a behavioral solution, not as a pedagogical strategy. Teachers do not yet fully see sport as an integral part of the learning process. This understanding is more reactive to children's behavior. Thus, exercise is positioned as a physical need, not a learning need.

Some teachers also associate sports with the formation of healthy living habits from an early age. The teacher stated that children need to be accustomed to moving so that they do not depend on gadgets. However, this understanding is more normative and not based on scientific knowledge. Teachers have not mentioned the relationship between exercise and brain development or children's executive function. This shows the limitations of teachers' pedagogical literacy related to physical activities. Teachers' understanding is greatly influenced by the general discourse in society.

This is reflected in the following interview excerpts:

"In my opinion, exercise is important so that children are healthy and not easily sick. Kindergarten children do have to move a lot." (G2)

"The important thing is that the child is active, healthy, so he is not weak in class." (G5)

The quote shows that teachers' understanding is still dominant in the aspect of physical health.

Overall, the findings on this theme show that kindergarten teachers already have a basic awareness of the importance of sports, but this understanding is not comprehensive. Teachers do not yet fully understand exercise as part of a learning strategy to improve concentration and learning readiness. Understanding is still fragmented and has not been integrated with the pedagogical goals of PAUD. This indicates the need to strengthen teachers' conceptual understanding. This strengthening is important so that sports are not only routine, but also educationally meaningful.

- **Theme 2: Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between Sport and Children's Concentration**

Kindergarten teachers are generally aware of changes in children's behavior after doing morning exercise. Teachers observe that children become calmer and easier to direct. This perception is obtained from hands-on experience in the classroom. Children who were previously overactive tended to be more focused after moving. However, this perception has not been developed into the basis for learning planning. The teacher sees it as a natural phenomenon, not as a designed outcome.

Some teachers said that exercise helps reduce children's anxiety while learning. Children become more able to sit and listen to the teacher's instructions. Teachers

view sports as a means of "expending" children's energy. This perception suggests that the relationship between exercise and concentration is understood simply. Teachers have not linked exercise to self-regulation mechanisms or cognitive function. The cause-and-effect relationship is still intuitive.

Some teachers mentioned that without morning exercise, it is more difficult for children to be conditioned at the beginning of learning. Children tend to run around and not focus. However, exercise has not always been done consistently. This shows that there is a gap between perception and practice. Teachers are aware of the benefits, but have not made it a priority for learning. Time factors and academic demands are the main reasons.

That perception is reinforced by the following interview excerpts:

"If the children have exercised, they are usually more obedient, not running around too much when studying." (G7)

"The difference seems to be that after exercise, children are more focused, but yes, it is not necessarily possible to do it every day." (G1)

This quote shows that teachers are aware of the positive impact of exercise on concentration, even though it is not yet structured.

Overall, the findings of this theme show that teachers have a positive perception of the relationship between sport and children's concentration. However, this perception is still empirical and has not been supported by theoretical understanding. Teachers have not made increased concentration the main goal of exercise. Exercise is still seen as a supportive activity, not a core learning strategy. This emphasizes the need to increase the capacity of teachers in understanding the pedagogical function of sports.

### • Theme 3: Sports Habituation Practices and Implementation Gaps

The results of observations show that exercise habituation in kindergarten has not been carried out consistently. Some kindergartens carry out morning exercise only once or twice a week. Sports activities are often in the form of simple gymnastics to music. The implementation of sports is highly dependent on the habits of each teacher. There are no written guidelines or specific planning related to morning exercise. This shows that sports have not become a school culture.

In practice, exercise is often done when there is free time. When the learning schedule is hectic, exercise tends to be eliminated. Teachers prioritize academic activities such as reading and writing. This condition shows that sports are still considered less important than the academic aspect. In fact, teachers are aware of the benefits of exercise for children. This gap is an important finding of the study.

Observations also show that the purpose of exercise is not always explained to the child. Children follow movements without understanding the meaning of the activity. Teachers rarely associate sports with readiness to learn afterwards. This shows that sport has not been integratedly reflectively in learning. Teachers play more roles as movement instructors, not facilitators of learning through movement. This practice shows the limitations of pedagogical integration.

This is reflected in the following quote:

"Usually gymnastics if I have time, because sometimes time runs out for learning activities." (G4)

"There is no special schedule for sports, depending on the condition of the children and teachers." (G9)

The quote confirms the inconsistency of sports implementation in kindergarten.

Overall, this theme shows the gap between teachers' understanding, perception, and practice related to sports. Although teachers are aware of the importance of exercise, its implementation is not optimal and sustainable. Sport has not been positioned as an integral part of early childhood learning. This gap is influenced by academic demands, time constraints, and lack of institutional guidance. These findings are an important basis for recommendations for strengthening policies and training of PAUD teachers.

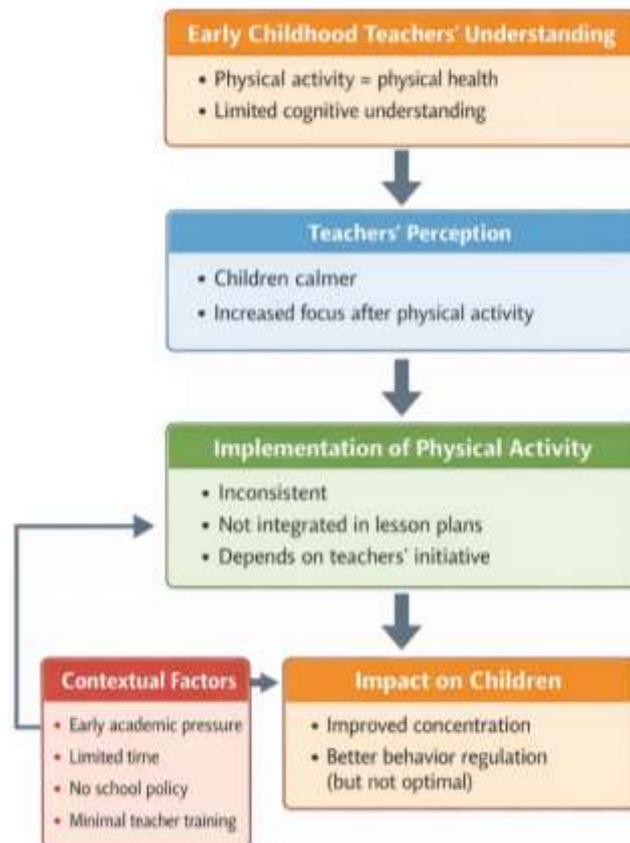


Figure 1. Results of Analysis of Findings

This conceptual model illustrates that early childhood teachers' understanding serves as the starting point for establishing physical activity routines for young children. The research findings indicate that teachers' understanding is predominantly framed around physical health benefits, while their comprehension of the relationship between physical activity, concentration, and cognitive functioning remains limited. This level of understanding shapes teachers' perceptions, namely the belief that physical activity helps children become calmer and easier to manage in classroom settings. However, such perceptions tend to be empirical and intuitive rather than grounded in deliberate pedagogical planning.

Teachers' perceptions subsequently influence the implementation of physical activity practices in early childhood education settings. Due to limited conceptual understanding, physical activity practices are often inconsistent, irregular, and insufficiently integrated into instructional planning. Physical activity is commonly treated as a supplementary activity rather than as a core pedagogical strategy to support children's concentration and learning readiness. As a result, although

positive effects of physical activity on children's concentration are observable, these effects are not optimal or sustainable.

The model also highlights the presence of contextual factors that influence the entire process, including early academic pressure, limited instructional time, the absence of clear school-level policies, and insufficient professional development related to pedagogically grounded physical activity. These factors weaken the transformation of teachers' understanding into meaningful practice. Therefore, the conceptual model emphasizes that enhancing children's concentration through physical activity cannot be separated from strengthening teachers' pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and the systematic integration of physical activity within early childhood education practices.

### 3.2. Discussion

#### Explaining research data

The findings of this study show that early childhood teachers' understanding of sports is still dominated by physical health aspects, while children's cognitive dimensions and concentration have not been understood in depth. These results are in line with the research of Carson et al. (2021) and Tandon et al. (2022) which states that PAUD teachers tend to view physical activity as a mere means of fitness. Research in various Asian countries has also found a similar trend, particularly in countries that still emphasize early academics (Lee & Kim, 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2023). In contrast to Finland and Australia, early childhood education teachers have understood sport as part of strengthening children's executive functions (OECD, 2021; Howard et al., 2022). This difference shows that there is a gap in pedagogical literacy of Indonesian PAUD teachers. In the context of policy, the Independent Early Childhood Education Curriculum emphasizes the importance of a balance between playing, moving, and learning. However, the findings of this study show that the implementation of the policy is not yet fully understood at the teacher level. This strengthens the findings of Sari et al. (2024) about the weak internalization of policies in PAUD units. Therefore, this research is relevant in evaluating the implementation of current policies. These findings are the basis for strengthening policies based on real practices.

The teacher's perception that children are calmer and more focused after exercise is a finding consistent with the literature of the last five years. Diamond and Ling (2020) and Pesce et al. (2021) prove that physical activity contributes to children's self-regulation and attention. Longitudinal studies in Japan and Canada have also shown that morning exercise improves children's learning readiness (Yamauchi et al., 2021; McClelland et al., 2023). This study confirms these findings in the context of Indonesian PAUD. However, the positive perception of teachers has not been followed by systematic learning planning. This is in line with the findings of Santos et al. (2022) who stated that perceptions without pedagogical support do not sufficiently change practice. In the policy of the Ministry of Education and Education, teachers are encouraged to become facilitators of meaningful learning. These findings show that the role of facilitators is not optimal. Therefore, policies need to be followed by practice-based training. This research provides evidence of this need. Thus, this research is relevant to the agenda of improving the competence of PAUD teachers.

The practice of exercise habituation that is not routine and not integrated in the RPPH shows the weak position of physical activity in early childhood learning. These findings are in line with the research of Wulandari et al. (2023) and Nurhayati et al.

(2024) which shows the dominance of academic targets in Indonesian PAUD. International studies also mention that without school regulation, sports tend to be incidental (Pate et al., 2021; Barbosa et al., 2022). In the policy, the Independent Early Childhood Education Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and play-based learning. However, this flexibility has not been accompanied by strong operational guidance regarding physical activity. As a result, implementation is highly dependent on teachers' initiatives. Research by Tremblay et al. (2022) confirms the importance of explicit school policies. The findings of this study show that national policies have not been fully translated into school policies. This is a challenge for the implementation of the current policy. Therefore, this research contributes to the evaluation of PAUD policies. These findings are relevant for systemic improvement.

The impact of exercise on children's concentration found in this study is in line with the latest neuroeducation findings. Hillman et al. (2021) and Tomporowski et al. (2022) show that physical activity improves attention function and learning readiness. European research also found that morning exercise routines improve early childhood behavioral control (Schmidt et al., 2021). This study confirms that this impact also occurs in Indonesian PAUD. However, the impact has not been optimal because sports have not been carried out consistently. This supports the finding of Donnelly et al. (2021) that consistency determines the effectiveness of exercise. In the context of policy, the government emphasizes positive habituation as the main strategy of character education. This research shows that sports habituation has not become a school culture. Therefore, these findings are important for strengthening habituation policies. This study adds the perspective that children's concentration is an indicator of policy success. Thus, this research is empirically and policy-relevant. These findings reinforce the urgency of policy implementation.

Compared to previous research, the novelty of this research lies in the analysis of the relationship between teachers' understanding, perception, and practice. Most previous studies have only examined the impact of exercise on children (Carson et al., 2021; Logan et al., 2022). This research shows that teachers are the main mediators of this impact. The Sheridan et al. (2022) study began to highlight the role of teachers, but not yet in the phenomenological context of Indonesia. The phenomenological approach allows an understanding of the teacher's life experience. This is important in the context of the Freedom to Learn policy which emphasizes reflection on practice. This research provides evidence that policy changes need to be accompanied by changes in teachers' understanding. Without it, risky policies are ineffective. These findings are relevant to the education reform agenda. This research also enriches the national PAUD research methodology. Thus, the contribution of this research is theoretical and practical. Its relevance is strong in the context of current policy.

The topic of this research is very relevant to the policy of 7 Great Indonesian Children's Habits which is officially implemented until 2025. One of the main habits is to live a healthy and active life through daily physical activity. Morning sports in PAUD are a concrete form of implementation of the policy. This study provides empirical evidence that exercise has an impact on children's concentration and learning behavior. These findings support policies that emphasize habituation, not verbal instruction. Research by Pratiwi et al. (2024) shows that the implementation of healthy habits is still uneven. Therefore, this study is relevant to evaluate policy achievements. The findings show that teachers have not fully understood the policy as a pedagogical strategy. This shows the need for more applicable policy socialization. This research provides a scientific basis for this reinforcement. Thus, the relevance of this study to policy is very strong. This research supports the strengthening of national policies.

In addition to healthy living habits, morning exercise also supports disciplined and independent habits in the 7 Great Indonesian Children's Habits. Research findings show that children are more likely to follow the rules after exercise. This is in line with Blair and Raver's (2020) research on children's self-regulation. Recent studies in East Asia have also shown that physical routines shape discipline early on (Zhang et al., 2022). In policy, character formation is a top priority for basic education. This research shows that character is built through concrete habituation. Teachers play an important role in this process. However, without a strong understanding, habituation is inconsistent. These findings show a gap in the implementation of character policies. Therefore, this research is relevant for strengthening national character policies. This relevance is practical. This research supports the transformation of character education.

Active habits of movement are also related to lifelong learning habits. Research by Howard et al. (2022) and Logan et al. (2021) shows that motion-based learning experiences increase children's motivation. The findings of this study show that children are more enthusiastic about learning after exercise. This is in line with the theory of emotion and learning (Immordino-Yang et al., 2020). Thus, morning exercise supports a positive learning climate. This study confirms that exercise is not an academic barrier. These findings are important to answer the concerns of parents and teachers. The study of Sari et al. (2023) shows that there is still resistance to reducing academic time. This study provides a data-driven argument. In the context of policy, this is very relevant. This research supports the paradigm change of PAUD. Its relevance is strategic.

This research is also relevant to the Integrative Holistic PAUD policy which continues to be strengthened until. Morning exercise activities reflect the integration of health, education, and nurturing aspects. The findings of the study show that this integration is not optimal at the practice level. This is in line with the 2022–2024 national PAUD HI evaluation report. This study provides micro evidence from the field of Bekasi City. This evidence is important for local context-based policy improvement. Research by Black et al. (2022) confirms the importance of a systemic approach. This research shows that teachers need cross-sector support. Without this support, the implementation of PAUD HI is difficult to optimize. Therefore, this research is structurally relevant. This relevance supports the strengthening of cross-sectoral policies. This research strengthens the agenda of PAUD HI.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the understanding of early childhood education teachers about the importance of sports for early childhood still tends to focus on physical health aspects and has not fully associated sports as a pedagogical strategy to increase children's concentration and learning readiness. Although teachers have a positive perception that exercise can make children calmer and more focused, this perception has not been followed by consistent and integrated exercise habituation practices in learning planning. These findings reveal a gap between the understanding, perception, and implementation of sports in early childhood education units, which is influenced by early academic pressure, time constraints, and lack of teacher policies and training. This study confirms that morning exercise has a positive impact on children's concentration and behavior regulation, but this impact is not optimal because it has not become a learning culture. In the context of education policies that apply until 2025, especially the Independent Early Childhood Curriculum and the 7 Great Indonesian Children's Habits program, this study shows that healthy and active living habits through sports are very relevant and

strategic to support the strengthening of children's character and learning readiness. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' understanding and competence as well as institutional policy support so that sports can be integrated meaningfully and sustainably in early childhood learning practices.

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