



INTRODUCTION TO GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION BASED ON EXPLORATION OF THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT FOR EARLY CHILDREN

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Abstract:

This research aims to explore and analyze critical aspects of Geography Education that can be applied to early childhood. The main focus of this research involves the concepts of location, human interaction, movement and area as the main pillars of geography learning for early childhood based on exploration of the environment around the school as the first introduction and interaction with the real (natural) environment. The literature review research method was used to investigate theories related to geography education, characteristics of early childhood, and relevant geographic skills. Through literature analysis, this research details the importance of understanding home location, place identity, and human interactions as a basis for the development of early childhood characteristics. The conclusions of this study include a synthesis of literature findings, identifying knowledge gaps that need further exploration, and suggesting further research directions. The results of this research contribute to an in-depth understanding of how to develop geography learning methods that suit the needs and characteristics of young children. The practical implications of these findings can help educators and educational practitioners in designing interesting and effective teaching strategies, creating a strong foundation for the development of geographical understanding in the early stages of children's development.

Keywords: *Geography Education, Exploration, Early Childhood Development*

INTRODUCTION

Learning is not only an activity of obtaining information but something must also be understood through the meaning of things obtained or learned while at school, by understanding the relationship between lessons at school and problems found in the environment or in society and applying all the knowledge they have learned obtained in schools in real life will encourage students to think critically.

In general, education aims to provide assistance for the complete development of students so that they can develop all the potential contained in students as fully as possible in order to become mature human beings. The variety of subjects in schools is one way to form quality human resources, one of which is geography.

Geography is a science that studies natural and human phenomena that occur on the surface of the earth. The importance of studying geography requires that everyone be able to understand the surrounding environment, natural phenomena and human activities. However, humans can never be separated from the natural environment around them. This is proven by all human needs which always depend on nature, especially in daily living needs.

This encourages every human being to always take advantage of the natural environment and also to preserve it. Nature preservation never escapes responsible

human intervention. Steps in preserving nature can be taken starting from learning about it from an early age. This kind of education can be provided not only in formal schools but also from education in the family.

Problems in the field based on research conducted by Logayah (2011, p. 152) "state that geography subjects place more emphasis on low-level cognitive aspects, meaning that geography subjects are still mostly at the theoretical level and not yet on skill development. This is apparent when giving assignments or training. This problem was also expressed by Maryani (2008, p. 931):

"In school, geography is often considered uninteresting to study. This is caused by several factors as follows: 1) geography lessons are often trapped in low-level cognitive aspects, namely memorizing the names of places, rivers and mountains, or a number of other facts; 2) geography is often associated with science that only makes maps; 3) geography only describes human journeys on the surface of the earth; 4) the process of learning geography tends to be verbal; does not involve actual facts, does not use concrete media and the latest technology; 5) less applicable in solving currently developing problems."

Therefore, geography skills are important for humans, so geography skills must be learned formally in early education, especially children's education, because geography skills develop an understanding of the land as a place for humans to live, and an understanding of the importance of interactions between components in a region. This is very important, because as virtuous creatures, humans will think and act morally (Olkun, Smith, Gerretson, Yuan, & Joutsenlahti in Ode Sofyan Hardi 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method, a type of literature study which aims to describe the results of the researcher's findings on several journal articles found. According to Sugiyono (2013), he explained that the qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis design was carried out intensively, carried out reflective analysis of various documents found, and made a detailed research report. This literature review was carried out with the awareness that knowledge will continue to develop along with changes and progress over time. The purpose of the literature review is for the benefit of the research project itself. In this case, making a literature review is to enrich the writer's insight into the research topic being carried out, help the writer formulate research problems, and help the writer determine the appropriate theories and methods and research results to be used in the research being carried out. As explained by Saputra (2017), research studies literature by looking for theoretical references that are relevant to the cases or problems found. Theoretical references obtained through literature study research are used as the basic foundation and main tool for research practice in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(1) Geography Education. Geography comes from the Greek words geo(s) and graphain. Geo(s) is an abbreviation of earth, and Graphain is an abbreviation of description, description, or image. So, in general, geography can be interpreted as an image/description of land. According to (Bintaro 1977) Geography is a science that describes the earth, explains the characteristics of the earth, analyzes natural phenomena and populations, studies the characteristics of life, and tries to discover the function of the earth's elements in space and time. Here we show that geography not only studies nature (earth) and its phenomena, but also humans and all the culture they produce. both physically and involving living organisms and their problems through spatial, ecological and spatial approaches.

Geography is a systematic science for exploring, analyzing and understanding the characteristics of the places that make up the world, using the concepts of place, space, environment, distribution, interdependence or sustainability, and spatial change or processes (Enok Maryani in Dine Rizky Pratiwi 2019). The International Charter on Geographical Education/ICGE in Gerber (2001, p. 5) states that "Geography education is a subject that aims to develop and improve geographic knowledge, geographic skills

and geographic character (geographical attitudes) of students regarding environmental conditions, social conditions and interactions between humans and their environment.

Geography education is a concept with high complexity that can be understood by explaining the relationship between geographic science, the objectives of geographic science, explanations of formal and non-formal education, as well as the important components contained therein (Gerber, 2003). Geography education investigates how geography is studied and taught, including spatial learning, use of IT, assessment and institutional factors (Texas A&M University). Geography education is a multi-disciplinary study, which originates from geographic content, the understanding process originates from education to cognitive development then from cognitive to technological development (Bednarz, Downs & Vender, 2004).

According to Yus. A (2011) The best education for early childhood is to start with introductory education on simple things in the immediate environment. Geography education for early childhood can start by introducing the school environment such as the surrounding culture, nature, society and socio-culture within it.

The aim of geography education is to create a society that is able to reflect critically on cultural assumptions, values and social relations as well as how to make decisions, influence lifestyle choices and actions locally. Furthermore, it can regenerate complex knowledge to make it easier for children to understand (Ali and Fauziah 2023). Geography education contributes to making children, teenagers and society active and critical. Geography education plays an important role in developing an understanding of how we act as cultural agents, how to interact, how to protect and improve the environment (Tilbury, 2003).

(2) The Importance of Geography for Early Childhood. Geography for early childhood includes the location of the house, interactions between people, moving places and regions. Teaching geography for early childhood includes home location, interactions between people, movement of places and areas. Location is an important part of a child's development. Place is a major goal of geography teaching to help children develop a sense of a place's unique identity.

Geography education for early childhood has an important role in forming the basis of their understanding of the world around them. At this stage, children are developing an awareness of their surroundings, and geography education can help them understand basic concepts about location, place, and human interaction with the environment. Through learning geography, children can develop knowledge about the location of home, school, or other places that are relevant in their daily lives. This provides a foundation for understanding the concept of space and explaining the relationships between objects or places.

The importance of geography education in early childhood is also related to the development of children's characteristics. Through studying geography, children can develop a sense of identity with a place, understand how humans interact with the surrounding environment, and develop a sense of togetherness in a community. Geography education helps shape children's spatial perspective and understanding of regional concepts, which can help them better adapt and participate in society.

Apart from that, geography education also supports the development of geographic skills in early childhood. Through learning activities that involve observation, simple mapping, and understanding the concept of direction, children can develop their cognitive and motor skills. The ability to understand relationships between objects, predict events based on spatial understanding, and recognize patterns in the surrounding environment are important skills that can help children overcome challenges in their daily lives. Thus, geography education in early childhood provides a solid foundation for the development of their understanding of the world and forms the characteristics and skills needed in the early stages of development.

(3)Geographical Skills for Early Childhood Children. Geography skills are an effort to develop a spatial perspective in higher level thinking. Geography skills are skills in studying, analyzing, drawing conclusions, and applying ideas from a spatial and regional perspective. The ability and habit of analyzing and interpreting various forms of

geographic data found in the region can develop aspects of geographic skills. Geography skills have an important function in students' lives. The function of geographic skills, among other things, is in making decisions in everyday life, as a frame of reference for thinking geographically, collecting and analyzing information to arrive at a conclusion (Handoyo in Fiqh Ainal Farah et al. 2018).

Geographic skills are one effort that can be made to attract students' attention and interest in learning geography. Geographic skills can train students to be able to think systematically about environmental and social problems or issues both locally and globally. Geographical skills can help students to practice their understanding of the environment around students.

Geography skills can be evaluated through several indicators, namely, uncovering geographic questions, obtaining geographic information, analyzing information, and making decisions based on geographic knowledge. The function of the geographic science approach in social sciences in elementary schools is expected to lead to the development of knowledge about space and related processes as well as components in space that interact with each other. Geographic skills acquire and transmit spatial information, as well as strengthen attitudes and interests towards the surrounding environment or the wider environment (Pillay in Ode Sofyan Hardi 2020)

The geographical skills possessed by students are able to provide geographical information and be able to make decisions regarding problems or phenomena that occur in the surrounding environment, for example a phenomenon or issue regarding the surrounding environment such as a flood disaster, so the geographical skills required by students are being able to answer questions. -geographical questions and providing geographical information by answering the following questions: where do floods occur?, why do floods occur?, what factors cause floods?, how to make a flood hazard map?, what hypotheses can be drawn regarding floods?, and what conclusions can be drawn? can be drawn about the phenomenon of flooding?

The development of geographic skills is important for humans, so geography skills must be studied formally in early education, especially in elementary education, because geography skills develop an understanding of the land as a place for humans to live, and an understanding of the importance of interactions between components in a region. This is very important, because as virtuous creatures, humans will think and act morally (Olkun, Smith, Gerretson, Yuan, & Joutsenlahti in Ode Sofyan Hardi 2020).

(4) The importance of geography education for young children. Geography education is important for young children because it provides a strong foundation in their understanding of the world around them. There are several reasons why geography education is important for young children, including:

(a) Introduction to the surrounding environment. Introduction to the surrounding environment is a critical aspect in the development of early childhood. Geography education plays a major role in helping children recognize and understand places that have significance in their daily lives. For example, through learning geography, children can identify the location of their home, where they go to school, nearby parks and their favorite play areas. This understanding provides an important foundation for the development of children's relationships with their surroundings, helping them feel more familiar and connected to the world around them. By knowing these places, children can feel safer and more confident in carrying out their daily activities.

Children's understanding of the surrounding environment also includes recognition of the physical characteristics and humans around them. For example, they can learn about landforms, differences in weather, and cultural aspects around them. Through this learning, children can develop their curiosity about the world and build a foundation for understanding more complex geographic concepts later in life. Geography education at an early age creates a strong foundation for an understanding of space and place, preparing children to better explore the world as they grow and develop.

1) Development of Geographical Thinking Ability. Geography education makes an important contribution to the development of geographical thinking abilities in young

children. One of the main aspects emphasized is understanding the concept of direction, where children learn to recognize directions such as north, south, east and west. Through learning activities that involve directions, children can develop their spatio-temporal abilities, helping them understand the relationships between objects and places. In addition, understanding the concept of distance is important in shaping children's perception of space, enabling them to measure and compare the distance between objects around them.

In the early childhood stages, children begin to develop a basic understanding of location. They learn to recognize places they regularly visit and understand how certain objects or places are in relationship to each other. Through various learning activities involving the use of simple maps, children can stimulate their geographical thinking abilities. These abilities not only provide a foundation for understanding more complex geographic concepts in the future, but also contribute to the development of their overall cognitive skills. Geography education at an early age stage builds a strong foundation for the development of children's spatial thinking, which helps them explore and understand the world around them.

2) Stimulation of Creativity and Imagination. Geography education in early childhood is not only about providing geographical facts, but also stimulating their creativity and imagination. Geography material includes exploration of various environments, cultures and natural conditions. For example, through stories or games involving maps or geographical pictures, children can imagine adventures in places they have never been. This opens up opportunities for them to develop rich imagination, explore possibilities and creative solutions in responding to the geographical situation they face.

In addition, learning geography at an early age stage can also involve arts or crafts projects related to certain natural or cultural conditions. For example, children can create maps of their own creation, adding creative and imaginative elements that reflect their understanding of a place. By involving creative elements in geography education, children can develop their creative thinking skills and imagination holistically, having a positive impact on their personality development and problem-solving abilities.

(b) Understand cultural and environmental diversity. Geography education in early childhood provides opportunities for them to understand and appreciate the cultural and natural diversity around them. Through exposure to various types of environments, children can learn about differences in climate, flora, fauna and other geographical characteristics. This understanding opens the door to developing their curiosity about the diversity of nature in various parts of the world, teaching them to appreciate the uniqueness of each place and ecosystem.

Apart from that, geography education also introduces children to cultural diversity around the world. They can learn about various customs, languages, traditional clothing, and habits of people in various countries or regions. Through this process, children can develop a sense of tolerance, appreciation for differences, and an understanding that the world is inhabited by a variety of interesting cultures. Geography education at an early age engages them in inclusive learning, where diversity is valued as an asset that enriches their life experiences and enhances their understanding of the wider world. This is in line with Sari and Mahlia (2022) that exploration-based geography education is the entry point for children to introduce themselves to the surrounding environment in the progress of environmental education.

Geography not only focuses on the characteristics of the earth and natural phenomena, but also on humans and their culture. Geography education in early childhood not only provides a conceptual understanding of location and place, but also helps form geographic characteristics and skills that are essential for their development. By understanding the relationship between geographic knowledge, geographic education goals, and geographic skills, it can be concluded that geography education has a crucial role in shaping critical thinking, identity, and skills in early childhood.

In addition, geographic skills acquired through geography education are not only relevant in formal learning contexts, but also have a positive impact on children's daily

lives. These skills help children to think systematically about environmental and social issues, gather and analyze information spatially, and make decisions based on their geographic knowledge. Therefore, geography education is not just about understanding the world theoretically, but also empowering children with practical skills that can be applied in their daily lives, helping them become active, critical and responsible members of society.

CONCLUSION

Geography not only focuses on the characteristics of the earth and natural phenomena, but also on humans and their culture. Geography education in early childhood not only provides a conceptual understanding of location and place, but also helps form geographic characteristics and skills that are essential for their development. By understanding the relationship between geographic knowledge, geographic education goals, and geographic skills, it can be concluded that geography education has a crucial role in shaping critical thinking, identity, and skills in early childhood.

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