

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT SURVEY AS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION EVALUATION INSTRUMENT IN SINTUK TOBOH GADANG DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Learning Environment Survey (*Survei Lingkungan Belajar/Sulingjar*) marks a policy shift in Indonesia's early childhood education (PAUD) quality evaluation, moving away from direct child testing toward institutional diagnostic assessments. However, existing literature primarily focuses on primary and secondary education levels, leaving a critical empirical gap regarding how Sulingjar is operationalized within suburban early childhood settings where severe resource disparities exist between formal Kindergartens (TK) and non-formal Playgroups (KB). This study analyzes the implementation process of Sulingjar, investigates its utilization for Data-Based Planning (*Perencanaan Berbasis Data/PBD*), and identifies the underlying operational barriers in suburban PAUD units. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected across three representative PAUD institutions in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District through in-depth interviews with six key informants (three principals and three teachers), direct observations, and document analyses. Data saturation guided sample determination, and Lincoln and Guba's framework (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) ensured trustworthiness. The findings reveal that Sulingjar successfully replaces direct child testing with an environment-based diagnostic framework, driving institutional budgeting (RKAS) and teacher pedagogical reflection. However, operational execution is constrained by internet instability, central server congestion, and complex pedagogical terminology, revealing a distinct digital readiness gap between formal and non-formal units. Theoretically, this study extends Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory by illustrating how macro-level evaluation policies reconfigure micro-level classroom practices; practically, it offers an empirical model of peer scaffolding and distributed leadership to overcome structural digital divides in suburban educational evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic investment in developing quality human resources (Fawwaz & Susanty, 2024). The success of a nation's development is determined not only by economic and technological progress, but also by the quality of education that optimally develops students' potential from an early age (null, 1983; Syamsurijal, 2023). Therefore, providing quality education is a shared responsibility of the government, educational institutions, educators, parents, and the community (Ng, 2003). Efforts to improve educational quality are inseparable from an evaluation system that provides accurate information on the actual state of education delivery as a basis for decision-making and continuous improvement (Rismawati et al., 2024; Tanjung et al., 2022).

Early Childhood Education (*Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini / PAUD*) serves as a fundamental building block in the lifelong learning trajectory of children (Fitriani, 2025; Latief, 2020). During early childhood, holistic development across cognitive, social, emotional, language, and physical-motor domains takes place rapidly, establishing the core foundation for future academic success and overall well-being (Fawwaz & Susanty, 2024; Maghfiroh et al., 2025). Recognizing the strategic importance of early education, national policy frameworks have increasingly shifted toward ensuring high-quality learning environments. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced the National Assessment framework (*Asesmen Nasional*), which includes the Learning Environment Survey (*Survei Lingkungan Belajar/Sulingjar*) tailored for early childhood education units (Maghfiroh et al., 2025; Suryani et al., 2024). Unlike traditional educational evaluation models that rely on direct cognitive testing of young children an approach widely recognized as developmentally inappropriate for early learners Sulingjar evaluates educational quality by assessing the supportive conditions surrounding the child, including pedagogical process quality, teacher-child interactions, safety, inclusivity, socio-emotional climate, and school leadership practices (Herlina et al., 2025; Isroani et al., 2024).

Current literature on educational evaluation emphasizes that environment-based assessment tools serve as crucial instruments for systemic quality assurance and diagnostic improvement (Samsudin et al., 2025). The data gathered through Sulingjar feeds directly into the PAUD Education Report Card (*Rapor Pendidikan PAUD*), an open platform intended to drive Data-Based Planning (*Perencanaan Berbasis Data / PBD*) at both the institutional and local government levels. Through PBD, early childhood leaders are expected to move away from subjective decision-making toward evidence-informed administrative and instructional improvements. However, existing studies on national education survey policies primarily focus on primary and secondary education levels, where digital infrastructure and teacher digital literacy are relatively mature. Few studies have critically examined how Sulingjar is operationalized in suburban and non-formal early childhood settings, where institutional structures differ markedly between formal kindergartens (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*) and non-formal playgroups (*Kelompok Bermain*).

Despite the growing literature on national education assessment policies, a critical research gap remains evident in two primary aspects. First, existing empirical studies on Sulingjar and national survey implementation predominantly focus on primary, secondary, and vocational education levels where digital infrastructure, school budgets, and teacher digital literacy are relatively mature and well-established. Very limited empirical research critically examines how Sulingjar is operationalized within early childhood settings, which operate under significantly different institutional structures and pedagogical frameworks. Second, while the few available PAUD-related studies treat early childhood institutions as homogeneous entities, they largely overlook the distinct operational realities, resource disparities, and technological readiness gaps existing between formal kindergartens (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*) and non-formal playgroups (*Kelompok Bermain*), particularly in suburban and semi-rural regions. Consequently, current research fails to explain how structural inequalities in suburban settings such as Sintuk Toboh Gadang District in Padang Pariaman Regency affect the fidelity of Sulingjar data collection, teachers' conceptual interpretation of survey metrics, and the practical translation of Rapor Pendidikan outputs into Data-Based Planning.

This research gap underscores a pressing problem: if technical connectivity barriers, platform registration obstacles, or conceptual misinterpretations of specialized pedagogical terminology occur during survey execution, the generated Sulingjar data may fail to accurately reflect genuine learning environment conditions. This compromises the construct validity of Rapor Pendidikan outputs and risks reducing Sulingjar to a superficial administrative compliance exercise rather than an authentic driver of pedagogical transformation (Jundullah, 2026)

This gap in contemporary research raises a novel empirical question regarding how Sulingjar actually functions on the ground within diverse early childhood education contexts, particularly in suburban regions such as Sintuk Toboh Gadang District in Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra. While official policy assumes uniform platform readiness and conceptual understanding across all educational units, early childhood institutions in this district exhibit substantial variations in technological infrastructure, internet connectivity, operator capacity, and educator digital literacy. Furthermore, many early childhood educators face challenges navigating complex single sign-on systems (*SDM Data/Dapodik*) and interpreting specialized pedagogical terminology embedded within the survey items. Consequently, a primary research problem arises: if technical barriers or conceptual misinterpretations occur during survey execution, Sulingjar data may fail to accurately reflect genuine learning environment conditions, thereby compromising the validity of Rapor Pendidikan outputs and limiting its effectiveness for data-driven quality improvement (Jundullah, 2026; Penerbit Cv Pena Persada, 2020).

To address this gap, the central objective of this study is to analyze the complete implementation process of Sulingjar across representative formal and non-formal PAUD units in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District, examine how school leaders and teachers utilize survey outputs for Data-Based Planning, and identify the underlying supporting and inhibiting factors that influence survey execution.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in three key contributions: (1) Empirical Contextualization in Early Childhood Settings: Unlike previous studies centered on primary and secondary schools, this study provides a pioneer qualitative examination of Sulingjar's operationalization specifically tailored to the early childhood sector, (2) Comparative Structural Insight: It offers a comparative perspective by analyzing the institutional dynamics and digital readiness disparities between formal (TK) and non-formal (KB) PAUD units within a single suburban district, and (3) Diagnostic-to-Action Framework Analysis: It explicitly traces the complete workflow from raw survey input to Rapor Pendidikan generation and its concrete translation into institutional budgeting (RKAS) and teacher pedagogical reflection, thereby offering an empirical model of evidence-based quality assurance in suburban early childhood education.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using a case study design (Sugiyono, 2018). A qualitative approach was chosen because the primary goal is to obtain a deep, contextual, and holistic understanding of how Sulingjar is implemented in PAUD units and how it functions as an evaluation tool to enhance educational quality. Furthermore, the case study design allows the researcher to explore contemporary real-life phenomena within their natural setting in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District by focusing directly on the actions, perceptions, and experiences of early childhood educators and school leaders.

The research was conducted across three selected PAUD institutions located in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra Province: TK Sayang Ibu, KB Harapan Bangsa, and KB Palembang. The rationale for selecting these three specific institutions was to capture a representative typology of early childhood services within the suburban district, contrasting formal Kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*) with non-formal Playgroups (*Kelompok Bermain*). Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their direct involvement in platform administration, survey completion, and institutional data utilization. A total of six key informants participated in this study, consisting of three school principals (coded as KS-1, KS-2, and KS-3) and three PAUD teachers (coded as GR-1, GR-2, and GR-3). The determination of these three school sites and six key informants was guided by the principle of data saturation (Himam & Anam, 2026; Nasution, 2023). Data collection was continued until no new empirical themes, operational patterns, or insights regarding Sulingjar implementation emerged from additional interviews and document cross-examinations. The six informants provided comprehensive, rich, and redundant information across all research dimensions, confirming that data saturation had been fully achieved.

The investigation focuses on three main aspects: (1) the implementation process of Sulingjar across administrative preparation, online execution, and data submission; (2) the utilization of Sulingjar outputs and Rapor Pendidikan for Data-Based Planning (*Perencanaan Berbasis Data / PBD*); and (3) the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing survey execution.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument (human instrument). To ensure structured data collection, auxiliary instruments were developed and applied, including semi-structured in-depth interview protocols for principals and teachers, observation checklists for digital infrastructure and school environments, and documentation checklists for administrative records, Sulungjar completion receipts, DAPODIK profiles, and institutional work plans (RKAS).

Data were collected through three primary techniques to achieve method triangulation: in-depth interviews, direct classroom and facility observations, and document studies. Collected qualitative data were analyzed interactively following the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which encompasses data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Figure 1).

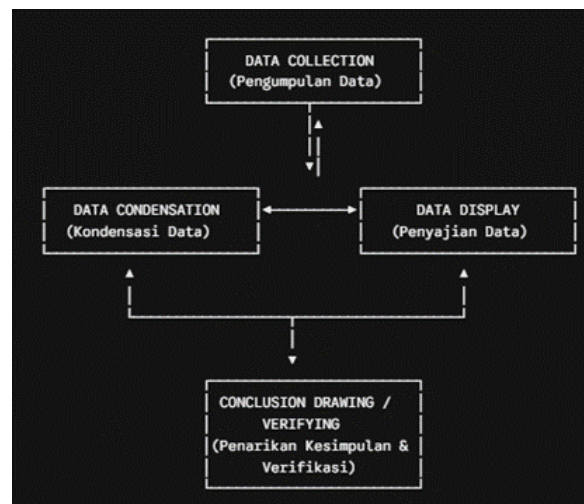


Figure 1. The Interactive Data Analysis Model

Source: Create by M. B. Miles, A. M. Huberman, and J. Saldaña, 2014

To guarantee the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, this study applied the established framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which evaluates four essential criteria:

1. **Credibility (Truth Value):** Ensured through source triangulation (cross-checking teacher accounts with principal statements) and method triangulation (corroborating interview responses with direct observations and official records). In addition, member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts and thematic summaries to informants to confirm accurate representation.
2. **Transferability (Applicability):** Achieved by providing a thick description of the suburban PAUD contexts, institutional structures, and operational workflows of Sintuk Toboh Gadang District, allowing future researchers to evaluate the applicability of these findings to similar educational environments.
3. **Dependability (Consistency):** Maintained by establishing an audit trail that meticulously documented all research steps, raw field notes, coding schemes, and analytical decisions, alongside continuous peer debriefing with academic advisors.
4. **Confirmability (Neutrality):** Guaranteed by ensuring that all conclusions were derived directly from empirical field data rather than personal bias, supported by direct participant quotations, official documentation, and observational evidence.

This study strictly adhered to standard ethical principles. Voluntary informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Anonymity was preserved through structural coding (KS-1 to KS-3; GR-1 to GR-3), and sensitive institutional records were kept strictly confidential. Research activities were scheduled to avoid disrupting regular instructional and administrative routines.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

General Profile of Research Settings and Informants

The study was conducted in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra Province, across three representative early childhood education units: TK Sayang Ibu (formal kindergarten), KB Harapan Bangsa (non-formal playgroup), and KB Palembang (non-formal playgroup). A total of six key informants participated: three school principals (coded as KS-1, KS-2, and KS-3) and three teachers (coded as GR-1, GR-2, and GR-3).

Table 1 summarizes the core empirical findings of this study, systematically linking major themes to direct qualitative evidence (verbatim interview excerpts) and analytical interpretations.

Table 1. Summary of Qualitative Findings

Theme	Evidence (Direct Quotes & Observational Findings)	Interpretation
Three-Stage Workflow & Peer Scaffolding	"In the beginning, we had to verify teacher accounts on Dapodik. Once tokens were issued, teachers filled out the survey online. For older teachers who were less familiar with laptops, we held collective filling sessions so no one was left behind." (KS-1) "Filling out the survey took almost two hours because we discussed several questions together, especially when the internet lagged." (GR-1)	Sulingjar execution follows a structured administrative process, relying heavily on peer collaboration and principal scaffolding to overcome teacher digital literacy gaps.
Shift to Institutional Diagnostic & PBD	"Sulingjar is different from old evaluation models because it doesn't test children directly. It measures our teaching environment, safety, and leadership, which is much more appropriate for early childhood." (KS-2) "We used the Rapor Pendidikan results to revise our school budget (RKAS), allocating more funds for teaching aids, playground safety facilities, and teacher training workshops." (KS-3) Sulingjar successfully replaces developmentally inappropriate child testing with an institutional diagnostic model that directly drives Data-Based Planning (PBD) and budget	Sulingjar successfully replaces developmentally inappropriate child testing with an institutional diagnostic model that directly drives Data-Based Planning (PBD) and budget allocation.
Pedagogical Reflection & Self-Efficacy	"When answering questions about inclusive learning and child-teacher interactions, I realized some of my teaching habits needed improvement. It made me reflect on how I handle diverse children in class." (GR-3)	Survey metrics function as reflective prompts that encourage educators to evaluate and improve their daily classroom practices.
Technological & Terminology Barriers	"Initially we experienced difficulties because internet access was unstable in our area and the central server often crashed during peak hours. We had to retry late at night to submit the data." (GR-2) "Some questions contained complex academic terms like 'stimulasi holistik' or 'iklim inklusivitas' that were hard to grasp immediately." (GR-3)	Technical infrastructure limitations and complex academic terminology create friction during execution, risking compliance-driven survey responses.

Source: Primary Data Processed by Authors (2026)

Empirical Implementation Process of Sulingjar

The operational execution of Sulingjar across the studied PAUD units encompasses three distinct sequential phases: administrative profile verification on DAPODIK, asynchronous online survey completion, and data submission. During the administrative phase, school leaders verified educator lists to issue operator tokens. However, execution revealed varying levels of digital autonomy between formal and non-formal institutions.

Educators with higher digital competence completed the instrument independently, whereas teachers with limited technological literacy relied on collaborative filling sessions organized by school leaders. As GR-1 explained:

"Filling out the survey took almost two hours because we discussed several questions together, especially when the internet lagged or when we encountered terms we didn't fully understand." (GR-1)

To ensure full compliance and complete data submission before the portal closed, school principals actively facilitated the process:

"In the beginning, we had to verify teacher accounts on Dapodik. Once tokens were issued, teachers filled out the survey online. For older teachers who were less familiar with laptops, we held collective filling sessions so no one was left behind." (KS-1)

Diagnostic Quality Assurance and Data-Based Planning (PBD)

The qualitative findings confirm that Sulingjar marks a paradigm shift in early childhood evaluation by moving away from direct testing of young children toward an institutional diagnostic framework. School leaders emphasized that survey outputs generated via the Education Report Card (*Rapor Pendidikan PAUD*) provided actionable data for school management.

A principal from a non-formal playgroup highlighted this shift:

"Sulingjar is different from old evaluation models because it doesn't test children directly. It measures our teaching environment, safety, and leadership, which is much more appropriate for early childhood." (KS-2)

"We used the Rapor Pendidikan results to revise our school budget (RKAS), allocating more funds for teaching aids, playground safety facilities, and teacher training workshops." (KS-3)

Beyond administrative planning, Sulingjar served as a catalyst for teacher pedagogical reflection. As GR-3 shared:

"When answering questions about inclusive learning and child-teacher interactions, I realized some of my teaching habits needed improvement. It made me reflect on how I handle diverse children in class." (GR-3)

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Sulingjar Implementation

While strong leadership, peer solidarity, and guidance from local PAUD supervisors (*penilik*) supported survey execution, significant operational barriers were identified. The most critical hindrance was technical infrastructure, particularly poor internet connectivity in suburban Sintuk Toboh Gadang and server overloads on the central platform.

A teacher at KB Harapan Bangsa highlighted these technical difficulties:

"Initially we experienced difficulties because internet access was unstable in our area and the central server often crashed during peak hours. We had to retry late at night to submit the data." (GR-2)

In addition to technical hurdles, educators faced cognitive challenges due to specialized pedagogical terminology within the questionnaire items:

"Some questions contained complex academic terms like 'stimulasi holistik' or 'iklim inklusivitas' that were hard to grasp immediately. We needed time to discuss what those questions were actually asking." (GR-3)

Despite these operational hurdles, collaborative problem-solving among teachers and school leaders enabled all three institutions to complete Sulingjar submission, establishing a baseline for continuous institutional reflection.

Discussion

Re-evaluating Early Childhood Quality Evaluation Through Ecological and Systemic Lenses

The empirical findings demonstrate that Sulingjar marks a significant paradigm shift in Indonesian early childhood education by replacing direct, developmentally inappropriate child assessment with an institutional diagnostic framework. Interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Sulingjar functions as a systemic evaluation tool that assesses the microsystem and mesosystem level parameters surrounding the young child such as teacher-child interactions, physical safety, and inclusive classroom climates rather than isolating the child's individual output. This finding aligns with

UNESCO's global guidelines on early childhood care and education (ECCE), which emphasize that quality in early childhood settings must be measured through environmental support, structural conditions, and process quality rather than high-stakes standardized testing.

Compared to global studies on early childhood quality assurance, such as OECD's *Starting Strong* framework, the operationalization of Sulingjar confirms that environmental metrics provide a more valid diagnostic indicator of educational quality. While previous national studies (Santika et al., 2026; Suryani et al., 2024) primarily documented the policy transition toward the National Assessment framework, this study reveals how environment-based evaluation directly stimulates teacher self-efficacy and reflective practice. By evaluating classroom climate, Sulingjar transforms routine administrative reporting into a catalyst for pedagogical reflection.

Data-Based Planning (PBD) and Educational Leadership Dynamics

The integration of Sulingjar outputs into the PAUD Education Report Card (*Rapor Pendidikan*) and its subsequent translation into annual school budgets (*RKAS*) provides strong empirical evidence of evidence-based educational management in suburban early childhood units. Interpreted through Educational Leadership Theory specifically Distributed and Instructional Leadership models the findings illustrate that effective data utilization depends heavily on the principal's capacity to distribute administrative duties and foster a collaborative diagnostic culture.

This finding extends previous research by Wardati (2026) and Rismawati et al. (2024), which noted that data systems often fail at the local school level due to top-down administrative rigidity. In contrast, this study shows that when suburban PAUD leaders actively engage teachers in interpreting *Rapor Pendidikan* indicators, data-based planning shifts from a passive compliance obligation to a strategic tool for instructional improvement. Compared to international benchmarks documented in OECD educational governance studies, the implementation of PBD in Sintuk Toboh Gadang District demonstrates that even resource-constrained early childhood units can achieve meaningful institutional reflection when diagnostic feedback is tied directly to school budgeting.

Infrastructure Disparities, School Climate Theory, and Structural Bottlenecks

Despite the diagnostic advantages of Sulingjar, its execution in suburban PAUD units is constrained by technological infrastructure deficits and specialized terminology barriers. Analyzed through School Climate Theory, a supportive school climate requires not only positive interpersonal dynamics but also structural stability and operational ease. When teachers experience recurring server congestion, poor connectivity, and cognitive overload from unfamiliar academic terms (e.g., "*stimulasi holistik*"), the reflective potential of the evaluation tool is severely compromised, risking a collapse into surface-level administrative compliance.

These findings mirror global challenges identified by UNESCO regarding digital equity in education across developing nations. While existing domestic literature (Jundullah, 2026; Penerbit Cv Pena Persada, 2020) attributes survey completion friction strictly to individual teacher digital literacy, this study proves that the problem is fundamentally structural. The sharp contrast in digital readiness between formal Kindergartens (TK) and non-formal Playgroups (KB) highlights a systemic equity gap within the early childhood sector that national policy frameworks have yet to adequately address.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study makes three explicit scientific contributions to the literature on early childhood educational evaluation:

1. **Theoretical Contribution:** It expands Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and School Climate Theory by conceptualizing digital survey instruments like Sulingjar as institutional macrosystem policies that directly reconfigure microsystem classroom practices through teacher reflection and PBD.
2. **Practical Contribution:** It provides a concrete empirical model illustrating how peer scaffolding, collaborative filling sessions, and distributed leadership can mitigate digital literacy and infrastructure gaps in suburban educational settings.
3. **Policy Contribution:** It offers actionable recommendations for central and local education authorities (Dinas Pendidikan), highlighting the urgent need to simplify survey terminology, optimize platform server stability, and deliver targeted pre-survey capacity building tailored specifically to non-formal early childhood educators.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Learning Environment Survey (*Survei Lingkungan Belajar / Sulingjar*) in early childhood education (PAUD) units across Sintuk Toboh Gadang District marks a pivotal transition from developmentally inappropriate child assessments to an institutional diagnostic evaluation model. Sulingjar outputs, accessible via the Education Report Card (*Rapor Pendidikan*), are actively used for Data-Based Planning (*Perencanaan Berbasis Data / PBD*) and budgeting in institutional annual work plans (*RKAS*). However, operational completion is significantly hampered by technological infrastructure deficits, server instability, and complex pedagogical terminology, revealing a distinct readiness gap between formal Kindergartens (*TK*) and non-formal Playgroups (*KB*).

The practical implications of this study highlight the need for policy simplification, infrastructure optimization, and targeted capacity building within early childhood education. The Ministry of Education and local education authorities (*Dinas Pendidikan*) must optimize server stability and simplify technical survey terminology to better match the diverse academic backgrounds of early childhood educators. Concurrently, local supervisors (*penilik*) and school principals should establish peer-assisted digital mentoring programs, particularly targeting non-formal *PAUD* units, to enhance data literacy and ensure that survey completion moves beyond superficial administrative compliance to genuine instructional reflection.

This study was restricted to three early childhood institutions within a single suburban district in Padang Pariaman Regency, utilizing a qualitative case study design. Consequently, while the findings offer deep contextual insights, they cannot be broadly generalized to urban centers or remote regions with vastly different socioeconomic and technological landscapes. This study was restricted to three early childhood institutions within a single suburban district in Padang Pariaman Regency, utilizing a qualitative case study design. Consequently, while the findings offer deep contextual insights, they cannot be broadly generalized to urban centers or remote regions with vastly different socioeconomic and technological landscapes. Future studies should expand the geographical scope by employing quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across broader regional samples to measure the direct statistical impact of *Sulingjar* implementation on classroom quality over time. Additionally, longitudinal research could explore how sustained engagement with Data-Based Planning (*PBD*) influences long-term institutional performance and child development outcomes across diverse *PAUD* service types.

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