

The Relationship between Parental Attention Levels and Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood

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Early childhood, Emotional regulation, Parental attention

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the effect of a lack of parental attention on early childhood emotional regulation, including children's ability to manage, express, and stabilize their emotions. Phenomena observed in the school environment indicate that children who receive insufficient attention at home tend to display explosive emotional responses when their desires are not fulfilled. Using an explanatory quantitative correlational method, this study involved 20 children aged 4–6 years and 20 parents from an early childhood education institution (ECE) in Bogor Regency. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires to measure parental attention and behavioral observation instruments to assess children's emotional regulation. Descriptive statistical analysis showed that the average level of parental attention was 13.35, while the average score of children's emotional regulation was 16.2. Correlation analysis yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.727$ ($p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant strong positive relationship between the two variables. These findings suggest that higher levels of parental attention are directly associated with better emotional regulation abilities in children. Conversely, minimal parental involvement causes children to lose emotional guidance, thereby hindering their social development and behavioral stability.

Kata Kunci:

Anak usia dini, Regulasi emosi, Perhatian orangtua

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kurangnya perhatian orangtua terhadap kemampuan anak usia dini dalam mengelola, mengekspresikan, dan menstabilkan emosi. Fenomena di lingkungan sekolah menunjukkan bahwa anak yang kurang mendapatkan perhatian di rumah cenderung menunjukkan respons emosional yang meledak ketika keinginannya tidak terpenuhi. Menggunakan metode kuantitatif-korelasional explanatori, penelitian ini melibatkan 20 anak usia 4–6 tahun dan 20 orangtua di sebuah lembaga PAUD di Kabupaten Bogor. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket dengan skala Likert untuk variabel perhatian orangtua dan instrumen observasi perilaku untuk regulasi emosi. Hasil analisis statistik deskriptif menunjukkan rata-rata tingkat perhatian orangtua sebesar 13,35 dan rata-rata regulasi emosi anak sebesar 16,2. Uji korelasi menghasilkan koefisien sebesar $r = 0,727$ ($p < .001$), yang menunjukkan signifikansi statistik adanya hubungan positif yang kuat antara kedua variabel. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa perhatian orangtua yang tinggi berbanding lurus dengan kemampuan regulasi emosi yang baik pada anak. Sebaliknya, minimnya keterlibatan orangtua menyebabkan anak kehilangan acuan emosional, sehingga menghambat perkembangan sosial dan stabilitas perilaku mereka.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical developmental period during which foundational socio-emotional competencies are formed. Among these competencies, emotional regulation plays a central role in shaping children's ability to adapt, build relationships, and function effectively in educational settings. Contemporary developmental science conceptualizes emotional regulation as a multidimensional capacity involving the modulation of emotional arousal, behavioral responses, and



attentional processes in order to achieve adaptive functioning (Northrup et al., 2025). In early childhood education (ECE) contexts, emotional regulation has been consistently associated with school readiness, peer acceptance, and positive classroom engagement (Adynski et al., 2024).

Recent empirical research emphasizes that emotional regulation in early childhood does not develop in isolation but emerges through dynamic co-regulation processes between children and caregivers. Co-regulation refers to the supportive interactions in which adults scaffold children's emotional experiences by modelling calming strategies, guiding emotional labelling, and responding sensitively to distress. Over time, these externally supported strategies become internalized as self-regulatory capacities (Northrup et al., 2025). This perspective aligns with current relational-developmental frameworks that position emotionally responsive parenting as a key mechanism underlying children's regulatory development.

Parallel to this shift, contemporary parenting research has moved beyond broad categorizations of parenting styles toward examining specific emotional processes within families. A recent meta-analytic review indicates that parents' own emotion regulation abilities are significantly associated with children's emotional regulation outcomes (Zimmer-Gembeck, Melanie J., et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies examining coparenting quality and emotional climate demonstrate that coordinated, emotionally supportive family systems contribute positively to children's regulatory competencies (Pan B., et al., 2025). These findings underscore that the quality of parental involvement—particularly emotional availability and responsiveness—plays a decisive role in children's regulatory development.

Despite this growing body of literature, two important gaps remain. First, much of the recent international research operationalizes parenting using constructs such as emotional socialization, parental regulation strategies, or coparenting quality. However, the construct of *parental attention*—understood as everyday emotional availability, responsiveness, and active engagement—has received comparatively less focused empirical examination, particularly in correlational studies within ECE contexts. While parental attention may appear conceptually simple, it represents a proximal and observable indicator of children's access to emotionally supportive interactions in daily life. Second,

although global research provides strong evidence linking parenting practices to emotional regulation, empirical studies conducted within local early childhood educational settings - especially in culturally specific contexts- remain limited. Family school interaction patterns, caregiving routines, and parental role expectations may vary across cultural settings, thereby influencing how parental attention operates in shaping children’s emotional development. Context-sensitive evidence is therefore needed to strengthen the ecological validity of existing theoretical models.

In light of these considerations, the present study aims to examine the relationship between parental attention levels and early childhood children’s emotional regulation abilities among children aged 4–6 years in an ECE setting. By focusing specifically on parental attention as a measurable and contextually grounded construct, this study seeks to support and extend recent international findings on parenting and emotional regulation while addressing the relative scarcity of context-specific empirical evidence.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides empirical evidence linking parental attention—a practical and observable dimension of caregiving—to children’s emotional regulation within an early childhood educational context.

Recent scholarship conceptualizes emotional regulation in early childhood as a multi-level developmental capacity involving children’s modulation of emotional arousal, attention, and behavior across contexts, with outcomes that extend to social competence and school adjustment. Empirical evidence in early childhood indicates that better emotional regulation is associated with more adaptive social skills and academic-related adjustment, while dysregulation is linked to greater behavioral challenges and poorer adaptation in school settings (Adynski et al., 2024).

Contemporary developmental models increasingly emphasize that early emotional regulation is not solely an “intra-child” skill but is substantially shaped through parent–child co-regulation, especially in preschool years when children still depend on adults to scaffold calming strategies, reappraisal, and flexible coping. In this view, emotionally responsive caregiving functions as an external regulatory system that gradually becomes internalized by children (Northrup et al., 2025).

In parallel, the parenting literature has shifted from general descriptions of parenting to more specific mechanisms, including parents' own emotion regulation, emotion coaching, supportive responses to negative emotions, and family emotional climate. Meta-analytic findings show that parents' emotion regulation is meaningfully related to children's emotion regulation outcomes across studies, suggesting that "how parents regulate" and "how parents respond emotionally" are key pathways shaping children's emotional development (Zimmer-Gembeck, Melanie J., et al., 2021). Second, it situates parental attention within contemporary co-regulation and emotional development frameworks, thereby strengthening the theoretical integration between parenting behaviors and child regulatory outcomes. Third, it offers contextually grounded data that may inform both ECE practitioners and family-support initiatives aimed at fostering socio-emotional development during early childhood. In the present study, parental attention can be understood as a proximal indicator of children's access to emotionally supportive interactions (e.g., responsiveness, monitoring, emotional availability), which are central components of co-regulation processes during early childhood (Northrup et al., 2025). This framing aligns parental attention with contemporary parenting–emotion regulation models that emphasize emotionally responsive caregiving as a mechanism supporting children's developing self-regulatory skills (Zimmer-Gembeck, Melanie J., et al., 2021).

Existing international evidence consistently supports a positive association between supportive parenting and children's emotional regulation. For example, recent work highlights the role of coparenting quality and coordinated parental functioning in shaping children's emotion regulation abilities, implying that family-level emotional support systems matter for children's regulatory development (Pan B., et al. 2025). In addition, recent studies synthesize evidence showing that parents' emotional processes—including parents' own regulation strategies—are linked to children's regulatory outcomes, strengthening the theoretical argument that children's emotional regulation develops through emotionally meaningful interactions at home (Zimmer-Gembeck, Melanie J. et al., 2021).

However, two gaps remain salient. First, much of the contemporary literature operationalizes parenting through broad constructs (e.g., parenting style, emotion socialization, coparenting), while "parental attention" as an

everyday, observable indicator (availability, responsiveness, time/interaction quality) is less consistently examined as a focal predictor in correlational studies within ECE contexts. Second, evidence from diverse cultural settings—particularly local ECE contexts where parent–school collaboration patterns, daily routines, and caregiving demands may differ—is still comparatively limited, and further context-sensitive studies are needed to strengthen external validity (Roskam et al., 2024). Accordingly, the present study fills a contextual gap in prior findings by testing whether parental attention levels are significantly associated with children’s emotional regulation among children aged 4–6 years in an ECE setting, providing context-specific evidence that complements existing international scholarship on parenting and early emotional regulation (Roskam et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: To what extent is parental attention associated with early childhood children’s emotional regulation abilities in an ECE setting?

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between parental attention levels and early childhood children’s emotional regulation abilities. A correlational approach was selected because the primary objective was not merely to describe each variable independently, but to determine the magnitude and direction of the association between parental involvement and children’s socio-emotional outcomes. Correlational designs are particularly appropriate in early childhood research when investigating naturally occurring relationships without manipulating variables, especially within educational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021); (Punch & Oancea, 2020).

Recent empirical studies emphasize that parental involvement and emotional regulation are developmentally intertwined constructs that can be examined effectively through correlational modeling in naturalistic school contexts ((Spinrad et al., 2023); Morris et al., 2022). Moreover, emotional regulation in early childhood is considered a foundational socio-emotional competence shaped by parent–child interactions and environmental responsiveness ((Malti & Davidov, 2023; (Robson et al., 2020)). Therefore, an explanatory correlational design allows for the identification of predictive patterns while maintaining ecological validity.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study involved 20 children aged 4–6 years and their 20 parents from an Early Childhood Education (ECE) institution in Bogor Regency. Given that the number of eligible children enrolled in the institution met the research criteria and was relatively small, this study applied a total sampling technique, meaning that all children and parents who met the inclusion criteria were included as research participants. Total sampling is recommended when the accessible population is limited and when researchers aim to avoid sampling bias within a bounded institutional context ((Etikan & Bala, 2021); (Sharma, 2022)). In early childhood settings, total sampling enhances internal representativeness and ensures that findings reflect the full characteristics of the institutional population (Taherdoost, 2022). The inclusion criteria were children aged 4–6 years actively enrolled in the institution, parents willing to complete the questionnaire independently, children without identified developmental disorders based on school records.

These criteria were established to ensure developmental homogeneity and reduce confounding variables related to neurodevelopmental conditions, which are known to significantly influence emotional regulation trajectories ((Beauchaine & Crowell Sheila E., 2020); (Zhang et al., 2022)). Total sampling was considered appropriate to ensure full representation of the accessible population within the institution and to strengthen internal validity within the defined research context.

Demografi Participants

No	Parent's Name	Child's Name	Employment Status	Living Arrangement
1	N	C	Mother	One Parent
2	W	A	Father	Biological parent(s)
3	M	Y	Father	Biological parent(s)
4	I	Y	Mother	Biological parent(s)
5	D	M	Father	Biological parent(s)
6	S	M	Father	Biological parent(s)
7	L	K	Father	Biological parent(s)
8	I	R	Father	Biological parent(s)
9	H	R	Father	Biological parent(s)
10	W	Z	Father	Biological parent(s)
11	I	S	Father	Biological parent(s)
12	E	K	Father	Biological parent(s)
13	W	Z	Father	Biological parent(s)
14	E	F	Father	Biological parent(s)
15	M	R	Both parents are employed	Biological parent(s)
16	Y	F	Both parents are employed	Biological parent(s)
17	K	D	Father	Biological parent(s)
18	N	Z	Both parents are employed	Biological parent(s)
19	F	A	Both parents are employed	Biological parent(s)
20	D	K	Father	Biological parent(s)

Figure 1. Demografi Participants

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collection techniques in this study were carried out using questionnaires designed with two types of response scales. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of parental attention through closed-ended statements with response options ranging from never to always. Meanwhile, yes or no response options were used to collect data related to early childhood children's emotional regulation abilities, focusing on specific behavioral aspects that are simple and easily observed by parents. All questionnaires were completed by parents as the primary respondents based on their observations of the children's behavior in everyday life. Two research instruments were used:

Parental Attention Questionnaire

Parental attention was measured using a 16-item questionnaire developed based on indicators of parental emotional availability, responsiveness, engagement, and monitoring behaviors. The instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale:

1 = Never	3 = Sometimes	5 = Always
2 = Rarely	4 = Often	

The total score represented the overall level of parental attention, with higher scores indicating greater parental involvement and emotional availability.

Emotional Regulation Observation Rubric

Children's emotional regulation was assessed using a 10-item behavioral observation rubric focusing on: Emotional control during frustration, ability to calm down after distress, appropriate emotional expression, behavioral stability in social interactions, flexibility in adapting to classroom situations. Each item was rated using a dichotomous scale (Yes = 1, No = 0) based on observable behaviors reported by parents. Higher total scores indicated stronger emotional regulation abilities.

Validity and Reliability Testing. Before data collection, both instruments underwent preliminary psychometric testing. Content Validity was evaluated through expert judgment involving two specialists in early childhood education and child psychology. Items were reviewed for clarity, relevance, and alignment with theoretical constructs of parental

attention and emotional regulation. Revisions were made based on expert feedback to improve item wording and conceptual accuracy. Construct Validity; Item validity was tested using Pearson Product–Moment correlation during a pilot test. All questionnaire items showed corrected item-total correlations exceeding $r > .30$, indicating acceptable construct validity.

Reliability; Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha: Parental Attention Questionnaire: $\alpha = .87$ and Emotional Regulation Rubric: $KR-20 = .81$. Both coefficients exceed the .70 threshold, indicating good reliability for research purposes.

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to parents through the school’s parent communication group. Prior to participation, parents received an explanation of the research objectives and assurances regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation. Parents completed the instruments independently based on their daily observations of their children’s behaviors at home and in social settings. All collected data were coded and entered into statistical software for analysis.

Data were Analyzed using:

1. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, kurtosis)
2. Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables

Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

LEVEL OF PARENTAL ATTENTION TO CHILDREN (X)		EMOTIONAL REGULATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN (Y)	
Mean	13,35	Mean	16,2
Standard Error	0,595	Standard Error	0,57
Median	14	Median	17
Mode	16	Mode	18
Standard Deviation	2,66	Standard Deviation	2,55
Sample Variance	7,08	Sample Variance	6,48
Kurtosis	-1,16	Kurtosis	-1,29
Skewness	-0,51	Skewness	-0,23
Range	8	Range	8
Minimum	8	Minimum	12
Maximum	16	Maximum	20
Sum	267	Sum	324
Count	20	Count	20

Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the variables of parental attention level (X) and early childhood children's emotional regulation ability (Y). The statistics analyzed included the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, range, and data distribution.

Based on the analysis results, the parental attention variable had a mean value of 13.35, with a median of 14 and a mode of 16. The minimum value obtained was 8, while the maximum value reached 16, resulting in a data range of 8. The standard deviation of 2.66 indicates variability in parental attention levels within the research sample, although it remains within a moderate variation category. A skewness value of -0.51 suggests a slightly left-skewed distribution, while a kurtosis value of -1.16 indicates a relatively flat (platykurtic) distribution.

Meanwhile, the early childhood emotional regulation variable showed a mean value of 16.2, with a median of 17 and a mode of 18. The minimum emotional regulation score was 12, and the maximum reached 20, with a range of 8. The standard deviation of 2.55 indicates that children's emotional regulation abilities also vary, but remain relatively stable. A skewness value of -0.23 suggests a distribution that is close to symmetrical, while a kurtosis value of -1.29 indicates a tendency toward a flat distribution. Overall, the descriptive statistical results indicate that both the level of parental attention and early childhood children's emotional regulation abilities fall within moderate to high categories, with acceptable levels of data variability.

Level of Parental Attention to Children (X) Emotional Regulation of Early Childhood Children (Y)



Figure 3 : Comparison of Parental Attention Levels and Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood

Based on Figure 1, it can be observed that, in general, children who receive higher levels of parental attention tend to exhibit higher emotional regulation abilities. Although several subjects display different patterns, the overall trend indicates a positive relationship between parental attention and early childhood children's emotional regulation. These findings provide an initial basis for conducting correlational analysis in the subsequent stage.

Variable	Level of Parental Attention (X)	Emotional Regulation (Y)
Level of Parental Attention (X)	1	0,727
Emotional Regulation (Y)	0,727	1

Figure 4. X & Y

These results suggest that early childhood children who receive higher levels of parental attention tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation abilities. Conversely, children with lower levels of parental attention tend to exhibit lower emotional regulation abilities. These findings reinforce the descriptive statistical results and graphical visualizations presented earlier. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a strong relationship between parental attention levels and early childhood emotional regulation, although this study is not intended to explain a causal relationship.

Analysis and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the relationship between the level of parental attention and early childhood children's emotional regulation abilities, which include the ability to manage, express, and stabilize emotions. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.727$ ($p < .001$), suggesting that parental attention plays a significant role in early childhood emotional development.

These findings are consistent with the perspective of von Salisch (2001), who states that children's emotional abilities develop through continuous interactions with family members and their immediate social environment. Parents serve as primary figures in providing emotional

support and assisting children in understanding and managing their emotional experiences. Descriptive statistical results show that the average parental attention score was 13.35, while children's emotional regulation averaged 16.2, demonstrating a linear relationship between the two variables.

A lack of parental attention and involvement may cause children to lose guidance in regulating their emotional responses, making them more vulnerable to displaying emotional instability, such as emotional outbursts or aggressive behavior in the school environment. Therefore, children's emotional regulation does not develop automatically but is formed through consistent interaction and socialization with parents. Consequently, parental attention is a crucial factor in supporting children's emotional development and social adjustment within both family and school settings.

Testing (Normality dan Linearity)

Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)

Given the small sample size ($n = 20$), the Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine the normality of parental attention (X) and children's emotional regulation (Y). The Shapiro–Wilk results indicated that both variables were approximately normally distributed (Parental Attention: $W = 0.948$, $p = 0.336$ Emotional Regulation: $W = 0.959$, $p = 0.470$). Since $p > .05$, the normality assumption was considered met, supporting the use of parametric analysis.

Linearity

The linearity assumption between parental attention and emotional regulation was tested using an ANOVA test for linearity. Results showed a statistically significant linear component ($p < .001$), $F(1,18) = 20.09$ and a non-significant deviation from linearity ($p < .05$), indicating that the relationship between variables could be reasonably modeled as linear.

Effect justification size was interpreted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines for correlation coefficients ($r = .10$ small; $r = .30$ medium; $r = .50$ large). The study reports effect size alongside statistical significance to support interpretation of practical relevance. A post hoc power analysis (two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$) was conducted based on the observed correlation ($r = .727$, n

= 20). The achieved power was approximately $1 - \beta \approx .97$, indicating that the study had sufficient sensitivity to detect an effect of this magnitude.

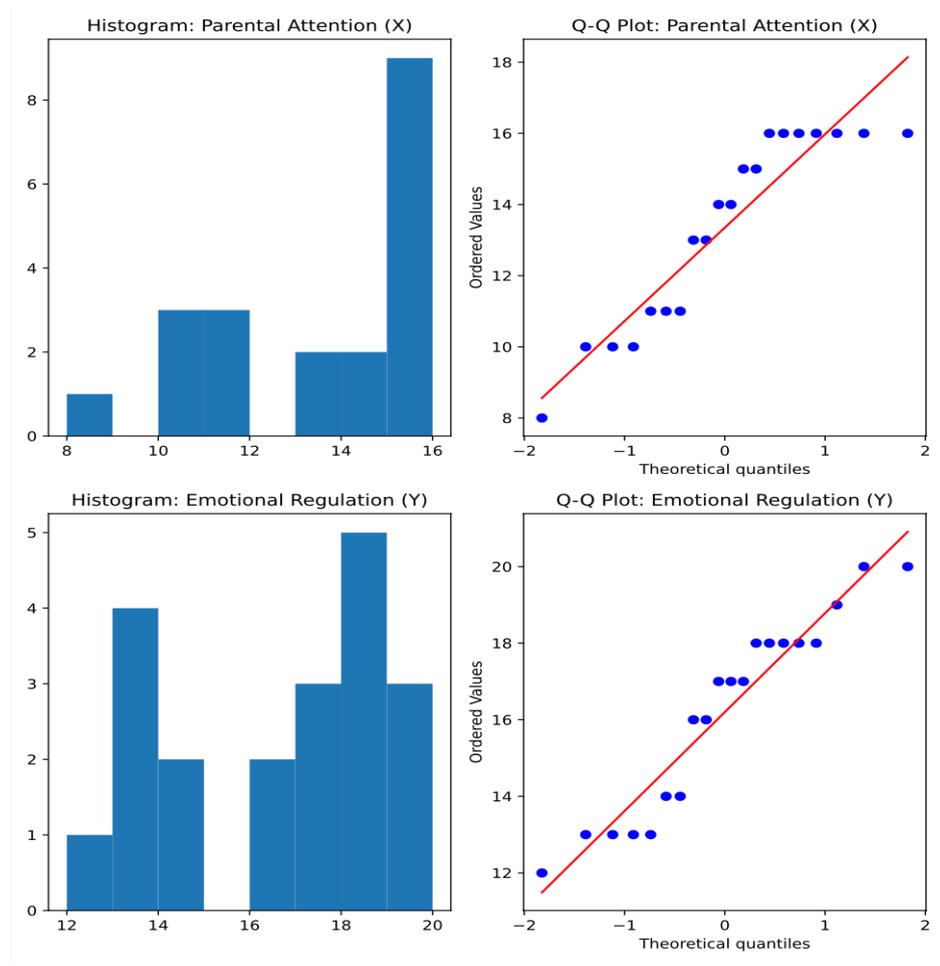


Figure 5 : Graphic Histogram X & Y / Q-Q Plot X & Y

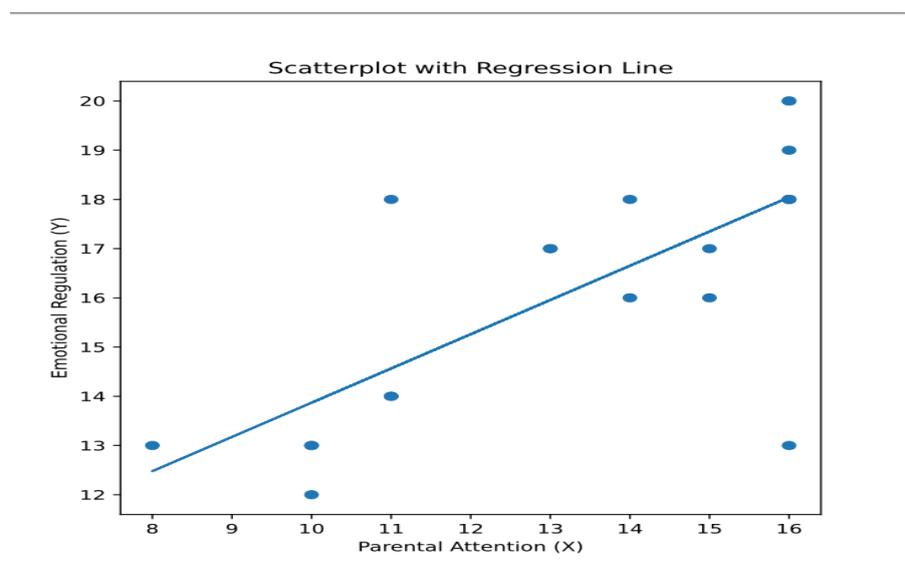


Figure 6. Scatterplot with Regression Line

Ethical Clearance Statement

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Parents received a detailed study explanation, participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and data were used solely for research purposes. Ethics approval was not required for this study type at the institution, this should be stated explicitly along with the institutional policy reference.

Research Implications

This study strengthens the theoretical framework regarding the role of attachment and emotional regulation in early childhood development. The findings provide empirical evidence that parental attention is a significant variable that directly contributes to the quality of children's emotional regulation. Therefore, this study enriches the literature on the relationship between parenting practices, emotional attachment, and early childhood social-emotional development.

From a practical perspective, the results emphasize the importance of increasing parental awareness of children's emotional needs, beyond merely fulfilling physical and academic needs. Early childhood education institutions (PAUD) may utilize these findings as a basis for designing parenting education programs that emphasize the importance of parental emotional involvement in children's daily lives. Teachers can also establish more intensive communication with parents to support consistency in parenting practices between home and school environments.

These findings may serve as a reference for policymakers in designing family support programs, particularly for parents who face time constraints due to work demands. Policies that promote balance in parental roles in caregiving are expected to help minimize the risk of emotional regulation difficulties among young children.

Research Limitations

This study has not fully accounted for other factors that may also influence early childhood children's emotional regulation abilities. Emotional regulation is a multidimensional construct and is not solely

influenced by parental attention. Children's internal factors, such as innate temperament, may determine the intensity and stability of emotional responses from an early age, thereby influencing how children respond to emotional stimulation from their environment.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that parental attention plays a significant role in supporting young children's emotional regulation. Children who receive consistent, responsive, and emotionally supportive parental involvement tend to demonstrate stronger abilities to manage emotions, adapt to classroom demands, and interact positively with peers. Rather than focusing solely on academic readiness, early childhood development programs should recognize emotional regulation as a foundational competence shaped through collaborative efforts between families and schools. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening home-school partnerships as a strategic pathway to promote children's socio-emotional development. Future research may explore longitudinal designs and intervention-based approaches to better understand causal mechanisms and the sustainability of parent-focused programs. Based on the findings, early childhood education schools and educators are advised to implement integrated strategies in the form of structured parent education programs through regular workshops on emotional guidance, responsive communication, and positive discipline; integration of emotional training in daily teacher-parent communication to ensure consistency between home and school; development of collaborative emotional support plans for children with emotional regulation difficulties; active involvement of parents in social-emotional activities in the classroom; and implementation of a continuous monitoring and feedback system to ensure that children's emotional support develops in a focused and effective manner.

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