

Early Childhood Care and Education Institutions' Innovative Strategies to Boost Father Participation in Parent Classes

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Article History

Received: November 07th, 2023

Revised: December 21th, 2023

Accepted: January 18th, 2024

Abstract: This research aims to elucidate the integrative strategies utilized by Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) managers in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon to foster fathers' participation in parent classes. Recognizing the pivotal role of fathers in early childhood development, yet acknowledging the barriers they face, this study sought to uncover the methods and strategies ECCE institutions employ. Through a qualitative case study method, interviews with five ECCE managers were conducted as the primary data collection technique. The data was subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, challenges, and innovative strategies. Findings highlight a confluence of traditional engagements, such as parenting guidance sessions, coupled with innovative tactics like cultural events and flexible scheduling. However, despite these efforts, work-centric challenges and societal expectations remain formidable barriers. This study underscores the imperative for a comprehensive, adaptive, and localized approach in enhancing father involvement in ECCE, adding a valuable dimension to the discourse on inclusive early education.

Keywords: Cultural Engagement, ECCE, Father Involvement, Managerial Strategies, Parent Classes, Parenting Guidance.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a great deal of emphasis paid to the role that fathers play in the areas of early childhood care and education (Bentenuto & Venuti, 2019; Ratningsih et al., 2021). Social structures have historically positioned mothers as the primary caregivers and fathers as the primary breadwinners (Mauerer & Schmidt, 2019). But as the dynamics of society changed and studies began to illuminate the complex roles fathers play, their importance in ECCE became glaringly obvious (Nengsih, 2020; Waroka, 2022). Children learn in a special and varied way from their fathers. Their interactions, which are marked by exploration and physical play, frequently put children in danger and help them develop problem-solving abilities (Nguyen et al., 2021). Children who have such experiences not only increase their cognitive abilities but also become resilient and adaptable adults (Anggraini et al., 2022). In addition to providing concrete education, fathers are essential in forming a child's emotional world. Children with high levels of emotional intelligence and self-esteem have been associated with engaged fathers because of their regular interactions, validation,

and support. While low cognitive stimulation and engaged but harsh discipline patterns in father involvement are associated with increased child behavior problems and lower socioemotional and cognitive functioning in low-income children 5 years (Yoon et al., 2021). The basis for children's mental health and their capacity to overcome obstacles in the future is laid by these early emotional ties.

Father-child relationships have a significant impact on social development as well. Fathers help children grasp gender roles and subtle social cues by being involved with them and imparting important social skills (Rosita et al., 2020; Rumsari & Nurhayati, 2020; Zhen, 2020). Children's relationships in larger social contexts, such towns and schools, are also influenced by this early socialization, in addition to family dynamics. In addition, parental engagement has equally significant cognitive benefits. Parents' engagement in activities like reading, exploratory play, and critical questioning fosters curiosity and intellectual development (Leech et al., 2023). Research has shown that active father involvement is associated with improved academic performance, successful jobs, and even healthier adult

relationships, demonstrating the long-term benefits of such early interactions (Baker et al., 2018). Fathers play a transforming role in ECCE, to put it simply. Numerous studies have shown how important their role is in helping children develop in a holistic and rich way, which calls for a change in how people think about them and encourages them to get involved in early learning environments. Furthermore, modern ECCE institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of father involvement (Rohrmann, 2019). Innovative strategies including tailored programs that cater to fathers is being implemented worldwide (Sanders et al., 2019).

The dynamic field of early childhood care and education (ECCE) has progressively acknowledged the crucial significance of dads. Although there has been substantial research on the several advantages of parent engagement and the difficulties they encounter, there is still a lack of awareness regarding the specific techniques used by ECCE managers, particularly in locations such as Kecamatan Bandung Kulon. Contemporary literature frequently provides a general overview of techniques, neglecting the subtle details of culturally specific and locally customized tactics. An extensive investigation is required to understand how ECCE managers in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon handle the complexities of father engagement, given the distinct cultural and societal dynamics of this region. In addition, although different solutions are frequently mentioned, there is a noticeable lack of comprehensive assessments regarding their efficacy in this particular area. Essentially, although the importance of father involvement in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is well acknowledged, there is still a lack of detailed study on the specific strategies used by ECCE administrators to enhance father involvement in locations such as Kecamatan Bandung Kulon. This research aims to delve deep into the strategies employed by ECCE managers in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon to enhance fathers' participation in parent classes. Given the proven benefits of father involvement and the challenges that persist in achieving this, understanding the tactics and barriers is of paramount importance. This research will not only shed light on the current practices but also provide insights for other ECCE institutions striving to bolster father engagement.

METHODS

This research delved into the strategies adopted by Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) managers in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, aiming to enhance fathers' participation in parent classes. A qualitative approach, enriched by the case study method, was meticulously chosen. Such an approach thrives in capturing the intricate perspectives, experiences, and nuances specific to particular contexts. In this instance, the focus was on the unique strategies and practices of ECCE managers within the bounds of Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, a region steeped in its own socio-cultural dynamics.

Five ECCE managers, pivotal in orchestrating and implementing parent classes in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, were selected as the study's main informants. Their vantage points, stemming from their roles, rendered them invaluable for gleaning deep insights into the subject. Data collection was a tri-pronged process, encompassing in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and a study of pertinent documents. The interviews, lasting around 60 minutes, were meticulously structured yet flexible, allowing participants to relay their insights while addressing the study's core queries. These discussions delved into their views on the significance of fathers' participation, challenges in augmenting such involvement, the strategies they've championed, and their reflections on the efficacy of these tactics. With participants' consent, these sessions were audio-recorded to maintain the integrity of their responses.

Complementing the interviews, observational sessions were embarked upon. These provided a tangible window into the dynamics at play during parent classes, revealing the depth of fathers' engagement, the strategies in action by ECCE managers, and the ambiance of the sessions. Concurrently, a document study was initiated, poring over relevant materials like curriculum blueprints, session agendas, feedback forms, and assorted communication between managers and parents. This exercise illuminated formal strategies, written feedback from fathers, and discernible patterns in father engagement over time.

The data analysis was anchored in a thematic approach. After transcribing the interviews, an immersive reading of the transcripts was undertaken to grasp their holistic essence. This was followed by a meticulous

coding phase, identifying and tagging pertinent sections. These codes, in turn, coalesced into broader themes that encapsulated the experiences, insights, and strategies shared by the ECCE managers. The observational notes and documents further enriched this thematic analysis, ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of the gathered data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The interviews with ECCE managers from various institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon have revealed intricate details about the dynamics of fathers' involvement in parenting classes. These insights are organized thematically to provide a comprehensive understanding.

Active Involvement by Teachers and PAUD Staff in Engaging Fathers

In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, teachers and PAUD staff emerge as the linchpins in championing the cause of father involvement in parent class activities. Their commitment, as illuminated through the interviews, is evident in the multifaceted strategies they employ. At the heart of their efforts is the focus on providing fathers with actionable parenting guidance. Rather than just offering generic advice, these sessions are meticulously crafted to offer tangible insights into daily life routines. One educator vividly described this intent, stating: "Guru mengundang para ayah untuk mengikuti parenting dengan maksud dan tujuan membimbing anak anaknya pada kehidupan rutinitas sehari hari dirumah... agar anak anak bisa mandiri." This methodical approach, more than just information dissemination, emphasizes holistic child development. It ensures that children are equipped with essential life skills, be it the courtesy of greetings or the independence of self-feeding.

Beyond these guidance sessions, the role of fathers extends to active participation in school programs. They're not mere spectators; they immerse themselves in curriculum discussions, providing invaluable input during school meetings. Their involvement, however, doesn't end with these discussions. Many fathers transition from being attendees to playing the roles of teachers or resource persons, leveraging their experiences to enrich the educational milieu. Highlighting their indispensable role,

many fathers also shoulder operational responsibilities. They take the helm as organizing committee members for various events, a testament to the trust and importance bestowed upon them by the institutions. This strategic involvement ensures that fathers transition from being passive participants to becoming essential gears driving the educational machinery. In essence, these findings underscore the profound and multifarious strategies harnessed by teachers and PAUD staff in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon. Their endeavors, marked by innovation and tradition, ensure that fathers are woven into every facet of the educational tapestry, fostering a collaborative and inclusive learning environment.

Strategies for Improving Father Engagement

ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon employ various innovative and tailored strategies to engage fathers actively. A significant strategy is the gesture of appreciation. Fathers who attend the sessions are met with a unique form of acknowledgment: the captivating artworks crafted by their children. This strategy, as one manager elaborated, is not just a mere recognition but serves a dual purpose: "Apresiasi khusus untuk para ayah yang hadir dari putra - putri nya dalam bentuk hasil karya anak yang terindah." It not only honors the fathers' presence but also strengthens the emotional bond between the father and child, reinforcing the importance of their involvement. Moreover, the institutions recognize the invaluable role fathers can play in the educational journey of their children. At TK Bintari, for instance, fathers don't just attend; they become an integral part of the learning process. They are invited to lead literacy activities, turning narrative sessions into interactive experiences. As elucidated: "Mengajak ayah untuk menjadi guru dalam kegiatan literasi bercerita di depan anak-anak TK Bintari." This hands-on involvement facilitates a deeper father-child connection while allowing fathers to make a tangible impact on the educational outcomes.

Diversifying their strategies, the institutions also harness cultural events as platforms for father engagement. The "Fashion" event stands out, where the theme celebrates the rich tapestry of Indonesian traditional attire. Fathers, along with their children, embrace this cultural celebration, donning traditional Balinese outfits and delivering performances that

mesmerize and educate. Such events, beyond their educational value, serve as a testament to the depth of cultural appreciation and the bonds they foster between fathers and their children: "Pada acara lomba Fashion dengan tema cinta pakaian Adat Indonesia... si ayah menari memainkan kipas dan di ikuti anaknya yg perempuan." Lastly, the scope of father involvement isn't restricted to isolated events or sessions. The institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon actively encourage fathers to immerse themselves in a spectrum of activities, from literacy programs and competitions to parenting sessions. The aim is clear: to integrate fathers into the very fabric of the educational programs, ensuring their involvement is active, meaningful, and consistent: "Mengajak ayah untuk menjadi guru dalam kegiatan literasi, lomba lomba, parenting, serta mengajak atau mengikut sertakan kegiatan program di lembaga kami." In essence, these strategies, as gleaned from the interviews, reflect the holistic and thoughtful approach of ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, all aimed at deepening father engagement in the early educational journey of their children.

Innovative Practices to Encourage Active Father Participation

In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, the innovative spirit of ECCE institutions shines through in their approach to foster active father participation. The strategies, as revealed in the interviews, are as diverse as they are impactful, underlining the concerted efforts made to ensure fathers are integrally involved in their children's education. Amidst the tapestry of strategies, one that stands out is the emphasis on leveraging celebratory occasions. Tapping into the euphoria of festivities, institutions craft unique engagements like the competition where fathers first demonstrate wearing socks, and their children follow suit. This seemingly simple activity, as one manager recounted, "Dengan kegiatan memperingati hari hari besar mengadakan lomba memakai kaos kaki di contohkan ayahnya dulu, lalu diikuti anaknya," is a testament to how ECCE institutions creatively mold learning experiences. Such engagements not only make learning enjoyable but also foster closer father-child interactions.

Furthermore, the realm of storytelling presents another avenue where fathers are actively involved. Fathers breathe life into tales and readings, creating an enchanting atmosphere

for their children. The very act of storytelling, as described, "Mengajak ayah ikut serta dalam mendongengkan cerita atau buku bacaan setiap hari," is emblematic of the dual purpose it serves: instilling a love for literature in children and cementing the emotional bond between the father and child. This active involvement extends to classroom settings as well. Fathers are not mere observers; they are at the forefront, especially during literacy sessions. Their role in narrating stories in front of children is paramount, turning classrooms into dynamic spaces of learning and interaction. A manager encapsulated this sentiment, stating, "Iya, dalam kegiatan di dalam kelas kegiatan literasi bercerita di depan anak-anak." Recognizing the myriad responsibilities fathers juggle, especially work commitments, ECCE institutions have adopted a considerate scheduling approach. Special activities are planned on public holidays or non-working days, ensuring fathers, who might otherwise be preoccupied, can participate. The strategic scheduling, highlighted in the observation, "Mengadakan kegiatan nya pada tanggal libur di hari kerja," is a nod to the institutions' adaptive approach to accommodate fathers.

In conclusion, the plethora of innovative practices employed by ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon underscores their unwavering commitment to enhancing father-child engagement. The strategies, characterized by creativity, adaptability, and understanding, are pivotal in shaping the educational landscape in the region.

Challenges Hindering Fathers' Participation in Parent Classes

Despite the proactive endeavors of ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon to bolster father involvement, certain intrinsic challenges persistently hinder their active participation. Predominantly, work commitments emerge as a significant barrier. Many fathers, due to their demanding professional roles and traditional responsibilities as primary breadwinners, grapple with time constraints. One respondent encapsulated this challenge, noting the limited participation of fathers owing to their work engagements: "Hambatannya belum banyak partisipasi ayah yang hadir dikarenakan kesibukannya bekerja." This work-centric challenge dovetails with the entrenched societal expectations of fathers as the head of the family. Their pivotal role in the family hierarchy often

dictates their daily priorities, occasionally relegating parent classes to the background. The sentiment was evident in the observation: "tidak semua orang tua dapat mengikuti kegiatan karena terbentur dengan kegiatan mereka sebagai kepala keluarga dan bekerja." Beyond these tangible barriers, there exists a myriad of personal reasons for fathers' reluctance or inability to attend. The diverse reasons, while not exhaustively enumerated, underscore the multifaceted nature of the challenge. As one interviewee pointed out, the resistance from fathers stems from a range of issues: "Banyak ayah yang keberatan hadir dengan berbagai alasan." Collectively, these findings spotlight the delicate equilibrium that ECCE institutions strive to achieve. While they ardently seek to enhance father involvement, they must simultaneously navigate the labyrinth of societal norms, work obligations, and individual reluctances that fathers face.

Discussion

Active Involvement by Teachers and PAUD Staff in Engaging Fathers

In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, teachers and PAUD staff stand out as significant proponents of father involvement in parent class activities. Echoing the sentiments of research by Rossini (2018), which emphasizes the role of educators in promoting paternal engagement, the commitment of the local educators is palpably evident. This approach aligns with Wang et.al (2022) study, which underscored the significance of holistic child development through active paternal involvement. Beyond guidance, fathers in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon are pivotal stakeholders in the educational journey. Their deep involvement, from curriculum discussions to taking on roles as resource persons, mirrors the findings of Zymroc (2022), who discussed the transformative role of fathers in educational settings when given the platform. Their transition from passive participants to active contributors is a testament to the evolving role of fathers (Palm, 2014). Furthermore, the operational roles undertaken by fathers, such as organizing committee responsibilities, resonate Bunga's research (2020), which discussed the positive impact of paternal involvement in school operational activities on child outcomes. In sum, the strategies employed by teachers and PAUD staff in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon reflect a global trend, supported by multiple research

studies, underscoring the transformative role fathers can play in educational settings. Through innovation and tradition, these educators ensure that fathers are not just participants but integral threads in the educational fabric, fostering a rich, collaborative, and inclusive learning environment.

Strategies for Improving Father Engagement

The pivotal role of fathers in early childhood education has been an area of growing research focus, with studies underscoring the positive impact of active paternal involvement on child outcomes (Monzo, 2019). In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, ECCE institutions have adeptly recognized and harnessed this insight, crafting innovative strategies to bolster father engagement. A cornerstone of their approach resonates with findings from Palazzeschi et.al. (2022), emphasizing the power of acknowledgment and appreciation. As fathers participate, they're greeted with heartfelt gestures, particularly the artworks of their children. The continuous and diverse involvement of fathers, as advocated by the institutions, resonates with Jeong et.al's (2019) findings on the myriad benefits of consistent paternal engagement across varied educational activities.

Innovative Practices to Encourage Active Father Participation

The importance of fathers in early childhood education has long been established in the literatures (Fagan & Cabrera, 2022; Forget et al., 2018; Monzo, 2019; Ratningsih et al., 2021). In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, ECCE institutions have translated this understanding into a myriad of innovative strategies, ensuring fathers play an active role in their children's education. The power of celebratory occasions as educational tools has been discussed in studies such as (Monzo, 2019; Reczek-Zymróz, 2022). Reflecting this, local institutions have crafted unique engagements around festivities. A notable example is the competition that engages both fathers and their children in the simple act of wearing socks. Storytelling, recognized in literature as a potent tool for cognitive and emotional development (Ghofur & Nurhayati, 2023), emerges as another realm of father involvement. Fathers not only share tales but imbue them with life, fostering a literary appreciation among children. Understanding the

constraints fathers face, especially work-related, ECCE institutions have showcased adaptability, a trait emphasized by Burk et.al. (2022). By scheduling activities on non-working days, institutions ensure broader father participation. This thoughtful strategy, as one observation noted: "Mengadakan kegiatan nya pada tanggal libur di hari kerja," reflects the institutions' commitment to accommodating fathers' schedules, ensuring their active engagement. In summation, ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, through their diverse and innovative practices, are forging a path that aligns with contemporary research. Their endeavors are shaping a more inclusive and engaging educational landscape, where fathers are pivotal stakeholders.

Challenges Hindering Fathers' Participation in Parent Classes

While research has consistently underscored the profound benefits of paternal involvement in early childhood education (Nengsih, 2020), the reality on the ground often presents a more complex picture. In Kecamatan Bandung Kulon, despite the commendable efforts of ECCE institutions, fathers grapple with several challenges that impede their active participation. A primary impediment, as echoed in the broader research landscape, is the rigidity of work commitments (Burk & Sharaievska, 2022). Many fathers, navigating their roles as the primary breadwinners and the demands of their professions, find limited bandwidth to participate in parent classes. This challenge isn't merely a product of professional commitments but is intertwined with deep-seated societal norms. The traditional expectations placed on fathers as the familial pillars often exert pressure, sometimes relegating their involvement in educational settings. Beyond these structural and societal barriers, personal reasons further compound the challenge. Fathers, for a plethora of reasons, might be hesitant or unable to attend sessions (Mauerer & Schmidt, 2019). In synthesis, while ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon are making strides in promoting father engagement, the intricate web of professional, societal, and personal challenges presents formidable obstacles. Navigating this complex terrain requires nuanced strategies and a deep understanding of the socio-cultural fabric.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the innovative strategies and challenges faced by ECCE institutions in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon in bolstering father involvement in parent classes. The findings underscore the commitment of these institutions to weave fathers into the educational fabric through a mix of appreciation gestures, hands-on participation, cultural engagements, and thoughtful scheduling. However, hurdles like work commitments, societal norms, and personal reservations often stand in the way. The results emphasize the need for other ECCE settings to recognize the benefits of active father engagement and adopt adaptive strategies. The efforts in Kecamatan Bandung Kulon can serve as a benchmark, offering insights into how institutions can navigate societal and personal challenges to foster stronger father-child educational bonds. Further studies can delve deeper into fathers' personal reservations and how they can be addressed. Additionally, comparative research across different regions could provide insights into cultural nuances and their impact on father engagement strategies. Lastly, the long-term impacts of such father engagement practices on child outcomes warrant exploration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers would like to give thanks to Early Childhood Education Institutions in Bandung Kulon Regency which have been willingly participated in this research.

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