

Early Childhood Education in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

New Zealand is one of the countries with the best education system in the world. This article describes how the early childhood education system in New Zealand is child-friendly. This is a library study and field observation. The data was collected through examining books, documents, and other relevant sources. The findings in this study show that education for children under the age of 5 in New Zealand is known as Early Childhood Education (ECE). The ECE curriculum acknowledges that all children have the right to protection, health, well-being, equitable access, learning opportunities, recognition of language, culture and identity, and to self-determination in life. There are two types of ECE, namely teacher-led services dan parent-led services. The education system in New Zealand is child-friendly because it has standardized buildings, a tailored curriculum, implements a contextual learning system, and involved families and communities.

Keywords: *early childhood education, new zealand*

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand is recognized with a good education system. In 2018 the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ranked New Zealand 12th-best at science, 12th-best at reading, and 27th-best in maths [1]. According to age, the education system in New Zealand is divided into 4 levels, namely early childhood education (0 - 5 years), primary school (5 - 13 years), secondary school (13 - 18 years), and tertiary education (18 years +) [2].

"A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish" [3] is one of the expressions that are always ingrained in New Zealanders when looking at a child. Every child is believed to be born with great potential. Children come into the world to learn and have high expectations. Therefore, the government, teachers, society, and parents work together to make their hopes come true.

If in Indonesia it is known as *Taman Kanak-Kanak*, education for children under the age of five in New Zealand is known as Early Childhood Education (ECE). Almost the same as other countries, New Zealand has a special curriculum for ECE. The ECE curriculum in the Maori language is called Te Whāriki, which means "woven mat" [3]. Te Whāriki interprets the notion of curriculum broadly, taking it to include all the experiences, activities and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting. It provides a framework of principles, strands, goals and learning outcomes that prioritize the child and the importance of respectful, reciprocal and responsive relationships.

New Zealand children are growing up in a diverse society that comprises people from a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities. Te Whāriki supports children from all backgrounds to grow up strong in identity, language and culture. The ECE curriculum is very child-friendly and recognizes that all children have the right to protection, health, well-being, fair access, learning opportunities, recognition of language, culture and identity, and to make choices in their own lives. A curriculum must speak to past, present and future [3].

Curriculum always involves the past, present, and future. This fast-changing world requires children to also be good at adapting, creative, and elastic. Therefore, Te Whāriki emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and character that supports lifelong learning.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the types of educational programs organized for children aged 0-5 years and to find out the child-friendly learning system implemented in New Zealand. It is hoped that this article will be useful for education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This is a library study. Literature study can be interpreted as a series of activities related to library data collection methods, reading, recording, and processing research materials [4]. While data collection in this research was carried out by reviewing several journals and documents, as well as other sources of data and or information that are considered relevant to research or studies.

RESULT

The ECE in New Zealand is divided into two types namely teacher-led services dan parent-led services [5].

1. *Teacher-led Services ECE*

This type of ECE is led by teachers like schools in general and a minimum of 50% of the teachers in one school must meet the requirements and be certified as ECE teachers. This ECE service must also have a license, meaning that it must meet standards set by the government in terms of property, teachers and staff, health and safety, educational programs, and service management. There are four ECEs that fall into the category of teacher-led services, namely:

a. *Center for Education and Care (Educare)*

This type of ECE accepts children from birth to school age (0-5 years), but some provide special services for children under 2 years of age. The programs provided also vary, some are full day and some offer a number of hours per day or per week (flexible). Educare is owned privately or by certain community groups. Some educare also follow educational philosophy for example Rudolf Steiner, Montessori, or Reggio Emilia. There are also those that offer services with a focus on the Māori language or culture. At least 50% of its teachers or caregivers must be registered with educational centres, and be qualified as ECE teachers, and hold a current practicing certificate.

b. *Kindergarten*

Kindergarten, usually called kindy, is almost similar to kindergartens in Indonesia. Kindergarten are generally intended for children aged 2 – 5 years although there are some that accept children under 2 years. Kindy is managed by the Kindergarten Association and the teachers are 100% qualified and certified. Services at kindy vary, some are full day, some are serving several sessions at the beginning and at the end. Some Kindy are open all year round (no holidays) and also offer holiday programs depending on the policies of each school. For the population itself, kindy in New Zealand is the most compared to other types of ECE services.

c. *Home-based education and care service*

As the name implies, this type of ECE is a home-based service. The house in question can be the teacher's house, children's house, or other designated house. This service is for children aged 0-5 years and the implementation itself is individual or in groups (4 children). The service time provided is full day and half day. Some of the things that are obtained when participating in this service are access to a mobile toy library, getting facilities to support learning, and traveling. All educators in this service must be registered and certified in practice. In addition, the teacher is also accompanied by a coordinator whose duty is to visit teachers and children regularly to check learning progress.

d. *Te Kura (the Correspondence School playgroup)*

This type of service offers learning programs for children aged 3 - 5 years who cannot attend ECE directly. Children who join this program usually live in areas far from school. Teachers in these services usually work closely with parents or caregivers to meet children's learning needs. The service also provides a range of books, puzzles, games and art materials that can be borrowed.

2. *Parent-led Services ECE*

This type of ECE is unique because it is parents who organize and carry out activities for children not teachers but parents. This service is usually intended for children aged 0 – 3 years. New Zealand is a country that strongly supports parental involvement in child development. With this service, parents are given the opportunity to learn more about parenting, develop social and community networks, and build self-confidence. There are five types of ECE, namely:

a. *Playcentre*

Playcentre is a community based ECE cooperatively run by Whānau. Whānau is a Maori language term meaning family. So it is the family of the child who plans and oversees the activities in the playcenter. However, the family referred to here is not only parents, but grandparents, siblings, even caregivers. So anyone is allowed to accompany a child to study at the playcenter. Playcentre places the family as the first and best teacher in children's lives. Playcenter creates community-based learning to ensure families are accepted. Some of the things that playcentre has to offer:

b. *Te Kōhanga Reo*

Te Kōhanga Reo was founded in 1982 to offer an environment for children and parents to immerse themselves in Māori culture and language. This service serves children from birth to school age. Te Kōhanga Reo's main

goals are to preserve Māori culture and language, create a supportive and caring environment, share responsibilities, knowledge, and create mutual respect and respect for one another.

c. *Playgroup*

The playgroup in question is a community-based group run by parents and volunteers. Playgroup sessions usually last no more than four hours per day and are often held in community halls. In order for the playgroup to run, at least half of the students must be accompanied by their parents. The playgroups are not licensed, but parents and anyone who runs the playgroups receive information, support and training from the Ministry of Education.

d. *Puna kōhungahunga*

This is a type of playgroup focused on learning the Maori language and culture. Languages spoken can be English and Maori or just Maori. Some kōhungahunga puna have one session a week and some five times a week. The place of implementation can be in a school, church, community room, or in the Marae (maori meeting place). Ngā puna kōhungahunga also provides an informal support network for families and encourages parents to learn about their needs, education, and to see the important role they play in their child's early education. Families and parents find play a valuable tool for learning, growth, and development. Ngā puna kōhungahunga can be performed with or without certification. However, funding and support from the Ministry of Education are only available for certified puna kōhungahunga.

e. *Pacific Island-focused playgroups*

As above, these playgroups focus on developing and nurturing the languages and cultures of Pasifika including Samoan, Tonga, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, and Fijian.

Child-friendly the Education System in New Zealand

A Child Friendly School is a school that recognizes and nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. A school is considered child friendly when it provides a safe, clean, healthy and protective environment for children [6]. There are three elements in child development that are essential for child-friendly school design – safety, health and nutrition. [7].

Education in New Zealand is very child-friendly because [8].

1. All buildings are ECE licensed and safe

All ECEs operating in New Zealand must be licensed and must comply with government standards. The New Zealand government stipulates very strict and detailed rules or criteria for the establishment of an ECE. Some things that are very concerned about the place and ECE facilities involve:

- Building design should support different types of experiences for children both indoors and outdoors. The area of the indoor room must be adjusted to the number of children who will take part in ECE. Indoor room designs usually consist of several spaces according to age, interests, or themes. While outdoor rooms are generally wider and the games are very varied.
- The layout of the place or room should allow for easy supervision by teachers or parents.
- The amount and variety of furniture, equipment and materials should be adequately adapted to the learning objectives and abilities of the children.

All indoor and outdoor items including surfaces, furniture and equipment are made of safe materials and are suitable for their intended use and can be easily cleaned. For example, outdoor games such as slides and tunnels are made of plastic which is thick, sturdy, smooth and does not fade. Iron games such as swings and monkey bars are made of thick, strong, and non-rusting iron. This is in accordance with the Design Standards for Educational Facilities according to UNICEF The building is to be structurally stable, weatherproof according to local environmental conditions, climatically comfortable, easily exited in case of emergency and well integrated with the environmental and cultural context [7].



Figure 1. Outdoor Games



Figure 2. Indoor Games

- d. The floor surface of the room must also be durable, safe, and suitable for the various activities carried out. As for outdoor play mats, they are also not arbitrary, but are chosen from materials such as flexible rubber or sawdust so that if a child falls they don't get sick. The type of flooring used for indoor activities such as telling stories, singing, dancing, playing educational games (puzzles, cards, blocks, etc.) is made of wood covered with carpet. For painting, drawing and playdough activities, wooden floors are used, but special tables are made of plastic and are very easy to clean. Meanwhile, the type of floor used by children to play with water and messy is done on soil or sand.



Figure 3. Floors

- e. Any window or other glass area accessible to children is made of safety glass or covered by an adhesive film designed to hold the glass in place if it breaks or protected by a barrier to prevent children from bumping or falling on the glass.
- f. There is sufficient space to store equipment and materials safely. Stored equipment and materials can be easily and safely accessed by both adults and children.
- g. There is a room that can be used by teachers or people who work in services to take breaks, meet privately with parents and colleagues, store curriculum support materials, assess, plan, and evaluate learning.
- h. There are adequate and appropriate facilities and space such as a place to eat, bed, toilet, kitchen, washing area, heating, lighting, and equipment.



Figure 4. The ECE Facilities

- i. There are facilities available for the preparation and cleaning of paints and other art materials.
- j. There is a telephone that can be used to call and from the service.

2. A Tailored Curriculum

New Zealand believes that every child has their own way of learning, meaning that one child with another must have different interests, abilities, and differences in the length of time in absorbing and developing new knowledge and skills. As the saying goes in the Maori language 'ā tōna wā' which means children's abilities often fluctuate from day to day. In a few minutes children can change independently, sometimes they are still very dependent on other people. It is greatly influenced by a variety of things including the environment, health, temperament, and the people around them.

The curriculum for pre-school children is designed to suit the characteristics, interests, and needs of the children, not the other way around, it is the children who have to meet the demands of the curriculum which are sometimes so high. This was in accordance with UNICEF who said that the child-friendly school to respond to diversity, to respect, and ensure all children have an equal opportunity to acquire education [7].

Kindergarten students in New Zealand usually spend most of their time playing according to what they are interested in. For children who like to paint or draw, schools provide very complete painting equipment. For children who like to play with sand, the school also provides a spacious sandbox equipped with tools such as shovels, buckets, sand gutters, construction cars, dumbbells, trucks and toys made of strong material. There are also children who like physical games to explore safely in the playground. Here is an example when children are playing.



Figure 5. A Tailored Curriculum

3. Kontekstual Learning

The learning system applied is contextual. Contextual itself is interpreted as learning that relates the material studied to real situations or students' daily lives. ECE in New Zealand often invites guests or experts from outside such as the police, fire department and humanitarian organizations. One example of an organization that is usually brought to school is Bark NZ. Bark NZ is a charity in New Zealand that aims to reduce the number of dog bites in children under the age of 12. As a country with a high rate of dog ownership, Bark NZ helps educate children around dogs to keep them safe. This is in accordance with one of the UNICEF Child Friendly School standards, namely the teacher education program promotes the safety, security and protection of children within and outside school. [9].

4. Involved Families and Communities

Children-Friendly Educational Systems and Schools based on UNICEF framework for Rights-Based are characterized as inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities - and children [7]. The ECE in New Zealand also often holds activities with parents. Children learn and develop best when their culture, knowledge, and community are affirmed and when the people in their lives help them to make connections across settings. This is very important to develop a good relationship between children and parents.

In addition, many ECEs in New Zealand offer anyone who wants to become a volunteer in kindergarten. Volunteers in kindergartens are people spending time in a kindergarten during operating hours and whose intention it is to work directly with children and who are not employed by WMK. All volunteers will be police checked before they start volunteering in the kindergarten. No Volunteers will be left alone with a child or group of children where they are not in view of the teachers.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author himself generates ideas, develops theories, collects data, analyzes data and writes the final manuscript.

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