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Investigating parents' degrees of trust and communication towards teachers in Indonesian kindergartens

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Abstract: The parent-teacher interaction has been identified as a critical component in the development of children. Teachers' capacity to educate children is influenced by the level of trust parents have in them. Creating a supportive environment at home and cooperating with the school are essential components of a positive educational experience for all parties involved. Prior research, however, found little parental involvement particularly in establishing a quality relationship with the schools in Indonesian kindergartens. This research aimed to examine Indonesian parents' degrees of trust and communication toward the teachers in 8 kindergartens in Dairi regency, North Sumatra. In constructing the questionnaire, 9 early childhood education practitioners were invited to make content suggestions before conducting validity test and reliability through factor analysis. The validity is guaranteed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure result of .872 and Barlett's Test (Chi-Square = 3451.561, df = 406, p 0.05). The reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha obtaining an alpha coefficient of .870, indicating good reliability. The findings from the 203 questionnaires consisting of 29 items that were distributed indicate parents' favorable attitudes toward teachers. Besides, the parent's background does not reflect their attitudes and practices. Suggestions, including delivering the concept of partnership to the parents and increasing the opportunities of participating in school activities, are provided to promote greater quality of the parent-teacher relationship.

Keywords: *Indonesian kindergartens, parents' involvement, parent-teacher relationship*

Abstrak: Interaksi orangtua-guru telah diidentifikasi sebagai komponen penting dalam perkembangan anak-anak. Kapasitas guru dalam mendidik anak dipengaruhi oleh tingkat kepercayaan orangtua terhadap mereka. Menciptakan lingkungan yang suportif di rumah dan juga bersikap kooperatif dengan sekolah merupakan komponen penting dari pengalaman pendidikan yang positif bagi semua pihak yang terlibat. Namun, penelitian sebelumnya menemukan kurangnya keterlibatan orangtua di taman kanak-kanak Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa tingkat keterlibatan orangtua di taman kanak-kanak tempat anaknya bersekolah. Sebanyak 203 kuesioner diperoleh dari orangtua dengan anak-anak berusia lima tahun yang terdaftar di 8 taman kanak-kanak di Kabupaten Dairi, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia. Hasilnya menunjukkan sikap positif orangtua terhadap guru. Selain itu, latar belakang orangtua tidak mempengaruhi sikap dan praktik

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mereka. Beberapa saran diberikan untuk meningkatkan kualitas kemitraan antara orangtua dan sekolah.

Kata kunci: *hubungan orangtua-guru, keterlibatan orangtua, taman kanak-kanak Indonesia*

Introduction

The parent-teacher relationship has been identified as essential in children's development. The Bronfenbrenner Ecological System Theory (1979) emphasized the importance of the environment for child development. In his ecological approach, children's development is influenced by their interactions with their surrounding contexts, such as the home and educational institutions, as well as the interactions between these contexts (see Figure 1). Those surrounding contexts refer to the microsystem, while their interactions refer to the mesosystem. These interactions are influenced and shaped by microsystems' culture and might jeopardize a child's development when they clash (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Therefore, a well-established smooth relationship between these microsystems is needed. As members of a child's microsystems, both home and school provide a vital support system to flourish children's development. Both groups are essential and expected to have a healthy relationship. When parents and teachers communicate and work together effectively, it can significantly impact each child's long-term success.

The intimacy among children's surroundings is as important as the relationship between the child and their surroundings. According to studies, when teachers and parents have a closer relationship, parental participation rises (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Additionally, families who felt more at ease were more willing to share information about parenting concerns (Coyne, 2013).

A study by Shayo et al., (2021) unraveled that trust remains one of the core dimensions of establishing a positive relationship between home and school. To foster a firm family partnership in school, a strong foundation of trust should form between school staff and families. Parents are more likely to view the teachers as providing high-quality care and participate in teacher interactions if they have trust in them (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017).

The second dimension is understanding. Understanding can also be about sharing information about the child's progress, interest, and needs. Meaningful conversation between parents and teachers creates mutual understanding. It also enhances parents' experiences with the school. To establish a strong relationship with the teacher and foster mutual respect, it is essential to refrain from criticizing the teacher in front of their child. (Raufelder et al., 2016).

Parental support at home, such as listening to children reading, reading stories to children, or doing some activities related to children's learning, will be highly appreciated by the teachers because this indicates a common goal between parents and teachers in advancing children's development. Epstein (2018) asserts that when instructors and parents concentrate on their shared obligations rather than their ones, their combined efforts will strengthen and enrich the interactions, which will improve the academic achievement of the children. Knowing the learning activities at schools, parents can get involved in children's education by making their home a rich learning environment. For instance, dinner conversations, trips, games, reading time, family sports, appropriate supervision, and daily routines can contribute to the child's development.

The last and most important dimension is communication. Communication is essential to ensure the formation of effective parent-educator partnerships that provide a stable foundation for education. Communication can be expressed in one-way or two-way exchanges and this means parents and educators may often have contrasting viewpoints.

(Murphy et al., 2021). One-way communication occurs when teachers seek to inform parents about events, activities, or student progress through various sources, such as an introductory letter at the beginning of the school year, report cards, or communication books. Two-way communication involves an interactive dialogue between teachers and parents. For example, parents providing comments or feedback on teachers' notes on their child's communication book constitutes interactive and encouraging communication with the teacher. Conversations may occur during telephone calls, home visits, stopped-by at school, parent-teacher conferences, or various school activities. Previous studies on various subjects found that parents' communication with teachers regarding their child's progress has shown a positive association with their academic achievement (Porumbu & Necşoi, 2013., 2015; Lara & Saracostti, 2019). The higher achievement was also found among students whose parents were involved in checking their homework. The reading activities at home also supported a positive association with the child's higher achievement.

Parents have benefited from partnership and communication, but both have also helped teachers gain a better understanding of the kids and their routines. According to a study by Bergen et al. (2017) involving 101 parent-child triads, parental reports on household literacy practices can predict how well-read a child would become. According to the study, parents' knowledge of their kids may be useful to teachers. Communicating with parents and acknowledging them as the experts on their children has allowed parents to be a resource for teachers to understand their needs and abilities better. Parents and teachers could form a relationship of mutual respect and trust. Reciprocal and sincere relationships between parents and teachers often helped parents feel less anxious about leaving their child in another person's care. Therefore, this trust enhances the parent's confidence in schooling and promotes the parent's willingness to communicate and find a solution when differences or concerns arise. Parents who trust teachers' practices greatly help the work of teachers in educating children. Parents who understand their roles and responsibilities tend to cooperate with schools without unnecessary intervention (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). When parents view school teachers as partners in their child's education, they will work together with teachers to establish a supportive environment at home and provide an excellent educational experience.

The aforementioned studies show just how important these dimensions establish a healthy relationship between parents and teachers, which leads to the child's development. More notably, what factors influence these dimensions? According to Jafarov (2015), the impacting factors are divided into three major groups, namely parent-related factors, school-related factors, and student-related factors. In this study, the parent-related factor was mainly investigated. This factor is more about parent background, such as the highest degree of education (Yulianti et al., 2018; Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013); Castro et al., 2015; Chevalier et al., 2013; Boonk et al., 2018; Nunez et al., 2015; Kim, 2018). For example, Yulianti et al. (2018) found that Indonesian parents showed a higher level of communication with school when mothers have a higher education level. Another study by Schweizer et al. (2017) revealed that parents with higher educational backgrounds show greater eagerness to personally ensure their children's academic success. Conversely, parents with lower education levels trust teachers more.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is another major factor. According to research by Kraft & Rogers (2015) and Baquedano-López et al., 2013, teachers in households with lower SES are more likely to initiate communication with parents than parents are. Teachers also rate their communication initiation as one degree higher than parents do. However, when teachers could not interact directly with parents, they often turned to other people for information. In most cases, teachers relied on other school personnel and the child for an answer. This is consistent with research by McGrath and Bergen (2015) that showed parents from lower SES levels engaged in fewer school-related activities and had fewer positive connections with

instructors.

Previous studies focused only on parent-teacher communication methods such as communication books (Yulianti, 2015), by phone and face-to-face (Syamsudduha & Ginanto, 2017), and Social Network Service (SNS) through WhatsApp Messenger (Mayangsari and Aprianti, 2017). A study by Jeynes (2018) confirmed the influence of parenting style on communication quality with teachers. Ogawa (2017) found that parents in schools in Jakarta are eager to participate in/ join the activities arranged by schools such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and Career Day. Previous research examined the communication strategies used between parents and teachers but did not explore the level of parental involvement or the relationship between the factors in the context of trust, understanding, communication, and support. In the current study, these issues are addressed, and conclusions are drawn.

Methodology

This study used a survey research method. In the first phase, a 35-item questionnaire was constructed by adopting survey items from relevant studies (Adams & Christenson, 2000., Longitudinal Survey of Child Sciences and Parenting Research Office Benesse ERD Institute, 2016., Murphy, 2009., and Gehlbach, 2015). The second phase was inviting 9 early childhood education (ECE) practitioners to make content validity suggestions. Changes were then made based on the suggestions resulting in a 38-item questionnaire. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure was then conducted to ensure that the questionnaire is appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 1. KMO and Barlett's Test

12		t
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.872
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3451.561
	Df	406
	sig.	.000

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10 After obtaining the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure result of .872 and Barlett's Test (Chi-square = 3451.561, df = 406, p 0.05), reliability was then measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The alpha coefficient ranged from 0 to 1 (the closer a scaled coefficient to 1, the greater the reliability of the instrument). With 9 items deleted, the reliability of the questionnaire achieved an alpha coefficient of .870. The final questionnaires comprised two parts, with the first part consisting of items related to parents' background and the second part consisting of 29 items that were grouped through a rotated component matrix into 4 dimensions, representing parents' perceptions of their attitudes and practices, namely *Trust* containing 14 items, *Understanding* containing 5 items, *Communication* containing 7 items, and *Support* containing 3 items.

The first two dimensions aimed to measure parents' attitudes toward teachers, whether parents believe in teachers' competence in teaching their children, and to what extent they understand their roles and other fundamental things to build a quality relationship with them. The latter two dimensions aimed to measure their children's education practices, how frequently they participate in the school's activities, and provide assistance related to children's education while at home. This final version of the questionnaire was distributed to 220 parents of children aged five from eight kindergartens in Dairi regency, North Sumatra, and 203 questionnaires were retrieved. Descriptive statistics were employed to display the parents' overall responses to demographic information in analyzing the data. T-test and ANOVA were conducted to determine if a

significant difference in demographic items, parents' attitudes, and practices exists. Also, a correlation test was used to examine the interactive effects among dimensions.

Findings and Discussion

As Table 1 shows, the total mean was 3.93. Among the four dimensions, parents' trust level is the highest at 4.39, followed by understanding, 4.22, and support, 4.04, while communication scores lowest at 3.08. Based on the parent's perspective, the result indicates a reasonably good relationship between parents and teachers. Parents tend to have high trust in their child's teachers in terms of educating their children. Parents also have a good understanding of the sharing responsibilities.

Table 2. Parents' perception of the parent-teacher relationship

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
Trust	4.39	0.516
Understanding	4.22	0.639
Communication	3.08	0.901
Support	4.04	0.698
Overall Mean	3.93	0.453

However, the low scores on support and communication dimensions are confirmed by observing the frequency of parents' participation (as represented by the Communication part) at the school's events such as monthly Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, inauguration preparation meetings, or sports day. The reason is that parents consider the education domain to belong to the teachers and should not cross it (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Parents see the teachers as those with appropriate power in their professional field and understand that the professionals generally knew best, and they respected their expert knowledge. Thus, they seldom raise questions about the child's progress or attend school activities (Vincent, 2013). Although parents realize that children's education is the responsibility of both parties, parents are firm about their role as the necessities provider for their children. Parents generally perceived that role as caring for their kids at home and seeing to their needs, including feeding and getting the child ready for school in the morning and picking him or her up at the end of the day (Wolf, 2020). Paying tuition fees was the primary way that parents defined their involvement and support of the school. Some parents thought that schools promoted this role by encouraging parents to donate resources for the school during PTA meetings resulting in parents' reluctance in enriching their participation (Yulianti et al., 2018).

Parents' support was related to trust, understanding, and communication

To explore how these dimensions influenced interactively, the authors conducted a Pearson Correlation test and presented the result in Table 2. According to the data, the parent's level of *Trust* was related to *Understanding and Support*, but *not communication*. Also, the quality of parents' *Support* was related to *Trust, Understanding, and Communication*.

When parents trust teachers to take care of their children, they tend to understand their roles as the teachers' partners and be willing to provide more assistance for educating children at home. A study by Hakim (2018) in a kindergarten in Bandung argues that parents will be more interested in knowing what happens to children while at school when parents trust teachers. Checking communication books will provide an overview of the day-to-day development of children at school. The need for this information will help parents

understand their responsibilities to continue their children's education. Therefore, parents will no longer see their role as clients but more as partners to their children's teachers.

On the other hand, when parents provide adequate company and support for children at home, they are more likely to understand their role as teachers' partners and trust them. This trust arises because parents who routinely accompany children while studying at home will see the difficulties teachers may experience teaching their children. Exchanging stories about children's everyday experiences will give the parents a better understanding of the teachers' sincere and hard work. This understanding will lead to a sense of sympathy, and a warm sense of kinship about their shared roles and responsibilities in cultivating their children. Besides, parents with high involvement in school activities such as helping the distribution of zakat (mandatory charitable contribution) for low-socioeconomic status (SES) parents, preparing for the school's annual carnival, and parents-teachers' monthly meetings are proven to have better support for their children at home (Irma, Nisa, & Sururiyah, 2019).

Table 2. The correlation between parents' trust, understanding, communication, and support

	Trust	Understanding	Communication
Understanding	.179* (<i>p</i> = .011)		
Communication	.029 (<i>p</i> = .676)	.168* (<i>p</i> = .017)	
Support	.232** (<i>p</i> = .001)	.434** (<i>p</i> = .000)	.335** (<i>p</i> = .000)

Note. * *p*< 0.05 ** *p*< 0.01

No significant influence of parents' backgrounds on their relationships with the teachers

Prior studies claimed that family background would influence parents' attitudes and practices toward teachers. Recent studies have established the relationship between parental education and their ability to provide support for children, demonstrating that parents with higher levels of education are better able to support their children at home. Higher SES families are also likely to participate more in after-school activities and informal homeschooling practices (Ankrum, 2016; Tan et al., 2020; Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; Trevino et al., 2021). This study's analysis showed no significant influence on parents' backgrounds except occupation on attitude toward teachers. Table 3 indicates no significant influence on trust, understanding, and communication domains. However, in the Support domain, a one-way ANOVA which employed Fisher's Least Significance Difference (LSD), demonstrates a significant difference existed between the Low 2 category and other groups with $F(3, 199) = 2.63, p = .025$.

Table 3. Parents' occupation affects their Support

Dimension	Occupation	<i>dF</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Support	Low 2	3	2.63	.025*
	Low 1	199		
	Moderate			
	High 2			

High 1
Elite

Note. *p < 0.05

Elite (Legal Adviser: Lawyer / Prosecutor / Court Judge; Elite Entrepreneur: Export - Import / Property / Stock; Experts and Scholars: Medical Doctor/Lecturer / Accountant; Government Officials; Celebrities: Musicians/Actors), **High 1** (National Guard: Soldier / Policeman; Civil Servant: Teacher / Administration Staff / Librarian), **High 2** (Retired; Honorary Employee: Teacher / Administration Staff / Librarian), **Moderate** (Agriculture / Livestock / Poultry / Grocery Store Owner), **Low 1** (Public Transportation or Heavy Equipment Driver; Farmer; Mechanic; Labor), and **Low 2** (Unemployed).

This happens because unemployed parents have more time to engage in activities with children than parents with permanent jobs demanding most of their time (Hsin & Felfe, 2014; Chelsey & Flood, 2016; Petts et al., 2020). With both spouses working and multiple school-aged children, parents found it challenging to fit volunteering into their busy schedules (Craig et al., 2014; Heinrich, 2014; Gracia & Kalmijn, 2015). The result also revealed that parents' background apart from their occupation does not affect their level of trust and participation in children's school. This result is different from the findings of other prior studies. Parents have a good relationship with their child's teachers regardless of their background, this is different from previous studies (Rescorla et al., 2014; Becker & Schober, 2017; Park & Holloway, 2013; Li et al., 2020; Hakim, 2018). High or low-socioeconomic status (SES) parents show the same attitude toward their child's teacher, also declined the findings of some studies that assert an inclination between SES with parents' perception (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2017; Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Tan, C. Y., Lyu, M., & Peng, B. (2020)). Also, the result confirms that parents' education, socioeconomic status, or marital status are not affecting their attitudes toward school and practices toward their involvement at school and home.

This study enriches the research on parental involvement in school within the Indonesian school context. For parents, this study will give them insight into their own participation in their child's education both at school and the support they provide at home. Knowing that some components have not been performing as intended, parents can take steps to encourage their involvement, such as creating a stimulating environment at home. The results may also serve as a reference for teachers and schools to improve parental involvement-promoting policies and programs. In addition to Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) gatherings, schools can provide low-income parents with self-development activities like training or workshops on small businesses. From the government side as the policymaker, some necessary measures can be taken to support parental involvement such as funding for school programs involving parents and requiring universities to include volunteering and community service at early childhood education centers as one of the requirements for university admission. This way, students will be encouraged to contribute to their community and at the same time, improve their knowledge and skill. Therefore, by synergizing the role of the community and the government, it is hoped that the intimacy between the home and the school will be more interwoven and will enhance the involvement of parents in schools which lead to improving children's development.

There are two primary limitations to this study. First, the study excludes the opinions of teachers and children, making this study rather limited and prone to bias because it only considers parent-related factors, i.e., their background and how it affected their perceptions. Second, the study was conducted in schools within a regency in North Sumatra province makes the study scope rather small. With a larger sample, future studies will enable superior generalization. To minimize bias, future studies may take into account

teacher- and student-related aspects, particularly when determining the degree and frequency of the four analyzed dimensions. Future studies may also consider incorporating qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews to gain more ample and substantial findings.

Conclusions

This study investigates the parent-teacher relationships in kindergartens in Indonesia and the effects of family background on parent-teacher relationships in terms of four dimensions trust, understanding, communication, and support. The findings confirm that parents put a high degree of trust in teachers, regardless of their background (socioeconomic status, education degree, marital status), however, their involvement in school activities was low. This result is different from previous studies that supported the correlation between parents' background and their involvement at their children's school. This distinct result is related to a cultural factor of Indonesian society, which, unlike Western countries, gives teachers a higher social status and generally trusts teachers' professional performance and contribution. However good as it may sound, trusting teachers to take over the role and responsibility holistically lowers parents' involvement. This study is an eye-opener for principals and policymakers to revisit schools' current agendas involving parents. So for parents with traditional beliefs and ideas about their involvement is no more than just raising funds or term meetings, activities such as Sports Day, a field trip, and parenting workshops will establish a more intimate connection between parents and teachers leading to better collaboration. In the end, joint efforts will shorten the gap between attitude and actual practice in the relationship.

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An Inventory of the Changes Made (All Highlighted in the Revised Manuscript)

1.	Title clarity Former: Parent-teacher relationship in Indonesian kindergartens: Exploring parents' attitudes and practices	Present: Investigating parents' degrees of trust and communication towards teachers in Indonesian kindergartens (The present title highlights what's novel offered by this study)
2.	Abstract clarity a. Questionnaire validity and reliability were not stated clearly. b. Wording "influence"	a. Questionnaire validity and reliability are stated clearly. b. Replaced with "reflect" as it is more appropriate. Regarding the following comment about the SPSS analysis result, yes, it does show in the "Findings and Discussion" section. c. Some paraphrasing
3.	Novelty clarity	Clarified with clearer wordings
4.	References: All cited studies older than ten years have been replaced except for: a. Bronfenbrenner (1979) b. Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007) since both are the foundation theories for this study, namely, Bronfenbrenner Ecological System Theory (EST)	
5.	Unclear methodology	Rewritten for clarity
6.	Findings and Discussion a. Lack of supporting studies of the parents' perception Means b. Lack of supporting studies of the parents' background and	a. Supporting studies are provided b. Supporting studies are provided

	how it affects their Support	
7.	Unconvincing Conclusion	Rewritten
8.	Implication/contribution & Limitations & supporting references	Added

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