

READINESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS TO ATTEND TRAINING THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Research related to distance learning for students has been widely carried out, contrary to research related to teachers. The lack of opportunities and facilities for early childhood education teachers to develop their competencies is the background of this study. This study aimed at explaining the readiness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers to face training conducted through distance learning. This study was conducted through a survey method participated by 409 respondents. The respondents were teachers or assistants from Satuan PAUD Sejenis (SPS), Playgroups (PG) and Kindergartens (KG). The results of this study indicated that most of the respondents were interested in participating distance learning. They showed high motivation to improve their competence through distance learning. Various obstacles faced by the respondents caused them to have difficulties in accessing distance learning.

Keywords: *distance learning, early childhood, early childhood education teacher*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a catalyst for change in a nation. As a catalyst for change, education must be interpreted as civilizing (hominization) while simultaneously humanizing humans (humanization). The process of civilizing and humanizing is directed so that humans can preserve themselves in a high and advanced civilization that leads to perfection (Anwar, 2014). Cultivation and humanization can not be separated from the interaction between humans in a particular culture. Everyone who experiences civilizing and humanizing can only be said to have succeeded through these stages if he is able to establish good relationships in the society in which he lives. In other words, being human means experiencing the world as an objective reality that is reflected, entered, and changed through creative action (Freire, 2001). As the person in charge of the success of education, teachers need to continue to reflect, improve competence and continue to be creative to produce learning that can adapt to changing times. Lifelong learning, innovation and creativity are the keys to be able to continue to present interesting learning for students. This applies to teachers at all levels including Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers.

In order to be able to face the increasingly rapid changes, early childhood teachers need to regularly update their knowledge and improve their competence in the field of teaching through participation in seminars and training. Teachers who are professional educators in the early childhood teacher field (RI, 2005) need to continue to improve their competencies to be able to adapt to the 4.0 education era that is now taking place. However, this is not easy to do because access to various trainings and seminars both initiated by the government and the private sector is still centered in big cities and has not touched many areas, especially remote areas. The implementation of one-day

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seminars and short training organized by the central government to regions has not been able to improve the professional competence of teachers in Indonesia (Chang et al., 2014), whereas in planning the direction of early childhood education development towards Indonesian Children of Hope launched by the government, 2015-2025 is a stage of strengthening the quality of early childhood education (Suminah et al., 2017). Strengthening the quality of early childhood education also needs to be accompanied by strengthening the competence of early childhood education teachers as implementers of learning activities so that they can direct students to achieve optimal development as expected. Given the difficulty of accessing teachers in order to increase their competence, it is necessary to think about other learning alternatives and innovative breakthroughs that can facilitate these needs.

Efforts to meet the needs of teachers to access training can be overcome by utilizing rapid technological advances in various lines of life. With the existence of smartphones, online and social media, as well as internet access, the world's distance seems to have folded, become so close, and connected to one another. This has an impact on the world of education which was originally offline and limited to online and unlimited and opens up learning opportunities for a wider audience (Saykılı, 2018). Advances in technology change the pattern of education from face to face to distance learning. Distance learning opens a space for equality for every person who is underrepresented and less fortunate in accessing education in such a way that everyone can access the same education. In other words, distance learning is the embodiment of democracy in the world of education because its reach is able to touch everyone in every layer of society (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). Through technological developments, the education system is required to play its role creatively in order to be able to present a taste of education that responds to challenges while enabling everyone to actively participate in accessing education for the common good. The distance learning model can be a way out to overcome the government's limitations to provide equal opportunities for teachers to increase competence. Especially considering that Indonesia is a very large archipelagic country, distance learning can be an effective way out to bridge the distance and time differences that are so far away.

Distance learning is a part of education that combines teaching methods with technology to deliver teaching materials to students who are not physically present in the classroom as in general and traditional education (Bušelić, 2017). Ease of accessing learning materials is one of the advantages of distance learning, besides that it can also anticipate the possibility of students' absence from accessing direct learning to existing information sources. Distance learning can be described as a creative process that provides access to learning when sources of information and teachers are separated by distance and time (Honeyman & Miller, 1993). Distance and time become one of the important elements in the distance learning process and it is at the same time a major problem which, at this time where information, computing, and communication technology, has ruled the world, can be overcome by using these technological resources. In the Indonesian context, distance learning is specifically regulated in Article 31 of the 2003 National Education System Law which states that distance learning has the function of providing educational services to community groups who cannot attend face-to-face or regular education (RI, 2003). It was further explained that the distance learning system was intended for "groups of people who cannot attend face-to-face or regular education". Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of distance learning which has also been regulated in the Act is an alternative solution for teacher competency development in Indonesia with geographical conditions and levels of development that vary from each region in Indonesia. Distance learning can provide opportunities for all early

childhood education teachers to access training activities as long as there is an adequate internet access. This study intended to determine the readiness of ECE teachers in participating in distance learning.

METHOD

This research was conducted using an online survey method using an instrument in the form of a questionnaire with open questions. The participants of this study were ECE teachers from various cities in Indonesia. The research, which was conducted before the pandemic, intended to know the readiness of ECE teachers from various regions in Indonesia to take part in training conducted through distance learning. The total participants who filled out the questionnaire were 409 respondents. There were 356 (87%) teachers from the island of Java and 53 (13%) teachers from outside Java. ECE teachers from the island of Java came from various cities in the provinces of DKI Jakarta, East Java, West Java, Central Java, and Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, teachers from outside Java came from various cities in the provinces of Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, Lampung, Riau, Jambi, South Kalimantan, Bali, NTB, NTT, South Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua.

Questionnaires distributed to teachers contained questions about the identity of teachers and four (4) open-ended questions related to willingness to attend training, availability of supporting equipment, motivation to attend training and obstacles that may have been faced during training through distance learning. Data collection was done online through the google form that had been provided. The distribution of information regarding this research was carried out via WhatsApp, Email and social media.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quality education is closely related to professional and competent teachers. The more professional and competent the teacher is, the better the education output will be, on the other hand, the more unprofessional and incompetent the teacher is, it is certain that the quality of the output produced is also not optimal. The reason is because the teacher is the implementer of education who directly deals with students so that the teacher plays a role as a determinant of the success or failure of the learning process. This study tries to provide an initial picture of the interest and readiness of early childhood education teachers in Indonesia to take part in competency improvement training conducted through distance learning. The results of this study are explained below.

Description of the Participants by Type of Service

The data displayed in Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants who filled out the questionnaire. Nineteen percent of the participants came from SPS, 7% from PG and 74% from KG. The majority of participants who filled out the questionnaire were kindergarten teachers. In Indonesia, the number of early childhood education institutions that provide educational services for students at pre-school age is mostly Kindergartens with 90,501 institutions, Playgroups with 74,940 institutions, and SPS with 19,962 institutions (Kemendikbud, 2021).

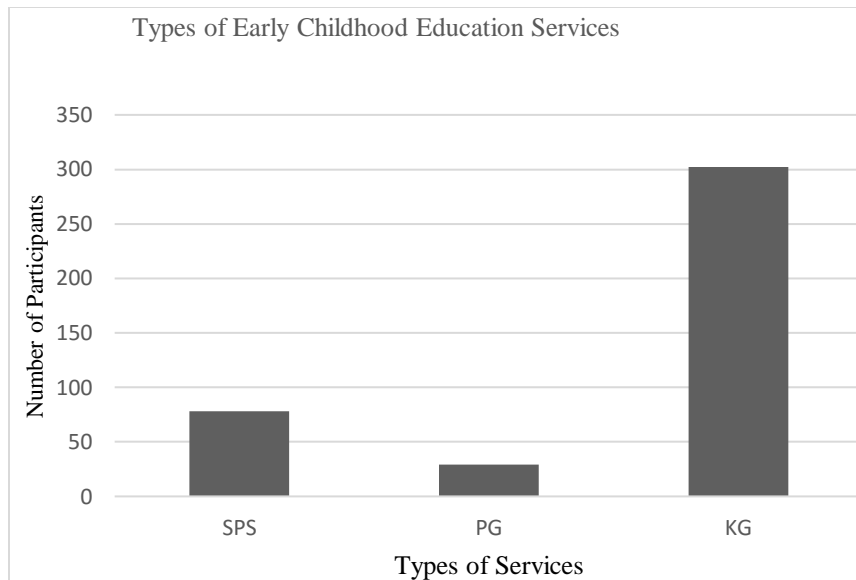


Figure 1. Types of Early Childhood Education Services

SPS is a non-formal institution other than KG and PG that provide educational services for early childhood. In its implementation, SPS is integrated with communities that provide integrated services for early childhood and families such as integrated service posts (posyandu), Family Development for Toddlers (BKB) and various other communities. Service providers in SPS are housewives and early childhood observers who are trained or self-taught to help the needs of early childhood and their families. Based on the data presented in Figure 1, it can be concluded that teachers from every educational service for early childhood starting from SPS, PG and KG have an interest in developing competence by participating in training conducted through distance learning. However, based on the results of the study, it is known that the largest portion of interest is shown by Kindergarten teachers. However, training for early childhood education teachers needs to pay attention to teachers from all early childhood education units so that the provision of services for early childhood and families can be standardized which will ultimately have a good impact on the development of early childhood education in general.

Willingness to Attend Training through Distance Learning

Before the pandemic, distance learning was a learning model that was not commonly applied by teachers in Kindergarten. Students are still at the pre-operational stage of development (Santrock, 2007). This has an impact on learning which is ideally carried out directly so that students gain direct and concrete experience. Since the pandemic began to take place until now, many teachers and students are still experiencing various obstacles in implementing distance learning (Azzahra, 2020). One of the causes is the difference in learning support facilities between each region which is too significant. Especially between areas on the island of Java with areas outside the island of Java.



Figure 2. Willingness to Participate in Training through Distance Learning

This present study conducted in 2019 shows the results that can be seen in Figure 2, namely the interest of teachers to take part in training through distance learning is quite high. The results showed that 407 participants or 99.5% of the total participants were interested in participating in the training, while 2 participants or 0.5% of the total participants did not want to join the training. This data showed the desire of teachers to improve their competence through training was very high. This is an opportunity that can be used to help teachers in Indonesia to improve their competence in the field of teaching.

Availability of Distance Learning Support Tools

The implementation of learning requires supporting devices so that the learning process can be conducive. Distance learning also requires devices to connect students with instructors to facilitate access to information and learning materials. Devices that can be used in the application of distance learning are smartphones, laptops or PCs. In addition, stable internet access is also a determinant of the success of distance learning. The results of the study which can be seen through Figure 3 show that 401 participants or 98% of the total participants answered that they had supporting equipment to participate in the training, while 8 participants or 2% of the total participants answered that they did not have the supporting equipment to participate in the training.

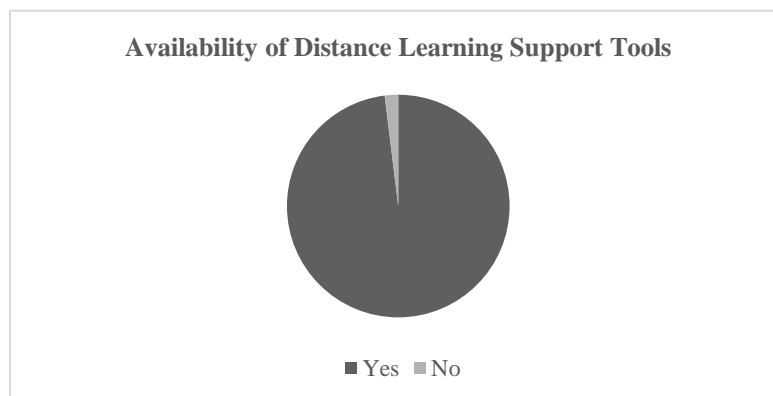


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If we look again at Figure 2 we can see that only two participants were not willing to take part in the training through distance learning. In fact, through the questionnaire answered, there are 8 participants who did not have devices. Six from eight participants who did not have devices still wanted to take distance learning. This is a contractual matter because one of the conditions for being able to participate in distance learning is the availability of technological devices that can be used as media for learning. This finding is interesting because we know that although there are limitations or barriers to participate in the training through distance learning, the participants still want to participate in the training. It can be said that participants will try to be able to follow the training regardless of the obstacles they face. Even though only a small percentage, this is a good signal because we know the enthusiasm for self-improvement is high from the teachers.

Motivation to Participate in Training through Distance Learning

In learning activities, motivation plays an important role in the success of the learning process. An important motivation that must be possessed is intrinsic motivation that comes from within the individual. Motivation can be a driving force for students to study hard to achieve goals (Froiland, 2012). This also applies to teachers who are participants in the study. Fourty six percent of the participants answered "motivated to participate in training to improve their abilities in order to provide better services for students", 24% of the participants answered they "need input related to innovation in learning", 18% of the participants answered "need to improve the ability to use technology" and 12% of the participants answered "want to understand more about early childhood as students". The results showed that overall the participants gave positive answers regarding participation in distance learning. Participants had a great desire to improve their competence so that they could provide optimal educational services for students.

Obstacles Encountered in the Implementation of Distance Learning

The last question from the questionnaire that was filled out by the participants was related to the possible obstacles they faced while participating in distance learning. The answers can be summarized into five major groups, namely: 51% of participants answered "network constraints are the biggest obstacle faced", 16% of participants answered "difficulty in dividing time between work, community activities and time with family can be an obstacle in participating in the training", 13% of participants answered "lack of adequate learning facilities and devices such as laptops, smartphones so that it is difficult to participate in distance learning", 12% of participants answered "worried about not being able to consistently attend training from beginning to end" and 8% of participants answered "Constraints that may arise are 'network constraints and difficulty sharing time'".

From the results of this study, information was obtained that network constraints were the main obstacles conveyed by participants both from the island of Java and from outside Java. This conclusion was obtained by observing the number of participants who came from the island of Java, 87% of the participants, while the participants who came from outside the island of Java were 13%. Fifty one percent of the participants complained about network constraints, meaning that almost half of the participants from Java also experienced network problems. The obstacles encountered by the participants in this study need to be a concern that has to be improved so that the implementation of distance learning can be carried out effectively and conductively.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Teachers as professional educators need to have a passion for lifelong learning. This need for learning can be met by studying independently or by attending seminars and trainings organized by both the government and private sectors. The results of the research previously described show high enthusiasm of the ECE teachers to improve their competence in order to be able to provide optimal educational services to support the growth and development of students. However, the fact is that the need to increase competence is not supported by the opportunities available for teachers to access seminars and training. Distance learning, which is offered as an alternative solution, is also faced with the problem of the lack of adequate learning tools and facilities. The internet network that has not reached all regions in Indonesia is also an obstacle to the implementation of distance learning. The limitations of this study are indicated by the absence of information related to the teaching experience of kindergarten teachers. Participants' teaching experience can affect the level of teacher resilience in making decisions to change (Tamah & Wirjawan, 2021).

Good quality education is an indicator of the success of a nation, especially education for early childhood which is the foundation for the development of students in the future. Equipping early childhood education teachers with skills and abilities that can be continuously updated is a long-term investment that benefits teachers. Teachers who keep abreast of developments in technology and information can apply innovative, creative and fun learning for students. Moreover, with the current pandemic conditions that do not allow face-to-face learning, distance learning can be applied to provide learning facilities for teachers with the lowest health risks. From this study, it can be concluded that the teachers as participants have the desire and motivation to participate in distance learning. Some predicted obstacles have been reported, especially network constraints when involved in the future distance learning. Taking this into account, the intervention of the authorities is needed to help overcome the existing obstacles. Relevant parties such as the central government and local governments need to pay attention to equitable and massive development, especially to strengthen the supporting infrastructure for distance learning.

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