



## **The Influence of Social Environmental Factors, Parenting Patterns, Education, Nutrition, and Culture on the Holistic Development of Early Childhood**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction to The Problem:** This phenomenon holds significant importance, given the complexity of the Indonesian socio-cultural context and the existing disparity in the quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) services. **Purpose:** This study is designed to meticulously explore the intricate interactions among social environmental factors, parenting practices, education, nutrition, and culture in shaping the holistic development of early childhood. **Design/methods/approach:** The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a combination of narrative inquiry and case studies. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation targeting 12 participants, comprising parents, ECE teachers, and administrators of early childhood education institutions within Sleman Regency. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to select the relevant informants. Data analysis was performed thematically, based on the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman. **Findings:** Five core themes were identified: (1) The quality of the social environment supporting socio-emotional development; (2) Democratic parenting practices fostering independence and self-expression in children; (3) Local culture-based ECE reinforcing children's identity and engagement; (4) Nutritional consumption patterns impacting children's focus and participation; and (5) Cultural values serving as instruments for character education. These findings affirm that child development is the result of an intricate system that is socio-economically and culturally interconnected. **Research implications/limitations:** It is recommended that future research thoroughly investigate the spiritual and religious dimensions of holistic child development. **Originality/value:** The primary contribution of this study is the enrichment of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and social constructivism within the local Indonesian context, alongside providing an empirical foundation for designing highly contextualized community-based interventions..

**Keywords :** Holistic child development; Parenting styles (or Child-rearing practices); Early Childhood Education (ECE); Child nutrition; Local culture; Qualitative approach (or Qualitative methodology)

### **Introduction**

The holistic development of young children constitutes a critical issue within the domain of global education and child welfare. International organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF have underscored the significance of a holistic approach encompassing physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual aspects during the golden age of child development. In Indonesia, this approach becomes even more crucial given the complexity of socio-cultural factors and the disparity in access to basic services such as quality education, nutrition, and caregiving (Yani Suryani & Rivo Panji Yudha, 2023). In both global and national contexts, the primary challenge is how to ensure that every child grows up in an environment that supports their optimal development.

Empirically, various studies indicate that the quality of the social environment and parenting styles significantly contribute to the formation of children's character and competence. Research conducted by Amanda Putri Nasution et al., (2025) found that children raised in a supportive social environment with a democratic parenting style demonstrated better emotional and linguistic development. Conversely, permissive and authoritarian parenting practices tend to inhibit children's self-regulation abilities. Furthermore, social interaction in play settings is also a principal factor influencing children's social intelligence and communication skills (Cahya & Siregar, 2024).

Children's nutritional intake and health are equally essential. A study by Khotimah et al., (2025) highlights that chronic malnutrition remains a significant problem across various regions, particularly in rural areas. This condition affects not only physical growth but also children's cognitive and affective development. Efforts to meet nutritional needs, based on family education and local culture-based approaches, have proven effective in raising parental awareness regarding the importance of early childhood nutrition (Susilowati et al., 2025).

Local culture and the education system also play a pivotal role in shaping the values, norms, and habits that influence child growth and development. Margono, (2018) asserts that a culture emphasizing communalism and collective responsibility tends to foster children with strong social competence. However, a disparity persists between local cultural values and the early childhood education (ECE) curriculum, which has not been fully contextually integrated. This suggests the necessity for an educational approach that is more adaptive and deeply rooted in the local community's culture (Azizah, 2025).

Previous literature has indeed partially investigated various factors such as nutrition, parenting styles, or education related to child development, yet few studies have explored the interconnections between these factors integratively within the context of early childhood life (Nisviati et al., 2025). Qualitative studies concerning the direct experiences of families, teachers, and children in facing these dynamics remain limited. This creates a significant research gap that

needs to be bridged, particularly in understanding the meaning and process behind children's holistic development across diverse socio-cultural situations.

Based on this background, this research aims to profoundly explore how the factors of social environment, parenting style, education, nutrition, and culture interact in influencing the holistic development of young children. The focus of the study will be directed toward the subjective experiences of the actors (parents, teachers, and children) within the local socio-cultural context, utilizing a phenomenological approach that emphasizes their meaning-making and perceptions.

This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of community-based intervention models for early childhood care and education that are more holistic and contextual. Practically, the research findings can also serve as a basis for education policymakers, ECE institution managers, and families in formulating more effective strategies to support optimal child growth and development amidst complex socio-cultural and economic challenges.

## **Literature Review**

The holistic development of early childhood children constitutes an educational and nurturing approach encompassing all aspects of a child's growth, ranging from physical, cognitive, emotional, social, moral, to spiritual dimensions. This approach is rooted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), which emphasizes that children develop within interconnected environmental systems: the microsystem (family), mesosystem (school, community), exosystem (public policy), and macrosystem (culture) (Komari & Aslan, 2025). In this context, the understanding of child development cannot be separated from the complexity of the interaction between the individual and their environment.

The social environment plays a crucial role in shaping a child's personality and social skills. Cahya & Siregar (2024) affirm that children raised in communicative and supportive environments tend to exhibit high levels of interaction and empathy skills. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) reinforces this perspective by stressing that children learn through the observation and imitation of the behavior of those around them. Consequently, social conditions characterized by minimal interaction, household conflict, or unsupportive communities can impede the child's socio-emotional development process.

Parenting styles also serve as primary determinants in early childhood development. Baumrind's theory classifies parenting styles into authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (often termed 'democratic' in certain literature), with the authoritative style considered the most ideal for fostering a child's independence and responsibility (Qotrunnada & Darmiyanti, 2024). Research

by Wahyudi et al. (2024) indicates that adaptive and communicative parenting styles promote stable emotional development and more resilient character traits in children. Variations in nurturing within specific cultural contexts also introduce unique characteristics to this process.

In the educational domain, the integrated holistic approach within Early Childhood Education (PAUD/ECE) strives to align cognitive learning with the strengthening of social, spiritual, and emotional values. Vygotsky, through his social constructivism theory, asserts the importance of social interaction in child learning, utilizing the zone of proximal development and scaffolding (Wahyudi et al., 2024). A study by Bunawardi et al. (2023) further supports the notion that physical and cultural learning environments, such as child-friendly architecture, can support the optimization of a child's potential in both academic and non-academic domains.

Nutrition and physical health constitute the fundamental foundation of child development, intrinsically linked to cognitive and emotional aspects. Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs theory, places physiological necessities such as food and health as the fundamental prerequisites for achieving further development (Cahya & Siregar, 2024).

Local culture is also an integral element in early childhood education. Sarinastitin (2018) notes that cultural values prevalent in society, such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), empathy, and respect for elders, play a significant role in a child's character formation. However, educational approaches that are overly standardized without considering local cultural uniqueness can lead to a mismatch between the curriculum and the child's social reality. This highlights the importance of developing contextual and participatory culture-based education (Jaya, 2024).

A review of various previous studies indicates that research concerning early childhood development often focuses predominantly on individual aspects in isolation. Studies by Komari & Aslan (2025), Wahyudi et al. (2024), and Bunawardi et al. (2023) provide significant contributions in mapping social, educational, and cultural influences. Nevertheless, an empirical gap remains in the integration across variables specifically, how parenting styles interact with social conditions and nutrition in comprehensively shaping a child's holistic development. Therefore, this study constructs a conceptual framework based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, Bandura's social learning theory, Vygotsky's constructivism, and Maslow's basic needs as a foundation for exploring the complexities of child development within the multicultural Indonesian context.

## **Methods**

The narrative study was selected because it provides the researchers with the scope to reconstruct the life stories of participants who possess genuine experience in nurturing, educating, and shaping the development of early childhood children (ECCD) within social, cultural,

educational, and nutritional frameworks. This approach is appropriate for exploring individual narratives as a form of structured and contextual meaning derived from their experiences (Asriani Puspita Dewi et al., 2023a). Narrative studies are highly suitable for tracing the holistic interconnections between factors from a personal viewpoint, particularly in the study of multidimensional holistic child development. Furthermore, we employed a case study methodology with the goal of describing and analyzing in depth the interaction of various factors—namely, the social environment, parenting practices, education, nutrition, and culture—that influence the holistic development of early childhood children. The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to trace phenomena contextually and in detail within the boundaries of a real system (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). This approach is considered relevant for deeply exploring the processes, experiences, and dynamics occurring within early childhood education environments characterized by diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

The research was conducted in two Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), from April to June 2025. These locations were selected because they represent social, cultural, and economic diversity relevant to explaining the empirical context of the research. The informants in this study consisted of 12 participants, including parents/guardians of early childhood children, ECCD teachers, and institutional managers. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, based on the following informant criteria: (1) having direct experience in the education or nurturing of children aged 3–6 years; (2) being capable of conveying their stories reflectively; and (3) originating from varied social and cultural environments. Subsequently, snowball sampling was utilized to expand the network of narratives through recommendations from the primary informants (Apriliani & Utami, 2021; Nurbadriyah et al., 2025).

Data were collected through semi-structured narrative interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted in an open, fluid, and permissive atmosphere, allowing informants the freedom to recount the experiences and significant events they had undergone. Observation was utilized to capture actual practices in educational activities, nurturing, and children's dietary habits. Documentation, consisting of child development journals, Daily Lesson Plans (RPPH), and parents' daily records, served as supporting material and a complement to the oral narratives (Amalika et al., 2023). Furthermore, these three techniques allowed for methodological triangulation, strengthening the depth and reliability of the data (Mayar & Astuti, 2021; Chofia Salsabila et al., 2025). This overall approach aimed to construct a complete and authentic narrative about the children's lives within their social environment.

Data validity was maintained through methodological triangulation (interviews, observation, documentation), source triangulation (parents, teachers, and managers), and member checking, which involved confirming the accuracy of the recorded and interpreted narratives with the participants. Additionally, the researchers employed an audit trail, consisting of reflective notes and the transcription process, to ensure the reliability of the interpretation and the transparency of the research process (Nurbadriyah et al., 2025).

Data analysis utilized the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Open coding was performed on the data to identify themes such as “children’s social resilience in low-stimulus environments,” “local culture as social capital for nurturing,” and “the role of dietary habits on children’s learning concentration.” All data were analyzed thematically and reviewed repeatedly to ensure the interconnections between themes and their social context (Asriani Puspita Dewi et al., 2023).

Through this approach, the research not only yielded an in-depth description of specific contexts in early childhood development but also contributed to building a conceptual framework regarding the importance of culture and community-based contextual interventions. This study is also expected to be partially replicable in areas with similar social and cultural structures, contributing to the development of environment-based models for child rearing and education.

## Result

The findings of this research were obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis involving 12 participants, comprising parents, Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers, and institutional heads across two distinct geographical contexts: urban and semi-rural.

Based on the thematic analysis process utilizing the Miles & Huberman model, five core themes were identified, forming the framework for holistic early childhood development: (1) Quality of the Social Environment, (2) Dynamics of Parenting Patterns, (3) Access to and Quality of ECE, (4) Nutritional Fulfillment Practices, and (5) The Role of Local Culture in Child Education. The first theme, the quality of the social environment, indicates that children's interpersonal relationships with family and the community significantly determine their sense of security and emotional openness. Children raised in attentive and conflict-free environments exhibit higher empathetic and social development. An ECE teacher stated:

*“A child who frequently receives hugs is more self-confident and adapts quickly to peers in the classroom.”*

The second theme, the dynamics of parenting patterns, reveals variations in parental strategies for raising children. In families utilizing a democratic approach, children are permitted to express opinions, taught responsibility, and given clear boundaries. Conversely, children from families employing an authoritarian pattern exhibit fear in self-expression. One parent shared:

*"We accustomed the child to speaking up and making choices, even if their choices are sometimes funny... but they get used to thinking and trusting themselves."*

The third theme, access to and quality of ECE, demonstrates that contextual learning facilities, responsive teachers, and programs based on real-life experiences significantly foster children's language, fine motor, and social development. In semi-rural ECE centers, culture-based activities such as weaving or singing regional songs were proven to increase children's engagement and sense of pride in their local identity.

The fourth theme, nutritional fulfillment practices, indicates that the nutritional adequacy of children remains a challenge, particularly in semi-rural areas. Some parents rely on staple foods lacking protein or vegetable variation. ECE teachers reported that children who regularly consume a healthy breakfast are more active and demonstrate better focus during the learning process. From the teacher's daily log:

*"Children who skip breakfast are usually quiet, refuse to answer questions, and cry easily."*

The fifth theme posits that local culture serves not merely as a social backdrop but as an instrument of character education. Activities such as "playing market" (bermain pasar-pasaran) or regional dances were found to train children in cooperation, empathy, and verbal communication skills. Culture is also reflected in the values of respect toward parents and mutual cooperation (gotong royong) instilled from an early age in both home and school environments.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this research reinforce Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of development, which posits that child development is the result of systemic interaction among the microsystem (family and school), the mesosystem (inter-institutional relations), and the macrosystem (culture). A positive and stable social environment is proven to significantly influence the social-emotional development of early childhood. This aligns with the findings of Cahya & Siregar (2024), who state that children raised in supportive environments demonstrate better psychological resilience, as children also experience emotions such as fear, happiness, disappointment, sadness, curiosity, love, affection, worry, anger, and guilt. Children constantly undergo emotional fluctuations, ranging from low to high intensity (Nasution & Amanda, 2025).

A supportive social environment provides a secure emotional foundation for the child. Children raised in warm, conflict-free, and attentive relationships exhibit better empathy and social competence. This is further supported by Zahroh & Na'imah (2020), who affirm that positive interactions between the child and their environment foster self-confidence and openness. The holistic development of children is also significantly influenced by parental involvement and the family environment, reinforced by S. Nauyoma et al. (2022), who found that active parental participation in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) activities directly impacts children's social-emotional and cognitive dimensions. This study highlights the importance of synergy between family and school in creating a supportive learning environment. Environmental factors greatly influence social attitudes and behavior. Environmental factors such as those found in rural and urban areas show significant differences. Technology and information are more readily accessible in urban settings, thus influencing children's knowledge base. Children in urban areas tend to possess superior intellectual, technological, and linguistic awareness compared to children in rural areas. Urban children also tend to exhibit higher levels of self-confidence (Kusumasari, 2015).

The democratic parenting style, as revealed in this study, is consistent with the research results of Qotrunnada & Darmiyanti (2024) and Hadian et al. (2022), who found that this style nurtures independent, self-confident children who are better able to resolve conflicts. However, this study expands these findings by adding that cultural background and family economic structure also influence parenting practices. For example, families facing economic pressure tend to be more permissive or authoritarian due to limitations in time and energy. Ulferts (2020) also suggests that parenting styles sensitive to cultural context can bridge the emotional needs of children and create an environment conducive to learning. This finding is consistent with field study results showing that a democratic parenting style underpinned by local values actually increases children's balanced engagement in social and academic activities. According to Ayun (2017), parental parenting style significantly influences the child's personality when they reach adulthood. In fact, an individual's traits and character begin to form during early childhood. A child's social and moral development is influenced by their parents' behavior and education during their early years. This social and moral development subsequently shapes the child's disposition, attitude, and character as an adult. Parenting style is a critical component in shaping a child's personality, although other factors also play a role. A family with limited resources may face greater pressure, which can affect their ability to provide adequate attention and emotional support, depending on their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, parental education is crucial, as parents who have attained higher academic degrees tend to possess better knowledge and abilities in raising their children. Previous experiences, such as how the parents themselves were raised, can influence their child-rearing practices (Nurlita,

2024). According to Werdiningsih (as cited in Sari et al., 2019), parental parenting style and communication are also influenced by their occupation. This is due to the fact that parents are actively involved in caregiving and communication, which is vital for child development, particularly the mother. A deficiency in the parental role, especially the mother's, in meeting the child's basic needs, will inevitably have a negative impact on the child's development.

In the context of Early Childhood Education (PAUD), participation in local activities such as traditional games or regional arts is proven to enhance children's fine motor skills, language development, and social engagement. Nurfadlilah et al. (2023) and Nur Saadah (2022) state that the integration of local culture into the PAUD curriculum strengthens children's memory and simultaneously enriches their emotional and cognitive development.

The subsequent aspect is nutrition, which shows a correlation between adequate nutritional intake and children's attention capacity and participation in learning. Children who consume nutritious breakfasts are more focused and active in class. This aligns with the studies by Anggari & Yunita (2020) and Riasti et al. (2025), which emphasize the importance of nutrition education for parents based on local approaches and indigenous eating habits. Rahayu (2020) also stresses the importance of a holistic-integrative approach that combines brain stimulation, nutritional adequacy, and home-based care. This reinforces the field study results, where children with healthy dietary habits and consistent emotional stimulation demonstrated more optimal development compared to those who only met one aspect.

Local culture in the final theme serves as more than just a social background. It functions as a means of values education through symbols, rituals, and daily practices. Children involved in cultural activities such as regional dances or traditional games exhibit robust social development and a spirit of collectivism. These findings are supported by Cahya & Siregar (2024) and Khaerunnisa et al. (2023), who state that the values of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and respect for elders form the foundational character of early childhood in various regions of Indonesia. The cultural aspect also emerges as a significant factor. A study by Oyira & Opiah (2019) highlights the influence of cultural practices on menu planning and children's eating habits, which often impede the fulfillment of balanced nutrition. Meanwhile, Rohman (2024) affirms that integrating local cultural values into the PAUD curriculum can strengthen children's character building and self-identity from an early age.

All these findings reinforce Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and add a local contextual dimension to the understanding of holistic child development. This research also indicates that successful child development does not depend solely on a single factor but is the

result of a complex interplay among social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors, as proposed by Yanuarsari et al. (2019).

The practical implications underscore the importance of integrating contextual PAUD policies that combine nutritional education, reinforcement of democratic parenting styles, and the preservation of local culture. The theoretical implications contribute to the conceptual framework regarding systemic synergy in child development, which is not only internal (cognition and emotion) but also social and cultural.

This entire narrative emphasizes that social environment factors, parenting style, education, nutrition, and culture are not independent entities but rather form an interconnected ecosystem that determines the trajectory of children's holistic development. Therefore, an interdisciplinary and community-based approach becomes highly relevant for the development of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) policies and practices, both in Indonesia and in a global context.

## **Conclusion**

This research reveals that the holistic development of early childhood results from the complex interaction among various factors social, parental care (nurturing), education, nutrition, and culture which do not exist in isolation but are mutually interwoven in the child's daily life. The five principal themes identified namely, the quality of the social environment, the dynamics of parenting patterns, the access and quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE), nutritional fulfillment practices, and the internalization of local culture demonstrate that these factors either mutually reinforce or impede development, depending on the surrounding social and cultural context.

Theoretically, these findings reaffirm the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and Vygotsky's social constructivism theory in explaining the systemic and contextual nature of the child development process. This research enriches the existing literature by offering a conceptual framework that integrates social, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions into a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood development.

Practically, the results of this study underscore the urgency for ECE institutions and families to design parenting and educational approaches that are contextual, participatory, and rooted in local culture. The integration of cultural values into the ECE curriculum is proven not only to strengthen the child's identity but also to significantly enhance their social and emotional competencies. Furthermore, the importance of nutritional literacy within the family unit is key to optimizing children's cognitive and physical development.

The policy implications of this study highlight the need for strengthening community-based interventions that integrate parenting education, cultural education, and nutritional fulfillment strategies into a single, sustainable early childhood education ecosystem. To achieve this, cross-sector collaboration among families, schools, communities, and the government is required.

Future research is recommended to further explore the spiritual or religious dimensions within the holistic development of children, and to apply similar models in other regions characterized by different cultural attributes, in order to test the broader relevance and applicability of the resulting framework.

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