

## **Policy Study Early Childhood Education to Elementary School Transition**

**Dewa Ayu Anom Pratiwi**  
TK Negeri Pembina Karangasem  
dewapратиwi19@admin.paud.belajar.id

### **Abstract**

There has been a wide gap between the approach to education in kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school. It has contributed to the suboptimal children's learning process when they are in elementary school. This research aimed to provide an understanding and steps to be taken to eliminate the gap between educational approaches in early childhood education and elementary school. Researchers chose literature review as the research method, which went through the stages of designing, conducting, analyzing, and writing the reviews. The research showed that the fundamental thing about the learning transition from kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school was that all parties had the same understanding and perception that children aged 7 – 8 years in elementary school were still in the early childhood phase. At that age, they should learn in a fun way to introduce various basic concepts taught through games. Furthermore, collaborative sharing between kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school teachers so that everyone could understand each other's position. Furthermore, the will to change following the learning pattern with kindergarten/early childhood education – elementary school transition strategy, which in this case was more dominant in intervening with teachers at the elementary education level. It means that elementary teachers had to learn more from kindergarten/early childhood education teachers in terms of organizing fun learning.

**Keywords: Transition; Childhood Phase; Collaboration; Joyful Learning**

### **Introduction**

A paradigm of education is constantly changing as the demands of the times are always evolving. In addition, the rapid development of human civilization is accompanied by the spirit of understanding the nature of life and humanity. History has proven the development of the human side that continues to grow. The cruelty of the early days of human civilization, which may now be seen as uncivilized, has developed and changed to appreciate the human side of a human being. Historically, wars, murders, and crimes were prevalent issues in human relations in competition for survival opportunities, resources, and fame. Nowadays, almost all of these have predominantly shifted towards relationships with competitive consequences for resources and influence, in addition to survival issues.

The culture of thinking and learning continues to develop as human civilization progresses. Education has played the most critical role in developing human thinking ability in the era of civilization's progress today. Many new views on education have also been born while eroding the old stories of education. Education in the past was more concerned with behavior change as something that could be shaped under certain conditions. It has shifted now that the essence of educating is providing opportunities for humans to grow and develop into mature humans in accordance with the nature of humanity, nature, and the times. This development has been evident since the end of the 20th century until now, which people know is in the same era as the existence of an Indonesian educational figure who helped color the development map of the world of education universally, namely Ki Hajar Dewantara.

Indonesian education's development, which began in the New Order era, has seen Ki Hajar Dewantara's views adopted by preschool and early childhood education. Meanwhile, formal education, which at that time began at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels, still adopted a Dutch colonial-style educational approach that prioritized an educational approach oriented toward behavior change. Undeniably, it also still applies today; such educational practices are still being implemented at the education level, especially in elementary school.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's implementation efforts have encountered some problems in the field, including as follows:

1. No real training conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology can touch the transition area between kindergarten/early childhood and elementary school.
2. A lack of understanding by both kindergarten/early childhood and elementary school teachers regarding the need for efforts made to finalize students' learning readiness from kindergarten/early childhood to elementary school.
3. A lack of awareness among parents in providing opportunities for their children to be ready for elementary school through the transition from kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school.
4. A lack of understanding of education bureaucracy regarding education in the kindergarten/early childhood education transition area.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct socialization and training to understand the critical areas of the kindergarten/early childhood transition to elementary school to optimize *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom of Learning) policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Training content that contains studies related to transition phase areas and solutions to overcome it can be done through the right approach. The intended approach is more directed towards the principles of education that humanize humans from Ki Hajar Dewantara's perspective. Therefore, the learning strategy in primary schools through the training conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is prioritized on how education is more favorable in creating learning independence in students who are growing and developing in line with their inherent characteristics.

Such a change in the mindset of policymakers, in this case, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has had far-reaching consequences that have forced the issuance of *Merdeka Belajar* policies starting from Episode 1 to 23 today. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology sees a wide gap between the educational approach in early childhood education, which now has partly become formal education, and education in elementary schools. The learning approach applied in kindergarten and early childhood education is more about the process of forming children's personalities and characters. While once they proceed to elementary school, they are forced to learn teaching materials, such as reading and arithmetic, without any adjustment between them. Whether people realize it or not, it has contributed to the suboptimal learning process of children when they are already in elementary school.

This gap also escapes the attention of families and parents who only emphasize children's academic achievement. According to Wu & Chiang (2014), a family is the broadest context and closely influences socialization. This phenomenon occurs because parents do not understand the nature of education for their children. This case is evident in several phenomena where parents send their children outside school hours to learn to read at kindergartens and early childhood education at private educational institutions that mainly offer attractive advertisements. Parents feel that their formal education in kindergarten/early childhood education is insufficient to meet the demands of elementary

school education, where some schools require children to be literate. Some parents do this not because they intend to educate but because of prestige with friends and neighbors. Thus, it is inevitable that this condition imposes the needs of parents on children without parents wanting to understand the needs of children themselves.

This concern has been recognized by academics in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, who have voiced concern over the very significant changes taking place in more complicated family situations, such as the increase in out-of-wedlock births and the extent of knowledge about transition (Canavan, 2014; Panico, 2012). It has been found that intact, single, or divorced parents can cause the cognitive and social-emotional development of children to be impaired. Another factor contributing to parents' negligence in realizing this transition is poverty, in addition to awareness of the principles of children's education itself, so children do not receive services as they should. In addition, poor parenting is also a cause of parental negligence that affects the social-emotional aspects of children (Berger, 2012; Hall & Monica, 2009). It has become a habit of busy families forced to leave their children in a daycare center.

The conditions of education in kindergarten/early childhood education should be successfully connected to the education's natural situation in elementary school, as Peters (2020) revealed that education in kindergarten/early childhood, which focuses more on fun learning, can transition to the educational situation in elementary school, which is more required to focus on early learning about literacy and numeracy. In fact, the field situation shows that it has never happened. Instead, kindergarten/early childhood has been required to learn to read and count, leading to parents' egoism, whether they are aware of it or not. Kagan & Neuman (1998). stated that early childhood learning is interrelated and interdependent on all aspects of development. Early childhood is in the range of less or equal to 8 years. Thus, school readiness is a continuous process from kindergarten/early childhood to early grade elementary school (Farida et al., 2021; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008). Nowadays, misconceptions about learning practices in kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school are still influential in society. The skills built in children in kindergarten/early childhood education focus heavily on reading, writing, and counting (*calistung*) and are considered the only evidence of successful learning. *Calistung* skills are narrowly conceived and thought to be built instantly. *Calistung* test is still applied as a requirement to enter elementary school, and the learning gap between kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school. In fact, building skills in children needs to be done gradually and in a fun way to achieve good learning benefits.

Things often found today are that children believe that they are not smart when they cannot do *calistung*, have not been able to manage emotions and respect others, and have not been able to take care of themselves and the things they are their responsibility. In addition, children can read but do not understand the meaning of words, lack communication skills, and can do addition only when sorting numbers (because of memorization, not understanding).

The ideal condition expects that children feel happy in learning, children believe that they can do it as long as they want to try, children can manage emotions and respect others, children can take care of themselves and items that are their responsibility, children understand words and their relationship to letters and sounds, children can listen and express simple ideas. In addition, children understand that  $5 + 3 = 5$  objects plus 3 objects. Therefore, the transition phase is important for kindergarten/early childhood education teachers to understand to collaborate with elementary school teachers to introduce their students to elementary education. Transition is an important issue to discuss. It is because closely related to the child's environment, especially in kindergarten/early childhood education. Early childhood education focuses on child

development and fun learning, while elementary school focuses clearly on subject areas, especially on literacy and math goals. However, parents and the kindergarten or elementary school environment often do not fully realize this transition issue. This research should add to the problems and create a different identity for kindergarten/early childhood education when moving to the next school level and becoming a student. It creates more expectations and something scary for most parents and teachers of the child where most kindergartens/early childhood education have been emphasizing and cramming on academic cognitive mastery. At the same time, affective and psychomotor seem to be secondary. It may take away from learning experiences that help develop the child's developmental milestones that are important for the child in the long term. Similarly, elementary school teachers should consciously understand the students' characteristics in grades 7 and 8, which still intersect with the early childhood phase. This condition will have far-reaching consequences, and many questions will arise. Two important fundamental questions are what should be understood about the learning transition from kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school and what steps should be taken by kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school teachers so that everyone understands the other's position.

## Method

This research was conducted by using a literature review as a method. It was based on the research's purpose, which aimed to analyze the description of the librarian status in the field of work related to knowledge and activities that librarians could carry out in their work as knowledge workers. The literature review obtained explanations from several experts (through writing). Snyder (2019) stated that a literature review is a research methodology that aims to collect and take the essence of previous research and analyze several overviews of experts written in the text. Furthermore, Snyder (2019) concluded that literature reviews have a role as a foundation for various types of research because the results of literature reviews provide an understanding of knowledge development, a source of stimulus for policy making, spark the creation of new ideas and are helpful as a guide for research in a particular field. Nowadays, the government is implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Freedom Curriculum) for all education levels. Thus, the references used as a reference for the scientific review article were also related to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's policies on the strategy for implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Freedom Curriculum). The steps of scientific writing study are as follows:

1. Identified the background of education concerning the nature of humanity itself.
2. Identified educational facts that occurred, especially at critical ages in the development of children's cognition (6 – 8 years), which have not received enough attention.
3. Analyzed the relationship between development and how the brain works that should develop naturally so that the education level could adaptively adjust to that condition. Not contrarily, children were forced to follow the education level based on a rigid understanding of the development of children's characteristics.
4. Analyzed the problem of why this case happens through fact analysis based on assumptions, literature review references, and government policies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology).
5. Formulated a solution to the problem based on the experts' perspectives.
6. Concluded regarding the impact if the solution's set of actions was implemented.

## Result and Discussion

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, on its website <https://ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id/transisipaudsd/> explains how important foundation skills are the right of every child. Early childhood education to elementary school transition is the process of shifting children's roles from early childhood education learners to elementary school learners and children's adjustment to a new learning environment. School readiness should stem from the true purpose of learning, ensuring that every child has the right to have the foundational skills to become a lifelong learner at any grade level. Thus, early childhood education to elementary school transition is an effort to ensure every child gets his or her rights regardless of the child's point of departure.

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### 1. The Importance of Kindergarten/Early Childhood Education to Elementary School Transition

As quoted from the report of the G20 Education Working Group Report, OECD (2020) discusses the critical role of early childhood education and care in realizing 21<sup>st</sup> century opportunities for all. In the text, there is a lot of important information explaining why early childhood education and care are important and provide many benefits to a child's development. One of the important information in the report is that early childhood brains have an incredible capacity to learn and develop skills from an early age. Therefore, quality education and care in the early years is a critical window in a child's development, determining the foundation for their future success.

In addition, quality early childhood education and care in kindergarten/early childhood education have been shown to have enormous benefits for individual children, especially for those who are most disadvantaged. These benefits include supporting social and emotional well-being, reducing the risk of dropping out of school, and improving future learning and career outcomes. In addition to the benefits for the child, participation in early education and care also provides opportunities for parents and other caregivers to participate in the labor market, increase family income, and break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.



The report also emphasizes that investment in early childhood education and care in kindergarten/early childhood education is one of the most effective and efficient ways to reduce social and economic inequality. In many cases, the return on investment in early childhood education is greater than the return on investment in other education. Ultimately, the report shows that the role of early childhood education and care is critical in promoting equality, reducing the costs of addressing poor outcomes later in life, and setting children on the right path to achieving their learning potential. Therefore, it is critical to ensure equitable access and good quality early childhood education and care in kindergarten/early childhood education for all children. Thus, they have equal opportunities for future success (Yeboah, 2002). Why is the kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school education transition very important? The transition from kindergarten/early childhood to elementary school is a significant milestone in the life of every child and their family. For all children, starting school is a significant change in what and how they learn. The adults who guide them and how they are organized manage this transition well. It is critical to realizing children's well-being and helping them reach their potential at school (OECD, 2020).

The importance of transitions for children's learning to realize equitable educational outcomes has led to increased research and quality-conscious policies through the kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school transition movement. It is a long-term investment in early childhood education because evidence shows that the benefits will only be felt when children can learn and solve their problems independently. Teachers' attention and concern to realize the importance of kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school transition is needed as part of the long-term investment. Some parents think accelerated literacy and numeracy learning will happen if their children learn much earlier, aiming to save money, but the opposite situation occurs. Their children are at stake in the experiment because the 6 to 8 years are when children develop their brain capacity and quality. It is a critical period that requires careful action for both teachers and parents in guidance and schooling. Therefore, this period requires more careful planning of guidance and learning to accommodate the learning needs of developing children. Curriculum approaches to harmonize the transitional education levels of kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school in some OECD countries through an integrated learning approach. Learning documents are organized in such a way as to provide common themes, objectives, and perspectives for at least the last year of kindergarten/early childhood education and the first years of elementary education, with separate content for each age group. In many countries, it is challenging to ascertain the age and developmental stages that are appropriate to the pedagogy. Kindergarten education emphasizes a more comprehensive approach by encouraging children to develop cognitive, social, and emotional development, while elementary schools tend to be more academic (OECD, 2020).

Due to the different levels, this separation creates the risk that efforts to ensure the continuity of cognitive, social, and emotional development become very rigid and abrupt. Countries should ensure that the curriculum includes a balance between play, self-regulation, and pre-academic activities while encouraging teachers to develop developmentally appropriate pedagogical skills aligned with children's needs to avoid this risk. Another important aspect of the continuity of teaching and learning activities involving children in the kindergarten/early childhood education to early school transition phase is that learning activities should provide some stability. For example, stability in learning practices can help children predict what they are expected to do. At the same time, it seeks to develop cognition based on previous experience, so they gradually become more independent with instruction becoming more complex (OECD, 2017).

There are guidance and examples on how the curriculum can help teachers customize pedagogical strategies for children's developmental levels while ensuring the stability of pedagogical implementation on an ongoing basis. For example, integrating the curriculum in Scotland (United Kingdom) includes learning design principles that teachers use to explore learning experiences. Likewise, it must pay attention to principles that allow kindergarten/early childhood education flexibility in innovating to create learning that focuses on positively impacting children.

## **2. Pedagogical Strategies of Kindergarten/Early Childhood Education Learning**

The knowledge of kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school teachers regarding the transition phase that is still in the wedge zone between 7 and 8 years old, which is children still get learning as learning strategies in kindergarten/early childhood education, is essential for elementary school teachers to understand as kindergarten/early childhood education teachers can communicate it to their colleagues at the basic education level. Strategic steps to implement this fundamental idea are outlined in the Ministry of Education, Culture, research, and Technology's policy since 2021, which is gradually being socialized so that it will become a massive movement to optimize their learning achievements at the basic education level. Through this program, children's readiness to go one step further in optimizing literacy and numeracy achievements can be overcome, which are currently very low in most schools.

Early childhood education to elementary school transition program is a program that contains a process to support learning readiness for young children who will enter primary education. When this process is carried out, it is expected can influence children's success in making learning adjustments at the basic education level (Faridah, et al., 2021). It is very important to do because early childhood education is the foundation for the basic education level, which requires continuity of social-emotional, language, motor, and cognitive stimulation until the next learning activities. The early childhood age range is 0 – 8 years, so school readiness is a continuous process from kindergarten/early childhood education to early grade elementary school. Thus, it will lead to well-being, engagement, and a positive attitude toward learning, which can be built when they are in kindergarten/early childhood education.

Implementing this program cannot only be left to elementary school or kindergarten teachers but requires parents' involvement as those who interact most intensively with children. In addition to teachers and parents, other elements that must be involved to ensure the sustainability of the implementation of early childhood education (PAUD) to elementary school transition are the District Education Office, PAUD Unit (*Satuan PAUD*), Elementary School, PAUD and Elementary School Partners, School Committee, *Bunda PAUD*, PKG PAUD, and KKG Early Grade Elementary School. Through this collaboration, children will gain important momentum in building motivation to learn more independently, meaningfully, and consciously when they enter elementary education. Kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school transition is a critical phase. If the right strategy is used, it will have a positive impact on optimizing children's development to pursue learning achievements aligned with the achievement of their character in a balanced manner. Conversely, in this critical phase, if parents and teachers in both kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school take the wrong action toward children, they will lose the opportunity to develop their potential, talents, and interests optimally.

The forms of transition recommended by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, as contained in the book *Teaching Materials for the Early Childhood Education to Elementary Transition Program (Bahan Ajar Program Transisi*

*PAUD-SD*), are as follows. 1) Scheduled inter-institutional visits (Early Childhood Education to Elementary School) and 2) Day program joining in low-grade elementary school, 3) Incidental programs, such as exploratory activity-oriented learning projects in collaboration with parents or 4) Socialization and discussion activities for parents with children in kindergarten/early childhood education and lower grades in elementary education, 5) Programmed workshops for early childhood education and elementary school teachers or 6) Other forms of activities that can be developed by education units harmonized with local conditions. (Faridah et al., 2021). Through the various program options, both kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary school teachers will have a common perception of how they should educate in line with children's needs.

The important thing that will be achieved when the program is implemented is that teachers will better understand the child development stages while exchanging ideas between kindergarten/early childhood education teachers with elementary schools or parents. Then, it becomes an important point in setting learning objectives. It will help teachers to plan learning activities by presenting experiences with measurable limits on learning challenges so that the challenges do not frustrate them because they are far beyond their ability to do it. Through these activities, the opportunity to optimize the impact of the learning process will be optimal in terms of 1) children's social-emotional abilities, 2) children's physical and motor skills, and 3) children's literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, the alignment of the three skill domains requires teachers to 1) recognize children's social-emotional development characteristics, 2) social-emotional skills that need to be mastered, 3) children's physical-motor development characteristics, 4) physical motor skills that children need to be mastered, 5) developmental features of children's literacy and numeracy, and 6) literacy and numeracy skills that need to be mastered.

The social-emotional development characteristics of children aged 6 – 8 years can be described as follows:

- a. Demonstrate independence
- b. Favors friendship and cooperation
- c. Want to be liked and accepted
- d. Want to be first and be competitive
- e. Shows enthusiasm, excitement, and likes surprises
- f. Easily disappointed and needs motivation to face failure
- g. Likes humor

As the social-emotional development characteristics above, the following are the skills that children aged 6 – 8 years need to master, namely as follows:

- a. Independent
- b. Care for the environment
- c. Can work together in a group
- d. Resistant (defensive) by using words or verbally
- e. Knowing the risks of an action
- f. Showing empathy

Learning activities that can be done to optimize children's emotional abilities are as follows:

- a. Involving children in designing project-based activities.
- b. Teaching children to role-play with their peers.
- c. Discussing together the events in the classroom to cultivate empathy.
- d. Involving children in reading favorite picture storybooks with a choice of independence, communication, cooperation, and empathy themes.



Learning activities that can be done to optimize children's social skills are as follows:

- a. Involving children to discuss rules and agreements before starting a particular activity.
- b. Involving children in game activities with rules in small groups.
- c. Giving children the opportunity to lead an activity.
- d. Inviting children to discuss events and feelings.

The physical motor development characteristics of children aged 6 – 8 years are as described as follows:

- a. Work with various tools
- b. Active and full of energy
- c. Limited range and concentration
- d. Doing physical exercise activities with good control

Based on children's physical motor characteristics above, the following skills that children need to master are as follows:

- a. Controlling movement speed
- b. Aware of space and direction of movement (spatial)
- c. Coordination of movement and finger control consistently
- d. Coordination, balance, flexibility, and agility skills
- e. Requires active activities for energy release
- f. Participate in games with rules

Activities that can be done to encourage children's motor skills as characterized and required above are as follows:

- a. Support activities on fine motor skills, such as writing, drawing, painting, using a computer and mouse, making crafts, and exploring outside the classroom to find many ideas and natural materials for creativity.
- b. Support for gross motor skills, such as jumping rope games, engklek games, obstacle course games with various movements, yoga, gymnastics, and dance.

The third important skill for children to master during the kindergarten/early childhood education transition is literacy and numeracy. As a basic education component and a foundation for lifelong learning, literacy is key to improving people's ability to achieve many other rights (Saputra & Sudarsana, 2023). Briefly, literacy and numeracy have far-reaching benefits not only to an individual but also to the family and community. The reason is that literacy is a crucial skill in children's development. Thus, practicing correctly and well according to the stage of skills or abilities is necessary so that children are happy to become lifelong learners.

Literacy and numeracy development characteristics of children aged 6 – 8 years can be seen as follows:

- a. Rapidly developing language skills
- b. Enjoys reading texts in the neighborhood
- c. Follows a more extended series of commands
- d. Begins to see that some words have more than one meaning
- e. Writes a preferred word
- f. Shows understanding of time
- g. Likes regimented activities
- h. Expresses solutions or problem-solving
- i. Able to explain pictures, graphs, maps, and tables simply
- j. Demonstrate understanding of concrete mathematical concepts and use measuring tools

Based on the characteristics above, the necessary skills in literacy and numeracy for children aged 6 – 8 years are as follows:

- a. Able to participate in simple discussions
- b. Expanded vocabulary
- c. Reads by stringing letter sounds in words through texts
- d. Forms most letters and numbers
- e. Understand simple math concepts
- f. Predict direction and position in activities

Literacy skills include the ability to access and use information intelligently through various activities to develop skills. In comparison, numeracy is the ability of children to use various kinds of numbers and symbols related to basic mathematics used to solve daily life problems. Based on the explanation above, the language skills that are the scope of literacy are as follows:

- a. Listening is the ability to listen attentively so that someone can understand the content or message conveyed.
- b. Speaking is the ability to speak words to express and convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings.
- c. Reading is the ability to translate a series of symbols (letters, numbers, and pictures) in writing into spoken sounds.
- d. Writing is the ability of language in the form of symbols (letters, numbers, and pictures) that have meaning.

Meanwhile, the concept of numeracy is translated into several concepts in mathematics related to the concept of:

- a. The concept of numbers or number symbols, with tips on teaching it to children, namely, start from children's interest, use media, contextual and meaningful, and allow children to choose the media used and how to use it.
- b. Geometry, with teaching tips to involve children in exploring the material, invite children to experience different perceptions and invite them to find, recognize and distinguish various basic geometric shapes.
- c. Measurement/ With teaching tips, such as using interesting and diverse learning media, asking questions to encourage children to take measurements, asking open-ended questions, and inviting children to take measurements through games in daily activities.
- d. Patterns and Data Analysis, with teaching tips that invite children to explore and recognize patterns around them and ask questions that can stimulate them.
- e. Design a variety of activities that reinforce interesting concepts and patterns

## **Conclusion**

Kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school learning transition required the involvement of all parties. It started from the highest policy-making to the local level by involving all elements of society who were interested in education, especially parents, besides school committees and others. The fundamental thing about the learning transition from kindergarten/early childhood education to elementary school was that all parties had the same understanding and perception that children aged 7 – 8 years in elementary school were still in the early childhood phase. At that age, they should learn in a fun way to introduce various basic concepts taught through games. Meanwhile, elementary school teachers had been focusing more on training cognition at a more complex level, denying the nature of early childhood. Based on this condition, the dissemination of information to have the same understanding related to it, where the need for collaborative sharing between kindergarten/early childhood education and elementary

school teachers so that everyone could understand each other's position. Furthermore, the will to change following the learning pattern with kindergarten/early childhood education – elementary school transition strategy, which in this case was more dominant in intervening with teachers at the elementary education level. It means that elementary teachers had to learn more from kindergarten/early childhood education teachers in terms of organizing fun learning as found in learning at these levels.

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