

## **LOCAL APPLICATION AND MODIFICATION OF THE INDONESIAN NATIONAL ECE CURRICULUM**

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### **Application of the curriculum as a research problem**

Many factors determine the effective achievement of preschool education within national education policies. One of the most important is having a sensibly drafted national preschool curriculum that sets out specific aims and content guidelines for the education and care of children about to enter compulsory schooling and that establishes the uniform and binding conditions to achieve this. Indonesia has a normative national curriculum and thereby meets this basic condition and lays down the basis for the provision of a quality preschool education throughout the country.

However, one cannot assume that a normative and centrally established curriculum will be directly and uniformly implemented across all preschools, given their varying conditions. The political and educational aims contained within a centralized curriculum are modified by those who use and incorporate it into the everyday life of the preschool, and by the conditions under which it is implemented and the cultures within which the ECE is provided. The values and determinants of these cultures inform preschool teachers' professional beliefs and working methods, parental expectations and models of children's behaviour. This means that the curriculum necessarily adjusts to the local conditions that reflect the professional or personal values of local preschool actors, often in an unintentional and involuntary manner. In this way, a kind of localized curriculum emerges that may, or may not, correspond to the national goals contained within the national curriculum. This does not, however, mean that the localized version is ineffective or unworkable; indeed, it may respond to the educational needs and values of the local community and also be effective from a global, national perspective.

Much of the international research and our existing unsystematic observations of preschool settings confirm that such curriculums do exist and that they can take the form of both a declarative school curriculum and a "hidden" curriculum. But, we have little knowledge of their precise forms, the mechanisms by which they emerge, the shape they take and how they interact

with the national ECE strategy in Indonesia. Nor are we entirely sure of how they should be viewed in terms of the development of national ECE policies, such that they feed meaningfully and operationally into the practice of ECE in the specific and varied conditions of our localities. For it is within them that these policies are realized, that they take on specific contours and impact upon young children.

The basic goal of this research is to identify how the preschool curriculum adjusts to the specific conditions and how it is localized and realized in practice. This entails identifying the true nature of the local curriculum as it reflects the values and preferences of specific ECE players within their natural contexts. The research will consider the declarative local ECE curricula (expressed, for example, in documents referring to the specific visions and missions of the various preschools), as well as the values that are mediated through ECE and the strategies and mechanisms whereby teachers incorporate these into their daily work. Additionally it will consider how these values are communicated or conveyed through the expectations of the local community, particularly those of the wider family and social background of the children attending ECE.

The information obtained via the research can provide a greater understanding of how the national ECE strategy is implemented at the local level, what impact it in fact has on ECE, and what role local players adopt in this process. They do not simply act as passive subjects when implementing the national preschool policy goals; they engage actively with the process and are the source of true diversity within ECE, which is all the greater and stronger, the more diverse and varied that society is. In Indonesia this diversity is both natural and much in evidence. It must, at the very least, be taken into account, not only in an academic sense, but also so the effectiveness of national ECE policies can be improved for the future.

### **Research of localization of the curriculum in detailed aspects**

If we want to understand the adaptation strategies that make the curriculum a local one, we need to choose more detailed research objectives. In long-term research, the complexity and breadth of the problem demands:

- to identify and analyse ECE programmes as declaratively stipulated in selected preschools,

- to analyse and describe the personal professional beliefs of preschool directors and teachers regarding the purpose of ECE as practiced,
- to identify the curricula followed in specific preschools in relation to the national ECE curriculum and to the local conditions,
- to determine the level of engagement among professional ECE workers in modifying and localizing the curriculum, in relation to their formal qualifications,
- to determine the proximity to the national ECE curriculum of any local curricula that have been identified,
- to analyse the national ECE curriculum (strengths and weaknesses) in relation to the existence of local curricula; to identify the potential for the national curriculum to be adjusted at the local level,
- to describe the engagement of preschool teachers as active actors in implementing the strategic aims of ECE at the local level,
- to identify and describe the degree of diversity in the local ECE curricula and cultures in the different localities and conditions under which ECE is realized,
- to identify the value profiles of the local curricula at the declarative level and within the “hidden” curriculum,
- to compare selected mechanisms whereby teachers become familiar with the ECE curriculum in Indonesia and countries in which similar research has been conducted.

### **Initial Findings and Comparative Framework**

From the discussion that had been done in three institutions in the different province, with three principals and six teachers; the result of the implementation of the local application and modification of the national ECE curriculum are as follow.

At the first institution in Kendal, we saw teachers prepared one activity for children which stated in the curriculum. Teachers made a simple implemented activity where children can try to made satay from Tempeh (one of the traditional food made from soya). Both group of children (A and B), 33 children were in the same class together joined this activity. The principal explained that the topic of "my needs" was an application for children to broaden child's information on how they understand the process of making the traditional food.

The process where teachers did in the beginning start with dicing the tempeh, seasoned it, then fried it. Once it ready, teacher presented the fried tempeh to the children, then children do the final process where the sticks are needed. They stacked the fried tempeh, add the soy sauce, then ate it. Children looked enthusiastic for this activity. The reason why children did not do all the steps mentioned by the teacher was because of the limitations of cooking utensils and to avoid children from injuries that could be caused by accidents with stoves and hot oil.

However, the main weakness of the activity is the failure to address how the children should technically do from the first step. Andresen, Boud, and Cohen (2000) mentioned that learners need to analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing in order to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience. Nurchayati and Pusari (2014) supported that the process of making and processing food, providing knowledge in the form of color and number recognition, motoric training, and also introducing the names of objects in the kitchen. Furthermore, it is believed that at the pre-operational representation-the beginnings of language, of the symbolic function, and therefore of thought, or representation; there must be a reconstruction of all that was developed on the sensory-motor level (Piaget, 1964).It means that the children need to know and understand the steps of each process to construct their own experience.

From the teachers point of view, most of the activity like what they have done, teachers often skip the essential steps to avoid fatal accidents in children caused by fire. However, as this activity very clearly demonstrates, it is important for teacher to show how to cut the tempe with a plastic knife, spice it up, then fries it. One thing for sure, teacher should be attach to children when frying; or teacher can invite the children to take turns looking at this frying process. It can be seen from this activity that the scientific approach from the 2013 curriculum is actually implemented in accordance to their needs; where children will make questioning from the things they did. Difficulties arise, however, when an attempt is made to implement the curriculum. Researcher asked about the learning tools that should be available at school, the principal stated that the curriculum was not fully prepared, and sought to be shown to the researcher in the following day. Indeed, before the academic year start, teacher should prepare the learning tools they need, not vice versa.

With a simple tools and materials, teachers should be able to arrange many activities which is adjusted to the curriculum where they can implement the content based on their needs within

their region/area. It also stated that early childhood is the most effective and cost-efficient time to ensure that all children develop their full potential (Engle, et al., 2011). In contrast, it may say that with the supporting school facilities do not necessarily guarantee the diverse activities within the preschool. To enhance the teachers ability in teaching, teachers need training, coaching, supervision, training, in-service education, pre-service, in-house training, and lesson study can be followed up (Ziswan, 2014); so that teachers can implement curriculum-based learning which has been modified.

The second observation conducted at one preschool in West Sumatra. It is a step for researchers to be able to dig deeper into how the curriculum is carried out in other region that have a slightly different culture and conditions. Researchers see that this school has a variety of supporting facilities. Not only seen from the area of land and buildings, but also a variety of children's playground equipment available both inside and outside the room. It is believed that supporting the children with physically playground tools may improve their stages of development. In contrast, the preschool's outdoor playground covered with cement not grasses. Although it is common in a typical Indonesian school, in fact, it is not suitable for children playground. Along with it, Yuliarto (2010) mentioned that it is better to make an outdoor play in the field, with grass as it base instead of cement castings or corn blocks. Moreover, the reason is more appropriate for the safety of children when they play; and can avoid fatal injuries due to falling on a hard base.

During the learning and teaching process, children enjoyed the activities prepared by the teachers. Some children ask about the certainty for what they must do on their works. In this process, the teacher provides a good explanation for apperception and extracting information from the child, so that the learning process occurred with practical question and answer. The function of this kind of method is to accommodate children who have completed all activities, motivate children to complete their tasks, and develop emotional, social, independence, cooperation and creativity aspects of children (Leoniya, 2015).

Can be described furthermore, when children play outdoors, some teachers accompany children while the teacher is watching them to play safely. Playing outside is done after the child has finished learning and eating activities. Although teachers did the systematic ways of teaching, it cannot be set-apart from the tools in teaching. Most teachers using the magazine -which is full of worksheet- for their daily activities for children. Teacher ask the children to open their "activity

book” -magazine to do the counting, rather than do motoric activity with leaves, or other natural resources or balls or dice for example.

The last preschool observation conducted on the island of Sulawesi, Gorontalo city, which is located near the northern tip of Indonesia. Assisted by a local committee, researchers invited to a kindergarten which located around the campus. This kindergarten is quite prominent because the building is quite large. At present, the preschool has two classes for Playgroups, and eight classes for Kindergarten. The amount of space affects the number of students in this school. At least, there are approximately 280 students in this school.

The principal explained that the institution he led became a place for activities designed by the kindergarten teacher team, which usually attended by teachers or students from different areas around Gorontalo. The recent activity was a center of kindergarten leaders' meetings throughout Gorontalo City, in which discussed various matters relating to improving the quality of learning, including the discussion of the action agenda in commemoration of the national education day.

In general, the area of learning in this preschool adjusted with the indicators developed, the facilities and tools used. Children can move to other areas according to their interests. For children who do not want to move activities, the teacher must motivate children to work in other areas. This area of learning includes three main pillars, namely; (1) constructivity; (2) in accordance with developments, and (3) progressive education (PAUD Jateng, 2015). Again, the lesson plan showed by the principal is not fully completed. Whereas in fact, curriculum or learning tools are made to accommodate the learning process for early children in relation to conducting environmental arrangements, providing selected main materials, building interactions with children and making plans for children's activities (Ministry of National Education, 2007).

From the six teachers interviewed, some stated that making curriculum is difficult, and requiring truly thinking. It is no longer become a secret that usually the lesson plan or the modified curriculum in the school is made by the group of teachers within the regions. So, not all the teachers in each school make the lesson plan. They prefer to receive the result of the curriculum that has been "made". This was echoed by the teachers in three different province. In line with this statement, Ziswan (2014) revealed that the facts in the field, many teachers were confused and did not understand how to arrange the learning tools. A more comprehensive study result by Gunawan (2017) describes that the constraints faced by the teachers' lesson plans are still not referring to the Curriculum 2013; application of learning with a scientific approach by the

teacher is not optimal; teachers less than optimal in applying the learning model; and teachers are not optimal assess student learning outcomes that cover three domains of learning, namely the attitude, knowledge and skills

On the other hand, the curriculum is an important thing to be understood by educators. Clearly, it is stated in the regulation of Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 137 of 2014 concerning the National Standards for Early Childhood Education, one of which deals with Process Standards which includes learning planning, implementation of learning, Evaluation of Learning and Learning Supervision in this case related to ECE curriculum standards (Hanita, 2017). Yet, as it stated before, the ECE curriculum program absolutely cannot be carried out by one single party. Developing well-coordinated cooperation would seemingly be more helpful, especially public supervision and parenting debriefing as maintenance of social understanding. It is also one of key features of good curriculum (Ismail, & Fata, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The three preschools are using the national curriculum as a learning reference. Teachers as one of the school system still trying their best to modify the curriculum which is suitable for their needs in their own region. Most of the teachers stated that making the curriculum is challenging, and requiring a genuinely thinking. Even how, to modify the curriculum, training and mentoring continuously are needed to help the teacher in the right path for implementing the curriculum, also modified it with their local need.

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