

# Salasika

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# The Pattern of Early Childhood Character Education in Villages and Cities: A Study in Tulungagung Regency, East Java

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## ABSTRACT

The pattern of early childhood education is paramount to be attentively concerned as the instrument to immerse children's attitude and behavior. The present study was conducted in Tulungagung Regency, East Java. The study was initially started by selecting early childhood schools with village-city and public and religious-based criteria, namely two Early Childhood Schools (ECS) both in the city and in the village area in Tulungagung. With qualitative and quantitative methods—including surveying the parents of 30 students, holding focus group discussions with 20 participants, and doing in-depth studies in schools—the study has arrived at some interpretative points. First, parenting in villages and cities showed the same style and was dominated by authoritative parenting style, meaning that the parents give choices to their children. Second, parenting showed different gender values and norms in which the daughter was treated to be more feminine than the son. Third, the villages and the cities had different space areas available for children to play outside the classroom. Specifically, in the city, girls had limited areas to play. Fourth, teaching materials, leadership, and group work were carried out jointly between girls and boys. The curriculum and school management have not been gender-sensitive and show no difference between village and city.

KEYWORDS: *Character education, early childhood, East Java*

## INTRODUCTION

Children are the hope of the nation's future. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Indonesia in 2020 was 273 million people, and about 12.9%

or 32.96 million are early childhood aged 1-6 years. The distribution by gender was 51.02% of boys and 48.98% of girls, while by region type, 45.12% were rural and 54.88% were urban. According to their age group, children <1 year are as much as



14.39%, those of 1-4 years are 45.12%, and those 5-6 years are 29.19% (National Socioeconomic Survey conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). With a population of about a quarter of a billion, Indonesia is faced with various problems, including population, economy, health, and education. At a very early stage, the treatment of children is influential on their intellectual development.

Gender inequality might be analyzed using the variations among gender, age, inclusiveness, urban villages, and poverty/wealth. The structure of society can be distinguished between exclusive and inclusive communities. Child communities represent inclusive groups in terms of age because they are often placed as objects of human resource development that do not have power. To achieve equality, drawing inclusive groups into exclusive is necessary to become the mainstream of community empowerment (Sukesi, et al., 2020).

Character building needs to be done from an early age, a critical age for the formation of personal and social adjustment patterns for family children and inclusion children. At this stage, the role of women is demanded because early children traditionally have an intimate relationship with their mothers. Bennet (in Megawangi, 2003) asserted that the family is the earliest and effective place to perform character-building functions.

Suyanto (2012) defined characters as values, attitudes, and behaviors acceptable to the public. The characters include being ethical, democratic, respectful, responsible, trustworthy, fair, and caring. Sources

of characters include societal values, state ideology, citizenship, national cultural values, religions, and ethnicities widely accepted by Indonesian society so as not to cause conflict. Therefore, there needs to be an implementation of character education for early childhood men and women and children with special needs. According to Samani dan Hariyanto (2012), character education is the process of giving guidance to learners to become a complete human being who has characters in the dimensions of heart, mind, body, and taste, and initiative.

Broadly, parenting styles are categorized into three: *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive* (Hurlock, 1993; Sukesi, et al. 2020; Ismail, et al. 2019).

### Authoritative Parenting

Authoritative parenting is a style of foster care with stable communication. The child is given the freedom to argue, and the parents help their child's development and support the child's talents or interests. There is no negative impact in this style. Children become intelligent, confident, able to adjust to the environment, and children can be responsible. Authoritative parenting is one form of treatment that parents can apply to shape their child's personality by prioritizing the interests of the child's rational or thinking (Suteja, 2017).

### Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian parenting is a style of foster care in which children must obey all parental orders.

Punishment is an act in this style, so the child carries out orders or duties of the parents for fear of punishment. With such a style, there is a negative impact on the child, i.e. the child prefers to be alone, showing a cowardly, aggressive, and mischievous nature in the outdoor environment. Consequently, the characteristics of this parenting style form the child's behavior, such as (a) irritability, (b) cowardice, (c) defiance and feeling unhappy, (d) easily affected, (e) easily stressed, (f) having no clear future direction, and (g) being unfriendly (Sofiani, et al., 2020).

### **Permissive Parenting**

Permissive is a style of pampered foster care in which all the child's will is followed; even parents never give a reprimand to the child. The negative impact of the style is that the child becomes very spoiled, stubborn, and often breaks down if the wishes are not granted. As a result, the children lack confidence and self-control and become impulsive, aggressive, dominant, and low achieving (Sofiani, et al., 2020).

Gender-sensitive education and social inclusion look at gender issues between girls and boys, identify inequality, and seek gender equality

and social inclusion. Early childhood schools can be studied using the parenting styles in family and school, access, quality and relevance, school curriculum, infrastructure, and school management.

The present study aims at (1) formulating early childhood parenting styles in the family; (2) exploring early childhood education styles in schools, both in rural and urban communities; (3) describing parents and teachers' perceptions of gender and social inclusion in early childhood education; and (4) analyzing school management and curriculum. The study's outcome is a policy recommendation for parenting styles and early childhood education based on GESI in early childhood education.

### **METHODS**

The present study was conducted in Tulungagung Regency, East Java. The chosen early childhood schools were selected using the village-city and public and religious-affiliation criteria. The study's research participants included two early childhood schools (a preschool and a kindergarten) in Tulungagung Regency, a kindergarten, and *Roudhatul Athfal* (RA) in the village. Here are the schools' profiles.

**Table 1. Number and Early Childhood School Characteristics**

Location	No.	School Name	ESC Characteristics	Geographic area
Tulungagung Regency	1	Dharma Wanita Desa Betak	Public, state	Village
	2	RA Al Khadijah	Religious (Islam), private	Village
	3	Mutiara Bunda	Public, private	City
	4	Al Hanif	Religious (Islam), managed by LPA (Child protection agencies)	City

**Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020**

The study used qualitative and quantitative methods. The data were collected through some procedures: (1) a survey of 30 students' parents in four early childhood schools, (2) in-depth participatory interviews at the schools, (3) focus group discussion with 30 participants at the district level, and secondary data utilization, (4) expert meetings between research teams, academics, practitioners, and consultation with policymakers. In addition, the data were analyzed using (1) descriptive analysis, (2) contextual analysis, (3) textual analysis, and (4) gender analysis.

## RESULT

### Parenting styles

Most parents pursued elementary and high school education in the village, while some are high school graduates. The parents work in the agricultural sector, and most are migrant workers. Consequently, children are raised by extended families, and schools are seen as 'day care' because the parents work. The distance from home to school is also relatively diverse and quite far

because of the scarcity of early childhood schools in the area.

In two kindergartens located in the city, namely *Mutiara Bunda* and *Al Hanif*, the lowest level of the parents' education is junior high school. The highest level is tertiary education, such as undergraduate or magister.

#### a) TK Dharma Wanita Betak

In *TK Dharma Wanita Desa Betak*, parents always put values in early childhood, especially instilling discipline in children; some parents tried to agree with the child. The parents opined that character building is substantial because children are not able to take responsibility for themselves. If the children insisted on having something, the parents tried to invite them to discuss the benefits or diverted their attention by giving them gadgets. 65% of parents thought that prevalent values such as interacting with parents and siblings, playing, and learning are important to be educated earlier.

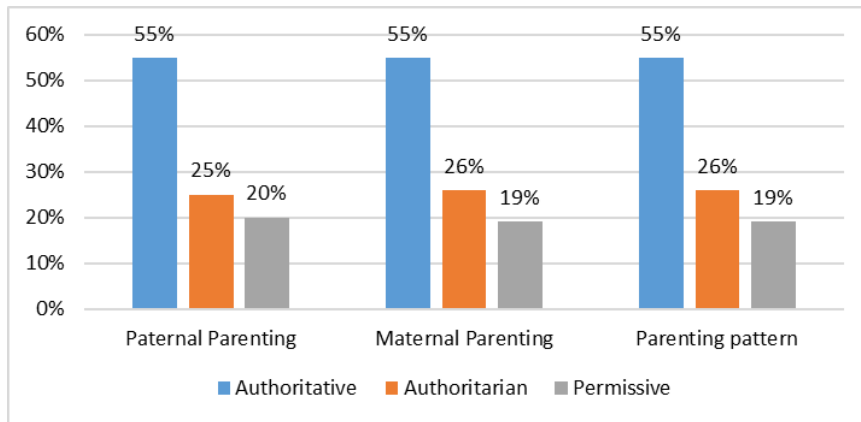


If the children made a mistake or behaved irreverently, the parents warned the children using harsh words and body language (staring). On the contrary, if the children were obedient and followed the norms and rules, such as learning diligently, being not fussy, and eating well, the parents rewarded the children by giving compliments or playthings. Based on the parents, the standards of being adorable are obedient, polite, and diligent,

and few of them say that the children should contribute to give ideas.

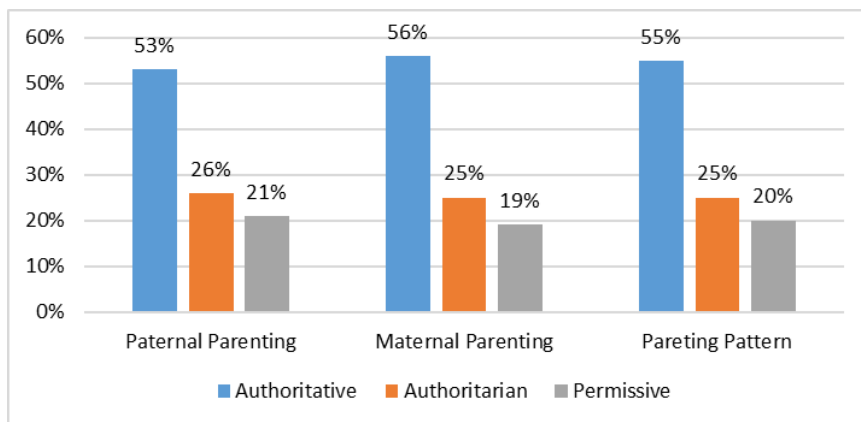
The parents and children frequently discussed the children's expected behaviors, although the children do not always agree. Both the paternal and maternal foster care towards the daughters have the same authoritative parenting style, with no difference in treatment.

**Chart 1. Parenting style toward Female Children in *Dharma Wanita* Betak**



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

**Chart 2. Parenting style toward Male Children in *Dharma Wanita* Betak**



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

The paternal and maternal parenting styles toward female and male children showed no difference. The majority of the parenting style was authoritative that provides choices for boys. It could be concluded that there was no difference in parenting styles between fathers and mothers in educating sons and daughters. The second parenting style was authoritarian (25%), followed by permissive parenting (20%). The result implied that parents did not free up the early childhood education for sons and daughters because they still needed parental guidance and direction.

**b) RA Al Khadijah Betak**

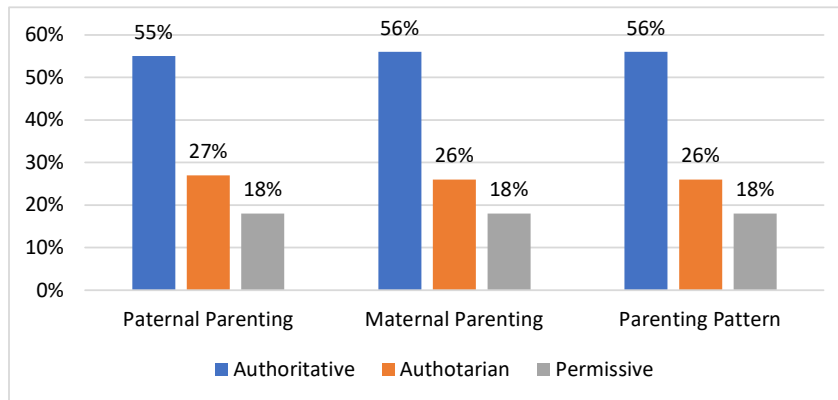
In *RA Al Khadijah Desa Betak*, the parents always put values in early childhood, especially about discipline. Parents realized that character building is important because children are still immature. When the children demanded something, the parents immediately reprimanded. Parents argued that the balance rule is important,

meaning that the parents should not be too strict and too loose in fostering the children.

If the children behaved and followed the rules, it was necessary to reward them, such as giving compliments (like giving thumb-ups) or playthings. The parents strongly emphasized that children must behave obediently towards parents and teachers and be polite and diligent. The children were expected to give a contribution to their future, parents, and the environment. According to the parents, the ideal standard of children's behavior was obedience to parents. However, little did they allow their children to express their opinion.

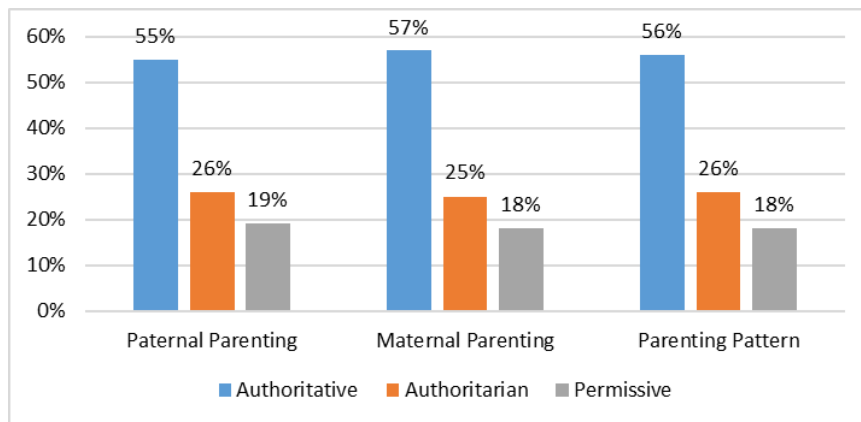
The paternal and maternal parenting styles toward daughters did not show any significant differences. The majority of parenting styles were authoritative, which means giving early childhood freedom to grow up. However, there were authoritarian and permissive styles towards their daughters.

**Chart 3. Parenting style toward Female Children in TK *Al Khadijah* Betak**



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

**Chart 4. Parenting style toward Male Children TK *Al Khadijah* Betak**



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

Chart 3 and Chart 4 show that the paternal and maternal parenting styles toward male children showed no difference. The majority of paternal and maternal parenting style was authoritative, with 56% of the parents choosing to have discussions with the children to create a democratic system in the family so that their characters can be well-formed.

### c) PAUD Mutiara Bunda

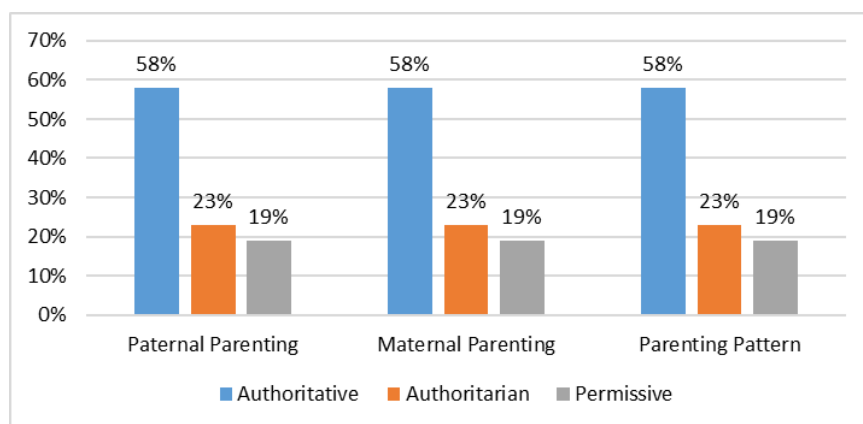
The parenting style emphasized discipline and shared the value through discussion. The parents took care of the children and directed their children because they were not ready to be responsible for their life yet. Thus, the parents warned the children if they misbehaved. Some of the parents also use discussion to solve the problem of misbehavior.

Parents asserted that specific rules were important. The children would get punishment if they misbehaved, but they would get rewarded if they obey the rules. The parents said that reward was important, and it was considered a must for some parents.

Obedience, politeness, and diligence were the ideal values that the parents expected from their children. However, the parents in *PAUD Mutiara Bunda* complained that their children

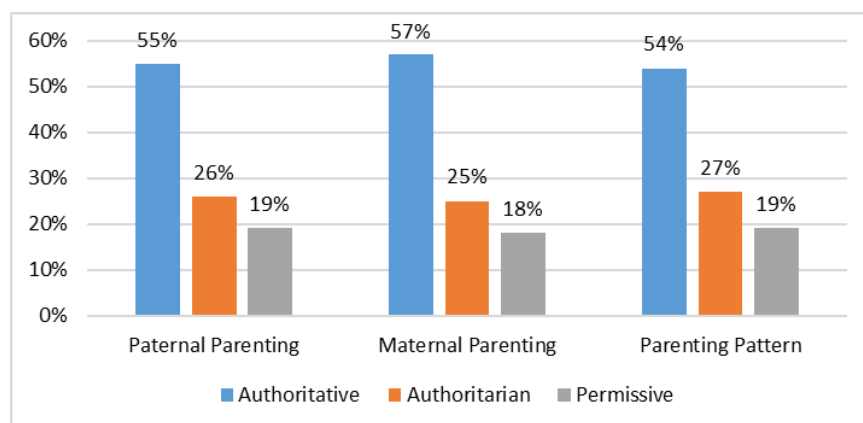
were spoiled and less confident. They argued that early age is a phase when children like to be spoiled. Since the children were not confident, encouragement from parents and teachers is vital. At an early age, parents expected children to be obedient and allowed them to express their opinions. If the children misbehaved, the parents tried to discuss it. Nevertheless, different opinions with the child sometimes appeared.

**Chart 5. Parenting style toward Female Children in PAUD *Mutiara Bunda***



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

**Chart 6. Parenting style toward Male Children in PAUD *Mutiara Bunda***



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

Based on the above charts, it could be concluded that paternal and maternal parenting styles in *PAUD Mutiara Bunda* were not significantly different. Both groups showed an authoritative style because it is important to use discussion and democratic ways to foster the children.

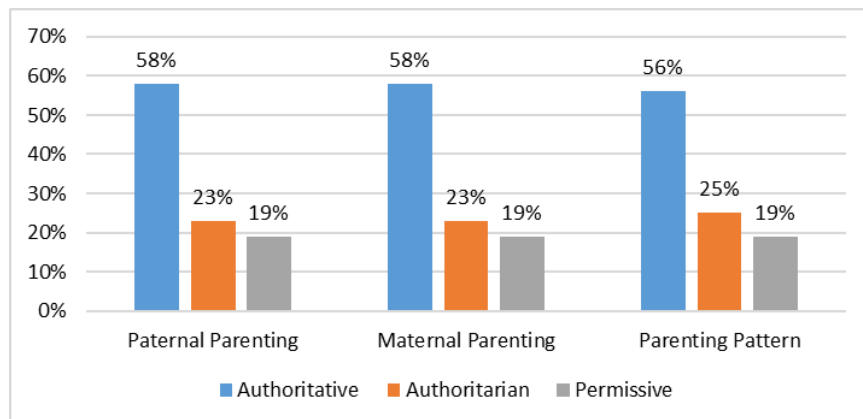
#### d) PAUD Al Hanif

*PAUD Al Hanif* is located in Desa Pojok, Ngantru Tulungagung subdistrict, which is classified as suburban. Parents instilled discipline in their children. The parents gave immediate warning to children when they

misbehaved to avoid repeated actions in the future. The parents imposed special rules on the children, meaning that they would get penalized if they made a mistake and rewarded them if they were obedient. Parents always expected that children from an early age are obedient to parents, polite, and diligent.

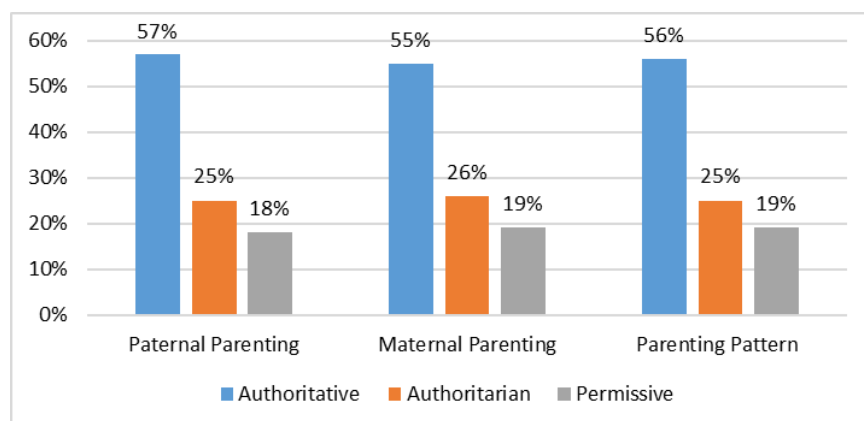
The parents felt that sometimes the children are less confident. Consequently, they always urged the children and guided them. They also discussed with the children to have a consensus on the value and to avoid violence against children.

**Chart 7. Parenting style toward Female Children in PAUD Al Hanif**



*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020*

**Chart 8. Parenting style toward Male Children in PAUD Al Hanif**



Source: *Processed Primary Data, 2020*

As illustrated in the charts, parenting style between different genders in *TK Al Hanif* is not significantly different from *PAUD Mutiara Bunda*. Both paternal and maternal parenting was mainly authoritative. It means that the parents provide choices to the children. All in all, the authoritative style is considered as the best style and choice for parents in the city and village.

### Early Childhood Education in Schools

The in-depth interview and focus group discussion in Tulungagung revealed some important results.

#### a) The Number of Participation at School

The total number of female students in PAUD Mutiara Bunda and PAUD Al Hanif is bigger than the male students. On the other hand, the number of male students is bigger than female in TK and RA in *Desa Betak*. This condition is affected by the number of the male and female population. There is no different

treatment given to the students among different parents' jobs or genders. The differences were in the school choice. The affluent family sent their children to playgroups, while those from a lower economic level started their children's education from kindergarten.

#### b) School Management

In managing the school, the principal and teachers in *TK Dharma Wanita Betak* gave equal treatment, attended to the problems happening at school, looked for children with special needs, and developed all students' skills. Male students tended to be more active, so they dominated the classroom. The different behavior was affected by the background family, especially the mothers' jobs and the residential area.

*"The majority of the parents here are farmers and peddlers in the village. Parents entrust their children's education to teachers. At home, limited time*



*is given to accompany the children to study.*" (TA Betak's teacher, August 2019)

This is different from what was stated by the teacher at PAUD Al Hanif in Tulungagung.

*"The parents are merchants, civil servants, and small-scale entrepreneurs. Few of them work as farmers because our location is in the city. At home, mother and sister accompany the children to study."* (Al Hanif Foundation Management staff, August 2019)

The different treatment given to female children live in the city made them as brave as the male students. Similarly, the same treatment to female and male students is given to students at PAUD Mutiara Bunda as the principal and the teachers realized the same access and control toward both genders.

This different treatment caused the girls in the city to have the courage not to be with the boys. This condition is not different from PAUD Mutiara Bunda. The knowledge and awareness of teachers and principals to access and control of boys and girls is realized by providing equal opportunities.

The school management reflected on the curriculum and the principal took responsibility for all teaching and learning processes. The processes were focused on the character-building of the students. The principal managed the administration of the school in general and conducted the classroom with games. Teachers are ordered to make lesson plans with the

principal's agreement. Thus, the principal could control the teaching and learning processes. The lesson plan followed the common format; there is no specific plan for a certain gender or children with special needs.

Four schools in the district were studied, and all of the teachers were women. Reflecting upon this result, we proposed a question to the headmaster *"Why are most early childhood school teachers women and why are they rarely men?"* According to the principal, this was due to salary problems ranging from Rp300.000 to Rp700.000 per month. Besides, women are perceived to be more caring and patient and to have a motherly nature. In addition, the rules in toilet training are more appropriately done by women. The gender perspective puts women in low-income jobs, services, and care which are an extension of women's domestic functioning.

The child's first education is in the family, especially done by the mother, but after the child enters the world of formal education, the child not only needs the education delivered by women. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce feminine and masculine education early. Regarding this notion, we proposed the question, *"How do you do that? Currently, 98% of PAUD teachers are women."* The male teachers got additional training to have good ethics (to avoid any cases of sexual harassment). This training opens more opportunities for a male to be a teacher in early education schools.

Such restrictions cause boys and girls to explore their respective territories. For example, when some girls have masculine traits, the task of educators is to direct and guide them. Early childhood educators are responsible for introducing gender perspectives outside the home and the neighboring environment. The principal supervises the teacher's behavior, from planning, teaching in class, and playing outside the classroom until the session ends and their parents pick the children up.

### c) Quality and Relevance

The quality of the early childhood school curriculum was scrutinized based on gender issues and inclusion issues. Toward this issue, we asked, *"Has gender issue become part of the curriculum and implemented in the school curriculum and teaching and learning in early childhood schools?"* The implementation of gender is highly possible to be included in early childhood education. In this case, the role of teachers and principle are essential.

The curriculum is the core of the learning process and becomes the guideline in educating the learners at various levels of schools. It consists of the aspect of the cognitive knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the learners. All components are systemically related in its application, ranging from learning inputs, processes, and outputs. Materials or teaching materials are important inputs, followed by learning methods as a process and supporting

infrastructure in hardware such as classrooms, instructional media, educational game tools, and teachers and stakeholders.

The present study revealed that the materials used in early childhood schools are gender-neutral. Gender inequality and injustice were found. Based on the result, it is necessary to include gender and social inclusion issues in the curriculum. Thus, the materials given to the students can be integrated with the gender and social inclusion issues so that both issues are rooted in the students' minds and behavior.

The gender perspective was identified from the female teacher. They were expected to manage the gender issues in the management, teaching and learning processes, playing time outside and inside the class, and all the activities during school time. For example, the female teachers should accompany the students in their toilet training to prevent sexual harassment if the male teachers did it. These issues were then reflected in the learning process and playing time. Therefore, it was optional to have male teachers in early childhood schools.

The school contributed to improve the access and urge the active participation of both female and male students. In terms of access, both female and male students have the same opportunity. However, because the number of male students is bigger than that of females, they got more access and were more active. In addition to this, the principal took control of the

management, while the teachers had a role in realizing quality outcomes and relevant standards.

**d) Support facilities and infrastructure**

The support of school facilities and infrastructure is a part that should be considered in early childhood, and that reflects gender-responsive school. This can be seen in the school environment, such as infrastructure facilities, changing rooms, toilets, areas, and play equipment. Based on the result of the observations, the schools have provided complete and appropriate facilities for the students, such as classrooms, instructional media, whiteboards, tables, benches, and playthings. Although simply built, some of the school toilets separate the male and the female are, so the students were accustomed to using the toilet based on their gender. Nevertheless, two schools have not separated the toilets for girls and men.

There is no particular changing room for students to change their clothes in their physical education session every Wednesday. There is no special instructional media for female and male students because the classroom activities are planned and stated in the lesson plan. Some instructional media used were rulers, drums, props for learning to count, and props for introducing the alphabet.

The playgrounds were provided outside and inside the classroom. The playground outside the classroom consisted of

a slide and colorful iron staircases. The inside playground contained colorful plastic balls and a small basketball ring. Contrary to this condition, early childhood schools located in the village provided more space for a playground, especially the outdoor one. There are various outdoor games, such as swings, basketball and mini football courts, and seesaws.

The playthings were provided for both genders, no difference for each gender. It all depended on students' will to use them. The children could play with Lego, small drums, dolls from coconut shells. In addition, they also played outside using seesaws, swings, slides, small courts for playing basketball or football, and cars made of used tires.

**Parents Perspective on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**

Generally saying, parents of the students in Tulungagung Regency agreed that education was for females and males, also for children with special needs. Parents feel that girls and boys should have the same growth, especially in teaching manners. For children with special needs, parents send their children along with normal children without any separation of media and teaching materials, because

*"in Tulungagung District, there are no schools for kids with special needs. Even if it exists, parents do not consider it as the school fee is high"* (Principal of PAUD Mutiara Bunda, August 2019).

Parenting styles in Tulungagung regency in the city and village had the same style for both boys and girls. Parents considered the

authoritative parenting style to be the most ideal for children of early age in this era, with all information, technology, and communication developing more rapidly. However, this is still not accompanied by the similarity of parents' perceptions of gender equality and social inclusion in early childhood.

Although the parenting style was generally the same, a sharp difference still exists from a gender point of view. For example, blue is perceived to be for males, while pink is for women, or some types of playthings are suitable for a specific gender. Parents understood gender equality, but it took time to change and apply gender-related understanding wholistically in the family's daily life.

## DISCUSSION

Education in Indonesia faces three major challenges, the first being as a result of a multi-crisis in which education is required to maintain development outcomes. Second, there is an anticipation of the era of globalization, and education is expected to prepare quality human resources. Thirdly, regional autonomy leads to the change and adjustment of the system (Anwar, et al., 2009; Nufus, 2016). Early childhood education is fundamentally necessary for the formation of the child's character that began to be formed at an early age with the range of 1-6 years before the child entered and studied in elementary school.

Nufus (2016) found that early childhood schools have an important role in the development of children in the aspects of

nutritional and psychological wellbeing of children. However, the condition of the psychological aspect of the child will eventually be different due to the different treatment between boys and girls. Parental gender bias towards early childhood impacts child development. Sofiani's research (2020) revealed that authoritarian parenting styles still dominate by 55.14% in *TKIT Ibu Harapan* in Bengkalis district. Meanwhile, in Tulungagung, it was found that parents prefer authoritative parenting styles. In line with this, Khasanah (2021) also found that paternal parenting was mainly permissive in the Special Region of Jogjakarta.

The results of this study found that there was no significant difference between the parenting style of fathers and mothers to boys and girls. They preferred to apply authoritative parenting that gives choices to the child. Harlistyarintica (2021) asserted that an authoritative parenting style is balanced and healthy and has a positive impact on the growth and development of preschoolers.

This agrees with Lidyasari (2013) that mentioned authoritative parenting as the best way to form the character of the child. This authoritative parenting style characterizes parents as democratic and appreciative and understands the child's state with the advantages of his shortcomings. As a result, the child can be a mature and easy-going person and can adapt to the environment.

The early education curriculum that becomes the first formal school for early childhood is considered

ideal for shaping the child's character. However, there is still much opposition to character development for the child himself. Kindergarten and other early childhood schools need to be constructed to discuss diversity and multiculturalism in early childhood education. In the future, it is expected that there will be strong institutions in the formation of children's character on an equal basis.

Gender issues are often overlooked in early childhood education because of the paradigm of biological determination. Besides, gender is still seen as a result of socialization. The normalization of gender discourse is still traditional, which is one of the reasons in *developmentalism silencing* in which children are considered innocent beings and seen as "sponges" that will absorb all the information obtained from the school environment. The rise of social exclusion still perpetuates patriarchal culture, normalizes differences, and maintains subordination to women. The conditions need to be changed starting from primary education, namely kindergarten and other pre-schools.

Early childhood schools are currently internalizing gender values, but they start to have practical reconstruction in the field. Many books show more pictures of mothers doing reproductive activities, which needs to be changed. Nowadays, the system and technology have made it easier for women to access many productive activities that men dominate. There is still much discrimination in children without being noticed by teachers and parents. Therefore, it

needs a capacity formulation for teachers in early childhood schools. It needs to deconstruct the understanding through dissemination of gender aspects and social inclusion for early childhood teachers.

## CONCLUSION

Parenting styles in families show the same style between villages and cities dominated by authoritative parenting styles, meaning that there is a choice from parents in educating girls and men. Variations are seen in a small percentage of parents applying authoritarian (coercive) and permissive parenting styles (giving freedom). Parenting styles for girls are more authoritarian, while boys are more permissive. In the research setting, the gender issues are indicated by the equal treatment for female and male children. However, it is found that male students are more active and dominate the class more than females. The female children tend to be shy due to the influence of family social-cultural factors.

Another gender issue in education is found in the composition of teachers, including the principals, in early childhood schools. Women dominate the schools, and only one male teacher is apparent. The school curriculum is also not yet gender-responsive and socially inclusive. Thus, the early childhood education curriculum needs to focus on GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) content, especially in teaching materials and the learning process for early children, including arts, dance, and effective educational game tools.

Villages and cities showed differences, especially in the space or playroom outside the classroom. In the city, the limited space resulted in limited space for girls to play. The curriculum and school management show no difference between the village and city. The care of parents in the city is stronger, especially maternal care. It should be noted that villages with a large area can be developed to be early childhood character education based on GESI community and nature.

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