



Exploring Teacher Expectations and Experiences in the Preschool-Primary School Transition Process

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Abstract

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This research explored the expectations, experiences, and challenges felt by Preschool and Primary school teachers. The expectations, experiences, and challenges teachers face can be considered for policy direction, implementation guidelines, and developing transitional preschool learning methods more contextual to real-world conditions and needs. The participants in this study include three lower primary school teachers and two Grade B kindergarten teachers. The research approach used is qualitative-descriptive. The research findings indicate that teachers have expectations that the preschool-primary school transition process is not solely the responsibility of preschool or primary school teachers. Still, there should be continuity and a shared perception between preschool and primary school teachers to ensure a seamless transition process. The experiences and challenges teachers face in teaching children during the transition period include dealing with students with different characteristics, which requires teachers to analyse each student's specific needs, especially when they encounter difficulties during this transition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition from preschool to primary school is when a child moves from participating in preschool to becoming a student in primary school. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2023) explains in detail that the transitional class is implemented in kindergarten or equivalent classes from Class B to primary school Grade 2, guided by the Child Development Achievement Standard (STPPA). This is based on the assumption that early childhood encompasses children aged 0-8. This policy aligns with the independent curriculum advocated by the government (Yuliantina et al., 2023). Additionally, referring to the circular on early childhood education and elementary and secondary education number 0759/C/HK.04.01/2023 regarding strengthening PAUD to SD, it emphasizes: 1) no literacy test during enrollment; 2) introduction period for new students and planning of learning according to the child's needs; 3) conducting enjoyable and test-free learning. Based on the above description, this reinforcement serves as a solid foundation for children to adapt to and enjoy the dynamics of learning in school, avoiding monotony and strict rules.

Today, the benefits of implementing preschool are widely recognized and felt by various segments of society. Parents acknowledge that early childhood education has a noble function and responsibility towards their children, helping them build and develop their potential (Sanusi & Khaerunnisa, 2022). Preschool can positively impact a child's physical and spiritual development, fostering self-identity and maximizing their interests and talents for transformation and improvement (Rofi'ah et al., 2023). The awareness of the importance of PAUD aligns with government regulations and policies, evident in the issuance of laws such as Child Protection Law No. 23 of 2002 and Article 28 of Law No. 20 of 2003 regarding the national education system, leading to the establishment of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education. Therefore, based on the above description, the government shows genuine attention and aims to foster the development of ECE, hoping it contributes significantly to advancing early childhood education. The contextualization of these policies aims to realize healthy and developed early childhood through community empowerment, cross-sectoral improvement, health management funding, and the development of science and technology (Kurniawan et al., 2023). With clear guidelines, structures, and goals, it is expected to contribute meaningfully to the progress of early childhood education, specifically in creating a quality institution that must be considered.

When discussing primary school education, the next level after early childhood education, learning at the primary school level becomes relatively more formal. Therefore, children must be prepared to enter this educational level (Supriani & Arifudin, 2023). The transition period is crucial as it involves significant changes in a child's social identity, environment, social networks, and learning methods when moving to a new educational level (Hewi & Shaleh Muhamad, 2020). Thus, the transition process needs to be well understood and interpreted by policymakers, teachers, parents, and the community to ensure that maladaptive tendencies do not hinder a child's potential, interests, and talents. Most perspectives on preschool focus on cognitive or academic mastery, neglecting the affective and psychomotor aspects. This oversight may exclude learning experiences that would help a child grow and develop in the long run (Handayani, 2024). Consequently, this process may make it difficult for a child to adapt to the formal school environment, resulting in disharmonious relationships with peers, the possibility of dropping out, and poor emotional dimensions (Kasih et al., 2023). Therefore, transition efforts must be comprehensive, involving parents and the community to assist teachers and schools in making the preschool-primary school transition beneficial for children.

Wijaya (2023) emphasizes the need to consider the psychological factors of children in the preschool-primary school transition process. The absence of literacy tests in elementary school and the emphasis on introduction periods during the first two weeks are mentioned, along with implementing learning that influences psychological development, such as 1) understanding religious and moral values, 2) social and language skills for child communication, 3) emotional maturity, 4) cognitive maturity, 5) motor skills and self-care, and 6) positive learning perception. The research results indicate that the involvement of external parties, such as parents and the community, is essential to helping teachers and schools ensure that the preschool-primary school transition process benefits children. Wulandari and Fachrani (2023) discuss the analysis of parents' perspectives on children's literacy skills as preparation for the preschool-primary school transition. The research results indicate that literacy skills are the only standard for success in group B's preschool-primary school transition process. Consequently, the government promptly abolished literacy tests for elementary school admissions as part of efforts to create a fun preschool-primary school transition program in the latest curriculum after the 2013 curriculum, known as the independent curriculum.

Aligning the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the transition process is crucial to providing positive educational stimuli for children (Musanna, 2012). However, it is acknowledged that teachers may face challenges in adapting their teaching methods due to each child's diverse characteristics, interests, and developmental achievements. Therefore, teachers need to provide suitable stimulation, from selecting learning materials to delivering teaching methods (Wijaya, 2023). The hope, experiences, and good practices of teachers in handling the preschool-primary school transition process are crucial for developing a better transition process in the future. Given the importance of the preschool-primary school transition process, several previous studies have addressed this topic.

In Indonesia, research related to the expectations, challenges, and needs of the preschool-primary school transition process from the teacher's perspective still needs to be completed. Previous studies on the preschool-primary school transition have mainly focused on the methods and strategies used by teachers in delivering lessons (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Hasanah et al., 2023; Hasmalena et al., 2023; Maulani & Mutiara, n.d.; Musanna, 2012; Reza & Asbari, 2024; Susilahati, Nurmalia, Ardia, et al., 2023; Susilahati, Nurmalia, Widiawati, et al., 2023; Wijaya, 2023). Research involving parents in examining and providing support or conducting a focus group discussion on the parent's perspective of the preschool-primary school transition is also limited (Lestari, 2023; Rika Amriani H et al., 2023; Supriani & Arifudin, 2023; Wulandari & Fachrani, 2023; Yuliantina et al., 2023). In conclusion, to comprehensively understand the preschool-primary school transition process, it needs to be reviewed based on a shared understanding among teachers, parents, and children. Therefore, the approach should focus on fulfilling cognitive and academic dimensions and fostering emotional dimensions and children's learning experiences. Government education and guidelines should

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, a method used to explore the social situation under investigation comprehensively. This qualitative approach also aims to obtain comprehensive information regarding teachers' expectations, experiences, and challenges in the preschool-primary school transition process. The data collection process in this study involves the following steps. Observation: The researcher observes the teaching and learning activities carried out by teachers and students. During this observation, the researcher attempts to understand the dynamics of the transition process. Interview: The researcher conducts interviews with teachers using structured questions to understand the issues and perspectives of teachers in evaluating the transition process holistically. Documentation: Documentation involves collecting various documents, such as photos, videos, and lesson plans (RPP), used by schools and teachers in the transition process.

According to (Huberman & Miles, 1984), data analysis utilizes the data triangulation technique, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Data reduction is selecting, simplifying, and organizing data from field notes for further data analysis. *Data presentation* is a stage that paves the way for valid analysis, where data is clarified through graphs, matrices, and networks. Concluding the data is a crucial part of the analysis, providing information about the interpretation of the data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the research results is presented in three sub-categories, namely regarding the expectations, experiences and challenges faced by teachers in the Preschool-Primary School transition process.

Teachers' Expectations of the Preschool-Primary School Transition Process

Based on the results of the interviews, there are several expectations of the teachers regarding the Preschool-Primary School transition process in terms of policy direction, students, teaching materials and parents of students. For example, RF expects the policy for implementing the Preschool-Primary School transition to not only emphasize numeracy and literacy skills. This certainly affects the views of parents who become narrow in interpreting children's learning readiness.

"Orangtua memahami bahwa kemampuan numerasi dan literasi memang penting namun bukan hal yang utama, masih banyak hal lain yang juga tidak kalah penting untuk dipersiapkan (parents understand that numeracy and literacy skills are important but not the main thing, there are many other things that are no less important to prepare) " (RF)

"Perlu adanya gerakan sosialisasi yang lebih masif dan jauh-jauh hari sebelum masa tahun ajaran berlangsung" (there needs to be a more massive socialization movement and well in advance of the school year). (RA)

The socialization expected by teachers is a practical socialization related to the implementation of the Preschool-Primary School transition program that is being launched by the government. Teachers hope that the socialization of the Preschool-Primary School transition program can have a real impact on the school readiness of students and not just as a fulfillment of the task of organizing government programs.

In addition to policies, clear teaching materials are something expected by DC as a grade 1 elementary teacher. According to DC, during the first two weeks of grade 1 students entering the school year made him confused about presenting teaching materials.

"... jadikan kita disuruh melakukan program transisi PAUD-SD wajib dua minggu diawal tahun ajaran, tapi tidak ada kebijakan atau sosialisasi yang jelas terkait bahan ajar apa yang perlu disampaikan pada anak, jadi kita harus memutar otak untuk membuat berbagai media biar anak tidak jemu dari pagi sampe siang..." (so we are told to do a mandatory Preschool-Primary School transition program for two weeks at the beginning of the school year, but there is no clear

policy or socialization regarding what teaching materials need to be delivered to children, so we have to rack our brains to make various media so that children are not bored from morning to noon...). (DC)

Through this statement, DC hopes that there will be guidelines for developing teaching materials for the Preschool-Primary School transition process program so that there will be no misperceptions in its implementation in the field. Further, RA expressed her hope that the Preschool-Primary School transition process will be held by opening preparatory classes that discuss children's readiness for elementary school both cognitively and psychologically. If this preparatory class does not exist, the learning target in grade one must be lowered where all preparations for elementary school learning are carried out in grade one.

Teachers' Experiences in the Preschool-Primary School Transition Process

The teachers have their own experiences and best practices. RA said that during her time as a grade 1 elementary school teacher, she often encountered children who were reluctant to go to class.

"Pengalaman yang paling melekat selama mengajar yaitu ketika anak tersebut pertama kali masuk ke kelas menangis dan selalu ingin ditemani oleh ibunya" (The most memorable experience during teaching was when the child first entered the class crying and always wanted to be accompanied by his mother.) (RA)

One of the efforts made by RA is at the beginning of the semester to always listen and follow the child's wishes, over time RA together with parents persuade children to enter class alone without being accompanied by parents. DC expressed an experience that was almost similar to RA. In the Preschool-Primary School transition process, DC often finds children whose socialization skills are less developed.

"...terdapat anak yang tidak mau berbicara pada siapa pun termasuk saya selaku gurunya, saya dekati dengan penuh kehati hatian, saya minta teman yang lain untuk selalu mengajaknya bermain, selama satu semester anak tersebut mulai berkembang dan sudah mampu bersosialisasi dengan lingkungannya." (there is a child who does not want to talk to anyone including me as his teacher, I approached him carefully, I asked other friends to always invite him to play, for one semester the child began to develop and was able to socialize with his environment...). (DC)

RA and DC experienced experiences related to children's adaptation to their new environment in elementary school. Then, RF and MA as kindergarten teachers have different experiences in the Pre-school-Primary School transition process. RF and MA, in providing lessons in grade B kindergarten, always provide an overview of life after elementary school. RF said "...Hal tersebut berdampak kepada kesiapan anak dan persepsi mereka tentang sekolah dasar. Banyak anak yang mengungkapkan bahwa mereka tidak sabar untuk masuk sekolah dan bertemu teman-teman dan guru-guru baru" ("This has an impact on children's readiness and their perception of primary school. Many children express that they can't wait to go to school and meet new friends and teachers.") MA also stated that "...ketika sebelum anak-anak masuk ke SD mereka sudah dapat mengenal dasar-dasar literasi dan numerasi melalui bermain, kecintaan terhadap buku dan aktifitas membaca, dan juga kemandirian dalam melaksanakan kegiatan" ("when before children enter primary school they can already recognize the basics of literacy and numeracy through play, love for books and reading activities, and also independence in carrying out activities...")

Teachers' Challenges in the Preschool-Primary School Transition Process

In general, the main challenge faced by teachers regarding the Preschool-Primary School transition process is the difficulty in identifying and facilitating the needs, learning styles and initial understanding levels of different learners.

"...the challenges are certainly many because children have diverse characters...". (RA)

"The challenges faced are sometimes related to mood, level of understanding and also different ways of learning." (MA)

Based on this, teachers feel that they need more time in identifying the characteristics and needs of students, both at the PAUD level and at the primary level. In addition, RF argued the challenges in the Preschool-Primary School transition process in group B kindergartens.

"...when we are close to primary school, with the demands, we feel quite chased by the cognitive and literacy targets of children so that the approach we take in the classroom contains a lot of that." (RF)

Because of these demands, teachers at group B kindergartens seem to prioritize numeracy and literacy over other aspects of school readiness. DC faced different challenges in dealing with Preschool-Primary School transition learning. DC believes that her biggest challenge is having to prepare many learning tools such as writing

materials, activities and student worksheets in large quantities. DC even admitted that during the implementation of the Preschool-Primary School transition process in the first two weeks of the school year, she received help from other class teachers to prepare learning tools.

“...at that time I was helped by teachers from grade 5, 6 too, because if I didn't prepare many activities, the children would get bored and I was also confused about what to say in class.”(DC)

The transition process from preschool to primary school must be interpreted as a crucial phase for children to adapt successfully to a new environment. A shared perception among all educational stakeholders is essential to helping children be school-ready and succeed in navigating their transition period. This aligns with the (Al-Hezam, 2017) assertion that this transition is a change phase within individuals, signifying the shift from informal to formal processes crucial for the child's future development. This aligns with (Caspe et al., 2015), who state that quality transition involves collaboration between family, school, and the community to share information in creating curriculum continuity, assessment, and learning quality. Therefore, the transition process should not be considered partial by various parties.

The research findings indicate that, from a policy perspective, there is still a prioritization of numeracy and literacy skills as prerequisites for children to adapt from kindergarten to elementary school. During the transition to school, children must be prepared to face these changes. However, each child will have their way of adapting to their new environment, influenced significantly by the school's readiness. School readiness often depicts academic, emotional, and behavioral abilities (Duncan et al., 2007). It is considered a predictor of academic outcomes (Pan et al., 2019) and is also increasingly linked to the future well-being of children and adolescents. Despite this, school readiness should not be labeled as a child being "ready" or "not ready" for school. According to Yulindrasari et al. (2021), school readiness depends not only on the child's readiness but also on the readiness of the community, preschool institutions, and elementary schools willing to accept children regardless of their abilities. Therefore, the preschool-primary school transition process must be interpreted as an effort to ensure that every child receives support from parents, teachers, and the community in developing foundational skills at any grade level.

According to Musfita and Setiasih (2019), the implementation of the preschool-primary school transition process needs support from established government policies. Undoubtedly, policies form the basis, flow, and references for the preschool-primary school transition process. Clear, detailed, and well-socialized policies among teachers, parents, and the community significantly support implementing the preschool-primary school transition. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology launched Episode 24 of the Merdeka Curriculum in early 2023, emphasizing the importance of the preschool-primary school transition. This aligns with Al-Hezam (2017) statement that the preschool-primary school transition program requires understanding, transparency, and a reasonable period between preschool and primary school organizations. Furthermore, Maulani & Mutiara (2023), Yuliantina et al. (2023), and Zhao (2017) suggest that effective handling of this transition requires fostering good cooperation between preschool and primary school teachers and coordination between elementary schools and preschool programs.

Through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the government launched six modules in early 2023 to support the transition of preschool-primary schools. The module discussions cover: 1) The importance of strengthening the preschool-primary school transition; 2) Building a learning environment that supports the preschool-primary school transition; 3) Building numeracy literacy gradually from preschool-primary school; 4) Building foundational skills holistically and gradually from preschool-primary school; 5) Planning learning that reinforces the preschool-primary school transition; 6) Reporting the results of strengthening the preschool-primary school transition. Respondent teachers in this study believe the modules launched must be comprehensive. Teachers still need to develop teaching materials without clear guidance. Therefore, teachers hope for massive socialization and comprehensive modules to facilitate the preschool-primary school transition process. This becomes a fundamental principle for the success of the preschool-primary school transition process, as Chouinard et al. (2010) stated: sharing responsibility for a successful transition among stakeholders through collaborative practices.

Furthermore, the best practices that teachers have implemented in the preschool-primary school transition process can be maintained and applied if facing similar challenges. However, teachers still need to plan, organize, and continuously evaluate the preschool-primary school transition process (Sanderson et al., 2015). While it is undeniable that challenges in implementing the preschool-primary school transition will continue to be felt by teachers, parents need to play a role in helping children face the transition period. According to (Caspe et al., 2015), parents need to engage in positive activities such as storytelling and playing, instill a growth mindset, and involve children in activities outside of school, such as participating in music clubs, among others.

4. CONCLUSION

Teachers' expectations regarding the Preschool-Primary School transition process are that there should be more comprehensive and massive socialization, training and Preschool-Primary School transition modules delivered to both Pre-school and primary school teachers. This is considered important considering the Preschool-Primary School transition process is a continuous process that requires the same perception from all parties. In addition, the Preschool-Primary School transition process needs to involve cooperation between government, teachers, parents and the community. The experiences and good practices that each teacher has need to be maintained and applied if the same case occurs. Some good practices in the Preschool-Primary School transition process are that teachers apply an individual approach to children who have difficulty adapting and provide a picture of learning in primary school with fun to group B kindergarten children to make children's perceptions not afraid to enter primary school. As for the challenges faced by teachers in the Preschool-Primary School transition process, teachers have difficulty in identifying the characteristics of different children and teachers find it difficult to make learning tools, especially preparing teaching materials and a variety of children's play activities. In addition, parents' perceptions that only emphasise numeracy and literacy skills make it difficult for teachers to develop other developmental aspects that can support the Preschool-Primary School transition process.

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