



Unveiling Multiracial Family Parenting Practices in Early Childhood Education within the Indonesian Context: A Case Study

Aghnaita¹✉, **Wahyuni Murniati²**

¹Department of Islamic Early Childhood Education, IAIN Palangka Raya, Palangka Raya, Indonesia

²Department of Islamic Early Childhood Education, UIN Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose – The presence of multiracial families in society has given rise to various questions regarding early childhood care practices. It is essential for children to develop a strong sense of identity, considering their diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. This research aims to investigate the parenting practices within multiracial families during early childhood.

Design/methods/approach – This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach. The study is conducted in West Nusa Tenggara, spanning from May to November 2023. The primary data sources involve three multiracial families. Data collection methods include observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Findings – The results reveal that parenting styles are intricately intertwined with the cultural and racial backgrounds of the parents, whether both the mother and father's races are considered or if one race predominates. Parenting responsibilities are shared, and gender-related issues are not visibly prominent. The parenting practices encompass fostering independence and discipline, promoting tolerance, instilling good manners, emphasizing health and hygiene, scheduling activities, granting freedom, providing sleep training, developing life skills, and encouraging literacy.

Research implications/limitations – This study utilizes qualitative research methods and focuses on three multiracial families as research subjects, thereby offering insights into early childhood care.

Practical implications – This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge pertaining to early childhood care within multiracial contexts. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable reference for formulating appropriate policies and educational strategies for children in multiracial families.

Originality/value – Future research can delve deeper into the caregiving practices of multiracial families, considering diverse cultural and social perspectives.

Keywords Parenting practices, Multiracial families, Early childhood

Paper type Case Study

✉ Corresponding author:

Email Address: aghnaita94@gmail.com.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is often referred to as a golden age marked by rapid development (Sujiono, 2012; Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013). However, it cannot be separated from the influence of culture and a dynamic environment. Nayani (2020) emphasized that young children can recognize racial differences from an early age. In these crucial early years, it is fundamental to instill a holistic sense of identity and an understanding of multiracial group relationships. Children should learn to embrace their identity as multiracial individuals and live in a society that accepts racial differences. Families play a pivotal role in nurturing positive attitudes and understanding regarding race and diversity.

Intensive interaction between parents and children profoundly influences child development and character formation (Baumrind, 1978). Parenting requires effective communication within a cultural context, where culture informs parenting practices (Bornstein, 2012; Cauce, 2008). Additionally, parenting establishes an emotional climate through consistent interaction, impacting children positively and negatively. It also provides protection and education in daily life (Lestari, 2013; Maknun et al., 2018). Parenting can be defined as the process of interaction between a child and parents as members of the family who are capable of fulfilling primary needs, psychological needs (such as a sense of security, affection, and others), and imparting the prevailing norms within the community and the nation, thus influencing the child's personality. Recently, there have been numerous cases involving underage children that have left the Indonesian Child Protection Commission deeply concerned. According to newspaper reports, during the pandemic, cases involving underage children have actually increased. This situation is undoubtedly linked to the role of parents, which may not have been optimal or parents who have not fully understood the growth and development of their children (Latif & Manjorang, 2021).

Children in multiracial families often develop distinct racial identities. For example, one sibling may identify as black, while another sees themselves as white. These identities are influenced by physical characteristics, family ties, parental support, and experiences with different racial groups. Research also suggests that multiracial children tend to be happier than their 'single race' counterparts (Fields, 2010). Multiracial families play a crucial role in early childhood development, shaping notions of race and culture.

Several previous studies are relevant to the research problem. For instance Lorenzo-Blanco, Bares, and Delva (2013) found that individuals from multi-ethnic backgrounds may experience mental and physical health issues and receive less parental support compared to those from monoracial backgrounds. Andriani and Rachmawati (2022) highlighted the significance of religious values and extended family involvement in parenting in multi-ethnic families. Bratter and Kimbro (2013) discussed poverty rates among multiracial groups compared to white and minority monoracial communities. Lansford (2024) examined parenting practices between parents and adolescents, while Zarei et al., (2023) explored the impact of discrimination on the mental health of racial and ethnic minority children. However, the current study aims to delve deeper into multiracial family care for early childhood in Indonesia, addressing a research gap.

West Nusa Tenggara Province comprises Lombok and Sumbawa islands, previously part of the Lesser Sunda Islands, covering around 20,514 square kilometers. The Sasak tribe is the native population of Lombok, often referred to as 'Bumi Sasak' (Amin et al., 1997; Kuswiah et al., 1997). Apart from that, West Nusa Tenggara Province is also famous as a tourism area both locally, The province is also renowned for tourism, attracting both local and international visitors. This has led to cultural mingling and intermarriage between locals and foreigners. As different cultures converge, people from diverse geographic areas exhibit varying behaviors and thought patterns (Small, 1996). This situation influences the education and care of children in families with complex multiracial identities. Hence, this study delves deeper into multiracial family care for early childhood in West Nusa Tenggara.

2. Methods

The method employed in this research is descriptive qualitative research. Within this study, we will delve deeply into the various data we have gathered. The rationale behind selecting this approach lies in its ability to begin with a thorough examination of the problem's context. This, in turn, enables the researcher to elucidate and explore early childhood care within multiracial families in West Nusa Tenggara. The focal point of our research lies within the West Nusa Tenggara region. The research spanned a duration of 7 months, specifically from May to November 2023. Our primary data sources encompassed three multiracial families. We employed various techniques for data collection, including observation, interviews, and documentation. For data analysis, we adopted the methods proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which involve data condensation, data presentation, as well as verification and drawing conclusions.

3. Result

Based on the results of our observations, multiracial family D employs the Montessori parenting method. Both parents collaborate and decide on their child's parenting style. The participant discusses their approach to parenting and how they work as a team with their husband to care for their child, Mince. They mention that they both resigned from their jobs to take care of Mince physically. However, when it comes to parenting style, the participant leans more towards the Montessori method, which is popular in Germany. They emphasize that while they use Montessori as a reference, they also incorporate other methods, creating a blended approach that suits Mince's needs.

The participant acknowledges that their parenting style may differ from their own childhood experiences, highlighting the evolving nature of parenting across generations. They stress the importance of adaptability and considering Mince's personality when determining the best approach to parenting. Overall, their approach involves a combination of various methods to provide a well-rounded and tailored upbringing for their child. This approach is elucidated in the following interview excerpts:

"We have always agreed, my husband and I, to work as a team since Mince was born. I resigned from my job, so we both take care of him physically. However, when it comes to parenting style, I lean more towards Montessori. In Germany, Montessori is quite popular. Still, when I'm on my own, I blend different methods because it's not exclusively Montessori. We want Mince to have access to everything, so we adapt. Our parenting style may differ from what my husband and I experienced in our own childhoods. Parenting evolves every year and generation, so we decide together what suits us best. We also consider Mince's personality and adapt accordingly. We teach him everything, combining various approaches."

In terms of parenting practices towards Mince, the family encourages independence, particularly in eating. However, at times, they still feed him. The participant discusses their child's eating habits and their approach to religion in a multicultural context. They mention that in Germany, children are encouraged to start eating independently at around 6 months of age, although there are different options available. The participant and their family prefer to let their child, who is referred to as "he," try eating on his own. They contrast this with their experiences in Indonesia, where he was occasionally spoon-fed porridge but started eating independently from the beginning.

The participant also touches upon their approach to religion, indicating that they tend to be less strict. They mention that in Germany, their religious practices are less frequent, with occasional prayers when they go to church. They highlight the difference in religious attitudes between Indonesia and Germany, with Indonesia being characterized by greater religious devotion. In Germany, it is more about culture than strict religious observance. The participant emphasizes that they teach their child about various religions but place emphasis on their own faith. They stress the importance of introducing their child to his identity in the context of

multiculturalism. Additionally, Mince is taught about religious practices, demonstrating tolerance towards different beliefs. Mrs. Mince explained:

"In Germany, children are allowed to start eating independently around 6 months old, but there are options. Some parents still feed their children, but we prefer to let him try on his own. In Indonesia, he was occasionally spoon-fed porridge. From the beginning, he started eating on his own. Regarding religion, we tend to be less strict. For example, we don't pray too much, just occasionally when we go to church because we don't want to be too religious. In Indonesia, people of different religions are often very religious, but in Germany, it's more about culture. We teach him about various religions, but emphasize our own. At least, we have already introduced him to his identity."

Furthermore, Mince is taught social skills, communication, and appropriate behavior depending on the context and people around him. The participant discusses their approach to teaching their child social etiquette and communication skills in a multicultural environment. They provide specific examples of how they navigate cultural differences.

The participant mentions the importance of using the right hand in certain situations, indicating that when their child is in a particular setting, like being outside the family circle, he should use his right hand. However, within the family, the use of the right hand is not strictly enforced, and politeness takes precedence. They emphasize the importance of teaching their child to adapt to various social situations and not grow up without knowledge of proper etiquette in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the participant highlights their family's multilingual environment, where they speak several languages at home, including German, Indonesian, English, and Javanese. They note that their child is proficient in all these languages but primarily uses German when communicating with his father. This showcases their effort to maintain a multilingual and multicultural upbringing for their child, allowing him to communicate effectively in diverse contexts. Similar to the following interview:

"For example, if he's here, he should use his right hand, but with family, it's not a big deal if he uses his left hand; what matters is politeness. We've taught him to adjust to different situations. We don't want him to grow up in Indonesia without knowing the proper etiquette here. Still, we maintain some practices, like using the right hand, while being more flexible with close family members. We help him communicate. For example, if he talks to his father, he uses German, because we speak several languages at home—German, Indonesian, English, and Javanese. He can communicate in all these languages. But with his father, he primarily uses German."

As for multiracial IS families, they tend to adopt French parenting styles while integrating aspects of both cultures in child-rearing. They emphasize children's health and hygiene. In Lombok, child-rearing practices are considered superior, particularly in terms of children's health and daily routines. For instance, smoking near children is less acceptable in Germany. We adhere to strict guidelines, such as maintaining a certain distance of about 4 meters when smoking around children to prevent them from inhaling secondhand smoke. Our approach is characterized by a strong emphasis on health and hygiene standards. Father I mentioned:

"In Lombok, the child-rearing practices are better, especially regarding children's health and habits. For instance, smoking near children is less tolerated in Germany. We follow strict rules, like not smoking within a certain distance of children, about 4 meters, so they don't inhale it. We're quite strict when it comes to health and hygiene."

They also teach children daily hygiene routines like brushing teeth and handwashing and establish a structured daily schedule. We establish daily routines to create a sense of comfort and security for our children. These routines provide them with a predictable structure, reducing stress and anxiety. We meticulously plan their schedules, including meal times, playtime, and various activities, all with the intention of minimizing stress and ensuring their well-being. According to Mrs. M:

"We have routines to make our children feel comfortable and secure. They know what to expect each day, which reduces stress and anxiety. We're particular about their schedules, including meals, playtime, and other activities. We don't want them to be overly stressed."

In addition to structured schedules, children are encouraged to sleep, eat, play, and participate in various activities. They are allowed to engage in outdoor activities, and the children understand their routines. Our children's happiness is our top priority. For instance, if a child isn't inclined to eat at a specific time, we respect their decision and don't force them. We draw inspiration from the discipline practices observed in German families and maintain consistent schedules, including designated meal times at 8 AM, 12 PM, and 6 PM. If a child declines to eat at 8 AM, they will wait until 12 PM, with the option of having some snacks in the interim. This approach helps instill discipline. While they are very young, under 1 year old, we adhere to Indonesian customs. However, once they reach the age of 1, we transition to the German approach. We understand that teething or illness can influence a child's eating habits, and in such cases, they may prefer to be fed rather than eating independently. Our approach adapts accordingly to the child's condition and age. Father I added:

"We prioritize our children's happiness. For example, if a child doesn't want to eat at a certain time, we don't force them; we let them decide. I observe how German families raise their kids and follow their discipline practices. We're consistent with schedules, like having meals at specific times, such as 8 AM, 12 PM, and 6 PM. If a child refuses to eat at 8 AM, they won't eat until 12 PM, just some snacks. This way, they learn discipline. When they're very young, under 1 year old, we follow Indonesian customs. But once they're over 1 year old, we adopt the German approach. If a child is teething or unwell, they may want to be fed instead of eating on their own. We adapt to the child's condition and age."

Multiracial family B gives their children the freedom to make choices in daily life and teaches discipline from a young age. We maintain a flexible approach to parenting, with a preference for the German style. For instance, children as young as 3-4 years old can independently tie their shoelaces, eat without assistance, and follow a structured routine that includes washing their hands, brushing their teeth, reading books, and going to sleep. We initiated these routines when our children were just 3 months old, and from birth, we've consistently engaged in reading to them. Such thing influenced by German customs:

"We're flexible, but we lean towards the German way. For example, children aged 3-4 can tie their shoelaces, eat on their own, follow a schedule like washing their hands and brushing teeth, reading books, and sleeping. We've applied these routines since they were 3 months old. We've been reading to them since birth."

In addition to encouraging independence, children are introduced to literacy early through reading:

"We emphasize flexibility and independence. We encourage them to make choices. For example, if they don't want to eat at a particular time, we respect that. However, we also have strict schedules, like meal times at 8 AM, 12 PM, and 6 PM. If a child doesn't eat at 8 AM, they won't eat until 12 PM, just a snack. This helps them learn discipline. We emphasize politeness, saying thank you, and apologizing when they make mistakes. We push them to express gratitude and apologize. In France, before saying thank you, they won't give anything."

Our approach emphasizes both flexibility and independence. We encourage our children to make choices, such as deciding when they want to eat. However, we also maintain a structured schedule, with designated meal times at 8 AM, 12 PM, and 6 PM. If a child chooses not to eat at 8 AM, they will have to wait until 12 PM for their next meal, with only a snack in between. This approach helps instill discipline in them. Furthermore, we place a strong emphasis on politeness, teaching our children to say thank you and apologize when they make mistakes. We actively encourage them to express gratitude and offer apologies. In the French culture, it's customary not to give anything until the child says thank you, reinforcing our emphasis on these manners. They also teach practical life skills and introduce children to literacy at an early age through reading books:

"We've been flexible with their upbringing, incorporating elements from both Indonesian and German cultures. For instance, when they play with other children, we allow them to stay out until just before mealtime. However, we limit certain activities, like playing with sand or dirt. We've given them freedom in many aspects."

Our approach to nutrition involves providing milk to our children one hour before meals, and we refrain from giving them candies 30 minutes before meals. We actively monitor their candy consumption and strive to control it. If our children eat their meals well, we occasionally reward them with a candy after they finish eating. Additionally, we have a practice of avoiding giving them ice cream in the morning. This is because we've observed that it can lead to stomach discomfort, dental issues, and overall health concerns. Therefore, we prioritize their health by refraining from serving ice cream in the morning. Moreover, they maintain a consistent feeding schedule and control the types of food children consume:

"We give them milk an hour before meals, and 30 minutes before meals, no candies. We try to control it. If they eat well, we may reward them with a candy after meals. We avoid giving them ice cream in the morning; it upsets their stomach and teeth, and it's unhealthy."

These multiracial families employ various parenting practices, adapting to their child's needs and combining elements from different cultures to create a balanced and nurturing environment for their children's growth and development.

4. Discussion

The family, as the primary environment for a child's growth, consisting of the father, mother, and siblings, plays a significant role in shaping a child's personality based on the parenting style applied within the family. Each family has its unique parenting style, which is often influenced by the parenting they received themselves and the specific cultural influences present in their surroundings. Implementing parenting styles during the first 0-6 years of a child's life is a critical period because children absorb and internalize what they see and experience through the guidance and parenting practices provided by their parents (Latif & Manjorang, 2021). Furthermore, parental upbringing has been shown to have an impact on a child's self (Sitnick et al., 2015) and child development (Ofly & Yalçın, 2023).

According to Nayani (2020), parents must take a proactive approach in exposing their children to various cultures. Introducing children to cultural aspects that support learning plays a pivotal role in fostering healthy self-awareness and can prevent the tension of not understanding parts of their heritage, which could lead children to reject elements of their identity. This proactive approach is precisely what the three multiracial families have undertaken in their child-rearing practices.

Child-rearing practices often intertwine with the customs of two different cultures. However, some families tend to apply parenting styles exclusively rooted in one culture. For instance, multiracial family D has chosen the Montessori method as their primary reference for parenting. In this family, parents collaboratively embrace the responsibility of parenting and share roles in educating their child. Their parenting practices also reflect their cultural background, encompassing aspects such as promoting independence, discipline, religious tolerance, good manners, imparting knowledge about health and hygiene, scheduling daily activities, granting children autonomy, implementing sleep training, teaching life skills, and fostering literacy.

Djuwita (2020) emphasizes that parenting involves fulfilling both the physical and emotional needs of children, including providing food, addressing religious matters, catering to emotional and affectionate needs, and involving children in decision-making. Parenting is a conscious and purposeful endeavor that encompasses thought patterns and communication, aimed at nurturing a secure and loving relationship between parents and children (Kiong, 2015). Establishing a strong attachment between parents and children significantly impacts a child's development, communication patterns, and sense of security (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Moreover, this form of nurturing care serves as a preventive measure against child sexual violence (Aghnaita, 2022).

The quality of parenting, as observed in these three multiracial families, is closely intertwined with various factors, including cultural and environmental influences (Khaleque, 2021) which significantly shape the parenting style adopted for their children. Furthermore, the dynamics within the family play a symbolic role in which the child matures and grows (Jamaluddin, 2013).

5. Conclusion

The parenting style employed is closely tied to the cultural and racial backgrounds of the parents, whether it involves the combination of both the mother and father's races or is predominantly influenced by one specific race. Parenting is a collaborative effort, and gender-related issues do not appear to be prominently visible within these families. The parenting practices that are being implemented encompass aspects such as fostering independence and discipline, promoting tolerance, instilling good manners, emphasizing health and cleanliness, adhering to structured daily activities, granting children autonomy, implementing sleep training, teaching essential life skills, and fostering literacy.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Aghnaita the presented idea and data taker. Wahyuni Murniati developed the theory of parenting and early childhood education. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to aghnaita94@gmail.com.

ORCID

Wahyuni Murniati  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3880-5316>

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