

The Uniqueness of An Early Childhood Education System in Japan

Budi Mulyadi

Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

Email: budimulyadi@lecturer.undip.ac.id

Abstract

The main objective of this research is to find out about some of the uniqueness of the early childhood education system in Japan. This research is a type of literature study that only relies on data from written sources such as books, journals, articles, and others. Data collection methods used in this study include classification, analysis, interpretation of synthesis and description. From the results of the study, in general, it can be described that the early childhood education system in Japan has much uniqueness. This uniqueness can be seen in the activities of the beginning of the new school year and how to enter kindergarten, at the entrance ceremony for new students, when doing daily activities in class, when additional activities outside the classroom, and when organizing traditional Japanese cultural activities.

Keywords: *education; uniqueness; early childhood; system*

1. Introduction

Education is an important thing and very influential in life. According to Freeman Butt, in the Cultural History of Western Education, education is also a growth process to develop the talents, strengths, abilities, and interests of an individual so that various kinds of abilities and capabilities are formed (Wijana, 2008: 126).

Education is a process to change the identity of a student to be more advanced. According to experts, there are several definitions that explore the definition of education itself. For example, education means maintaining and giving training. In maintaining practice, it is necessary to have teachings, guidance, and leadership regarding morals and intelligence of the mind (Mustofa, 2015: 6).

According to UNESCO, education should be built with four pillars, namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. In essence, the human learning process must take place throughout life. One effort to improve quality human resources is through education. Education is a

conscious effort that has been planned in realizing the atmosphere of the learning process in developing all the potential which includes self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills that are carried out for life (Putriyanti, 2018). To create a generation of quality, creative, and have a strong character, education must be done from an early age, in this case through early childhood education (Mulyani, 2016: 1). Agreeing with Mulyani, John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) strongly believes that education must begin early. Such learning is the best learning because sensorial experiences experienced by young children are the basis for all learning (Wijana, 2008: 2.16). Development theorists agree that early age is the golden age that only comes once and cannot be repeated. In another study, Benjamin S. Bloom (1913-1999) suggested that about 50% of the variability of adult intelligence had occurred when a child was 4 years old. The next 30% increase occurs at the age of 8 years, and the remaining 20% in the middle or end of the second decade.

Early childhood education is one of the coaching efforts aimed at children from

birth to age 6 years which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual development so that children have the readiness to enter further education. Early childhood education has been implemented throughout the world, including in Indonesia and in Japan.

In Japan, early childhood education received great attention from the government. Moreover, after the birth rate decline since 2003, the Japanese government has increasingly increased various facilities to support population growth programs through improving the quality of care and early childhood education throughout Japan.

Moreover, after the birth rate decline since 2003, the Japanese government has increasingly increased various facilities to support population growth programs through improving the quality of care and early childhood education throughout Japan.

Japanese society is very aware that in order to give birth to the next generation of young people the development of the nation must have a strong education system from an early age. Early childhood in Japan must be educated with an education system that can bring out superior characters such as discipline, responsibility, mutual cooperation, and not easily give up. The seriousness of the Japanese government and its people in building an early childhood education system gave birth to its own uniqueness both in regulations and in the implementation of the early childhood education system.

From the description above, what I want to describe in this paper is the uniqueness of the early childhood education system in Japan that is not yet widely known. The uniqueness is closely related to the efforts of the Japanese government to implement character education for its people. Each country has its own way of shaping the character of its

people. The typical way of each country that has certain emphasis points in achieving its goals. So, it is undeniable that everything will produce positive and negative impacts. The success of achieving a country in shaping the character of its people cannot be seen from just one perspective, but with two different points of view. With that comparison, we can conclude whether the country really succeeded or not (Sari, 2017). The purpose of writing this article is to explain how the uniqueness of the early childhood education system in Japan.

2. Methods

This research is a qualitative study, or also referred to as naturalistic research. This study is qualitative because the data is not quantitative and do not use statistical measurement tools. And the data of this study is naturalistic because the research field situation is natural, this experiments and tests without manipulation (Tarsito through Nasution, 2003). in other words, qualitative research is research that presents data with descriptive paragraphs, not with concrete numbers.

This research is included in the library research or research library. The characteristics of library research are, researchers do not deal directly with respondents or primary sources of data but rather deal with letters or numbers. Second, the data used in library research is ready to use. Third, the data used in library research are secondary data. Fourth, this study uses data that does not divide space and time.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Early Childhood Education Institutions in Japan

Japan views education as a tool to build the nation. Through education, the government controls the quality of human resources, advances in science and technology, cultural preservation and the application of community values. Therefore the Japanese government

provides education with a good and effective educational structure. Such education does not only exist at the secondary school level, but starts from the lowest level, namely early childhood education. The attention of the Japanese government towards early childhood education is increasing with the population crisis which peaked in 2003. The fall in birth rates caused the number of workers to shrink, thus causing more and more mothers to enter the workforce. Responding to this, the Japanese government improved itself by improving the quality of early childhood care and education throughout Japan (Juliandi, 2014: 1). In order to meet the needs of children and parents, the Japanese government created three types of formal elementary children's educational institutions. As stated by Riyadini (2010: 15), the institution is:

3.1.1 *Youchien* (幼稚園)

Youchien is the same as a kindergarten in Indonesia. In general, *youchien* accepts students from three to five years old. Registration starts from June, while the new school year will start in April. Because most of *youchien* in Japan is privately owned, the costs needed to get into *youchien* are quite expensive. But the government provides assistance of up to 50% of the entrance fee to ease the burden on guardian parents who earn less. In *youchien*, children do a lot of activities in the field. There are no special lessons for memorizing numbers and letters. The introduction of numbers and letters is done through the game in a fun and without coercion.

Juliandi in his book titled *Pendidikan Anak Ala Jepang* (2014:2) explains that *youchien* education in Japan is based on the following three important things: a) Children can receive as much experience as possible, b) Children can learn through play, c) Children can grow up according to the nature and character of each.

Through the three points above, kindergarten education is held. Kindergarten is an institution where children can get as much experience as possible. That can be obtained through the game. Game (play) is a fun activity that is carried out for the benefit of the activity itself (Santrock, 2002).

Through play, children will get more information so that their knowledge and understanding are richer and deeper. If this new information turns out to be different from what he has always known, then it means the child is getting new knowledge. With the game, the child's cognitive structure becomes deeper, richer, and more perfect (Fauzzidin, 2018).

The goals of kindergarten education in Japan is to build children's strength to live and have a strong foundation for living on the next step in their lives. The basis of life in question is physical and mental health, good social relations, good relations with an environment, language skills, as well as the ability of expression, creativity, and art.

3.1.2 *Hoikuen*

Commonly known as a child care institution. *Hoikuen* is under the guidance of the Minister of Welfare, because there are more public *hoikuen* than private *hoikuen*. Because *hoikuen* serves as a child care agency. *Hoikuen* accepts students from one month to five years. School hours are longer, from 7:30 to 19:00 to meet the needs of parents who both work. Education in *hoikuen* is not much different from education in *yochien*, the only difference is the length of foster hours so that children in *hoikuen* are accustomed to being more independent and disciplined. Due to longer education hours, school fees in *hoikuen* are relatively more expensive. *Hoikuen* only accepts children whose parents work.

Juliandi in his book titled *Pendidikan Anak Ala Jepang* (2014: 11) explains *hoikuen* education in Japan is based on the following three important things: a) Baby time is an important time to

grow a power base for life, b) Respect the human rights and existence of every child so that every child has the right to receive good care, and c) Collaborate with families and communities in the process of raising children.

The goals of *hoikuen* education in Japan are divided into two, namely: a) The goals of early childhood education are the same as the goals of kindergarten education, which includes five aspects such as physical and mental health, social relations, relationships with the environment and surrounding communities, language skills, and ability to express art and creativity; b) The purpose as a body or institution that helps parents take care of children with family, community and the environment.

3.2 The Uniqueness of the Early Childhood Education System in Japan

Japan at present has achieved a state of progress and prosperity, among others, is the result of the nation's efforts in education. Education in Japan aims to develop personality fully by striving to build a healthy human mind and body, loving the truth, respecting individuals, valuing work, and having a deep sense of responsibility and a spirit of independence as the builders of a peaceful country and society (Susilo, 2017: 13).

Radjasa in his paper explains that in kindergarten in Japan, children are educated to become independent, responsible, sensitive, and caring to the environment, appreciative of others, disciplined, and cooperative. The process is applied through various activities such as sports, arts, and crafts instead of thorough explanation and memorization. Children are trained to perform good activities, and not to be lectured about goodness (Radjasa, 2017).

To achieve this the Japanese government has tried to build a strong foundation in the field of education by

creating and implementing a competent education system starting from early childhood education. In the early childhood education system in Japan, there are much uniqueness that we cannot find out in other countries. And it is characteristic of the education system in Japan that other countries cannot imitate. Like the countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia and so on. The followings are some of the uniqueness of the early childhood education system in Japan.

3.2.1 Beginning of a new school year and how to enter kindergarten

Unlike in Indonesia and many other countries, in Japan, the new school year begins in April and registration of new students has begun to open since October. For public kindergartens, school information and registration forms can be taken at the mayor's office or called *shiyakusho* by showing an ID or insurance card, whereas private kindergartens must come directly to the school and queue to register the form.

Unlike in Indonesia, to register in kindergarten in Japan, the only conditions that must be fulfilled are an age requirements, ie the child who wants to be registered must be 4 years old as of April 1 of that year, if the child is born after April 1, then he must wait for the following year to be able to sign up.

3.2.2 New admissions ceremony

The entrance ceremony for new students in Japan is quite unique. That ceremony was quite lively. The entrance ceremony for new students in Japan is called *nyuenshiki*. Juliandi in her book explained that the welcoming ceremony was held on the first day of entering school. New students, parents, local education officials, representatives from the mayor's office, and seniors attend *nyuenshiki*. The program opened with a short greeting from the principal, congratulations from representatives of the mayor's office, local education officials, and representatives of students' parents. The next program was a

brief introduction of all new students, singing offerings from seniors, and ending with introductions from the teachers and offering puppet plays or reading storybooks. And then, new students and parents are invited to tour the school to look at classrooms and other rooms in the school and take pictures together (2014: 37). The uniqueness of the ceremony for admission of new students in Japan can be seen from the series of events and the people who attended it. In Indonesia, there were no mayor officials present at the entrance ceremony for new kindergarten students, whereas in Japan education service officials from the mayor's office came to attend the invitation and give a speech.

3.2.3 Daily Activities

The daily activities of kindergarten children in Japan are very unique and different from Indonesia. If in Indonesia the daily activities of kindergarten children by theme, in Japan, the daily activities of children are permanent. The kindergarten daily schedule in Japan is laxer when compared to the kindergarten daily schedule in Indonesia. However, through this schedule there is much learning being taught. For example, through listening to stories and borrowing books in the library, children are taught to love books. Through singing and playing musical instruments, children learn to express themselves by dancing to the rhythm. And through lunch activities, children learn to independently prepare cutlery as well as tidy it up again after eating. That is the uniqueness that can be seen from the daily activities of kindergarten children in Japan where all activities that seem practical turn out to contain educational value to train them to have superior character when they grow up. Another unique feature of daily kindergarten activities in Japan is no reading or counting lessons. All lessons are taught subtly and pleasantly through habits taught in the classroom.

3.2.4 Additional activities

Additional activities besides daily activities, kindergarten children in Japan also have their own uniqueness that is different from kindergarten in other countries. Kindertartens in Japan hold sports activities every year called *undoukai*. *Undoukai* is a competition that is participated by all students.

All students participate in this event. The competition that was held during the *undoukai* was *tobibakao*, which was a beam jumping competition, *nawatobi*, a rope race, a hola hoop race, walking on a footbridge, *noboribo*, which was sliding on a pole, relaying, dribbling, and others. *Undoukai* is usually held in October to commemorate national health and sports day (*taiku no hi*) on Monday the second week of October.

In addition to *undoukai*, kindertartens in Japan also hold an art performance called *happyoukai*. *Happyoukai* is an art performance that involves all students and teachers. Students are free to choose the shows they want to do. For example, drama, orchestra, and dance. On the day of the implementation of the school decorated with crafts that are made together. Parents and families are invited to watch the art performance offerings. After the performance, parents, students, and all teachers together clean the school clean as before (Juliandi, 2014: 123).

The unique thing that can be seen from the *happyoukai* activities is the existence of synergy, harmony and very strong cooperation between parents of students and kindergarten teachers. Parents of students are very supportive of the *happyoukai* event even after the event is over, they want to be together with a teachers to clean up and clean the school so that it is clean as before.

3.2.5 Hold traditional Japanese festivals

Another unique thing from the kindergarten education system in Japan is

that the school is very concerned about traditional Japanese cultural values and maintains them by carrying out various activities related to Japanese traditional culture. For example, routinely every year on the specified date they implement *Setsubun Matsuri* every February 3rd. *Setsubun Matsuri* is a bean throwing festival to ward off evil spirits. In kindergarten, children celebrate that festival by throwing soybeans at the teacher who pretends to be a devil (oni). The teacher and students will wear a unique costume together so that this activity becomes very enjoyable.

In addition to *Setsubun Matsuri*, kindergarten in Japan also holds a *Hinamatsuri* every March 3rd. *Hinamatsuri* is also called girls festival or doll festival. At the time of this festival, the school will be decorated with *Hina Ningyo* dolls. Kindergarten teachers will read fairy tales about *Hinamatsuri*, students are invited to make despicable dolls from origami and sing songs about *Hinamatsuri*.

Even for boys at the Japanese kindergarten school, there is a *Kodomo no Hi* festival. Children celebrate that festival by hanging *Koinobori* or koi fish flags of various colors and sizes as a symbol of life success. In addition to flying the finished *Koinobori* flag, children are invited to make their own *Koinobori* and then fly it together in the schoolyard.

In addition to that festival, kindergartens in Japan also celebrate other festivals. Like *Tanabata* or the so-called star festival. This festival is held on 7 July. The children come to school wearing *yukata* clothes, they dance together in the schoolyard accompanied by traditional music, then hang a paper containing a request on a tree. Usually, schools create artificial markets, and children celebrate that festival there. The artificial market is a market that sells goods made by themselves and is bought by friends and teachers with play money. This is very

unique because in this activity contained the value of character education for kindergarten children to be able to become an entrepreneur.

There is another festival held at a Japanese kindergarten called *Natsu Matsuri* or a summer festival. Same with the *Tanabata*, during the summer festival, children come to school using *yukata* with their parents and play traditional games such as *Suikawari* (watermelon split), *Nagashisomen*. The school usually ends the *Natsu Matsuri* celebration by holding a fireworks party.

Another unique thing for kindergarten children in Japan in the summer is swimming almost every day. It aims to adapt to hot weather, and at the same time introduce water sports early on so as not to be afraid of water. Therefore all kindergartens in Japan have swimming pools or pump pools in a school. Every summer morning, parents must prepare swimming equipment.

The activities of kindergarten children in Japan described above indirectly formed the foundation of the superior character of Japanese society. The formation of superior characters and distinctive values of Japanese culture possessed by the Japanese until Japan has reached a state of progress and prosperity is the result of Japanese efforts in education issues, including character education (Budi, 2014: 71).

4. Conclusion

There are some things that can be deduced from the uniqueness of kindergartens in Japan. For example, The unique thing that can be seen from the *happyoukai* activities is the existence of synergy, harmony and very strong cooperation between parents of students and kindergarten teachers. Parents of students are very supportive of the *happyoukai* event even after the event is over, they want to be together with the

teachers to clean up and clean the school so that it is clean as before.

Another unique thing from the kindergarten education system in Japan is that the school is very concerned about traditional Japanese cultural values and maintains them by carrying out various activities related to Japanese traditional culture.

There are still much uniqueness of the early childhood education system in Japan which is rarely found in other countries. The world community has widely known about that uniqueness that shows the identity of the Japanese nation. This uniqueness reflects a lot of the positive side of the early childhood education system in Japan.

The early childhood education system in Japan is very concerned about character education for children because the Japanese government believes that character education must be planted in early childhood as a foundation to give birth to superior seeds of the next generation of the nation's future.

The early childhood education system in Japan is also very concerned about the traditional values of the nation's culture. Early childhood in Japan has instilled a love for traditional Japanese culture by carrying out activities; Japanese traditional activities as described in the discussion above.

References

- Fauziddin, Moh & Mufarizuddin. (2018). Useful of Clap Hand Games for Optimalize Cogtivite Aspects in Early Childhood Education. *Journal of Early Childhood Education*. DOI: 10.31004/obsesi.v2i2.76.
- Juliandi, Saleha & Putri, Juniar. (2014). *Pendidikan Anak Ala Jepang*, Jakarta: Pena Nusantara.
- Kurniawati, Indah. (2015). *Perbandingan Taman Kanak-Kanak di Jepang dan Indonesia*. Tugas Akhir. Semarang: Universitas Diponegoro. Tidak dipublikasikan.
- Mulyadi, Budi. (2014). Model Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Masyarakat Jepang. *Jurnal Izumi Vol.3 no.1* Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Diponegoro.
- Mulyani, Novi. (2016). *Pendidikan Seni Tari Anak Usia Dini*. Yogyakarta: Gavamedia.
- Mustofa, Bisri. (2015). *Psikologi Pendidikan*. Yogyakarta: Parama Ilmu.
- Nasution, S. (1955). *Berbagai Pendekatan Dalam Proses Belajar Mengajar*. Jakarta. Bumi Aksara.
- Putriyanti, Dwi Dkk. (2018). Peningkatan Karakter Keberanian Anak Melalui Bahasa Ibu di TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Sungai Pinang Ogan Ilir Program Studi PG-Paud, Fakultas Keguruan Dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Sriwijaya. *Journal of Children's Education*, Vol. 7, Edition 2.
- Radjasa et al. (2017). Developing Character Education Grounded on "Abk" (Attitude Before Knowledge) Model for Kindergarten at Raudlatul Athfal State Islamic University "Sunan Kalijaga" Indonesia. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*.
- Ramli, Murni. (2015). *Prinsip Pendidikan Anak Usia dini di Jepang*. Makalah. Downloaded from <https://murniramli.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/prinsip-pendidikan-anak-usia-dini-di-jepang-makalah/> on April 10, 2020.
- Ramli, Murni. (2018). *Menjadi Orang Berakarakter dan Berbudaya di Jepang*. Bantul: Manggar Media.
- Riyadini, Geri Pratidina. (2010). *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini di Jepang*. Tugas Akhir. Semarang: Universitas Diponegoro. Tidak dipublikasikan.
- Santrock, J. W. (2002). *A Topical Approach*

- to Life-span Development*. Jakarta: Erlangga.
- Sari, Septi Devita. (2017). Perbandingan Sistem Pendidikan Di Indonesia Dengan Jepang: Ilmu Sosial Sebagai Pembangun Karakter Berkebangsaan. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Tahunan Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Negeri Medan*, Vol. 1 No. 1 Hal. 181-186.
- Susilo, Taufik Adi. (2017). *Belajar Sukses dari Jepang*. Jogjakarta: Starbooks.
- Wijana, Widarmi D. (2008), *Kurikulum Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*. Jakarta: Universitas Terbuka.