

## Business Motives or Educational Services? A Preliminary Study of Early Childhood Education Needs in Kendari City

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### ABSTRACT

**Background.** This study delves into the dichotomy between business motives and educational services in Kendari's requirements for early childhood education (ECE). The rapid growth of the education industry has led to numerous institutions offering ECE services, raising questions about the balance between profit-driven business motives and genuine educational needs. The research aims to understand dynamics by examining incentives behind establishing ECE institutions in Kendari and how they influence educational service quality and accessibility.

**Methods.** Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the study aims to identify drivers for entrepreneurs investing in the ECE sector and their alignment with educational goals. It would explore how these motives affect comprehensive early childhood education delivery and their connection to the broader educational landscape in Kendari.

**Results.** Findings are expected to show the equilibrium between commercial interests and educational aspirations in the ECE sector, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.

**Conclusion.** By delving into the interplay between business motives and educational services, this research establishes a foundation for comprehensively exploring the ECE landscape and its implications for young learners' future development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

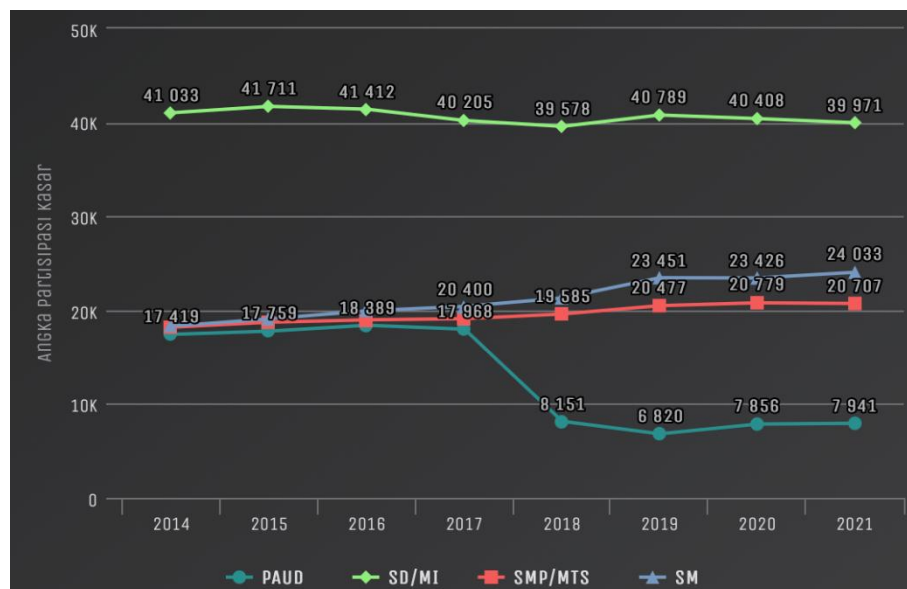
Early childhood education (ECE) shapes children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in the early years (Chapman & O'Gorman, 2022). In the modern era marked by social and technological challenges, early childhood education in Kota Kendari faces the demand for improved quality and the complexity of choosing a dominant approach: business motives or fundamental educational services. This study aims to compare the business motive and educational service in the context of ECE in Kendari city, focusing on meeting the needs of young children and their long-term implications.

Firstly, the presence of business motives in education cannot be ignored. Some educational institutions in Kota Kendari might adopt a business-oriented approach to meet early childhood education needs. According to Miço and Cungu (2023), "business education" refers to education organized with business strategies, where increasing student enrollment

and profitability are the primary goals. This phenomenon raises questions about the sustainability and quality of education in ECE.

On the other hand, educational services are an ethical foundation in early childhood education. Martínez and Heilig (2022) highlight the importance of educational services to ensure that every child has equal access to quality education, regardless of their economic background. Educational services focus more on holistic aspects and comprehensive child development to create competitive and ethical citizens.

Based on data from the Education Department of Kota Kendari, the participation rate of young children in formal and non-formal schools has increased over the past 3 years (Figure 1). However, this increase is also accompanied by the emergence of several ECE institutions with a strong business orientation. This indicates a shift in the approach to early childhood education in Kota Kendari, raising concerns about the quality and commitment to holistic child development.



**Figure 1.** Students' Data of Schools and Madrasas in Kendari City

[https://apkapm.data.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/cberanda/pesertadidiksekolahmadrasah?kode\\_wilayah=206000&tahun=&tabs=ECE](https://apkapm.data.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/cberanda/pesertadidiksekolahmadrasah?kode_wilayah=206000&tahun=&tabs=ECE)

Previous studies also support the urgency of this research. According to a study by Tesar & Pangastuti (2024), in recent years, the landscape of early childhood education in Indonesia has experienced a transformation, with several ECE institutions transitioning from traditional educational models toward more commercially driven approaches. The results of this study highlight the need to pay attention to the role and impact of business education on child development. Sururi et al. (2022) identified a shift from traditional orientation to a business-oriented approach in ECE institutions in Indonesia. The study's findings highlight how the business orientation has influenced early childhood education in the country. Kinman & Kinman (2001) provided a perspective on the role of business motives in education. This study underlines that business strategies and objectives can influence education. Peters (2004)

emphasized the importance of holistic educational services to ensure equal access to education for every child. This concept is highly relevant in early childhood education. Kasser (2018) investigated the impact of business-oriented educational institutions on child well-being in Norway, providing insights into the implications of business education for child development.

The studies outlined above provide rich insights into comparing business-oriented and educational service approaches in Early Childhood Education (ECE). These findings offer a deeper understanding of the implications of a business orientation in early childhood education. By summarizing the findings from these studies, we can observe the variations in perspectives on business and educational service approaches in ECE. These findings provide a more comprehensive overview of both approaches' impact and implications on young children's development.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of business-oriented and educational service approaches in ECE institutions in Kota Kendari. Through a detailed analysis, the research aims to uncover how these differing approaches affect the quality of child development outcomes. By identifying the motivations behind the establishment of ECE centers and evaluating their alignment with educational goals, the study seeks to offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to more informed decision-making, helping to shape strategies that prioritize educational quality and the holistic development of young children in early childhood education settings.

## **2. METHODS**

The research approach in this preliminary study is qualitative, focusing on field research and in-depth qualitative analysis. The research began by setting clear research objectives: to identify the comparison between business-oriented and educational service approaches in ECE in Kendari City. The research questions include: How do ECE administrators, teachers, and parents perceive the differences between business-oriented and educational service approaches in ECE? The selection of informants encompasses variations in the educational approaches they represent, aiming to obtain diverse perspectives.

Interviews were conducted by recording and taking detailed notes for further analysis. Subsequently, interview transcriptions and data analysis were carried out manually. The researcher employed a content analysis approach to identify themes and patterns from respondents' responses, thereby identifying differences and similarities between views on the business and educational service approaches.

The coding process in this study followed a systematic sequence to ensure a thorough analysis of the interview data. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The researcher then conducted multiple readings of the transcripts to gain familiarity with the content, while taking initial notes on significant ideas. The data were

broken into smaller units during the open coding phase, with descriptive codes assigned to relevant segments. These codes were then grouped into broader categories during the development of code categories. The researcher explored the relationships between categories through axial coding, identifying causal connections and patterns. Selective coding followed, focusing on integrating categories into central themes directly addressing the research questions. Major themes were developed by organizing related categories, clearly naming and defining each theme. A thorough review and refinement were conducted to ensure coherence and consistency across the themes. Finally, the findings were reported by presenting the themes and supporting quotes from respondents, highlighting differences and similarities in views regarding business and educational service approaches in ECE institutions.

Additionally, the researcher employed a triangulation approach by comparing findings with other data sources, such as official reports or relevant literature. The final stage involves interpreting the findings to draw conclusions based on the data analysis.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The research Subject

The object of the survey instrument deployment consists of 197 administrators of ECE institutions in Kendari city (Table 1). The instrument, in the form of a Google Form, was distributed through a WhatsApp group.

**Table 1.** List of ECEs in Kendari City (2022)

No.	Region (subdistrict)	Kindergarten			Playgroup		
		Total	PS	PrvS	Total	PS	PrvS
1	Poasia	20	1	19	20	0	20
2	Kendari Barat	10	1	9	5	0	5
3	Baruga	13	1	12	8	0	8
4	Kadia	15	1	14	8	0	8
5	Mandoga	12	1	11	6	0	6
6	Puuwatu	15	1	14	6	0	6
7	Kambu	14	1	13	3	0	3
8	Wua-wua	15	0	15	5	0	5
9	Kendari	5	1	4	3	0	3
10	Abeli	6	2	4	4	0	4
11	Nambo	3	1	2	1	0	1

Source Url: <https://kendarikota.bps.go.id/indikator/12/139/1/jumlah-penduduk-menurut-jenis-kelamin-dan-kecamatan.html> Access Time: July 7, 2023, 9:00 am

#### Description

PS: Public school

PrvS: Private school

The table above indicates that private kindergartens and playgroups (186) occupy a significantly larger proportion than public schools (11). This comparison raises a significant question that the researcher would investigate in the next research project. Meanwhile, the

population of early childhood education (ECE) children (refer to Table 2) in Kendari city totals 65,082.

**Table 2.** Population by Age Group and Sex in Kendari Municipality (2020)

Age Group	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
0 – 4	16.707	16.548	33.255
5 – 9	16.220	15.607	31.827

### 3.2 Commitment to Developing Holistic Education

ECE institutions in Kota Kendari rely on several primary funding sources, including the government financial assistance, BOP & BOS from the national budget/APBN, and community contributions. The funds acquired from these sources are allocated to various educational programs and activities to enhance the quality of education and children's development within these ECE schools.

The educational services encompass various aspects within the school's curriculum and development programs. These range from religious components like "*manasik haji cilik*" and religious activities, to the enhancement of teacher and student competencies in literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, the schools emphasize nurturing students' character, preventing bullying, and reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills. This commitment extends to educators, who are encouraged to innovate using software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

The effort to involve the entire school community in literacy and numeracy improvement programs reflects an inclusive approach to education. Additionally, the schools have plans for accreditation, expanding classroom facilities, and enlarging play areas for children. Renovations to the school buildings and the construction of fences are also planned to ensure a safe and comfortable physical environment for students.

The schools' commitment does not solely revolve around education; they also aim to foster partnerships with various stakeholders involved in the education and development of children, particularly in the context of combating stunting. This illustrates that the schools view education not only as an internal responsibility but also as a part of broader efforts to enhance the well-being of children.

In conclusion, ECE institutions in Kendari city are dedicated educational establishments committed to holistic development. Their focus includes academic, character, religious, and physical well-being aspects. They strive to utilize various funding sources and collaborate with multiple parties to realize their vision and mission of providing quality and sustainable education.

### 3.3 Diversity in Available Options for Parents/Guardians

In Kendari city, a diverse range of ownership types exists for ECE school buildings, including government-owned (public) and privately-owned (private) institutions. The

ownership choice can influence management practices, facility standards, and school policies. In terms of mandatory fees for parents/guardians, there is a variation in the amounts that must be paid. Some schools do not require fees, while others request specific amounts such as Rp 30,000 per student, Rp 5,000 per week, or Rp 80,000 per month (SPP). This variation likely reflects the schools' policies regarding funding and operational expenses.

Facilities within ECE schools also exhibit diversity. Some schools provide basic facilities like classrooms, libraries, teacher rooms, and restrooms. Conversely, others offer more comprehensive amenities such as dedicated classrooms, libraries, play areas, sports fields, gardens, dining areas, cafeterias, and more. The availability of these facilities contributes to the overall learning experience and children's development.

The distances between ECE schools also vary, ranging from being in proximity, around 100 meters away, to being more distant, up to 2 kilometers away. This distance can impact the comfort and accessibility for parents and children attending the schools.

The findings offer an overview of the diversity in ownership, funding policies, facilities, and locations of ECE schools in Kendari City. This variety reflects the dynamic nature of early childhood education and the array of choices available to parents/guardians. The diversity in these aspects contributes to the richness of the educational landscape, accommodating the diverse needs and preferences of parents and guardians in the region.

### 3.4 Strategies for Enhancing the Quality of Early Childhood Education in Kendari City: Implementation of Structured Plans and Programs

The author formulates a more organized and effective follow-up scenario (Figure 2), creating a quality educational environment that positively impacts children's development.



**Figure 2.** Strategies for Enhancing the Quality of Early Childhood Education

Enhancing the quality of ECE requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that integrates operational planning, team formation, material development, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration. Effective operational planning provides a structured roadmap for achieving educational objectives, as Vreuls et al. (2022) emphasized, ensuring that daily activities, curriculum design, and staff roles are systematically aligned. Forming an

implementation team fosters collaborative leadership (Shashyn et al., 2024), ensuring collective accountability among teachers, administrators, and community representatives.

Developing high-quality, age-appropriate learning materials is critical, grounded in Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which highlights the importance of exploration and discovery (Alharbi, 2022). Teacher and educational staff training, as outlined by Daniels & Pyle (2023), further strengthens instructional quality by focusing on developmental appropriateness, play-based methods, and inclusive practices. Planning for developing safe and stimulating learning facilities, supported by Martin et al. (2022) standards, also enhances children's well-being and engagement.

Partnerships with relevant parties, including universities, local governments, and NGOs, expand resources and expertise, aligning with the model of school-community involvement (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022). Regular monitoring and evaluation based on Ratnay et al. (2022) CIPP model ensures that educational programs remain effective and continuously improve. Moreover, inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, community participation campaigns enhance social interaction and shared responsibility for children's education (Ghosheh et al, 2021).

Empowering students and parents through active involvement, as suggested by Rosales (2023), promotes better learning outcomes and strengthens home-school connections. Finally, as Datnow et al. (2022) argued, strengthening the institution's vision and mission ensures that all efforts are unified toward holistic child development and long-term educational success. Together, these strategies provide a strong foundation for building high-quality, sustainable early childhood education programs.

The school must develop a detailed operational plan for each planned program. This includes implementation schedules, resource allocations, and measurable success indicators. Meanwhile, an implementation team of teachers, school staff, and community members should be formed. Each program should have clear responsibilities and tasks distributed among team members. Teachers and educators need to develop relevant learning materials aligned with the objectives of each program. The materials should encompass religious aspects, literacy, numeracy, character development, and bullying prevention.

Programs to enhance teacher competence and use software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint require specialized training. Collaboration with experts and trainers can enhance their skills. Plans for adding new classroom buildings, expanding play areas for children, and renovating the school should be well-prepared. This involves location surveys, architectural planning, and resource procurement.

The school can meet with educational institutions, community organizations, and institutions involved in stunting prevention to establish mutually beneficial partnerships. Regular monitoring of each program is necessary to measure progress and achieved outcomes. This evaluation helps identify areas for improvement and assess program effectiveness. To garner

community support for voluntary efforts, the school can launch campaigns explaining the benefits of quality education and inviting participation in fundraising or other resource contributions. Involving students and parents in literacy, numeracy, and bullying prevention programs can foster an inclusive and empowered educational environment.

Throughout the implementation of all programs, it is crucial to solidify the school's vision and mission. This involves consistent and continuous communication with all stakeholders. By following this follow-up scenario, ECE schools in Kendari can execute their plans and programs more effectively and in a more organized and effective way, creating a quality educational environment with a positive impact on children's development.

### **3.5 Discussion**

Early Childhood Education plays a significant role in shaping the foundational development of children. In Kendari city, a holistic approach, diversified funding, diverse facilities, varying access, and parental choices are key factors in identifying ECE needs. However, behind these elements, business motives and ECE service provision also play a crucial role in shaping and managing ECE institutions. In this context, it is important to analyze the relationship between these components, business motives, and ECE service provision.

#### **3.5.1 Business Holistic Commitment as a Business Strategy**

The holistic commitment in Kendari's Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions extends beyond academic aspects to encompass character development, religious education, and the physical well-being of children. This comprehensive approach serves as an effective business strategy. According to the research conducted by Morris & Perry (2019), educational institutions that prioritize holistic development tend to attract parents seeking comprehensive education for their children. This business motive considers parents' aspirations to foster all-around development in their children, which drives the demand for ECE services offered by schools.

The study emphasizes that parents are increasingly drawn to institutions that offer a well-rounded educational experience, focusing on cognitive growth and nurturing character, spirituality, and physical health. In the context of Kendari, the ECE institutions' commitment to holistic development aligns with the desires of parents seeking a comprehensive and balanced educational experience for their young children. This strategic approach addresses parents' aspirations for their children's growth and positions the institutions competitively in the ECE market. As such, the holistic commitment is a unique selling point that attracts parents and shapes the institutions' business strategy.

#### **3.5.2 Variation in Funding and Service Quality**

The diversified funding sources in Kendari's Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector, such as BOP, BOS, and community contributions, reflect efforts to optimize resources and avoid reliance on a single funding stream. In the realm of educational business, diversified funding can help mitigate financial risks and provide flexibility in service provision. Education with



diversified funding is more likely to adapt to market changes and shifts in demand (Horta et al., 2008; Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011). Furthermore, this approach enables institutions to enhance service quality and cater to the diverse needs of their clientele.

Securing funding from multiple sources reduces the vulnerability of ECE institutions to financial instability resulting from changes in government funding or economic fluctuations. By diversifying their funding, these institutions can ensure a more sustainable financial base and allocate resources efficiently. This not only contributes to the stability of the institutions but also enables them to invest in enhancing their educational offerings and facilities.

Furthermore, diversification of funding aligns with sound business principles by reducing the dependency on a single source of income. It allows ECE institutions to respond nimbly to changes in the educational landscape, adjusting their programs and services to meet evolving demands. This approach enhances their competitive advantage by positioning them as adaptable and responsive to market dynamics.

In conclusion, diversifying funding sources in Kendari's ECE sector reflects a strategic effort to enhance financial resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. This practice aligns with prudent business strategies and ensures that ECE institutions can provide high-quality education while managing financial risks and market changes effectively.

### **3.5.3 Adequate Facilities and Competitive Advantage**

The availability of adequate facilities in Kendari's Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers can be a determining factor in creating a competitive advantage in ECE services. According to Harini et al. (2023), high-quality facilities can enhance the institution's image and attract parents' attention. In business competition, institutions that offer superior facilities tend to have an edge in capturing the interest and trust of parents (Gupta, 2023), ultimately supporting the growth and sustainability of the institution.

Investments in high-quality facilities contribute significantly to the overall learning experience and well-being of children in ECE centers. Modern and well-equipped classrooms, safe play areas, libraries, and other amenities create an environment conducive to effective learning and development. Moreover, appealing facilities can establish a positive first impression and build a strong reputation for the institution.

In the context of competitive business, the quality of facilities can serve as a differentiator, attracting parents who seek the best possible educational environment for their children. When parents perceive an institution as offering better facilities, they are more likely to consider it a reliable and credible choice for their child's education. This competitive advantage can drive enrollment, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, all of which are essential for the sustained success of ECE institutions.

In conclusion, providing high-quality facilities in Kendari's ECE centers can play a pivotal role in creating a competitive edge in the ECE market. These facilities not only enhance the learning environment for children but also influence parents' perceptions and decisions.

Institutions that prioritize and invest in superior facilities position themselves favorably to capture parent' interest and trust, contributing to their growth and long-term viability.

### **3.5.4 Access and Diversification of Parental Choices as Marketing Strategies**

The variation in access and choices for parents in Kendari's Early Childhood Education centers reflects an understanding of the diversity of preferences and needs among parents/guardians. In a business context, diversification of options is a powerful marketing strategy. Providing a diverse range of choices to consumers increases the likelihood of customer satisfaction and helps institutions target a broader market segment (Gabellini & Scaramuzzi, 2022). By offering options that align with various preferences, ECE institutions can capture parental interest and expand their market share.

In a dynamic and competitive educational landscape, catering to different preferences and needs is essential for attracting a wider audience and staying relevant. Parents often have varying priorities regarding their child's education, including teaching methodologies, extracurricular activities, language options, etc. By accommodating these diverse preferences, ECE institutions can position themselves as adaptable and customer-centric. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the concept of customer-centered marketing, where the focus is on meeting the needs and desires of the target audience. Offering a range of options increases the chances of attracting parents and enhances the institution's reputation for being responsive and attentive to individual needs.

Ultimately, diversifying choices in Kendari's ECE centers goes beyond catering to parental preferences; it also serves as a strategic tool for expanding the institution's reach and ensuring its competitiveness in the market. By acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of parents, ECE institutions can strengthen their appeal, build trust, and foster long-term relationships with families.

### **3.5.5 Integration of Business Motives with Early Childhood Education Interests**

In connecting the holistic commitment, diversified funding, facilities, access, and parental choices with the business motives and services of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Kendari, it is crucial to understand that integrating business and educational aspects is key. A seamlessly integrated business motive aligned with the goals of early childhood education can establish a sustainable and service-oriented approach. Successful educational businesses are those that generate not only financial profits but also have a positive impact on children's development (Aizer et al., 2022).

Aligning business strategies with educational objectives enhances ECE institutions' overall quality and effectiveness. When business motives are deeply embedded in the educational framework, a harmonious relationship exists between providing valuable services and achieving financial sustainability. This integration enables institutions to allocate resources more effectively, deliver relevant programs, and continuously improve their offerings to meet the evolving needs of parents and children.

An integrated approach also supports the development of long-term relationships with parents and the community. Trust and loyalty are fostered when parents perceive that the institution's business strategies are aligned with their child's educational and developmental needs. This, in turn, can lead to positive word-of-mouth referrals and sustained enrollment.

Furthermore, research has shown that educational environments focusing on holistic development attract parents seeking comprehensive education for their children (Morris & Perry, 2019). By integrating business motives and holistic education, ECE institutions in Kendari can position themselves as valuable partners in children's growth, ensuring a balanced and impactful early learning experience.

In conclusion, integrating business and educational aspects is a fundamental approach that allows ECE institutions to thrive financially while positively contributing to children's development. This alignment creates a win-win situation where institutions flourish, parents are satisfied, and children receive a holistic education that prepares them for success.

While this study provides in-depth insights into the relationship between holistic commitment, diversified funding, facilities, access, and parental choices in Kendari's ECE with business motives and ECE services, there are several limitations to acknowledge: 1) The findings of this study have limitations in their direct applicability to ECE contexts in other locations. Different variables, such as culture, social environment, and education policies, can influence how these components interact with business motives and ECE services; 2) Data limitations could restrict the depth of analysis. Unavailable or incomplete information about parental motivations and preferences, appropriate funding, or the direct effects of business strategies on child development may lead to less comprehensive conclusions; 3) External factors' influence, such as economic developments or demographic changes in the region, can affect how ECE institutions operate and respond to business motives and services. Internal analysis does not always cover these factors; 4) Data interpretation and findings can be influenced by the researcher's and analyst's perspectives. Although methodological steps are taken to mitigate subjectivity, an interpretation remains influenced by individual viewpoints 5. This study has not yet been able to trace the long-term impact of implemented business strategies in Kendari's ECE. Longer-term changes have not been fully explored; 6) While the discussed factors in this study have significant impacts, other factors might also influence business motives and ECE services, such as government regulations or broader industry competition.

Awareness of these limitations is crucial to provide a more comprehensive context for the study's findings and help readers understand the constraints that might affect the interpretation and generalization of research results.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Kendari, the holistic approach, diversified funding, varied facilities, diverse access, and parental choices are interconnected with the business motives and ECE services. The holistic commitment appeals to parents seeking comprehensive education, while funding diversification aids institutions in adapting and enhancing service quality. High-quality facilities become a competitive advantage, and the range of access and choices demonstrates an understanding of the diversity of parental preferences. Integrating business motives and educational objectives creates a sustainable approach that positively impacts children's development. Educational business success encompasses financial gains and positive effects on children. By combining these elements, Kendari's ECE demonstrates that a service-focused and holistically developmental business approach can deliver enduring positive impacts on children's growth and the overall growth of ECE institutions.

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