

Fathers' engagement in co-parenting practices to support early childhood social skills development

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Abstract

Fathers' involvement plays an important role in supporting the development of children's social skills; however, in practice, this involvement is not always optimal. This study aims to explore the role of fathers in co-parenting practices related to the development of children's social skills at TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi, Magetan. This research employed a qualitative case study approach. The participants consisted of five fathers and two teachers, selected as key informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using source triangulation to ensure data credibility. The findings indicate that: (1) the kindergarten has programs designed to foster children's social skills, which require active father involvement to function optimally; (2) fathers are generally aware of their roles in nurturing children's social development; (3) this awareness is reflected in their efforts to allocate quality time with their children; (4) fathers employ various interaction patterns to support social skill development, including teaching polite communication, engaging in play and recreational activities, maintaining dialogue, reading bedtime stories, sharing meals, and exercising together; and (5) fathers adopt diverse parenting strategies, often through discussion and coordination with their spouses. In conclusion, fathers play a significant and positive role in co-parenting practices that support the development of children's social skills. Strengthening father involvement through collaborative parenting can further enhance children's social competence.

Keywords: *father parenting; co-parenting; children's social skills*

Abstrak

Keterlibatan ayah memiliki peran penting dalam mendukung perkembangan keterampilan sosial anak; namun, dalam praktiknya keterlibatan tersebut belum selalu berjalan secara optimal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk



mengeksplorasi peran ayah dalam praktik co-parenting yang berkaitan dengan pengembangan keterampilan sosial anak di TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi, Magetan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas lima orang ayah dan dua orang guru yang dipilih sebagai informan kunci. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik triangulasi sumber untuk menjamin kredibilitas data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa taman kanak-kanak memiliki program-program yang dirancang untuk mengembangkan keterampilan sosial anak, yang memerlukan keterlibatan aktif ayah agar dapat berjalan secara optimal. Para ayah pada umumnya menyadari peran mereka dalam mendukung perkembangan sosial anak. Kesadaran tersebut tercermin dalam upaya ayah untuk meluangkan waktu berkualitas bersama anak. Dalam praktiknya, ayah menerapkan berbagai pola interaksi untuk mendukung perkembangan keterampilan sosial anak, seperti mengajarkan komunikasi yang sopan, mengajak anak bermain dan berekreasi, melakukan dialog, membacakan cerita sebelum tidur, makan bersama, serta berolahraga bersama. Selain itu, ayah menerapkan strategi pengasuhan yang beragam melalui diskusi dan koordinasi dengan pasangan. Sebagai kesimpulan, ayah memainkan peran yang signifikan dan positif dalam praktik co-parenting yang mendukung perkembangan keterampilan sosial anak. Penguatan keterlibatan ayah melalui pola pengasuhan kolaboratif dapat semakin meningkatkan kompetensi sosial anak.

Kata Kunci: Pengasuhan Anak; Pengasuhan Bersama; Keterampilan Sosial Anak.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration between parents and teachers in educating early childhood is very important and necessary (Cox & Paley, 1997; Ren et al., 2020). Early childhood children have levels of readiness and cognitive and emotional maturity that still depend on parental attention. *Co-parenting* is an effort involving coordination between parental responsibilities in caring for and raising children, and it reflects how they relate to each other at home (Ren et al., 2020). Therefore, *co-parenting* by parents in monitoring child development—whether emotional, social, or academic—must have a balanced portion so that development can be optimal (Cookston et al., 2023).

Cooperation between parents and the school is important so that the vision of development can be achieved maximally. Harmony between parents in raising and educating children is also important and has a significant influence. Therefore, the quality of *co-parenting* is always associated with parenting outcomes reflected in child behavior, such as physical and mental

health and the warmth children receive from parental care. *Co-parenting* components include cooperation, conflict management between parents, and triangulation. Nevertheless, balanced triangulation between teacher–child education, parent–child education and care, and teacher–parent cooperation must be well-maintained.

The formation of *co-parenting* and children's social-emotional development has been widely supported by published research. However, many researchers focus more on what mother experience in *co-parenting* and its impact on child development. Although empirical research suggests that father parenting is more sensitive in quality to achieving goals in relationships and child-rearing patterns (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000; Ren et al., 2020).

During early childhood development, social skills are one aspect that must be mastered by children, making it important and requiring attention from parents and kindergarten educators (Agusniatih & Manopa, 2019; Maria & Amalia, 2018; Su'ud, 2017). These skills relate to how children interact with others, show empathy, and behave politely and orderly according to societal rules and norms (Agusniatih & Manopa, 2019; Rachman & Cahyani, 2019). The role of parents, especially fathers, significantly influences the development of children's social skills. Fathers have a special role in providing behavioral examples, supporting emotions, and guiding children in social interactions. Father involvement in the child's educational process can have a positive impact on children's social skills in both family and surrounding social environments.

Child development in early childhood occurs over a short period (Hanafi & Sumitro, 2020). Development is a pattern of movement or any change that begins from conception and continues throughout the life cycle (Aisyah et al., 2021). The movement pattern is complex because it results from several processes: biological, cognitive, and social (Santrock, 2002.p.20; Santrock et al., 2002). One development mentioned by Santrock is social development. Soetjiningsih (2012) states that children's social-emotional development relates to empathy, *respect*, self-confidence, and *trust* (Hari, 2012.p. 213).

Such social development certainly cannot be separated from the roles of family and school. The family is the first environment for children and the smallest unit in shaping personality, so it naturally has a major role (Zhang, 2013). If good cooperation between parents in raising children does not occur, it is difficult to optimize positive social development in children. Therefore, mothers and fathers must cooperate in parenting, so it is not only the mother who plays a role, but the father also participates (Tang et al., 2023). Father involvement in *co-parenting* when children enter early childhood education

(PAUD-TK) is certainly different from the mother role. In early childhood, children imitate both speech and actions (Cookston et al., 2023; Zhang, 2013). Habits frequently spoken by fathers tend to be easily imitated by children, including intonation and speaking style (Anatoli & Cekaite, 2023; Tola, 2018). Children also quickly imitate what their fathers do. Behavior shown by fathers when interacting at home becomes the result of father *co-parenting* for the child. This is just one example of the influence of father *co-parenting*. Many other patterns can impact and influence children's social skills. Therefore, father parenting patterns in child *co-parenting* are very important to explore further (Cookston et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2020; Zhang, 2013).

The positive role of a father in early childhood social development is highly valuable (Zhang, 2013). From various perspectives, children's social skills at least begin with their relationship with their father. First, from an attachment perspective, the father-child relationship reflects the quality of emotional bonding between father and child. According to attachment theory, the outcome of internal attachment between father and child from the start can guide children's expectations, refine their feelings, and enhance their ability in subsequent social interactions, especially when children interact with peers (Lamb, 2012). Children with positive relationships with their fathers can enhance parenting patterns that make the father respected, trusted, and supportive. This, in turn, forms positive attitudes when children socialize with peers.

Second, social-cognitive theory argues that a child's social skills are influenced by the father through *modelling* (Cookston et al., 2023; Zhang, 2013). Parents who are friendly and enjoy direct social interaction provide real examples for children on how to handle conflict and solve problems. Through positive father interaction, children can learn and directly apply new social skills systematically in meaningful contexts.

Several studies include research by Maulida Nurliza and Sri Intan Rahayuningsih, which found a relationship between the father's role in stimulating preschool child development at PAUD in Syah Kuala sub-district, Banda Aceh (Nurliza & Rahayuningsih, 2016). Research by Ren Remy et al. (2020) explains that father involvement in *co-parenting* can increase children's academic readiness levels, such as reading, writing, speaking, and counting. Ren Remy's research explains that authoritative, authoritative, and regulatory father *co-parenting* can influence children's academic readiness. Another study Dubeau et al. (2013) states that fathers are more involved with their children, thus playing a greater role in forming children's social competence.

Father involvement in early childhood co-parenting is essential; however, in diverse social contexts, parents do not share equal opportunities or face similar challenges in practicing co-parenting (Meuwissen & Carlson, 2015), particularly in settings where fathers' occupational demands vary. Diverse parental occupations mean diverse work commitments. Some parents have dense working hours, reducing interaction time with children. Thus, some children do not receive sufficient interaction time with their fathers and miss the benefits of father *co-parenting* (Vollmer et al., 2015). Work busyness experienced by fathers must be balanced with father awareness of the importance of participating in *co-parenting*. Father awareness can find good solutions, at least managing time to accompany the child. Additionally, socio-cultural environmental situations also influence, including stereotypes in child education, fully delegating *co-parenting* to the mother, and so on. Parental education levels can also affect awareness of the importance of *co-parenting* and how they maintain parenting quality for their children.

From the above issues, it is known that fathers also have an obligation to be active and involved in parenting. There is a relationship between the father's roles in stimulating early childhood social development. TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan, located in Nguntoronadi District, Magetan Regency, has a strong commitment to parental involvement, including fathers, in kindergarten-level education. Therefore, this research aims to determine the extent to which fathers of TK Dharma Wanita children play a role in *co-parenting*. From observations conducted, father *co-parenting* in the TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi environment is not optimal, with symptoms including: (1) most fathers lack time due to work; (2) different behavioral patterns and challenges among fathers; (3) lack of father awareness about the importance of their role in parenting; (4) differences in socio-cultural child-rearing practices.

This research aims to descriptively determine the father's role in developing early childhood social skills at TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan. From several previous studies, the novelty of this research is that it focuses on describing the extent to which fathers participate in *co-parenting* tasks to support their children's development in the TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan environment. In carrying out *this co-parenting* role, it is expected to reveal the interaction patterns between father and child. Thus, effective strategies can be sought to design or address parental obstacles in *co-parenting*. With better understanding of the father's role in early childhood education, this research is expected to contribute valuably to education, parents, and researchers in strengthening father involvement in the child's educational process.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The research was conducted at TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi, Magetan, with a focus on describing father involvement in co-parenting practices aimed at developing children's social skills.

In this study, the researcher acted as the primary research instrument, playing an active role in observing and interpreting social situations and interactions in the field, as suggested by Creswell (2017). Data were obtained from seven key informants, consisting of five fathers and two kindergarten teachers. The fathers varied in age, ranging from early thirties to early forties, and were engaged in diverse occupations such as entrepreneurs, private-sector employees, and traders. The two teacher informants included the school principal and a classroom teacher, both of whom were directly involved in implementing programs related to children's social development.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, direct observation of fathers' parenting practices, and document analysis related to school programs and parenting activities. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, source triangulation was employed by comparing and integrating information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). The combination of these data sources enabled a comprehensive understanding of fathers' co-parenting roles in supporting children's social skill development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The presented results are from triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation. From triangulation, findings are summarized as follows:

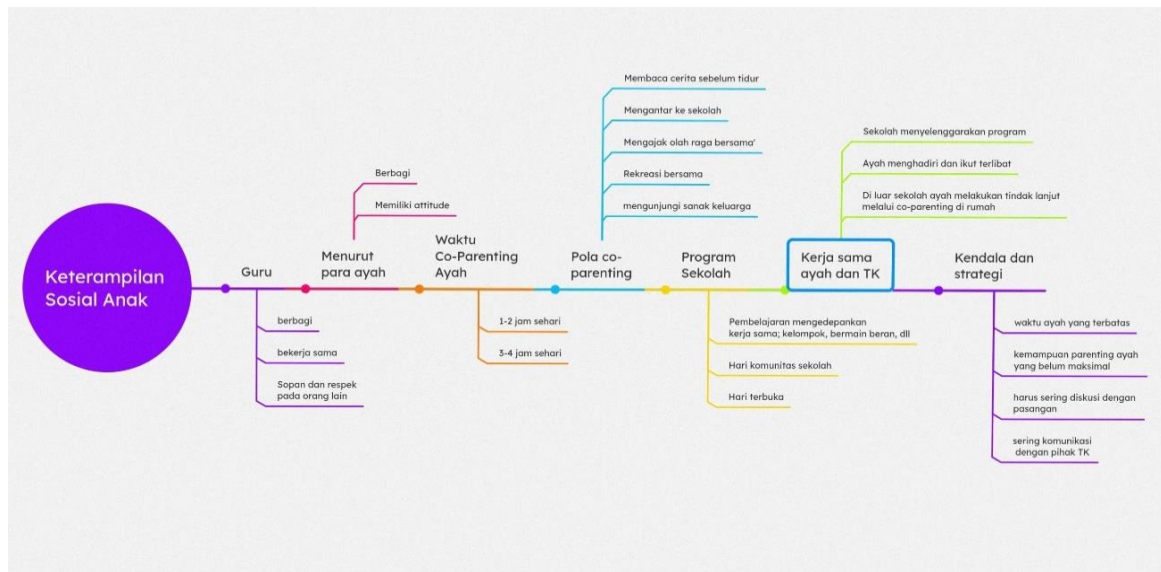


Figure 1. Finding on father *co-parenting* in honing children's social skills.

Kindergarten Programs in Children's Social Skills and School Perspective on the Importance of Father *Co-Parenting* in Supporting Kindergarten Programs

Every program developed by the kindergarten aims to educate and train children to grow and develop with several basic skills. In instilling children's social skills, the kindergarten program creates a learning climate or situation where children can share and cooperate, both in classroom learning and outside the classroom. According to teachers, training children's social skills fundamentally involves instilling a spirit of sharing and cooperation.



Figure 2. One of the school community day activities involving fathers.

In classroom learning, teachers condition children to learn together in groups, such as role-playing, group projects, and team games. These activities, according to teachers, can train children to communicate well, politely, and

develop sharing. Outdoor activities include events involving parental presence, such as open days and school community events. There is also a follow-up program monitoring children's activities outside kindergarten through parental reports. At school, teachers can directly monitor student activities. At home, the role shifts to parents. Therefore, parental presence, especially father *co-parenting*, in school-organized activities is very important for children's social skill development and program success. According to teachers, synergy between kindergarten and fathers or parents is crucial for properly monitoring child development, facilitating follow-up programs.

Fathers' Awareness of Their Role in Co-Parenting

From the information obtained, all five fathers are fully aware of the importance of their role in educating their children, including honing and developing children's social skills. For them, social skills to be trained are simply described as:

- (1) Children can share. *"For me, it is already sufficient if my child can share toys to play together or take turns"* (Father 1).



Figure 3. Greeting activities help train children to develop positive attitudes

This means socially, the child is ready to face situations where they can position themselves and their role in a group, and sharing is a skill that must be possessed. (2) Respect the interlocutor, as it relates to *attitude*. (3) Be friendly, gentle, polite, avoid fighting with friends. (4) Be orderly, peaceful, and able to cooperate with friends.

According to informants, such skills must be applied consistently. They realize they have a role in helping children develop these attitudes. Their presence as fathers serves as a guide for children on how to behave, and their behavior becomes a model for their children.

Fathers' Involvement and Active Role in Co-Parenting

The involvement and active role of informant fathers show that all strive to be present and interact directly with their children. Due to different work-related backgrounds, some fathers have varying interaction times. Some have 1–2 hours daily for direct interaction. *"I spend approximately 1–2 hours a day for interacting..."* (Father 1 dan 2), Others feel less than one hour daily but maximize

the time. Interaction quality is highly regarded by fathers when beside their children to fulfill co-parenting duties. *"I do not have much time due to my work; however, I make the most of the time I have to ensure quality interactions, such as taking my child to school and accompanying them before bedtime"* (Father 2). Some, due to midweek work limitations, fully utilize weekends for child-rearing. *"On weekends, I spend as much time as possible with my child and choose shared activities that allow for longer interaction with them"* (Father 3 dan 4)

Interaction Patterns in Co-Parenting

Interaction patterns fathers use with their children in parenting activities include inviting them to play, reading stories before bed, taking children to school, going to nearby parks, eating together, and inviting children to exercise. These interaction patterns are also important, according to fathers, for enhancing children's social skills. *"I take my child to visit relatives to help foster familial bonds from an early age. This activity is also important for developing the child's social skills, particularly in building confidence when interacting with others"* (Father 4). Another pattern is making time to take and accompany children before bed by reading stories and conveying moral message. *"I regularly read stories to my children before they go to sleep. These stories often contain positive moral messages that are beneficial for the development of their social skills"* (Father 5). Another pattern is inviting direct storytelling and dialogue. *"I consistently teach my child basic norms of politeness so that they become accustomed to practicing them in social interactions, such as using expressions like please, thank you, sorry, and excuse me."* (Father 2)

Fathers' Strategies in Parenting and Cooperation with Partners and School

Regarding strategies fathers use in co-parenting, the general strategy is direct companionship for their children. Fathers realize their presence is very important and greatly influences child development. *"One of the challenges I face as a father is dealing with my child when they experience tantrums. At times, I find myself losing patience as well. Therefore, I consistently engage in self-reflection to consider what alternative strategies I should apply in the future to better support my child"* (Father 3). Regarding strategies, cooperation with partners is very important. *"We (the father and his partner) regularly engage in discussions regarding the division of roles and responsibilities in child-rearing, identifying practices that need improvement and minimizing strategies that are considered ineffective for future implementation"* (Father 1). Time together is also a serious concern for fathers to make children feel safe and comfortable with their presence, so they strive to create such moments whenever possible. *"My wife and I consistently make efforts*

to spend time together with our child by going for outings, whether simple walks around the neighborhood or recreational trips on weekends. These activities help strengthen family bonds; moreover, from the perspective of children's social skills, such experiences allow them to observe and understand social life from broader and diverse perspectives" (Father 3).

Discussion

Role and Kindergarten Perspective on Children's Social Skills and Father Co-Parenting

Findings show that TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan pays attention to children's social skill development. Programs support child skill development and involve parental roles and father *co-parenting*. Synergy between kindergarten and parents is important for proper child development monitoring. This aligns with (Zhang, 2013) who states that placing the full burden on the school prevents programs from running maximally. The kindergarten needs information from parents about children's activities and development at home. This information serves as reflection and evaluation material for designing follow-up programs. Positive aspects can be followed up with other programs; obstacles require immediate anticipation. In the observed case, synergy between school and father *co-parenting* runs well. Challenges are overcome through good communication between both parties. Therefore, synergy among school-child-parents in early education, especially fathers, must be maintained proportionally so that children's social skill development can be achieved optimally (Sara & Acar, 2021).

Fathers' Awareness of Their Role in Co-Parenting

Generally, information from fathers shows high awareness of the importance of their role in child-rearing and developing children's social skills. Fathers are aware and understand that their children must have social skills to interact with others. Social skills, including cooperation and collaboration, are 21st-century skills (Aslamiah et al., 2021). By developing skills early, fathers hope their children will not become antisocial. Father awareness of the importance of their care leads them to allocate time as much and as well as possible for child *co-parenting*. Because, in kindergarten age, father involvement and influence on child socialization are significant (Dubeau et al., 2013). Additionally, with understanding of social skills children must possess, these fathers strive to provide stimuli they believe positively impact children.

For example, reading stories before bed provides understanding of social skills through moral messages in the stories. Honing social skills through

storytelling is effective in training children's social abilities (Adrianindita, 2015; Andani et al., 2017; Fitroh & Sari, 2015).

Fathers' Involvement and Active Role in Co-Parenting

Active father involvement in *co-parenting* greatly influences children (Aryanti, 2017; Septiani & Nasution, 2018). Skills children possess result from father accompaniment. Fathers' hobbies and preferences also impact children liking the same. Therefore, the quality and quantity of father parenting are crucial for developing children's social skills. Kindergarten children still engage in much imitation; activities and behaviors shown by fathers become role models for action (Park & Kwon, 2019). Interaction patterns, such as frequently taking children to relatives' homes or crowded family events, even sports together, are beneficial for children to socialize well with their social environment.

Time is a constraint for parents, especially fathers with dense working hours. From the five informants, all feel their time is not ideal. But due to high awareness of their parenting role, fathers strive to maximize available opportunities and time. In other words, these fathers try to enhance *co-parenting* quality so their children have good social skills.

Interaction Patterns in Co-Parenting

From informant information, they prioritize direct interaction in providing *co-parenting*. Direct interaction has greater influence because children feel safe and comfortable near their fathers ((Brown & Cox, 2020). Fathers conduct varying interactions with different intensities. Such interaction patterns benefit fostering children's social skills. For example, habituating children to play with friends and share toys develops social skills. Habitual activities train cooperation and collaboration (Lechowicz et al., 2019). Simple implementations need to be applied to children.

Father-child interaction patterns provide comfort and safety. Especially interactions using friendly, gentle, soft communication, as taught by Father 2, training children to always use simple words (Brown & Cox, 2020; Lechowicz et al., 2019). Such communication style develops ingrained politeness affecting speaking style. This benefits children, who imitate the modelled communication style. In social interactions, it trains children to be habitually polite (Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Fathers' Strategies in Parenting and Cooperation with Partners and School

Strategies informants use in child-rearing involve direct interaction or companionship. This parenting strategy is very appropriate and ideal. Children need the direct presence of parental figures. Father figure presence is important for safety and comfort (Novela, 2019; Syafiqoh & Pranoto, 2022). Therefore, fathers must have strategies in parenting to achieve optimal child development. Good communication with partners or wives can produce good strategies in parenting patterns according to desires (Saral & Acar, 2021).

Cooperation with the school is also important (Acar et al., 2018). Fathers' role here can be as program partners or controllers monitoring school programs. Schools have designed programs aimed at child development. However, without home support and father/parent roles, achieving desired development is difficult. Therefore, synergy between school and parents, especially fathers, must run in parallel (Saral & Acar, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This research aims to describe the father's role in developing social skills of kindergarten children at TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan. From findings and discussion, it is concluded: (1) School programs in honing children's social skills are implemented in the learning process and with father *co-parenting* assistance. (2) Fathers have full awareness of their role in nurturing children to develop social skills. (3) Full awareness possessed by fathers is implemented through efforts to spend as much time as possible together nurturing their children (4) Interaction patterns carried out by fathers to develop social skills include teaching polite speech, inviting them to play and go on vacation, engaging in dialogue with children, reading bedtime stories, eating together, and inviting children to exercise (5) Strategies employed by fathers vary; they discuss with partners the strategies needed to nurture their children. Likewise with TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan, fathers strive to actively support and cooperate in implementing programs conducted by TK Dharma Wanita Nguntoronadi Magetan.

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