Addressing Diversity Through Religious Education In The Early Childhood Education Curriculum (Case Studies in Early Childhood Institutions)

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Abstract

Education is the right of all citizens; diversity is a challenge for the world of education to meet the needs of inclusive education. This study aims to describe ECE addressing diversity through religious education in early childhood education. This research is a type of qualitative case study research model with researchers as observer participants. This research produces the following findings, (1) Permata Hati early childhood education institution develops a local curriculum based on religious education, (2) Religious education is an approach to local curriculum development, (3) The services provided are the same across the diversity of students at Permata Hati Early Childhood Education Institutions (4) Children with special needs show progress in development, especially in social, emotional, language and spiritual development.

Key words: Religious Education, Curriculum, Diversity.

Introduction

Education is the primary need of every individual, not just a biological need such as food and drink; humans will grow and develop as a whole to become good, insightful individuals through the educational process that is obtained formally and informally.

Diversity is a necessity of life in all lines, society, ethnicity, culture. Thus education, especially on formal pathways in all institutions, should ideally be able to serve a variety of student backgrounds because each has diversity, including children who have special needs obtained and applied to students.

As one of the countries with UN member countries in 2015 that agreed on SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). The President of the Republic of Indonesia followed up by issuing Presidential Regulation No. 59 of 2017 concerning Implementation of Achieving Sustainable Development Goals. One of the 17 goals to be achieved is to provide quality, inclusive and equitable education to support lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Regarding inclusive education in Indonesia, legally, the government issues Permendiknas number 70 of 2009 Article 3, paragraph 1, which states that the purpose of inclusive education is to provide the widest possible opportunity
for all students who have physical, emotional, mental and social disabilities or have potential intelligence and/or special talents to obtain quality education according to their needs and abilities.

However, inclusive schools are not only limited to providing opportunities for children with special needs to enjoy the same education but also the right to education for other less fortunate children, for example, children with HIV/AIDS, street children, children with unable (poor–poor), children victims of rape, victims of war, children who use their mother tongue and others, regardless of religion, race and language (D.Aisyah, 2018)

The existence of inclusive schools is a metamorphosis of human culture. That every human being is the same, has the same rights and the same opportunity to develop and get education for the sake of a better continuation of life. Regardless of skin colour, race, religion, or genetic makeup, everyone has the right to be equal in education. An inclusive school is one of the answers, that education knows no discrimination, that all have the right to get it.

Sue Keil, Olga Miller, and Rory Cobb (2006) note the development of inclusive education in Scotland within a new framework based on the concept of ‘need for additional support’ separating disability from educational needs and purporting to represent a more inclusive approach to children’s learning.

The theory of inclusion and inclusive education has important implications for policy and practice of special education in developed and developing countries (Artiles et al., 2011; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014). Others argue that inclusion has become a fashionable term (Armstrong et al., 2010) and, like high fashion, is often considered impractical and unaffordable for most people in the world. In reality, especially in Indonesia, not many children with special needs can get an education; the high cost of education for children with special needs is an obstacle for parents to be able to send their sons and daughters to school.

Community needs for inclusive educational institutions have also increased from year to year. In practice, inclusive schools in Indonesia are still far from expectations. Some of the challenges and obstacles faced by the implementation of inclusive schools include:

a. The minimum number of teaching staff or special accompanying teacher staff at the institution.
b. Not all teachers and staff in schools understand how to teach and guide children with special needs
c. The possibility of parents of regular students not accepting or rejecting children with special needs studying together in class
d. Readiness of schools/institutions in terms of facilities, for example, limited books or other learning needs that use Braille for blind students
e. The risk of bullying or harassment from regular students against students with special needs

elementary school and one junior high school in each sub–district and one secondary education unit to provide inclusive education that is obliged to accept students with special needs. Early childhood education institutions, as the initial foundation of education towards basic education, should also provide services for children with special needs.

The (early childhood) curriculum should be sufficiently flexible to allow adaptation to the special, developmental, cultural, financial and social needs of the children and families served by the program and to allow the incorporation of new ideas departing from current research in child development and early childhood education (Carol.E.C & Jan Allen, 1999)

SPS Permata Hati, as an early childhood education institution, develops an education unit-level curriculum (KTSP) by implementing religious education as a big umbrella that contains philosophy, views, beliefs, ways of learning for children, learning materials, and programs that are applied comprehensively to all students. In schools that have diversity, including children with special needs. SPS Permata Hati, an early childhood education institution for the middle to lower economic class, seeks services for various backgrounds of children who reach the poor.

The religion–based curriculum is considered less effective from the perspective of kindergarten teachers in Saudi Arabia in the midst of multicultural life (Alshaikhi, A. A., 2021). educational material in schools because it is very important and fundamental for children's lives in the future (Ahmed, J. M. 2018).

Religion–based education is not something exclusive that is synonymous with the spiritual domain. One developmental domain influences other developmental domains. Spiritual development in children appears to be related to holistic development (Mata–McMahon 2018a, Haslip and Gullo 2018b; Mata–McMahon et al. 2018c); religious commitment with a good understanding of religion given from an early age will be more effective and productive in realizing prosperity increasing prices self–esteem, school motivation, as well as various bad access such as intolerance as well as inter–religious conflicts, will easily manifest in individuals (children and adolescents) who have a good religious background (Rafael López et al., 2021)

Religious commitment with a good understanding of religion given from an early age will be more effective and productive in realizing prosperity, increasing self–esteem and school motivation (Rafael López Cordero et al., 2021); this also has an impact on reducing various bad access such as intolerance and inter–religious conflict. Several countries in Europe assumed the increasing importance of studying the influential and potential role of religion and religiosity in de–escalating conflicts and social tensions across the continent. Education is a vital area for addressing religious issues in creating an educational dialogue setting for the peaceful coexistence of peoples across Europe.
Based on previous research, the discrepancy in the early childhood curriculum on religious education content in the education unit level curriculum that provides educational services for students of various backgrounds, how it is implemented and contributes to the development of children with special needs, is the concern of researchers to explore.

Method

The location of this research was carried out at the Permata Hati Early Childhood Education Institution on Jl. Setia I No. 14, Jatiwaringin Pondok Gede, Bekasi City. As a PAUD institution that has existed since 2003, making religion the basis of learning while still referring to the national curriculum. ECE Permata Hati has 49 students divided into 3 groups, playgroup (2–3.5 years), group A (4–5 years) and group B (5–7 years). Diamond by 7 teachers, 1 teacher with a Masters degree in public administration, 1 person with a Bachelors degree in early childhood education, and 5 others have a high school education background. Seven students at this institution are indicated as children with special needs, such as ADHD, delayed speech and autism.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. In this study, it is explained and analyzed how learning is managed by early childhood institutions in classes that have a variety of student backgrounds, especially related to child development. In this study, the researcher acts as an instrument and plays an active role in exploring in-depth data information (in-depth interviews and probing questions). All the data obtained and relevant were analyzed as material for the richness of the research.

The research begins with a documentation study that is relevant to the research material. The next stage is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with teachers who teach at the institution, school principals, foundations and parents of several children with special needs. It is assumed that the Islamic education–based curriculum at the early childhood unit level is able to accommodate the growth and development needs of children with special needs. The next step is to prepare observation and interview guidelines in an effort to collect research data. Because this type of research is descriptive qualitative in nature, which records, records, and describes events or phenomena that occur at the research location, participatory data collection is used in collecting data. Data collection was carried out in a participatory manner, in which researchers positioned themselves as life instruments who conducted in-depth interviews with informants and key informants.

This research was conducted at an early childhood education institution, namely SPS Permata Hati in Bekasi City. Research data was collected through a documentation study to assess various actual conditions of early childhood who have various backgrounds, get learning services with KTSP institutions based on religious (Islamic) education and their application in kindergartens or PAUD research targets. The results of the study documentation were referred to at the beginning and end of the study as expert justification.

Results and Discussion

SPS Permata Hati, which is the research site located in the city of Bekasi, this institution is trying to be able to organize the concept of an inclusive school. The term inclusive education or inclusive education is a word or term echoed by UNESCO derived from the word Education for All, which means friendly education for all, with an educational approach that seeks to reach everyone without exception. They all have the same rights and opportunities to get the maximum benefit from education. These rights and opportunities are not differentiated by the diversity of individual characteristics physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and even socioeconomic status. At this point, it appears that the concept of inclusive education is in line with Indonesia's national education philosophy, which does not limit students’ access to education simply because of differences in their initial conditions and backgrounds. Inclusive is not only for those who are disabled or extraordinary but applies to all children.

Inclusive education is generally considered as a multi-dimensional concept that includes assessments of difference, diversity, human rights, issues of social justice and equity, as well as a social model of disability and a socio-political model of education. It also includes the school transformation process and focuses on children's rights and access to education (Kozleski et al., 2011; Loreman et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2005; Sliw, 2011; Smith, 2010; Topping, 2012). In terms of facilities, SPS Permata Hati does not have adequate facilities; additional facilities are needed to support the implementation of more comprehensive educational services for the variety of students who become students at this institution. Students are divided into 3 groups of 5 classes, 1 class for the playgroup consisting of 8 students (3–4 years), 2 classes for group A (4–5 years) consisting of 18 students, and 2 classes for group B (5–6 years) consisting of 26 students.

Not all study rooms are in separate rooms; group B occupies a large room which is partitioned off using only student locker cabinets, which are routinely used as a hall or student assembly activities which are routinely held at least once a week in the area behind the school. The backyard is not too wide, divided into being used as a physical play area, rows and rows, a fish pond area, plants, and facilities for flying foxes. Group A study room and playgroup are located at the front of the school, which are separate rooms. Because the local school is a residential house, the
class settings adjust to the existing house plans. For example, access to the back of the class area must go through the study rooms of two groups; if you need to go in and out between rooms in learning conditions, it is not uncommon to pause the attention of students and teachers when learning activities are in progress.

The teacher’s and principal’s rooms are also inadequate; there is only one room that functions not only as the principal teacher’s room, but as well as an administration room. If there is a need for each at the same time, for example, school guests or parents who have administrative needs, then only one can use it; the others switch to using another room, such as the school terrace or in the classroom.

In terms of the concept of a child–friendly school that promotes environmental culture, clean, safe and caring, SPS Permata Hati is sufficient; the environment is quite clean, beautiful with various plants, and fish ponds, quite adequate for learning activities while playing, which is the concept of children’s learning early age. Internationally, universal design seeks to promote access to learning and environments by recognizing the diversity of learners throughout the design process rather than trying to adapt existing and often incompatible approaches and environments. When applied to education, this can mean a more inclusive (universal) approach to curriculum design and teaching methods.

Permata Hati early childhood education institution, with the spirit of education for all, is open to serving children with a variety of backgrounds, including children with special needs; in the 2022–2023 academic year, there are 7 children out of 49 students at this school who are indicated to have special needs. Regarding children with special needs, some of these statements were made directly by the parents of the students when they registered for school, even though they did not bring information from the hospital or development clinic. The reasons for parents to send their children to regular schools, generally apart from economic reasons, are that they believe that their children will be able to participate in activities at school like other regular children.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem–solving strategies through collaborative dialogue with more knowledgeable members of society. Vygotsky’s theory consists of concepts such as culture–specific tools, private speech, and the Zone of Proximal Development.

Piaget that the development of cognitive abilities occurs gradually and views cognitive development as a social process in which children learn from experienced adults. While Vygotsky claimed that babies are born with basic abilities for intellectual development called ‘basic mental functions’, including Attention, Sensation, Perception and Memory.

Eventually, through interaction in the sociocultural environment, these are developed into more sophisticated and effective mental processes that Vygotsky called ‘higher mental functions.’ Every culture provides its children with intellectual adaptation tools that enable them to use basic mental functions more effectively/adaptively. Intellectual adaptation tools are Vygotsky’s term for methods of thinking and problem–solving strategies that children internalize through social interaction with more knowledgeable societies, in this context is the school environment.

Social interaction is an important vehicle for growth and development in early childhood who are in the golden age period, not only for children with average but also for children who have special needs; this is the background for SPS Permata Hati’s belief, regardless of the variety of children, through interaction in an environment, will help the process of growth and development to be more optimal. It is realized by the institution, with limited knowledge about handling children with special needs.

In a broad sense, education is a process related to efforts to develop one’s potential, which includes three aspects of life. The three aspects of life are outlook on life, attitude to life and life skills. The three aspects of language that are often used are cognitive, affective and psychomotor, all three of which are a unit of totality inherent in a person (Bloom et al., 1979). As it is known that the taxonomy/coaching domain, according to Benjamin S. Bloom et al., on human behaviour has been accepted as a reference in the world of education.

In Islam, the term education is stated in the Qur’an with the term at Tarbiyah. As quoted by Ahmad Tafsir that education is the meaning of the word ‘Tarbiyah’ The word comes from three words, namely; rabba–yarbu, which increases, grows, and ‘rabbaya–yarbaa’ means to become big, and ‘rabbya–yarubbu’ which means to improve, control affairs, guide, guard, maintain.

Islamic education in its implementation is based on Islamic teachings, which are based on the main guidelines of the Islamic religion, namely the Qur’an and Sunnah from the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Because the main principle of Islam is the implementation of the Two Sentences of the Creed “Asyhadu anna Laa ilaah illalah wa asyhadu anna Muhammadarrasulullah” namely testimony or promise or oath or commitment to believe in the One God and believe that Muhammad SAW is Allah’s Apostle, that Muslims are obliged to follow the guidance and example . Allah’s demands contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW provide detailed and comprehensive directions, especially education.

Early childhood (including early childhood with special needs) requires a learning environment that validates their existence, feels accepted, and feels acknowledged; this will be realized when school is in a pleasant atmosphere that is able to fulfill the human nature of children at school. Thus, many people agree that no child is born who is not smart, not capable, not useful, but every child has the potential and uniqueness of each; for this reason, the curriculum in schools is made to guide the growth and development of potential and uniqueness according to their nature.
Education given to children always pays close attention to the characteristics of each stage in the child’s development. The education provided includes education from the fields of academics and religiosity (religious education), which is given from the start. Religious values are one area of habituation development prepared by teachers to improve children’s ability to recognize concepts related to their religion from an early age. In stories that provide understanding and learning to children, the inculcation of religious values, concrete media is needed because religion/belief is abstract and complex (Masitah et al., 2021).

The curriculum is structured within the framework of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia by taking into account: (a) increasing faith and piety, (b) increasing noble character, (c) increasing the potential, intelligence and interests of students, (d) the diversity of regional and environmental potentials, (e) demands for regional and national development, (f) developments in science, technology and art, (g) religion, (h) dynamics of global development, (i) national unity and national values.” (UU 20/2003, article 36). This confirms that religious values are the main principle in education in Indonesia.

Religion as an element of learning is an important concern because religion is the foundation of education which has a vital role in the formation of a person who is godly, social, skilled and efficient. Religious education has an important position in national education in line with the goals of national education, namely: "National education functions to develop capabilities and form dignified national character and civilization in the context of educating the life of the nation aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens." (Law 20 of 2003, article 3).

Attention to values-based learning and religious practice in Indonesia is quite supportive, with the establishment of educational institutions such as madrasahs starting at the basic education level, such as madrasah ibtidaiyah, to senior high school or aliyah. Not to mention Islamic boarding schools and integrated schools from pre-school to high school levels. This shows the recognition of the importance of religion as the basic foundation, concept and practice of education. To support the success of learning outcomes, it is important for a teacher to innovate in the curriculum implementation; teachers must be trained to be innovative and creative in curriculum implementation (Hannah et al., 2021). Education level curriculum is internalized in teaching and learning activities in Early Childhood Institutions Permata Hati is an important part of efforts to achieve holistic and integrative learning targets and goals carried out by the Institute.

In the context of curriculum development, it is the curriculum planning process to produce a broad and clear curriculum plan. The process is related to the selection and organization of the various components of a teaching and learning situation, including establishing a timetable for managing the curriculum and determining objectives, subjects, activities, resources and curriculum development measures that lead to the creation of resources and unit plans, as well as multiple curriculum learning paths. Others to facilitate the learning process (Yu’timaalahuyatazzaka 2016, p. 140).

In the learning program implemented, it is applied equally to all students or learners; for example, morning circle activities in congregational Duha prayers which are routinely carried out every day, all children are involved in carrying out activities, including children with special needs, as the researchers saw in the observations in the institution. Even though they don’t do it in the same and orderly manner as regular children at the institution, some children with special needs seem to be able to follow and participate in the movements and recitations of the prayers recited.

Likewise, in other daily activities, learning time is given the same activities in the same class, which allow continuous interaction with teachers and classmates; it can be seen that one of the children who is indicated to have speech impediments is currently more active in talking interactively with teachers and friends, also more urban vocabulary and more complex sentences.

Salend (2011) distills from the literature on inclusive education that there are four main principles under which the philosophy of inclusion is practised; first, providing all students with a general education curriculum that is challenging, interesting and flexible; second, embracing diversity and responsiveness to individual strengths and challenges; third, using different reflective practices and instructions; and fourth, forming a community based on collaboration between students, teachers, families, other professionals, and community institutions. Therefore, inclusive education aims to provide a facilitative and constructive focus to enhance the development of children with special needs.

The cognitive development of children with special needs at SPS Permata Hati seems to have developed with an inclusiveness pattern at the institution in terms of learning on a religious basis, the ability to follow prayer movements, recite prayer readings, express opinions; these children are able to do this from the results of observations and discussions of researchers with teachers and parents of students. In the environmental theory or empiricism that he pioneered, John Locke argued that the level of intelligence is determined by the experience and knowledge he gets from his environment, thus the great influence of the environment on human development.
Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion and discussion of this study, the following conclusions were obtained: 1. Early childhood education institution SPS Permata Hati develops a curriculum at the early childhood unit level (KTSP) that is based on religion and applies to all students, including students with special needs. 2. Religious Education is an approach to curriculum development at the education unit level (KTSP). 3. Services that are applied equally to the diversity of students’ backgrounds at SPS Permata Hati. 4. Children with Special Needs at SPS Permata Hati show development, especially social, emotional, language and spiritual development.

References


