

Teachers' Perception towards the Abolishment of Academic Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian government has prohibited academic early childhood education. However, teachers at many kindergartens in Indonesia still give literacy and numeracy to students. The researcher, therefore, was interested in conducting research exploring teachers' perception towards the abolishment of academic early childhood education in Indonesia. The method of the research was qualitative research by using phenomenological method. The informants of this research were teachers at TK Para Bintang Jambi. In collecting the data the researcher used interview. Through interview, the researcher found that all teachers at this kindergarten appreciate governments policy related to teaching literacy and numeracy prohibition. Unfortunately, they cannot implement the policy due to some reasons. They are because people claim that students in kindergarten are in golden period to grasp knowledge, parents expect their children able to read, write, and count as early as possible, Elementary Schools still carry out enrolment test, and many teachers misunderstand the curriculum demands of early childhood.

Key Words: *perception, academic early childhood education.*

INTRODUCTION

As Indonesian governments have prohibited pre-schools to be academic early childhood education, many kindergartens, parents and teachers still teach children academically. Academic-model early childhood education is learning curriculum for children aged before 7 years old which emphasize the learning of numeracy and literacy all day long at schools. The issue of whether we should allow our children aged before 6 are taught with overly academic

burden has been widely debated in our country recently. It is an important issue because it concerns fundamental cognitive, psychological, and behavioral development of our children. A variety of different arguments have been put forward about this issue.

Some people believe that academic-model early childhood education can improve children's cognitive development due to two reasons. Firstly, teaching children academic content in their childhood is better than teaching them after aged 7 years old.

Literacy and numeracy develops in early period of kids (Strictland & Ayers 2006). Children will find it difficult to read and count if they are not often exposed to meaningful experiences of literacy and numeracy. But, exposing students with literacy and numeracy early in their childhood makes them able to read without comprehending the reading. This phenomenon leads to Indonesia poor math achievement compared to other countries in joining math competition. Indonesia ranks 32 from 34 countries. According to Turisqoh (2015), the problem happens because children with rapid exposure to reading and math early in their life cannot understand the math story questions. Indeed, they just read without grasping the meaning. It is based on a research conducted by Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The subjects of research were the fourth year students of 12 Islamic primary schools who were given test related to reading comprehension. According to Suhardjono (2008) as a member of PIRLS committee most students cannot answer the questions well because they did not comprehend the meaning of the questions.

Secondly, pre-schools with play-based curriculum are perceived not able to prepare

children in encountering academic demands of formal schools. Children who are enrolled to academic-model pre-schools have higher score in standardized test than those with play-based curriculum pre-schools. However, the discrepancy in score between children with academic curriculum kindergartens and play-based kindergartens happen only at the first year of formal school. This is strengthened by a research conducted in America (1998) that children from academic-model early childhood education do not have short term academic excellence nor long term academic excellence compared to children from play-based early childhood education. Children from academic preschools even show restiveness and minor creativity.

In addition, play is an appropriate situation to teach children because children's neural pathways in brain are more developed by exploring, solving problem, thinking and communicating during play. According to council of minister education Canada (2010) play advances intelligence, imagination, confidence, self esteem, problem solving, and positive attitude towards learning. Forcing children to learn something that they are not interested in may create bad perception perceived by

children that can affect their next level of education. Furthermore, a research done in Finland by Korkman et al (1999) proved that children who learn to read when they have formal schooling (6-7 years old) have better reading achievement compared to children who have studied to read before they are 6 years of age. The researchers conducted research by testing children (subjects of the research) when they are 9 to 10 years old. Moreover, some experts now claim that one of the greatest predictors of life-long success is child's ability to control impulses and self regulation, which is learned in social environments (Council of minister education Canada 2010) not in academic-model pre-schools which offer many worksheets to kids. On the other hand, Prasojo, et al (2017:53) said that the familiarity of Social Network Service (SNS) used by the students could also help them feel more comfortable and motivated since SNS provide the users a communication environment which is not limited with space and time because they are online tools that generate interaction by allowing new opportunities for more information, interest, and data sharing.

TK Para Bintang is one of many kindergartens in Jambi city that still teach

their students literacy and numeracy (academic model early childhood education). This school is located in Kenali Jaya street No.144 Jambi city. It is a favorite school indicated by the increasing number of students in each year. Researcher is really interested in knowing the teachers' perception about the abolishment of literacy and numeracy in early childhood education.

METHOD

This research is related to the analysis of teachers' perception towards the elimination of academic model early childhood education. Therefore, this research was designed into a qualitative approach by using phenomenological method. Sukmadinata (2008:63) states that phenomenological research collects the data concerning the concept, opinion, conviction, attitude, evaluation and giving meaning to the situation or the life experiences. Furthermore, according to Kuswarno (2008) phenomenological method is not intended to find the correct nor wrong answer instead to explore people's awareness towards phenomenon perceived.

To obtain the data, researcher interviewed the teachers at TK Para Bintang. According to Sugiyono (2006:261)

interview will provide the researcher a means to gain a deeper understanding of how the participant interprets a situation or phenomenon that cannot be gained through observation alone. The suitable type of interview was an informal or unstructured interview with the relaxed environment. It was applied in order to make the informants (teachers) feel comfortable during the interview. In this case the name of the subject will be anonym unless otherwise negotiated and agreed. It was recorded to ease the researcher in collecting data. There are six teachers in this school. However, researcher only interviewed three teachers because researcher only focused on teachers of students aged four to five years old (TK A).

Gay (2000:447) states that analyzing qualitative data is formidable. It is also difficult job. Therefore, the one who conduct qualitative research must systematically search, categorize, integrate and interpret data that have been obtained, and the researcher will also need to provide their own understanding towards the data. In analyzing the data, I followed the techniques of data analysis offered by Gay as: 1) Data managing, arrange the data from each informant in order not to be exchanged; 2)

Reading/memoing, researcher read the answer obtained from interview; 3) Describing, the researcher explain thoroughly how the informants perceive case being discussed; 4) Classifying, sorting the informants' answer based on categories that represent different aspects of data; 5) Interpreting, the writer identified the important themes and meaning in the data about teachers' perception of academic early childhood education; 6) Representing the finding.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perception towards Abolishment of Literacy and Numeracy in Early Childhood Education.

According to teachers in kindergarten, the neglect of reading, writing, and counting in kindergartens is difficult to implement, not because of teachers. Teachers will certainly feel eased when not teaching math or reading. However, Chaotic between those who agree and disagree will always be discussed and become a polemic for teachers. This is because from the beginning the introduction of academic material has been taught in kindergarten but they almost never had any complaints from parents about the rejection of their children to learn. In fact, according to reports they receive

from parents, their children are always eager to go to school every day unless they got sick.

Factors Causing Teachers Still Teach Literacy and Numeracy in Early Childhood Education.

1. People claim that students in kindergarten are in golden period to grasp knowledge.

Based on the interview result, three informants (teachers) had almost the same opinion related to the importance of literacy and numeracy to be learnt by children before 7. They said that learning literacy and numeracy in early childhood education is not a taboo thing. It is very possible to make them happy. Even, the students are in their golden age, children should get the right stimulus so that they can actually be printed into a golden generation that can advance the nation. The key lies only in the way the knowledge is transferred to them.

If we can find the right or effective way or method in teaching literacy and numeracy for young children without putting aside their pleasure, why do not we optimize their potential during the golden period. The key is we have to follow the world of children that is play. So learning is done with fun, not burdening the child so they do not feel forced. Unlike the case when

learning is done while playing, then the child will be easier to understand and can remember for long-term memory. (Informant 3, interview 20 April 2018).

Academic model early childhood education is cruel. Although some people argue that children are deserved to have academic learning because they are in the golden age for learning and they can deal with the pressure of academic work. They can only deal with the introduction of pre-literacy and math (dokter sehat: 2015). There are three reasons for not teaching children with academic burden. Firstly, according to Piaget (1994), kindergarteners are not ready to have structured pattern of thinking. They are not ready to remember formula and apply the formula to the problems they have. That is why Piaget always emphasizes social interaction to be involved in children's learning. Secondly, children who are exposed to heavy burden of academic works tend to have more behavior problems than those who do not. They sometimes have nightmare completed with diarrhea, stomachaches or headache (Budzienski: 2017). These symptoms lead them afraid of going to schools. They perceive schools as frightening places which will only make them depressed. The worst

thing is that they may bring this perception to their next education. Thereby, children will lose their desire to study.

2. Parents expect their children able to read, write, and count as early as possible.

As a teacher, I understand why the government forbids us to teach students to read, write and count but on the other hand we have to deal with parents who really expect their children to master the script and math since kindergarten. If their request is not fulfilled then it will certainly affect the number of new students who will enroll to our school. (Informant 1, interview 20 April 2018)

Most parents in Indonesia tend to choose kindergarten with academic-model education. It is caused by the standardized test conducted by primary schools as an enrollment test. According to Lin and Qin Hai (1995), high scores in examination is a big concern of parents. In addition, many parents worry their children cannot pass the exam and enter favorite schools because some elementary schools in Indonesia oblige candidate students to reach certain standard set by the schools. This reason is not a matter anymore because Indonesian government has prohibited primary schools

to conduct test as a requirement that students should pass before being accepted at the schools. However, although governments have prohibited elementary schools to conduct test to determine candidate students' pass, many parents still want their children to be taught academically in preschools. Some parents want their children to be able to read, count and write in their early education. Besides the ability to read in early age is regarded as a prestigious ability to be shown to be proud of, it is also a determinant for better future for Indonesian children perceived by parents. Indeed, academic-model of early childhood education is considered to be moment for preparing bright future for Indonesian younger generation. However, brilliant people such as Albert Einstein, George S Patton, and William Butler Yeats are great persons who were able to read lately (Turisqoh 2015). Albert Einstein was able to read after he was nine years old and so did William Butler and George S Patton. It is evidence that having high cognitive ability in early childhood is not the only factor to better life.

Furthermore, many parents do not understand the essence of play-based curriculum for early childhood education

(Turk 2015). Some of them believe that kindergartens are institutions that can teach academic to their children. If math and literacy are not taught, they tend to let their children at home and teach their children by themselves or send kids to math and literacy course. According to Levin (2000), parents whose children have studied in play-model preschools have good perceptions towards this kind of curriculum. Therefore, it is essential for governments to familiarize parents with play-model early childhood education through socialization and preschools quality improvement.

3. Elementary Schools Still Carry Out Enrolment Test

When our students graduate and want to continue their studies to elementary school then the elementary school will hold a test to test the students. Those who can read, write and count will be accepted. Therefore we are rather urged to teach children literacy and numeracy because if not they will fail to enter the public school or favorite school. This certainly gives a bad image for the quality of our school. Later the parents will think many times before putting their children into our school.
(Informant 1, 21 April 2018)

According to Suyanto (2010) there is no reason for elementary level (SD) or equivalent primary education providers to hold admission tests for prospective students. Government Regulation (PP) No. 17 Year 2010 on the management and implementation of education clearly and firmly mention it. Based on government regulations, namely Government Regulation (PP) No 17 of 2010 on the management and implementation of education, only the age consideration should be used as the basis of admission for elementary school students, not the test of academic ability. PP No. 17 of 2010, especially article 69 paragraph 4 and 5, which regulates the acceptance of students at the level of primary school / MI or other similar forms. Article 4 states that SD or other equivalent forms shall receive citizens aged 7 (seven) years up to 12 (twelve) years as learners up to the limits of their capacity. While article 5 states; the acceptance of students of grade 1 (one) SD or other equivalent forms is not based on the results of reading, writing and numeracy, or other tests.

4. Many teachers misunderstand the curriculum demands of early childhood.

In the curriculum of early childhood there are words imitate, pronounce, and write letters or numbers and "use stationery correctly". These words easily become a gap for educators to teach academic things. Governments should avoid using words that are at risk of misinterpretation. When teachers do not teach reading easily we will be protested because of the language of the curriculum. Being a kindergarten teacher today will be a dilemma. Teaching literacy is wrong, not teaching is also wrong. (Informant 2, 19 April 2018).

In fact, the percentage of literacy and numeracy in the curriculum is very small. But in practice these are taught daily and many early schools target students' literacy capability. Whereas learning in kindergarten must be fun and if it should be taught to read and write then the teacher simply introduce the most basic materials as contained in the curriculum of early childhood. The governments in this case as a curriculum policy maker is not necessarily to blame because the use of the language is correct but the government should be firm in the kindergarten that overcharges the child with

the matter of calculation. This can be done with socialization and inspection to the school.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, academic model early childhood education should not be implemented in Indonesia, or at the very least no high stake math and literacy test given to kindergarteners. Giving overly academic burden to children will only hamper their cognitive, psychological, and behavioral development. Our children should no longer be prepared to tolerate unnecessary academic burden for the purpose of elementary schools enrollment or parents' desire to have incredible children. If preschoolers continue to have academic burdens as victims of parents and schools, we must be ready for having younger generation with limited childhood fun experience and low academic ability and creativity in the future. Until then, governments should introduce parents and teachers the importance of play-model early childhood education as the best model of preschools for children's development.

In fact, teachers actually support government policy to prohibit teaching literacy. But they are powerless to

immediately apply the policy as a whole. This is due to several factors such as the demands of the parents of the students. Parents want their children to be proficient in reading and writing so they can pass the primary school entrance test. If literacy is not taught then the parent will incur more expenses to enter their children to additional course. This phenomenon is also exacerbated by the assumption that kindergarten students are in the golden period so it is a pity if not taught to read and write. Misunderstanding of the meaning of the curriculum for early childhood education is also the reason why the removal of literacy in kindergarten is difficult to apply.

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