# Parents_and_Teachers

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# Parents and Teachers' Voices of Quality Preschool: Preliminary findings from Indonesia

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**Abstract** —This paper describes preliminary findings of a study on Indonesian teachers and parents' perspectives of quality preschool program. It departs in one hand from the context of the Indonesian government massive promotion of early childhood programs and on the other hand of the country top-down, government-dominated quality system. Moreover, it is contextualized within the growing body of literatures, which emphasizes the centrality of quality issues to early childhood service and the notion that quality is a complex, contextual, multifaceted construction and idea. This study found that even though parents and teachers' constructions of quality share some commonalities with those of the government-constructed ones, they significantly differ. The government-constructed quality framework for example emphasizes on teacher formal qualification, but teachers and parents have moved beyond such formality and urged the importance of teacher personal character

**Keywords** —early childhood education, Indonesia, parent, teacher, quality.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the Indonesian teachers and parents' opinion about quality preschool program. To do so, it also reviews the way the Indonesian government policy defines quality of its preschool education. The study from which this paper departs was situated mainly within the following contexts. The first is the Indonesian government massive campaign for of early childhood education (ECE), notably since the early 2000s [1] in one hand, and the country top-down preschool education quality system on the other hand [2]. Secondly, the fact that parents' engagement is believed as one of the prerequisites for quality ECE [3]-[5], including in Indonesian context [6], yet in most cases parents are subordinated and their voices are hardly heard or seen as not important [7, 8]. The third and seemingly more theoretical point of departure is the understanding of 'quality' as a complex, contextual, and multifaceted idea [9]-[13]; and that 'quality' is not a sort of one-size-fits-all concept [14, 15] that can easily be unilaterally defined and regulated.

With this understanding in mind, this paper assumes that quality could mean different things for different speakers and audience. Furthermore, it argues that the

idea of quality cannot just be single-mindedly framed, even under such seemingly powerful words and phrases as, say, 'national quality framework', 'national standard' or 'government regulation'. Considering the potential complexity of quality, a sole reliance on such official yet single-minded and single-sourced concept is undoubtedly dangerous if not even misleading for the creation of high quality preschool program. Thus, by investigating teachers and parents' voices aspirations about preschool quality, this study is expected to provide an understanding of quality from different point of view.

## INDONESIAN ECE AT A GLANCE

Formally speaking, and seen from a policy perspective, ECE was introduced in Indonesia in the early 2000s [16]. In a cultural perspective, early care and education however have established for long, dated back even to the country's imperial era before Indonesia as a nation-state was proclaimed and modern-day kindergarten was founded. In the past it was a common practice for parents, to send their young children to live together in their relatives, colleagues or a guru's family [17]. This practice however has been eroded along with the introduction of modern education system; yet in

some cases it has been transformed into the boardinghouse education system.

The European colonization in the past had enabled the introduction of the Western-styled preschool education into the archipelago, mainly Fröbelian kindergarten program [17, 18], even though it was almost impossible for the local children to access it. Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat, later named Ki Hajar Dewantara and the first Indonesian education minister was the most prominent indigenous figure to bridge the local childcare practice and the Western one. After his relocation from political exile in the Netherlands, he founded Taman Siswa (literally, Garden of Pupils) in 1922; and for the younger children, Taman Indria (literally, Garden of Senses)—referring to the massive sensory development and the child's sensory-driven exploration during the early childhood period. Dewantara's very legacy is his educational principle of tut wuri handayani (literally means 'supporting from the back'), which in many ways is the localization of the Western constructivism's scaffolding—a West-East encounter [19, p. 3] praises it as "a creative amalgam". Following the death of Dewantara in 1959 the Taman Siswa has also faded. No comprehensive explanation is seemingly available about why such "creative amalgam" is not formally adopted into Indonesian preschool education policy, regardless the fact that his name is always referred across Indonesian literatures of education and early childhood studies.

A breakthrough took place in 2003 along with the enactment of a new education law [20]. Unlike the pre-existing 1989 education law, the new law clearly stipulates "earlychildhood education" [20]. It also regulates the ways early education is delivered, that is, through the informal or family-based line, the non-formal lines, and the formal lines. Inclusive to the non-formal lines are services delivered through institutions such play groups and nursery school, which can cater children from birth up to the age of six. The formal line includes kindergarten and Raudhatul Athfal (Islamic kindergarten), which provide the service specifically for children aged 4 to 6. Kindergartens are under the coordination of the Ministry of National Education (MONE, now, Ministry of Education and Culture, MOEC), while Raudhatul Athfals belongs to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). Prior to the birth of the 2003 law, the government created the Directorate of Early Childhood Education (DECE) within the MONE. This made the early childhood education service has become more complicated, as there was another body within the MONE structure responsible for formal early childhood education, namely Directorate for Kindergarten and Primary School. This had brought a new, more serious challenge, for each directorate hold its own construction of quality and standard of good young children education. The duality was eventually solved after the birth of the President Regulation No. 24 of 2010 [21], which gives MONE only one body responsible for early childhood education. This however does not merger MOEC-MORA responsibilities for early childhood education.

The presence and involvement of multiple actors in early childhood sectors is not a phenomenon exclusive to Indonesia, indeed it s commonly found across the world [22]. But such situation is undoubtedly daunting for the sake of the creation of good, quality early childhood practice. In Indonesian case, the presence of two responsible bodies within the MONE structure has brought with different, often conflicting assumptions about what young children and about what is good and appropriate for them. Additionally, the Islamic-Non-Islamic differentiation of early childhood programs has "led to the issue of unequal service quality" [23] given for example the unequal capacity of the respective responsible bodies to finance their programs or the difference in what their service focusing on.

Apart of these problems, however, the birth of the new law in 2003, and its following policies, has marked a new landscape in Indonesian EE. This is apparent for example through the clear position of ECE in the MONE's strategic plan 2005-2010 and 2010-2014 [24]. This position has been even stronger, following the publication of *The Grand Framework of Indonesian Early Childhood Education* Development in 2011 [1]. Not only emphasizing the importance of preschool, the *Framework* claims that ECE is both the very foundation and path to what it calls "Indonesian dreamed generation of 2045"—a comprehensively intelligent, golden generation, "a gift for the centennial commemoration of Indonesian independence" [1]. This ambition necessitates the presence of high quality ECE, for logically speaking only good education can produce a generation of such characteristics.

Despite its gigantic ambition, the Framework unfortunately has no clear statement about quality, other than its macro, "jargonistic" idea of ECE outcome: 'the dreamed generation'. This makes the questions about what the present-day children should be to align with

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the country vision of 'dreamed generation' and what capacities a preschool institution must have to be able to facilitate the development of children of such qualities remained unanswered. The first question is closely related to the understanding of educational quality in terms of outputs, outcomes or products, while the latter is related to the understanding of educational quality in terms of good process. Questions about service and programs quality are now even more plausible, considering that most of the policy texts produced since 2003 confidently quotes and emphasizes the benefits of preschool programs for both children's individual development and their future life [24, 25], yet it seems to miss the issues on service quality [23]. Indeed, research has emphasized "high-quality" as the condition of the claim that early childhood is the best development tool [26].

In the following sections Indonesian early childhood quality system will be elaborated in more detail. In line with the aim of this paper, the sections will also touch issues related to way parents and their voices are positioned by and within the current quality system.

## ECE QUALITY SYSTEM IN INDONESIA

To define what quality ECE means in Indonesian context is unfortunately a challenging task. First and technically speaking it is due to the abundance of policy documents and directives published by the central ECE authorities—as a consequence of the presence of multiple actors mentioned in the previous sections. Entrapped in this situation, the issues related to quality, if any, are incomprehensively touched, they are scattered across numerous documents. The second reason is the fact that there is seemingly no clear, reliable as well as official position statement about what is meant by 'quality of ECE'.

In 2009 for example, the education ministry passed Regulation No. 58, which stipulates the national minimum standard of ECE programs [2]. This regulation standardizes: child's development; teachers qualification; contents, process, and assessment; and, facilities, management, and finance. This regulation is seemingly the most comprehensive one, but still it has no statement about what these four mean for the creation of quality early childhood programs and for the child development. This is totally different when the regulation is compared to, for example, to New Zealand's *Te Whàriki* [27], which clearly emphasizes competence, confidence, the unity of mind, body, and spirit, as the main characteristics and qualities of children's learning outcomes.

This paper agrees upon the notion that children are the very ends of all early childhood intervention endeavors [28]. With this understanding, the quality of children, their experiences and life should be set as the main goal—and such aspects as teacher qualification, curriculum, and facilities, should be understood as the requisites to achieve it. Thus, such requisites must follow the main goal. Consequently, a good quality framework must clearly define its main goal, that is, children's qualities and characteristics during and upon the completion of their participation in early childhood programs. Unfortunately, this is something missed in and across Indonesian policy documents [23].

The absence of clear quality framework, however, does not necessarily mean that there is no quality system in Indonesian ECE. Indeed the country has such system as it is regulated in the Government Regulation No. 19/2005 [29], later amended in 2013 [30], which says, for example, "the educational quality assurance and control in accordance to the National Standard of Education are conducted through evaluation, accreditation, and certification". These three lines of quality system are also applied to ECE programs. Evaluation is done at the center level to assure the program effectiveness to achieve its learning outcomes. Accreditation is done to assess whether or not a given program is in line with the determined criterion, derived from the national standard. Certification is specifically applied for early childhood teacher who work for the formal programs, kindergarten and Raudhatul Athfal. Unlike for the higher level of education, the 2005 regulation, however, does not provide comprehensive, detail standards for preschool level. More detail standards, as this paper has indicated previously, must be tracked in and through different policy documents, which can be summarized into four main rubrics: child development; teacher qualification; program contents, process, and assessment; and, supporting facilities, management, and finance.

### Child Developmental Achievement

Within the theoretical spectrum, Indonesian EE is developmentalist in nature. It relies much on the notion of developmentally appropriate practice of the US National Association for the Education of Young Children. Thus, developmentalism, a way of thinking on children mainly derived from developmental psychology, is one of the Indonesian early childhood dominant policy discourses [23].

TABLE I. SAMPLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARD

| Area | Age group | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | *4 – 5* | *5 – 6* |
| Religion & moral values | • Knowing God in accordance to the religion he/she adhered to<br>• Imitating worshiping physical movement<br>• Uttering prayer before and after activities | • Knowing the religion adhered to<br>• Familiar with prayer and worship<br>• Understanding good behaviors & characters (honest, helpful, respect)<br>• Differentiating the good from the bad<br>• Knowing rituals and religious holidays<br>• Respecting to people of different faith |
| Gross motor skills | • Imitating movement of e.g. animal, tree, plane, etc.<br>• Hanging on a bar<br>• Jumping and running in a coordinated way<br>• Throwing an object to a determined direction effectively | • Performing body movement in a coordinated way to master flexibility & balance<br>• Coordinating foot-hand-head movement to follow movements in dancing or physical exercise.<br>• Performing ruled physical games.<br>• Using right and left hand effectively |

It is common in the developmentalist perspective to differentiate child's development into four main areas—motor and physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social and emotional. Yet, given the religious nature of Indonesian societies, a new area is added, that is religious and moral values [2]. In the past, there was also another area of development, namely the aesthetic development [6]. It however has been removed in the 2009 national early childhood standard. Table 2 shows the samples of developmental achievement for children aged 4 – 6 as regulated in the 2009's Standard [2].

**Teacher Qualification**

Indonesian education defines 'teacher' (Indonesian, *guru*) as those working for school or for the formal early childhood institution (kindergarten and Raudhatul Athfal); those who work for non-formal institutions such as playgroup and nursery are called 'educator' (Indonesian, *pendidik*). According to the regulation [29,30], early childhood teachers must be the holders of a degree from at least a four-year diploma or an undergraduate program, majoring in ECE, general education, or psychology, and professional teacher certificate.

Prior to the enactment of 2009 and 2013's Regulation, in 2007, the government has also launched the national standard of teacher qualification and competencies [31]. It is compulsory according to this policy document that a teacher must be a person capable of four grand competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal, which then are derived into 24 teacher main competencies.

Following the enactment of 2007's teacher standard, the government introduced teacher professional certification, done through professional portfolio assessment and a 12-day university-based professional remedial training. The training facilitates in-service teachers to master the major competencies required by the 2007 teacher standard. Those who are successful of such portfolio assessment or training are entitled to additional income, whose amounts are at least equal to their net salary, from the government.

TABLE II. SAMPLE OF TEACHER STANDARD

| Grand/main teacher's competencies | ECE teacher competencies |
| --- | --- |
| *Pedagogical-1*<br>Good mastery of the characteristics of learners from the physical, the moral, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual aspects. | • Good understanding of the characteristics of learners related to their physical, intellectual, social-emotional, moral, and socio-cultural background.<br>• Ability to identify the learners' potentials in various aspects of development<br>• Ability to identify difficulties the learners might face with |
| *Personal-1*<br>To act in accordance to the religious, legal, and social norms as well as to the Indonesian national culture. | • Showing respect to the learners regardless their religious belief, race, customs, regional background and gender.<br>• Behaving in accordance to the religious, legal, and social norms as well as to the Indonesian cultural plurality. |

## Program Contents Process and Assessment

Another aspect of quality stipulated in the 2009's Standard is related to contents, process and assessment [2] As it is mentioned elsewhere in this paper, the Indonesian preschool is developmentalist in nature. This standpoint determines that the focus of program early childhood is mainly to teach young children about developmental skills (Table 2), which includes moral and religious, physical, cognitive, linguistic, as well as social and emotional development. Focusing on these aspects, non-developmental contents are rather marginalized.

To make sure that the learning process is effective, the 2009's Standard suggests the grouping of the children based on their age and the development of lesson/activity plans [2]. It says that a preschool institution must develop an annual plans, semester plan, and weekly plan and suggests that activity plans must follow the developmental stage of the children, the younger the child the more individual the plan should be. Moreover, the 2009's Standard emphasizes the principles of child-centeredness and the use of play as the main learning vehicle. The effectiveness and success of learning activities are to be assessed through observation, performance assessment, anecdotal recording, documentation, and portfolio, which cover the whole, comprehensive aspects of development [2].

## Facilities Management and Finance

Supporting facilities, management, and financial capacity are somehow crucial for the creation of quality ECE. The 2009 Standard stipulates that all facilities of an early childhood center must follow the children's need for safety and security as well as in line with their right to health. They must also be easily accessible for children. Whenever possible learning facilities should also involve the maximum utilization of used resources [2].

Early learning centers should be managed in a way that follows the school-based management approach, for the formal line and community-based management for the non-formal one. The center management must put on the center the principles of partnership, participation, openness, and accountability.

For those working in kindergarten, the birth of the 2009 document has unfortunately led them to new problems. This is related to the fact that kindergarten has its own 2004 National Curriculum, popularly called kindergarten standard of competencies [6], which is officially not repealed after the birth of the 2009's

Standard. Such dualism is not the end of the problem. Even more challenging is the fact that although both documents standardize child's developmental achievement, they provide in many ways different details, leaving teachers disoriented and confused. Complicating the situation is the presence of two different sets of early childhood program accreditation instruments, published in 2009 [32], [33]. One set is for formal early childhood institutions (kindergarten); another one is for the non-formal institutions such as playgroups and nurseries. They both assess the level of quality of early childhood centers. Whilst the first document gives spacious room to measure the children's learning and development outcomes, the second emphasizes more on the managerial and administrative aspects of the centers. The second document for example has only one item to measure child development quality aspect [33]. Center management, including its human resources management, is also the focus of the first document, yet unlike the second document, it provides at least 22 questions for the same quality aspects [32]. This means that even the government bodies define 'quality' differently. Table 3 shows, the non-formal instrument over-simplifies the children developmental aspects of quality into a single item. The formal instrument, in contrast, provides highly detailed developmental achievement quality criterions.

TABLE III. SAMPLE OF ACCREDITATION INSTRUMENT ITEMS

| Formal center instrument | Non-formal center instrument | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Description of developmental achievement | Description of developmental achievement | | |
| Percentage of learners who are effectively able to respond to moral and religious stimulus<br>A. 81% - 100%<br>B. 61% - 80%<br>C. 41% - 60%<br>D. 21% - 40%<br>E. less than 21% | The application of the developmental achievement standard at your center included the followings aspects: | | |
| | a.Religious & moral | Y | N |
| | b. Physical (health & gross/fine motor) | Y | N |
| | c.Cognitive | Y | N |
| | d. Language | Y | N |
| | e.Social & emotional (attach *supporting documents*) | Y | N |

## TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN ECE QUALITY SYSTEM

Literatures have abundantly stated the importance of teachers and parents in the creation of quality ECE [10, 4,5]. After their children, parents are indeed the very raison d'être of the modern ECE, with teachers as its front-liners. Their voices are therefore more than significant to be heard and recognized.

In contrast to the above ideal, however, both parents and teachers are not given spacious rooms across the quality documents. In addition, the Indonesian quality system was developed in a top-down way, dominated mainly by the government representative and university-based think-tank and academia. The fact that parents and teachers' voices are marginalized in the Indonesian formal documents on quality reflects not only top-down and dominating nature of the government's construction of quality but also violation of the ideal of early childhood centers as the "loci of democratic practice" [34, p. 122]. Being marginalized in the production of quality system as well as unrecognized across quality system texts does not mean that teachers and parents have no aspiration on quality. The following sections are devoted to elaborate this issue.

### Teachers and Parents' voices on quality

This study follows the notion that that quality is a socially constructed concept [14], [10]. With this understanding this study assumes that parents and teachers might hold different assumption and construction about quality. To bring this assumption into practice, 10 preschool teachers and 10 parents were interviewed. They were purposefully selected from 10 out of 35 districts (Indonesian kabupaten/kota) in Central Java. They were selected from preschools considered to be of a high quality, recommended by the authors' university network at the district level. The parents involved here are those who sent their children to the preschools whose teachers are selected. The main question the study asked was "How should quality ECE look like". The following table shows the general categorization of their responses.

Research and studies into the issues of quality in preschool setting have seemingly agreed to divide quality into two main aspects, the structure and the process [35-39]. The structural aspect refers to preschool characteristics that will be the basis for children learning process. It may range from the number or teachers available and their education, the number of

children a teacher is responsible for to the child-space ratio.

TABLE IV. EXTRACTS OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS' VOICE

| Teachers | Parents |
|---|---|
| • Must have qualified teachers/educators who are the holder of bachelor degree in ECE teaching; skillful and creative in teaching; professionally certified; sensitive of young children<br>• Must have established rules and standard especially in teacher/educator recruitment.<br>• Must be supported with high quality facilities.<br>• Must have building permit and safety clearance.<br>• Must have clear vision and mission.<br>• Must have reliable and systematic management | • Must have teachers who are skillful and creative and not monotone in their teaching; capable of teaching young children in accordance to their developmental stages; professionally certified; humble and worth-modeled.<br>• Offers quality service, characterized by the presence of moral and religious as well as local genius contents (e.g. local language).<br>• Must have reliable internal management, with regard to facilities, teacher development, finance, curriculum, and efforts to achieve center goals and vision<br>• Must have clear rules to make the centers easily regulated<br>• Must have good, effective coordination and communication with parents to support and maximize children's growth and development. |

The process aspect of quality refers to the actual experience the children have in their preschool, such as the way they interact with their teachers, peer, and learning materials. It also refers to whether or not their needs are properly met while they are in the preschool: children and their families somehow are the very end goal of a preschool program [13]. Therefore he adds another aspect of quality, outcomes, referring to the actual impacts that a given preschool program gives to the children and their families.

Comparing what the present study found with those found in the previous studies it is therefore clear, as the table shows, that teachers emphasized much on the structural aspects of quality. Moreover, their characterization of quality seemed to be general. The parents on the other side saw quality in a seemingly more complex way. Their views shared some commonalities with those of the teachers, but emphasized some particular aspects that are absent in the teachers point of views.

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Both teachers and parents emphasize teacher qualification and children's development as the quality aspects. This commonality might represent their exposure to the discourses of 'developmentalism' and 'professionalism', which has been massively circulated amongst those involved in the ECE service. Although both the parents and teachers emphasized the same things, the parents called for a move beyond the formal qualification aspect. A male respondent asserted:

> "a teacher ideally is not only cognitively capable, but more importantly is also good in terms of his/her behaviors and manners. Good teachers are those who can behave appropriately for they are their children models. It is important, for early childhood institutions therefore to set up standard and rules that regulate the way the teachers should behave. The teachers must be very careful of his/her words, behavior, and even the way they are dressed".

Both parties also shared the same perspective on the importance of rules and internal management system. During the group interview their opinions on these matters were confirmed. The presence of clear rules and reliable internal management system are crucially importance especially when the center has to set a conflict resolution. Indonesian early childhood centers are mainly run by the private sector. This often creates conflicting owners-teacher relation, as the owners are more market-oriented whilst the teachers are more regulation and standard-oriented in their decision-making.

One of the issues that have for long time precipitated owners-teachers conflicts is "teaching reading skills to young children". The teachers, and this is the way they were trained, are not allowed to teach reading skills to kindergarteners. What they are allowed to do is just to introduce those skills to their children. On the other hand, many primary schools have made reading skills as the screening tools during the enrollment. This raises a dilemma amongst the early childhood service providers, in which often the teacher voices are often neglected. A teacher respondent stated the following in the FGD:

> "To teach the reading skills is a dilemma for me, but it is not the only problem. [The owner of] my institution often gives us pressures and limit, which bound us as teachers and make us lost our freedom to decide and to further develop our capacity"

Such conflict can easily happen partly due to the fact that many owners of early childhood centers have no adequate knowledge on the service they established. Such conflict is often so open and therefore it is easy for parent to smell or witness it. Clear rules and reliable

internal management system, so this is the teachers and parents' assumption, would be an effective recipe for the centers solve their internal conflicts. The same logic also applies to the teachers' aspiration of quality, which is related to teacher recruitment. This aspiration seemingly departed from the context that often the owner of their centers recruits new teachers in a seemingly very loose way.

Apart of the above commonalities, the teachers and parents participating in this study advocated some different view about quality. It is surprising that the teachers have no points about teachers, while on the other hand parents has some for them. This predictably happens because of the strong influence of the discourse of professionalism in early childhood in Indonesia. This discourse is held by the teachers and gives them a strong sense of confidence. This discourse however often leads to the 'othering' of parents by the teachers [7].

In contrast to this situation is the fact that parents ask for more room and significant roles. This is apparent in their last point shown in Table 4. One of the participants, a mother, explained the reason behind their aspiration to involve center-parent communication and coordination as part of quality aspect. She said:

> "A center would not develop without parents…they are one of the most influential parties which determines the center success. Children's family background and home experience is an important factor for quality, well-developing children. Children spend more time with their parents and family…parents are the first agent for children to learn about good moral. That is the importance of effective communication between parents and early childhood institution".

It is regrettable that neither the teachers nor parents advocated the aspects of quality that directly respond to the Grand Framework (Direktorat Jenderal PAUDNI, 2011) document. Even no quality aspects regarding children and their experiences and development were advocated by the teachers. In fact, it is the most fundamental aspect of quality ECE as the previous studies indicated [14, 5]. There is seemingly no better explanation of this problem, than that it has happened because Indonesian early childhood strong, single reliance on the developmentalist idea of good practice of education. Both teachers and parents have been so exposed to this idea, seeing ECE as merely a site for children to develop in the way developmental theories define.

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## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The initial findings presented in this paper confirmed the notion that quality is not a simple concept to define, especially when it is put the context of ECE. The findings, which clearly show the difference in the way parents, teachers, and policy makers perceive quality, necessitates a new approach to construct quality, especially when such construction would be widely applied. Moreover, the findings show the conflicts between what the policy documents stipulate and what the grass root actors of the policy, in this case the teachers and the parents, aspire and advocate.

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