

# Realizing Quality Early Childhood Education and Parenting in Indonesia: Pitfalls and Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

The significance of education in the earliest years of life has been indicated by extensive research, globally and in Indonesia. Supporting this evidence-based finding, both global and national objectives aim at ensuring access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services. Parenting education which plays a fundamental and supportive role to quality ECCE also receives stronger recognition from the wider public, including the Indonesian government. Through a desk-based research, this paper elaborates measurable solutions and strategies that can be implemented in order to realise the global and national commitments in providing quality ECCE and parenting.

**Keywords:** quality, ECCE, parenting

## 1. BACKGROUND

Extensive research point to the importance of education in the earliest years of life as critical in shaping a child's future cognitive, social, and emotional development as well as physical and mental health (Greenough et al, 1972; Chugani et al, 1987; Huttenlocher 1987; Jernigan et al, 1991; Pfefferbaum et al, 1994; Gilmore, 1997; Kolb et al., 1999; and Osborn, 1999). In addition, research on child and family studies consistently shows that parents' involvement in early childhood education play an important role to support the optimal development of young children and fundamental factor for learning development throughout the life span.

The importance of quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has indeed taken the global spotlight (Bell and Stevenson, 2007). It is globally accepted paradigm that investment in education, especially ECCE, is the key factor in determining the ability of nation states to hold their own in a globalized world. Nowadays, numbers of countries around the world recognize the significant role of ECCE both for the future of their young children and the nation.

Accordingly, delivering quality, holistic and integrative ECCE supported by parenting education is often recognized as one of the most critical and cost-effective investments a country can make. These investments are not just to provide every child with quality of health, education, and economy, it is also to realize sustainable development and society.

In the last five decades, various international documents and commitments have been agreed to ensure that all children

have access to free and quality ECCE. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that education is one of the most essential human rights that shall be directed to develop human personalities and characters that value human rights and fundamental freedoms, foster and promote mutual understanding, tolerance, friendship and peace. More than four decades afterwards, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) specifically stipulates that all children, i.e. population under the age of 18, have all the rights it contains, whatever their race, religion or abilities, whatever they think or say, and whatever type of family they come from that every country needs to guarantee.

In line with these declarations, in 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, came out with six global goals of education encapsulated in the Dakar Framework for Action of Education for All (EFA). One of the goals mandated the significant achievements in ECCE that UNESCO Member States had to meet by 2015. In 2016, the Dakar Declaration was strengthened by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a specific target in education known as the 2030 Education Agenda.

The fourth goal of the Agenda embodies the global aspirations to ensure that in 2030 there will be quality and inclusive education, and lifelong learning opportunities for all. One of the targets of the fourth goal (SDGs 4.2) is to ensure that by 2030 "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (UNESCO, 2016).

In accordance with the Dakar Declaration and SDGs above, the Indonesian Government has developed multiple efforts in order to enhance access to ECCE services throughout the

country. At the policy level, the efforts have been executed through the formulation and issuance of Law Number 20/2003 on National Education System, Presidential Decree Number 60/2013 on Holistic-Integrative Early Childhood Development, Presidential Decree Number 87/2017 on Character Education, and most recently, Presidential Decree Number 59/2017 on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, and Government Regulation Number 2/2018 on Minimum Service Standards. All these provisions show a very strong national commitment to provide ECCE services to all children from birth to six years of age, to prepare their physical and spiritual growth and development prior to entering primary education.

In addition to ECCE, multiple countries have committed to focus on realizing parenting education in order to acquire good-quality education. Parenting education has gained prominence in Europe over the past decade and the education typically focusing on parents' involvement in the education of their children. Council of the European Union (2013) states that parent-school engagement is a lever factor for improving educational and societal outcomes. Therefore, at European level, aspects of support for parenting education were present in the Lisbon Strategy and One of these strategies are focused on matters provision of children's early years services.

In order to support parenting education, The Indonesian Government through The Ministry of Education established the Directorate of Family Education with the objective to support the relationship between parents and their children (parenting skills), parents and school (collaboration and accountability), parent involvement engagement of children education, and to develop the *Trisentra* of education. Numbers of regulation has been formulated (i.e. Minister of Education and Culture Number 30/2017) in order to ensure parenting education is available for parents and young children.

## 2. CURRENT CONDITION OF ECCE AND PARENTING EDUCATION

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2015) shows that since 2000, ECCE services have expanded considerably. Globally, pre-primary education enrollment increased by approximately 60%, and the sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia regions even experienced a 250% increase. The Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) of pre-primary education in the world increased from 27% in 1990 to 58% in 2015 (Figure 1).

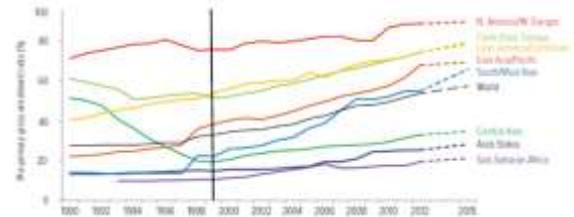
However, there is a significant discrepancy among continents. While the pre-primary education GER in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 74%, and 89% in North America and Western Europe in 2012, it was only 20% in sub-Saharan Africa and 25% in the Arab states. Countries

in transition period returned to a positive trend after 1999 following an increase in pre-primary education services. Although the level of pre-primary education enrollment in Central and Eastern Europe continued to increase after 1990, enrollment rate in both regions remained far below that in Central Asia.

*Source: UIS database; Bruneforth (2015)*

**Figure 1** Pre-primary enrollment rates based on continents (1990-2015)

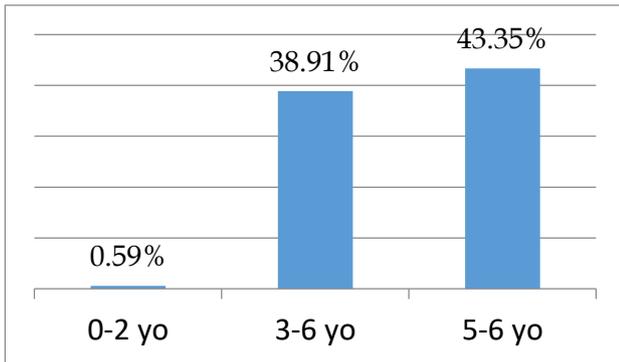
Gaps in pre-primary education enrollment continue to occur



within and beyond countries, especially between urban and rural areas. Although globally the percentage of participation in private ECCE institutions increased from 28% in 1999 to 31% in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015), many countries still have limited ability to provide public pre-primary education services. Evidence shows this is due to various reasons, such as inadequate supporting policy environment or lack of funding availability. Meanwhile, household surveys show that the provision of pre-primary education services by private institutions is often underestimated in many countries where regulation of the sector is weak.

In terms of financial support, a joint recent regional study on financing for ECCE conducted by UNESCO, Kobe University and United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) (2018), with financial support of the Ministry of Strategy and Finance of the Republic of Korea, suggests that in the Asia-Pacific region, ECCE continues to be an education sector with very minimal funding. Public funding in the Asia Pacific regions is often insufficient, while external funding is sometimes unsustainable. Consequently, many families still have to contribute in cash to access the pre-primary education services.

In Indonesia, there has been significant progress in ECCE services from time to time. The ECCE Net Enrollment Rate (NER) (3-6 years old) in 2018 reached only 38.91% (Figure 2). About 62,739 villages in Indonesia also had access to ECCE services. To support One Village One ECCE Centre policy, there were about 63,245 villages that had already at least one ECCE centre. It reached 75.73% achievement. In addition, 7.4 million children received ECCE Operational Funding in 2017.



Source: Pusat Data dan Statistik Pendidikan dan kebudayaan (PDSPK) Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia

Figure 2 ECCE NER based on province 2018

While there is significant improvement in the access for ECCE services, the current global and national conditions of ECCE services have not run hand in hand with existing achievements and conditions. It does not only happen in Indonesia, but throughout the world. In other words, it turns out that the global paradigm in ECCE is reflected not by global achievements, but by global issues and challenges. Secondly, there is still a lot of "homework" to accomplish in order to realize quality ECCE services. Before discussing some feasible steps and strategies that can be implemented to realize the objective, the following section will describe various challenges of ECCE that have occurred up to this present time.

In the area of parenting education, while parenting supports are often seen as a lever for improving educational and societal outcomes, the implementation of family policies has raised various definitions and implementations in many countries. For example, there are some initiatives at European level, such as the Europe 2020 strategy, to support young people and reduction of early school-leaving. Countries such as the UK, Portuguese, Belgium, The Netherland, Denmark, and Swiss have turned point towards a shift from passive to active investment-oriented strategies for children and families through the implementation of parenting education at schools or family centers. The parenting supports policies are also implemented in other developed countries, such as in the United States of America, Singapore, and Australia since their governments are fully aware that in order to support child's positive outcomes, family policies and parenting support programmes are required.

In Indonesia, the government has developed various parenting programmes in coordination with schools, partner organizations, and municipality or district government across the country. Parenting supports have been made available to the society through multiple sectors, including education sector. To date, the Ministry of Education has reached 380 districts/cities for the parenting education and

the interventions are accessible for 20.39% parent across the country.

### 3. CHALLENGES

At the global level, UNESCO Bangkok (2018) identifies three major challenges that are currently impeding the adequate and sustainable financing of ECCE in the participating countries of the regional study. They are, namely, insufficient government expenditure on pre-primary education, lack of sustainability of ECCE financing, and the absence of enabling governance model and lack of coordination. With regard to the current conditions of ECCE in Indonesia as described in the previous section, the challenges are actually not much different from those at the global level. More specifically, however, the challenges can be categorized as follows.

#### 3.1. Access

In 2018, the most cited ECCE NER in Indonesia was 38.91%, and this achievement indeed exceeded the target set by the Directorate General of Early Childhood Education and Community Education, Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). However, it is important to note and acknowledge that the GER only represents children aged 3 to 6 years old. In contrast to this, the globally accepted definition of ECCE refers to "a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support and aid in the holistic development of children, from birth to age 8 years" (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, in this context, there is an issue with the age range.

The data show that the number of children aged 0 to 6 years old in Indonesia reached approximately 33.34 million, and the number of children aged 3 to 6 years old was around 19.15 million (Statistics Indonesia, 2018). Nevertheless, the number of children who had access to ECCE services in the country to date is only around 14.22 million children. There are more than 19 million children lack of access and enrollment to ECCE services across the country.

One of the major problems causing minimum access to ECCE services for the Indonesian society is due to a wide and apprehensive gap in the availability of ECCE centers. While there are now (as per Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019) 202,611 ECCE Centers available across 57,654 villages in Indonesia, this still does not fulfil the need of access to ECCE services across the country. To date, the total number of villages in Indonesia reached 83,762 units. Approximately 26,108 of them could be categorized as developing villages with no ECCE services. Therefore, children living in these villages need access to ECCE services.

Similar challenge occurs in parenting education. While there are 514 municipalities and districts area across the country, during these three years, the Indonesian

government has just able to reach 380 local governments. This is due to family policies are not being priority yet for the local governments in this autonomy era. To date, parenting education that has been undertaken by the Ministry of Education reached 15,569,231 parents or approximately 20.39% of the total population. Given that Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world, with 63 million families living in the country (Statistics Indonesia, 2013), there is a “homework” for the government to make the programme available for every parent in Indonesia.

Another challenge faced by the Indonesian government relates to the issue of equity in ECCE. Indonesia is a country that experienced rapid economic development. Yet, it also faced inevitable inequality among different social-classes in its society. This impacts access to ECCE programmes, especially for children from the underprivileged background. At the same time, the notion of equity also raises questions when it comes to young children with special needs.

### **3.2. Quality**

While access to ECCE services has shown a relatively encouraging progress, quality improvement is a demand that has to be met immanently. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2015) shows that the quality of ECCE services in Indonesia is quite alarming due to the low quality and competence of ECCE educators, minimum funding, and the ineffectiveness of bureaucracy and coordination channels.

It was reported that of the 519,518 ECCE educators, those with Masters’ Degrees background constituted only 0.66%, Bachelor degree 33.16%, Diploma 12.68%, Senior Secondary School 48.69%, and Junior Secondary School 4.81% (MoEC, 2018). Not least alarming is the fact that many of the educators hold the Degrees in non-ECCE major. This situation seems to speak for itself about the quality of ECCE in Indonesia. Therefore, it makes a perfect sense if the ECCE in Indonesia is often labelled as the “generic” education. In this sense too, the ECCE trainings focusing on upskilling teachers’ competencies are essential for ECCE educators.

In terms of parenting education, although the Indonesian government is fully aware that family supports have significant impacts on children’s positive developmental outcomes, the delivery of parenting support programmes has not gained significant attention by the local governments. Providing quality family services is not a priority either in education sector or other sectors. The parenting services delivered are sporadic, and there is no structured and standardised programme developed yet. In addition, there is no requirement for the competency framework for the parenting educators across the country. These could lead to lack of evidence regarding to how

parenting programmes will lead to children’s positive developmental outcomes.

### **3.3. Governance**

In addition to the MoEC, another ministry that is responsible to manage ECCE in Indonesia is the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA). From law and bureaucratic perspectives, this does not seem to be a problem. However, in practice, coordination between the two ministries remains a challenge. From management to data collection, the ECCE services managed by these two ministries are somehow difficult to integrate. This condition presents a serious challenge that has existed since far too long, and has now become an insurmountable issue.

On the other hand, of the 202,747 ECCE Centers in Indonesia, 97% of them are private institutions, established and managed by and for the community. From the point of view of public involvement in education, this is one of the good practices that can become a powerful legacy in the history of Indonesian ECCE. However, from the perspective of government realizing the state’s commitment to guarantee its each citizen’s right to education, this is quite a challenge.

Similar to ECCE, parenting education in Indonesia has gained attention by multiple sectors, such as health, social, women empowerment and child protection and religious affairs. In practice, implementation of integrated parenting programme from these sectors is quite challenging. The coordination among the ministries is sometimes ineffective. These three categories summarize the challenges of ECCE and parenting education in Indonesia at macro level that do exist. There are many other challenges which certainly cannot be described in this limited paper. For example, in ECCE, there are misconceptions over literacy that have been inherited across time and generations. Although the rules and regulations forbidding reading drill in ECCE have been issued, the Indonesian society at large still do not see this prohibition a matter of concern. However, in order to be able to resolve these challenges, access, quality and governance of ECCE services and parenting education are the fundamental aspects that need immediate thinking.

How could the challenges of ECCE and parenting education services in access, quality and governance be overcome? This is the main question that needs an answer. The following section will explain various alternative solutions and strategies that can be executed to overcome the three macro challenges.

## **4. REALIZING QUALITY ECCE IN INDONESIA**

To address the existing challenges discussed previously, as well as to realize quality ECCE services and parenting education, here are some alternative solutions and strategies that can be taken. The solutions and strategies below are grouped into three main categories, in line with the four macro challenges problems presented earlier.

### **4.1. Improving Access**

#### *4.1.1. Expanding access*

At present, the ECCE Centers scattered throughout Indonesia have not been able to fully serve the entire children population (0 to 6 years old) whose numbers keep increasing in the country's vast territory. Thus, it is necessary to map the design of improving access to ECCE services based on a reliable blueprint.

In terms of parenting education, in order to increase the accessibility of parenting services, it is required to map the design of improving the parenting services. In addition, the cooperation and coordination with local governments are needed to fully support the parenting services to be available for parents in the country.

#### *4.1.2. Developing new ECCE Centers in frontier, outermost and least developed regions (often referred to as 3T)*

The Indonesian National Development Planning Agency (MoEC, 2018) shows that there were 122 districts in Indonesia that could be categorised into the frontier, outermost and least developed regions (often referred to as 3T: *terdepan, terluar, tertinggal*). The 26,108 villages that do not have access to ECCE services discussed in the previous sections are mainly located in these regions. Thus, all 3T regions need to be given priority in establishing of new ECCE Centers.

### **4.2. Enhancing Quality**

#### *4.2.1. Improving ECCE teachers' competencies in collaboration with higher education institutions*

Competency development is an aspect that requires serious scrutiny. With a large number of targets, more intensive efforts are needed through collaboration with various

stakeholders to develop ECCE teachers' competencies. This can be undertaken through building networks, partnerships, and cooperation with universities, either public or private. An example of an initiative that can be upscaled is the transfer of the training points into credits in higher education institutions.

#### *4.2.2. Providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for heads of ECCE Centers*

This is the conclusion of various international studies on the importance of effective leadership in education (Day et al., 1999; Bush & Glover, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood, 2007; Robinson, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Day, 2012a, 2012b; Bush & Glover, 2014). In fact, research by Day, et al. (2016) concludes that the biggest change in an education institution is very dependent on its leader; if the leader is transformational, so many changes will occur regardless of how much intervention the government provides.

Based on these studies, it is time for educational leadership to get stronger attention in Indonesia. In the context of ECCE, the Heads of ECCE Centers should appropriately receive sustainable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes in order to create quality and well-established ECCE Centers.

#### *4.2.3. Developing a structured and standardised parenting education services*

The elements of effective parenting programmes include structuring and tailoring of interventions to the needs of both parents and children, service integration and interagency collaborative services. This structured parenting service is important for the government to measure the quality impact resulted by the programmes. In addition, because the needs of parents and children vary greatly and often depend on family context and characteristics, implementing parenting services using structured manual approaches that tailor the services to fit individual needs is considered to be strategic effort.

#### *4.2.4. Providing professional development programme for educators of ecce Centers about parenting services*

Having parenting services delivered by qualified individuals trusted by or already known to parents is very important in order to encourage them to participate. In order to deliver quality parenting programmes, strengthening competency of parenting educators or trainers is needed.

With a large number of targets across Indonesia, more intensive efforts are needed through collaboration with various stakeholders (i.e. Universities or NGOs) to develop the professional development programmes. The professional development can be undertaken by using multiple strategies, including digital professional development in order to reach educators across the country efficiently.

### **4.3. Strengthening Governance**

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) are two ministries within the Government of Indonesia that are mandated to oversee ECCE. To avoid and overcome coordination issues, it is important to be fully aware that the overall objective of both ministries is to educate and prepare children for the next level of education and to embrace the demographic dividend in 2045. The inter-ministerial synchronizations are required to realize this objective.

### **4.4. Achieving Social Equity through ECCE: Case Study of Indonesia and China**

The Indonesian government has attempted to adopt several strategies in order to ensure that the practices of ECCE in the country take equity into consideration. In this case, China is a good example, as the Chinese government that has taken various approaches to ensure that children from poor family background could have access to ECCE (World Bank, 2016). The Chinese Ministry of Education has launched several subsidy programmes, such as providing free basic tuition fee, matriculation, uniform and transportation fee, including improving teachers' salary. Similarly, the Indonesian government has developed and implemented numbers of programmes. One of the most important programmes is One Village One ECCE Centre where the government encourages the village government to establish ECCE Centers to improve access and participation to ECCE in the village. In line with it, the government has also developed some other programmes, such as the initiatives of ECCE for children with special needs (*PAUD Layanan Khusus*). The term "special needs" here is not confined to children with physical disabilities, but more importantly it aims to serve underprivileged children in a marginalised community. To reach out children with special needs, the government has created a programme called Inclusive ECCE (*PAUD Inklusi*), an initiative that encourages ECCE Centers to implement inclusive education by accepting children with special needs into their institution.

## **5. ECCE POLICY INTERVENTIONS**

There are eight policy interventions needed to strengthen ECCE in Indonesia. All interventions are child-based centred, implemented to optimally support child growth and development. Parents are expected to be fully involved in the implementation, not only as programme beneficiaries, but also as initiators. Collaboration and partnership are important to help support the delivery of ECCE services in ECCE Centers.

### **5.1. Strengthening Child-centred ECCE Policy**

Educational policies need to be understood by all stakeholders. Policies focusing on children's learning outcomes (Child Development Index) are instrumental to design tools to monitor children's growth and development. Other policies that need to be reviewed also relate to the minimum age for entering primary school, the participation of children in compulsory pre-primary education, and the primary curriculum, especially grade 1, which needs harmonization with the ECCE ones.

### **5.2. A Campaign for Change of Paradigm**

Misconceptions about the role of ECCE do not require a new policy, but an effort to build public awareness as a basis for behavioral change. The campaign strategy has the potential to build reasonable understanding and change among stakeholders and educators. One of the fundamental misconceptions about ECCE is whether or not children should be taught reading and writing. Literacy should be introduced through play-based learning, yet the dilemma occurs when ECCE becomes a prerequisite to enter primary school.

### **5.3. Strengthening ECCE Quality for Children Aged 0-2 Years Old**

This policy Centers upon integrating family-based education programmes, improving and mapping the quality of educators, improving the quality of ECCE Centers through mentoring programmes, and integrating health, nutrition, and child protection services with ECCE Centers.

**5.4. Improving ECCE Quality for Children Aged 3-6 Years Old**

This policy puts emphasis on integrating parenting programmes, improving competencies and capacities of educators and educational personnel, improving the quality of ECCE centers through mentoring programmes, integrating children to primary school (transition strategies), and integrating health, nutrition, and child protection services with ECCE centers.

**5.5. Expanding Access to ECCE for Children Aged 5-6 Years Old**

This policy is implemented by expanding access to ECCE centers for children aged 5-6 years old through One Village One ECE Centre policy, and children aged 0-2 years old, especially those from marginalized families, through partnerships with the private sector.

**5.6. Strengthening the Role of the Local Government and ECCE Ambassador (Bunda PAUD)**

Local governments are expected to prioritise achieving the goals of ECCE interventions, and commit to achieving SDGs 4.2 by allocating the regional budget for ECCE and strengthening the role of local ECCE Ambassador.

**5.7. Integrating ECCE Data System**

It is important to have a database that combines data from various sources so that the information provided to stakeholders becomes more meaningful.

**5.8. Analyzing and Adjusting ECCE Budget**

Budget availability is one of the critical issues in improving ECCE access and quality. At present, the budget for ECCE is only around 1% of the total national budget for education. The above policy measures are described in the national roadmap for ECCE development in Indonesia (2020-2030). The roadmap functions as a reference for various relevant parties and stakeholders that seek for ECCE development.

**Tabel 1** ECCE Roadmap Year 2020-2030

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2030
Strengthening child-centered ECCE policies						
A campaign for change of paradigm						
Strengthening ECCE quality for children aged 0-2 years old						
Improving ECCE quality for children aged 3-6 years old						
Expanding access to ECCE for children aged 5-6 years old						
Strengthening the Role of Local Government and ECCE Ambassador (Bunda PAUD) to support the interventions						
Integrating ECCE Data system						
Analysing and adjusting ECCE budget						

**5. CONCLUSION**

Quality ECCE and parenting education services are noble objectives and aspirations that are desired by everyone, both at the global and national levels. These ideals are further strengthened by the commitments of the world in general and Indonesia in particular that guarantee and promise to be

fulfilled by 2030 at the latest. What is elaborated in this paper is basically logical and measurable solutions and strategies that can be implemented in order to realise the commitments.

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