

From Play to Learning: Fun Strategies for the Transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School

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Abstract : *The transition period from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Elementary School (ES) is an important phase in a child's educational journey. At this stage, children experience significant changes in terms of the learning environment, teaching approaches, and academic demands. If not managed well, this transition can cause anxiety, a decrease in learning motivation, and even difficulties in adapting to new routines.*

Children who were previously accustomed to a play-based learning approach in early childhood education (PAUD) now have to start adjusting to a more structured learning environment in elementary school (SD). However, this difference does not have to be an obstacle. On the contrary, if the transition is carried out with the right and enjoyable strategies, children can enter the world of elementary school feeling happy, confident, and ready to learn.

Therefore, it is important for educators and parents to design transition strategies that not only prepare children cognitively but also emotionally and socially. Fun approaches such as role-playing, storytelling, visits to elementary school, and project-based learning can serve as effective bridges in helping children smoothly transition through this period.

This article aims to explore various enjoyable strategies that can be applied in accompanying children from the play phase in early childhood education (ECE) to the learning process in elementary school (ES), as well as providing practical guidance for teachers and parents in creating a positive transition experience.

Keywords : *PAUD-SD Transition, fun strategies, play to learning*

INTRODUCTION

The transition from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Elementary School (ES) is a crucial period in a child's life. Changes in the learning environment, demands for discipline, and more structured learning patterns can be sources of stress and

confusion for children who are not yet psychologically, socially, or academically ready. This transition period, if not managed well, can lead to anxiety, lack of motivation to learn, and difficulties adapting in early elementary school.

On the other hand, young children have unique characteristics: they learn most effectively through concrete experiences and enjoyable activities, such as play. Playing is not only a form of entertainment but also a learning tool that aligns with their cognitive, emotional, and social development. However, in practice, the learning approach in elementary schools often does not fully accommodate the principle of play, resulting in children experiencing a learning culture shock or "school shock."

Initial observations in the first grade at SDN 4 Panggungrejo show that most new students exhibit signs of being unprepared to participate in learning activities: they cry easily, lack focus, are afraid of being left by their parents, and are not independent. Teachers face challenges in guiding the children because the learning approach has not yet adapted to their transitional needs.

Based on these issues, the researcher feels the need to take action aimed at bridging this transition period with enjoyable and child-friendly learning strategies. Through Classroom Action Research (CAR), the researcher aims to explore how structured play methods can help children adjust, build independence, and embrace the learning process in elementary school more positively. With the title "From Play to Learning: Fun Strategies for the Transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School," this research is expected to make a real contribution to enhancing children's readiness to face the basic education level through enjoyable approaches that are appropriate for their developmental stages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Understanding the Concept of Transition from PAUD to SD

The transition from PAUD to SD can be defined as the process of changing a child's role from being a learner in the PAUD environment to being a learner in the SD environment, which also involves the child's adjustment to the new learning environment. An effective transition is not just an administrative move, but a process that ensures that the child does not have to make too many burdensome adjustments. The concept of a pleasant transition emphasizes the continuity between the social-emotional, cognitive, language, and motoric stimulation that the child has received in PAUD with their learning experiences in SD. Thus, the learning environment and pedagogical approach in the early grades of SD should be more in line with those applied in PAUD, with a focus on play-based learning and holistic development, rather than a sudden transition to formal academics.

2) The Basis for a Fun Transition Policy from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School (Independent Learning Episode 24)

The Independent Learning Policy Episode 24 was launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) with the main objective of eliminating misconceptions that are still strong in learning practices in PAUD and SD related to the transition. This policy sets three main targets for change that are expected to be achieved through support and collaboration from various parties. The first target is **to eliminate the Reading, Writing and Arithmetic test** as a requirement in the New Student Admissions (PPDB) process in SD. Second, **implementing an introduction period** for new students during the first two weeks of the school year, both in PAUD and SD, so that children have time to adapt to the new environment. Third, **implementing learning that builds children's six foundational abilities** holistically and gradually, which applies to both PAUD and early grades of SD.

To strengthen the implementation of this policy, the Director General of PAUD Dikdasmen has issued Circular Letter Number 0759/C/HK.04.01/2023 concerning Strengthening the Transition of PAUD to Early Elementary Schools. The success of this pleasant transition program is highly dependent on the understanding and consistent implementation of this policy by all stakeholders in the field of education.

3) Psychological Aspects of Children in Transition Period

The transition from preschool to elementary school is a major event in the life of a child and his/her family, which can be a moment full of opportunities to learn new things, but also has the potential to cause anxiety and worry. Therefore, it is important to prepare the psychological aspects of children so that they do not experience difficulties in adapting to the changes that occur. There are six foundational abilities that need to be built in children and have a significant influence on their psychological condition during the transition period.

1. **Understanding religious and ethical values:** This ability is an important foundation in the formation of children's character and morals from an early age.
2. **Social and language skills for interaction:** Children need to have adequate skills to communicate effectively and interact positively with peers and adults in the new school environment.
3. **Emotional maturity:** The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions is a crucial aspect for children to adapt well to the school environment and actively participate in the learning process.
4. **Cognitive maturity:** Cognitive readiness, which includes the ability to think, solve simple problems, and understand basic concepts, will greatly influence a child's success in learning in elementary school.

5. **Motor skills and self-care:** The development of good motor skills and independence in carrying out self-care activities will help children feel more confident and independent in the school environment.
6. **Positive meaning of learning:** Building an understanding that learning is an activity that is fun, useful, and relevant to their lives will motivate children to continue learning and developing themselves.

Children who have good mental readiness will be better able to cope with changes and adjust to the new demands of the elementary school environment. It is important to remember that each child has a unique view of this transition, which can range from feelings of joy and enthusiasm for new friends and experiences to feelings of anxiety and fear of unfamiliar surroundings.

4) The Role of Foundation Skills in School Readiness

Foundational skills play a very important role as a basis that needs to be developed continuously since children are in PAUD until they enter the early grades of elementary school. These skills cover various aspects of development, including basic literacy and numeracy, social emotional maturity, and other skills that support children's learning and adaptation processes in the school environment. In the context of a pleasant transition, the development of literacy and numeracy skills in PAUD and early grades of elementary school should be carried out gradually, through fun and meaningful activities, and should not only focus on reading, writing and arithmetic skills alone. It is important to understand that school readiness is not an end result that can be labeled on a child, but rather a development process that needs to be appreciated and supported by the school, teachers, and parents.

5) Transitional Child Development Theory (Cognitive, Social-Emotional)

Understanding the theory of child development at the transition age from PAUD to SD is essential for designing effective implementation strategies. Two main developmental aspects that need to be considered are cognitive development and social-emotional development.

a. Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides a useful framework for understanding how children think and learn at this age. The **preoperational stage** (ages 2–7) is the stage in which most preschool children are located. At this stage, children begin to develop symbolic abilities, use language, and imagine, but their thinking is not yet fully logical. When children enter elementary school, they are generally in the **concrete operational stage** (ages 7–11), where they begin to develop logical thinking skills, but this thinking is still limited to physical and concrete objects. At this stage, children begin to understand concepts such as conservation (for example, the amount of water remains the same even though the shape of the container changes) and classification. Therefore, learning in the early elementary grades should still involve direct experiences and the use of concrete materials to help children understand abstract concepts. Cognitive stimulation that is appropriate to the child's age and developmental stage is essential to support their learning progress.

b. Social-Emotional Development

The social development of children aged 6-9 years is marked by their ability to begin to understand the feelings of others, develop a sense of humor, and learn to take positive lessons from social interactions. At this age, children also begin to form closer friendships with peers. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development identifies the **industry (competence) vs. inferiority stage** (ages 7-11 years) as a relevant stage for elementary school children. At this stage, children begin to focus on mastering various skills in school and begin to compare themselves with their peers. Support and praise from parents and teachers for children's efforts and achievements will foster a sense of competence and self-confidence.

The emotional development of children aged 6-7 years includes their ability to recognize and express a range of emotions, including fear, anger, sadness, and happiness. They also begin to learn to understand that others may have different feelings than they do. The skills of managing emotions and developing empathy become increasingly important at this age. Developing emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, social awareness, the ability to regulate emotions, responsible decision-making, and the ability to build positive relationships, plays a vital role in a child's social and academic development.

Table 1: Six Foundational Skills of Early Childhood

Foundation Ability	Description
Understanding religious values and morals	The ability to understand the concept of God, carry out worship according to each religion, and make friends with peers regardless of religious differences.
Social and language skills	The ability to interact positively with peers and adults, use polite language, and understand and convey ideas effectively.
Emotional maturity	The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, demonstrate tolerance, and maintain attention while participating in learning activities.
Positive meaning of learning	Having enthusiasm for coming to school, not giving up easily when faced with difficulties, showing curiosity through questions, and having a desire to try again or improve work.
Motor skills and self-care	The ability to manage personal belongings, maintain personal hygiene, and develop gross and fine motor coordination necessary to actively participate in activities in the school environment.
Cognitive maturity	Have basic literacy skills (for example, recognizing symbols and letters), numeracy (for example, understanding the concept of numbers and simple arithmetic operations), as well as a basic understanding of the surrounding environment and how the world works, which is sufficient to participate in learning activities in elementary school.

A. A Fun Strategy for Implementing the Transition from PAUD to SD

1. New Student Admissions Practices (PPDB) Oriented on Foundation Ability Assessment

In accordance with the Merdeka Belajar policy, the practice of New Student Admissions (PPDB) in elementary schools should no longer use the Calistung test as the main requirement. Instead, elementary schools need to adopt a more holistic approach by using assessments to identify children's foundational abilities. This assessment should be designed to comprehensively measure various aspects of a child's development, including comprehension, visual perception, motor coordination, language skills, concentration, independence, adaptability, emotional maturity, endurance, and interest in learning. The results of this initial assessment can be used by teachers to get a clearer picture of each student's initial abilities and as a basis for designing learning that is more in line with their individual needs. It is important to remember that the main purpose of this assessment is not to label children as "ready" or "not ready" for school, but rather to understand each child's strengths and areas of development in order to provide appropriate support.

2. The Role of an Effective and Inclusive School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS)

The School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS) plays a very important role in creating a pleasant transition from PAUD to SD. MPLS is generally carried out during the first one to two weeks of the beginning of the school year. The main purpose of MPLS is to provide a positive and enjoyable experience for new children, help them feel comfortable and safe in the new school environment, and introduce them to teachers, peers, school facilities, and the prevailing routines. MPLS activities can include various interesting and non-burdensome activities, such as self-introduction and school community introduction, introduction to school facilities and environment through a fun tour, explanation of activities that will be carried

out at school, learning basic *life skills* (for example, how to wear clothes or prepare supplies), as well as various games, singing, and art activities that encourage interaction and collaboration. MPLS should be designed in such a way as to be inclusive and consider the needs of all children, including those who may have never attended PAUD education. Parental involvement in several MPLS activities can also help smooth the child's adaptation process.

Table 2: Examples of MPLS Activities that Support a Fun Transition from PAUD to SD

MPLS Activity Themes	Activity Examples
Introduction to School Environment	Tour around the school to introduce the classrooms, library, field, toilets, and other facilities. Create a simple map of the school together.
Introduction to the School Community	Introduction session with class teachers, principal, administrative staff, janitors, and security guards. Making simple business cards.
Fun Learning Activities	Role-playing classroom activities (e.g., being a teacher or a student). Reading story books together. Doing art activities such as drawing, coloring, or making collages. Singing nursery rhymes about school and friends. Playing simple educational games.
Social Skills Development	Games that encourage cooperation and interaction, such as playing ball together or building blocks in groups. Discussions about the importance of sharing and helping friends. Creating simple classroom rules together.
<i>Life Skill</i> Learning	Practice how to open and close school bags, take out and store stationery, prepare supplies and eat together, and how to ask for help if you have difficulties. Simulation of routine activities at school, such as lining up before entering class or during breaks.
Parental Involvement	Inviting parents to information sessions about school programs and classroom routines. Holding simple activities that involve interaction between parents, children, and teachers (e.g., making snacks together or playing traditional games).

3. Alignment of Curriculum and Learning between PAUD and Early Grade Elementary School

To ensure a smooth and enjoyable transition, it is important to align the curriculum and learning practices between PAUD and early elementary school. The main focus should be on the holistic development of children's six foundational skills, which include cognitive, social-emotional, physical motor, language, religious and moral values, and positive learning meanings. Learning at both levels should use active, creative, and fun methods that encourage children to explore, ask questions, and interact with peers and teachers. Creating a learning environment that supports the transition is also very important, including setting up classrooms in early elementary school that are more similar to the atmosphere in PAUD, with play and learning areas that are interesting and familiar to children. It should be noted that learning in early elementary school must also provide opportunities for students who may not have attended PAUD education to receive adequate foundational skills training.

4. Partnership and Collaboration between PAUD and SD Teachers

Strong partnerships and collaborations between PAUD and SD teachers are crucial elements in ensuring continuity of learning and the success of transition programs. Through this collaboration, teachers from both levels can share information about effective learning approaches, the curriculum implemented, and a deeper understanding of the unique needs and characteristics of each child. Some forms of collaboration that can be done include holding regular meetings to discuss child

development, exchanging teachers between kindergarten and SD to provide different perspectives, and establishing PAUD-SD communication forums at the school or regional level to discuss and plan more integrated transition programs.

5. Active Parental Involvement in Supporting Children's Transition

Active parental involvement plays a very important role in supporting their children during the transition from preschool to elementary school. Parents need to have a good understanding of the stages of child development and the psychological aspects involved in the transition process. They can support their children's mental and emotional readiness by establishing open communication about their hopes and concerns regarding the new school. Helping children adapt to new routines, such as bedtime and wake-up times, and introducing them to the school environment through visits before the school year begins, are also very beneficial. In addition, establishing a good partnership with the school and teachers, and actively participating in school introduction activities with children, will further smooth the transition process.

B. Challenges and Solutions in Realizing a Fun Transition from PAUD to SD

1. Overcoming Misconceptions about Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and School Readiness

One of the main challenges in realizing a pleasant transition from PAUD to SD is overcoming the misconceptions that are still strongly embedded in society about the importance of reading, writing and arithmetic as the main requirement for entering SD and as a measure of school readiness. The solution to overcome this is through continuous education efforts for parents, PAUD teachers, and SD teachers about the true meaning of school readiness, namely holistic readiness that includes various aspects of child development. Massive socialization of the Merdeka Belajar Episode 24 policy to all education stakeholders is also very important to change this wrong paradigm. It should be emphasized that reading, writing and arithmetic skills will be built gradually in the early grades of SD, and the main focus in PAUD is on developing a broader foundation. Presenting examples of good practices from schools that have successfully implemented PPDB and learning that is no longer oriented towards reading, writing and arithmetic can be an effective way to inspire change.

2. Dealing with Differences in Characteristics and Individual Needs of Children

Each child has different characteristics, developmental speeds, and learning needs. The challenge for teachers is how to accommodate this diversity during the transition period. The application of differentiated learning in early elementary school classes is a relevant solution to answer this challenge, where teachers adjust learning methods and materials to the abilities and learning styles of each child. In addition, it is important to identify children who may need additional support during the transition period, whether academically, socially, or emotionally. Collaboration with psychologists or other experts can be done if necessary to provide appropriate interventions for children who are experiencing difficulties.

3. Building Understanding and Support from All Stakeholders

The successful implementation of a fun PAUD to SD transition program requires understanding and support from all parties involved in the education ecosystem. This includes local governments, education offices, school supervisors, school principals, PAUD and SD teachers, parents, and the wider community. Establishing an active communication and collaboration forum between PAUD and SD at the regional level can be a place to share information, plan joint transition activities, and overcome various obstacles that may arise. The government needs to provide adequate training and assistance for PAUD and SD teachers related to the implementation of transition policies and learning practices that are in accordance with the principles of Merdeka Belajar. Efforts to build public awareness about the importance of a fun transition through various media will also greatly help create a supportive environment for children.

C. Examples of Good Practices in Implementing a Fun Transition from PAUD to SD in Indonesia

1. Case Study Analysis from Various Regions and Schools

Several schools and regions in Indonesia have demonstrated good practices in implementing a fun transition from PAUD to SD, in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Belajar policy. At SD Lab School FIP UMJ, for example, the PPDB practice no longer uses the Calistung test, but rather a more holistic and fun assessment for children. This school also implements the School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS) for the first week with various activities designed to make children feel comfortable and excited. The learning process at this elementary school also focuses on developing children's six foundational abilities through fun methods and in accordance with the Grade 1 Elementary School Curriculum.

Another example is SDN Cipaku 2 Kota Bogor which has implemented the PAUD-SD transition program through the MPLS activity which was carried out for two weeks at the beginning of the school year. SD Karakter was also selected as one of the pilot schools for the enjoyable PAUD to SD transition movement by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, demonstrating a commitment to implementing child-friendly practices. At SDN 01 Duhiadaa Pohuwato, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Episode 24 is also reflected in the school policy which no longer uses the Calistung test as an initial selection material for entry, and focuses on creating a positive environment for children at the beginning of the

school year. In addition, the PAUD-SD communication forum has also produced innovative programs such as the Gemilang Program which aims to facilitate a pleasant transition through various collaborative activities.

2. Lessons from the Implementation of the Independent Learning Policy

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy related to the transition from PAUD to SD has provided various valuable lessons. The elimination of the Reading, Writing and Arithmetic test in the PPDB has begun to change the practice of accepting new students in many schools. The introduction period at the beginning of the school year is also increasingly being implemented with a variety of activities aimed at helping children adapt to the school environment. Schools have also begun to focus more on developing children's six foundational abilities through more holistic and enjoyable learning. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has also provided various resources and tools, such as modules, booklets, and videos, to support the implementation of this transition program. The active role of PAUD mothers in various regions is also very significant in socializing this enjoyable transition program to stakeholders at the provincial, district/city, and village levels.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted in Group B of PAUD/TK Kartika with a focus on the transition of children from PAUD to elementary school, it can be concluded that:

1. Effective Play Strategies for Educational Transition

The implementation of play strategies, such as role-playing, school activity simulations, and creative projects, has proven effective in facilitating the transition of children from early childhood education to elementary school. Fun play activities help children to get to know the elementary school environment, reduce anxiety, and prepare them emotionally and socially for the next level of education.

2. Improvement in Children's Readiness for Elementary School

After the implementation of play-based transition activities, there was a significant increase in children's readiness to enter elementary school. Indicators of independence, ability to follow rules, and enthusiasm for learning activities have increased significantly. Children are starting to show more independent behavior, can follow instructions better, and are more confident in facing elementary school routines.

3. Collaboration Between Teachers and Parents

The success of this transition is also influenced by good collaboration between preschool teachers, elementary school teachers, and parents. Close collaboration in planning and supporting children during the transition period has a positive impact on their readiness.

4. The Importance of Experience-Based Activities

Project-based learning and hands-on experiences, such as visits to elementary schools and creating creative projects, have proven to be very helpful for children to better understand the routines of elementary school. These activities are not only enjoyable but also introduce basic concepts that they will encounter in elementary school.

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