Early childhood practitioners’ insights on professionalism: views from Indonesia

By

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Abstract

Understanding early childhood teachers’ perspectives on professionalism is important because the notion of professionalism in early childhood is contextual and varies according to location and cultural backgrounds. Despite numerous studies on early childhood teachers’ insights on professionalism, no investigation has yet existed regarding unique environments of Indonesia. Thus this study examines Indonesian early childhood practitioners’ insights about the notion of professionalism and what constitutes the characteristics of a professional early childhood teacher. This study adopted a phenomenological method to be able to conduct an in-depth exploration of teachers’ experience and their insights about professionalism. The participants for this study were 21 kindergarten and playgroup teachers who had experienced intermediate level training in the national programme for up-skilling in South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Teachers in this study considered professionalism as a journey toward an improved state at both the pedagogical level at their actual early childhood centre and the personal level of self-improvement as a role model. The study argues that these two outputs of the journey were like parallel tracks; that lead towards improvement in both teaching performance and personal qualities. The outcome of the first track is tangible in each day of teaching performance, while the outcomes of the second track are experienced one’s entire career, or even an entire life. This echoes Urban and Dalli (2012) conclusion that being professional cannot separate the “nature of practice, thinking about practice, and thinking about oneself in this practice – making the boundaries between doing, knowing and being blurred or non-
existent” (p.161). This sense of understanding professionalism as collections of interrelated actions towards an overall goal underpinned the attitudes of the teachers in South Sulawesi, Indonesia.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Chapter overview

Over the past years, there has been an increased interest in the concept of teacher professionalism, specifically for the early childhood education (ECE) sector (Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008b; Lazzari, 2012). Understanding the concept of professionalism from the ECE teachers’ perspectives is considered important as they provide personal and specific insights on the understanding and interpretation of professionalism. This study explored how a group of Indonesian early childhood practitioners in the province of South Sulawesi understand professionalism and its characteristics; this has the potential to provide information from an insider’s perspective that can supplement existing ‘outside’ understandings of early childhood professionalism by the Indonesian government (Jalal et al., 2009).

This chapter provides an overview of this study. It starts with the context for the study and is followed by information about the researcher’s background. A discussion of the significance and purpose of the study and the issue it intends to address are then provided. Next, the research questions and the limitations of the study are outlined. The last section provides a description of the organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Context for the study

Research over the last few years has discussed the notion of professionalism in ECE. In her seminal work, Katz (1985) identified eight characteristics of a profession and, by extension, of professionalism: social necessity, altruism, autonomy, code of ethics, distance from client, standards of practice, prolonged training and specialized knowledge. A decade or so later,
Dalli (1993) questioned the applicability of some of these criteria as markers of professionalism in the early years’ sector in New Zealand and argued that they needed more clarification when applied to this context. For example she considered the nature of optimal distance of teachers to children and level of teachers’ autonomy as problematic. She also argued that these criteria are conceptualized as residing in teachers as individuals and that the concept of professionalism needed to be understood more broadly as it is influenced by local, national and global contexts (Dalli & Thornton, 2013).

In recent years, attention to the concept of teacher professionalism has shifted toward understanding professionalism from the teachers’ perspectives (Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008b; Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, & Vanderlee, 2013). As noted earlier, these perspectives and voices of the teachers are important for the more personal insights that they contribute to understanding professionalism as it is experienced by teachers themselves. In the “Day in the Life of an Early Years Practitioners project”, Urban and Dalli (2012) found that teachers’ understanding of their own professionalism was not separate from their own perceptions of their practical work, nor from how they gave meaning to their relations with children, adults, and communities.

1.2 The issue of early childhood professionalism in Indonesia

Indonesia has realised the importance of early childhood education (ECE) since the birth of the nation in 1945, but it was not until 2001 that the plan of massive ECE building was started (MoEC, 2011). The establishment of an ECE office in the Ministry of Education marked the start of the plan and the office worked to lead the improvement of access and quality of ECE. The number of children participating in ECE improved greatly from 39% in 2004 to 56.7%
in 2010, with 174,367 centres serving children aged from 0 to 6 years (MoEC, 2010; Rubiyantoro, 2013). In 2011, the Ministry started a national programme serving more than 45 million children, to ensure an ECE centre in every village. The Ministry expects to improve the gross participation index to 86.5% in 2025 (MoEC, 2011). In addition, Indonesia is also improving the quality of the ECE workforce to provide better quality ECE through improving the welfare of teachers and issuing teacher policies (MoEC, 2011).

The Government of Indonesia has recognized teaching as a profession and sees professionalism as dependent on qualification and on-going training (Law/14, 2005). For ECE, teaching as a profession is equated with holding a degree in EC or psychology (Law/14, 2005). Since 2005, various policies and professional development programmes have been launched to support teacher professionalism. In addition, a monthly professional allowance is given to those who become certified professional teachers.

The 2005 Teacher Law was enacted because of the concern for the quality of education in Indonesia, which was believed to be related to the conditions of teachers at that time: unqualified, with low salary levels and poor teaching quality. The law authorized the government to certify eligible teachers as professional. To be eligible, teachers should have a minimum qualification of four years of post-secondary education (S1/D4) and have passed a portfolio test or one-year of additional professional training (Jalal et al., 2009). Meeting these two criteria is considered evidence of having attained pedagogical, personal, social and professional competencies. Certified professional educators receive professional allowances from the Government of Indonesia.
The problem is that this concept of professionalism that is embedded within the Law, is mainly reserved for teachers working in a formal education setting from the level of Kindergarten (ages 3-6 years) to high school, thus excluding other types of education and care provision in centres such as play groups and day care centres since they are considered as non-formal education settings. Another problem is that early childhood educators in Indonesia have a very high variation in both qualifications and competence. Their level of education varies from primary school level education to undergraduate degree qualification. However, most educators have a level of secondary education (high school or vocational school), and a small number have graduated with a diploma or bachelor degree, mostly from a discipline other than ECE (MoEC, 2012a).

1.3 Researcher background

I have worked in the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia within the office of Non-formal Education Personnel for nine years. Since 2006, this section of the ministry has prepared and published programmes and policies concerning non-formal education teachers and staff. In addition to the former responsibilities, since 2010, the office is no longer specified as dedicated to non-formal education, but also serves a specific formal sector – early childhood education. Consequently since 2010, my work and responsibilities shifted from working with non-formal teachers in general, to working with ECE practitioners - both formal and non-formal. In this capacity, I have been in close contact with a number of stakeholders in the ECE sector in Indonesia, and have noticed the complex role and duties of ECE teachers during their work in the field.
The government’s expectations and demands for quality improvement in the field has taken its toll by putting more pressure on the teachers. Governments have demanded that teachers be professional by putting in place a certification policy. The policy states that to be eligible for certification teachers must hold bachelor degrees and a teaching certificate, and then are considered professionals. However, not every early childhood educator or teacher is eligible to obtain a teaching certificate because the certification option is solely open to kindergarten teachers. Practitioners from play groups and day care centres are not eligible for certification even if they hold the same qualification as those working in Kindergarten. This anomalous situation is one motivation for this study: I want to understand more about the notion of professionalism within the Indonesian context. In particular I was interested to find out whether the teachers consider themselves professionals irrespective of their eligibility to gain certification.

Broad reading in the area of teacher professionalism during my postgraduate study gave me more insight into this issue. I realized that there is more to understand concerning professionalism in ECE. In most parts of the world, teachers’ insight is considered important and is taken into account in the formation of the notion of professionalism. This raised my curiosity to understand what ECE teachers in Indonesia might think about the notion of professionalism. I saw this experience of drawing out teachers’ insights through research and understanding the notion of professionalism as beneficial to my future development as a government official.
1.4 Statement of the issue

As noted earlier, Indonesia has set its understanding of the concept of professionalism through enactment of the Teachers Law (Law/14, 2005). Discussion of the concept of professionalism is dominated by the necessity of qualification and certain characteristics to be fulfilled by teachers. However, internationally it has been argued that EC practitioners’ work is influenced by various factors, not only their qualification and educational background. Teachers’ life experiences, interactions with children and families, and social conditions in specific local contexts are also argued as contributing factors to the playing out of professional practice (Cable & Miller, 2011; Spodek & Saracho, 1988). Thus, a study that explores how Indonesian early childhood practitioners understand professionalism and its characteristics has the potential to provide information from an insider’s perspective that can supplement existing ‘outside’ understandings by the government (Jalal et al., 2009).

1.5 Purpose of the study

Current research on the notion of professionalism has shifted in focus to understanding ECE teachers’ voices as the important stakeholders in the field (Dalli, 2008b). Additionally there is now a focus on how teachers’ conceptualisation of their professionalism relates to their environment and how it reflect their working conditions, which further give insights on the condition of the country’s ECE (Brock, 2012). However, the majority of the current work on this issue has mostly been conducted in western and developed countries and much less so from the view of teachers in developing countries; none have been done in Indonesia.
This study investigated Indonesian ECE teachers’ perspectives on early years’ professionalism. The study participants were teachers who had taken part in Indonesia’s national training programme for ECE teachers. The study explores how participants interpreted their own professionalism. It aimed to identify qualities that the teachers considered to be professional and those that were not. My expectation was that the data gathered from the research participants would be heavily influenced by their experiences, which provided justification to pursue this research using phenomenology. As a methodology, phenomenology helps the researcher to describe participants’ experiences of a phenomenon. As a philosophy, phenomenology would hold that objects, experience or concepts – such as professionalism – mean different things to different people. Using phenomenology, I aimed to find the ‘essence’ of the concept of professionalism, that is, the ‘what’ professionalism is and ‘how’ it is constructed by the participants in my study. Focus groups and interviews were used as data gathering methods.

1.6 Significance of the study

Researchers on professionalism believe that it is context bound, which means each different context will offer its own rich understanding of teachers’ professionalism (Cable & Miller, 2011; Harwood et al., 2013; Lazzari, 2012; Urban & Dalli, 2012). Teachers’ perceptions of professionalism within one context in Indonesia will certainly add another ‘local’ understanding to discussions of the notion of professionalism. Within the local context of Indonesia, this research will also be valuable to the local and national government to help explain teachers’ experiences and inform future policies and programmes. More contextual
programmes and policies will certainly be beneficial to teachers in particular and children and families more generally.

1.7 Research questions

The primary research question of this study is: “What are Indonesian early childhood teachers’ perceptions of early years’ professionalism?”

Sub questions:

1. How do Indonesian early childhood teachers who experienced the national training programme perceive professionalism in their field?

2. Which qualities are considered to be the qualities of professional early childhood teachers? Which qualities are not considered to be professional?

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is presented in six chapters. This chapter provides an introduction for the study. A review of literature relevant to this research is presented in chapter two, including literature on early childhood education, professionalism and teachers’ views of characteristics of professionalism. Chapter three outlines the methodology of this study, with a discussion of phenomenology. Chapters four and five present the findings of this research. The last, Chapter six, presents a discussion of the research findings and draws them together in a conclusion.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a review of literature that is relevant to this study. It begins with the issue of changes in ECE that have affected the conception of professionalism. The notion of professionalism that is built on specific attributes is also described. Further, the debates on the need to reconceptualise the notion of professionalism and the need to understand teachers’ voices are considered. The following section describes ECE in the Indonesian context. This chapter then concludes with a discussion of the gaps in the existing research.

2.1 The issue of ECE professionalism

The notion of professionalism in the early childhood sector is increasingly of interest to parents, policy makers, researchers and society largely because of two issues: quantity and quality of provision of ECE (OECD, 2012a, 2012b; Urban, 2008). As most countries believe that ECE is an important part of building their next generation and as the beginning of their learning throughout life (Urban, 2008), policy makers and society try to improve access to and affordability of early childhood. The OECD (2012a) reported significant improvement of access to ECE in 16 member countries in the last ten years. In 2010, enrolment in ECE went up to 69% for 3-year-olds and 81% for 4-year-olds across member countries. In some countries, the improvement has increased by more than 20%, for example in Mexico and Poland (OECD, 2012a). However, not enough ECE centres are available for every child. For example Indonesia is only able to reach 28.04% of the total of 28,845,400 children (MoEC, 2011).
The increase of children attending ECE brings more challenges and expectations to ECE practitioners (Urban, 2008), for example increased diversity in ECE (Gonzales-Mena, 2008; OECD, 2001). Globalization and immigration have shaped most of the countries in the world into culturally diverse nations (UNESCO, 2009). This phenomenon occurs in most countries, for example in the USA (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001; Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer, 2004) and New Zealand (Loveridge, Rosewarne, Shuker, Barker, & Nager, 2012). Diversity affects early childhood education and brings challenges to the educators, who are required to build good relationships with children and families (Gonzales-Mena, 2008; Lynch & Hanson, 1992). This echoes Lynch and Hanson’s (1992) argument that services for children should be closely related to “family’s values, beliefs and traditions” (p.6). Therefore, the need for practitioners with adequate knowledge of diversity is increasing (OECD, 2012b), which further requires teachers to improve their skills, competence and knowledge to accommodate this changing condition in society.

Another challenge is the issue of quality in ECE (Urban, 2008). Research shows that there is a need for ECE centres to provide high quality services, which has proven to give a positive effect on children’s development outcomes (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014; OECD, 2001, 2012b). However, despite the intentions of many countries to improve the quality of their ECE services, providing a high-quality service is costly and risks services becoming unaffordable for low income families (OECD, 2012b). Also, the concept of quality is still being questioned. Urban (2008) criticises the concept of quality as problematic. He says that “the language of ‘quality’ is employed to legitimise the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education and care and to undermine instead of support professional autonomy” (p.138). To Urban (2008), quality is often a word not well understood by teachers, because it is ‘provided’
by upper management of policy makers. In her research on the impact of political neoliberalism on teachers’ professionalism, Duhn (2010) suggested that the concept of quality is not uniformly understood by teachers today. In her analysis of Kidicorp, a large ECE corporation in New Zealand, she saw teachers only as the object of concepts of quality imposed by the corporation with teachers having no critical view of the concept as well. In this context, the meaning of quality is reduced to only a chance to achieve higher salaries and promotions. In this view, fulfilling the target for quality means fulfilment for personal achievement (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Duhn, 2010).

By contrast, others have argued that professional teachers are those who are self-critical and question not only themselves and their own practices, but also the country’s policy and early childhood conditions and changes that have also happened in other parts of the world (Dalli, 2010; OECD, 2001). In her review of the history, policy and conditions of early childhood in New Zealand, Dalli proposed that the professional teacher should be self-critical and see changes as challenges and chances to improve themselves. She argued that the achievements that New Zealand has made in the area of professionalising ECE service so far are because of the teachers involved, who put their strength into shaping the policy.

2.2 Roles, dispositions and characteristics of an EC professional

The term professionalism encompasses many aspects: certain and specific knowledge, skill and competence dealing with children, and particular dispositions (Cable & Miller, 2011; Dalli, 1993; Katz, 1985; Oberhuemer, 2005; Osgood, 2006a, 2006b; Vincent & Braun, 2011). Research shows that the common characteristics that define professionalism typically include specialised knowledge and a qualification gained through lengthy study, maintaining a good
relationship with clients (children and their family), community awareness through involvement in professional associations and linked with a professional work ethic, and commitment to personal growth (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Castle, 2009; Manning-Morton, 2006; Moyles, 2001; Rodd, 1997; Spodek & Saracho, 1988).

2.2.1 Qualifications and knowledge acquisition

Many educators feel that effectiveness as a teacher stems from a combination of knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics (Colker, 2008). Understanding this, many countries have initiated the process of professionalizing ECE practitioners by putting down requirements of teachers to possess particular knowledge and dispositions (Urban, 2008). Bredekamp and Willer (1993) considered that professionalizing the field will give a good knowledge base, which is the precondition for professional teachers providing better service than those who do not have this basic knowledge. This is also expected to provide consistency in the care of children, even in the diverse settings of early childhood centres. Also, a shared way of conduct will be understood by all the teachers and; additionally, improved skills are expected to translate into improvement in financial recompense. Rodd (1997) also argued that sufficient basic knowledge would promote practitioners’ professionalism and having a bachelor degree would be a good start in gaining that sufficient basic knowledge.

The base knowledge of ECE practitioners is gained through specialised and long-term education (Moyles, 2001). Long-term education is usually obtained through tertiary education and results in a degree. Spodek and Saracho (1988) argued that to ensure teachers achieve specific competencies, special standards are established and certification is undergone. In the context of the United States of America, Spodek and Saracho (1988) called
for integrating research into ECE teacher education programmes as an important part of ECE teachers’ professionalization. Katz (1988) listed specialised knowledge among her characteristics of a profession and argued that the specialised knowledge should be relevant to practical use and also be exclusive to those belonging to the profession. Rodd (1997) argued that sufficient knowledge, with confidence, will help teachers become professional.

However, Cable and Miller (2011) question these traditional concepts of professionalism. They argued that despite the necessity of sharing the same idea about qualification, differences in application are found in many countries. For example in England, it is more common for practitioners to only graduate from vocational education at pre-university level. This is different to New Zealand, which has had teacher education programmes at diploma and degree level for all practitioners in early childhood services since 1988 and the expectation that all early childhood practitioners hold a degree is now widespread in New Zealand (Dalli, 2008b).

Cameron (2006), in her UK-based study on male workers and professionalism in ECE, also agreed that professionalism is related to a “unique body of knowledge, selected entry to the field and protected identity” (p. 69). Taking early childhood in England as an example, she pointed out that these criteria of professionalism are not being met. In other words, in England, qualification is not a condition of entry to the early childhood sector. This is problematic, and shows that the required ‘knowledge’ is not necessarily held by all the practitioners. Also, as the entry requirements to the field are all related to personal traits, such as patience and enthusiasm, it seems that it is easy for anyone to become an EC
practitioner (Cameron, 2006). This contradicts the need for qualification and long attained knowledge as a condition of being a professional ECE teacher.

The same argument is echoed by Krishnaveni and Anitha (2007). Their work attempted to find professional teachers’ characteristics that will meet the high standard demanded. They found that being a professional is a lifelong learning journey that also involved continuous reflection about their own practice. Among three important factors of professional characteristics, they considered the gaining of necessary skills and knowledge for the work as the most important priority. They expected that teachers with more understanding of knowledge can offer better and more interesting learning experiences for students. Having sufficient knowledge should also be followed by willingness to update the knowledge. This combination will surely empower teachers’ teaching ability.

In addition, for their learning to be successful, professional teachers should have the necessary motivation to become professional (Castle, 2009; Rodd, 1997). The motivation should come from within. Collegial cooperation is also important in learning as a professional (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013). Manning-Morton (2006) suggested a focused content and contextual atmosphere as positive factors for early childhood teachers. She believed that developing knowledge of children should be done in an environment filled with trust and respect with people for a long period of time.

### 2.2.2 Relationships as the site of professionalism

Another characteristic of professionalism is service to clients (Dalli, 1993; Katz, 1985). Service to clients is best translated as giving exactly what is needed by the clients, the children.
However, the necessary distance of being autonomous professionals is still in question (Dalli, 1993). A professional teacher is expected to maintain a distance from the client. This is to maintain professional conduct that is free from personal and emotional attachment that might hinder them from making a sound judgment when needed (Katz, 1988). Bredekamp and Willer (1993) have also voiced a concern about this matter. They argued that, based on research in USA, parents are concerned that a professional teacher will develop an uncaring or less personalised setting for their children if they keep a distance from children as the result of being professional.

Specifically about working with children of 0–3 years of age, Manning-Morton (2006) translates professionalism in the relationships between ECE practitioners and the students as mainly related to children’s physical and relational needs. In her article about professionalism for ECE teachers who work with children aged 0–3 years, she argued that teachers should be able to cope with the demands of children to continue to grow physically. Teachers’ understanding of children’s development processes is important, as well as physical contact and teachers’ ability to understand and fulfil children’s curiosity about themselves and what they are able to do. An emotional relationship that is continuously built will also keep the children in their growth track. Further, she argued that “the links between physical and emotional development are clear and it can also be seen that the emotional learning that takes place in early relationships is also hugely influential on children’s cognitive development” (p.47).

In addition to the focus on relationships, ECE teachers also relate their professionalism to commitment to the work. Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, and Ting (2010) found that
commitment has the strongest influence on participants’ perceptions of professionalism. Analysing survey responses in a questionnaire concerning a profile of child care professionals, they reported that apart from commitment, other significant factors that influenced participants’ perceptions about professionalism were enjoyment of work; training; parents’ involvement; and feeling qualified.

Teachers’ commitment in the field is usually derived from altruistic commitments (Dalli, 1993; Katz, 1988). This commitment can be shown with an absence of complaints and accepting all the challenges of teaching (Phelps, 2003). A professional should embrace enthusiastically any challenges that come in their teaching profession. The highest standard of behaviour and integrity is a proof of teachers’ commitment to quality. Teachers in ECE settings are believed to be models and are copied by children (Phelps, 2003).

2.2.3 Social involvement

To maintain being professional, teachers also need collegial support (Rodd, 1997). Teachers need their friends and cooperation among practitioners to keep updated and share knowledge. Gaining information and knowledge on the latest research and improvement in ECE can also be a product of peer support. In addition, understanding the community and the need of society for ECE and the political condition of ECE are also important (Dalli, 2010). This awareness of current political issues can be gained by joining a specific teachers’ association (Castle, 2009; Rodd, 1997).

Rodd (1997) considers two understandings that are necessary for teachers to grasp in order to move towards better practice: understanding of what is happening in the field, at centre
level, and understanding what is happening at the political level. Rodd (1997) realized that best practice is contextually bounded, so by understanding these two, teachers will build the capacity to achieve quality practice.

The need to be able to take a stand is also echoed by Sumsion, Shepherd, and Fenech (2010). In their study on one ECE manager and four long-day care teachers in Australia, they found that professionalism was used to resist the power of the regulatory framework implemented by the government. They argue that professionalism is not only fulfilling the objectives and requirements as expected by the government. It is not enough to simply understand the surrounding circumstances, but it is important also to critically respond and provide input to all related parties. Practitioners should not just accept every regulation related to early childhood provided by the government and related parties. As professionals, teachers should be able to critically evaluate the existing regulations.

2.2.4 Commitment to professional growth

Continuing professional development is essential for practitioners who have to continually respond to the ever-changing social context (Brock, 2011). Extensive studies support the beneficial effect of training programmes to improve the skills of ECE practitioners, which in the end relate to classroom quality. For example, the study by Burchinal et al., (2002) in 553 childcare centre classrooms indicated the relationship between classroom quality and training workshops. While having a degree was the best predictor of higher quality caregiver skills among the various measures of training, other training programmes were also related to higher quality skills regardless of the practitioners’ educational background. Training
programmes were also found to be related to better skills of ECE practitioners irrespective of their educational background.

For Reed (2011), the need of being a reflective practitioner is driven by the changes occurring in ECE teachers’ surroundings, and in the practices and personal understanding about what happens in ECE. Reflective practice entails advancing from just showing technical competence and being engaged with critical reflection. Reed (2011) further argues that reflective practice “involves exploring one’s own practice and the practice of others, and critically examining the way to respond professionally and personally to managing change, developing leadership, fostering teamwork and working with children” (p. 148). Similarly, Moyles (2001) claims that without reflection there will be no learning and at the same time teachers will not be able to reach professional status.

One apparent change is the use of technology, which requires teachers’ competence in using it in the teaching process. Cherrington and Thornton (2013) argued for two advantages of using ICT for ECE practitioners’ professional development. Firstly, IT works as a support for implementation of skills and learning knowledge, and secondly, it enhances professional learning through online tools to support reflection and collaboration. Critical reflection has become a key facet of professional life. Teachers gain insights when they engage in the reflective and reflexive processes to cast light upon and enlighten that which needs examination. In this way thoughts can be clarified, new comprehension evoked, practice re-evaluated and solutions determined (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013).
2.3 On the notion of professionalism

Previous studies, which have attempted to define the notion of professionalism (Dalli, 2013; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Woodrow, 2008), agree that the concept of professionalism in ECE is “not easy to pin down” (Dalli, 2013, p. 3). Further, Dalli (2013) argued that historically professionalism used to be identified with structural characteristics, for example qualifications, which were then imposed on the field with laws and regulations. However, the condition of the field has changed and demanded a new perception about ECE, including teachers’ professionalism (Dalli, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Dalli & Urban, 2010).

Another example of differences of perception concerning the notion of professionalism between the government and practitioners can be seen in Mausethagen and Granlund’s (2012) study. They tried to understand the differences between the Norwegian Government and the Teachers’ Union concerning the concept of professionalism. After analysing the Government’s white papers and Teacher’s Union policy documents, they found differences in the emphasis on the conception of professionalism. The Government emphasises teacher accountability, research-based practice and specialisation. By contrast, the Teachers’ Union highlighted research-informed practice, responsibility for education quality and professional ethics.

In the study of the discourse of professionalism in family day care, Cook, Davis, Williamson, Harrison, and Sims (2013) argued that a homogenous way of describing ECE is unacceptable. Specific to day care, they argued that homogeneity erases the particularity of the family day care service. Teachers in this study argued that being professional is subjective and related to maternal aspects of service delivery. However, the management expect teachers to comply
with the need of quality assurance, such as qualifications. Teachers then reproduce their
discourse of professionalism to accommodate both views.

In the *A Day in the Life of an Early Years Practitioners’ project*, Miller, Dalli, and Urban (2012)
tried to answer the question of who is the early years professional? The project aimed to
explore the notion of professionalism with individuals in six different countries. Based on the
result of the project, Urban and Dalli (2012) concluded that professionalism lies in the
practices or actions of what the ECE practitioners do on a daily basis. It is practitioners’ actions
and roles that create “their image of themselves as professionals” (p.161). However, there is
no uniformity in the idea of the profession, which is not to say that there were no
commonalities. It is bound to the local context (Urban & Dalli, 2012).

Another work by Oberhuemer (2005) addressed the changing condition of ECE in Europe,
admitting that professionalism is varied across countries, in both concept and policy.
Oberhuemer (2005) proposes the notion of “democratic professionalism” as the answer to
the current changing society, “a concept which is based on participatory relationship and
alliances” (p.13). Democratic professionals relate to children with the consideration that
children are equal socially, which means that they have responsibilities about themselves.
Democratic professionalism also considers distributed leadership as important. Professional
teachers should also be aware that knowledge is vast and changing, so they should always
question their own believed knowledge.

The need to listen to teachers’ voices about the concept of professionalism is made also by
Grey (2013). Her article argued that professionalism is identified with a set of attributes,
which are produced by regulations and external standards. Echoing Dalli and Urban (2010),
she proposed that the view of professionalism should include early childhood teachers' perspectives. She argued that ECE professionalism would continue to be debated, as the field of ECE is complex, unique and multifaceted, and always in the process of construction.

2.4 Teacher voices

As discussed earlier, the early childhood sector is changing, calling for a new understanding of the sector, including the notion of professionalism (Dalli & Urban, 2010). Simpson (2010) argued that there are two emerging issues about professionalism in early childhood education. The first is that existing notions of professionalism are “largely socially constructed and determined” (p. 6) as reflected in regulation and policy documents, painting a top-down process of professionalising the workforce and providing an “official discourse on professionalism” (p. 6). The second is that those working in the early childhood education field are starting to actively engage in finding and building their own notion of professionalism. Cable and Miller (2011) likewise argued that early years practitioners are the key to the process of understanding professionalism.

Urban (2008) further argued that there is a shift in the notion of professionalism: it is not simply individuals who need improvement in knowledge delivery, but the larger context of the field of early childhood as well. At the individual level a professional is also identified by the person’s ability to establish dialogues and critically evaluate practices. One thing that needs to be remembered is that Urban is offering a concept about a system, not individuals. The same arguments are developed by Dalli (2011). At that time, she argued that in New Zealand the early childhood sector was already on an equal footing with other parts of the education field in terms of required qualifications. With all the changes in the field, we need
to consider the realities in the work of early childhood practitioners. Therefore, considering the voice of the practitioners in the field is necessary for this effort.

Several attempts have been made to understand the professionalism phenomenon from the experience of teachers. Using data from a survey of a random stratified sample of 594 early childhood centres in New Zealand, Dalli (2008b) argued that the traditional elements of professionalism, such as qualifications and specialised knowledge, were still considered important by the teachers as an indication of being professional. In addition, being reflective and able to work with parents and other teachers were also considered as important. She also found that understanding the vast number of theories on child development and wellbeing was considered a precondition for becoming professional. Further, this pedagogic knowledge was developed through professional learning.

In another study, Harwood et al. (2013) questioned 25 teachers in Canada, Nigeria and South Africa about professionalism. They found that, despite differences in context, teachers consider that passion in interaction with children was still an important part of their professionalism, a finding that Dalli (2008b, 2010) also reported.

In her research, Brock (2012) tried to elicit practitioner thinking through interviewing 12 teachers. She attempted to understand what teachers thought about their professionalism through their own reflection on their professionalism. She found many similar dimensions of professional teachers, as has been discussed earlier. An important finding from this work is the emphasis on the importance of various skills for ECE practitioners’ work. The skills include understanding teaching methodologies, developing curriculum frameworks and organizing children’s learning experiences. To be able to communicate effectively was also important in
building a strong team that is capable of integrating practitioners’ different skills for the benefit of the children.

Another work that explored the issue of ECE as context-bound was conducted by Lazzari (2012) in the Italian city of Bologna. Lazzari conducted a study involving 60 teachers and concluded in favour of the need to re-conceptualize teachers’ professionalism from within. This was to accommodate local needs and connect it to political aspiration and reshaping pedagogic identity. She called for better cooperation between ECE institutions and research facilities to work together on this matter.

2.5 The Indonesian context

As noted earlier, the education system in Indonesia has changed dramatically since 2001 when all managerial and financial responsibilities for public education at every level were moved to local government at district level (Stein Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). The decentralisation started because of the financial crisis in 1998 and led to positive results. In their analysis about the condition of Indonesian education, Stein Kristiansen and Pratikno (2006) found that the quality of education was higher compared to three years before decentralisation in three provinces. Unfortunately, they did not explain how quality was defined or measured. They added that several aspects still required further improvement, such as the access to and affordability of education and also the quality of teachers in every level of education.

However, managing education in Indonesia is a challenging task. Indonesia’s Central Bureau of Statistic (BPS) recorded that the current population of the country is 237 million (BPS,
2010), making Indonesia the fourth most highly populated country in the world. Indonesia is also very diverse culturally and linguistically, with more than 546 different languages and a thousand cultures(Akuntono, 2012). In addition, the country’s geographical features are also challenging as it consists of more than 130,000 islands(Antara, 2010).

Indonesia’s ECE system is divided into formal and non-formal provision. Kindergarten is included in formal ECE while playgroups, day care centres, and other types of ECE are considered to belong to non-formal ECE. An important policy was made in 2001 by establishing an office dedicated to ECE. Another milestone was when ECE was included in a key policy document, the National Education System Law No. 20. Since then, ECE has improved vastly and the barrier between formal and non-formal ECE has also been eradicated since the merger of both offices in 2010 (Hasan, Hyson, & Chang, 2013). Professionalizing teachers in Indonesia, as has been noted in the Teacher Law (14/2005), is intended to improve the prestige of the work and teachers’ role as learning agents, which in the end functions to improve quality of national education(Law/14, 2005; MoEC, 2009). However, since the Law was established before the merger of formal and non-formal ECE, the concept of professionalism which is embedded within the law is generally assumed to be mainly reserved for teachers in kindergarten.

According to the Teacher Law, professionalism is defined as a source of living that requires skills, competency and certain expertise that meet quality standards (Law/14, 2005, p.2). In addition, a professional should also have already participated in professional education (Law/14, 2005). A certification is given to teachers who have been admitted as professionals by the government. For this, teachers should uphold certain principles, namely: personal
willingness and commitment to the work and personal improvement, possess certain competencies, possess academic qualification, and join an appropriate professional organization. The four competencies for the teachers are: pedagogic, personal, social and professional.

Pedagogic competencies are related to the learning processes in the classroom: planning and evaluation, understanding learning theories, using information technology in teaching, understanding children, and communicating effectively. Personal competence promotes teachers to act according to local norms, have a high work ethic and implement teachers’ code of ethics. Social competence is related to the ability to maintain good relationship with parents, colleagues and community. Teachers are also expected to be open-minded and able to communicate with their professional organization (Law/14, 2005; MoEC, 2009). And professional competence is heavily focused on knowledge acquisition. Teachers are expected to understand and know the children’s developmental stages, child growth, understand how to give appropriate stimuli accordingly, and work together with parents.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2007, 2009), early childhood practitioners are professionals who are in charge of planning, implementing the learning process, and assessing learning outcomes. They are also responsible to coach, care and protect the children in ECE centres. Practitioners work in both formal and non-formal ECE under different names that depend on their qualifications. The Minister of Education decree 16/2007 expects all teachers to have completed a four-year undergraduate degree (MoEC, 2007, 2009). These teachers work in both kindergarten and play groups. Those who have not obtained such an education degree can work as assistants to teachers and nannies in ECE centres.
2.6 Research gap

Internationally, there is currently a strong interest in the area of early childhood education (OECD, 2012a; Urban, 2008). Many countries are striving to improve the access to early childhood with varied results, some of the countries have been able to achieve more than 20% improvement in access over the last 10 years as reported by theOECD (2012a). However, this triumph is not without problems. One of the problems is that with the increase of population of children participating in ECE, the issue of cultural diversity has also increased (Gonzales-Mena, 2008; OECD, 2001). Further, this brought to light the issue of the quality of the field. With all the diversity, quality services are needed as they are proven to give a positive effect on children’s developmental outcomes (OECD, 2001, 2012b). However, the inability of low income families to access quality improved ECE continues to haunt many countries in their efforts to provide high-quality services (OECD, 2012b).

Changes in the field of ECE also demand teachers’ voices in the understanding of the notion of professionalism (Dalli, 2008; Grey, 2013). Existing definitions of the notion of professionalism are problematic as it is usually imposed in the field through laws and regulations (Dalli, 2013; Grey, 2013). Many studies then propose the conception of the notion of professionalism to be taken from the teachers’ point of view as the direct players in the field (Dalli, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Dalli & Urban, 2010). As Dalli& Urban (2010) argued, the notion of professionalism in ECE is contextual and varies according to location and cultural backgrounds.

Considering the above discussion, it can be argued that ECE teachers’ views on professionalism within the Indonesian context and culture will add valuable understanding to
the “meaning making paradigm” introduced by research seeking teachers’ perspectives (Harwood et al., 2013). The notion of professionalism in Indonesia is imposed by regulation with the establishment of the Teachers’ Law (14/2005). However, there has not yet been any investigation of Indonesian early childhood teachers’ perspectives on professionalism. Understanding Indonesian teachers’ perspectives on early childhood professionalism can provide a valuable additional dimension to the Indonesian Government’s current concept of professionalism. Thus this thesis explores Indonesian ECE practitioners’ insights about the notion of professionalism and what constitutes the characteristics of a professional ECE teacher.

2.7 Chapter summary

This literature review has provided a discussion and analysis of the ways that the concept of ECE professionalism is discussed. Studies on dispositions and characteristics of professional ECE teachers were also reviewed. A more contextual notion of professionalism was discussed, which focuses more on the effort to listen to the voice of ECE teachers. Lastly, this literature review has established gaps in the literature concerning the notion of professionalism, particularly in an Indonesian context.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology. First, the choice of using qualitative research is explained. The second section explains the use of phenomenological methods of enquiry in this study. Next, the general steps of research according to Moustakas (1994) will be described. This will include personal interest, research problem, choosing participants, ethical principles and managing data from collection to analysis. Lastly, research limitations will be discussed.

3.1 Qualitative research approach

This research takes a qualitative approach in order to explore and understand teachers’ views on professionalism. A qualitative approach is adopted because it enables the exploration of reasons behind various aspects of behaviour. Instead of asking what, where and when just like quantitative research does, qualitative research explores the why and how of human actions (Yin, 2003). Cresswell (2013) argues that qualitative research focuses “on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research” (p.47). Further, Cresswell (2013) noted that the meanings gained from the participants of the research provide multiple perspectives and views on the topic.

Furthermore, qualitative study is appropriate when we need to explore and gain complexity and detail about the issue in question enabling researchers to obtain detailed information from the stories of participants through direct interactions with them during interviews, focus
groups or observations. Cresswell (2013) suggested that a researcher should “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p.48). Involvement of participants is encouraged to further promote collaboration. Qualitative research is also conducted with the intention to further understand the context or settings in which participants address an issue. According to Cresswell (2013) researchers cannot isolate what people think and say from the place in which they say it.

3.2 Method of enquiry

To be able to conduct an in-depth exploration of teachers’ experience and their insights about professionalism, phenomenological method was applied. Phenomenology is the study of human ‘lived’ experience or the way we understand things consciously through experience. A person’s main perspective about certain phenomena or experience is what a phenomenological researcher seeks (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Moustakas (1994) describes that “the empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experiences” (p.16). Van-Manen (1990) further argues that lived experience can only be grasped through reflection, the reflection of more individuals with the same experience. It is not the uniqueness of individuals that phenomenology seeks but the commonalities or essence in human experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Cresswell (2013) explains that the basic purpose of phenomenological research is to “reduce individuals’ experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76).
Johnson and Christensen’s (2012) use of the term “essence” refers to the structure of the common experience of a phenomenon. The essence is extracted through finding the commonality of a certain phenomenon experienced by participants based on data collected from individuals. Interviews are the commonly used method of data collection. Using interview data, the researcher will attempt to reduce the transcript to the essence of experience as described by the individuals.

Phenomenology was founded as a philosophy by the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Phenomenology was based on Husserl’s urge to come back to the Greek conception of philosophy. He argued that the search for knowledge and wisdom should be through lived experience, as in Greek philosophy (Cresswell, 2013). Phenomenology seeks the essence of knowledge by putting aside all opinion about the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell, 2013). The essence is the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of a phenomenon being experienced by a group or groups of people.

According to Cresswell (2013) there are several features that are included in phenomenological research. The first is emphasis of the phenomenon to be explored. The phenomenon should be a single concept or idea. Next is the exploration with a group or groups of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. This is usually in the form of an interview. In order to be able to grasp the essence of experience, the researcher needs to ‘bracket’ themselves out of the phenomenon being studied. This means that they should concentrate on the experience of the participants and set aside their own prejudgment. The third is the data analysis. Finally, the study ends with the description of the essence.
3.3. General steps of the research

The general steps of this study followed those explained by Moustakas (1994), as outlined below.

3.3.1 Personal interest in topic of study

Moustakas (1994) has noted that understanding personal interest in the topic of study is the first step of the research. The study of teachers’ professionalism interests me due to my interaction with teachers and teacher training in my 10 years of professional work. I began my professional work as a lecturer teaching future teachers of English and I am currently working within the early childhood office in the Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia. My main duty is to plan and implement programmes related to ECE teachers’ professional development. The programmes are varied, but mostly in the area of qualification improvement and career development, improving the system of rewards, and policy evaluation of early childhood practitioners (MoEC, 2012b).

3.3.2 Determining the research problem

According to Cresswell (2013) phenomenology is best used to understand several individuals’ shared experience on certain problems or concepts. As has been described earlier, this study aimed to understand Indonesian ECE teachers’ perspectives on the notion of professionalism including those characteristics that they considered to be professional, and those that were not. The concept of professionalism used as the basis of this thesis is the one stated in the Teacher Law (Law/14, 2005), namely that professional teachers are those who hold bachelor degrees and hold a teaching certificate. However, not every teacher is eligible to obtain a
teaching certificate but only those who are kindergarten teachers. In other words, practitioners from playgroups and day care centres are not eligible for certification. The fact that those practitioners from three different types of centres hold the same qualification but not all of them can be recognized as professional motivated me to understand more about the notion of professionalism within the Indonesian context.

3.3.3 Participants

Moustakas (1994) suggested several considerations in choosing the participants for a phenomenological study: age, race, religion, ethnic and cultural factors, gender, and political and economic factors. Furthermore, he added that all the participants should have experience of the same phenomenon.

The participants for this study were kindergarten and playgroup teachers who experienced intermediate level training in the national programme for up-skilling which was held in September 2013. The training was conducted in five provinces in Indonesia: Riau, South Sulawesi, West Java, East Kalimantan, and East Java. The training was conducted by an independent training provider under supervision from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and involved early childhood practitioners with a range of training and qualification backgrounds. For the purposes of this study, only teachers who hold a degree were invited to participate. This was to ensure that the practitioner views accessed were informed by a background of tertiary education.

Based on the preliminary data gathered from the Ministry of Education, there were 606 total teachers who joined the programme, with 99 of them holding a bachelor degree. However,
only 18 participants came from kindergarten (see table 1). To increase the likelihood of a balanced participation of teachers from both kindergarten and playgroup, the province with a more balanced participation of teachers from both types of centre, South Sulawesi, was chosen for this study. The distribution of participants in the training across the different provinces is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Summary of participants of the training programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
<th>Participants with a Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Riau</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>South Sulawesi</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>West Java</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>East Kalimantan</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>East Java</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>606</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.3.4 Ethical consideration**

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee on 6 June 2014, and this was sent to the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia to ask permission to reach the participants and conduct the interviews in relation to this research. Then, an information letter was sent to the training provider in South Sulawesi concerning this study, requesting the list of participants from the 2013 intermediate training.

A letter of invitation was then sent to the 27 eligible teachers directly or through the training providers. Of those teachers, 21 were willing to participate in this research and signed a
consent form. It was made clear that they could always withdraw their participation anytime they wished before the data analysis stage. There were no participants who requested to withdraw from this research.

3.3.5 Validation of data

This research used participant feedback or member checking before writing the research analysis. Johnson and Christensen (2012) argue that member checking can be the most important strategy to maximize the interpretive validity or trustworthiness, and to share researchers’ interpretations from the data collected with the research participant. In this research, as described above, confirmation was obtained from participants about whether the interview results had been transcribed clearly and correctly. This ensured the content had the same meaning as that intended by the participants. In addition, low-inference descriptors have been used to increase the accuracy of the findings. Low-inference descriptors help the reader experience the participant’s own words such as actual language, dialect and personal meaning (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Individual interviews were transcribed and returned to participants to check the accuracy of the content before it was analysed. The transcripts were emailed to each individual on 9 August 2014 with a request of a reply by 30 September 2014. Otherwise, it would be considered that all the participants had agreed to the transcripts. To protect participants’ identity, initials or aliases were used to refer to the participants in the research. All audio-recordings, notes and transcripts were kept in a locked file and access restricted to the investigators. They will be destroyed after five years.
3.3.6 Data collection

In phenomenology, data is collected from individuals who share the same experience of a phenomenon. In this study, to capture an in-depth exploration of teachers’ views on professionalism, focus groups and interviews were used as the method of enquiry. Focus groups were used because they enable researchers to learn what the group members think and feel about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2010) and they rely on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups provide in-depth information with less time compared to having an interview with each of the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). In addition, focus groups are best with homogenous participants because they promote discussion and participants’ view (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In my study, the focus group was intended to capture the teachers’ general overview on the issue addressed in the study.

Similarly, interviews give the researcher a chance to explore participants’ descriptions. In case of any confusion, in an interview the researcher is directly able to reflect, clarify, and request examples and descriptions (Flood, 2010). Kvale (1996) describes that phenomenological methods intend to obtain the ‘immediately experienced meaning’ (p.53) of a phenomenon from the participants who provide direct explanation of experience. A phenomenological interview should be structured in a way to be able to understand the phenomenon thoroughly (Bevan, 2014). Bevan (2014) proposes a structure of phenomenological interviewing that should start with phenomenological bracketing, that is, to “abstain from the use of personal knowledge” (Bevan, 2014, p.138). Interviewers’ common sense and scientific knowledge about a phenomenon should not be used to comprehend and make assumptions about
participants’ experience. This is in order to arrive at an “unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, p. 54). To achieve this state, the researcher should accept the natural attitude of participants, be reflexive by conducting critical dialogue with oneself and listen actively (Bevan, 2014).

Focus groups were conducted in the second week of June 2014 and lasted for about 90 minutes each. At the end of each focus group, I asked for volunteers from each group to be involved in interview sessions to be conducted later on a day and time of the participants’ choice. Ten participants, six from kindergarten and four from playgroup, were interested in participating in the interview. Seven of them were interviewed right after their focus group sessions, and three of them were interviewed on later days in their respective centres.

**3.3.7 Data analysis**

The data analysis followed the modified method of Van Kaam’s (1966) procedures as listed in Moustakas (1994). The process began with listing and preliminary grouping of participants’ transcripts from focus groups and interviews. Moustakas (1994) called this horizonalisation. This is where all participants’ statement relevant to the phenomenon in questions were listed. The second step was reduction and elimination. At this stage, the statements listed before were tested using two requirements: (1) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent of the phenomenon to enable understanding of it? and (2) Is it possible to abstract and label it? All the statements that did not meet the requirements were eliminated. The third step was clustering and arranging the selected expressions into themes. The fourth step was validation. The statements were checked to know whether they were expressed explicitly in the transcription. The fifth was individual textual description. This
is where the data were interpreted and what happened was described (Cresswell, 2013). Further, a structural description was developed to write about how the phenomenon was structured, in which the essence of this study was further developed. I then searched for a pattern of how themes were related and created a structural description which is articulated in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. As a project undertaken in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, this study is limited in scope and size due to the length of the study period. First, the sample is based on the views of participants of the Intermediate level of the national ECE training programme in South Sulawesi Province, and, as a result, the findings may not necessarily be generalised to a broader population or other training participants, such as the basic level of the national ECE training programme. The second limitation was the time constraint of the interviews and focus groups. In several sessions, teachers were too busy to be able to spend more time for discussions. It is likely that more elaborate discussion of the topics in question would have been gained with more time.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology used in this study. The choice of qualitative design using phenomenological methods has been justified. This study was conducted following the general steps of study articulated by Moustakas (1994). The data collection processes of interviews, focus groups and data analysis have been explained.
Ethical considerations, including the participant selection process and how to protect their confidentiality, were justified. Lastly, the research limitations were discussed.
Chapter 4: Professionalism as comprising educational background and practice

4.0 Chapter overview

The focus of this chapter is on the perceptions of teachers regarding professionalism. This chapter reports on data generated through the three focus groups and ten interviews with teachers. The chapter begins by exploring how the participants defined professionalism through educational background, professional development and experience. Further, the chapter explains what knowledge is considered important for ECE professionals and what was seen to promote and hinder the process of professionalisation. Lastly, there is a description of how professionalism is presented through teaching practice and leadership positions.

4.1 Educational background

Various studies agree on ECE practitioners’ need for a certain educational background as the mark of professionalism (Cable & Miller, 2011; Dalli, 2008b; Katz, 1985; Oberhuemer, 2005). This section focuses to participants’ responses on the question of what is professionalism, in particular on themes relating to educational background and knowledge attainment. Data in my study shows that, despite minor differences, participants considered qualifications, professional development and training as attributes of ECE teachers’ professionalism. In addition, participants also commented on the policy of ECE teachers’ qualification in Indonesia as inequal among ECE teachers, here referring to the law (14/2005) which regulated
teachers’ certification for kindergarten teachers only and neglected teachers from playgroups or day care centres.

4.1.1 Qualification

Participants in this study responded that being professional means obtaining certain qualifications or educational background, although some participants differed in the minimum level of education background they thought appropriate. Qualification here means that a professional ECE teacher should be a graduate from a university with a four-year degree. As the following participant in Focus Group 1 mentioned, a bachelor degree in ECE is a mark of a professional teacher:

The characteristics of a professional teacher... is that she holds a degree in early childhood education (Focus Group 1, Lines 17-18)

In Focus Group 2, one participant also agreed that qualification is important for professionalism, though she did not specify the type needed:

In my opinion, a professional teacher holds a qualification, at minimum by attending training (Focus Group 2, Line 21)

Data from the interviews also showed similarities with the focus group responses indicating that a certain level of educational background is considered the minimum requirement of a professional. One participant commented that professionalism is complying to the standard. The standard minimum qualification of ECE teachers in Indonesia, as stated in the Teacher Law (Law/14, 2005), is completion of a four-year undergraduate degree (MoEC, 2009).

Professionalism for early childhood teachers means they must meet professional standards of an early childhood teacher (Interview 5, Lines 15-16)
The reasons why a specific qualification was considered necessary is because teachers are expected to possess certain competencies and skills to be able to interact with children. As one participant in Focus Group 3 reported:

> You can call a teacher professional when she has already got skills or various capabilities related to early childhood or child education knowledge (Focus Group 3, Lines 18-19)

However, participants differed about the minimum level of qualification that marks professionalism. Another participant proposed that a standard minimum educational background of graduation from high school would be sufficient to call someone a professional:

> A professional teacher is someone who has graduated from high school and has attended training in early childhood (Focus Group 2, Lines 11-12)

Similarly, one teacher also commented in an interview that the minimum requirement is high school:

> I think professionalism means that a teacher is responsible and has a minimum educational qualification of high school (Interview 4, Lines 13-15)

Thus, there were two different groups of ideas concerning the minimum level of education required for ECE professionals: a four-year university qualification or high school education. Completing a four-year university programme is understood as having attained sufficient knowledge for working in ECE. Participants did not mention why high school is sufficient as an educational background, however, the data shows that when participants mentioned high school as the minimum educational background, they added training as a necessary requirement for being professional.
4.1.2 Professional development

As we can see in the data above (Focus group 2, Lines 11-12), in cases where the qualification of a four-year degree is absent, participants proposed training as the answer to gaining more knowledge. As one participant mentioned, this is because professional early childhood teachers need to possess certain skills and competence when working with children. When teachers are unable to attain required skills and competences through the qualification process, they were seen as needing to learn from training programmes and professional development.

Continuing professional development is essential for practitioners who have to continually respond to the ever-changing social context (Brock, 2011). In line with the government policy documents that promote ECE teachers’ professionalism through professional development (MoEC, 2011), participants in this study also mentioned training programmes as an integral part of being a professional teacher. To cope with the lack of knowledge and information, professional teachers can upgrade their understanding through professional development. One participant mentioned that training programmes and seminars are on the same level as qualifications, which she saw as a possible substitute for a degree:

The second [meaning of being professional] is … she has attended training programme or seminars on early childhood education (Focus Group 1, Lines 16-18)

Participants agreed that training programmes would improve their teaching and knowledge, and that attending training programmes in ECE would improve their competencies. One participant commented on teachers who are yet to be considered professional. If those
teachers want to be professional, they need to gain more knowledge. One of the ways to ‘be professional’ is through training programmes:

I think that if the teachers were not professional, what has to be done is to gain more experience, in the sense of attending training programmes. Although they only have graduated from high school, they have experienced training programmes and so on. And to further add to the experience again, they should go to university and take early childhood as their major. In addition, they can also get a lot of good information from mass media, from colleagues, peers, comparative studies, and internships (Interview 4, Lines 23-28)

As mentioned by the participant above, professional development does not end with only attending various training programmes. Teachers could also extend their knowledge through readings and discussions with friends in their own school. In addition, comparative studies and internships are promoted as ways to learn from ‘outside’ the school. Participants also mentioned an idea similar to tiered training that leads to a university degree. Another participant echoed this idea that teachers should broaden their horizons by joining programmes outside their schools:

To broaden ourselves, we need to follow orientation programmes [a programme that usually inform teachers about new policies or knowledge. It is funded by the government] at district level or attend training programmes and join teacher discussion groups (Focus Group 3, Lines 185-186)

Practitioners understood the value of improving their knowledge through the professional development process. One participant supported this idea of the importance of professional development as a way of knowledge attainment.

Very important. That means that we can gain knowledge not only from formal education, but also from training programmes (Interview 9, Lines 42-43)

However, the same participant also criticized the training programme conditions in South Sulawesi. She reported the absence of training programmes specifically about children aged
0–5 years. In her view, most of the training was concerned with children aged 5–6 years. Until recently the only training programme specifically focused on under five year olds was conducted under family policies outside the Ministry of Education, namely the National Bureau for Coordination of National Family Planning (BKKBN). BKKBN also conducted training programmes about children. As one participant reported:

Mostly, information [in training programmes] is about kindergarten. Mostly the training programme is about general topics in ECE, and specific to 5–6 year olds. I went to college, at that time, I learnt about 0–6 year olds and also got information from books, books on how to care for children. I also have joined BKB [a programme specified for children under five], I am also completing a master training for BKB which is held by BKKBN. In the training programme, I have learned a lot about 5–6 year olds (Interview 9, Lines 50-55).

The teachers reported that they utilize the training programmes to gain more information according to their needs. Even in training programmes specific to the 5–6 year old children, they will try to gain information they require for their practice with 0-5 year olds through the discussion session:

If it is me, I will join the training programmes. Because I am in play groups, when there is a question and answer session, I will ask about 0–2 year olds in the training programmes (Interview 9, Lines 59-60)

Professional development is required to improve and keep updated on the current information, as one participant reported:

Knowledge of a professional should be increased, not [stay] the same each time. Knowledge must be continuously improved and up to date. Also, I think a professional should be willing to sacrifice. If the school is in a weak economic community, and incidentally the teacher is rich, why not? [join training programmes] (Interview 7, Lines 164-167)

From the data we can see how the participants highly valued training programmes as a way to professionalize themselves, and as a way to improve and up-grade teachers’ knowledge of
children. Participants in this study were also aware that training programmes are scarce or are not specifically appropriate to their needs, but they showed creativity to adjust and optimize the benefits of the training programmes.

4.1.3 Experience

In addition to qualifications, experience is valuable to enhance professional growth (Brock, 2012). Working closely with other childhood educators, as an employed aide, or through formal or informal mentoring, provides valuable first-hand experience for professional teachers. During their years of experience, teachers will have many opportunities to observe, explore, inquire, and experiment with ideas while teaching (Brock, 2011). This idea of the importance of experience is echoed by participants in this study. Teachers emphasized the need of experience as the proof of professionalism. When a teacher was asked whether they saw themselves as a professional or not, they replied by calling on their years of experience as evidence:

I think I am professional because I have been working in early childhood for 20 years. I was appointed in 1986 and have worked in the field until now. So, I consider myself a professional (Focus Group 2, Lines 38-39)

A different comment from another participant but stating the same idea, clearly shows that having years of service was perceived to endow them with professionalism:

Maybe I am not a professional yet. Because I have only been teaching for two years and I still have a lot of inadequacy and I am still learning how to teach well and interact with children (Focus Group 2, Lines 43-45)

In another conversation with a teacher during the focus group, I tried to widen the question about their views about whether or not teachers at their centres are professional. After some debate, the teachers agreed that at least three years of experience were required as a mark
of professionalism. Qualification alone is not sufficient; it should be extended with experience:

LH: Two teachers. Are they professional or not?
T1: No. Because she just [recently] graduated
LH: She is not a professional because?
T1: Because she doesn’t have enough experience in teaching.
LH: Ok, how long has she been teaching?
T1: Just last week
LH: Ooo, she has just been teaching for a week. That means she is not a professional because she lacks experience. So that means, being a professional means to have experience. How many years of experience do you think are needed to be called professional?
T1: Three years, more or less (Focus Group 3, Lines 290-303)

Experience here also means that teachers would have opportunities to undertake professional development. Teachers’ base knowledge could be attained from initial training programmes. However, as the knowledge should be up to date, teachers should also be actively involved in programmes that help them update their knowledge. As one teacher reported:

One of them is a senior teacher. My school principal. I think she is professional. She is knowledgeable. But the other five teachers, if we think about their knowledge, they might, yes [possess the knowledge]. But it is not up to date. When they are told to make something... they make it... without being creative. They are dependant on other people. Being a teacher means you can work independently. Should know what they are doing. In my opinion, they are not [giving their] total [effort]. For example, while teaching they are sitting down on a chair. Teaching should be standing [and walking] here and there, but this one tends to sit (Interview 7, Lines 90-96)

From the comment above, it is evident that the teachers in my study believed that a teacher with experience has more knowledge and a better attitude toward their work. One participant gave an example of better treatment of children in the quote below. She suggested that a professional should not scare children. Today, teachers hitting their students
in the classroom is not a common practice in Indonesia. Just like in most of the Western World now, hitting children is considered illegal in Indonesia:

Okay, from my experience in my work place, a professional teacher should not hold things that may scare the children, like a stick [usually used for hitting the children to make them do what the teacher say] or sitting down while holding a stick that might harm the children or threaten the children (Focus Group 1, Lines 160-163)

Another participant also commented on how experience added to the knowledge gained beforehand:

It is a profession because we are directly involved with children. We are teaching children every day. Just like what [one of the participant] said that we need to go experience the field and that has been our work (Focus Group 3, Lines 384-386)

However, not all participants mentioned that experience is related to professionalism. One teacher commented that professionalism is not merely a number of years, but requires more than that, including having a calling to the work, and a strong commitment to the field. However, as she thought she did not yet possess qualities required of a professional, she was reluctant to call herself professional:

I have been working for nine years and I don’t think of myself as professional [because of not possessing certain qualities] (Focus Group 3, Line 351-353)

From the above discussion, we can see that participants also consider years of experience as a mark of professionalism. Experience was considered important as it helps teachers to have a chance to practice and improve their knowledge gained from initial study.

4.1.4 Critique of educational background

Indonesia passed the law on teacher certification in 2005 (Law/14, 2005). The Law certified ECE teachers with a minimum degree in ECE or Psychology as professional. However,
participants in this study expressed disagreements with this law. They pointed out that certification in the field of ECE was only available to kindergarten teachers, and only for those with a degree in ECE or psychology. They considered that the Law should accommodate teaching experience as a qualifier for professional status. They mentioned that many senior teachers with years of experience and better teaching skills could not participate in the certification process due to the requirements of having a degree. One teacher stated:

I believe that a high school graduate teacher with five years of experience can teach better compared to a fresh graduate from a four-year degree programme. But sometimes those who are considered professional are those who have been certified because of the qualifications. I don’t have the qualifications, so I don’t have the chance to gain teacher certification. There are also a lot of smart teachers out there, but those teachers do not hold a degree as required by the law. I expect you to consider those experienced teachers in the field [as also professional] (Focus Group 3, Lines 341-346)

The perception that there were many graduate teachers with certification in their hands but who were not able to display sufficient skills as professionals was reported by several other practitioners. One teacher who works in a playgroup reported the same situation among her colleagues. She works for a Foundation that operates both a kindergarten and playgroup. She is the only practitioner at the playgroup, while there are five teachers in the kindergarten. All of the five kindergarten teachers are certified. When she was asked if all the kindergarten teachers were professional, she replied that only two of them could be described in this way. The arguments were that the other three were unreliable, reluctant to change, lacked motivation to improve, and showed undesirable characteristics in the classroom. She admitted that the three teachers have sufficient base knowledge as they have graduated with a degree. However, she called for a better implementation of the knowledge they had. Professionalism comes only after sufficient time of knowledge implementation in the field.

She commented:
I think she should to be able to apply the knowledge. It is useless to be smart, if you cannot share. For me it is more important that teachers know the basic knowledge about the child and be able to put this in practice. It is better than being too smart, not be able to apply it in the field (Interview 7, Lines 155-158)

One anecdote that illustrated this critique of qualifications as a key criterion of professionalism was recounted during the third focus group by another playgroup practitioner. She recounted how within a training programme conducted by one of the local well-known universities, one of the organising committee members of the training programme claimed success only from finishing the training programme schedule. They also considered bringing in a professor from Japan. The practitioner telling the story instantly disagreed:

I raised my hand and told him: ‘early childhood education is teaching children and we don’t really need someone ‘too’ professional from Japan. We actually need... let’s say you go and practice for a month or a week in a childcare centre and meet the children. I believe it won’t be easy. You can understand how we do it for years. Dealing with children is not as easy as dealing with high school students. So, we don’t need a professor from Japan or elsewhere, but we need to practise directly’. You should see what the children need directly. We have been teaching children for years and we are achieving good results. But, if a professor came, he would only give us academic stuff, and neglect the non-academic stuff (Focus Group 3, Lines 318-338)

Another participant emphasised experience and practice as more important than formal qualifications:

I don’t really blame our previous friend for that answer: both [qualifications and experience] are important, but the point here is that even with a high level of qualification the non-academic stuff is zero, it is useless. The most important is experience. We can understand early childhood if we do hands-on practice directly in those centres. So, that we know what a child is like. We are not supposed to say that in early childhood you should do this and that without ever being in practice. Sometimes we have a person with a S.Pd [bachelor of education], but she cannot teach. We are high school graduates with 10 years of experience. We are better. That is why we are not confused [in how to teach children] (Focus Group 3, Lines 318-338)
Participants in this study also showed resistance to the idea of qualification as the only mark of professionalism focused on the quality of university graduates. Teachers concentrated a great deal on the idea that a professional teacher is what the personality shows. They considered that someone’s educational background does not really correspond with their behaviour:

If we are talking about behaviour, there are some who have a degree who do not show good behaviour. I think that good behaviour doesn’t correspond to their qualifications but to their personalities. Even if we are only high school graduates, if we are well behaved, we can educate children and produce well behaved children. So, it is not that education is not important, but I think a teacher with a degree doesn’t necessarily have good behaviour (Focus Group 3, Lines 233-237)

Thus, despite their agreement that qualifications are significant, some Indonesian teachers in this study were still doubtful that qualifications on their own are equal to professionalism. From their experiences, the participants reported that not all practitioners with required qualifications are ‘good’ at their teaching and can be considered professional:

Maybe they also need to go to college [as a marker of professionalism] but, currently, there are a lot of teachers who hold a degree that does not have an ECE major [mostly from general education]. Just like me, I am a teacher education graduate [not from ECE]. Not all of us [come from ECE]. I think what is important as an ECE teacher is being patient (Focus Group 3, Lines 219-221)

Another participant also expressed her view of inequalities between playgroup and kindergarten teachers in the area of certification. This participant had a background which is part of non-formal ECE, which is not included in the Law (Law/14/2005) for certification

The idea of professionalism related to ‘good behaviour’ will be discussed in Chapter Five.
process. She commented that playgroup teachers have the same work responsibilities as the kindergarten teachers, yet they received different treatment from the government:

The truth is, I really want to [become certified teacher]. There is inequality. We are the same as [kindergarten] teachers. We live in the same world, have the same law. But why is there a gap? Some of them said that early childhood education [non-formal ECE] is new, just be patient. They believe that we will also go in the same direction as what kindergarten teachers experience nowadays; but that it will be a long process to go there (Interview 7, Line 82-86)

Clearly, these teachers consider qualification as important, but they also proposed that experience should be considered as of the same or similar importance. They saw the higher status and attention, as described in the law put on the kindergarten as creating inequality in the field of ECE. Teachers in playgroup objected to this inequity and used the research process as a forum where they could express their unhappiness about it.

4.2. Specialised knowledge

Many studies support the idea that professionalism is related to a specialised body of knowledge (Cameron, 2006; Katz, 1988; Rodd, 1997). Katz (1988) lists specialised knowledge, both practical and theoretical as being exclusive to those belonging to the profession. Having a good base knowledge will give consistency and the same standard in the care of children, even in the diverse settings of early childhood centres, and provide better service (Bredekamp & Willer, 1993).

As noted in Chapter 2 section 2.5, Indonesia’s ECE teachers are expected to master four different competences: personal, professional, social and pedagogic (MoEC, 2007, 2009). Participants in this study agreed and considered obtaining specialised knowledge and mastery of related skills as important, alongside mastery of knowledge about children as well as
pedagogical expertise in the classroom. A professional can only be identified through their ability to use their knowledge during teaching sessions:

In my opinion, you can call a teacher ‘professional’ when she has already got skills or various capabilities related to early childhood or child education knowledge. She is said to be professional when she masters the knowledge and know how to teach (Focus Group, Lines 18-20)

One participant also reported that having sufficient knowledge is also evidence of compliance to the Law:

She also needs to master the teaching methodologies as has been mentioned in the rules and laws (Focus Group 3, Lines 20-22)

Clearly, the participants considered specialised knowledge acquisition to be important. Working in ECE is a ‘specialised’ field of work, which requires specialist knowledge. They have special knowledge just like other professions, which is comparable to other ‘professional’ work like being a doctor or an architect:

Just like what others have said, being an ECE teacher is a profession because not everyone is able to be an ECE teacher. It is the same as being a doctor or an architect. This means, it needs specialist skills to be an ECE teacher (Focus Group 1, Lines 201-203)

Another participant from the same focus group also echoed the same idea of the specialised knowledge about children. The idea is that ECE work is specialised, thus needs special knowledge and skills:

In my opinion, our work as ECE teachers can be considered a profession because it needs specialised knowledge or special skill about child development (Focus Group 1, Lines 204-206)
During focus groups and interview sessions, participants mentioned knowledge in three different areas as important for professional ECE teachers to master: knowledge of child development, knowledge of child characteristics and knowledge of religious teaching.

**4.2.1 Knowledge of child development**

Teachers of ECE are expected to be able to prepare and maintain appropriate surroundings so that children can experience the best education possible. Pucket and Diffily (2004) argued that they can create these conditions by applying age-appropriate decisions for children in their centre. Understanding the theories of child growth, development and learning are thus seen to enable teachers to predict the likely development of children, while also remaining fully aware that children grow and develop at different rates (Pucket & Diffily, 2004). As one participant put it:

> Basically, an early childhood teacher should understand about child development psychology (Focus Group 1, Lines 57-58)

Another teacher commented:

> She also understands about children: children’s psychology and children’s development. That makes her understand better (Focus Group 1, Lines 168-169)

Focusing on age-appropriateness as a focus of teachers’ practice, other participant emphasised:

> She should also know the developmental stages of children specific to their age 0-6 years old. Then, to be professional, you need to understand the children’s developmental psychology between 0-6 years old. How are they when they are two years old, when they are three years old, how are their skills when they are 4-6 years old? (Interview 2, Lines 57-62)
Clearly the perception that profound knowledge of children’s development will give teachers the opportunity to predict children’s needs and provide appropriately for them was widespread (Pucket & Diffily, 2004). However, having understood the importance of knowledge of child development, teachers then needed to be able to implement the knowledge. This view was expressed in statements such as that teachers needed to prepare the lessons to adjust to the needs of children:

The professional behaviour of teachers towards children can be summed up like this: all the professional teacher does is to understand and treat children according to their developmental stage, from the beginning of the class until the end (Focus Group 1, Lines 70-72)

Another teacher explained that children are expected to learn from the examples modelled by the teachers. The participant commented:

As we know, children at early ages always want to know. All that we give to children should be shown in practice. This corresponds to the minister decree number 58 (Focus Group 3, Lines 63-64)

In addition to appropriate practice in the classroom, teachers are also expected to work with parents and share their knowledge on child development. This is to extend the possibility of creating a supportive learning environment for children. The teacher reported that regular meetings are conducted with parents, and these were used as a way to communicate and improve cooperation. One participant mentioned:

Professional teachers should work closely with parents on the children’s development (Focus Group 1, Line 95)

Another participant commented that regular meetings with parents were focused on informing them about their child’s development:
We also conduct a monthly meeting with parents specifically to discuss their children’s development, either about portfolios [profile book] or other things (Focus Group 1, Lines 104-106)

Understanding knowledge and its application was thus considered important by participants, however, it is not until teachers were able to share their knowledge with parents that they were considered to have attained professional standing. Seeking to explore this further, during the interviews, I asked teachers to give example of professional actions:

LH: Can you now give me example of a professional action?
NA: Discipline. Discipline with time, making RKH [daily work plan], making learning media, socializing and being able to explain child development to the parents (Interview 5, Lines 86-81)

From the data presented above, we can see that participants in this study considered knowledge about children’s developmental stages as very important to enable the provision of an appropriate learning environment. This emphasis is perhaps understandable when one considers the focus on the knowledge of the children’s developmental stages in Indonesia’s ECE curriculum, which is based on the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Formen & Nuttall, 2014).

4.2.2 Knowledge of child characteristics

4.2.2 Knowledge of child characteristics

In addition to knowledge about children’s overall development, the data showed that knowledge of individual child characteristics was also considered to be important. Fromberg (2003), in an idea that is also echoed by Pucket and Diffily (2004), has reminded us that children are unique and specific, and therefore, generalisation is not always useful. Sharing the same idea, teachers involved in this study agreed that, as professionals, they should have the ability to understand each child as an individual. They believe that understanding the
character of each child will help with their teaching and give them the ability to work better with children. Participants commented that:

A teacher needs to fully understand what the children want because they have different characters (Focus Group 3, Lines 35-36)

For me, a professional teacher should understand children’s characters (Focus Group 1, Lines 32-34)

One participant emphasised knowledge about children as the priority knowledge, otherwise one cannot become an ECE teacher:

So, the point is that she should possess knowledge of children [as individuals], and that is compulsory; if not, she has no business being an early childhood teacher if she doesn’t have knowledge of children’s characters (Focus Group 1, Lines 21-25)

The teachers saw understanding of the child’s character as something that emerged during teachers’ and students’ interactions, and appropriate responses could then be provided based on the child’s individual characters:

A professional teacher attitudes toward children should be: able to understand, to know, and even to imitate the characters of zero to six year old children. Because, if she doesn’t understand the character of children, she will find it difficult to educate [work with] them (Focus Group 1, Lines 46-49).

One teacher commented that if a teacher understood about child’s characteristics, she could work even with difficult children:

She can face the children, even naughty ones. She can understand the kid’s characters (Focus Group 3, Lines 42-43)

One participant recounted an experience from her own background that showed how understanding a child’s characteristics could make a teacher work better with children. Her effort to know the child’s characteristics was through her communication with parents.
Information from parents added to her understanding of the child and helped her to successfully deal with the child. She said:

We believe that children are not all the same. Sometimes we have tried hard to do something with the child, but it is unsuccessful. We might ask the parents about that. Why is this child having this difficulty? For example, once we have experience of a child who wanted to use the toilet constantly, and when I asked the parents they said that he was once sick and he has been like that since then (Focus Group 2, lines 100-104)

Participants in this study also expected teachers to build a close attachment to the children to the level of knowing each child personally. They saw this ideally starting from the first day of attendance at the early childhood centre:

[It is important] to acknowledge the various individual characteristics of children since the first day they come to the centre. It is the work of an ECE teacher (Focus Group 1, Lines 187-189)

One participant emphasised that knowledge about children’s characteristics is one of the important aspects that makes early childhood teaching a profession:

We can say that being a teacher in early childhood is a profession because we need to know the character of the child. Without us understanding what the children want, we would be educating children inappropriately (Interview 4, Lines 49-51)

Also, participants in this study understood that they needed to keep their knowledge updated. Children are unique, therefore no children are alike:

Early childhood teachers cannot stop learning, especially given the individuality of each child. Because they, even though siblings or twin brothers, each of the 20 or 15 children that we face, they are all different. So this is why we must learn (Interview 5, Lines 52-55)

Cultural competence can help teachers avoid conflicts in situations of cultural diversity (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001), which in the end will improve relationships with children (Horn, 2003; Lee, Ostrosky, Bennet, & Fowler, 2003). Indonesia is culturally diverse, so that
understanding of family background is important. This idea is also reported by one participant who gave an example of how an understanding of parents’ backgrounds might help to understand the characteristics of children and could help them solve difficulties they encountered in the centre:

This story is from my centre. There were two boys who fought. We understand that parents [in our community] usually intervene immediately and scold the child up at his house. The thing I do as a professional teacher is to go to the parents and provide understanding [that they should not scold or intervene directly]. Unfortunately they could not understand this approach. We can understand because they come from a coastal area where there is a low level of education. But we continued to approach and provide understanding, and finally they understood, even though they are not directly aware of his wrong actions. Teachers should be gentle with them, and that's what we did to successfully reconcile them (Interview 4, Lines 66-72)

From the data, it is evident that teachers understood that each individual is unique and that development varies among children. Therefore, in addition to knowledge of child development, teachers considered knowledge about each child’s characteristics as equally important. Participants also suggested that working with parents and trying to understand their background would help to understand a child’s character.

**4.2.3 Knowledge of religious teaching**

Another knowledge that was considered important by the participants was knowledge about religion, mainly Islam. This section discusses participants’ comments that mastery of knowledge about Islamic teaching is one of the characteristics of a professional. Among the participants, only one was Christian. From all the Muslim participants, surprisingly, only one participant commented strongly on Islamic knowledge acquisition. She reported that in her school, knowledge about Islam was seen as even more important than the pedagogy and knowledge of the children. In this school, the primary criterion for becoming a teacher is
considered to be the personal character of the teacher, and whether she has already passed the necessary requirement of having Islamic knowledge:

We, from our school, require the teachers to possess basic Islamic knowledge. We are an Islamic based school, so that is why it is necessary. So, we would test her basic Islamic knowledge, behaviour, character, which we consider as essential for a teacher. It is possible that at the beginning she doesn’t know anything about educating children, but if she passed our test of teaching practice for a month, we would train her on how to educate children, like no pinching (Focus Group 1, Lines 26-31)

In this statement it is clear that, consistent with Islamic teachings, a person’s character is considered most important. Training teachers about pedagogy or other knowledge comes after the teachers are considered as knowledgeable about Islam. The additional knowledge, which a teacher can be further trained in is about behaviour toward children. “No pinching” here means that teachers should use no violence in order to build strong attachment to children.

One participant explained that the reason why they considered Islamic knowledge to be important in working with children is that it complied with what the Law expected, to build a religious citizen:

So we want the children to achieve something and develop the five aspects of development as mentioned in the MoEC decree number 58, 2009, which are moral-religious, social-emotional, psychomotor, language and cognitive (Focus Group 2, Lines 77-79)

One participant described why understanding religious teaching is important when she commented that teachers should set a good example. She believed that good morals build society. Teaching children about morality will ensure the future of society. This ‘greater good’ reason supports their understanding of the importance of religious knowledge:
What is important is that the teachers should have good manners, because we teach children about religious values. We also teach children how to recite prayers. We expect teachers to memorize these before they teach the children... Just like a house without pillars, the house would not be able to stand tall and might collapse. So, we will give guidance to children starting from their religious values and morality (Focus Group 3, Lines 387-395)

Moral religious aspects here mean that teachers need to build children’s attitudes toward themselves and others. Children are expected to understand the morally good ways of behaviour according to the religion in which they believe. However, there is a difference in the level of importance concerning the knowledge of religion compared to teaching-related knowledge. In the following statement one teacher explained that knowledge about Islam was of the same importance as the knowledge of children’s development and characteristics, as well as teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy:

To me, I believe that we need to strengthen the foundation of children. In any way, we need to embed good behaviour for the children. In ECE knowledge there are various skills, including religious skills. Within these skills, the moralities are important. However, being a professional is not only teaching about morality... This means that even though we stress religious and moral values as the most important, to achieve that we also need knowledge about pedagogy (Focus Group 3, Lines 244-250).

In the previous section on the knowledge of children’s characteristics, participants commented that they need to keep their knowledge up to date. This is based on the belief that children’s characteristics change over time. This belief that knowledge needs to be updated is also echoed by participants concerning Islamic knowledge. One participant commented:

I think I need to always improve my knowledge because it cannot be denied that there is a lot of theory in early childhood. Also, in our case, we must combine the knowledge about early childhood with the knowledge of the religion of Islam (Interview 5, Lines 48-50)
Similarly, another participant reported that she needed to continue learning Islamic knowledge:

According to me, the most important is, to read a lot. It is to learn. We need to learn our religion and faith and also to attend training programmes. This is as a support. Also to have a degree (Interview 6, Lines 19-21)

The data showed that participants in this study considered that knowledge of Islamic teachings is important for professional ECE teachers in Indonesia. However, there were differences in the strength of the emphasis the teachers put on Islamic knowledge relative to other knowledge and skills. One participant reported that knowledge of Islamic teachings should be mastered by teachers prior to learning about pedagogy, while others put the importance of knowledge of Islamic teachings on par with other knowledge.

4.3 Factors that enhance and hinder professionalism

This section discusses several factors that were seen by the teachers in my study as promoting or hindering professionalism for ECE teachers. Overall, participants saw four factors as promoting their professionalism and two factors hindering it. The factors that promote it can be further divided to internal and external factors. The internal factors are motivation and reflexive practice, while the external factors seem focused on issues of leadership and teachers’ organisations, and collaborative learning. Two big factors that teachers saw as hindering professionalism were poor acknowledgement of this work and bureaucratic corruption.
4.3.1 Factors that enhance professionalism

4.3.1.1 Motivation and reflective practice promote professionalism

Participants in this study mentioned several sources of motivation that help them build their professionalism, with motivation coming from both internal and external drivers. One teacher commented that her motivation to be a professional pushed her to continue her professional development. In addition, society’s request for better education acted as an external push for her to be a professional as she commented below:

What schools do is continue to work with the government so that we can also join the training as well. We want to be professionals. We have an operational certificate from Himpaudi [Indonesia Early Childhood Teachers Association], so we will receive information from them. Many schools, especially schools of Islam, simply put "We are Islam", but we cannot close our eyes to the fact that people also want a standard. We follow the Indonesian standards [so need to learn about them]. The school also supports us to attend training, for example the one conducted by Himpaudi or other training conducted by the government (Interview 5, Lines 97-103).

Another teacher commented that the context of the centre where she works motivates her to be professional. She believes that the quality of ECE is mostly influenced by the teachers’ skills and competences:

I think it is the same, it depends on the teachers. Sometimes, I am really disappointed with teachers who teach in early childhood haphazardly. Children are learning haphazardly. Then they go home singing, not many cognitive skills are being taught. That is saddening (Interview 6, Lines 67-69)

One important motivation that was reported by participants of this study is the feeling that they are special. They are special because they can teach in ECE. They help to build the future generation for the greater good:

I think that being an early childhood teacher is a profession because to be a teacher you also need to go through education... So what I mean is that not everyone can be
an early childhood teacher, that’s what makes it a profession (Focus Group 1, Lines 180-183)

Other than motivation, reflective practice is also found in the data as a support to the participants’ professionalism. Through reflective actions, teachers are able to understand their current context and how to improve them. Participants in this study reflected on the current state of the ECE field and understood that changes had occurred. They recognised that ECE today was no longer the same as when they started teaching. One teacher expressed the changes in the field with more IT involvement:

Yes. Many changes have occurred from 2001 to the present, particularly in a child's life, in the context in which they grow up, and how the economy supports the child. In 2001, many schools were still using manual systems for everything. Now, many are using IT in teaching and learning. Children are now more sensitive [familiar] when we use knowledge and IT to teach. They are happier if we use electronic media rather than just the manual image (Interview 1, Lines 28-32)

Another teacher also reflected on the changes in pedagogy, from the teacher-centred types of settings, to the child-centred ones:

Yes. There is a difference in the learning process. Before, we tended to teach like a dictator to children, but now we have already useda BCCT [Beyond Centre and Circle Time] systems or centres which focus on children (Interview 4, Lines 63-64)

Teachers understood that the work of ECE teachers is full of responsibility. They also saw the emergence of professionalism, marked with the certification, as bringing even more pressure on top of the responsibility. For some, this understanding of the responsibility gave them the motivation to improve their teaching:
For me, since I attended the PLPG training,\(^2\) it had become a huge responsibility to truly put in practice all that I have learnt (Focus Group 3, Lines 273-274)

The data showed that participants in this study took into account all the motivation that comes from within or outside them. A sense of the importance of the work pushed them to improve their professionalism. Reflective practice also helped teachers to pursue their professionalism. Their reflection on the changes of the field and the impact of these on their responsibilities enhanced their motivation to become increasingly professional.

4.3.1.2 Leadership and teachers’ association

Supports to the professionalization of ECE teachers do not only come from within, but also externally. From the data, I could see that some teachers had support from their principal, colleagues and teachers’ association. Participants in this study considered that support from some one in a leadership position was vital to their professional improvement. One participant who considered herself a professional reported that she gained full support from the school to attend various professional development programmes with the school providing funding for this, which included her degree, internship and training:

In my case, at the moment I am doing a Master’s degree in early childhood education. At the moment I am writing my thesis, just like you (giggle), that is one of the ways that I do professional development. The second is that I am still finishing my internship [in Jakarta and work there for a week] in Al-Falah [considered one of the best schools in Jakarta]. It is so expensive there, even more expensive than taking a Masters degree… also several times the province asked us to attend their training (Interview 2, Lines 153-158)

\(^2\)This training is specifically for those seeking to become certified teachers; teachers become certified once they have passed this training.
However, not all participants were lucky enough to receive strong support from their school. One teacher reported that she was not at all well supported by her school. Even though she said that she was full of motivation and willing to study and be reflective, the support she expected from her principal was not available. She did comment also that the poorly-resourced nature of the school might account for this. The principal supported her as long as the school did not have to pay. Comments from other teachers indicated that this was a common situation in ECE centres, and hindered teachers’ development. In one face-to-face interview one teacher reported:

RD: Yes. I was sent to training. Even though it was not much, I was sent to free-of-charge training by our head school. Personally, I am willing to pay with my own money for attending training, as long as I get the information.
LH: Where do you get the information?
RD: Friends, meetings and teachers organisation. I am actively involved at the district level (Interview 6, Lines 35-41)

Clearly, from the data, leadership influences teachers’ chances to access professional development. The teacher above reported the lack of support from her principal by emphasising that the only training she attended was ‘free-of-charge’ training programmes. Another teacher, whose principal believed that teachers’ quality can be improved through professional development, reported that the principal did all she could to send her teachers to training programmes:

HM: Our principal used to send the teachers to join training programmes from Himpaudi or other training providers.
LH: So, your school sends teachers to training? How often?
HM: When there is an activity, let’s say once in three months when Himpaudi or IGTKI [provider of training programmes]. Everytime there is a training, our principal will tell us and ask us to go.
LH: Up till now, how often do you go to training?
HM: From 2008, hmmm... I have been to some training (laugh)
LH: How many times?
HM: Yes, it’s more than 10 (Interview 3, Lines 100-108)

In addition to leadership, the participants reported that belonging to a teachers’ association was very important to enable them to gain information for improving their professionalism. Most of the participants considered the teachers’ association as the only source of professional development, as they could not access the training conducted by the government. As well as training, the teachers’ association also acted as a pool of information and knowledge:

Himpaudi is a vessel, for teachers... where teachers gather, not only kindergarten teachers, but also from playgroups and day care. I mean this place is where teachers can... share about problems and challenges in early childhood education... and also teachers can share how to make this and that and to make RKH [daily work plan] or exchange information. And also, Himpaudi provides a lot of training (Interview 3, Lines 91-95)

One teacher also commented that she relied on the teachers’ organisation for information on programmes concerning ECE:

I have never heard of the government [in South Sulawesi] having any special programme for early childhood teachers. It is not because I am not active in the organization. I have friends within the organization who always inform me about any new initiatives. As far as I know, there is no such thing as a special programme for us, or maybe because the district leader is new. The previous one often invited us to have events in hotels (Interview 7, Lines 34-39)

From the data above, we can see that the people in leadership positions are important in promoting teachers’ professionalism. As reported by teachers, those who are lucky to gain full support from their principals or of their Foundation leaders, could experience more opportunities to improve their professionalism compared to those who did not gain support. Similarly, the teachers’ association also played an important part in providing information for the teachers to take part in professional development programmes.
4.3.1.3 Collaborative learning

Rodd (1997) claimed that to maintain professionalism, teachers need collegial support. Teachers need their friends and cooperation among practitioners to keep updated and share knowledge. Gaining information and knowledge on the latest research and improvement in ECE can also be gained from peer support, an insight that the following teacher also reported:

Outside our environment, for example at district level, we sometimes attend training and have friends who live far away. We established communication with them and be like sisters (Focus Group 3, Lines 172-174)

Overall, however, chances and opportunities for attending training programmes seemed to be rare for the ECE teachers who participated in my study. To overcome this matter, teachers worked and learnt together within their centre to update their knowledge. One participant mentioned that they conducted regular meetings for collaborative learning. In another centre, chances for professional development sometimes came, but only for one teacher. In order for the whole centre to benefit, some teachers reported that they shared the new knowledge with their colleagues in specific and regular times:

Formally, we hold a weekly meeting. We also have a programme to improve teachers’ personal competence and curriculum management. We hold both programmes once a week. Practically, every [working] day but Monday, we have meetings with teachers (Interview 2, Lines 141-143)

Yes we have. A monthly meeting (Interview 6, Lines 83)
Another participant commented that she utilized her break times for discussion with her colleagues. To ensure the safety of children, certain measures are taken by the teachers, such as taking turns in watching children:

Every time we have new knowledge, we will share it with other teachers during our break time at the office. So there is no regular appointed time for meetings (Interview 6, Lines 85-86)

Yes. We have discussions among teachers. We usually have discussion after class or during break time. We all go inside the office and have a short talk then we go back to working with the children. We share the responsibility during the discussion, one teacher in the classroom and the other is outside, just to keep the children safe. We also have a monthly meeting. In the meeting we discuss what we are going to do in the coming weeks and how to prepare teaching aids (Interview 1, Lines 45-95)

Clearly, the teacher valued their collaboration with their colleagues and this helped them in improving their knowledge, and thus their professionalism. They established collaboration not only with colleagues in their centres, but spread the initiative to neighbouring centres. Teachers also set a specific and regular time to share knowledge and information.

### 4.3.2 Factors that hinder professionalism

Other problems that hinder professional development were also reported by participants. The first was poor acknowledgement of the profession and the second was bureaucratic corruption. During conversations before the focus group, practitioners from Focus Group 1 mentioned the low status of ECE in Makassar, South Sulawesi. They reported that ECE is considered as a lower grade profession compared to work at other education levels. They said that when they meet an elementary school teacher, for example, and are asked “where do

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3For information, kindergartens in Indonesia usually start at 7am until midday. Children usually play outdoor during 30 minute break, which usually starts at 9.30am.
you work?”, when they reply that they work in ECE, the one who asked will reply with the statement “Paudji…” [“only in ECE”]. These are belittling words, as if working in ECE is considered less significant compared to teaching at another education levels. However, these words are not only being uttered by teachers from other education levels, but also by ECE teachers themselves, revealing a lack of confidence in their work. Teachers said that this shows that ECE has low status in society.

Apart from its effect on teachers, the low status of ECE work also affects policy making concerning ECE. With the status of the field poorly acknowledged, local governments allocate only a small percentage of their budget for ECE of which very little is specifically for teachers’ professional development. As has been reported by one of the teachers above, she did not know about any programmes offered by the local authorities. All her information about training programmes came from the Teachers’ Association.

Within the NZ context, Cherrington and Thornton (2013) have argued that access provided by the government can help teachers improve their professionalism. Within the Indonesian context, teachers’ professional development can be hindered by bureaucratic and political corruption. Corruption was known to be extensive under the Suharto regime because of lack of transparency in state affairs (S. Kristiansen & Santoso, 2006). Suryadarma (2012) reported that in certain regions, he still observed higher enrolment in education because of higher public spending. However, there is insufficient evidence about the relationship of public spending to school quality. He argues that allocation of more funding to the education sector should also be followed by other policies, such as improving curriculum and recruiting higher-quality teachers (Suryadarma, 2012).
One of the participants reported that she experienced inequality and discrimination in accessing training programmes, with access limited to those who have a close relationship with public officers or their families, or the centres that belong to the officials:

Perhaps the provincial government are too focused on their friends only. Although there is a potential for early childhood teachers to access training, they remain unable to do so. Incentives are only given to the same person. I know people in the city education office. Every person in there has their own early childhood centre. In fact it is not a problem [for them to have their own centre and give incentives to teachers at their centre], but unfortunately [there are plenty of] the old teachers with very long working experience [from other centres] who do not get incentives [this is because the incentive only goes to the centres owned by policy officers]. Yes. Only their friends [from their centres] are invited to training programmes (Interview 5, Lines 109-116)

A different perspective was expressed by another teacher in an interview. This teacher had a very close relationship with the local government as she worked for the government as a civil servant. She was first appointed as a teacher in a local public kindergarten and subsequently she became a school principal. In addition, she also worked as a trainer and evaluator of other kindergartens in her district. In her view, the problems lay with teachers themselves, and she saw their improvement as dependant on internal factors, not external:

I can’t think of anything that hinders professionalism. In my opinion, all the government officials in sub-districts, district, provincial and national level always give chances to teachers who are willing to be creative and improve themselves to be professional. So, it is up to the teachers whether they are willing to develop or not. We always give the teachers motivation, but perhaps the teachers doesn’t want to improve (Interview 4, Lines 85-89)

We can clearly see that the above discussion presented the participants’ demand of the governments’ involvement in professionalising the ECE workforce. Their reports about the low status of being an ECE teacher that hindered them from being professional and demotivated them because they were not being confident in their work, and unequal treatment among ECE teachers provide evidence that governments should increase its
attention to the field. However, as one participant mentioned above, teachers should not only rely on external support, but also on themselves to improve their professionalism.

4.4 Professionalism in practice

I turn now to the final theme in this chapter identified in data from focus groups and Interviews concerning participants’ responses about being professional. The theme is that professionalism is in the teaching and learning process. Within this theme, professionalism lies in the preparation prior to teaching, the teaching process, and evaluation of the teaching. In addition, participants also commented that being professional is being in a leadership position.

4.4.1 Professionalism is the process of teaching

When asked whether they considered themselves as professional, participants mentioned pedagogy as the key in the notion of professionalism. What participants mean by ‘pedagogy’ is the activities related to prior, during, and after the learning process in the classroom. Participants understood that how the teacher understands and implements the curriculum in her daily activities is crucial to her identity as a professional. One teacher emphasised the implementation of her knowledge, not only for her students but also for herself. Likewise, another teacher mentioned executing the curriculum as a mark of professionalism:

I think I am. Because I have implemented all the knowledge I got in working with my students, and I also implemented the knowledge to [improve] myself (Focus Group 3, Lines 280-281)

A professional means that she can execute and be responsible for all the learning processes, which correspondsto the [national] standard, which is the ECE curriculum (Focus Group 3, Lines 202-204)
Executing responsibility for daily chores and duties also marks professionalism. Commitment to be punctual and all the administrative work that goes with teaching were also considered important. Teachers, most of the time, are expected to submit paperwork to many different offices: their school, offices of education authorities in their area and sometimes to teachers’ associations. This paperwork is in addition to what they are doing on a daily basis: class preparation plans for teaching for the next day, and self-evaluation notes for after the teaching process has ended:

In my opinion, a professional teacher should be responsible in conducting her daily duties and be punctual. As we might know there are teachers who are not being responsible to their daily duties such as coming to school on time, doing the daily administrative work, and attending various activities. That is what we might be able to see everyday that she [a professional teacher] comes to school on time and go back home also on time and fulfil her daily job (Focus Group 2, Lines 50-55)

Participants understood that professionalism starts with a good plan to support a good teaching process. They saw this as enhancing the interaction with children. As Dalli (2008b) argued, in the end, professionalism is how teachers build relationships with the children. Further, Dalli (2008b) described strategies that were seen by typical NZ educators as typical of how professional teachers conducted their pedagogy. In other word, Dalli argued that a professional ECE teacher was one who encouraged herself to maintain close relationships with the children through a focus on listening and speaking “at the child’s level” (p.177). These strategies, or teaching methodologies, were also understood by the Indonesian teachers in my study as proof of being a professional teacher. Knowledge and skills were seen as necessary to be able to conduct the best teaching practice for the children’s benefit:
You can call a teacher professional when she has already got skills or various capabilities related to early childhood or child education knowledge. She is said to be professional when she has mastered the knowledge and how she teaches, mastering various competences like pedagogic competence. She also needs to master the teaching methodologies as has been mentioned in the rules and laws (Focus Group 3, Lines 18-22)

4.4.2 Preparation of teaching materials

Participants of this study put a strong emphasis on the importance of preparation for teaching. They agreed that preparation is everything to the quality of the classroom, which is further evidence of a professional teacher:

In my opinion, a professional teacher should prepare everything she needs to teach a day before. For example, the materials should be completed, any adjustments to the classroom setting need to be made. All that is proof of a professional teacher (Focus Group 2, Lines 15-17)

Another participant stressed the need to do a set of preparations, even from the beginning of the study year. If the teacher is able to do that, she is then considered responsible, a professional. Preparation is deemed good because teachers will be able to appropriately plan the materials relative to the students’ needs. Also, with good preparation, teachers are likely to be able to handle the classroom situation when there are changes in circumstances:

Professionalism is to be responsible. This means that she will do good planning, for class administration or learning materials that will be given to the children. For example one can start by making a yearly, four monthly, weekly and the most important is a daily plan which is going to be used every day (Focus Group 2, Lines 62-67)

The government requires teachers to be able to understand the principles of how to prepare meaningful classroom activities (MoEC, 2007), however, it provides no specific examples or guidance on what activities are to be prepared. Participants mentioned “being responsible” as an important ingredient for good classroom teaching, which means to be punctual and to
turn up every day to perform their duties. For example, a teacher is expected to arrive at the centre before the students, so they can go to the school gate and welcome the children:

A professional teacher is a teacher who is disciplined with time. Instead of being welcomed by the children, she is the one who greets the children. She also makes RKH [daily work plan], develops learning media and be prepared to change her plans if the need arises (Focus Group 1, Lines 165-167)

Specific to play, participants also put an emphasis on preparation. Learning through play is vital in early childhood education and builds the creativity of children (May, 2007). However, tensions between elements of freedom and the control elements in creativity need balancing in the classroom and this is the centre of good teaching (May, 2007). Being prepared gives the teacher freedom to prepare the activities and consider elements that that would enhance the results of play (MoEC, 2009). One participant mentioned that she encourages children to play and at the same time, she placed rules and orders to keep the play meaningful and beneficial for children:

My opinion about how a teacher should give instruction to the children is that first the teacher should make a daily plan. This means we shape the play environment with children and we will give the children freedom to play by giving them the rules before they play. As we know a children’s soul is to play. So we want the children to achieve something and develop the five aspects as mentioned in the MoEC decree number 58 (Focus Group 2, Lines 74-79)

Another participant also commented similarly that preparation guarantees the success of the learning process. She also reported that she received this understanding of the importance of preparation from her years of study at university:

I look at a professional from the education [qualification] angle. So, before the teacher goes to the classroom, she should already master all the materials of the day. So a professional teacher is not doing things at random. For example today the children will learn about animals, but what is available is the pictures of fruits, so, just grab it, it’s all right. She should prepare today what she will be teaching tomorrow. So, she already memorized the materials, is no longer looking at books. She should use all the
materials available optimally and also be able to use the surrounding materials. So a teacher should be well prepared, mentally, her knowledge, tomorrow’s materials, all should be memorized today (Focus Group 1, Lines 143-150)

It is clear then that the participants in this study considered preparation of teaching materials as a key indicator of the professional ECE teacher.

**4.4.3 Professionalism is the teaching process and evaluation**

Participants of this study believed that professionalism can only be assessed through the practice in the classroom. In other words they saw professionalism as visible in daily activities. The professional is seen when she has full control of the classroom, and that this is done through careful and demanding preparation. This is evident in statements made by one participant:

> I can see professionalism in someone when she is teaching, comes to school on time, and she can manage the situation inside the classroom effectively [when the children are being noisy, she can handle this situation very well]. She also prepares her daily work plan and the teaching aids (Focus Group 2, Lines 56-59).

Despite such clear views on the nature of professional practice, however, teachers in this study showed no confidence when they were asked about their own or their friends’ professionalism. At least two reasons are possible for this view: the belief that professionalism is a lifetime process, and thus that attaining a state of perfect professionalism is not achievable during one’s teaching career. The other reason is that the teachers saw that professionalism is only able to be measured during the teaching process. How teachers perform in the classroom is the embodiment of their professionalism:

> T: If someone sees herself as a professional, it means that she is pompous. We are only...[not clear]...
LH: I see. If you say it like that. Let’s see, do you see Mrs Nur [another teacher in the room] as professional? Because I have asked Mrs Nur about that question, she said that she cannot assess herself.

T: I cannot asses her, because I cannot see how she is at her school. I can only assess if I see directly when she is in the middle of the learning process (Focus Group 3, Lines 282-289)

Professional ECE teachers are interested in information about children’s development, which is gained from observation and evaluation (Caulfield, 1997). Evaluation is important as it provides information for the development of the programme or even adjustment of the curriculum to meet the best compatibility with children. The same idea is echoed by participants in this study. They also consider evaluation as a necessary action by professional teachers, in addition to preparation:

HM: Yes... hmm... then to prepare what is needed for today’s lesson and all the materials... hmmm... scoring and evaluating children, like that... then give the children according to their need (HM, 82-83)

4.4.4 Professionalism is leadership position

Participants also commented that being professional is being in the leadership position. In addition to the length of time one teacher spent in the field, they mentioned that having a leadership role is a proof of a better teacher, as an example for everyone, making them a professional. One participant confirmed her professionalism is shown by her length of time teaching and her leadership position. She mentioned:

I also have become a principal and I have to be an example for other teachers. I have already gained teacher certification. And moreover, I have been actively involved in various teacher association like Aisyiyah [Kindergarten Association of Muhammadiyah Organization], IGTKI [Indonesia Kindergarten Association] and Himpaudi (Focus Group 2, Lines 40-42)
4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter describes findings from the focus groups and Interviews that related to the participants’ description of professionalism. Participants mentioned that educational background is an important indicator of professionalism. However, differences in the minimum level of education were found. Some participants mentioned a four-year university degree while other considered high school graduation as sufficient. Participants also considered professional development and experience as indicators of professionalism. Some of them even expected that the policy concerning certification consider years of experience. Further, three areas of knowledge were described as part of specialised knowledge in the field. Amid the factors that hinder professionalism, participants still also mentioned more factors that promote professionalism. Lastly, participants considered that professionalism can only be seen through implementation in teaching practice and leadership positions.
Chapter 5: Characteristics and Relationships of a Role Model

5.0 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines participants’ comments concerning the characteristics of a professional ECE teacher starting with the place of altruism in professionalism. A key finding was that the Islamic concept of *Ikhlas* – an Islamic concept tied to devotion to God (Al-Ghazali, 1994) - played an important part in participants’ conception of professionalism. Results from the focus groups and interviews also found that participants considered that a professional is a role model not only to the children, but also to parents, colleagues and communities. Concerning relationships, professional ECE teachers are expected to build strong and caring relationships with children. To conduct collaborative work with other colleagues for the better service to children is the reason of teacher-teacher relationships. Strong collaboration with parents is also believed to be beneficial for children. Additionally, professional early childhood teachers were seen as focused on building relationships with surrounding communities. Lastly, participants’ comments on the feasibility of professionalism will be discussed.

5.1 Altruism and professionalism

Recent trends show an increased professionalization of the ECE workforce receiving enormous attention from politicians, media and governments (Osgood, 2004). However, it is still shadowed with poor payment and conditions (Cameron, 2006). Osgood (2004) argued that this condition of low pay and absence of various benefits is a sign of genuine commitment to caring for others. Some have commented that what makes ECE professionals stay working
in the field is their altruistic commitment (Cameron, 2006; Dalli, 1993; Katz, 1985). Altruism is an unselfish dedication and service-oriented work (Katz, 1985), the same dedication that was also found in my study. This section discusses the concept of *ikhlas* as capturing participants’ concepts of altruism and also their ideals to nurture the next generation.

### 5.1.1 Ikhlas as the source of motivation

Participants of this research talked about their work in the field of early childhood education using reasoning based on what they called *ikhlas*. *Ikhlas* is an Islamic term, which captures the idea that the source of every action is a genuine spiritual reason, a devotion to God (Al-Ghazali, 1994). In addition, Al-Ghazali (1994) argued that the work of a teacher is to educate children in a way to promote their devotion to God. This work to build a child as person was prominent in the participants’ discussions of the role of an ECE teacher:

> A professional kindergarten teacher is a teacher who conducts her duty earnestly and tries to do it according to the mission and vision of the school. She is also conducting her duties *ikhlas* [with sincerity] and tries to develop children’s personalities from her behaviour, cognitive, scientific and so on (Focus Group 3, Lines 46-49).

In the discussions that took place in the focus group, it was clear that the mainly Islamic participants saw *Ikhlas* as the remedy to endure all the demanding work of professional ECE teachers. Without complaining, teachers will conduct their duties in the best possible manner, all as a way to show their devotion to the Creator.

> I think it is *ikhlas* [sincerity]. We should be sincere in performing our duties, which are our responsibilities. We also should show children what they can take as examples. For example, to tidy up our shoes when we come to the centre and put them on the

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^4Al-Ghazali or Algazel (1058-1111) is a medieval author who has great influence in Islam. His work is mainly about philosophy, Sufism and shari’a (Islamic jurisprudence). See Burnet (2013) for brief information on Algazel.
shelves. That is our part as a teacher to be more authentic when we educate children. Children can be demanding sometimes and tiring but we need to do it sincerely (Focus Group 3, Lines 80-84)

This genuine intention to help children in their growth appeared to have been the basis of teachers’ choice to work in the ECE sector. Having made the choice to work in the field, the participants then expected the choice to be followed by the commitment to perform the job with the intention of continually improving oneself. *Ikhlas* is translated as performing teachers’ sense of “duty” and being whole-hearted about it. Dissatisfaction with the job as a teacher should not be channelled into negative actions, for example complaints, but into positive actions and love of the job:

Being sincere for a kindergarten teacher is to work with genuine intention and we work as our heart tells us. This doesn’t mean to accept everything the way it is. But the fact that we are already becoming a kindergarten teacher automatically compels us to perform the job and love the job. So, it is impossible that we will say ‘hmm, that kid is so naughty’ at the end of the day, because we understand that educating them is our responsibility (Focus Group 3, Lines 85-90)

By practicing *ikhlas* teachers expect that, instead of expecting to receive physical rewards from their fellow human being, their devotion will be rewarded by God. This boosts their motivation. However, this did not mean that they accepted the current state of affairs unconditionally; rather, they were also expecting changes in policy, and they called for attention from the government to the condition of the ECE sector:

Is being an ECE teacher a career? This is an important question to ask. I guess, since we can become certified teachers and be part of the public service, we can call it a profession. But there are those who have been working for 20 years and still earn very little, thus, haven’t been certified nor are they civil servants. If we think that being a teacher is a God-given Grace. Then, we are feeling pumped up with spirit and we no longer think about salary, we only think about God’s reward in this world and the after world. But I think it would also be great if the government could help us as well (Focus Group 3, Lines 368-374)
Al-Ghazali (1994) also mentioned that teachers are obliged to teach the next generation as true believers. As one participant mentioned that teachers should teach children how to behave in good manner, which is considered as basic knowledge. She emphasised that prior to teaching way of conduct, teachers should have already applied all the principles to herself (See first quote on page 62).

For teachers in this study *ikhlas* becomes their source of motivation to work in the ECE field. Being a teacher is a sense of duty. It is teacher’s job to build the next Islamic generation. Although they are still expecting governments’ attention to the field, they are whole-hearted to their work.

### 5.1.2 Nurturing the next generation

Participants commented that that they felt compelled to help nurture the next generation. This was not for economic reasons, but rather for the sake of the duty itself. They cited pride in seeing the young students grow into fine citizens in the future as the motivation for their work:

> I think being an ECE teacher is a profession. Personally, I see being an ECE teacher as a calling. There might be some who are choosing to be an ECE teacher because of economic reasons but I am not. Personally, I feel I am called to be an ECE teacher. So an ECE teacher can be a professional if she has a calling in the field and can educate children because children need their foundation. It is also about how we can give the best to the children so that they could, in the next ten years, become great kids. So we can proudly say that, hmmm I was this kid’s teacher in kindergarten... I can say that being a teacher is a calling (Focus Group 3, Lines 375-382)

As reported by Osgood (2004) and Cameron (2006) ECE professionals do not receive adequate income and other benefits; the participants in this study reported the same thing. Nonetheless, participants had a strong sense of obligation to provide the best services to
children. Katz’s (1985) claim that “client-centredness of the profession is clearly characteristic of… early childhood teaching” (p.223) was also commented on by the participants below:

Being professional in ECE means that your heart calls you to that work. If we are thinking about income, if we are expecting to earn more in early childhood education, it is impossible. Everyone knows that if we are working in the field it is based on our conscience and can be called professional...That is my calling and I hope that every ECE teacher is like that and not because they expect certification. We don’t deny that [need of certification] but what is important in ECE is to give what the children need” (Focus Group 3, Lines 348-354)

The data above clearly showed that participants considered this intrinsic worth of their work as a key driver of their action. It is that worth and the calling to do the job that makes the work professional. However, the participants did not deny that they were excited about programmes from the government that would help improve their income. One participant reported that they appreciated the certification programme from the government which had given them additional monthly salary. However, this was not the primary reason why they had chosen the job of an ECE teacher. Rather it was the altruism:

I am working in this field and love the world of children.It is my profession. I am proud of being an ECE teacher... Moreover, at the moment, we have the certification programme and we should be grateful of that and can consider it as motivation. Being an ECE teacher is no longer just last resort work because someone cannot find another job. We should not feel sorry that we are an ECE teacher. We should be proud instead. We lay the foundation of human beings. We should be proud... We should not be embarrassed to be a kindergarten teacher. Rather, we should be proud of it (Focus Group 3, Lines 357-366)

As mentioned, participants do not necessarily consider income as their source of motivation for working as ECE teachers. Rather, they relied on more altruistic reasons to pledge their commitment. They preferred the personal satisfaction of seeing children grow and be successful in the future as their motivation, in addition to their view that devotion to their work was in the form of *ikhlas*:
Because, we are educating children at their early ages, we need to teach them this first [a good conduct]. If we want to see what is happening at the moment [in society] that is the result of our action as an early childhood education teacher (Focus group 3, Lines 24-243)

Similarly, other participants commented on their role in preparing children for their future years as a service to society. They saw the work of adults as being to pass on the local wisdom to the next generation. Despite the challenges that the work brought, these reasons elevated the teachers’ motivation to teach:

An early childhood teacher is a professional. The job of an early childhood teacher is not as easy as it seems... We are at the basic stage where we make the best foundation for a child’s life (Focus Group 2, Lines 122-127)

South Sulawesi, where the participants work, is a poor area, as one participant reported. However, the participants elaborated well on how the future generation motivates them to work in the ECE sector:

We are talking about the welfare of the teachers, it is indeed so low. If we once again consider that we are responsible to prepare the foundation of a child for his/her next 20 or 45 years ahead, I believe that there should be an improvement in our welfare, not only in Sulawesi Province, but also in every part of Indonesia. We need to support ECE teachers so we can educate our next generation to possess good character (Focus Group 2, Lines, 130-137)

In addition to ikhlas as a source of motivation, nurturing the next generation for the benefit of the country comes as their second reason to work in the field. This reason helped them to endure the low income and the poor area where they work.

5.2 The early childhood teacher as a role model and characteristics

In this section, I discuss the findings concerning participants’ conception about the professional teacher as a role model. Participants commented that a professional teacher
should possess good behaviour as they will be a model not only for the children, but also for colleagues, parents, and their local community.

Participants considered professional teachers as people whom children would look up to as role models representative of what they wanted to be (Wilford, 2007). The current Indonesia Minister of Education and Culture, Baswedan (2013) argued that children learn from the teachers’ behaviour as role models, similarly, Wilford (2007) emphasised teachers’ attitude as an important factor of a role model. For this reason Wilford argued that teachers should pay close attention, and think carefully, to their manners (Wilford, 2007). In line with these arguments, participants in my study also strongly argued that professional ECE teachers are role models, not only for children, but also for fellow teachers and the wider community:

A professional teacher is someone who can be a role model for other teachers, their students and the community (Focus Group 1, Lines 174-176)

As one participant commented, a professional is a role model who should conduct themselves well at all times showing good behaviour, such as being disciplined. A professional should devote her time and thought to the learning and development of children:

When a professional teacher interacts with other teachers she should become a role model. Starting from coming on time and going back home on time as well. And also she should always check the learning process (Focus Group 2, Lines 81-83)

Another participant further commented on the status of a role model, as someone who is perceived by everyone as exemplary. Being exemplary is as simple as doing her job as requested by the school and the law and being an example in the school environment, to children and colleagues, but also in the wider community, to parents and surrounding society:

In my opinion, a professional teacher is someone who can do her job as it should be. Then, as my friend has said, she should be a role model for everyone, especially
children, colleagues, parents and community. I think that is the most important (Focus Group 1, Lines 140-142)

According to the teachers, there are three reasons why a professional should maintain good behaviour as a role model: being faithful to religious teaching, recognising that children are imitators, and, recognising that teachers are the keepers of morality. Participants in this study believed that their religion meant that to be a good believer they had to practise good conduct. Therefore, devotion to a teachers’ belief would require that she be a well-mannered teacher, or a role model, and maintain good relationships with parents and colleagues:

The first is how we show a good character corresponding to the holy Quran and the Prophet’s Sunna, in terms of the way we speak, in building relationships with parents and building good relationships with fellow teachers (Focus Group 3, Lines 230-232)

Another reason for maintaining good behaviour as a role model was the belief that children are pure and like a blank slate. They saw children as learning from copying adults and modelling what they do. The belief that children will copy all the teachers’ actions: right or wrong, big or small is common in Indonesia (Formen & Nuttall, 2014). Therefore, the teachers believed that professional teachers should be eager to keep themselves in check of misconduct, so as to not let the children copy inappropriate or unwanted behaviour:

Another important matter is that she also needs to possess a good and competent personality. We need a good personality when we are working in kindergarten, because the children will copy all the teachers’ actions. We should be very careful with our actions and words, because children will adopt them (Focus Group 3, Lines, 24-27)

The third reason for professional teachers to exhibit good behaviour is that this helps the moral learning of children. As has been mentioned in the regulations, a teacher should always conduct herself according to local moral standards and culture (MoEC, 2007). In line with this,
participants were convinced that it is their obligation as teachers to preserve the local norms and cultures, and help educate children about traditional values and moralities:

It is important but I think the most important for ECE children is their moral education. That is what we need to build... That is what I think is professional (Focus group 3, Lines 216-219)

Participants in my study clearly expected that, as a role model, a professional should possess a good character as this will set a good example for the children. Discipline and commitment to the job are considered as the most important behaviour. To focus on the work as ECE teachers and putting work commitment above personal interest are considered as key traits of a role model:

A professional teacher is a teacher that can be an example, from her attitude, manners, her daily actions, her discipline, and responsibility to her duties. They are what need to be taken as indicators, that teacher is a professional. Otherwise, if the teacher is too lazy to come to school [absent], abandoning work at school, is more concerned with personal tasks than with public [work] interest, that is an example of an unprofessional teacher... We should not take it as an example. The point is that a professional teacher should really be an example to other teachers (Focus group 1, Lines 132-139)

Another participant added that a professional should maintain good personal traits, which she listed in the following statement:

She should also possess good character. A person of good character is likely to be responsible, dedicated, honest, and strong, and work hard in educating the children (Focus group 2, Lines 13-14)

In addition to good personal traits, maintaining good relationships with other teachers and the community was also considered as a good behaviour. One participant spoke about ethical values that a role model should comply with the local rules and how teachers position themselves in society:
Teachers should understand about ethics or work ethics to build relationship with other teachers on the school premises or wider community. Professional teachers interact with ethics to their friends, also with other people. She should be friendly, talk politely, not mocking anyone and not humiliating a friend (Focus group 1, Lines 75-78)

From the findings above, we can see that participants in this study highly considered that professional teachers act as role models. Role models exhibit exemplary behaviour in their surroundings for three reasons: their religious beliefs; their view of children as imitators; and the belief that teachers are the keepers of the moral standards of society. A role model is also expected to comply with the local rules and understand their roles in the society.

Many studies have identified various characteristics or traits that are perceived to be important in a professional early childhood teacher (Brock, 2012; Osgood, 2004). For example, having interviewed 12 early years educators in West Yorkshire, England Brock (2012) argued that participants' knowledge contributed to their description of the characteristics and values of a professional. Additionally, Brock (2012) found that commitment to their work with children was considered a desirable characteristic of an ECE professional teacher. Likewise, Osgood (2004) argued that a strong personal commitment is characteristic of early childhood teachers’ professionalism.

Commitment is also one of the characteristics mentioned by participants of this study with comments indicating that they generally saw the characteristics of a role model as falling into two categories: characteristics related to the improvement of the teaching and learning conditions in the classroom; and personal traits. Among the latter traits, commitment to the work, and creativity, were considered key characteristics which enhanced the work of professionals. Additionally, friendliness, patience and honesty were seen as desirable
personal traits that a professional should model to their students and others in the local environment. The following subsections elaborate on teachers’ views of these traits.

5.2.1 Creativity

The expectation of a professional to be creative was mentioned several times by the participants. A creative teacher can utilize materials from her surrounding environment within her teaching. There was also a focus on the interaction between the teacher and children. A creative teacher is expected to be adaptive to any changes that may occur during class interaction with children. Knowledge of children is vital in this adaptive skill, as argued by one participant in Focus Group 3:

A teacher who acts with professionalism possesses various skills... that means that she can develop early childhood pedagogy in every place without her copying from other institutions. Not copying means that she has her own creativity when dealing with children. She can handle the children, even the naughty ones. She can understand their characters (Focus Group 3, Lines 38-43)

A creative teacher understands that the learning conditions in ECE centres need changing occasionally to respond to the children. Appropriate responses to the needs of children would be possible if ECE professionals focussed on listening to children and speaking ‘at the child’s level’ (Dalli, 2008b). In line with this, one participant argued the importance of close listening for creative teachers:

When we have understood the developmental aspects of a child and what the child wants, we, as creative teachers, should closely listen to their needs. So, during the learning, we can creatively give what is exactly needed by the children. For example in origami, we may teach them how to make something that they understand and interested in (Focus Group 3, Lines 66-70)

As has been mentioned above, the creativity to adapt and adjust to the learning context that is appropriate to children’s needs is supported by the teachers’ knowledge and understanding
of early childhood education in general and children in particular. In addition to intensive
listening, creative teachers should also master the learning content to be taught. Mastery is
marked with a ‘hands on’ ability, which means that the teacher is able to put ideas directly
into practice in front of children. In addition, creativity also means being able to create
something with any available resources at the centre:

Creativity means that in giving a lesson we are creative. Just like in origami we should
be able to give example to children. A creative teacher can create [origami] and this
experience is being taught to children without seeing examples from outside. This
means that she can use recycled materials and use them with the children in the
learning (Focus Group 3, Lines 57-64)

Another participant also argued that creative teachers are those who make the children the
centre of their effort. Being “genuine” is important for creative teachers. During the
conversation after the focus group, one participant mentioned that most of the centres do
not have much funding. The centres rely on the teachers to develop teaching materials. This
is what is meant by being genuine. Teachers are not expected to just copy what other centres
have, they should make their own resources:

A professional teacher is one who can give something good to her students. I mean
that she does not give to her children something that is not coming from herself. Being
a professional means that when she gives something to the students she is being
creative in herself and in what she develops. A professional teacher also does not
demand that the children follow her but we need to follow what the children want.
We need to accept that early childhood education is not as easy as turning your hand.
A teacher needs to fully understand what the children want because they are all
individuals (Focus Group 3, Lines 29-36)

The creativity mentioned above is to be centred and practised by the teacher during
classroom activities. The ability to adapt to the children’s needs and to manage their
classroom is evidence of teachers’ professionalism. As one teacher explained:
The teacher needs to be creative enough to manage her classroom (Focus Group 2, Lines 66-67)

The findings on creativity showed that participants considered creativity as the ability to be adaptive to the children’s need as well as the ability to adapt the learning environment to the needs of children. This means that professional teachers should utilize available resources in and around the centre; in the end, that in order to run a well-functioning classroom, a teacher needs to be creative and resourceful so that the children are productively occupied.

5.2.2 Commitment to one’s work

In her research, Brock (2012) found that professional ECE teachers were expected to show commitment to their role. Similarly, in this study, participants mentioned that commitment to work is an integral characteristic of a role model. As part of this a professional teacher had good time management skills including being consistently punctual:

A professional teacher should be responsible to her daily duties and punctual. As we might know there are teachers who are not responsible in their daily duties, for example: coming to school on time; doing their daily administrative work; and attending various activities. But it is through this behaviour that we might be able to see everyday that she is a professional teacher (Focus Group 2, Lines 50-55)

Another participant supported this view adding that discipline was also an important characteristic to model to children:

I want to add to what my friends have told us. If we want to see a professional teacher, the first thing to notice is her discipline. In other words, she arrives at school on time, right before the children ... yes, first and foremost a professional teacher is self-disciplined. (Focus Group 1, Lines 13-16)

A teacher should be self-disciplined, giving children a good example. For example in the classroom when it is the time to finish the session, a teacher should finish her job (Focus Group 1, Lines 33-34)
Commitment to work, self-discipline and being punctual are further clearly explained by the participant below:

As I said before, a professional should be responsible for what she is doing, if she is not that means she is not professional. For example, not coming on time, still having conversations outside the classroom, spouting too many reasons for being late: I am late because of this and that... and clearly these are all excuses. A professional teacher should only ever be late for a good reason, we need to keep our commitment and be reliable. We call it “time discipline” during learning-teaching process. And also never leave the classroom and the children unattended (Focus Group 1, Lines 125-131)

Further evidence of commitment to the work as a professional ECE teacher is the teacher’s preparation for teaching which includes writing a daily work plan and preparation of the teaching material. One participant considered the teacher’s level of preparation for the learning session as the realisation of responsibility and discipline. Similarly, she stressed that the success of the implementation in the classroom was the proof of commitment:

In my opinion, a professional teacher is highly responsible and self-disciplined. She is responsible in her job and profession as a teacher. As my friend has said, a professional teacher should already prepare today what she is going to do tomorrow. She is also responsible for the activities from the beginning till the end. The second is discipline. Being self-disciplined means not coming late, but arriving on time, teaching on time, and she completes all the programme for the day. On the contrary, unprofessional teachers are those who don’t possess responsibility and discipline (Focus Group 1, Lines, 151-157)

A professional teacher is expected to show her genuine commitment to her work. This commitment is implemented through being disciplined and punctual. A professional teacher is also expected to show her commitment with good preparation prior to her teaching in the classroom.
5.2.3 Friendliness

Temple and Emmett (2013) have argued that warm and responsive caregiving will give children a sense of safety in their relationships with adults. Experience of good relationships with adults has also been shown to support children to have good social skills and high emotional intelligence (Temple & Emmett, 2013). In addition, those who experience good attachment relationships in childhood develop interpersonal relationships that are flexible and constructive; they are also able to demonstrate compassionate feelings and responsiveness to others (Temple, 2014).

Participants of this study agreed that professional ECE teachers should closely understand and maintain relationships with children. This relationships should go to the extent of ‘understanding the soul’, which means understanding children’s individual personality or character and being responsive to their strengths and weaknesses, their overall development and specific characteristics:

A teacher should know the children well. A kindergarten teacher should know children’s souls, from observation in daily activities. We can see what the children will be like in the future, because we have understood them from our daily observation (Focus Group 1, Lines 41-44).

As role models teachers’ behaviours are likely to be imitated by the children (Sub chapter 5.2, p. 88-89); therefore teachers should pay close attention to their actions and attitudes. Teachers with friendly characters will not only promote close attachment with children, but also a strong understanding of the children. The simple act of being friendly can be implemented in the daily actions of teachers, such as smiles, gestures and the way teachers
talk. Mirroring what other colleagues had said earlier within the same focus group session, one teacher said:

I think, a professional attitude toward children can be communicated throughout the day starting from the morning time. The teacher should be at the gate and then welcome and greet the children, not the other way around. She should greet them with a happy face and feel delighted. When she calls a child, she would not yell but get closer to the child. Then... the point is... when she teaches the children how to call their parents, teach to call softly. So, a teacher does not arbitrarily yell at students. If the children often hear the teacher yell, then they will be accustomed to yelling when they call the teacher. ‘Teacher...’ [simulates a child yelling at a teacher]. When they like to see the teacher, there will be feedback. So, just behaving well is a characteristic of a professional teacher” (Focus Group 1, Lines 61-69)

A professional should maintain a friendly character to build caring relationships with children.

One participant suggested that using a soft voice in communication with children was an important way to maintain this friendliness:

I think we should show our personality, moreover we are working with children, so we need to show our caring nature. We are not supposed to yell. A good character means to be a role model for children with our daily attitude at school (Focus Group 2, Lines 18-20)

Friendly characteristics will help teachers to communicate better with children and open more opportunities to understand them. In addition, when children are treated in a friendly manner, they will respond positively to the teacher. This will create a positive understanding.

One participant provided advice about how a teacher should act when faced by fighting children.

Then, the next is that a teacher should possess a child-loving character. Have empathy with children. Because when they find children fighting, most teachers don’t handle it correctly. The correct way to handle fighting children is to calm the children down first. I often see that teachers who see the children fighting will directly ask “why do you hit?” while the other kid is crying. “why? Come on tell me why?” “why did you hit your friend until he cried?” when actually she should calm them down first, because children can’t actually talk while crying. So, basically, an early childhood teacher should understand the psychology of child development (Focus Group 1, Lines 51-58)
The participants were clear that a professional teacher should show her friendliness to children in order to build a caring relationship and strong attachment with them. In other words, a friendly character and good communication skills will help to improve relationships with children.

5.2.4 Patience and honesty

Other characteristics of a professional teacher mentioned in the data from focus groups and interviews are: patience and honesty. The participant mentioned that being patience is closely linked to the work of ECE teacher. The nature of children, who like to explore and try new experiences, involves a lot of movement. It takes extra patience and energy to deal with this movement. Also, differences in the characteristics of children contribute to the need for patience:

Perhaps that is why I see that most of the ECE teachers are women, and I rarely see men as ECE teachers, because you need a lot of patience with all sincerity. That is what I think makes one professional. I think that is what is important, being patient (Focus Group 3, Lines 216-221)

Honesty is a personal trait that is expected of every role model. Every parent expects their child to be honest, therefore children are also expected to learn from a model who talks and behaves honestly:

Being honest is important for us because we need to give a good example to children. We cannot be a role model if we are not honest. So, honesty is important (Focus Group 3, Lines 50-54)

Another participant also commented that being honest was an important characteristic or trait of a professional teacher:
Yes... maybe it was what you have said... you said that it is really important that teachers need to have a good character... first is having a big heart [patience], the second is being honest... as a teacher, we should focus on cultivating an honest character, (Interview 8, Lines 36-38)

From the findings above, we can see that the participants expected professional teachers to have patience with children. Professional teachers were also expected to be honest and exemplary to children.

5.3 The relationships of a role model teacher

Many studies have found that professional ECE teachers are expected to construct good relationships with children and others in their work environment (Brock, 2012; Dalli, 2008b; Oberhuemer, 2005; Pucket & Diffily, 2004; Rodd, 1997). Professionalism implies distinctive sets of relations with those people they are working with, such as children, parents or clients, as well as with colleagues—the relational dimension of professionalism (Pucket & Diffily, 2004).

5.3.1 Relationships with children

Various studies have found that interactions between teachers and children have profound effects on children(Dalli et al., 2011; Oberhuemer, 2005). Children develop self-concepts from the ways they are treated by others(Pucket & Diffily, 2004). Participants in this study were very aware of this relationship between their actions and the experiences of the children in their care and mentioned the importance of their communication with children, both verbal and non-verbal. Through verbal communication children not only learn languages, they also learn how conversations work by observing and interacting with adults, who are mature
speakers of the language (Massey, 2004). Participants of this study also promoted the uses of soft voices in verbal communication with children:

She should be friendly, friendly here means that she should lower her voice (Focus Group 1, Lines 169-170)

Using a soft voice in communication was seen as evidence of the caring character of the teacher, a character that is expected from professional ECE teachers. Therefore, yelling was seen to be out of the question. Yelling at students will not only hinder the development of close relationships between teachers and children, but also will be an inappropriate example of attitude for children:

I think we should show our caring character when working with children. We are not supposed to yell. A good character means to be a role model for children with our daily attitude at the centre (Focus Group 2, Lines 18-20)

One participant clearly explained how to maintain close relationships with children. Teachers are expected to remove all the dangerous items from the surrounding environment, such as sharp or small objects. This is to build a comfortable and safe environment for children where they can learn effectively. To communicate softly is also mentioned. However, being soft in communication does not mean that the teachers are not firm and decisive. A teacher should help children to make sense of the world and to find their own solution:

From my experience in my work place, a professional teacher should not hold things that may scare the children, like a piece of wood\textsuperscript{5} or sitting down while holding a stick that might harm the children or threaten them. So, a kindergarten teacher should be patient, with much persuasion, but at the same time not be too weak. A teacher

\textsuperscript{5} In old teaching practices, teachers would hold a long rattan or stick in their hand while teaching. The stick was used to hit the table to grab students’ attention or to hit students as punishment. These practices are now forbidden.
should not say ‘don’t cry because of this...’ She should be able to deliver the best information” (Focus Group 1, Lines 159-165)

Relationships with children are also built through non-verbal communication (Manning-Morton, 2006). One participant argued that body language, like gestures and facial expressions, are highly important in communication with children. She argued that body language will be a stronger way to communicate with children:

... [the professional teacher] should understand body language, she should be expressive, not only through facial expressions but also body movement, because expressions will also influence children. Children learn better with body language compared to our words” (Focus Group 1, Lines 169-172)

In addition, the participants of this study considered deep listening as crucial to building relationships with children. Listening closely to children is one pedagogical strategy (Dalli, 2008b) and skill expected from a professional (Oberhuemer, 2005). Giving children the chance to tell their own stories, and teachers acting as facilitators who promote activities, would build the child’s confidence. As facilitators, teachers will ask questions of the children and do anything possible to promote the activity further. To be able to do this, professional ECE teacher should be able to listen with interest to the children:

A professional teacher should not talk all the time. She should let the children talk and then she will respond to the children. For example, when a child said that yesterday he went to a place, the teacher would reply to the story and ask questions about where, with whom, and all about the trip. The teacher should not talk all the time (Focus Group 2, Lines 70-73)

Clearly, the findings showed that teachers use both verbal and non-verbal communication when building relationships with children. One participant proposed that a professional

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6 The participant was saying when responding to a crying child one should not ask him/her to stop crying but first understand the reasons why he/she is crying and respond accordingly.
teacher should talk in a soft voice yet decisively with children. Teachers are also expected to use body language and listening with attention and interest to children in addition to using gestures and maintaining a friendly manner.

5.3.2 Relationships with colleagues

Good collaboration among ECE professional teachers is identified as a desirable element of the environment that will be beneficial for children (Thomas, 2012). It is the duty of teachers to build an environment of trust and mutual respect, and Brock (2012) argues that this is inherent in a professional role (Brock, 2012). Oberhuemer (2005) translates this collaboration among teachers as a distribution of leadership, which promotes a participatory culture in learning. Participants of this study mentioned three factors that should be considered by professional ECE teachers in building their relationships with colleagues: cooperation, personal knowledge, and sharing.

5.3.2.1 Cooperation

According to the regulations (MoEC, 2007, 2009), the ECE teacher is expected to be highly competent socially and to maintain a fair treatment and not be discriminative despite differences in the origins, cultures, gender and religious background of the children in her care. Teachers are expected to have well-developed interaction skills so that they will be able to communicate effectively and empathetically with children, parents and colleagues. Adaptability is one of the indicators of social competence (MoEC, 2007, 2009). Another quality of the socially competent ECE teacher is the ability to communicate and affiliate with
a professional organization. In Indonesia, as reported by one of the participants in this study, a professional teacher is expected to:

- be a master of social competence, where she needs to cooperate with peer teachers. (Focus Group 3, Lines, 22-23)

Teamwork is an important skill for professional teachers because good teamwork at the centre is considered beneficial to the children (Brock, 2012) because teamwork can integrate teachers’ different skills through effective communication. One teacher gives a good example of a simple cooperation among them:

> Here is an example of cooperation: if one teacher is tidying up the toys and the other is unoccupied, perhaps she can help the teacher by arranging the chairs and clean up. It is not helpful when one teacher is tidying up and the other is pretending to write at her table. This happens often. One teacher is more diligent than the other and is left to domost of the work on her own (Focus Group 3, Lines 97-101)

Building trust among colleagues is also important to maintain cooperation. Trust is built when there is: “respect for each other, tolerance, and open discussion when there is problem” (Focus Group 1, Lines 91). Teachers maintain each other’s trust by working together to improve their practice by discussing materials and knowledge, including the results of trainings and other new knowledge: Participants also commented that respect is important in maintaining good relationship with colleagues. Maintaining each other’s “pride” in front of children is one form of respect as reported by one participant:

> A good relationship between a professional teacher with other teachers is built by not humiliating her fellow teachers in front of the children. We should not rebuke each other as teachers in front of the children. We should be careful with words and topics when we converse on the grounds of the school, not gossiping, and not talking about problems that are not related to work. Rather, at work one should talk about work matters such as trainings or other knowledge (Focus group 1, Lines 85-88)
Participants commented that teamwork, trust and respect are important in maintaining cooperation among colleagues. Professional teachers are expected to work together to improve their knowledge through communication.

### 5.3.2.2 Knowing each other as a person

Participants in this study believed that relationships between colleagues developed through interactions in the centre; therefore, understanding each individual becomes crucial. By understanding their colleagues, teachers are able to respect each other’s individual characteristics. In addition, personal and professional ethics should also be maintained as a boundary for relationships:

> I want to explain that among us teachers, we should understand each other, have tolerance, help each other, share what we know with teachers who don't have the same understanding, and cooperate well (Focus Group 3, Lines 91-95)

One participant also added that the adaptability of a teacher in her working environment was crucial in maintaining relationships among colleagues. This skill will make them able to personally interact with colleagues and maintain good relationships:

> In my opinion, it is the same when we interact with children. We should know about other teachers’ personalities [souls]. We should know about each teacher’s individual temperament, so when we interact with her, we should choose our words carefully. When a teacher is easy to get along with, and is humorous, we should also make jokes. The point is the ability to adapt to each situation and person (Focus Group 1, Lines 80-84)

As relationships among personnel in the centre are important, participants considered personal understanding among colleagues as one factor that improves relationships. By personally understanding colleagues, participants are expected to be able to adapt to any situation they are involved in.
5.3.2.3 Sharing

As Lazzari (2012) argued, sharing is crucial in building professionalism among ECE teachers. She argued that diversity in skills and competences among teachers is a useful resource to improve other teachers’ skills. This argument is also echoed by Thomas (2012) who noted that through sharing teachers will have the chance to complement each other. In line with this argument, teachers in the focus group similarly commented that sharing knowledge and information will help teachers build their professionalism.

Sharing is for example that I am here experiencing and getting knowledge from you about your research. If I go to the centre tomorrow, I will share the knowledge I got with my friends and also about the topic that we are going to teach that day. So we can complement each other (Focus Group 3, Lines 102-105)

Sharing means we should complement each other. For example: I don’t know [something] but the other teacher knows and has more experience than me, so we share with each other. We accept that as human beings we don’t each have the same experience but through sharing the experiences that we do have, we can know what we don’t know before (Focus Group 3, Lines 107-110)

Sharing will also provide a chance for reflection (Lazzari, 2012). During shared moments, other teachers can give feedback or respond about information shared by the other. For example, one participant mentioned that during the sharing process, comments and opinions by other teachers are also welcomed. This will create a supportive environment for collective reflection and add the value of maintaining good relationships among colleagues and strengthen the existing relationships:

A professional teacher should be able to share her knowledge that she has attained with other fellow teachers. For example, we could share our experience and opinions during the sharing process. (Focus Group 2, Lines 86-84)
As fellow teachers, there should be cooperation between one teacher and another to give information and share our thoughts on children’s behaviour and how to handle them. (Focus Group 2, Lines 87-88)

Two benefits from sharing that we could understand from the findings are that sharing will give teachers opportunities to understand and gain knowledge that they did not previously have. Sharing also gives an opportunity for them to reflect with each other based on the discussion opportunity during the discussion.

5.3.3 Relationships with parents

Involvement of parents in children’s learning is important (Caulfield, 1997). It is the responsibility of a professional to engage in effective communication with parents and all parties related to the development of children (Oberhuemer, 2005). When professional caregivers form partnerships with parents, children benefit from the consistency in common goals between home and the early childhood programme. Parents’ involvement in the program enhances its quality when they volunteer and share their expertise (Caulfield, 1997). Thomas (2012) illustrates three types of teacher-parents relationships which also correspond to the data of this research: parent participation, parent education, and parent empowerment.

5.3.3.1 Parent participation

Parent participation is expected based on the idea that children will gain more benefit when their parents are more involved in the activities of the centre (Thomas, 2012). Knopf and Swick (2006) suggested that initial contact with parents should be positive and conducted as early
as possible. They argued that the first interaction that teachers have with families sets the mood for further relationships.

The study participants understood that the start of school term is ideal for establishing mutual understanding with parents. They agreed that it was important to conduct a meeting in each semester to provide all the necessary information to the parents, and to explain to the parents all the expectations of the school. In addition, administrative and financial information is mostly provided during this meeting:

What we have done is to conduct a meeting with parents twice a year. The first meeting is on the first day of school. We gather all the parents and explain all the rules of school, such as the payment of fees (Focus Group 2, Lines 92-94)

We usually set out the rules during the first day of school. We invite the parents to come to school. The first thing that we tell them is about finance and administration. Then, we will also do a house visit if we find a student didn’t show up at school for a week or two so we can ask the parents why their children did not come to school (Focus Group 2, Lines 105-109)

This initial relationship is further strengthened and built on every day. Teachers will maintain communication and interaction with parents at the start of the day. Also, communication is maintained through a communication book that children take home daily. The book is called the “connecting book”. Through the book, teachers will inform parents about what happened at school during the day. Usually, parents will also record the children’s activities at home and give their comments when necessary on activities that are conducted at school. Some of the teachers added that when considered necessary, other meetings were conducted with parents at specific times during the school year:

It is customary in our kindergarten that when the parents bring their children to the centre, we will welcome them at the gate and greet them. We will also smile, greet and converse with them when they pick up their child. We also communicate with
parents through our connecting book. We also conduct a monthly meeting with parents and on special occasion, like when we have an outing together with parents. We use those times to share and converse with parents. We have a very harmonious and close working relationship (Focus Group 3, Lines 119-119)

The importance of initial communications was further explained by the participant in the next quote. She understood completely that parents are the best source of information concerning the wellbeing of their children. Therefore, she argued that whenever teacher needed information, a true professional would seek help from parents, in this case concerning children’s health condition:

There are children who are sick; if we know this, and if we know this from the parents, we will give special attention. We have in our registration form the children’s history of illness. We should know the children, for example, has he got asthma or not. So, a professional teacher is already working to know the children and the parents starting from the beginning or registration period (Focus Group 2, Lines 114-119)

Similarly to teachers’ relationships with colleagues, trust-building is essential in the relationships of parents and teachers. The initial meeting is the key point when this trust building starts. Participants reported that they would inform parents about ‘the rules of the game’ of the school. Commitment of the teachers to conduct the rules will then preserve the trust they have built with parents:

We will show our commitment to the parents at the time they register their children in our centre. We will tell them that we have rules about this and that. We ourselves will also follow the rules and when the parents see that the rule is truly implemented, they will also be friendly to us. They will think “hmm the teachers are truly implementing their school vision and mission”, this will make parents accept us well (Focus Group 3, Lines 120-128)

The findings showed that the teachers firmly believed that the parents’ participation was best triggered by setting mutual understandings at the beginning of the year and maintaining and strengthening it through communication in order to build trust with the parents.
5.3.3.2 Parent education

Through engaging in teacher education, teachers are considered to have better knowledge which can then be shared with parents so they can better support their children, and to be more effective parents (Thomas, 2012). Participants commented that teachers should make more effort to educate parents. The first thing to do is to avoid misunderstanding of what happened at school and what to expect from the parents at home:

If the parents don’t come to school, I will call them in order to establish good communication and to establish a good reputation. If parents understand what the teachers do, they will not give a bad name to the school at the end of term. We also need to communicate with parents so that they will understand their children character at school. (Focus Group 3, Lines 153-157)

After good communication is well established, professional teachers will start to share knowledge and information with parents about the children’s education. The participants spoke about having a regular meeting time for this purpose:

In our school, we have a special time for sharing with parents. Usually once a week. We have a discussion with parents in the classroom” (Focus Group 3, Lines 140-151)

During these meetings the teachers mostly inform the parents about their methods of teaching and the material given to the children at school. The teachers’ expectation was that there would then be similarity in the children’s education between what happened at home and at school. This similarity would avoid confusion for the children, which participants believed was a disadvantage to children. One participant said:

It is so that we will have continuity at home, for example if we teach children English at school, and at home they are being taught Indonesian while their nannies taught them in other language, that will make the children confused with what they learn at home and at school. So we will communicate with parents, for example: Miss, we taught your children how to count like this and this, please teach your children at home with the same method, otherwise they will be confused. It will make the
children say “mum, this is not how our teacher tell me to do it”. I will tell the parents to teach them at home exactly in the same way as at school. So, there will be no miscommunication s 3, Lines 129-138)

Thomas (2012) argued that in parent education the teacher-parent relationship positions the teachers to be at a ‘higher’ level compared to parents. Teachers are acting as an expert while parents as those who are lacking knowledge. To some degree, I could see this dynamic operating within the context of my study. For example one participant mentioned that in her school, they plan for parents to have a consultation with the teacher. This means that teachers are seen as experts who know better than parents about the children’s education:

The teacher-parent relationship at our school is good, we don’t experience any problems. We share the parents’ thoughts at our monthly meeting. We also conduct a parenting programme. We bring experts who possess knowledge on children to speak to the parents… Then, every day, teachers should spend some time for teacher-parents consultation after school time when necessary” (Focus Group 1, Lines 115-120)

However, the teachers also noted that it was important to remember that parents live closely with their children on a daily basis and that they have more specific knowledge about their children than the teachers. Some participants noted that they conducted a sharing session with parents because they realised that information from parents was vital to understand children better:

However, we do understand that we need to make an intense connection with the parents because both of us should understand the children’s context … When we find a child behaving badly, we might discuss it with the parents:Why does this child behave like this or if there is an influence from surrounding community (Focus group 2, Lines 95-100)

In parent education activities, professional teachers promoted communication as a means to avoid misunderstanding with parents. Teachers also shared their knowledge with parents.
This was to maintain the same level of educational input for children both at school and home. Parents were then expected to share information about their child at home.

5.3.3.3 Parent empowerment

Parent empowerment grows where there is “evidence of genuine efforts to develop partnerships between parents and early childhood professionals” (Thomas, 2012, p.90). However, Thomas argued that this type of relationship can be frustrating as it places a huge responsibility on the ECE professional and, only those with appropriate skills are capable of managing this relationship. One teacher commented on the reasons why relationships with parents should be built:

Professional teachers should work closely with parents about the children’s development. So the teacher should not only tell the parents about the good side, but present a realistic picture of the child to avoid miscommunication about what the school is teaching while at home something else is being taught. The children can get confused (Focus Group 1, Lines 95-98)

Empowering parents usually started with communicating about their children’s experiences at the centre. Participants commented that parents needed to know whether their children were doing well or not. Once parents are fully informed about their child’s wellbeing, teachers can then discuss with them what parents can do to assist children at home:

I will not communicate with parents through the parenting program [in this school parents were invited to attend seminars or discussions on parenting issue, usually led by a resource person from outside of the school].. I will communicate anytime, anywhere. For example when the parents come to pick up their children. I will tell them that their children have progressed in this and that or that their children have a little setback in a certain area. I will request parents’ assistance about the children’s growth, and I believe that they are happy and grateful for this. (Focus Group 3, Lines 158-163)
Similarly, another participant explained that communication with parents started through any means available at school, for example the communication, or “connecting” book. Through this book, parents are able to monitor their children’s progress on a daily basis. Commenting on what a parent might do to help at school, one participant said:

There are a lot of ways to do it, through the connecting book, phone, or text. In our school, we have a ‘connecting book’ that should be filled in by parents, or at least be signed by them. With that, we would know whether the parents read about their children’s activities at the school and other information. The book should be signed daily. If, in three days they haven’t signed the book, we will mark the book with a big question mark. We also conduct a monthly meeting with parents specifically to discuss their children’s development, either about a portfolio or other thing. So, children’s education is not merely the responsibility of the teacher, but also both sides. (Focus Group 1, Lines 99-113)

Findings showed that communication started the process of parents’ empowerment. Communicating an overall picture of the child, both the good and not so good side of children, and expecting parents’ contribution to education helps teachers empower parents to contribute to their children’s education.

5.3.4 Relationships with community

The MoEC (2007, 2009) regulations noted that professional ECE teachers are role models and thus have an obligation to maintain values and moralities of the community where the school is located. This means that teachers should build good and strong interactions with the “local” community. However, participants of this study did not discuss much about their relationships with the surrounding community. Those who did comment on this issue said that professional ECE teachers should be a role model within their local environment, thus mirroring the official position stated in MoEC (2009) that a professional should act and behave according to the religious and cultural values. One participant commented:
Our attitude toward the environment, for example, needs to be that of a good role model, with good behaviour. And also, to our neighbour, we need to do 5 Ss: Senyum, Sapa, Salam, Sopan and Santun [smile, greet, salaam, polite and well-mannered] (Focus Group 3, Lines 167-169)

Another way to maintain contact with the local community is through involvement in community activities. One participant commented that they once participated in Earth Day by educating children about the importance of sustainability, and how to preserve the natural environment. At least two benefits are expected from this activity. One is the awareness of children about ecological environment; another is recognition from the local community about the value of the school:

A good relationship with the natural environment should start with the closest environment. Let me give you an example. Yesterday was World Environment day. So, on such a day we should educate our children about the natural environment like we will plant trees and flowers and also clean the natural environment where we live and at school. We should educate children so that they should love plants because plants provide us with oxygen and shade. Children can learn many lessons from the environment. The community can also see and will think that our school is good because we have implemented what is being expected by the government (Focus group 3, Lines 179-185)

Another participant from Focus Group 3 likewise argued that cooperation with the local community was important in order for the centre to grow. The centre was seen to gain a good reputation and thus gain ‘free’ advertising within the community. In the end this would bring financial advantages to the centre:

We cannot just judge that this school is good without looking at the nearby environment. It would also be impossible that a school doesn’t cooperate with its environment, because we will not be able to develop. The environment will give us information from outside of school, usually about the learning process at school and the outcome of children there (Focus Group 3, Lines 188-194)

Another participant emphasised the idea that interaction with the community helped them to advertise and take benefit from it:
Usually we will conduct a programme, for example, we will have hajj lesson [Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca]. During that programme, we will involve local sites and places so the community will see the school and they will know that our school is good. They will understand that the children are not only studying. So they will know what we do at school. I think it is very important to establish a good reputation with the community (Focus group 3, Lines 195-199)

It is evident that participants understood the importance of the community or society surrounding the centre. In describing what professional relationships with the community should look like, they argued that professional teachers should maintain good conduct and establish contact with the community through involvement in activities related with the community. Participants understood the profit they might gain from the relationship with the community both in terms of the general good name of their school and in terms of recruitment of children.

5.4 The Professional as a role model, is it feasible?

As has been discussed in this chapter, participants in this study considered being professional as equating to being a role model. Participants listed characteristics and personal traits that should be possessed by a role model. In addition, teachers also mentioned that it was a role model’s duty to build relationships with children, parents, colleagues and communities. During the focus groups and interviews, several participants questioned whether they were already professional or not. Looking at the description of a role model, one participant interpreted the idea of being a role model as being a “perfect” human being, a perfect ECE teacher. With that in mind, she showed reluctance in answering the question of whether she considered herself a professional. In the end she refused to describe herself as a professional:

To say that I am a professional seems to be heading towards saying I am perfect. Human beings haven’t reached that yet, because it is impossible. We can only do what
we can do, and what we have learnt. Our responsibility as ECE teachers is to give the best we can. (Focus group 3, Lines 308-310)

Also not feeling comfortable with answering the question, another participant proposed the idea that whether or not one is a professional should be the judgment of other people, not herself. One should not self-judge:

> If you ask me, I think I am a professional but it is other people who should assess me. I can only do everything in my responsibility in accordance to my current ability. Professional or not, let others do the judgment. I am just doing what I can (Focus Group 3, Lines 313-317)

The view that having an attitude of continuous learning is part of the conduct of a role model, was also part of what participants saw as the profile of a professional. As long as a teacher was working in the field of ECE, she should keep on practising to be better:

> We can do it every day. Perhaps, while teaching, she can practice the qualities [good behaviour and conducts]... on her attitude towards children. What can she give to children... hmmm... like equal care to all children... a teacher should possess good qualities that will be a good example for children (Interview 3, Lines 46-49)

Similarly, since being a role model is a path to perfection, and judgment of professionalism is at the hand of outsiders view, professionalism is always in the process, always in the making.

Participants realize that as human beings, they still have room for improvement:

> We are not professionals yet, because, as long as we are alive... since we are human beings, we are still full of shortcomings. We are learning day by day. Even though I have been teaching for years, every day with children, there still is a lot to learn.(Interview 6, Lines 25-27)

Participants were thus reluctant to say whether they were professional or not. They were concerned that to claim to be professional meant claiming to be a perfect human being. They are also commented that professionalism could only be judged by others and a professional should keep on improving her knowledge and her character.
5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the study findings about the teacher characteristics which the participants saw as marking out the professional teacher. It also discussed the type of working relationships perceived to go along with these characteristics. *Ikhlas* was identified by the teachers as a key source of motivation. The results also show that commitment and creativity were seen as important to maintain the classroom activities at the expected standards. In addition, professional teachers were also expected to be friendly, patient and honest. As role models, professional teachers were expected to establish relationships with children, colleagues, parents and the local community. Verbal and non-verbal communications were both recognized as ways of communication with children. Teacher – teacher cooperation was supported with their willingness to share and the intention to get to know colleagues as individual personalities. Strong participation of parents in the centre was seen as promoted through parent education and empowerment. Teachers, as part of the community, were also encouraged to build relationships with their surroundings. Lastly, some of the participants showed their reluctance to self-identify as a professional because of the fear that this would equate to claiming to be a perfect human being.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Chapter overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate Indonesian ECE teachers’ perspectives on early childhood professionalism. The research methodology drew on phenomenological principles. In Chapters Four and Five I examined the insights of Indonesian ECE teachers about the notion of professionalism and characteristics of a professional teacher. In this final chapter, the findings from this study are discussed within the context of the international literature on the notion of professionalism. This chapter concludes with the argument that professionalism is a phenomenon that exists in its action. It subsequently explores implications for future research, implications for policy and limitations of the study.

6.2 Professionalism as a journey

Teachers in this study nominated a set of actions that they associated with professional behaviour in an early childhood teacher. In this way this view of professionalism was of a phenomenon that is expressed in its actions (Urban & Dalli, 2012). Additionally, they saw professionalism not as a point that once achieved, one’s duty is complete; rather, they saw it as set of actions to achieve certain goals that teachers considered desirable. This appears to illustrate that professionalism, according to the teachers, is a journey forward towards an improved state. Participants in my study mentioned two goals that a teacher should achieve in this journey: a better classroom, and becoming a better person. Both of these goals were
perceived to be fuelled by motivation from various sources, ranging from personal to greater reasons related to religious belief or government initiatives.

The journey towards a better classroom centred on pedagogy and teachers’ knowledge. Teachers in my study emphasised the importance of attaining base knowledge prior to working as a professional in the field. They were promoting attainment of specific knowledge, embracing factors that help knowledge attainment, and understanding factors that hinder knowledge acquisition. Further, they saw professional teachers as implementing their knowledge through careful preparation of teaching materials, pedagogy in the classroom, and evaluation. On the other hand, the professional journey towards becoming a better person was centred on the belief that teachers are role models. The participants believed that professional teachers exhibited good conduct and possess characteristics that promoted good relationships with children, parents, colleagues and community.

6.3 Motivation that fuelled the journey

In exploring the participants’ views on what motivated them towards professional behaviour, the teachers nominated different sources of personal motivation. One participant mentioned that teachers’ motivation came from their feeling that as ECE teachers they were special. Special here means that they are working in a field that requires specialised knowledge and had the ultimate goal of building the future of the nation. Others mentioned that the condition of their centre was the source of their motivation. They understood that their working context and the context of the centre, needed improvement to provide a better service to children.
Other sources of motivation for teachers to achieve professionalism were altruistic. Participants in my study argued that the reasons they had stayed in the field were altruistic, using the term of *ikhlas* to explain this. As has been explained, *ikhlas* is an Islamic term which means that every action is encompassed and intended as a devotion to God. From this perspective education is a way to build future devotees, and Islamic teachers are therefore obliged to teach the next generation as true believers. The concept of *ikhlas* entered the discussion when the participants explained their reasons to pledge their commitment to their work. The teachers argued that by practising *ikhlas*, teachers expected that, instead of awaiting rewards from humans, their work would be rewarded by God.

Literature supports the idea that personal motivation is crucial to teachers’ development (Guskey, 1991). This personal drive is seen to translate into a willingness to change personally and improve oneself, which is essential to becoming professional (Castle, 2009; Rodd, 1997). Although, in this study, teachers were still expecting the government’s involvement to improve the working conditions of ECE, their own personal motivations related to *ikhlas* helped them overcome the poor payment and condition of the field (Cameron, 2006). They considered their work as a genuine altruistic commitment to caring for others.

### 6.4 Teachers’ journey toward professionalism

#### 6.4.1 The Journey towards a better classroom

Participants in my study believed that the journey in improving the classroom context started with attaining sufficient basic knowledge. There were two opposing views on how to attain basic knowledge: (i) through attaining a bachelor degree from a university or (ii) a high school
certificate and subsequent additional training. Apparently, the first view that a bachelor degree acted to provide a base knowledge for a teacher’s career was influenced by the government policy, which required ECE teachers to have graduated from ECE or psychology major from universities in order to be eligible for certification as a teacher. This idea of the need of educational background to ensure base knowledge is supported in the literature (Bredekamp & Willer, 1993). What Bredekamp and Willer (1993) considered as a proper educational background was an undergraduate degree, a view that is also supported by many other contemporary researchers (Cable & Miller, 2011; Dalli, 1993; Katz, 1985; Oberhuemer, 2005; Saracho & Spodek, 2007) and which has translated into a policy in many countries, for example Indonesia (Law/14, 2005; MoEC, 2007, 2009) and New Zealand (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Dalli, 2008b; Grey, 2013).

However, participants in my study commented that being a qualified teacher is not equal to having good teaching practice in the classroom. They reported that they had experienced newly graduated teachers in the classroom and proposed that teaching experience is more important than qualification. They saw experience as gained through years of working in the field supplemented by professional development. They argued that qualification alone cannot guarantee the competence and skill of a teacher and therefore that a high school certificate and additional training would be sufficient for teachers to gain the necessary base knowledge. This view also acted as a protest to the exclusivity of the certification policy, which only allowed eligibility for kindergarten teachers. Participants in my study believed that it was iniquitous that teachers all shared the same responsibilities and duties, yet only those those working in kindergartens had received attention from the government.
Participants’ arguments that professionalism could be identified with teachers’ working experience are supported in the existing research literature. In her study to identify characteristics of professionalism from ECE teachers’ point of view in England, Brock (2011) argued that experience is valuable to enhance professional growth. Working closely with other childhood educators, as an employed aide, or through formal or informal mentoring, constitute valuable first-hand experiences for teachers. During their years of experience, teachers will have many opportunities to observe, explore, inquire, and experiment with ideas while teaching (Brock, 2011). In discussion with my participants about whether a particular number of years were considered sufficient to be called a professional no agreed time period emerged though one participant mentioned three years. This was contradicted by another participant who had nine years of experience and still did not consider herself as professional.

Participants in this study also considered the journey toward professionalism to be about obtaining specialised knowledge and mastery of related skills; in other words not only the mastery of the knowledge about children, but also the practice in the classroom. Teachers of ECE are expected to be able to prepare and maintain appropriate surroundings and enable children to experience the best education in their life. They can create these conditions by applying age-appropriate decisions for children in their centre. They also indicated their belief that understanding the theories of child growth, development and learning would enable teachers to predict the likely development of children, while also remaining fully aware that children grow and develop at different rates.
This focus by the participants on the knowledge of children’s developmental stages and characteristics is understandable, as Indonesia’s ECE curriculum is based on the approach of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (Formen & Nuttall, 2014). DAP is a pedagogy and curriculum that is significantly based on stages of child development. It was developed in the US and is used for programmes serving children from birth to eight years (Nutbrown, 2006). Its main ideas are based on understanding age-based child development and learning, knowledge of the individual child, and knowledge about the child’s environment (Bredekamp, 1996).

However, Fromberg (2003) warns of the need to continually evaluate the knowledge base of ECE because of its continuously changing nature. The body of knowledge is mainly about “individual children’s predetermined development” (p.186). Today’s society is more diverse and requires more attention to children’s backgrounds, such as sociocultural context and family cultures. Fromberg and others have argued that teachers need to consider more interdisciplinary and holistic knowledge to be able to attain a stronger platform from which to function as an ECE teacher. Fromberg (2003) further adds that professional ECE teachers should consider the flexibility of materials and ideas that are going to be used in the classroom. Flexibility is necessary in the current field of ECE, which Fromberg (2003) calls unpredictable.

Within the Indonesian context these ideas are worth reflecting upon especially in relation to the appropriateness of the use of DAP, a curriculum which is based on views of children in the ‘western’ world. The differences in historical, cultural and demographic background between Indonesia and the USA, where DAP was developed, raise questions that need further study.
Indonesia is culturally diverse, as many cultures and languages exist creating definite challenges for teachers to overcome; a ‘one size fits all’ approach will not work.

Participants also understood that to support the journey of gaining knowledge toward a better quality classroom they needed to consider internal and external factors that impacted the teaching context. For example, they reflected on the current state of the ECE field and understood that changes had occurred, which had transformed the field since the time they started teaching. Various authors have commented on this type of reflection as necessary for continual self-improvement. For example, Reed (2011) noted that reflective practice “involves exploring one’s own practice and the practice of others, and critically examining how to respond professionally and personally to managing change, developing leadership, fostering teamwork and working with children” (p. 148). Similarly, Moyles (2001) argued the importance of reflection in learning and enhancing professionalism. Teachers gain insights when they engage in reflective and reflexive processes to cast light upon that which needs examination. In this way thoughts can be clarified, new comprehension evoked, practice re-evaluated and solutions determined (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013).

As mentioned by participants, to be able to continue their professional development, teachers need support from many parties, including the school, colleagues and community. They saw this support as influenced by the leadership of the school. Principals with good leadership were reported to be able to broaden teachers’ opportunities for professional development and help them improve their practice. On the contrary, with the absence of this quality, teachers felt unable to improve. By themselves teachers did not have the funds to
attend professional development and were not be able to access training programmes as this information tends to go directly to school principals and to teachers’ association.

Literature supports the view expressed by the study participants that colleagues and leaders in ECE centres play important role in helping teachers to improve. Rodd (1997) stated that the leader in ECE centres plays a vital role in creating an appropriate atmosphere for continuous professional development. She also promoted ECE practitioners’ involvement in two different levels of ECE: the centre level, and the political and policy level. At the centre level, teachers are expected to be able to understand and apply practices that are closest to teachers’ understanding of quality. Rodd also argued that at the policy level, teachers can influence matters related to them through their involvement in teachers’ association, which can then advocate on their behalf. Teachers will be able to gain more information and make necessary changes to their field if necessary. Likewise, collaborative learning where teachers and other professionals learn together is important because, on these occasions, teachers will share their experiences in learning opportunities (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013). Similarly, Lazzari (2012) argued that in collaborative learning teachers are able to support each other’s learning, including supporting new teachers towards professionalism through the process of reflecting on all the practices among all the teachers.

In their journey towards professionalism, teachers also require access to training and support for this from the Government (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013). Unfortunately, the participants in my study still reported factors that hindered their professionalism. They claimed unequal opportunities for professional development and insufficient support from the Government. For example, one teacher mentioned favouritism by government officials
towards family members and close acquaintances when choosing participants for training programmes.

All the participants considered that pedagogy related to their professionalism and saw professionalism as enacted in the classroom through the teaching process. How the teacher understands and implements curriculum in her daily activities is crucial to her identity as a professional. Taking responsibility for daily chores and duties also marks professionalism. The commitment to be punctual, and the commitment to complete all the administrative work were both considered important.

In the end, participants in my study believed that professionalism can only be exhibited in the classroom. Participants had a strong belief that putting effort in the preparation prior to classroom teaching would increase the opportunities of successful learning. A good plan was seen to support a good teaching process, which also enhances the interaction with children. As Dalli (2008) argued, professionalism includes how teachers build relationships with the children. Further, Dalli (2008) described strategies which were seen as exemplifying how professional teachers conducted their pedagogy. In Dalli’s New Zealand study, a professional ECE teacher was one who encouraged herself to maintain close relationships with the children through a focus on practices as such as listening and speaking “at the child’s level” (p.177). These strategies, or teaching methods, were also understood by the participants in my study as indicators of being a professional teacher with knowledge and skills seen as necessary to be able to conduct the best teaching practice for the children’s benefit.
6.4.2 Journey towards becoming a better person

The notion that the journey towards professionalism involved a journey to become a better person derived from the idea expressed in both interviews and focus group sessions that a teacher is a role model. The view that teachers are role models is widely upheld across Indonesia (Baswedan, 2013; Khodijah, 2014). A simple search in the Google search engine on articles about *guru* (the word for teacher in Bahasa Indonesia) will mostly discuss teachers as agents of change and as responsible for instilling good conduct in every child. In Javanese philosophy, the word ‘guru’ itself is widely understood as “*digugu lan ditiru*”, from the word *gugu* (believe or heed) and *tiru* (to be imitated). This means that a teacher should be trusted and imitated, which suggests that a teacher should be an example in their surroundings, mainly to the students (Khodijah, 2014). And, as mentioned earlier, to be able to become a role model, a teacher is expected to behave according to local moralities and culture (MoEC, 2007).

Participants mentioned at least three reasons why they needed to be a role model. First, as role models, children will look up to teachers and see them as what they themselves want to be, and who they want to be with (Wilford, 2007). Similarly to the current Minister of Education and Culture’s argument (Baswedan, 2013) that children learn from the teachers’ behaviour as role models, Wilford (2007) emphasises teachers’ attitudes as important factors of a role model. Teachers should pay close attention and think carefully about their manners (Wilford, 2007). Furthermore, Wilford believes that as role models, teachers need to be aware of their impact on children socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.
Another reason for being a role model arises from the belief that children are pure and like a blank slate. As noted earlier (see section 5.2) the belief that children learn from copying adults and modelling what they do is common in Indonesia (Formen & Nuttall, 2014). It is taken for granted that children will copy all the teachers’ actions: right or wrong, big or small. Participants in my study believed that teachers should be eager to keep themselves in check and avoid misconduct, so as to not let the children copy inappropriate or unwanted behaviour.

Further, Formen and Nuttall (2014) analysed that the idea of childhood innocence can be seen as both positive and negative. It is positive insofar as the idea of innocence means that, in contrast to adults, children are religiously sinless and should never be punished for their ignorance of religious knowledge of practices. On the other hand, the idea of innocence is detrimental to young children’s educational practice if it positions children as ‘empty vessels’ emphasising their lack of knowledge and competence. This results in the type of education that focuses only on giving students information, not about the skills to gain information.

The third reason is the imperative embedded in the regulations (MoEC, 2007, 2009) that teachers should engage in moral teaching of children. The study participants, likewise argued that a teacher should always consult local moralities and culture (MoEC, 2007) and were convinced that it was their obligation as teachers to preserve the local norms and cultures, and help educate children about traditional values and moralities.

Thus, being a role model was perceived to carry the obligation to conduct oneself in rightful manners. In line with this, participants mentioned a set of qualities that characterised being a role model. Generally, these characteristics can be divided into two categories:
characteristics related to the improvement of the teaching and learning condition in the classroom, and characteristics related to personal traits. Commitment to the work and creativity are characteristics of a professional which are intended to enhance their work. Teachers’ commitment to their work helped them to keep maintain discipline and responsibility in their performance. Participants mentioned that teachers showed their commitment through coming to the centre on time and preparing materials for teaching. These commitments were also seen to be underpinned by the concept of *ikhlas*. Being *ikhlas* means that teachers will be able to endure all the demanding work of professional ECE teachers. Without complaining, teachers will conduct their duties in the best possible manner, all as a way to show their devotion to the Creator. Although not necessarily underpinned by the same concept of *ikhlas*, commitment to work is also valued in the Western world of early childhood education. Brock (2012) found that commitment is one of the characteristics of a professional ECE teacher. Osgood (2004) acknowledges the character of a strong personal commitment of an ECE professional teacher as a way to improve their professionalism.

Role model characteristics highlighted by the participants were friendliness, patience and honesty. A friendly character was perceived to promote a good relationship with children, which will further help a teacher to understand her students better. Similarly, participants in my study closely related patience and honesty as characteristics necessary to interact and deal with children. Participants believed that these traits are expected of a role model to build good relationships with children and as well as the local community. This is consistent with Pucket and Diffily (2004) argument that professionalism implies distinctive sets of relations
with those people who are the subject of professional intervention, such as children, parents or clients, as well as with colleagues.

In the relationship with children, participants of this study mentioned two types of communication that a professional teacher and a role model should be mindful of: verbal and non-verbal. Through verbal communication children learn how conversations work by observing and interacting with adults, who are mature speakers of the language (Massey, 2004). They also argued for the importance of nonverbal communication with children and treating children not merely as objects who receive treatment from adults, but as subjects who can contribute to interactions with the adults working with them.

In addition, participants of this study also considered deep listening as crucial to building relationships with children. Listening closely to children is one strategy of pedagogy (Dalli, 2008) and a skill expected from a professional (Oberhuemer, 2005). Giving children the chance to tell their own stories with teachers acting as facilitators to promote that activity, would build the child’s confidence. As facilitators, teachers will ask questions or do anything possible to further promote this activity. To be able to do this, professional ECE teachers should be able to listen intensely to the children.

Participants of this study mentioned four factors that should be considered by professional ECE teachers when building their relationships with colleagues: cooperation, respect, close relationships and sharing. By cooperation, they meant that children will benefit when teachers cooperate because it will promote stronger bonds among teachers and this would affect them in the form of better classrooms. Respect for one another will promote close relationships and build a conducive environment at the centre. In turn this will further
enhance opportunities for teachers to share their knowledge among colleagues. Participants saw it as the duty of teachers to build an environment of trust and mutual respect, which is inherent in the professional role (Brock, 2012). Oberhuemer (2005) talked about this collaboration among teachers as distribution of leadership, which promotes a participatory culture in learning. Sharing is important in building relationships among teachers and Lazzari (2012) considers it as crucial in building professionalism among ECE teachers. This argument is also echoed by Thomas (2012) who claimed that by sharing, teachers will have the chance to complement each other. In line with this argument, teachers in the focus group similarly commented that sharing knowledge and information will help teachers build their professionalism.

Participants in the study also suggested that role model teachers should promote participation of parents in children’s learning (Caulfield, 1997). It was seen as the responsibility of a professional to establish and maintain effective communication with parents and all parties related to the development of children, as argued by Oberhuemer (2005). When professionals form partnerships with parents, children benefit from the consistency in common goals between home and the programme (Caulfield, 1997). Thomas (2012) illustrates three types of teacher-parent relationships that also correspond to the data of this research: parent participation, parent education and parent empowerment.

That professional teachers should encourage parent participation was based on the idea that children will benefit when their parents are more involved in the activities of the centre, a view that is well established in existing literature, ed., Thomas (2012). As noted in Chapter 5, participants reported that they always started the year with meetings with parents. Further,
the meetings would be conducted regularly every week, month or six months. Knopf and Swick (2006) suggested that initial contact with parents sets the mood for further relationships and should be conducted as early as possible. Knopf and Swick (2006) add that a positive interaction will last throughout the school year, and will have good effects on the relationships of teachers and parents. They further argued that teachers can build more on these early contacts by conducting meetings and promoting parent participation.

The Indonesian regulations require that professional ECE teachers have an obligation to maintain values and moralities of the community where the schools are located (MoEC, 2007, 2009); intense communication is also expected to be built with the local community. However, participants of this study did not discuss much about their relationships with the local community. Participants who commented on this issue also considered that professional ECE teachers should be role models within their environment. It means that personal conduct and behaviour should be above reproach.

6.5 Two parallel tracks, a journey towards better quality

This project arose in the context of significant change in the Indonesian ECE sector aimed at improving quality through strengthening teacher professionalism. The data in this thesis showed that in this context, early childhood professionalism was understood as visible in teachers’ actions as they work to achieve higher quality pedagogy. It was also visible in the personal characteristics of early childhood teachers who were committed to becoming a better person and thus fulfil their obligation as role models. In the journey towards professionalism, these two goals are like parallel tracks having the same destination. Along the journey to improved pedagogy, professional teachers were seen as required to ensure
sufficient knowledge and to remain continuously up-to-date through professional development. Implementation of this knowledge was seen as crucial to professionalism. In other words, it was not just important to have pedagogical knowledge; the professional teachers were able to act on it, such as when preparing teaching materials prior to classroom activities. Similarly, to become a teacher who can be a role model for children, colleagues, parents and community, teachers were perceived to need to show their commitment to their work and to be creative in the classroom. In addition, for the purpose of building and maintaining good relationships with children, colleagues, parents and community, a professional should be friendly, patient and honest.

The participants in this study perceived that teachers proceeded on these two tracks simultaneously on their journey towards professionalism. The journey towards achieving better pedagogy is a journey with demonstrable outcomes in the classroom. In other words, professionalism is exhibited in the classroom through good teaching practices that would enhance interactions with children. Thus, teachers’ performance in the classroom was seen as the embodiment of their professionalism. In this sense, therefore, teachers saw professionalism as achievable. This perception was strongly evident in teachers’ statements even as it co-existed with reluctance to claim professionalism at the individual level. This reluctance reflected a sense of modesty on the teachers’ part as well as the fear of sounding pompous. Additionally, without access to evidence about their colleagues’ performance in the classroom, they did not feel in a position to comment on others’ professionalism.

By contrast, the journey to becoming a role model can be described as one of internal transformations that become visible in personal characteristics recognisable to children,
colleagues and parents as well as the wider community. A role model was seen as an example of a perfect human being, a perfect ECE teacher. With that in mind, participants showed reluctance in answering the question of whether they were professionals or not. In the end they refused to state that they saw themselves as professional. It appeared that the teachers believed that professionalism is a lifetime process, and therefore may not be fully achieved during one’s teaching career. Also, participants believed that to be a role model, they needed continuous learning and to keep on practising to be better teachers. Similarly, since being a role model is a path to perfection, participants realised that as human beings, they would always have room for improvement.

While these two goals ran on seemingly parallel tracks, they were also inseparable. Teachers spoke about their intention to improve their performance in the classroom as an ongoing process that matched their attempt to improve their personal qualities. The outcomes of one goal, improved pedagogy, are visible in each day of teaching, while the outcomes of the other goal were seen to continue to evolve throughout an entire career, or even an entire lifetime. This resonates with Urban and Dalli’s (2012) conclusion that the notion of professionalism reflects the “inseparable nature of practice, thinking about practice, and thinking about oneself in this practice – making the boundaries between doing, knowing and being blurred or non-existent (p.161).

6.6 Limitations of the study

This study is a small-scale research study located in South Sulawesi, one of the thirty-four provinces in Indonesia. The participants were 21 teachers who had finished their intermediate level of a national training programme. As this programme was only recently introduced, very
few ECE teachers have yet participated in it, thus the findings from this study should not be
generalized as representative of all ECE teachers across Indonesia.

6.7 Implications for policy

It is evident in this research that teachers view knowledge and relationships as at the centre
of their professionalism. This research supports the view that professionalism is a process, a
journey towards the goal of high quality classrooms as well as towards personal-and
professional improvement. This perspective from the participants’ own lived experience of
being ECE teachers in Indonesia can make a useful contribution to policy making related to
early childhood teachers in this context; it broadens understanding of professionalism beyond
the issue of qualification and thus opens up other possibilities for government policy
considerations.

6.8 Implications for future research

This study has shown that professionalism is a journey whose destination is better teaching
performance and personal and professional improvement. This small scale research in a
specific area and cultural context of Indonesia provides a useful insight into a hitherto un-
researched topic in Indonesian ECE scholarship. Future research could be conducted on a
bigger scale given the huge cultural diversity of Indonesia.
References


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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research information sheet for teacher participants

Early childhood practitioners’ insights on professionalism: views from Indonesia

What is this study about?

My name is Lukmanul Hakim. I am completing a Masters of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. I would like to invite you to participate in my project in which I am investigating Indonesian early childhood education (ECE) teachers’ perspectives on professionalism in early years practice. In particular, I am interested in how you, as an early childhood teacher, interpret the notion of professionalism and the qualities that they consider to be professional and those that are not. You are invited to participate in a focus group made up of teachers who work in the same type of early childhood setting as yourself whether this is a kindergarten or a playgroup. All invited teachers will have attended the intermediate level of national training programme for early childhood teachers which was conducted by HIMPAUDI in South Sulawesi Province in September 2013. The focus group will last about one hour. After the focus group discussion, I will ask for three teachers from kindergarten and three from playgroup to volunteer for a face-to-face interview which will be no longer than 90 minutes. Both focus group and interviews will be arranged at a time convenient for the participants at the training provider office.

If you decide to participate in the research, you will need to indicate your decision by signing a consent form and sending it back to me through my email address or the training provider office. The focus groups and interview will be conducted in Bahasa. The focus groups and interviews will later be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to check your transcript for accuracy. Your feedback will be highly valued, even if you wish to delete some statements. If you change your mind you can just let me know and withdraw your participation before the analysis stage, without having to explain the reason.

Neither your name nor any information that would identify you will appear in the research reports, articles and presentations. Only my supervisor and I will have access to your data. I will ensure that your personal information is kept confidential. All responses will be kept in password-protected files and locked offices at Victoria University of Wellington or at my home office and will be digitally wiped five years after the completion of the research. A summary of the research findings will be made available upon your request after the completion of this project.
This research has been approved by Victoria University of Wellington’s Faculty of Education Human Ethics Sub-Committee under delegated authority from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee on (date to be included). Once my thesis is completed, it will be deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington’s library.

If you would like to receive more information regarding my research, please feel free to contact my supervisor at the below address:

Professor Carmen Dalli,
Phone +64-4-463-5168
carmen.dalli@vuw.ac.nz
Institute for Early Childhood Studies
Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington
Donald St, Karori, Wellington 6012, Room GR 305
PO Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington 6147
New Zealand

Or you could contact me directly at:

Lukmanul Hakim
Faculty of Education
Victoria University of Wellington
Lukman.Hakim@vuw.ac.nz

If you have any human ethics concerns about the research, you may contact:

Dr Allison Kirkman
Chairperson of the Human Ethics Committee
DDI: +64 463 5676
allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz
Appendix 2: Letter to Ministry of Education and Culture

April 2014

Research Project:

Early childhood practitioners’ insights on professionalism: views from Indonesia

Dear Madam,

My name is Lukmanul Hakim. I am completing a Masters of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand as a scholarship recipient from the Government of Indonesia. My programmes of studies involves an empirical study which I would like to focus on Indonesian early childhood education (ECE) teachers’ perspectives on professionalism in early years practice. In particular, I am interested in how teachers interpret their own professionalism and the qualities that they consider to be professional and those that are not.

In order to conduct this study, I would like to involve early childhood teachers who took part in the intermediate level of national early childhood training programme in September 2013. I therefore write to request your permission to approach the training provider in South Sulawesi which conducted the training programme last year in order to contact potential participants in the study.

This research will not affect the reputation of the office of early childhood teachers’ quality improvement, Ministry of Education and Culture nor the training provider in South Sulawesi province. The study explores how participants interpret their own professionalism and aims to identify qualities that they consider to be professional and those that are not.

With your permission, I would expect to access participants’ general data which would enable me to identify eligible participants to be invited into the study. These will be teachers from kindergarten and playgroups who have completed a four year undergraduate study programme. The teachers then will be placed in two focus groups: one for kindergarten teachers and one for playgroup teacher. The focus groups will last about one hour. After the focus groups, I will ask for three teachers from kindergarten and three from playgroup to volunteer for a face-to-face interview which will be no longer than 90 minutes. Both focus group and interviews will be arranged at a time convenient for the participants at the training provider office. The focus groups and interview will be conducted in Bahasa. The focus groups and interviews will later be transcribed and participants will have the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy.

I will use pseudonyms for the participants in my thesis or other reports from the research. I will ensure that their personal information is kept confidential. Informed consent will be obtained through a signed consent form. The participants would be able to withdraw from participation before the analysis phase, without having to explain.
Access to the research data will be restricted to my supervisor, Professor Carmen Dalli, the transcribers, and me. All responses will be kept in password-protected computer files or locked offices at Victoria University of Wellington and will be digitally wiped five years after the research submission.

This research has been approved by Victoria University of Wellington’s Faculty of Education Human Ethics Sub-Committee under delegated authority from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee on (insert date once this is known). Once my thesis is completed, it will be deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington’s libraries.

If you would like to receive more information regarding my research, please feel free to contact my supervisor at the below address:

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Or you could contact me directly at:

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Victoria University of Wellington
Lukman.Hakim@vuw.ac.nz

If you have any human ethics concerns about the research, you may contact:

Dr Allison Kirkman
Chairperson of the Human Ethics Committee
DDI: +644 463 5676
allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz
Appendix 3: Letter to training provider in South Sulawesi

April 2014

Research Project:

Early childhood practitioners’ insights on professionalism: views from Indonesia

Dear Madam,

My name is Lukmanul Hakim. I am completing a Masters of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. My programmes of studies involves an empirical study which I would like to focus on Indonesian early childhood education (ECE) teachers’ perspectives on professionalism in early years practice. In particular, I am interested in how teachers interpret their own professionalism and the qualities that they consider to be professional and those that are not.

In order to conduct this study, I would like to involve early childhood teachers who took part in the intermediate level of national early childhood training programme that you provided in South Sulawesi in September 2013. With the permission of the office of early childhood education teachers’ quality improvement, Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia, I am writing to seek your support in this project.

In particular, I seek your permission to (i) access general data about the participants in the intermediate level of national early childhood training programme conducted by your organisation in order to be able to identify potential participants in the project; and (ii) use your training premises as the place to conduct focus groups and interviews with the teacher participants.

This research will not affect the reputation of the office of your organization in South Sulawesi. The study explores how participants interpret their own professionalism and aims to identify qualities that they consider to be professional and those that are not.

With your permission, access to participants’ general data would enable me to identify eligible participants to be invited into the study. These will be teachers from kindergarten and playgroups who have completed a four year undergraduate study programme. If teachers accept the invitation to participate, they will be placed in one of two focus groups: one for kindergarten teachers and one for playgroup teacher. The focus groups will last about one hour. After the focus groups, I will ask for three teachers from kindergarten and three from playgroup to volunteer for a face-to-face interview which will be no longer than 90 minutes. Both focus group and interviews will be arranged at a time convenient for the participants at the training provider office. The focus groups and interview will be conducted in Bahasa. The focus groups
and interviews will later be transcribed and participants will have the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy.

I will use pseudonyms of the participants in my thesis or other reports from the research. I will ensure that their personal information is kept confidential. Informed consent will be obtained through a signed consent form. The participants would be able to withdraw from participation before the analysis phase, without having to explain.

Access to the research data will be restricted to my supervisor, Professor Carmen Dalli, the transcribers, and me. All responses will be kept in password-protected computer files or locked offices at Victoria University of Wellington and will be digitally wiped five years after the research submission.

This research has been approved by Victoria University of Wellington’s Faculty of Education Human Ethics Sub-Committee under delegated authority from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee on (insert date once known). Once my thesis is completed, it will be deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington’s libraries.

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allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz
Appendix 4: Focus group questions

Introduction:
Thank you very much for agreeing to be in this focus group to discuss your work as an early childhood teacher. Our discussion should take just over 60 minutes.
I would like to remind you what this project aims to investigate Indonesian early childhood education (ECE) teachers’ perspectives on early years’ professionalism.
I am interested in exploring:
1. How you, as teachers interpret the notion of professionalism?
2. What you, as teachers consider as an act of professionalism: what goes along with that in terms of qualities of a professional teacher?
So, I’m very keen to hear about your professional practice and how you perceive this.

I have 4 areas that I would like you to discuss as a group- all in relation to EC teachers’ professionalism.
Focus 1. What does professionalism means for you as kindergarten/playgroup teachers?
Probes:
- Do you consider yourselves as a professional kindergarten/playgroup teacher?
- What do you expect from a professional kindergarten/playgroup teacher

Focus 2. Thinking about specific interactions that occur regularly in EC settings, what are professional behaviours that you expect in:
- Teacher interactions with children
- Teacher interactions with colleagues
- Teacher interactions with parents
Teacher interactions with the local communityProbes:
Can you give me an example of that (apply to each type of interaction category)

Focus 3. What are the qualities of professional teachers?
Probes:
- How would you recognise a professional teacher?
- What do professional teachers do?
- What do professional teachers not do?

Focus 4. Is the field of kindergarten/playgroup teaching recognised as professional one? If yes, what makes you say so? If not, what is needed for it to be recognised?
Appendix 5: Questions for interviews

These draft questions could change depending on discussions during focus groups

Questions for teacher semi-structured interviews

Part I: Teacher background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Background</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Interviewer:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Interview:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Setting:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Setting:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range of practitioner: (circle) 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher's qualification and experience:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children in group:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range of children:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff in setting:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Times of sessions:</td>
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</table>
Part II: Views on Professionalism

Focus 1: Notion of Professionalism

Objective: to get the teachers’ views on about the word ‘professionalism’ and what they consider as qualities of professional

Question 1:
I would like to ask you to describe professionalism.

Probes: Follow up
- What qualities do you consider as being professional?
- Professional qualities, what would they be? How are these gained? How are these manifested?

Focus 2: Being professional

Objective: To understand teacher’s perception of their own professionalism and their work as professionals

Questions:
As an early childhood teacher, how do you see yourself? Do you consider yourself a professional?

Probes: Follow up
- What contributes to this view of yourself? What makes you see yourself in this way?
- Have you always seen this work as a profession?
- Have there been changes to the profession of early childhood from the time of first employment to now?
- How do you recognise professionalism in yourself?

If the teacher doesn’t consider herself as professional, ask:
what would need to happen before you saw yourself as a professional? (explore in terms of attitudes and dispositions)

Focus 3: Example of professional practice

Objective: To obtain examples about being professional from teachers’ real experience

Question:
- Can you describe a situation in which you acted professionally? And when a colleague acted professionally?
Probes: Follow Up
Why do you think that this is a professional action?

**Focus 4 : What helps and hinder professionals?**

**Objective:** To gain information on structural matters that help/hinder EC professionalism in Indonesia’s context

Questions:
- What helps you to be/act professionally in your local ec setting? And more broadly?
- What hinder you from being professional in your local ec setting? And more broadly?

Probes: This is to gain information on structural matters, like training, PD, policies (at individual level, at centre level, at national level)

**Focus 5. ECE as a profession**

**Objective:** To gain teachers’ view on working in early childhood education, whether they consider them as a profession or not?

Questions:
Thinking about working in early childhood education sector in Indonesia, do you think being a teacher in kindergarten/playgroup as a profession?
Probes:
Follow up:
- What makes it a profession/not a profession?

**Focus 6. Looking at ECE generally**

**Objective:** To gain a sense of what EC practitioner sees as the common features of EC practices generally in Indonesia context?

Questions:
Thinking about early childhood practice in Indonesia, what do you think are the common features between kindergarten and playgroups?
Probes:
What would you comment about:
- the general level of qualification of EC practitioners in Indonesia?
- The EC curriculum in Indonesia?
- Interaction with outside agencies?
- Involvement of parents in ECE?
**Researcher reflections after the interview:**
(Notaanything about the circumstances of the interview that seems pertinent. For example, did the teacher appear comfortable; background noise level; were there any distractions or interruptions?; anything unexpected about the interview; anything that might be worth following up?)