Building School - Family Synergy in Urban Early Childhood Education: A Case Study on Parental Participation at PAUD Al- Hikmah, Jakarta

Nur Asiyah Tul Alawiyah[1], Masni Erika[2]

[1]Al- Azhar Indonesia University; asiyaalw@gmail.com
[2]Al- Azhar Indonesia University; masni.erika@uai.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to describe parental participation in parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah, Jakarta, and identify the obstacles faced in building school–family synergy. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings show that parental participation is still limited due to parents' work commitments, children being cared for by other guardians, inflexible activity schedules, and uneven levels of involvement. These constraints hinder effective collaboration between school and family. The study recommends adaptive communication strategies, such as flexible scheduling, the use of online platforms, and personal approaches to parents, so that parenting activities can become sustainable collaborative spaces supporting early childhood education.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan partisipasi orangtua dalam kegiatan parenting di PAUD Al-Hikmah, Jakarta, serta mengidentifikasi kendala dalam membangun sinergi sekolah –keluarga. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi orangtua masih terbatas karena kesibukan kerja, anak diasuh wali lain, jadwal kegiatan yang tidak fleksibel, dan keterlibatan yang tidak merata. Kendala ini menghambat kolaborasi yang efektif antara sekolah dan keluarga. Penelitian merekomendasikan strategi komunikasi adaptif seperti penjadwalan ulang, pemanfaatan media daring, dan pendekatan personal agar kegiatan parenting menjadi ruang kolaboratif berkelanjutan dalam mendukung pendidikan anak usia dini.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) refers to educational efforts aimed at children aged 0–6 years, providing holistic stimulation and care both at home and in formal or non-formal institutions. PAUD supports children's physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral development to achieve their optimal potential (Rizqi et al., n.d.) Parental involvement is a key factor in children's development, as parents guide learning and provide motivation from an early age. Active engagement not only enhances children's growth but also strengthens school–family relationships, creating a supportive learning environment both at home and in school (Aly et al., 2018; Literasiologi Literasi Kita Indonesia et al., n.d.). and their environment play a critical role in development, as described in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977). National regulations, such as Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 30 of 2017,

emphasize the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities to achieve educational goals (Diadha, n.d.)

Previous studies have shown that parental involvement positively influences children's socio-emotional development, self-confidence, and school–family communication (Adrianti 1, n.d.). Some research focuses on general forms of involvement or school-based programs, while fewer studies examine structured parenting activities, especially in urban PAUD settings. Urban parents face unique challenges, such as demanding work schedules and limited time to attend school activities. Frameworks like Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement (1995) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) help explain how different forms of engagement and external factors influence participation.

Despite the recognized benefits of parental involvement, limited research explores structured parenting activities in urban PAUD and the barriers parents encounter. Therefore, this study focuses on parental participation in structured parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah, Jakarta, aiming to describe participation patterns and identify challenges that hinder effective school–family synergy. By addressing this gap, the study offers novelty through its focus on urban contexts and structured programs. The aim of this research is to provide insights for optimizing parental engagement in early childhood education, contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for strengthening school–family collaboration.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study method was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of parental participation in parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah, as well as to explore the processes through which school–family synergy is developed within the context of urban early childhood education. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of experiences, interactions, and challenges faced by both parents and educators, providing rich insights into the dynamics of parental engagement and collaborative practices in a real-world educational setting. The population of this study consisted of all stakeholders involved in parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah, Jakarta. Using purposive sampling, a total of 25 informants were selected: one school principal, four classroom teachers (representing Classes A1, A2, B1, and B2), and twenty parents

(five parents from each class). Parents were chosen to reflect diverse backgrounds and levels of involvement, including working parents, stay-at-home mothers, and those who entrusted their children to grandparents. This composition was intended to ensure comprehensive representation of school and family perspectives in the research.

Data in this study were collected using three complementary techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of parental participation. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to explore their experiences, challenges, and perceptions related to parenting activities. Second, direct observations were carried out during parenting sessions and school events involving parents, providing detailed insights into participation patterns and the interactions between parents and educators. Third, documentation analysis was performed, including the review of attendance lists, activity schedules, and school records, which helped to triangulate the findings and strengthen the credibility of the study. Ethical considerations were applied throughout the research. All participants provided informed consent and were informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality was maintained, participation was voluntary, and data were securely stored to ensure protection of participants' identities.

To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, several strategies were employed:

1. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation.
2. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for validation.
3. Dependability was supported by keeping detailed field notes and reflective journals.
4. Confirmability was ensured through maintaining an audit trail of the data collection and analysis process.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was applied thematically to identify categories such as time constraints, caregiver substitution, communication gaps, and uneven participation. Themes were then compared across sources and participant groups to strengthen validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data in this study were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. One of the documented activities was a parenting session conducted at PAUD Al-Hikmah involving teachers and parents. This activity served as a space for communication and collaboration between the school and families. The documentation below presents a snapshot of the parenting activity held at the school:

Figure 1. Parenting Activity at PAUD Al-Hikmah

In addition to observation and documentation, interviews were conducted with the school principal, classroom teachers, and a parenting coordinator. The results revealed that parental participation in parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah is still limited. Several factors were identified as barriers to effective participation.

These findings are summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Obstacles to Parental Participation

No	Description of Findings	Informant
1.	Many parents are unable to attend parenting activities due to word commitments	Teacher A, several parents
2.	Some Children are cared for by grandparents, causing limited information flow	Teacher A & Teacher B, Parents of Class B
3.	Parenting schedules often conflict with parent's availability	Teacher C, Parents of Class C
4.	Parental Participation is uneven across families	Principal Teacher D

5.	Some parents feel insecure or shy about joining school activities	Parents of Class A & C
6.	Transportation difficulties and distance between home and scholl	Parents of Class D
7.	Parents prefer communication via WhatsApp rather than attending in person	Parents of Class A & B

Information Notes:
Teacher A : Classroom teacher for group A
Teacher B : Classroom teacher for group B
Teacher C : Classroom teacher for group C
Teacher D : Classroom teacher for group D

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the level of parental involvement in parenting programs at PAUD Al-Hikmah and to identify the main barriers preventing active participation. Through interviews with one principal, four teachers (Teacher A–D), and twenty parents across four class groups (Classes A–D), seven interrelated factors were identified (see Table 1). These findings provide a nuanced understanding of how structural, psychological, logistical, and cultural elements converge to shape parental behavior in early childhood education.

The findings are highly relevant to the initial objective of the study, which was to understand the gap between the ideal of active parental participation and the practical reality at the school level. Parental involvement has long been recognized as a cornerstone of effective early childhood education. According to Epstein's framework, active engagement in communication, volunteering, and home-based learning promotes children's emotional, social, and academic development. At the same time, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains how external environments—such as the workplace or societal norms—can indirectly influence parents' capacity to participate in school life.

Parental involvement is crucial in early childhood education because parents are the first educators and the first people to interact with their children. The quality of an educational institution can also be reflected in its relationship with parents. However, several studies indicate that parental involvement remains low due to factors such as busy schedules or a lack of understanding of their roles. Parental involvement has a positive impact

when parents understand the meaning, forms, and objectives of their participation. (Diadha, n.d.)

The first barrier identified is the challenge of work commitments. As highlighted by Teacher A and several parents, many parents are unable to attend parenting sessions due to long working hours or inflexible schedules. This aligns with findings by (Adrianti 1, n.d.)(Kim et al., 2022), who emphasize that both standard and non-standard work hours reduce parents' ability to engage in school-based activities. In many urban contexts, parents must balance demanding jobs with household responsibilities, leaving little room for participation in school events. From an ecological perspective, this reflects the influence of the exosystem—factors outside the home that indirectly affect children's development, such as employers' leave policies or shift systems. Therefore, it is crucial for schools to design flexible and inclusive approaches, such as offering online parenting sessions or providing asynchronous materials, to enable parental participation without compromising their professional responsibilities. One solution to address communication challenges is to establish more flexible and sustainable communication channels, such as instant messaging apps, email, or other online platforms that allow for faster and more direct information sharing. Through these methods, parents can receive regular updates on their child's progress, while teachers can more easily engage parents in the educational process. This approach can also foster a more transparent relationship between parents and schools, where both parties have the opportunity to discuss the child's development, plan improvement strategies, and provide mutual feedback. (Amalia et al., 2024)

Secondly, the role of grandparents as substitute caregivers creates a communication disconnect. Teacher A and B observed that some parents entrust their children to grandparents during working hours. As a result, important school information is filtered or lost in transmission, especially when verbal messages are not passed along or written notes are not well understood. This finding supports (Juwita et al., 2020) who emphasize the need for schools to adopt proactive, two-way communication rather than relying solely on the transmission of information. Within Epstein's framework, this represents a breakdown in the "communication" type of

involvement and points to the need for schools to consider who actually receives and processes information in a household.

The third challenge lies in the timing of parenting activities. Teacher C and parents from Class C indicated that scheduled sessions often clashed with key family routines. This misalignment is common in urban PAUD contexts, where parents juggle multiple roles throughout the day. If school events are only offered at rigid times, participation naturally declines. (Nurhayati, 2021) suggests implementing needs assessments before setting schedules, while also offering alternatives such as weekend sessions, multiple time slots, or asynchronous content. This kind of schedule adaptation reflects the principle of responsive programming, which takes into account the daily realities faced by modern families.

The fourth finding reveals uneven participation across families. According to the principal and Teacher D, some parents are highly engaged while others are consistently absent. This disparity cannot be explained solely by interest or motivation. Instead, it likely stems from deeper issues such as educational background, employment conditions, and home-to-school distance, as identified by (Kustiani & Fauziyah, 2019).The inconsistency also suggests that current parenting strategies are not personalized. Schools need to explore innovative ways to engage parents, such as delegating small but meaningful tasks, establishing buddy systems, or recognizing contributions in public forums. Personalization fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, which may be missing from standard models.

To address the disparities in parental participation, schools need to develop responsive and inclusive parenting programs that consider the unique needs and circumstances of each family. This approach can be implemented by regularly conducting needs assessments to ensure that the programs are relevant and accessible to all stakeholders. Schools can also offer various options for timing and formats (in-person, online, asynchronous) to accommodate different schedules. Furthermore, involving parents in the planning and evaluation of programs can increase their sense of ownership and motivation to participate. Strategies such as buddy systems or support groups can also foster a community of mutual support

among parents. In this way, parenting programs become not just a formality but a collaborative process that respects diversity and genuinely enhances engagement.

Another important insight from this study is the presence of psychological barriers. Parents from Classes A and C reported feeling shy or intimidated when attending parenting activities. They feared judgment or felt inadequate compared to other parents. These emotions are rarely acknowledged in program designs but play a significant role in limiting engagement. In Epstein's model, the dimension of "volunteering" is not limited to physical presence; it includes the perception of being welcomed and valued. Schools must therefore focus not only on inviting parents but on empowering them, ensuring a non-judgmental atmosphere and acknowledging that every parent's contribution matters, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The effectiveness of parental involvement in children's education cannot be separated from socio-economic factors, educational levels, as well as family culture and values. Parents who have access to these resources tend to be more capable and prepared to actively engage in their child's education. Therefore, educational policies need to consider how to support families from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds while respecting cultural diversity in educational approaches. Interventions aimed at increasing parental involvement should be holistic, taking into account structural factors and being sensitive to local cultural values, in order to promote equitable educational opportunities for all children. (Rosyadi & Pd, 2024)

Transportation and distance issues emerged particularly among Class D parents, who cited traffic congestion and limited access to public transport as reasons for poor attendance. This logistical constraint is especially relevant in urban areas like where PAUD Al-Hikmah is located. In Bronfenbrenner's theory, these barriers lie within the macrosystem, influenced by city infrastructure, economic planning, and access to mobility resources. Similar findings by (Kustiani & Fauziyah, 2019)reinforce the notion that geography continues to play a role in limiting school–family

partnerships. Schools might consider holding localized sessions in community centers or using mobile outreach strategies.

The finale finding, and perhaps the most adaptive one, is the growing preference for digital communication, particularly via WhatsApp. Parents from Classes A and B reported that receiving parenting content through WhatsApp is not only convenient but allows them to engage at their own pace. This trend reflects broader digitalization in society, a transformation acknowledged in Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, where technology shifts how families interact with institutions. (Nurhayati, 2021) supports this, asserting that digital tools enhance family–school collaboration, especially for busy parents. Digital delivery of parenting content—via recorded videos, infographics, or voice notes—ensures that participation is not limited to physical presence alone.

In addition to utilizing digital platforms like WhatsApp, schools have an important role in enhancing parents' digital literacy. Not all parents possess the necessary skills or confidence to navigate online tools effectively, which can limit their engagement despite the availability of digital content. Therefore, schools should provide training or guidance sessions that empower parents to use these technologies confidently. By improving digital literacy, schools not only facilitate smoother communication but also enable parents to participate more actively and meaningfully in their child's education through online resources and virtual activities. (Sumarsono, n.d.)

Synthesizing these findings, it becomes clear that the challenges faced by PAUD Al-Hikmah are not isolated problems, but interconnected realities that require an integrated approach. Work pressure leads to grandparent caregiving; caregiving impacts communication; communication gaps amplify insecurity; insecurity lowers participation; and all these are worsened by logistical barriers. Understanding these dynamics helps schools design programs that are not only informative but also accessible, respectful, and empowering.

Practically, this research has several implications for PAUD institutions. First, parenting programs should begin with needs assessments and be planned in partnership with parents. Second, the format of delivery

should be diversified—combining physical meetings, online content, and micro-interactions. Third, communication should be proactive and tailored, recognizing who the real caregivers are. Fourth, schools must be intentional in fostering a welcoming environment that values every parent, regardless of how much time or experience they bring. Finally, technology should not just be used for announcements but as a platform for interactive learning and sustained involvement.

Academically, this study contributes new insights to the literature by combining Epstein's and Bronfenbrenner's models in analyzing parental involvement in an urban Indonesian PAUD context. The novelty lies in highlighting overlooked dimensions such as psychological barriers and digital preferences. It also emphasizes the importance of seeing parental involvement not as a static outcome, but as a dynamic process shaped by multiple systems and daily realities.

Practically, this research has several implications for early childhood education institutions. First, parenting programs should begin with needs assessments and be planned in partnership with parents. Second, the delivery format should be diversified—combining face-to-face meetings, online content, and brief interactions (Anjani & Mashudi, 2024) Third, communication should be proactive and tailored, recognizing who the actual caregivers are. Fourth, schools must intentionally create a welcoming environment that values every parent, regardless of how much time or experience they bring (Izzah et al., 2023). Finally, technology should not only be used for announcements but also as a platform for interactive learning and sustained engagement. (Dinda Sari, n.d.)

In conclusion, parental involvement at PAUD Al-Hikmah is shaped by complex and interrelated barriers—ranging from work commitments and transportation issues to psychological factors and digital preferences. Addressing these challenges requires a shift from traditional, uniform approaches to more inclusive, adaptive, and family-centered strategies. Only by embracing the diversity of family experiences can schools build meaningful partnerships that support children's holistic development.

CONCLUSION

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be concluded that parental participation in parenting activities at PAUD Al-Hikmah remains limited. Barriers include parents' busy work schedules, children being cared for by other guardians, inflexible parenting activity schedules, and unequal levels of parental involvement. These factors hinder the formation of strong school–family synergy. This study recommends strategies such as rescheduling activities, utilizing digital communication platforms, and implementing personal outreach to parents. Structured and adaptive parenting activities have the potential to serve as effective spaces for collaboration. Further research is encouraged to explore more flexible and responsive digital parenting models suited to urban early childhood education settings.

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