

Research article

The Instructional Shift of Early Childhood Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract.

One of the prevention measures used to stop the spread of COVID-19 was to stop face-to-face learning at all levels of education, including early childhood education programs. Early childhood education, which is rich in teacher-student interaction, has been transformed into virtual learning. The purpose of this article was to look at how the early childhood education program in Kendari changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a descriptive qualitative study. Data were collected through documentation analysis and interviews with key informants, such as school principals, teachers and parents of the students. Triangulation techniques were used to assess the validity of the findings. The results revealed that the early year program in Kendari underwent significant transformations in almost every aspect of learning, including curriculum, educators, strategies, media, learning objectives and learning outcome evaluation. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a change in all learning components, namely psychological and social distancing, so that learning activities were no longer carried out in the classroom with teachers and friends. PAUD teachers now involve parents in implementing learning in each student's home.

Keywords: transformation, teaching model, education

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has become a problem that has created a multi-dimensional crisis, not only in the health sector, but also in the social, economic, and educational dimension. One of the responses in the education sector to the Covid-19 pandemic is the existence of circular number 4 of 2020 concerning the implementation of education policies in the emergency period of the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) from the ministry of education and culture. This opens a new stage in learning form in educational institutions at each level of education. The termination of face-to-face learning for all levels of education starting from basic education, secondary education and higher education, including early childhood education, is a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Early childhood education learning which was initially full of interactions


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between teachers and students in early childhood education institutions transformed into virtual distance learning activities.

Early childhood education still prioritizes the principle of playing while learning even though it uses distance learning. Papalia and Feldman argued that as learning activities, playing has contributed to aspects of early childhood development. Through playing, children master body functions properly, coordinate their eyes with their movements, train their muscles, make decisions and gain new skills / abilities [1]. Hurlock further explained that early childhood was known as the toy stage because all the play routines of children used toys [2]. Suyadi and Ulfah argue that by playing, children are involved in exploring, detecting and using objects around them as a media [3]. For all learning activities in early year education, playing is the main strategy for educators to implement.

A well-designed play whose purpose is achieving learning object will be very good and effective for stimulating child development. Jawati suggested that the cognitive abilities of children aged 5-6 years could be improved by playing ludo geometry [4]. Dice games are very good for the development of children's prosocial behavior [5]. Tatminingsih stated that a comprehensive game-based learning model may improve children's cognitive abilities and can be applied either to the center or group models [6]. Ayu argued that children's cognitive abilities in counting activities could be improved through the number card playing method [7]. Based on the assumptions, it leads to the idea that playing activities in early year school must be made with the good planning and use of media in accordance with the child's development. All early year educators as managers of the learning process should be able to use and select media properly, so that children development can be maximized.

Educators in early year school consist of senior teachers, accompanying teachers and young accompanying teachers whose status is determined by the teachers' educational qualifications. As professional early childhood educators, they have the main task of planning learning, implementing and evaluating learning outcomes as well as providing guidance, training, care and protection [8] While planning stage is related to the preparation of daily, weekly, and semester learning plans, play activities and assessment of learning outcomes are on the step of learning implementation.

Due to covid 19 outbreak, the role of early year teacher tends to change. While in normal life, early year school is only handled by main, accompanying, and young-accompanying teacher, the parents of respected students also take a role during the pandemic. This is suited to the government policy which makes social and physical distancing required to do and all learning activities be held online. As a consequence, the full engagement of parents in educating the children should be made. The main,

accompanying, young accompanying teachers who used to stimulate the development of cognitive, language, motoric, social-emotional, moral children's ability, functions as learning planning makers and assessors during the pandemic.

The aspects of development that are stimulated by the parents of students at home are in accordance with or the same as the aspects of development developed by main teachers, namely the aspects of cognitive development, physical motor skills, language, religion and morals, art and social emotional. This is suited the regulation of the minister of education and culture number 137 about national standards for early childhood education which states that the level of achievement of child development is an ability that must be achieved by early childhood in five aspects of development, namely religious and moral values, physical motor skills, cognitive, language, social emotional and arts [9].

Despite learning practice at home, the perception of parents about early childhood learning that is identical to children must be able to read or recognize the letters of the alphabet, write properly and correctly is still visible, but the aspect of children's development which gets intense stimulation is only cognitive, language, and spiritual sector. Ruhaena and Ambarwati suggest that the development of pre-school children's interest and early literacy skills can be made from home [10]. Likewise, the findings from Fatihah and Widayati suggested that the dice image media may improve the literacy skills of group children [11].

The provision of developmental stimulation to children in early years school is very important to do so that the potential and abilities of the children can grow and develop in a planned and massive manner. Hapsari, Ruhaena and Pratisti suggest that the stimulation program can improve the early literacy skills of preschool children [12]. The implementation of learning that has adjusted to Covid-19 pandemic has attracted the interest of the author to focus the study of the transformation of early childhood education learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Research Method

This research is qualitative with analytical descriptive method and was conducted from June to August 2020. Researcher is as an instrument to find and categorize the data obtained. The data were collected through documentation and interviews with some informants (The principal of early year school, the teachers, and parents of the children who received early childhood services in Kendari City. The data collected was then

categorized, presented, and concluded by the researcher. Triangulation was used to maintain the validity of the research data.

3. Results and Discussion

The interaction between teachers and children in the form of learning while playing is important to implement in early years school. Due to the pandemic, those learning activities have experienced a transformation affecting all levels of education make adjustments to such models. Learning implementation, which was initially carried out in the classrooms, has transferred into online learning. Class activities which first focused on achieving standard of curriculum changes to giving meaning learning experience to students without the achievement of targeted curriculum. Besides, the materials taught to the students is closely related to life skills such as the understanding of the corona virus transmission between the countries, regardless the targeted syllabi.

Also, same changes can be seen in the form of student's activities. Initially rigid and stick to the curriculum, students' activities now are in accordance with their interest and talent and considered with learning facilities the students have in the home. As consequence, the form of learning activities varies between the students. Finally, learning outcomes previously focused on mastery of knowledge, skills and attitudes by providing scores in the form of numbers quantitatively, the policy changes this to qualitative feedback that is useful to teachers without having to bother giving quantitative scores to the students.

With the purposes of giving support to the children's physical and spiritual growth, early childhood education provides educational services to children from birth to six years of age so that they have the skills to continue at the next level of education. Sujiono stated that early childhood education includes both efforts and actions given by educators and parents to provide stimulation, guidance, and care for children so as to create an atmosphere that allows children to explore experiences, knowledge and understanding of learning experiences that children have obtained from the environment, by observing, imitating, experimenting repeatedly and involving all the potential and intelligence of children [13].

Previously, early childhood learning patterns were carried out with active involvement of educators and students through playing while learning. But because of covid-19 outbreak, all of these activities were at home. Providing stimulation for cognitive, language, physical motor, social emotional, religious and moral as well as art must be done in the homes of each student. The provision of stimulation for early childhood development

is carried out effectively and efficiently by teachers using a variety of media with the principle that the main activity of children is playing while learning. Zaini stated that the learning method for early childhood is play [14]. Playing is the main activity of children to learn and explore their experiences so that children gain new knowledge.

The learning transformation at the early childhood education level in Kendari city occurs online and semi online. While online learning activities are carried out using social media (WhatsApp group), semi-online learning is held by teachers visiting students' home while using WhatsApp as a learning platform.

To do an online learning, by utilizing WhatsApp as learning platforms, the teacher sent learning plan with materials to the parents and then guide the parents to use that learning plan to do a supervision of students' learning activities. Meanwhile, semi online learning is conducted by communicating the entire plan for the implementation of daily learning when the teacher visits the parents of students at their respective homes and the control of the implementation will be carried out using social media (WhatsApp group) including the parent's assessment to the children.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the form of implemented learning in early years is that beside as a learning planning maker, the teacher functions as an assessor. Meanwhile, the implementation of learning is fully conducted by the parents at home with the principle of learning while playing. Previous early children playing activities were always with teachers and their peers, but because of the coronavirus disease, children's playing activities are with close family members. Mulyasa stated that there are several types of games for early childhood as a learning method, including social play, playing with objects and role playing [15].

4. Conclusion

To conclude, for children, playing activities carried out at home is closer to both methods of playing with objects and role playing. The transformation of early childhood education in Kendari city occurs in almost all learning components, starting from curriculum, educators, strategies, media, to objectives and evaluation of learning outcomes. The transformation is a result of social and physical distancing, a policy to contain the outbreak of corona virus, affecting that there are no learning activities between the students and teachers in the classroom. Also, the teachers involve parents as a partner in implementing learning activities while children are stayed in their homes.

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