

The Importance of Early Childhood Education and Development in Indonesia

Budiharjo

University of Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama)
Jl. Hang Lekir I No. 8, Senayan, Jakarta 10270, Indonesia
budiharjo@dsn.moestopo.ac.id

Abstract

Many experts refer to the period in the development of childhood as a golden period only lasting once and cannot be delayed. An early age is an age that is crucial in shaping the character and personality of the child, because the environment is indispensable stimulation of children in developing intelligence potential. Early education efforts form of psychosocial stimulation as early and as much as possible into a very important thing. This paper presents the importance of early childhood education and development in Indonesia. It is expected to contribute significantly to the development and improving the quality of human resources, in turn, our nation will become a nation full of high quality and competitiveness.

Keywords: Development; Children education; Early childhood

1. Introduction

Education is an important asset for the advancement of a nation; therefore, every citizen must and is compelled to access levels of education: early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, or higher education. In the field of education, since birth a child requires appropriate services to meet his educational needs. Schachter *et al.* discussed the connectivity between early childhood educators' *knowledge*, beliefs, education, experiences, and children's language-and literacy-learning opportunities [1]. An understanding of the characteristics of children according to their growth and development will be very helpful in fitting the learning process of the children to their age, needs, and circumstances intellectually, emotionally and socially [2-7].

Education is a conscious and deliberate effort to create a learning atmosphere and process so that learners are actively developing their potentials to have a spiritual power of religion, self-control, personality, intelligence, nobility, and skills required by themselves and society [8-11]. Seker, *et al.* presented a study on the contributions of second language education to language development in pre-school period [12]. Education includes the teaching of special skills, and also of something invisible yet more thorough, that is the provision of knowledge, judgment, and discretion. One of the main bases of education is to teach culture over generations.

Education can be viewed as a process of helping learners to achieve an optimum level of development in all aspects of their personality in accordance with the potential they own and the value systems prevailing in the socio-cultural environment in which they live [13-14]. Education is essentially an attempt to pass a value, which will be a helper and a determinant of human beings in life and also to improve the lot of humanity and civilization. Howard *et al.* discussed about parent support in early childhood [15]. Without education, it is believed that humans today are no different from past generations of human beings, who compared to the man of today, has lagged behind both the quality of life and the processes of empowerment. In the extreme it can even be said that the good

or bad of a civilization, of a nation, will be determined by the education obtained by the people of the nation.

Based on studies in psychology and education, early childhood is the foundation or keystone for the growth and development of children [16-20]. Early childhood education is one of the training efforts targeted to children from birth up to the age of six years, conducted through the provision of educational stimulation to help the growth and development of children physically and mentally in order to have the readiness to get further education [21].

The importance of early childhood education has become international attention. The World Education Forum 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, has resulted six agreements as the framework for action of education for all, one of whose points is to expand and improve the overall early childhood care and education, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Lindberg presented early childhood education and care staff support in Finland [22]. Indonesia as one one member of the forum is bound to implement this commitment. International attention to the urgency of early childhood education is reinforced by various recent researches on the brain. Demirok and Haksiz discussed the comparison of early childhood special education system in Turkey with in Hungary, Italy and Romania [23]. By the time the baby is born God already provided him with a complete structure of the brain, nevertheless it only reaches maturity after outside the womb. Newborns have more than 100 billion neurons and about one trillion glial cells that function as glue and synap (branches of neurons) that will form trillions of inter-connections between neurons whose total number exceeds his needs.

This paper presents the importance of early childhood education and development in Indonesia. It is expected to contribute significantly to the development and improving the quality of human resources, in turn, our nation will become a nation full of high quality and competitiveness.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow. Section 2 describes the importance of early childhood education and development in Indonesia. Section 3 concludes this work.

2. The Importance of Early Childhood Education and Development in Indonesia

2.1. Understanding Early Childhood Education

Education is the process of changing the attitudes and behavior of a person or a group of people in an effort to raise men through teaching and training (Complete Dictionary of Indonesians). Early Childhood Education is an education for children ages 0 to 6 years; this is in accordance with Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas), defining education for children ages 0 to 6 years old as Early Childhood Education (ECE). The Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System chapter 1, article 1, clause 14 stipulats that, "Early childhood education is a training effort targeted to children from birth to the age of 6 years, conducted through the provision of educational stimulation to help the physical and spiritual growth and development of children to have the readiness to get further education."

Early childhood education has a primary function to develop all aspects of child development, including the cognitive, physical (gross and fine motor), social and emotional developments. Various studies indicate that there is a very strong relationship between the developments experienced by children at an early age with their success in later life. For example, children living in an environment either at home or in preschool or kindergarten that is full of interactions using a good language will commonly be used to speak and pronounce words correctly. When they enter school, they already have the capital to read [21].

According to Byrnes (the winner of the title of Woman of the Year from Vitasoy, Australia) early childhood education will prepare children to face future periods; the closest is facing a schooling period. Currently, some kindergartens already require children who wish to enroll to be already able to read and count. They even have taught social skills and problem solving in kindergartens, since such abilities can be established at an early age. Furthermore, according to Byrnes, early childhood education is crucial, since at this age, children are ready for the best education. It is at this age that children establish their readiness facing a schooling period and the future. The best investment you can give to children is the preparation of their education at an early age.

There are two purposes why early childhood education should be organized: The main objective is to establish qualified children who grow and develop in accordance with the level of development, so that they have the optimal readiness to enter basic education and to go through life in adulthood. The secondary objective is to help prepare children to achieve learning (academic) readiness at school. In such terms, then early childhood education can be formulated as follows:

- a. Provide care and guidance which enable young children grow and develop in accordance with their age and potentials.
- b. Identifying irregularities that may occur, so that if there are deviations, early intervention can be done.
- c. Provide diverse and exciting experiences for young children that allow them to develop their potentials in various fields, so that they are ready to participate in education at primary school level.

2.2. The Importance of Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

The condition of Indonesian human resources is reflected through the results of a survey conducted by the PERC (Political and Economic Risk Consultancy) in March 2002. The survey shows that the quality of Indonesian education ranked the 12th lowest in the ASEAN region, *i.e.* a level below Vietnam. The low quality of education results in low quality of Indonesian human resources. In such condition it will certainly be difficult for Indonesia to compete with other countries. The human resource development carried out in the developed countries like USA, Germany, Japan, and so on, starts with early childhood development that includes treatment, care, and education as an incorporated program and implemented in an integrated manner.

The understanding the importance of early childhood development as a basic step for the development of human resources has also been established by other ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Singapore, as well as the industrialized country, South Korea. The early childhood education services in Singapore are even considered the most advanced compared to other ASEAN countries. In Indonesia, the implementation of early childhood education still seems exclusive, and only reaches a small portion of society. Singapore is a barometer of the implementation of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in the Asia Pacific region. Various ECE institutions from different countries often look to Singapore as a reference for the implementation of learning. In its implementation, ECE program in Singapore is coordinated by two different departments/ministries. Ministry of Community Youth and Sport (MCYS) overshadows the child care and infant/toddler care programs, while the Ministry of Education (MOE) overshadows the nursery, kindergarten one (K1), and kindergarten two (K2) programs [24]. The instructional material refers to the simplified curriculum of kindergarten. The short learning, a kind of shortcourses, are carried out by applying the learning method of Reggio Emilia, by giving learning stimulation in early childhood, giving knowledge to parents, and improving nearby-community participation. Children need to be given the ability to adjust to life. Therefore, the material presented during the short learning is more focused on aspects of Psychical, Intellectual, Language, Emotional, and Social (PILES) developments. By stimulating the

PILES aspects, children are expected to have readiness and ability to follow the teaching in elementary school.

The involvement of parents in the learning activities of children at home is a must, so that the learning atmosphere in school is supported and reinforced by the learning environment at home. For that, parenting education is crucial in early childhood education; hence parents are actively involved in the development of children. To be able to play their roles, parents are also given the knowledge and capabilities through simultaneous learning process, together with the learning given to their children. In addition to scheduled learning, home visit activity is a method implemented to provide knowledge for parents. Furthermore, parents are required to accompany and guide the education of their children, so that children have almost similar ability with their friends when entering elementary schools.

The program implementation process is handed over to private educational institutions that have been accredited. The role of government (MOE) is to provide the regulation and component standards of program implementation, such as: the passing grade (output), infrastructure and facilities of learning, competence of educators (teaching skills and educational background), and learning materials. In Singapore, the program is effective because of the high public awareness about the importance of education. In addition, there are fines/sanctions for families/parents whose do not send their children to early childhood education up to high school level. The fines and regulations are actually implemented so that parents and the community in Singapore are made aware of the importance of education for all [25]. Singapore's education system aims to provide basic knowledge and religion for students. To unify the diversity of characteristics, differences of race and culture, the diversity of languages, each students in Singapore learns English as a language of everyday life. Students also learn their mother language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil, or Thai) to help them retain their identity, culture, heritage, and values of the nation.

2.3. The Obstacles of Implementing Early Childhood Education

What is wrong with early childhood education in Indonesia? According to Professor S. Byrnes *i.e.* article in [21] that today there are many ECE institutions in Indonesia, especially in big cities, starting from internationally certified, to those having religious backgrounds. So many programs are offered, making parents confused to choose: which one is appropriate for their child? Byrnes said there are some obstacles that hamper early childhood education in Indonesia.

- a. *First*, early childhood education does not have a universal curriculum. The absence of universal standard triggers the uprising of many early childhood schools. There has been no standard of what age limit a child can do what activity. Different schools apply different standards. Having an international certificate turns out not to guarantee its quality. In fact, early childhood education is important; since it is in these ages that the best education can be established. Children in early childhood should establish their readiness to face school years and the future. The best investment given to children is educational preparation at an early age.
- b. *Second*, there is power struggle between children and the teacher. This could be an indication that the curriculum or the teaching method makes children do not feel at home. Resources for teachers should have knowledge of how to deal with children because every child is different.
- c. *Third*, several institutions of early childhood education is not consistent. Some even allow the nanny of the children to be in the classroom. This will make the children dependant on the nanny. They do not have the courage to do the learning activity, whereas children in early age must learn to take risks.
- d. *Fourth*, early childhood education in Indonesia has not been evenly distributed; the certification was not even a guarantee. Like-many other countries, early childhood

education is not subsidized by the government. Besides, the lack of training for teachers, a lack of cooperation between the school and parents, and lack of cooperation with other ECE institutions.

In addition, according to UNICEF Indonesia, there are some obstacles found in the implementation of early childhood education in Indonesia, namely:

- a. School fees are one of the barriers that prevent children to access and complete his education. The fees have not included transportation costs.
- b. The low quality of education roots from the learning process. Teacher certification and qualifications are required to improve the quality of education.
- c. The absence and demotivation of teachers is a constraint, especially in remote areas.
- d. Poverty, together with a low level of family education, encourages children to leave schools and become child laborers.
- e. The quality of early childhood education services needs to be improved.
- f. Institutional constraints and other obstacles hamper the implementation of early childhood education program comprehensively and integratedly. Cooperation among government agencies at various levels are required to perform in an integrated approach [26].

Meanwhile, according to World Bank, there are some aspects still considered lacking for early childhood education in Indonesia, causing the services limited and the implementation of programs undertaken by the Indonesian government not optimal. Some inputs from the World Bank are:

1. Interventions centered on the family, such as parental education or home visit programs, are needed to improve children achievements. This kind of service has not been running well in the existing early childhood education programs.
2. The early childhood education services must be comprehensive, including health care, education, and social protection needed by children aged 0-6 years. As of yet, there has been no strong synergy among services focusing on education, parenting, health, and nutrition. The government needs to move towards a model of early childhood education that is holistic and integrated.
3. The sustainability of services, and the results achieved will require support in the form of policies, systems, and resources [27].

2.4. The Policy Orientation for Future Early Childhood Education

The policy orientation of the Directorate of ECD is to (a.) expand early childhood education services with diversification of programs based on the existence of children; (b.) empower all potentials of the public; (c.) improve the understanding of parents, families, and other stakeholders about the importance of early childhood education; (d.) act as a mediator between the government, communities, practitioners, and experts; (e.) increase the institutional capacity of the ECE service, especially on the education-technical aspects; (f.) improve coordination with various agencies and other components related to holistic and integrated early childhood education services; (g.) increase the quantity and quality of teachers and education staff in every level of early childhood education, by facilitating internships/comparative studies, ECE institutional support, early childhood education pilot program/seminar/workshop/symposium, and others; and (h.) initiate and facilitate studies on the concept of early childhood education in the field.

The government, in this case, has formulated a policy on early childhood education [28-31]. The policy orientation of early childhood education is formulated in PPTK PAUDNI Strategic plan 2010-2014, emphasizing on achieving the mission of 5K namely:

- a. Increasing the availability of educational services,
- b. Increasing the affordability of educational services,
- c. Improving the quality and relevance of educational services,
- d. Improving equality in obtaining educational services, and

e. Increasing certainty/assuredness to obtain educational services [21]

The missions are to reach service excellence of the national education to establish intelligent human beings. Furthermore, the ECD system is needed based on awareness, openness, sustainability, building, understanding, and integratedness of standards in the learning process, in accordance with the target of achievement level of development; provision and management standard of teacher and education staffs; as well as standard of facilities and infrastructure, management, and financing.

Practically, the formation of ECE system shall be conducted through the following work programs:

- a. Establishing a vision and mission that ensures the availability of a conducive learning environment for the implementation of learning process appropriate for children from all classes, in order to develop optimally in accordance with their potentials.
- b. Designing student policy, namely by establishing a policy regarding the target learners, including their rights and obligations, determining the distribution of study groups based on age and capacity.
- c. Designing curriculum and learning activities by performing the following steps: (a.) modifying the indicators of the Standard of Development Achievement Level, listed in Regulation of the Minister of National Education to be more detailed, according to the assessment instruments that have been successfully arranged; (b.) cultivating these indicators into a matrix of achievement targets that form the basis for lesson planning; (c.) linking learning materials with the daily life of all learners; (d.) making learning design by leveraging the performance of the Reticular Activating System, Emotional Brain, Connections Mapping, and Brain Cycle, where if necessary, also create an individualized education program for children with disabilities; (e.) making an example of learning media, either in the form of worksheets and props, which meet the diverse needs; (f.) designing a sensory-based report as a tool of assessment for learning success; (g.) designing behavior modification using the principle of economic token.
- d. Preparing teachers and education staffs, namely: (a.) designing a selection system for recruiting teachers and education staffs; (b.) designing employee's capacity improvement through further education in accordance with the direction of their career development.
- e. Designing facilities and infrastructure, namely designing a learning environment that meets the needs of diverse learners.
- f. Expanding the network of public relations, namely by working with some competent authorities, for example doctors, psychologists, therapists, and other inclusive schools, and making school website as a tool of socialization of ECD system (pptkpaudni.kemendikbud.go.id).

3. Conclusion

It is undeniable that early childhood education is a very basic and strategic education in human resource development. It is so crucial that no wonder many countries pay great attention to its implementation; therefore, Indonesian government also provides free education up to junior level. Early childhood education not only serves to provide learning experiences to children, but more importantly also serves to optimize brain development. Early childhood education should also cover the whole process of psychosocial stimulation and is not limited to the learning process occurring in educational institutions. That is, early childhood education can take place anywhere and anytime, just like human interactions occurring in the family, between peers, and of communal relations in accordance with the early childhood conditions and development. Education is one of the factors determining the progress of a country. A good education shall produce a good nation. Singapore is a country that focuses on the education sector to advance the country. Education in Singapore starts from the level of Kindergarten School up to University. As the best among ASEAN countries in the fields of education, many factors cause the success of Singapore's education system. These factors are adequate facilities, cost factor, and factor of educators. Singapore's education system is based on the premise that every student has unique talents and interests. Singapore takes a flexible approach to foster the potential of the students.

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