



Collaboration in Preparing Early Childhood Readiness to Enter Elementary School through Habituation Programs

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Abstract

This research examines the collaboration across different levels among kindergartens, elementary schools, and parents in facilitating children's readiness for the transition to elementary school via a shared lunchbox acclimatization initiative at TK-IT Ar Rohmah Magetan. The subject is crucial since early transitions greatly influence children's autonomy, social abilities, and preparedness for learning. A qualitative case study methodology was utilized to gather data via direct observation, comprehensive interviews with educators, open-ended surveys from 28 parents, and analysis of documents. The research suggests that organized teamwork improves children's preparedness for school. Findings indicate that collaborative initiatives – like synchronized lunch menus, elementary teachers visiting kindergartens, and combined parenting workshops – enhance communication among stakeholders and foster better habits in children's table manners, discipline, and health. A significant discovery is the proactive involvement of elementary teachers as transition collaborators instead of merely receiving kindergarten graduates passively. This change enables more seamless and contextually fitting transitions. The research provides actionable insights for Islamic educational organizations to implement a cooperative habituation framework that incorporates character development from a young age.

Keywords: collaboration, elementary school readiness, habituation, islamic education, early childhood



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Introduction

In the last decade, the focus of the education world has increasingly focused on the urgency of building holistic readiness for early childhood before entering elementary school. This readiness is not only related to cognitive aspects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also includes social-emotional skills, healthy lifestyles, and the ability to be independent in self-management (Mahardhani et al., 2022). The emphasis on everyday experiences, including eating habits with peers, plays a crucial role in building positive attitudes, discipline, and social skills that form the basis when children continue their education at the elementary school level (Rosmi & Zakiya, 2025). Afia & Malik (2024) explains that an effective collaboration model between schools and parents can

improve children's readiness to face academic and social challenges in the next stage of education. In the Indonesian context, the transition from early childhood education (ECE) to elementary school remains a significant challenge that early childhood children in rural areas still have difficulty in adapting to the culture of elementary schools, especially related to self-discipline and learning habits (Ramli, 2023).

Although a number of habituation programs have been implemented at the ECE level, inconsistencies are still evident in the lack of planned collaboration practices that also involve elementary school institutions as important partners. Initial observations conducted by researchers at the Ar Rohmah Magetan Integrated Islamic Kindergarten showed that although the "Eating Lunch Together" program had been implemented consistently and succeeded in increasing children's independence, communication between kindergarten and elementary school teachers about children's readiness was still minimal. The initial survey results given to parents also showed that 61% of respondents felt that collaborative activities between kindergarten and elementary school were important so that children would be more psychologically and socially prepared. In addition, interviews with elementary school class teachers showed that a number of children who graduated from ECE still appeared awkward and less independent when entering the formal learning environment in elementary school, especially in terms of managing food supplies, time discipline, and communication skills in class.

Recognizing this gap, this study aims to present a collaborative approach that involves not only schools and parents, but also active cooperation with elementary schools. The researchers concluded that three-party collaboration (kindergarten-elementary school-parents) through real habituation programs such as eating together, educational visits to elementary schools, and parent sessions with elementary school teachers will be more effective in preparing children, both in terms of independence, social skills, and emotional readiness. This study aims to expand the concept of early childhood education collaboration, from a two-party model to a three-party model, and provide a picture of real practices that can be emulated in other ECE institutions.

International studies from Europe and Turkey have shown that a school readiness model that emphasizes collaboration between early childhood education institutions and elementary schools through curriculum adjustments, teacher visits, and early parental involvement has been shown to ease children's transition to elementary

school (González-Moreira et al., 2021). Furthermore, other habituation interventions, such as shared play activities, have also been shown to improve children's academic and social readiness, as demonstrated by play-based pedagogies in Finland and Brazil that integrate play-based learning to build self-regulation and social interaction before entering formal school (Kalinde et al., 2024). What distinguishes this shared meal program is the strengthened active role of teachers: elementary school teachers function not only as recipients of graduates but also as transition partners directly involved in kindergarten – planning shared menus, accompanying children on-site, and facilitating parenting sessions to ensure educational expectations are aligned between the institution and parents. In this context, the teacher's position is more as a facilitator and collaborator in the learning process than a passive observer, in line with the principle of teachers as co-learners in approaches such as Reggio Emilia and HighScope (Henderson & Edwards, 2020; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2018) .

This study specifically aims to: (1) describe the form of collaboration between kindergarten, elementary school, and parents through a daily habituation program; (2) analyze its impact on children's readiness to enter elementary school; and (3) identify supporting factors, challenges, and reflections on the implementation of the collaboration program. Therefore, this study not only highlights the internal activities of ECE, but also connects the differences in communication and views between kindergarten and elementary school teachers in understanding the developmental needs of early childhood.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the real cross-level collaborative approach, different from previous research which generally only discussed the role of ECE teachers or parental involvement in supporting children's readiness to enter elementary school (Pudyaningtyas et al., 2025; Widarnandana et al., 2023). This study makes elementary schools active partners, with the hope of creating smoother and more efficient transition practices. In addition, this study highlights daily habits, such as eating packed lunches together as a strategic way to build children's independence, responsibility, and self-confidence, which have rarely been studied in studies of the transition from early childhood education to elementary school in Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study applies a qualitative approach with a case study type that focuses on the program of introducing shared lunch boxes as a means of collaboration between kindergartens, elementary schools, and parents in preparing early childhood to face elementary school. The variables analyzed include collaboration between institutions, forms of parental participation, and the influence of the habituation program on independence, social skills, and children's mental readiness. The subjects of the study included the principal and teachers of the Ar Rohmah Magetan Integrated Islamic Kindergarten who participated directly in the program, representatives of partner elementary school teachers who received the kindergarten graduates, and parents of group B students whose children would enter elementary school. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, selected to ensure that participants directly involved in or affected by the joint lunchbox habituation program could provide rich, relevant, and in-depth data. This technique was chosen because the research aimed to explore specific experiences and perceptions related to collaborative practices in preparing early childhood for school transitions.

The research instruments included in-depth interview guides for kindergarten and elementary school teachers, open-ended questionnaires distributed to parents to explore their perceptions and experiences, participatory observation sheets to record the implementation of joint lunch activities, as well as photo, video, and archive documentation of communication between the school and parents and the elementary school. Data were obtained through direct observation during five joint lunch activities, in-depth interviews with four kindergarten teachers and two elementary school teachers, and analysis of questionnaire responses from parents. All data were analyzed by applying data reduction techniques to separate relevant information, present data in narrative format and thematic tables, and draw conclusions that were verified through source triangulation, which included observation data, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. These steps were carried out regularly so that other researchers could repeat or examine the research results in the same context and place (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Pahleviannur et al., 2022).

Results and Discussion

Form of Collaboration between Kindergarten, Elementary School, and Parents in Habitual Program

Observations at the Ar Rohmah Magetan Integrated Islamic Kindergarten show that the program of habituating eating lunch together has increased to become a means of collaboration between various parties, involving kindergarten teachers, parents, and partner elementary school teachers. Kindergarten teachers actively organize the implementation of activities every Friday through a WhatsApp group, providing an agreed menu schedule so that children get used to eating healthy food and the same type of side dishes, in order to prevent envy among friends. Conversely, partner elementary school teachers are invited to parenting sessions with parents to explain expectations regarding children's readiness when entering elementary school, which include independence, discipline, and social skills. In this activity, a two-way information exchange process takes place: kindergarten teachers gain a clearer understanding of the expectations of elementary school teachers, while elementary school teachers can understand the background of children's habits since kindergarten (Widarnandana et al., 2023).

Questionnaire data filled out by 28 parents showed that 82% felt more knowledgeable about appropriate parenting patterns to prepare children for elementary school after participating in the joint lunch program and inter-level parenting. In addition, 68% of parents said they had started to regularly train their children to eat independently at home according to instructions from the teacher, while the rest were still adapting to patterns at home due to time constraints. Kindergarten teachers reported in interviews that interactions with parents had become more transparent, as seen from the increase in questions and discussions in the group, especially regarding healthy menus, time discipline habits, and appropriate lunches.

To clarify the influence of collaboration on children's readiness, the following presents summary data from questionnaire results from 28 parents regarding changes in children's behavior after participating in a program to get used to eating lunch together for five weeks.

Table 1 Aspects of Change in Children's Behavior

Number	Aspect of Child Change	Presentase
1	Children are more independent when eating	82%
2	Children start to like vegetables/fruit	64%
3	Children are more disciplined with time and sit neatly	71%
4	Children are more disciplined and confident in speaking in class.	68%
5	Children help tidy up the cutlery	86%

The results of this study indicate that collaboration between various levels of education and parents has a significant impact on children's non-academic readiness, such as independence, discipline, and social skills, which are essential indicators in the transition from preschool to elementary school (Rademacher, Zumbach, et al., 2022). Parents who actively participate in healthy eating habits at home also report that their children are more enthusiastic about bringing lunch and modeling healthy eating habits from their teachers and peers. This supports Bandura's social learning theory that children imitate the behavior of models they frequently see in constructive social environments. These results align with recent research by Rademacher, Goagoses, et al. (2022), which emphasizes that a child's successful transition to elementary school is strongly influenced by consistent routines and collaboration between caregivers, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers. Therefore, a habit-forming approach such as sharing meals together not only creates routines but also serves as a psychosocial bridge for children in recognizing the value of responsibility and preparing them for the more complex learning environment in elementary school.

Cooperation is also seen from the return visit of elementary school teachers to kindergarten classes, where elementary school teachers accompany the children while eating lunch together. Based on observations, the children seemed enthusiastic and showed a more orderly attitude, for example washing their hands without being reminded and sitting quietly before eating. Elementary school teachers in interviews stated that this moment helped students feel close to the figure of the elementary school teacher, thus reducing tension when they actually enter elementary school. This activity also serves as a reflection for elementary school teachers on how to create a learning environment that is more familiar with children at an early age.

Analysis of documentation data, including photos, WhatsApp group notes, and menu schedules, shows ongoing collaboration: every week, kindergarten teachers upload documentation of activities and note children's problems, such as difficulty

eating vegetables or being easily distracted. Elementary school teachers and parents provide recommendations, such as preparing supplies or giving symbolic awards. This form of collaboration between levels is one of the program's innovations (Bullah et al., 2024; Harjaya & Idawati, 2022), because it is not only limited to internal coordination between the kindergarten and parents, but also extends to building organized communication with elementary school teachers who will receive kindergarten alumni.

The Impact of Habituation Programs on Children's Social Readiness and Independence

Observation data showed a marked change in children's behavior, especially related to independence when eating. From the beginning, many children were usually spoon-fed or dependent on teachers, but by the fifth week of the program, 23 out of 28 children were recorded as being able to open their own lunch boxes, get drinking water, and tidy up the table without help. Kindergarten teachers observed an increase in children's courage to try various vegetables and side dishes, although they did not always finish them. Parents also reported similar changes via questionnaires: 75% said their children had become more independent and complained less when asked to try new foods.

In terms of social skills, kindergarten and elementary school teachers who accompanied the group lunches noticed that children began to demonstrate prosocial behavior, such as offering food to friends, waiting their turn, and reminding friends to say prayers. An elementary school teacher noted that children who had been accustomed to eating together since kindergarten tended to adapt more easily when sitting in elementary school, were less shy, and were more ready to receive instructions. This information was supported by parents' answers: 68% admitted that their children became more confident and enjoyed sharing their experiences of eating together.

The results of in-depth interviews with kindergarten teachers also emphasized changes in children's behavior outside of mealtimes. Teachers revealed that children were more organized in putting things away, more patient when waiting for their turn to speak, and better able to complete activities without full supervision. Elementary school teachers emphasized that these habits made it easier for teachers when they first received first graders, because children had been accustomed to simple, consistent rules since kindergarten.

From the aspect of healthy lifestyle, documentation data shows that the variety of provisions brought by children is increasingly varied. At the beginning of the program, children's food was dominated by rice and fried side dishes, but after a few weeks, steamed vegetables, sliced fruit, and even grilled side dishes were added. Parents in the questionnaire also stated that children often asked to be prepared provisions like their friends, which shows a positive impact from social interaction in the classroom. This change in behavior serves as an indicator of children's readiness to undergo routines in elementary school, which requires children to be more independent and responsible for their needs (Tamba & Shaleh, 2024).

Supporting Factors, Challenges, and Program Reflections

Qualitative data analysis shows various factors that support the program, such as active communication via WhatsApp groups that make it easier for parents to get information, consistency in the planned joint lunch schedule, and the role of elementary school teachers as a third party who provides new perspectives. Kindergarten teachers feel very helped by input from elementary school teachers regarding expectations at the next level, so they can adjust habits, such as training children to be more disciplined with time or bringing more practical supplies.

However, the program also experienced some difficulties. Questionnaire data showed that 32% of parents had difficulty preparing lunch boxes according to schedule due to time constraints or work. Through interviews, kindergarten teachers revealed other obstacles, such as children who are picky eaters who are still unwilling to try vegetables even though they have been motivated. In terms of coordination, a number of elementary school teachers were involved for the first time, so it took time to build smoother and more regular communication.

Reflections from kindergarten and elementary school teachers show that this program provides a valuable lesson: the transition from kindergarten to elementary school is not only the responsibility of kindergarten teachers, but also requires the active participation of elementary school teachers and parents (Mahardhani, 2023). Elementary school teachers consider visiting kindergarten classes as a good effort to minimize the psychological distance between children and elementary school. Kindergarten teachers feel more confident in designing habituation programs because they gain a clear understanding of the learning conditions in elementary school.

The results of data triangulation from observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation strengthen the finding that cross-level collaboration has a broader impact than collaboration that only involves kindergarten and parents. The activity of eating lunch together is not just an activity, but also a tool to develop independence, courage to socialize, and prepare children to face a more formal learning environment. This finding broadens the understanding of the significance of the kindergarten to elementary school transition approach that is based on real habitual practices and collaboration between institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it was concluded that cross-level collaboration between kindergartens, elementary schools, and parents through the program of eating lunch together at the Ar Rohmah Magetan Integrated Islamic Kindergarten can significantly prepare early childhood to enter elementary school, especially in terms of independence, social skills, and healthy lifestyles. The results of this study confirm that the transition approach that not only involves kindergarten teachers and parents, but also involves elementary school teachers as active partners, is an innovation that provides new contributions to the development of Islamic education at the elementary level, especially in forming the character of discipline, responsibility, and gratitude in children from an early age. This collaboration has been proven to not only facilitate children's transition to elementary school, but also strengthen collaboration between the family environment, early childhood education institutions, and elementary schools as a single learning ecosystem. Practical approaches such as the habit of eating lunch together which is carried out regularly, with intensive communication between levels and active participation of parents, have become effective means to instill Islamic values such as table manners, togetherness, and concern for others, which will then become provisions for children when entering the formal learning environment in elementary school. Therefore, this study presents a transition collaboration model based on real habits that can be adopted in other Islamic educational institutions to strengthen children's academic and moral preparation, while meeting the needs of character education at the elementary school level that is in line with Islamic values.

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