

Empowering Parents for the Golden Age: A Community-Based Parenting Education Initiative at Al-Fatah Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood, especially from birth to age six, is a foundational phase often described as the “golden age” of human development, when rapid brain growth and learning potential are at their peak. During this critical stage, parenting plays a pivotal role in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. However, in many contexts, including in Indonesia, parents often face challenges due to a lack of parenting knowledge, limited access to educational resources, and socio-cultural barriers. In response to these challenges, this community service program was conducted at Al-Fatah Kindergarten in Ambon with the aim of enhancing parental understanding of early childhood development and increasing awareness of the significance of their role as primary educators. The program employed a two-day interactive workshop approach, featuring themes on parenting for Generation Alpha and holistic child development. The sessions were delivered through participatory methods, including lectures, focus group discussions, real-life case sharing, and direct consultation with parenting experts. Results showed increased parental awareness and understanding of their role in child development, particularly regarding the impact of parenting styles, screen time management, emotional support, and developmental stimulation. The initiative also fostered a stronger school–community relationship and positioned the kindergarten as a collaborative center for parenting education. The success of the program illustrates that school-based parenting education, when delivered in culturally sensitive and engaging formats, can effectively bridge knowledge gaps and support families in providing nurturing, responsive, and developmentally appropriate care for their children. The findings reinforce the need for sustainable, community-driven models of parenting education that empower parents as active contributors to lifelong learning and early childhood success.

Keywords: community engagement, early childhood development, generation alpha, holistic parenting, parenting education

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to the age of six, is a critical and formative stage in a person's life. This stage, often referred to as the "golden age," is a window of opportunity when a child's brain develops at an extraordinary rate, laying the foundation for future health, learning, and behavior (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). According to the Indonesian Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 1, paragraph 14, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a form of educational development aimed at children from birth to six years old, provided through educational stimulation to assist their physical and spiritual growth, so they are prepared to enter further education (Government of Indonesia, 2003). During this crucial developmental window, children are highly responsive to external stimuli, particularly those provided by their immediate caregivers—primarily, their parents.

Parents are considered the first and foremost educators for children (Epstein, 2001). Their role is central in shaping the cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development of children in the early

years. In fact, Trisnawati (2021) argues that 75% of the educational responsibility in early childhood lies with parents, while only 25% is assumed by early childhood education institutions. This significant proportion underscores the necessity for parents to possess a strong understanding of their parenting role, as it directly influences the developmental trajectory of their children. However, despite the well-documented importance of parental involvement, numerous studies continue to highlight the lack of adequate parenting knowledge among many parents, particularly in low- to middle-income contexts (Bornstein et al., 2012; Lansford et al., 2021). Misconceptions about child-rearing practices, limited access to parenting education, and a lack of awareness about developmental milestones are common barriers (Sanders et al., 2000). The absence of effective parenting can result in suboptimal developmental outcomes, including poor school readiness, behavioral challenges, and diminished socio-emotional skills (Britto et al., 2017).

Effective parenting is multifaceted, encompassing warmth, responsiveness, communication, discipline, and educational support (Baumrind, 1991). Research by Maccoby and Martin (1983) outlines four parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—each with different implications for child development. Among these, the authoritative style, characterized by high responsiveness and high demands, has been found to be most beneficial for children's development, fostering independence, self-regulation, and academic achievement (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). These parenting practices, when applied during early childhood, promote neural development, build emotional security, and shape lifelong habits and values (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) and UNICEF (2019) both emphasize the pivotal role of parents in early childhood care and education. They advocate for increased community engagement in parenting programs that empower families with the knowledge and skills necessary for nurturing care. Such programs, when implemented through school–community partnerships, have been shown to significantly enhance parental awareness and involvement (Reynolds et al., 2014; Sheridan et al., 2010).

In the Indonesian context, studies conducted by Sari & Marlina (2018) and Wahyuni (2020) reveal that a large proportion of parents in early childhood education institutions lack comprehensive knowledge about child development. Many are unaware of the stages of cognitive, emotional, and motor development, and consequently, do not provide adequate stimulation or guidance at home. This lack of understanding often leads to overdependence on teachers at formal institutions and a disengagement from the child's holistic development process. Furthermore, parenting in Indonesia faces cultural and socioeconomic challenges. Traditional beliefs about discipline, gender roles, and family hierarchy often influence parenting practices, sometimes in ways that may hinder positive development (Utami et al., 2021). Socioeconomic pressures also reduce the quality and quantity of parental engagement due to work commitments and stress, especially among urban and lower-income families (Hastuti et al., 2019). Recognizing this problem, community service initiatives play a crucial role in filling the knowledge gap. Through structured interventions, these initiatives aim to educate and empower parents, thus enabling them to actively participate in the growth and development of their children. The present community service project, titled “The Role of Parenting in Early Childhood Development at Al-Fatah Kindergarten, Ambon,” aims to raise awareness and improve parental understanding of early childhood development.

The Al-Fatah Kindergarten serves a diverse community in Ambon, many of whom face challenges related to limited educational backgrounds and restricted access to parenting resources. Preliminary observations and informal assessments revealed that many parents had a limited understanding of their roles in nurturing their children's development. These included misconceptions about discipline, inadequate stimulation of cognitive activities at home, and insufficient emotional support. This finding aligns with the work of Fitriani et al. (2022), who found that low parental education is strongly correlated with reduced involvement in early learning activities. To address this issue, this community service project was designed with two primary goals: (1) to enhance parental knowledge about the fundamentals of parenting in early childhood, and (2) to increase awareness of their critical role in their child's overall development. The project employs an interactive approach, including workshops, role-playing activities, and collaborative parent–teacher discussions. It is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental systems, with the microsystem—especially the family—being the most immediate and impactful (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moreover,

the project draws on the concept of "nurturing care" as outlined in the Nurturing Care Framework (WHO, UNICEF, & World Bank, 2018), which identifies five essential components for early childhood development: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early learning. Parental engagement cuts across all five dimensions, reinforcing the critical need to educate and empower parents as key stakeholders in their children's futures.

Ultimately, effective parenting is not instinctive; it is a skill that can and should be developed through intentional learning and community-based support (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). When parents are well-informed, emotionally responsive, and engaged in their children's education, the long-term benefits are profound, ranging from improved academic outcomes to better mental health and social skills (Melhuish et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2010). Thus, the success of early childhood education depends not solely on formal institutions but on the synergy between schools and families. Through this initiative at Al-Fatah Kindergarten, we aim to create a model of collaborative engagement that emphasizes the parents' indispensable role in early childhood development and encourages sustainable behavior change through education and community participation.

METHOD

Preparation and Orientation Phase. The implementation of the community service program entitled "The Role of Parenting in Early Childhood Development at Al-Fatah Kindergarten, Ambon" was carried out through several systematically structured stages to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. The first stage consisted of preparation and orientation activities, designed to lay the foundation for program success. These activities included: (1) coordination meetings with the school principal of Al-Fatah Kindergarten; (2) the development and organization of educational materials on parenting for early childhood; (3) determination of the activity schedule; and (4) dissemination of program information to the participants, primarily the parents of enrolled students. The collaborative partnership between the community service team and the school administration was fundamental. Effective partnerships in educational initiatives have been proven to enhance stakeholder engagement and program success (Epstein, 2001). Furthermore, the preparation phase involved careful selection of qualified resource persons. Two facilitators with backgrounds in early childhood education and developmental psychology were assigned to deliver the parenting materials, thereby ensuring the pedagogical and psychological relevance of the sessions (Sheridan et al., 2010). The instructional materials were aligned with current literature on parenting in the context of early childhood education, emphasizing holistic child development, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Visual aids, case studies, and discussion prompts were included to enhance interactive participation.

Implementation Phase. The main implementation phase took place over two days, on February 12–13, 2025, starting at 11:00 AM WIT each day. This phase involved the delivery of parenting workshops targeting parents of children enrolled at Al-Fatah Kindergarten. The sessions were designed to increase both awareness and knowledge of the critical role that parenting plays in the development of early childhood, particularly in the formative "golden age" period. The program used a face-to-face participatory method that allowed for open dialogue, sharing of parenting experiences, and direct interaction between facilitators and participants. Each day's session focused on a distinct theme: **The Role of Parenting for Generation Alpha** – This session introduced parents to the unique characteristics of Generation Alpha (children born after 2010), including their high exposure to digital technology, changing learning preferences, and the need for responsive parenting models. The discussion highlighted how modern parenting must adapt to developmental and technological contexts (Twenge, 2017; Holloway et al., 2013). **Parenting's Role in Multiple Aspects of Child Development** – The second session emphasized the multidimensional impact of parenting on various domains of child development: emotional regulation, moral reasoning, language acquisition, socialization, and physical growth. The session incorporated models such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to demonstrate how parenting interacts with environmental systems to influence child outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Throughout the sessions, the facilitators employed methods such as mini-lectures, focus group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and scenario-based simulations to keep the engagement level high. Evaluation

forms were distributed at the end of the second session to gather feedback and measure immediate learning outcomes.

Program Sustainability Plan. To ensure long-term impact beyond the initial implementation, a sustainability plan was developed. The community service team proposed the expansion of this parenting education model to other Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Ambon and surrounding areas. The plan includes building formal partnerships with other PAUD institutions and conducting periodic outreach programs in a more extensive, community-based format. Such expansion is aligned with best practices in sustainable community engagement, which emphasize continuous capacity building, participatory planning, and scalability of impact (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). Additionally, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to assess the impact of the program on parental behavior and children's developmental progress over time. In conclusion, the method applied in this community service project reflects a participatory and context-sensitive approach. By involving parents directly, providing culturally relevant materials, and establishing collaboration with the school, the initiative aims to foster lasting improvements in parental engagement and early childhood outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service (PKM) program was carried out as part of the tri dharma obligations of higher education institutions in Indonesia. Conducted over two consecutive days—February 12 and 13, 2025—this program targeted the parents of students at TK Al-Fatah, Ambon. The main objective was to enhance their understanding and awareness of parenting roles in the developmental stages of early childhood. The program was delivered in two key sessions: "The Role of Parenting for Generation Alpha" delivered by Ferdinanda Sherly Noya, M.Pd; "Parenting Roles in Various Aspects of Child Development" presented by St. Andrianti, M.Pd. Both sessions utilized an interactive lecture format that enabled not only the transmission of knowledge but also encouraged parental engagement through Q&A sessions and real-life case discussions. This participatory model allowed parents to openly share their challenges, ask questions, and receive direct guidance from educational experts.



Figure 1. Interactive Parenting Education Session with Parents of Al-Fatah Kindergarten

The positive reception by both the school leadership and the parent participants signified a strong interest and need for parenting education. Participants demonstrated high enthusiasm, particularly during discussions that directly related to daily parenting dilemmas. For example, one parent shared concerns about their child's excessive screen time and lack of concentration. The facilitators responded with practical strategies grounded in developmental psychology, such as establishing consistent routines and applying positive reinforcement techniques (Morin, 2019; Kabali et al., 2015). The tangible outcomes of this activity included: 1) Increased awareness among parents regarding their pivotal role in child development. 2) Enhanced knowledge about the developmental needs of early childhood, especially within the context of Generation Alpha. 3) Direct resolution of parenting issues raised during the sessions through expert recommendations. 4) This engagement also fostered a deeper school–community relationship, reinforcing collaborative responsibility for children's developmental success (Epstein, 2011).

The Importance of Parenting Knowledge in Early Childhood

Early childhood is a foundational period for shaping personality, behavior, and learning capacity (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Parenting during this stage plays a crucial role, especially in domains such as emotional regulation, cognitive stimulation, and socialization. Parents who are informed and involved can significantly boost their children's development, a fact consistently supported by empirical studies (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012; Sheridan et al., 2010). The workshop reinforced this principle by educating parents on how their everyday actions—communication style, routines, discipline strategies—impact brain development and behavior. By understanding that brain plasticity is highest in the early years (Nelson, 2000), parents became more receptive to adopting evidence-based parenting practices.

Parenting for Generation Alpha

Generation Alpha, born after 2010, represents the most technologically integrated generation to date. Their learning and behavioral patterns differ substantially from previous generations, requiring modern parenting strategies (Twenge, 2017). During the session on Generation Alpha, the facilitators emphasized: 1) The impact of early exposure to technology on attention span and social skills. 2) The importance of parental modeling in digital behavior. 3) The necessity of balancing screen time with unstructured play and interpersonal communication. Research shows that excessive screen time among preschoolers is linked to delayed language development and attention problems (Christakis, 2009; Madigan et al., 2019). The discussion empowered parents to set boundaries, create tech-free zones, and engage in meaningful conversations to nurture interpersonal and emotional intelligence.

Parenting and Holistic Child Development

Parenting directly affects various dimensions of child development, including physical health, emotional stability, social adaptation, and intellectual growth (Lerner et al., 2015). The second session of the PKM emphasized the interconnectedness of these dimensions and provided actionable insights on: 1) Encouraging empathy and emotional expression. 2) Stimulating critical thinking through open-ended questions. 3) Supporting motor skills through physical play. Participants were introduced to Baumrind's parenting typology (1991) and encouraged to reflect on their parenting styles. The facilitators advocated for an authoritative style—high in warmth and firm in guidance—which research has associated with the most favorable developmental outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Spera, 2005).

Impact of Parenting Programs

The PKM aligns with global movements that promote parenting education as a tool to improve child welfare. According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF (2018), nurturing care from parents significantly improves children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Structured parenting programs have shown success in enhancing parenting skills, reducing child behavior problems, and improving family cohesion (Sanders, 1999; Kaminski et al., 2008). The success of the sessions at TK Al-Fatah adds to this growing body of evidence. Evaluation feedback from parents

indicated increased confidence in applying parenting strategies, such as managing tantrums, building daily routines, and establishing consistent discipline.

Cultural and Contextual Relevance

While universal principles of parenting exist, their application must be tailored to cultural and socioeconomic contexts. In Indonesia, parenting is often shaped by traditional values, religious beliefs, and communal structures. Thus, the PKM materials were designed to be culturally sensitive, aligning with local norms while introducing global best practices. This culturally responsive approach aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which asserts that child development is mediated by culture, language, and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Facilitators used real-life scenarios familiar to Ambonese families to bridge theory and practice effectively.



Figure 2. Group Photo with Parent Participants after the Parenting Workshop

Implications for Educational Institutions

This program underlines the strategic role of early childhood institutions not only as educators of children but also as facilitators of parental growth. Strong school–family partnerships are essential for improving educational outcomes and holistic child well-being (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). TK Al-Fatah has now become a model for integrating parenting education into its annual calendar, with plans to replicate the program in future semesters. Moreover, early intervention through parent education is cost-effective and yields high returns in cognitive and behavioral development (Heckman, 2006). Schools that invest in parental capacity-building contribute to a stronger foundation for lifelong learning. The community service activities implemented at TK Al-Fatah Ambon effectively fulfilled their objectives by enhancing the parenting knowledge and awareness of early childhood development among participating parents. The enthusiastic engagement, coupled with the tangible learning outcomes, indicates a pressing need for continued and expanded efforts in this area. The initiative demonstrates how targeted, culturally-relevant interventions can bridge gaps in parental understanding and empower families to contribute meaningfully to their children's growth. As Generation Alpha continues to grow in a fast-paced and digitally-saturated environment, parents must be equipped with tools to guide their development with empathy, structure, and responsiveness. Community-based parenting education programs such as this one offer a practical model for other early childhood education centers. Future initiatives should incorporate follow-up support and longitudinal impact assessments to ensure sustained behavior change and improved developmental outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the community service initiative effectively demonstrated the critical importance of equipping parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to support their children's development during the formative early years. Through interactive workshops focused on parenting for Generation Alpha and holistic child development, the program not only enhanced parental awareness but also empowered them to address real-life parenting challenges with evidence-based strategies. The positive reception and active engagement from participants underscored a significant need for continued parental education, especially within culturally and contextually tailored frameworks. As parenting plays a foundational role in shaping children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth, this initiative reinforces the essential collaboration between families and educational institutions. Looking ahead, expanding such programs and embedding follow-up mechanisms will be vital to sustaining impact and ensuring that parents remain active, confident partners in their children's lifelong learning journey.

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