



Revitalizing The Professionalism of Early Childhood Education Teachers As A Key to Improving The Quality of Early Childhood Education Services

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ABSTRACT

Revitalizing the professionalism of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers is an urgent need in order to enhance the quality of early childhood education services, particularly in rural areas such as Singajaya District, Garut Regency. ECE teachers are required not only to possess strong pedagogical competence, but also to adapt to the dynamics of the times and to understand the local characteristics of their students. This study aims to analyze strategies for revitalizing teacher professionalism as a key to improving the quality of educational services. A descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method was employed. The research subjects consisted of ECE teachers in Singajaya District. Data were collected through observation, open-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that enhancing teacher professionalism can be achieved through locally-based training, the establishment of teacher learning communities, educative supervision, and regulatory support from local governments. Moreover, integrating local cultural values into the learning process is a critical strategy in developing reflective and adaptive educators. The study concludes that revitalizing teacher professionalism not only improves individual competencies but also strengthens a more responsive and higher-quality ECE service ecosystem.

Keywords: Teacher Professionalism ; Early Childhood Education ; Quality Of Services



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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a strategic role in shaping the character, values, and fundamental potential of children from an early age. The early years are considered a "golden age," a critical period that determines the trajectory of a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. Therefore, ECE services must be delivered professionally and with high quality to ensure optimal outcomes for children's growth and development. One of the key factors in the success of ECE services is the role of teachers as the primary facilitators of learning and as creators of a supportive learning environment (Munawir et al., 2022).

However, various studies have shown that the challenges to ECE teacher professionalism in Indonesia remain significant, especially in rural areas. ECE teachers often face limited access to ongoing training, lack of regular supervision, and insufficient support from local governments. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022), many ECE teachers in rural regions do not possess the appropriate academic qualifications or have not participated in regular competency training. This situation negatively affects the quality of teaching and the educational services provided to young children. Thus, revitalizing teacher professionalism has become an urgent need to ensure the delivery of high-quality ECE.

Revitalizing teacher professionalism involves not only improving knowledge and skills, but also strengthening attitudes, work ethics, and the willingness to engage in continuous learning. Locally-based training models, the establishment of teacher learning communities, and the integration of cultural values into the learning process are relevant approaches in the context of community-based ECE. A study by (Harefa & Suprihatin, 2023) emphasizes the importance of contextual and continuous teacher development so that ECE teachers can become reflective educators who are responsive to social dynamics and child development. In this context, teachers are not merely instructors but also facilitators, innovators, and lifelong learners.

This study was conducted in the Singajaya District, Garut Regency, a rural area with rich local cultural diversity. The study aims to explore strategies for revitalizing ECE teacher professionalism that can enhance the overall quality of educational services. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable early childhood education policies and practices, especially in areas with limited resources and access to information.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth and holistic description of strategies for revitalizing the professionalism of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers within real-world contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study method was deemed appropriate, as the research focused on a specific phenomenon occurring in a particular setting Singajaya District, Garut Regency which possesses unique characteristics as a rural area with a distinct socio-cultural background. The study not only aimed to describe the phenomenon but also to recommend contextually relevant and applicable strategic models.

The subjects of this study were ECE teachers from various institutions in Singajaya District, including school principals and educational supervisors who served as supporting informants. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their experience and direct involvement in teaching practices and teacher professionalism development. Data collection techniques included open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The questionnaires were used to identify training needs and teachers' perceptions of professionalism, while interviews and observations were conducted to explore actual practices in the field.

For data analysis, this study adopted the interactive model proposed by (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data collected from various sources were thematically analyzed by identifying patterns, relationships among categories, and the influence of local socio-cultural contexts on teacher professionalism. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking to verify the accuracy of the information provided by informants.

The study also adhered to research ethics principles, such as obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining the confidentiality of personal data, and ensuring transparency regarding the research objectives to all stakeholders involved. Additionally, the research process was designed to provide feedback to local ECE institutions as a direct contribution from the study's findings. This method is expected to yield an accurate representation of the challenges and opportunities in revitalizing ECE teacher professionalism and offer an evidence-based foundation for context-sensitive policy formulation (Yin, 2018) ; (Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

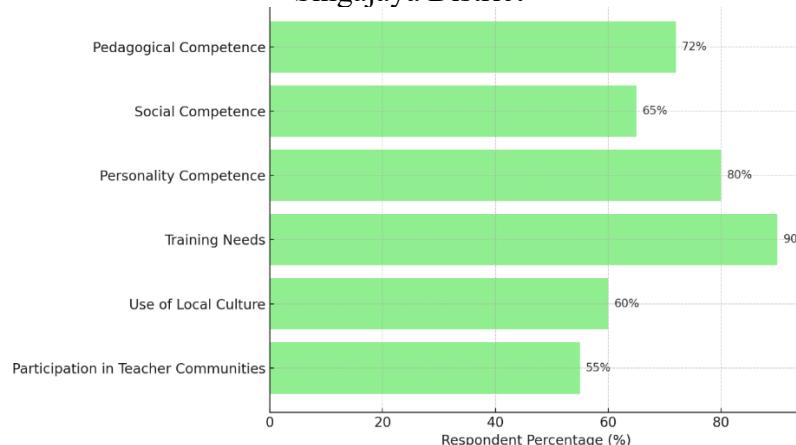
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were obtained through the distribution of questionnaires, in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation involving ECE teachers in Singajaya District, Garut Regency. The main objective was to identify the needs, practices, and challenges in the process of revitalizing ECE teacher professionalism. Based on the analyzed questionnaire data, it was found that most teachers still felt the need to improve several areas of competence, particularly in pedagogical skills and the integration of local culture into learning innovation.

Table 1: Questionnaire Results on ECE Teacher Professionalism in Singajaya District

No	Professionalism Aspect	Respondents (%)
1	Pedagogical Competence	72%
2	Social Competence	65%
3	Personal Competence	80%
4	Training Needs	90%
5	Utilization of Local Culture	60%
6	Participation in Teacher Communities	55%

Diagram 1 : Survey Results of Early Childhood Teachers on Professionalism Aspects in Singajaya District



The table and diagram above show that 90% of respondents expressed an urgent need for ongoing training. Meanwhile, 80% of teachers reported having strong personal competencies such as discipline and responsibility, but only 72% felt adequately equipped in terms of pedagogical competence. This indicates a gap between mental readiness and technical expertise in managing early childhood learning. The aspect of utilizing local culture in teaching remains relatively low, with only 60% of teachers actively integrating it into daily learning activities.

In-depth interviews confirmed that most ECE teachers in Singajaya lack regular access to professional training. The majority of training programs attended were general in nature and

not context-specific. Teachers felt more supported when the training was delivered in the form of local workshops tailored to the needs of their environment and culture. This aligns with the findings of (Harris & Sass, 2011), who emphasized that the effectiveness of teacher training greatly depends on local context and the active involvement of teachers as learners.

One successful approach identified in this study was the formation of ECE teacher learning communities. Through these communities, teachers can share experiences, reflect on practices, and develop instructional innovations. However, only 55% of teachers reported being actively involved in such communities. Time constraints, geographical distances, and the lack of facilitators remain the primary obstacles.

Moreover, observations revealed that teachers who engaged in educative supervision by school supervisors demonstrated improvements in teaching practices and classroom management. Coaching-based and collaborative supervision proved to be more effective than traditional administrative assessments. These findings support the arguments of (Hasanah et al., 2022) and (Air & Cita, 2024) who stated that supervision focused on teacher development significantly impacts the quality of teaching.

The integration of local cultural values into the curriculum remains a notable challenge. Some teachers have started incorporating folklore, traditional songs, and local games into daily activities, but these efforts have not yet been systematically embedded into the curriculum. In fact, local cultural values can strengthen children's identity and foster a sense of belonging to their social environment. This strategy also aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages context-based and character-driven learning.

Overall, the findings suggest that revitalizing ECE teacher professionalism must be comprehensive, contextual, and sustainable. These efforts not only enhance individual teacher competencies but also help build an ECE service ecosystem that is more adaptive to changes and responsive to community needs. Support from local governments, training institutions, and inter-institutional collaboration are key factors in the success of these revitalization strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that teacher professionalism is a key factor in improving the quality of early childhood education services, particularly in rural areas such as Singajaya District, Garut Regency. ECE teachers are expected not only to master pedagogical competencies, but also to adapt to the changing times, understand the local characteristics of children, and develop meaningful and contextual learning experiences. The quality of ECE services largely depends on the extent to which teachers can fulfill their professional roles in a reflective and continuous manner.

The findings indicate a strong need for locally relevant, context-based training. Teachers expressed a desire for technical and methodological support through practical training that aligns with their specific teaching environments. In addition, the involvement of teachers in learning communities and educative supervision has proven effective in enhancing their reflective and collaborative capacities. However, participation in professional communities and the integration of local cultural values into the curriculum still require improvement through more structured and sustainable approaches.

Revitalizing teacher professionalism must involve multiple stakeholders, including local governments, education supervisors, training institutions, and the community. Policy support that promotes regular and targeted teacher development is essential to ensure that quality improvement efforts are not short-lived. Furthermore, the integration of local cultural values into early learning should be part of a broader strategy to strengthen children's identity from an early age, making education more meaningful and grounded in their real-life experiences.

In conclusion, revitalizing ECE teacher professionalism not only enhances individual teacher competence but also fosters an early childhood education ecosystem that is more adaptive, contextual, and competitive. This effort must be carried out sustainably through collaborative, participatory, and needs-based approaches. It is hoped that this study can serve as a reference for policymakers and education practitioners in designing more effective and sustainable strategies for ECE teacher development in the future.

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