



Cooking Class Activities: Fostering Independence and Building Self-Confidence in Early Childhood

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Abstract:

Learning innovation is very important because it can provide fun and meaningful learning experiences for young children. Cooking class activities in ECE are one application of Project Learning, which is an implementation of the Independent Curriculum that involves children actively in the learning process. This qualitative research aims to discover how ECE teachers design cooking class activities, how students are involved during the activity, and what aspects of development young children achieve through this activity. The research was conducted at the Open Flow Learning Centre, Badung, Bali, using observation, interviews, and documentation methods for 4 ECE teachers and twelve students (three boys and nine girls). Through observations, it was found that cooking class activities at this institution are unique because they involve students from collecting ingredients to handling leftover ingredients that are not used. It was also observed that children had independence and self-confidence when carrying out activities. Considering the many benefits children get from cooking class activities, it is hoped that ECE teachers in other institutions can implement this activity to maximize children's involvement and development.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is the first level of education that children take in their educational journey so that early childhood education teachers are expected to provide meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences to grow lifelong learners (Saracho, 2023; Sairanen et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2021). Early childhood is a period when children experience very rapid growth and development which includes physical-motor, intellectual or cognitive, language, and social-emotional development (Mayra et al., 2022; Dhiu & Laksana, 2021). Early childhood is a need for every early childhood education student and can innovate in learning activities (Mustafa et al., 2022; Su & Zhong, 2022; Ramdhani & Dea, 2021). This is in line with the Independent Curriculum where teachers as the driving force of national education are given the freedom to innovate, so that both teachers and students can learn independently and creatively (Qolbiyah & Ismail, 2022; Thohir et al., 2021; Adom et al., 2021; Sanjani, 2024). In learning in the independent curriculum, children are given the freedom to learn calmly, relaxedly, and happily without certain pressure by paying attention to their wishes and abilities, so that each child has a portfolio that suits their interests (Nasution et al., 2023).

The concept of innovation in early childhood education, as discussed in the excerpt, refers to adaptation to external changes to improve the quality of learning (Yang

& Li, 2022; Korhonen et al., 2023; AlMalki & Durugbo, 2023; Zuhdi et al., 2024). The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning methods, promoting independence and meaningful learning experiences through play and environmental exploration (Ni'mah et al., 2024; Wang, 2023; Maryani, 2023; Faiz et al., 2023). The Project Based Learning (PjBL) learning model supports this approach by offering projects that match the child's interests and abilities, improving not only cognitive abilities but also social skills and creativity (Salmawati & Maryatun, 2024; Kautsar, 2023; Baran et al., 2021). With the application of this concept, it is hoped that children can develop holistically and be ready to face future demands, as well as make a positive contribution to society and the country.

One of the project-based learning activities that is widely applied in education childhood is the cooking class. Cooking class activities can improve children's growth and development, train children's fine motor skills, and develop children's creativity (Taverna et al., 2021; Aghdasi et al., 2021). A variety of fine motor skills are involved in cooking class activities, including scooping, pouring, mixing and stirring ingredients, peeling, cutting, and shaping dough (Pereira et al., 2022). Cooking class activities provide many benefits, including getting to know food ingredients, nutritional content, and their benefits for early childhood growth and development, training children's fine motor skills, and developing early childhood creativity through decorating serving plates according to children's creations.

The aspect of independence is very important to be instilled and trained from an early age (Kuntadi & Hidayat, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2022; Wesseldijk et al., 2021). Independence is the ability that children must have to be able to carry out daily activities in their lives with guidance that has been provided by adults as a form of readiness for children to face the next life (McClure & Leah, 2021). According to Saracho (2023) independence must be introduced to children as early as possible because it will prevent children from being dependent on others or adults, and the most important thing in instilling independence is to foster courage, confidence, and motivation in children to continue to explore new sciences, such as behavioral independence.

The development of self-confidence from an early age plays an important role in shaping a positive self-image in children. Self-confidence includes not only confidence in one's abilities, but also an active attitude, leadership, and initiative (Perets et al., 2023; Sahrul et al., 2022; Sheikh & Khurram, 2023). Their research highlight the crucial role of teachers in this process. As a mentor, teachers are responsible for guiding and accompanying children in their learning process. In addition, as a motivator, teachers provide encouragement and rewards that encourage the development of self-confidence. In addition, as initiators, teachers play a role in creating change and initiating new ideas for the advancement of education. As facilitators, they ensure all learning activities run smoothly and support the comprehensive growth of students. Thus, the role of teachers is not only to teach, but also to build a strong foundation for children's personal development from an early age.

Based on the above explanation, the researcher conducted a study on cooking class activities in a non-formal educational institution in Bali to find out how early childhood teachers in the institution design cooking class activities, how the students are involved during cooking class activities, what developmental aspects are achieved by early childhood through cooking class activities, and how students' independence and confidence are while involved in cooking class activities. The results of the study are

expected to provide an overview of the planning and implementation of cooking classes so that they are useful for PAUD teachers in other institutions and can be used as a reference in implementing cooking class activities to maximize children's involvement and development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to describe the conditions observed in the field specifically (Williams, 2021). The research was carried out during April 2024 at the Open Flow Learning Center, a non-formal educational institution located in the Lukluk area, Badung Regency, Bali. The subjects in this study are 4 teachers (1 core PAUD teacher, 2 PAUD assistant teachers, and 1 cooking class teacher) and 12 PAUD students with an age range of 3.5 to 6 years (3 male students and 9 female students).

The data collection technique is carried out by observation to see, recording various activities to collect information, in the form of written notes about what the researcher sees, hears, experiences, and thinks (Williams, 2021). Observations were made during the cooking class activities, where there were 8 cooking class activities observed with a variety of menus, both Balinese specialties, Indonesian food, and food from foreign countries. The researcher made observations starting from the planning of activities carried out by the teacher and during the implementation of the cooking class activities, which included the introduction of activities to students, the collection of tools and materials, cooking activities, cleaning the equipment, tidying up the cooking area, enjoying the results of the cooking, and reflecting on the activities. The researcher then conducted interviews with the four teachers at the end of the 8th activity, when the students had left school. Interviews were conducted one by one by the researcher with each teacher using audio recordings.

The collected data was analysed using the Miles & Huberman method. According to Miles & Huberman (1994) in (Williams, 2021) analysis consists of three streams of activities that occur simultaneously, namely: data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawn/verification. The data that appears in field notes or written transcriptions are then selected, focused, simplified, and abstracted. The researcher also conducted a literature study, in the form of studying three research journals on cooking classes and the development of children's independence as well as various other journals and reference books.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning Cooking Class Activities

Through observation, the researcher observed that the learning program at the Open Flow Learning Center was divided into cycles that lasted for five to seven weeks with different themes in each cycle. The planning of learning activities, including cooking class activities, is carried out by a team of PAUD teachers consisting of one core teacher and two assistant teachers at the beginning of the cycle by adjusting to the theme, interests or interests of children, conditions, or basic materials available in the school environment. Meanwhile, the cooking class teacher who accompanies children aged 3.5 - 14 years also coordinates with PAUD teachers about the PAUD group cooking class activities. The teacher plans a menu that allows the maximum use of foodstuffs with the concept of zero waste. According to Saracho (2023), the proper use of kitchen waste

generated in cooking class activities needs to be done to maintain the cleanliness and sustainability of the school environment, increase children's creativity and provide experience for children in processing or recycling waste into something that can be used. One example of processed food made with the concept of zero waste is gummy bear using fruits, gelatin, and honey. The pulp is used as gummy, the seeds are dried and planted, the peel is used as an eco enzyme or fermented into a probiotic drink.

"I design cooking class activities based on the children's interest or interest in something they want to make. The discussion was done with the child a day or two before, for example there was one child who wanted to make a gummy bear so we made it with fruits. In addition, activities are designed according to the theme, for example on Kartini Day we make small tumpeng. It can also be based on conditions, for example, during rainy weather, many children are sick, we make immune boosters. We can also design based on the ingredients available at school, for example, we harvest a lot of turmeric and ginger, so we make herbal medicine, or we can stock ginger and turmeric by drying them." (I-gj, 9/6)

"For early childhood, usually they lack attention, they get bored quickly, so I think about activities that are easier for them to do and in between I give breaks, like playing or making something fun like a natural bracelet from nature, from leaves and flowers." (I-gc, 9/6)

The results of interviews with several respondents revealed various strategies and considerations in designing cooking class activities for early childhood. According to Guru Inti, the design of activities is based on the children's interest or interest in something they want to make. Discussions with children are carried out beforehand to understand their preferences, such as making gummy bears from fruits or small tumpeng when commemorating Kartini Day. In addition, activities are also designed according to the conditions at that time, such as the weather or children's health, by choosing to make an immune booster. The choice of materials available at the school also influences the design of activities, such as utilizing the harvest of turmeric and ginger to make herbs or drying certain ingredients for stock.

Cooking teachers emphasized the importance of paying attention to children who tend to be less stable by choosing activities that are easy to do and inserting breaks or fun activities such as making natural bracelets from leaves and flowers (Williams, 2021; Saracho, 2023). This approach aims to keep the children's engagement and enthusiasm throughout the activity, ensuring they stay focused and engaged in the process of learning to cook. By combining these various considerations, the design of cooking class activities not only meets practical learning objectives, but also adjusts to the needs and interests of children in their learning environment.

Student Involvement in Cooking Class Activities

Observing the involvement of students during the cooking class, the researcher observed that the children were enthusiastic when the teacher introduced the tools and materials to be used. Children are involved from the process of preparing tools and ingredients to the process of washing equipment and cleaning the cooking area. For dishes that require natural ingredients available in the school environment, children are also involved in looking for these ingredients, such as pandan leaves, telang flowers, turmeric, ginger, and so on. Children look enthusiastic about doing various activities

during the cooking process, such as peeling fruit, cutting, mixing and kneading ingredients, blending, printing, and so on. After the cooking activity is over, children are involved in washing equipment and tidying up and cleaning the cooking area. This is in line with what was conveyed by Murphy et al. (2021) that there are 3 stages of learning to play fun cooking, starting from preparation by introducing tools and materials to children, implementation by explaining and giving examples of processing techniques and the last stage of completion, namely serving food and cleaning equipment. There are times when children seem to be less enthusiastic about participating in cooking activities when they don't like the basic ingredients used, the process is quite difficult (for example, cutting ingredients that are too hard, such as sweet potatoes), or the cooking process is long. To overcome this, on the sidelines of the cooking process, the teacher provides opportunities for children to take a break by playing for a moment or making creations from natural materials.

"So our children here really like cooking class activities because cooking class is like playing for them. So they like to make dough with flour, cut into pieces, stir-fry. Yes, they like to see the changes they make themselves, for example like cutting (fruit) and then in the blender, they really like to see the blender process. But sometimes when we have a rather long cooking process, sometimes I give them a break, for example they make cakes, make cupcakes for example from carrots, so we while they are baking, I say they can take a break before it is cooked and then come back again to decorate it." (I-gi, 9/6)

"From their involvement, sometimes it depends on what they like. For example, I prepare pineapple but they actually don't like pineapple too much, they like banana, so they may want to do it because we are tasking but not enthusiastic." (I-gc, 9/6)

The results of the interviews highlighted that the children really enjoyed the cooking class activities because they considered it as a form of play. They enjoy processes such as stirring the dough, cutting ingredients, and observing the changes from raw ingredients to ready-to-eat meals, such as the blending process. However, their involvement may vary depending on the personal interest in the ingredients or types of food provided. For example, even though they are given an assignment with anas ingredients, they may be less enthusiastic because they prefer bananas. Teachers pay attention to the importance of providing breaks when the cooking process takes a long time, such as letting children make cakes and cupcakes from carrots, so that they can take a break before proceeding to decorate the final result. This approach not only facilitates practical learning but also pays attention to children's preferences and level of involvement in the process of learning to cook.

The concept of designing cooking class activities for early childhood highlights the importance of integrating fun play aspects in cooking learning (Adom et al., 2021; Qolbiyah & Ismail, 2022). Children enjoy processes such as stirring the dough, cutting ingredients, and observing the transformation from raw ingredients to ready-to-eat meals such as blending, which helps build a practical understanding of the cooking process. The variation in children's engagement levels depending on their personal interest in ingredients or types of food suggests the importance of subject matter adaptation to maintain their interest and engagement. The strategy of providing a break during the long cooking process shows an understanding of children's need for rest and variety in learning activities, enhancing their learning experience in a fun and relaxing

way.

Aspects of Early Childhood Development

The researcher observed that there are many aspects of development that are improved through cooking class activities. The benefits of cooking class activities include being able to introduce foodstuffs, nutritional content, and their benefits for early childhood growth and development, as well as training children's fine motor skills, and developing early childhood creativity through decorating serving plates according to children's creations (Wang, 2023; Ni'mah et al., 2024). Based on the results of the researcher's observations, it was found that cooking class activities stimulate the development of fine and gross motor, language, cognitive, and social-emotional children. Children's gross motor skills develop because children are involved in the search for materials in a wide institutional environment, so they are used to moving quickly from one place to another. Fine motor development is obtained through various activities such as scooping, peeling, cutting, forming dough, and so on. In terms of language, children experience additional vocabulary about the names of tools and ingredients, names of foods, and verbs, such as peel, pour, grate, and others. From a cognitive point of view, children can understand mathematical and scientific concepts, such as calculating, measuring, weighing, mixing colors, and changing the form of objects (liquid to solid, solid to liquid). In terms of social and emotional aspects, children practice patience in waiting for their turn, the ability to cooperate, perseverance in going through the process and waiting for results, overcoming feelings of disappointment when the results are not suitable, and feeling proud of efforts and work results.

"So there are many aspects, for example, there is a time when we make dough, some are chopping, it's their fine motor. Then you can also measure their cognitive, for example, I tell them to four spoons of flour, two spoons of rice flour, three spoons of sugar, that's part of cognitive, yes, learning counting. Then also from creativity, so before cooking is planned, children can determine their own ideas what they want. Then in terms of language, he also learned a lot of new languages, such as the word ingredients for them, for example, it turns out that flour is not just flour, it can be rice flour... Rice flour, sugar is not only sugar, you can say brown sugar or you can say white sugar, also other ingredients, turmeric, ginger, lemon grass." (I-gi, 9/6)

"In terms of development, at first they were still unfamiliar with the tools, the same materials used, but more and more after being taught, they came to know the materials, the tools. Also the math also knows because it measures materials. And for their fine motor development, they can peel themselves, keep cutting." ((I-gc,9/6)

According to the results of the interviews, the cooking class program for early childhood not only teaches cooking skills, but also holistically supports various aspects of their development. During these activities, children engage in a variety of activities that stimulate their fine motor development, such as making dough and chopping ingredients. In addition, they learn cognitive concepts such as measuring and counting materials, which helps them develop a practical mathematical understanding. The creativity aspect is also strengthened with opportunities for children to come up with their own ideas before the cooking process begins. In terms of language, they hone their communication

skills by learning new terms such as the types of flour or spices used in recipes. As time went on, they also became more familiar with the various equipment and materials used, increasing their understanding of the surrounding environment and strengthening their overall skill development. This development certainly encourages early childhood development from various aspects.

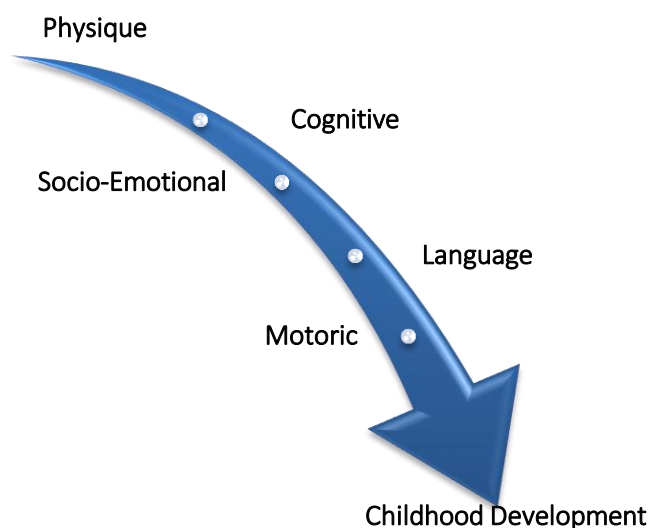


Figure 1. Aspects of Early Childhood Development

Early childhood development by Figure 1 includes a variety of important aspects that include physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language, and motor. Physically, children experience rapid physical growth as well as health development that is important to support their daily activities, including activities such as cooking in the classroom (Korhonen et al., 2023; Thohir et al., 2021). The cognitive aspects include language skills and thinking power, which help children understand instructions, follow procedures, and understand basic concepts in cooking. Their social-emotional development is through interaction with classmates, understanding their own emotions and those of others, and practicing moral values such as cooperation and respect in sharing roles in cooking classes. Developed language skills help them communicate with teachers and classmates, while motor skills, both gross and subtle, allow them to perform practical tasks such as chopping, mixing, and decorating food in cooking activities. The cooking class program in early childhood education not only provides the opportunity to learn to cook, but also holistically supports children's multidimensional development, preparing them for the more complex learning challenges of the future.

Fostering Independence and Self-Confidence in Early Childhood Education

In early childhood education, fostering independence and self-confidence is a crucial goal. This process is not only about teaching children to perform daily tasks independently, but it also gives them the opportunity to explore and learn from hands-on experience. Independence is developed through a learning approach that gives children control over their own activities, such as preparing cutlery or cleaning up after eating. Meanwhile, confidence is strengthened through positive support from teachers and a supportive environment, where children feel safe to try new things without fear of making mistakes. This process not only prepares them for future challenges, but also

forms a solid foundation for their personal and academic development.

Independence is very important to be trained and instilled in children from an early age because independence will help children in doing many things and can be a milestone for children's success in the future. According to Pangastuti, independence is the ability of individuals to manage themselves and not depend on others (Widiyono, 2022). Meanwhile, Ningrum (2020) said that an independent child is a child who has high confidence and motivation so that in every behavior he does not depend much on others. Researchers observed that PAUD children at the Open Flow Learning Center are very independent not only in cooking class activities but also in other activities.

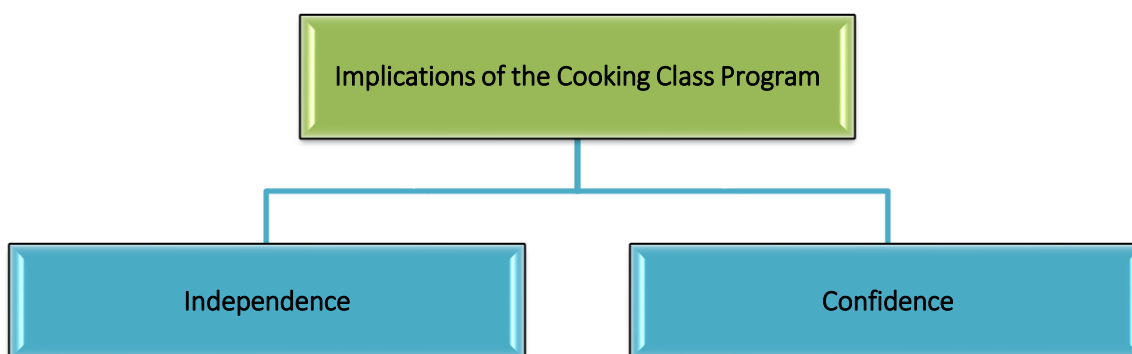


Figure 2. Results of the Cooking Class Program

The development of student independence in cooking class by Figure 2 shows a significant increase from the beginning to the present. At first, children had trouble cutting hard materials and needed help, but now they have mastered more effective cutting techniques such as slicing (Ramdhani & Dea, 2021; Saracho, 2023; Su & Zhong, 2022). Their independence is also evident in their ability to independently pick up measuring tools such as spoons when they are not available at the table, indicating that they know the location of the necessary tools. In addition, the habit of cleaning cooking utensils after use also shows an increase in their responsibility and independence. At first, children were afraid to cut on their own and needed help, but with the trust and support they have given, they are now more confident in performing various cooking tasks, including peeling and using kitchen utensils. This increase in independence not only reflects the success of the cooking class program in teaching practical skills, but also in building confidence and responsibility in children.

CONCLUSION

Smart Cooking class is a form of PAUD learning innovation that is in accordance with the Independent Curriculum, where children get freedom in learning through fun activities. This activity is student-centered because children are actively involved in the process of cooking and learning activities through real experiences that are more effective than conventional teacher-centered methods and use more worksheets. Direct observation in the field and interviews with PAUD teachers and cooking class teachers revealed that the design of activities and menu selection took into account children's abilities, their interests and interests, environmental or weather conditions, and the availability of natural ingredients around the institution. With careful planning, it is hoped that children will be actively involved in every cooking class activity planned by the

teacher, although there are times when children are not enthusiastic or feel bored if the process is quite challenging and takes a long time, which can be used as reflection material for planning the next activity.

Cooking class activities can be said to be a form of holistic learning because various aspects of development are stimulated through this activity, including physical, motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional. This is especially beneficial for early childhood who are in the golden period of their growing up. Through these activities, children gain important life skills to improve their independence. They are proficient in using cooking equipment, trying new menus, being skilled in washing equipment, and being responsible for keeping the cooking area and the surrounding environment clean. In addition, the confidence that a child has is strengthened through this activity. With confidence, they can perform the tasks given and tell their experiences to friends and parents with enthusiasm. Fostering confidence from an early age is important, and cooking classes are one of the effective ways to help children develop that confidence.

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