

Strategies of Early Childhood Teachers in Developing School Readiness

Siti Hanifah¹, Iis Basyiroh², Dede Hikmah³

¹STAI Al-Marhalah Al-'Ulya; sihanifah1@gmail.com

²STAI Al-Badar Cipulus; iisbasyiroh@albadar.ac.id

³STAI Al-Badar Cipulus; dedehikmah@albadar.ac.od

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze early childhood teachers' strategies in managing classrooms to foster school readiness during the transition to primary school. The participants consisted of four early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Purwakarta Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model. The findings reveal that teachers employed various strategies, including routine habituation, play-based learning, and the reinforcement of socio-emotional skills. Challenges encountered include limited facilities, diverse levels of children's readiness, and insufficient collaboration with parents and primary schools. A critical analysis using Paulo Freire's framework highlights the importance of participatory and transformative approaches in supporting children's transitions. The study emphasizes that school readiness encompasses not only academic aspects but also socio-emotional development and the support of a holistic educational ecosystem. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on teachers' classroom practices in building school readiness, offering valuable insights for the development of early childhood education practices and policies in Indonesia.

Kata Kunci:

Transisi, Anak usia dini, Kesiapan

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi guru PAUD dalam mengelola kelas untuk membangun kesiapan sekolah anak pada masa transisi ke SD. Responden penelitian terdiri dari empat guru PAUD di Kabupaten Purwakarta. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan berbagai strategi, antara lain pembiasaan rutin, pendekatan bermain-belajar, dan penguatan keterampilan sosial-emosional. Tantangan yang dihadapi meliputi keterbatasan sarana, perbedaan kesiapan anak, serta minimnya sinergi dengan orang tua dan pihak sekolah dasar. Analisis kritis dengan kerangka Paulo Freire menyoroti pentingnya pendekatan partisipatif dan transformatif dalam mendukung transisi anak. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kesiapan sekolah tidak hanya menyangkut aspek akademik, tetapi juga sosial dan emosional serta dukungan ekosistem pendidikan yang holistik. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada penekanan praktik lapangan guru PAUD dalam membangun kesiapan sekolah anak, yang dapat menjadi rujukan bagi pengembangan praktik dan kebijakan pendidikan anak usia dini di Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from early childhood education (ECE) to primary school (PS) is a crucial stage in a child's educational journey. This transition not only involves a change in the learning environment, but also requires adjustment to new routines, academic demands, as well as different social and emotional expectations (Hanifah & Kurniati, 2024b; Mustifa, 2019). Children are required to adapt to a more structured learning system and to demonstrate greater



independence compared to when they were in early childhood education (Khalawati et al., 2023).

At this stage, the role of early childhood education (ECE) teachers becomes crucial in preparing children to face the challenges of the primary school environment. Teachers are not only deliverers of learning material but also act as facilitators, motivators, and emotional companions who can support children in developing academic, social, and emotional readiness (Hanifah & Solehuddin, 2023). Therefore, classroom management carried out by early childhood education (PAUD) teachers must be designed strategically and contextually.

Many factors influence the success of the transition process, one of which is how ECE teachers create a learning environment that supports children's holistic development (Imani et al., 2023; Kasih et al., 2023). A learning environment that is enjoyable, structured, and responsive to children's needs can encourage them to feel safe and confident in facing change (Farida, 2017). Familiarization with learning routines, classroom rules, and activities resembling those in elementary school becomes an important part of this strategy.

Recent studies show that children's readiness to enter elementary school is not solely determined by cognitive skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also by non-academic abilities such as emotional regulation, social skills, and the ability to adapt to new rules. Imrotul (2024) study on a joyful transition from early childhood education (ECE) to elementary school highlights that it is not merely a matter of academic readiness, but also requires holistic protection strategies that position the child as the main subject. Attention to other equally important aspects in supporting children's success in elementary school remains limited. However, most studies still emphasize curriculum or program interventions, while research examining ECE teachers' classroom management practices in the context of transition is relatively scarce, particularly in Indonesia.

Literature on the PAUD–SD transition rarely integrates a critical theory perspective. In fact, Paulo Freire's framework offers the understanding that teachers are not merely authorities, but dialogical facilitators who empower children to become active subjects in the learning process. From this perspective, school readiness is not limited to academic preparedness, but also encompasses readiness to think critically, participate, and engage meaningfully. This gap shows that although theory often idealizes the teacher's role as a dialogical facilitator,

practice in the field still faces real challenges such as limited facilities and infrastructure, varying levels of children's readiness, curricular pressures, and the lack of synergy with parents and elementary schools.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining ECE teachers' classroom management strategies during the transition to elementary school through the lens of critical pedagogy. The focus of the study is not only to identify the strategies used by teachers but also to analyze the challenges they face and the forms of collaboration they establish with parents. The novelty of this research lies in its contribution to showing how ECE teachers' classroom practices in Indonesia can be interpreted through the perspective of critical pedagogy, thereby providing an alternative map for developing more participatory and transformative theories and practices of transition.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its focus was to gain an in-depth understanding of how early childhood education (ECE) teachers manage classrooms to build children's school readiness during the transition to elementary school.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) active ECE teachers with at least two years of teaching experience, (2) currently teaching in Group B (the transition class before elementary school), and (3) willingness to participate in the study. Based on these criteria, four teachers from two ECE institutions in Purwakarta Regency were recruited as participants. The two institutions had different characteristics: one located in a semi-urban area with relatively large classes (20–25 children per class) and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, while the other was situated in a rural area with smaller classes (10–15 children) and children mostly from farming families. The participants consisted of four female teachers, aged between 28 and 42 years, with 3–15 years of teaching experience, and a minimum qualification of a Diploma in ECE.

Data were collected between April and May 2025 through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Each participant was interviewed twice, with each session lasting 45–60 minutes, using an open-ended interview guide to explore strategies, experiences, and challenges. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Classroom observations were conducted during two regular teaching sessions per

participant, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, focusing on classroom routines, teacher–child interactions, and the implementation of transition strategies. Data were considered saturated when no new themes emerged after the fourth interview.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guides, field notes, and open-ended observation sheets. Data analysis followed Braun & Clarke’s thematic analysis framework, consisting of: (1) transcription and repeated reading of interview data, (2) open coding to identify units of meaning, (3) grouping codes into categories, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) naming themes, and (6) constructing the narrative of findings. Verification was carried out through peer debriefing and cross-checking the consistency of themes with raw data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data generated five main themes regarding ECE teachers’ strategies in fostering children’s school readiness during the transition to primary school: (1) habituation of routines, (2) play-based literacy and numeracy introduction, (3) scaffolding independence, (4) managing children’s attention, and (5) collaboration with parents.

1. Habituation of routines

Teachers emphasized the importance of routines as a means of building discipline and a sense of security. Routines were implemented from the beginning, such as lining up every morning, praying together, and introducing daily schedules. One teacher stated:

“We get the children used to lining up every morning, so they become accustomed to discipline and get familiar with the atmosphere they will encounter in primary school.” (Teacher A)

2. Play-based literacy and numeracy introduction

Literacy and numeracy learning was carried out through games, songs, and visual media. Teacher B explained:

“We don’t teach reading, writing, and arithmetic directly, but through pictures, songs, or matching activities. For example, introducing letters through their own names.” (Teacher B)

3. Scaffolding independence

Teachers trained children to carry out daily activities independently, from carrying their school bags, tidying up toys, to washing their hands. Assistance was given gradually and then reduced.

“At first the children are helped, but over time we give them opportunities to try on their own.” (Teacher C)

4. Managing children’s attention

When children’s concentration decreased, teachers used ice-breaking strategies such as singing or short play activities.

“If the children start losing focus, I invite them to play for a while or sing together.” (Teacher D)

5. Collaboration with parents

Teachers maintained regular communication with parents through meetings and short messages to report on children’s development.

“We often inform parents about the child’s progress. If there are any issues, we let them know so they can also support at home.” (Teacher B)

DISCUSSION

The transition period from early childhood education (ECE) to primary school (PS) is a critical stage in children’s development. During this time, children are learning to adjust to a new, more demanding environment (Soenaryo et al., 2024). Teachers play a vital role in accompanying children through this stage so that they feel comfortable, confident, and ready to participate in learning at primary school (Mardiah et al., 2024).

In this transition process, teachers do not immediately force children to be able to read, write, and count (Wulandari & Fachrani, 2023). Instead, they adopt a gradual and enjoyable approach. One of the activities commonly practiced is training children to line up every morning before entering the classroom. Through this activity, children learn discipline, how to follow instructions, and begin to understand that there are rules to be followed at school.

In addition to fostering structured habits, teachers also introduce letters and numbers in fun ways. They use media such as alphabet cards, songs, or matching letters with pictures. These activities spark children’s interest in learning without creating pressure.

Teachers also nurture children's independence in daily activities. For instance, children are encouraged to carry their own bags, tidy up toys after playing, and maintain personal hygiene. Teachers patiently guide them until these practices become habitual. In this way, children learn responsibility for themselves.

Teachers also familiarize children with daily routines they will encounter in primary school. Children are taught to understand the sequence of activities such as learning, eating, playing, and resting. These routines provide children with a sense of security, as they know what to expect next.

The approaches employed by ECE teachers show that the transition process does not need to be rigid. On the contrary, by creating a calm, enjoyable, and supportive environment, children adapt more easily. This resonates with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of dialogical and humanizing learning processes (Gusti Ayu Agung Sinta Diarini et al., 2024). In this context, teachers act not as authoritarian instructors but as companions who help children make sense of the world around them.

During the transition period to primary school, teachers seek to build children's independence and discipline. Children are trained to perform various activities independently, such as putting on their shoes, tidying toys, washing hands before meals, and carrying their own bags. These activities are repeated daily to become habits.

Teachers also adopt a gradual approach so that children do not feel burdened immediately. At first, teachers assist the children in carrying out activities, then gradually reduce their support. This aims to accustom children to doing things independently, without relying excessively on parents or teachers.

In terms of discipline, teachers introduce simple rules such as arriving on time, sitting properly during lessons, and not fighting over toys. Children are also encouraged to understand the reasons behind these rules, rather than merely being told to obey. This reflects a dialogical educational approach. Freire emphasizes that educating should not be limited to issuing commands but should build critical awareness (Graziano et al., 2007; Pantan et al.,

2021). Thus, children obey not out of fear, but because they understand the benefits of the rules.

A critical analysis of these practices shows that teachers not only instill habits but also cultivate children's responsibility and awareness. From Freire's perspective, this process is a form of liberation, where children are not merely objects to be regulated but subjects who are actively engaged and conscious of their roles and actions within the learning environment (Fahmi et al., 2022; Pantan et al., 2021).

In the transition to primary school, ECE teachers serve not only as instructors but also as facilitators and collaborators (Rifai & Fahmi, 2017). Teachers create a learning environment that mirrors the atmosphere of a primary school classroom. For example, children learn at small desks arranged in rows, follow a fixed daily schedule, and participate in activities such as reciting prayers, singing, and writing their names. Classroom management is designed to reduce children's sense of shock when entering primary school. Additionally, teachers employ various strategies to keep children focused and prevent boredom. Games, ice-breaking activities, and educational songs are integrated into daily routines.

From Freire's perspective, the teacher as facilitator means providing space for children to be active participants rather than passive recipients of instruction (Cardos et al., 2024). Teachers accompany and allow room for children's expression, making learning a dialogical process. Children are encouraged to think, ask questions, and respond, thereby fostering confidence and a sense of ownership in the learning process (Basyiroh et al., 2023).

The teacher's role as collaborator is also evident in their relationship with parents (Hanifah & Kurniati, 2024b). Collaboration becomes a key factor in the success of the transition. Parental support at home reinforces children's independence, discipline, and readiness for school. Within a critical pedagogy framework, such collaboration reflects education as a collective endeavor rather than merely the responsibility of schools. Teachers and parents become partners in nurturing children to be active, independent, and prepared for the next stage of education.

Therefore, field findings indicate that ECE teachers consciously enact a complex role in supporting children's transition from ECE to primary school. They focus not only on cognitive aspects but also on children's socio-emotional development and life skills. Efforts to strengthen independence and discipline reflect teachers' awareness that transition involves not only adapting to a new learning environment but also shaping children's character. By gradually encouraging children to carry out independent activities, teachers provide opportunities for experiential learning rather than mere compliance. This aligns with constructivist principles while simultaneously challenging authoritarian approaches to education, as critiqued by Freire.

Teachers also perform dual roles: as facilitators who create a conducive learning environment and as collaborators who build partnerships with parents. Such collaboration is crucial, as parental support at home reinforces children's learning experiences at school (Hanifah & Kurniati, 2024a). When teachers maintain open and positive communication, the transition process becomes smoother, allowing children to feel welcomed and accompanied rather than abruptly pressured.

Referring to Freire's critical pedagogy, the strategies employed by teachers illustrate an educational process oriented toward freedom, self-awareness, and dialogue (Hendriani, 2018; Humaeroh et al., 2021). Children are engaged in meaningful learning, not positioned as "empty vessels" to be filled. Teachers do not act as so uthorities but as learning partners who facilitate children's growth.

CONCLUSION

This study found that early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Purwakarta implemented transition strategies through the habituation of routines resembling activities in primary school, the reinforcement of children's independence and discipline, as well as play-based classroom management supported by collaboration with parents. These findings highlight the novelty of the research in emphasizing teachers' real practices as a key factor in fostering children's school readiness, not only in academic aspects but also in social and emotional domains. The limitation of this study lies in the restricted scope of participants (four teachers from two

institutions), making the results not yet generalizable. Therefore, further research could broaden the context by involving more institutions, assessing parental involvement, and investigating the long-term impact of teachers' strategies on children's readiness for primary school. Practically, the results of this study recommend the need for policy support and training programs for ECE teachers so that transition strategies can be implemented more systematically and sustainably.

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