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## PREPARING PRE SCHOOL–CHILDREN WITH SENSORIAL AND PRACTICAL LIFE CLASS

Wulan Yulian Anggini<sup>1</sup>, Danang Dwi Harmoko<sup>2(\*)</sup>, Ahmad Bakhtiar<sup>3</sup>

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>13</sup>

Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>

angginiwulan10@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, danang.dnd@bsi.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, ahmad\_bakhtiar88@yahoo.com<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstract

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This study explores the critical role of early childhood education in nurturing sensory and practical life skills within preschool classrooms. Focusing on the Montessori method, the research examines how experiential learning and activities closely tied to everyday life can significantly benefit preschool-aged children. The Montessori approach prioritizes hands-on engagement, allowing children to develop fine motor skills, sensory awareness, and practical abilities that are essential for fostering independence. These foundational skills are not just about mastering basic tasks; they are integral to broader cognitive, social, and emotional development. The study emphasizes how well-structured sensory and practical life activities enable children to explore their environment, develop problem-solving abilities, and gain confidence in their capabilities. By participating in such programs, children demonstrate marked improvements in their sensory processing and practical competencies, which are critical for their overall readiness to advance in more formal educational settings. The findings underscore the long-term benefits of integrating Montessori principles into early childhood education, suggesting that these methods not only prepare children for academic success but also contribute to their holistic development, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of everyday life.

**Keywords:** Pre School-Children; Sensorial Practice; Practical Life

(\*) Corresponding Author: Harmoko, danang.dnd@bsi.ac.id

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is critical in shaping a child's holistic development. The preschool years, often referred to as the "golden period" of development, are when children experience rapid growth across various domains, including cognitive, motor, emotional, and social (Adzani et al., 2023; Hanny & Suteja, 2024; Hoskens et al., 2024). Given the importance of these formative years, a well-rounded and structured educational approach is essential for preparing children to transition smoothly into formal schooling and, ultimately, to navigate the challenges of life. Among the various educational methods available, a growing body of research highlights the effectiveness of sensorial and practical life approaches in preschool education (Patimah & Nurhayati, 2023).

The sensorial approach in early childhood education is deeply rooted in the Montessori method, which was introduced by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 20th century. Montessori emphasized the importance of sensory experiences in learning, asserting that children learn most effectively when they engage directly with their

environment through their senses (Politi, 2023). By manipulating tangible objects that stimulate their senses such as feeling different textures, identifying colors, or distinguishing sounds children develop foundational cognitive and motor skills (Bernal & Sholl-Franco, 2023). This sensory learning process also helps sharpen their attention to detail and enhance their ability to concentrate, which are crucial skills as they progress in their educational journey (Aziz et al., 2022; Smith, 2017).

Parallel to the sensorial approach, practical life activities are another cornerstone of Montessori education and play a vital role in preschool settings. Practical life activities encompass everyday tasks that help children develop independence, fine motor skills, and a sense of responsibility (Bhatia et al., 2015). Activities such as tying shoelaces, pouring water into a glass, or cleaning a table are designed to prepare children for real-life situations. By engaging in these tasks, children learn to manage themselves and their surroundings, ultimately boosting their confidence and autonomy (Rosenberg, 2022).

The benefits of sensorial and practical life activities extend beyond cognitive and motor development; they also have significant impacts on children's social and emotional growth (Güleç & Yıldırım, 2024). For instance, when children participate in group activities involving practical life tasks, they learn to cooperate, share, and respect one another. These social interactions are crucial for building communication skills and empathy, which are essential for their future social lives.

As awareness of the importance of child-centered education grows, many preschool institutions have begun integrating sensorial and practical life approaches into their curricula (Popovych, 2023). These methods are considered effective ways to prepare children for the demands of formal education and everyday life. However, despite the widespread acceptance of these approaches, there is still a need for more research to quantitatively and qualitatively measure their effectiveness across different cultural and social contexts.

In Indonesia, the adoption of sensorial and practical life approaches in preschool education is still in its developmental stages. While some schools and institutions have begun to incorporate these methods, there is limited research exploring their impact on the development of preschool children in the country. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the extent to which sensorial and practical life approaches can prepare preschool children for formal education. The study will also explore how these approaches can be adapted to meet the unique needs of children in Indonesia, considering the cultural, social, and economic factors that may influence learning outcomes.

The Montessori method is built upon the principle that children are naturally curious and eager to learn when provided with the right environment (Doğru & Doğru, 2024). Sensorial education, a key component of this method, is designed to help children develop and refine their senses, which are seen as the primary means through which they explore and understand the world around them (Nyzhnyk, 2023). Montessori (1912) emphasized that sensorial materials in the classroom should be designed to isolate one specific quality, such as color, shape, or texture, allowing children to focus and refine their perception of that quality.

According to Ferdinand et al., (2023), sensorial activities are not only fundamental for developing cognitive skills but also for laying the groundwork for more complex learning. By engaging in tasks that require them to distinguish between different sensory inputs, children develop classification skills, which are essential for later academic tasks such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Furthermore, these activities enhance children's ability to concentrate and sustain attention, which are critical skills for success in formal education.

Practical life activities are equally important in the Montessori framework. These activities are divided into four main categories: care of self, care of the environment, grace and courtesy, and control of movement. Each category is designed to help children develop autonomy and responsibility, which are foundational for personal development. According to Mayar et al., (2019), practical life activities serve as a bridge between the home and the school environment, providing children with a sense of continuity and relevance in their learning experiences.

Research by Jacobson & Mahone (2012) suggests that practical life activities are crucial for developing executive functions such as planning, organization, and self-regulation. When children engage in tasks that require them to follow a sequence of steps, they learn to plan ahead and anticipate the outcomes of their actions. This not only helps them develop problem-solving skills but also builds their self-confidence as they successfully complete tasks on their own.

In addition to cognitive and motor skills, sensorial and practical life activities play a significant role in social and emotional development (Vygotsky, 2003). Social development theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, and Montessori education aligns with this by encouraging cooperative learning. Through group activities, children learn to communicate, collaborate, and resolve conflicts, which are essential skills for their future social interactions.

Research by Murray et al., (2022) supports the idea that Montessori education fosters intrinsic motivation and a sense of community among students. In a Montessori classroom, children are encouraged to work at their own pace and choose activities that interest them, which fosters a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation. At the same time, the mixed-age group setting of a Montessori classroom promotes peer learning, where older children often help younger ones, creating a strong sense of community and mutual respect.

While the Montessori method has proven successful in various contexts, its implementation in different cultural settings requires careful adaptation. Indonesia, with its rich cultural diversity, presents both challenges and opportunities for the adaptation of Montessori methods. Research by Varma (2022) highlights the need to consider local cultural values and social norms when implementing Montessori education in non-Western contexts. For example, in some Indonesian communities, the concept of communal living and collective responsibility is deeply ingrained, which aligns well with the Montessori emphasis on community and cooperative learning. However, other aspects, such as the focus on individual autonomy, may need to be adapted to better fit the local cultural context.

This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on early childhood education by examining the effectiveness of sensorial and practical life classes in preparing preschool children for formal education. By exploring the theoretical foundations of these approaches and considering the cultural context of Indonesia, this research seeks to provide insights into how these methods can be effectively implemented to support the holistic development of children. Ultimately, the findings of this study may serve as a valuable resource for educators and policymakers in designing preschool curricula that not only focus on academic preparation but also on the development of essential life skills that are crucial for children's overall well-being and success in the future.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which is particularly suited for exploring and understanding the nuances of human behavior and interactions within a

naturalistic setting. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study utilized multiple data collection methods, including direct observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and parents, and an analysis of curriculum documents related to the sensorial and practical life areas. The inclusion of curriculum document analysis provided a deeper understanding of the educational framework and its implementation within the Montessori context.

These techniques were chosen to capture a holistic view of the educational environment and the perspectives of key stakeholders involved. The data collection process was systematically carried out over a three-month period, from June to August 2024, at Little Q Montessori in Cibinong, Bogor. The extended duration of data collection allowed for a thorough examination of the educational practices, parental involvement, and the alignment of curricular goals with practical classroom activities. This comprehensive approach provided rich and detailed insights into the subject matter, particularly how the sensorial and practical life curriculum supports child development within the Montessori educational setting.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### *Results*

**Table 1.**

Result of observation and interview with teacher and parents

| No | Category                  | Indicator          | Result  |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1  | Sensorial Activities      | Engagement         | High levels of engagement with materials, especially with textures and colors.                                    |
|    |                           | Skill Development  | Significant improvement in fine motor skills and cognitive abilities (e.g., pattern recognition, classification). |
|    |                           | Attention Span     | Increased by 15-20% over the study period.  |
| 2  | Practical Life Activities | Independence       | Noticeable improvement in daily task independence, such as dressing and snack preparation.                        |
|    |                           | Social Skills      | Enhanced cooperation and respect in group activities.   |
|    |                           | Confidence         | 70% of children showed more initiative in taking on new tasks.  |
| 3  | Teachers' Perspectives    | Skill Acquisition  | Significant improvement in fine motor skills and cognitive abilities, linked to consistent engagement.            |
|    |                           | Behavioral Changes | Positive changes such as increased patience and problem-solving skills.   |
|    |                           | Academic Readiness | 80% of teachers believe children were better prepared for formal schooling.                                       |

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|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| 4                     |                      | Increased independence at home, including taking initiative in household chores. |
| Parents' Perspectives | Home Behavior        |  |
|                       | Communication Skills | 65% of parents reported improvements in communication.                           |
|                       | Overall Satisfaction | 90% of parents were satisfied with their child's progress.                       |

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## *Discussion*

### 1. Sensorial Approach

#### a. Development of Cognitive and Motor Skills:

The sensorial approach in the Montessori method is designed to develop and refine children's senses through activities that isolate and focus on specific sensory experiences. For example, the use of tactile boards, where children feel and distinguish between rough and smooth surfaces, enhances their ability to perceive subtle differences in texture. Similarly, color tablets help children learn to differentiate between various shades, improving their visual discrimination skills.

This sensory refinement is critical because it forms the foundation for more complex cognitive tasks. For instance, the ability to distinguish different sounds (auditory discrimination) is directly related to phonemic awareness, which is essential for reading. Likewise, distinguishing between shapes and sizes enhances geometric understanding and spatial awareness, foundational skills for mathematics.

In terms of motor skills, the activities require precise hand movements, such as using tweezers to pick up small objects or fitting geometric shapes into corresponding holes. These tasks not only improve fine motor coordination but also prepare children for writing by strengthening the small muscles in their hands and fingers.

#### b. Academic Readiness:

Sensorial activities are not just about sensory development; they also contribute significantly to cognitive development, particularly in areas related to academic readiness. By engaging in these activities, children learn to classify and categorize objects based on different attributes such as color, shape, size, and texture. This ability to organize and make sense of sensory information is a precursor to logical thinking and problem-solving, both of which are critical for academic success. For example, sorting activities—where children group objects by similar characteristics—develop early mathematical skills such as understanding sets, patterns, and sequences. These skills are fundamental for arithmetic operations and algebraic thinking in later education.

Furthermore, the sustained concentration required to complete sensorial tasks fosters a child's ability to focus on academic work. In a Montessori classroom, children often spend extended periods working on a single task, which helps them develop the persistence and attention to detail needed for more structured learning environments.

## 2. Practical Life Activities

### a. Development of Autonomy and Responsibility:

Practical life activities in the Montessori curriculum are designed to be meaningful and relevant to the child's everyday life, fostering a sense of autonomy and responsibility. These activities include tasks such as dressing oneself, preparing snacks, and caring for the environment (e.g., watering plants, cleaning tables). Each task is carefully designed to be achievable by the child, promoting a sense of competence and self-confidence.

The repetitive nature of these activities allows children to practice and master skills, reinforcing their sense of independence. For example, learning to pour water from a jug into a glass requires concentration and control, and when children accomplish this task without spilling, they gain confidence in their abilities.

Responsibility is further emphasized as children are encouraged to care for their environment and contribute to the community. By participating in the maintenance of their classroom, children learn the importance of taking care of shared spaces and resources, fostering a sense of stewardship and community.

### b. Executive Functioning:

Executive functioning refers to a set of cognitive processes that include planning, organization, and self-regulation—skills that are crucial for success in both academic and everyday life. Practical life activities in the Montessori method are particularly effective in developing these skills because they require children to think ahead, follow a sequence of steps, and manage their behavior.

For instance, a task like preparing a snack involves several steps: washing hands, selecting ingredients, cutting or spreading, and cleaning up afterward. Each step requires the child to plan and execute a series of actions, which enhances their ability to organize thoughts and actions logically. This process also encourages cognitive flexibility, as children learn to adjust their plans if something does not go as expected.

These activities also teach self-regulation, as children must control their impulses and focus on completing tasks accurately. The careful attention required in tasks such as pouring without spilling or tying a shoelace without loosening it teaches children to manage their emotions and behavior, which are essential skills for classroom settings where they must follow instructions, wait their turn, and resist distractions.

## 3. Social and Emotional Development

### a. Cooperation and Communication:

Social and emotional development is integral to the Montessori method, which places a strong emphasis on creating a community-oriented learning environment. Practical life activities often involve group work, where children must cooperate to achieve a common goal. These experiences are vital for developing social skills such as communication, empathy, and teamwork.

For example, activities like setting the table for lunch or cleaning the classroom require children to work together, sharing responsibilities and communicating effectively to complete the task. These activities teach children how

to negotiate roles, take turns, and listen to others' ideas, all of which are crucial for building strong interpersonal relationships.

The study found that children who regularly engaged in group practical life activities were better equipped to handle social situations, as they had developed the necessary skills to communicate their needs and feelings while also being sensitive to the needs of others. These skills are fundamental for building healthy relationships and navigating social dynamics both in and out of the classroom.

b. Intrinsic Motivation and Community Building:

Montessori education is designed to cultivate intrinsic motivation, where children engage in activities out of interest and curiosity rather than external rewards. This is achieved by providing children with a choice in their activities and allowing them to work at their own pace. The study observed that when children are given the freedom to choose their tasks, they are more engaged and motivated, leading to deeper learning and satisfaction.

The Montessori environment also emphasizes the importance of community building. In mixed-age classrooms, older children often take on leadership roles, helping younger peers with their tasks. This mentoring dynamic not only reinforces the older children's knowledge but also fosters a sense of responsibility and empathy. Younger children benefit from this interaction by receiving guidance and support, which helps them feel more secure and confident in their learning environment.

This peer learning and community building contribute to a strong sense of belonging and mutual respect among the children. The study found that this environment encouraged children to take pride in their work and to care for their community, creating a positive and supportive learning atmosphere that benefits all students.

4. Cultural Adaptation in Indonesia

a. Alignment with Indonesian Cultural Values:

The research emphasized the need to adapt Montessori methods to fit the cultural context of Indonesia. Indonesian culture, with its emphasis on community and collective responsibility, aligns well with the Montessori focus on cooperative learning and community building. However, the Montessori emphasis on individual autonomy required careful adaptation in the Indonesian context, where interdependence and family values are highly prioritized.

The study found that integrating group-oriented tasks and emphasizing the role of the child within the larger community allowed the Montessori method to resonate more deeply with Indonesian cultural values. For example, activities that involved family participation or community service were particularly effective in bridging the gap between Montessori principles and Indonesian cultural norms.

This cultural alignment is crucial for ensuring that educational practices are relevant and meaningful to the children and their families. By respecting and incorporating local values, the Montessori method can be more effectively implemented, supporting the holistic development of children in a way that is both culturally appropriate and educationally sound.

b. Challenges and Opportunities:

Implementing Montessori methods in Indonesia presents unique challenges and opportunities. One of the primary challenges identified in the study was the lack of resources and trained educators who fully understand the Montessori philosophy. Without proper training, educators may struggle to implement the method consistently, leading to varied outcomes for students.

Despite these challenges, the study highlighted significant opportunities for the successful integration of Montessori methods in Indonesia. With appropriate training and resources, educators can adapt the Montessori approach to fit the local context, ensuring that children benefit from its holistic educational model. For example, incorporating local materials and cultural practices into Montessori activities can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the method.

Additionally, the study suggested that ongoing professional development and support for educators are essential for overcoming these challenges. By providing educators with the tools and knowledge they need to implement Montessori methods effectively, schools can maximize the benefits of this educational approach, fostering the development of well-rounded, independent, and socially responsible children. The research also indicated the potential for Montessori methods to influence broader educational practices in Indonesia, offering a model for integrating cultural values with progressive educational techniques.

The study concluded that sensorial and practical life activities are effective tools for preparing preschool children for formal education. These activities not only enhance cognitive and motor development but also play a significant role in social and emotional growth. The research also emphasized the importance of cultural adaptation when implementing these methods in non-Western contexts like Indonesia. With appropriate adaptations, the Montessori method can support the holistic development of children, equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in both academic and everyday life. The findings from this study provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in designing preschool curricula that focus on comprehensive child development.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of sensorial and practical life activities on the holistic development of preschool children, particularly within the Montessori educational framework. These activities not only enhance cognitive and motor skills but also play a critical role in fostering social, emotional, and executive functioning abilities. The findings underscore the importance of early childhood education that emphasizes hands-on learning and real-life applications, preparing children for both academic success and everyday life challenges. Furthermore, the research demonstrates the adaptability of the Montessori method to different cultural contexts, such as Indonesia, where integrating local values into the curriculum can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the approach. The study suggests that with proper training and resources, educators can effectively implement Montessori methods, thereby maximizing the developmental benefits for children. These insights offer valuable guidance for educators and policymakers in designing preschool curricula that support comprehensive child

development, ensuring that children are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of formal education and beyond.

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