



Cultural Cooking as Parenting Pedagogy: Strengthening Father-Child Attachment in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the effectiveness of fun cooking activities using Minangkabau traditional food as a culture-based pedagogical strategy to strengthen father-child attachment in early childhood education settings. The research aims to demonstrate how local cultural practices can serve as meaningful tools for fostering emotional connection and parental engagement.

Design/methods/approach – A quantitative pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach was employed to measure changes in attachment levels before and after the intervention. The study utilized a structured questionnaire encompassing four key indicators of attachment: frequency of interaction, emotional warmth, involvement in activity, and father-child communication. Data were collected through action-based activities, and the degree of improvement was analyzed using the N-gain formula to assess effectiveness.

Findings – The findings revealed a significant increase in all four indicators of father-child attachment after participating in the fun cooking sessions. The most substantial improvements occurred in emotional warmth and involvement in the activity, suggesting that shared cooking experiences offer a highly interactive and emotionally rewarding context for strengthening familial bonds. These outcomes indicate that collaborative culinary activities not only promote affection and cooperation but also enhance communication and active participation between fathers and their young children.

Research implications/limitations – The findings are context-specific to the Minangkabau community, which may limit their generalizability to other cultural settings. Future studies with larger samples and comparative designs are recommended.

Practical implications – The study provides insights for educators, family practitioners, and policymakers on how local culture-based activities can be integrated into parenting programs to encourage father engagement. It underscores the significance of embedding local wisdom in designing family-centered educational practices.

Originality/value – This research offers a novel perspective on fatherhood by positioning cultural cooking as a pedagogical tool to enhance paternal attachment. It expands the literature on father engagement in early childhood education and demonstrates how cultural traditions can be leveraged for sustainable parenting and educational practices.

Keywords Fun cooking, Minangkabau cuisine, Father-child attachment, Parenting, Early childhood education

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Indonesia has been described as the “third fatherless country” in the world, reflecting the limited presence of fathers in the everyday lives of children (Ashari, 2018). This phenomenon is largely influenced by patriarchal culture, in which fathers are positioned as breadwinners and mothers as primary caregivers (Nurjanah & et al., 2023). Such division of roles often creates an imbalance in parenting practices, despite the importance of both parents’ active participation for children’s development (Anggraini, 2018). Data from the State of the World’s Fathers report emphasizes that patriarchal culture significantly hinders paternal engagement in caregiving. Meanwhile, Statistics Indonesia (2023) shows that although 90.82% of children live with their biological parents, their access to balanced parenting—particularly paternal involvement—remains low.

The lack of father participation in caregiving has direct consequences on children’s socio-emotional well-being. Evidence from classroom observations in Pertiwi I Kindergarten, Padang, shows that many children aged 5–6 experience developmental difficulties linked to limited paternal attachment. Specifically, 85% of children displayed low self-confidence, 84% lacked independence, 77.45% had underdeveloped self-regulation, and 84% were unable to demonstrate responsibility (Anggraini & et al., 2022). These challenges illustrate how inadequate paternal presence can hinder emotional growth and essential life skills in young children. Teachers have attempted solutions through parent–teacher meetings and counseling, but these interventions have not significantly improved father–child relationships (Aryanti & Oktavianto, 2019; Halimah et al., 2020).

This issue underscores the urgent need for meaningful strategies that directly involve fathers in children’s daily learning experiences. Research emphasizes that children learn best through active, experiential, and contextual activities tailored to their developmental needs (Rasid, 2020). Integrating fathers into such activities can provide a pathway for strengthening attachment and ensuring balanced caregiving within families (Anggraini, 2018). However, culturally grounded and practical methods that resonate with local contexts are still underexplored in Indonesia. Addressing this gap is essential to support both family well-being and children’s holistic growth.

Attachment theory offers a strong foundation for framing this discussion. Secure attachment is developed through consistent, responsive caregiving, which allows children to feel safe in exploring their environment (Bowlby, 2012). Empirical evidence has shown how attachment can be observed through interaction quality between children and caregivers (Ainsworth et al., 2016). While early studies mainly focused on maternal bonds, later research confirmed that fathers also play a critical role in forming secure attachments (Fearon et al., 2018). This theoretical perspective suggests that paternal involvement, when nurtured through engaging experiences, can significantly enhance children’s socio-emotional resilience.

One promising approach is the use of fun cooking as a pedagogical activity. Fun cooking, defined as enjoyable and simple food preparation with children, provides opportunities for cooperation, communication, and shared problem-solving (Amaros & Rohita, 2018). Several studies demonstrate that cooking together enhances family cohesion, improves interaction quality, and develops children’s social-emotional competence (Farmer et al., 2018; Utter et al., 2015). Cooking is inherently multisensory, combining visual, tactile, and taste experiences that promote creativity and collaboration (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Mosko & Delach, 2020). These characteristics align closely with the experiential learning principles that support attachment building between fathers and children.

In this study, fun cooking was implemented through the preparation of traditional Minangkabau food. Minangkabau culture, rich in culinary traditions, emphasizes values of cooperation and community that can be integrated into family learning (Moeriabrata-Arbai, 1997). Prior research on ethnopedagogy in Indonesia highlights how embedding local wisdom in early education strengthens cultural identity and family relationships (Sakti et al., 2024; Utama & Dea, 2023). Similar findings from Sasak and Pandalungan communities reveal that cultural parenting practices cultivate children’s sense of responsibility, spirituality, and social connection

(Asri et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2020). Therefore, combining cultural practices with attachment-based interventions provides both pedagogical and socio-cultural benefits.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of fun cooking with Minangkabau traditional food in strengthening father-child attachment. Conducted at Pertiwi I Kindergarten in Padang through the “Friday Father Day” program, the intervention invited fathers to engage in weekly cooking activities with their children. Theoretically, this research contributes by bridging attachment theory with ethnopedagogy, situating paternal engagement within cultural contexts. Practically, it offers educators, practitioners, and policymakers a culturally relevant strategy for promoting paternal involvement in early childhood education. In doing so, the study not only addresses the gap in father-child attachment research in Indonesia but also demonstrates how cultural heritage can be mobilized to support modern parenting practices.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study is a pre-experimental research with one group pretest - posttest design. This design did not require a control group as a comparison, but instead used a pretest to measure the changes seen after the experiment. One-group pretest-posttest design combines pretest (test prior to treatment) and posttest (test after the treatment) in one group.

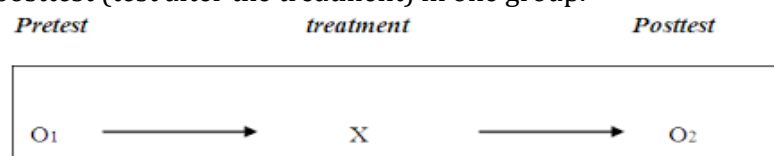


Figure 1. Pre-experimental design (Thyer, 2010)

2.2. Population and Sample

The study was conducted over a one month period with samples drawn from group B of Pertiwi I Kindergarten, Padang City, during the July-December 2024 semester. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 15 samples for inclusion in the study.

2.3. Instruments

A questionnaire was used in this study to determine the effectiveness of the Fun cooking Minangkabau food activity on increasing father and child attachment. The questionnaire consists four indicators, including 1) Frequency of interaction, 2) Emotional warmth, 3) Involvement in child's activity, 4) Father and child communication. The questionnaire has been validated by experts in related fields. There were five rating scale on the questionnaire, which are “Very Less” (1), “Less” (2), “Enough” (3), “Good” (4), and “Very Good” (5).

2.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection techniques used in this study was an action test to measured the effectiveness of Fun cooking traditional Minangkabau food on paternal attachment. Action test requires participants responses in the form of behaviour or action based on the instructions or questions given. The instructions on the test were aligned to the indicators listed in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using N-gain statistical analysis to determine the effectiveness (Hake, 1998, 1999) and presented in the well-structured table and chart.

Table 1. N-gain Effectiveness Category (Hake, 1998)

N-gain Score	N-gain Category
$N\text{-gain} \geq 0.7$	High
$0.7 < N\text{-gain} \geq 0.3$	Medium
$N\text{-gain} < 0.3$	Low

3. Result

This section reports the results of the effectiveness of fun cooking Minangkabau traditional food. There were four classifications of data collected for the study: frequency of interaction, emotional warmth, involvement in the activity, and father and child communication. The outcomes are presented respectively in the following table and chart.

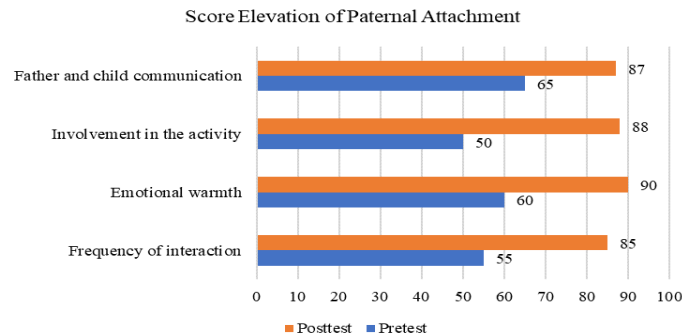


Figure 2. Pretest and posttest scores for each indicator

The data illustrated in Figure 2 shows a meaningful difference between pretest and posttest for the four indicators. The chart data suggest an increase in all indicators after the intervention and the most significant gain among all were: involvement in the activity (pretest = 50, posttest = 88) and emotional warmth (pretest = 60, posttest = 90). This indicates that fun cooking activity of Minangkabau traditional food has a positive impact on the bond between father and child. For trustworthiness, the result of statistical analysis is presented in the following table.

Table 2. Statistical Result

Indicator	Pretest	Posttest	N-gain	Category
Frequency of interaction	55	85	.67	Medium
Emotional warmth	60	90	.75	High
Involvement in the activity	50	88	.76	High
Father and child communication	65	87	.63	Medium

As reported in the table above, the effectiveness of fun cooking traditional Minangkabau food on the father and child attachment ranged from .63 (medium, for the father and child communication) to .76 (high, for the involvement in the activity). In terms of father and child attachment, involvement in the activity had the highest effectiveness (N-gain = .76) followed with emotional warmth (N-gain = .75). In case of frequency of interaction (N-gain = .67) and father and child communication (N-gain = .63), both were in the medium category.

According to the results, it implies that fun cooking of traditional Minangkabau food is effective to increase the attachment of fathers and children. These enhancements include the frequency of interaction, quality of communication, and emotional bonding between father and child. This suggests that a local culture-based approach through collaborative cooking activity is a valuable and innovative strategy to strengthen paternal attachment.

Beyond the numerical differences, each indicator reflects a unique dimension of the father-child bond. The highest increase in involvement in the activity demonstrates that the cooking process provided direct opportunities for children to actively participate alongside their fathers. This finding suggests that shared hands-on experiences foster a sense of belonging and cooperation, which is central to developing secure attachment. Meanwhile, the significant rise in emotional warmth indicates that the fun and culturally meaningful atmosphere of cooking traditional food creates space for positive affective expressions such as encouragement, laughter, and mutual appreciation.

Although the gains in frequency of interaction and communication were categorized as medium, they remain important. The increase in interaction suggests that fathers became more engaged in spending time with their children during the activity, while the moderate rise in

communication reflects that verbal exchanges were present but not the main channel of bonding. It can be assumed that younger children may rely more on non-verbal cues, shared attention, and physical proximity, which explains why emotional warmth and involvement outweighed verbal communication in effectiveness.

These results also highlight the cultural dimension of paternal attachment. Cooking Minangkabau traditional food is not merely a domestic task, but a cultural act embedded in values of togetherness, cooperation, and respect for heritage. By engaging fathers and children in preparing cultural dishes, the activity connects emotional bonds with cultural identity, strengthening both family relationships and cultural continuity. This suggests that parenting interventions rooted in local traditions may provide added value compared to generic bonding activities, as they integrate emotional closeness with cultural learning.

The effectiveness of fun cooking Minangkabau traditional food lies not only in improving measurable indicators of attachment but also in offering a culturally relevant, enjoyable, and meaningful context for father-child interaction. The findings suggest that similar approaches could be adapted in other cultural settings to foster paternal involvement and attachment, emphasizing the significance of culture-based educational and parenting strategies.



Figure 3. Fun cooking traditional Minangkabau food with father

4. Discussion

The results of this study highlight the role of fathers in shaping secure attachment through shared cultural activities. The significant improvements in *involvement in the activity* and *emotional warmth* suggest that joint participation in meaningful routines provides a strong basis for emotional closeness. According to attachment theory, the presence of a responsive and engaged caregiver creates a sense of safety and trust for the child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). While Bowlby's early work focused primarily on the mother-child bond, later developments emphasized the father as an equally important attachment figure (Bowlby, 2012). The findings from this study contribute to this expanded view by showing how paternal engagement in everyday tasks can reinforce attachment security.

The dominance of affective dimensions over verbal communication can be explained by the nature of cooking activities. Preparing traditional dishes is not only hands-on but also multisensory, requiring cooperation, shared focus, and mutual encouragement. Such interactions naturally foster laughter, gestures of care, and expressions of affection, which may explain why emotional warmth showed the highest gain. Research in developmental psychology consistently shows that parental warmth is associated with prosocial behavior and social competence in children (Daniel et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2024). Thus, the activity appears to provide a fertile ground for strengthening emotional bonds beyond what purely verbal communication could achieve.

The moderate increases in *frequency of interaction* and *communication* also merit attention. One possible explanation is that baseline scores for these dimensions were already relatively high before the intervention, leaving less room for substantial change. Another factor may be developmental: young children often rely more on nonverbal forms of communication, such as

shared attention and coordinated action, rather than on elaborate verbal exchanges. Studies have shown that the quality of warmth and involvement moderates the relationship between parental engagement and children's academic or behavioral outcomes (Ogg & Anthony, 2020; Wang et al., 2014). This pattern suggests that while communication improved moderately, it was complemented by strong affective gains, producing an overall meaningful impact on the father-child relationship.

The use of cooking as an intervention aligns with broader evidence on family meals and domestic collaboration as pathways to stronger relationships. Family cooking and shared mealtimes have been linked to higher cohesion, better communication, and increased psychological well-being (Farmer et al., 2018; Utter et al., 2015). Beyond immediate relational benefits, such activities also foster creativity, stress reduction, and resilience within families (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Mosko & Delach, 2020). These findings reinforce the interpretation that the gains observed here are not incidental but consistent with the wider literature on collaborative domestic activities. Cooking together, therefore, can be seen as a form of family-based intervention with psychosocial as well as relational benefits.

Importantly, the cultural dimension adds depth to the findings. Cooking Minangkabau traditional food is more than a household task—it embodies values of cooperation, respect for heritage, and community identity. Previous studies have shown that integrating local wisdom into parenting practices strengthens character and family bonds, while also promoting cultural continuity (Sakti et al., 2024; Utama & Dea, 2023). In this study, the use of traditional cuisine likely amplified the sense of belonging and emotional resonance between father and child. Ethnopedagogy emphasizes that learning embedded in cultural practices carries more meaning and is more sustainable across generations (Nggaruaka et al., 2022). Thus, the cultural context of the activity may explain why the intervention had particularly strong effects on emotional warmth and involvement.

The practical implications are significant for the design of father-inclusive parenting programs. Evidence shows that interventions are more effective when they include flexible schedules, culturally relevant content, and activities that emphasize the father's role (Freeman, 2022; Lechowicz et al., 2019). Programs that focus on shared activities, whether reading or cooking, provide fathers with concrete ways to engage with their children and build attachment. Furthermore, family-centered approaches that involve both parents tend to reduce conflict and enhance cooperative parenting (Williamson et al., 2023). By embedding cultural practices like traditional cooking into parenting programs, it is possible to create interventions that are both accessible and meaningful for fathers.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations that need to be acknowledged. The research design was limited to a pretest-posttest approach without a control group, which restricts causal inferences. In addition, the sample was drawn from a specific cultural context, making generalization to other populations more tentative. Future studies should consider comparative designs across different cultural practices or family activities, such as gardening or traditional crafts. Observational measures of warmth and involvement, using validated tools such as the Warmth/Affection Coding System (Prasad et al., 2023), would also strengthen the reliability of findings. Addressing these gaps will help clarify the mechanisms by which culture-based activities contribute to paternal attachment and provide stronger evidence for program development.

4.1. Research Contribution

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on paternal attachment by introducing fun cooking with traditional Minangkabau food as a culturally relevant and interactive strategy to strengthen father-child bonds. The research of fun cooking Minangkabau food enhances the understanding of how cultural practices can serve not only as tools for heritage transmission, but also as a meaningful pathways for emotion connection when adjusted within everyday family life. This contributes to the development of culture-based parenting approaches that promote active father involvement and holistic child well-being. Furthermore, the study offers practical insights for early childhood parenting programs and family education initiatives that seek to incorporate local wisdom into attachment-based interventions.

4.2. Limitations

Despite the valuable insights offered, certain limitations must be acknowledged in this study. The samples were from Padang City, Indonesia, and shared a Minangkabau cultural background. This specific social and cultural context may have influenced the findings, thus limiting the generalizability of the results to other regions with different cultural characteristics.

4.3. Suggestions

This study suggests that incorporating fun cooking activities involving traditional Minangkabau food can serve as an effective approach to enhance paternal attachment. Future research is recommended to involve more diverse cultural context to test the generalizability of these findings. Methodological improvements, such as mixed methods or longitudinal designs may also provide more in-depth insight into long-term impact of cultural practices on parents and child bonding. Further studies may also examine related factors such as cultural values, gender roles, and modern family dynamics.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that engaging fathers and children in fun cooking activities based on Minangkabau traditional cuisine effectively strengthens emotional bonds, increases active involvement, and enhances the quality of interaction between them. The findings confirm that father-child attachment can be fostered through culturally meaningful practices that go beyond routine caregiving, aligning with perspectives that highlight the critical role of paternal engagement in children's social, emotional, and character development. Moreover, incorporating local cultural values into parenting not only reinforces family cohesion but also contributes to cultural preservation from an early age. Therefore, fun cooking of traditional food can be recommended as both a practical parenting strategy and an educational intervention that integrates attachment building with cultural transmission.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Vivi Anggraini conceived and designed the study. Tia Novela conducted the data collection. Rahmi Dwi Febriani and Ezi Anggraini developed the theoretical framework on fatherhood and the father's role in parenting and children's emotional development. Adi Priyanto performed the data analysis. Yulsyofriend and Dwi Septia Ochi Wahyuni engaged in discussions concerning the findings. All authors contributed to the writing and final revision of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

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