

Fathers' Involvement in Early Childhood Education: Navigating Parenting with Working Mothers in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Social skills are a key component of early childhood social-emotional development. This study investigates the influence of gadget usage intensity, parenting patterns of working mothers, peer interaction, and the moderating role of father involvement on early childhood social development. This explanatory research employed a quantitative approach, targeting kindergarten teachers and students in Mayong District, Jepara Regency. Using proportionate random sampling, 100 participants were selected. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using multiple regression analysis with moderation testing. Findings revealed that gadget usage intensity ($p = 0.041$), working mothers' parenting patterns ($p = 0.017$), and peer interaction ($p = 0.040$) significantly affected early childhood social development. Father involvement significantly moderated the effect of working mothers' parenting patterns ($p = 0.047$), strengthening their influence on children's social development. However, father involvement did not moderate the impact of gadget usage ($p = 0.184$) or peer interaction ($p = 0.449$). The results suggest that balanced parenting and peer interaction are crucial for early childhood social development, and father involvement can enhance maternal parenting effectiveness. In contrast, excessive gadget use remains a risk factor. Parental supervision, particularly in gadget use, is essential. Schools should implement interactive group activities to support children's social skills. Future studies should explore additional influencing factors, such as family support and parent-child communication, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood social development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, defined as the age range from 0 to 8 years, is a critical period characterized by rapid growth and development—often referred to as the "golden age." During this stage, comprehensive stimulation across all developmental domains is essential to support optimal growth. Developmental standards for early childhood serve as benchmarks for children's progress in various areas, including

religious and moral values, physical and motor skills, cognitive abilities, language, social-emotional competence, and artistic expression.

Among these domains, social development plays a pivotal role in preparing children to adapt to social environments and participate in community life. It encompasses children's ability to interact effectively with peers, adults, and the broader society (Berliana, Rosidah, & Sayekti, 2022). Social development during early childhood lays the foundation for future emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and cognitive functioning. Through social interactions, children begin to understand societal norms, learn appropriate behaviors, and develop the skills necessary to navigate diverse social situations. As such, fostering social development in early childhood is crucial for holistic growth and lifelong success.

Ideally, early childhood with good social development will be reflected in several indicators. As explained by Winarni, Hardiyanti, & Istiklaili (2020), indications of children with good social development are 1) having self-awareness, where children are able to control their feelings, show self-confidence, understand rules and discipline, and do not give up easily; 2) having a sense of responsibility for themselves and others, namely the child's behavior that shows the ability to take care of themselves and their environment, and 3) having prosocial behavior, such as obeying the rules that apply in a game and respecting others.

Many factors influence children's social development. These factors include parenting patterns, peer interactions, and gadget use. Parenting patterns towards the development of early childhood independence greatly determine the behavior and characteristics of the child himself (Andhriana, 2021).

Regarding the gadget factor, in essence a technology was created to make human life easier and more comfortable. The use of gadgets in children has positive and negative impacts (Berliana et al., 2022). The positive impacts of using gadgets include increasing children's insight, and can increase children's intelligence. The negative impacts can cause a lack of social mobility in children. They prefer to play using their gadgets rather than playing with their peers (Elka Fitri, Dwi Sagita, & Wahyuni, 2022). Therefore, the use of gadgets by children needs to pay attention to the benefits of the functions and applications on the gadget, the frequency of gadget use, and the duration of gadget use (Kontesa, 2022).

The results of initial interviews with parents showed that children prefer playing with gadgets than playing with their peers. This is inseparable from the various game applications on these children's gadgets, which of course attract more attention from these children compared to the games in their surroundings. In addition, parents also agreed that when their children play with gadgets, these children tend to be quiet in front of their respective gadgets without caring about the world around them.

Parental presence, particularly that of mothers, plays a crucial role in supporting the growth and development of young children. However, with societal advancements and changing economic demands, many mothers now work outside the home, often leaving their children in the care of nannies or relatives. The increasing number of working mothers has become a defining feature of modern life (Wahyuni, Depalina, & Wahyuningsih, 2021). Several studies have highlighted the potential negative consequences of this trend, particularly the weakening of the mother-child bond, which can lead to behavioral issues in early childhood (Zen & Mulyani, 2021). If a mother's reduced presence is not compensated by other caregivers providing high-quality interactions, it may adversely affect a child's developmental outcomes (Bue, Perova, & Reynolds, 2023).

In Indonesia, the number of working women continues to rise. According to BPS RI (2019), 40.23% of Indonesian women were employed in 2019 (Badar, Yuniati Demang, & Fredi Daar, 2021). A similar trend is evident in Jepara Regency, where the number of working women increased from 252,258 in 2019 to 261,414 in 2020 and further to 266,506 in 2022. In Mayong District, this growth is largely driven by the presence of numerous factories that offer employment opportunities for women. While this allows more mothers to participate in the workforce, it also reduces the amount of time they spend with their young children. Consequently, limited mother-child interaction may hinder the development of children's social skills and emotional well-being.

Based on the results of a pre-survey on parenting patterns in early childhood in Mayong District, Jepara Regency, it can be seen that working mothers whose children attend Pertiwi 08.03 Mayong

Kindergarten apply various different parenting patterns. There are mothers who use democratic parenting patterns. However, there are still mothers who tend to be authoritarian, such as immediately scolding their children if they do something wrong, parents only communicate during free time. This means that children are allowed to play without parental control.

The social development of early childhood can also be influenced by interactions with peers. Peers can help children's social development, such as children being able to obey rules and help friends in situations such as studying and also sharing with friends (Melinda & Izzati, 2021). If peer interactions are better, the level of social behavior in children will be better. This is because other children who become their friends often influence the individual's personality, from these friends children will accept social norms or values that exist in society. If their friends are good, children will accept positive norm concepts (Ningsih, Ali, & Yuniarni, 2018). Good social behavior is built through social interactions that occur in relationships between individuals (Mardiyani & Widyasari, 2023).

The phenomenon that occurred in the field based on the results of observations conducted by researchers at Pertiwi Kindergarten 08.03 Nalumsari Jepara, it was found that there were still students who had behavior that was not as expected, such as, there were children who still liked to be alone, could not control their actions and feelings, did not want to share, and did not want to cooperate. This can have an impact on children's behavior, such as imitating things that are not good in social relationships.

Several previous studies have identified key factors influencing the social development of early childhood. Berliana (2022) found that gadget use significantly affects the social interactions of children aged 5–6 years. Similarly, Irawan et al. (2019) demonstrated a significant relationship between the parenting patterns of working mothers and the social development of preschool-aged children. Furthermore, research by Ningsih, Ali, and Yuniarni (2018) revealed a strong correlation between peer interactions and asocial behavior in early childhood, particularly among children aged 5–6 years.

Beyond these factors, the role of father involvement has also emerged as a critical component of children's social-emotional development. Rohmalina et al. (2019) emphasized that children raised with active paternal involvement tend to exhibit more positive personality traits, such as increased competitiveness, confidence, and risk-taking ability. Other studies further support this notion, highlighting that father involvement contributes positively not only to children's behavior but also to maternal emotional stability (Esterilita & Utami, 2024). Fathers who actively engage in parenting help reduce negative behaviors in children and enhance the overall family dynamic (Syafiqoh & Pranoto, 2022).

Based on these findings, this study introduces father involvement as a moderating variable in examining the effects of gadget usage intensity, working mothers' parenting patterns, and peer interactions on the social development of early childhood. Specifically, the study aims to analyze both the direct impact of these three factors and the moderating role of father involvement in shaping early childhood social development.

2. METHODS

This research design aims to find a solution to a problem. The type of research used is quantitative research with an explanatory research approach. Explanatory research is research that intends to explain the position of the variables studied and the relationship between one variable and another (Sugiyono, 2016).

The population of this study was parents of children aged groups A and B in Kindergarten in Mayong District, Jepara Regency, who work outside the home, totalling 964 people. The total number of samples was calculated using the Slovin formula, and obtained 100 samples. Sampling in this study used the proportionate random sampling technique, namely, taking samples from four dabins evenly. In this case, 25 samples were taken from each dabin.

Data collection used questionnaires and observation sheets. The questionnaire was used to measure the variables of Gadget Use Intensity (Musdalifah & Indriani, 2017), Working Mother

Parenting Patterns (Riany, Cuskelly, & Meredith, 2018), Peer Interaction (Regina, H. Sutrisno, 2016), and Father Involvement (Esterilita & Utami, 2024). While the observation sheet was used to measure the variable of Early Childhood Social Development (Winarni et al., 2020). The validity and reliability of the instrument were tested using research data. All question items that were declared valid and reliable were then used as research data collection instruments. The data analysis technique used multiple regression analysis. Analysis prerequisite tests, namely normality test, linearity test, heteroscedasticity test, and multicollinearity test. If the criteria in the analysis prerequisite test are met, hypothesis testing is continued. The research design according to the conceptual framework of the research and the research hypothesis can be described in Figure 1 below:

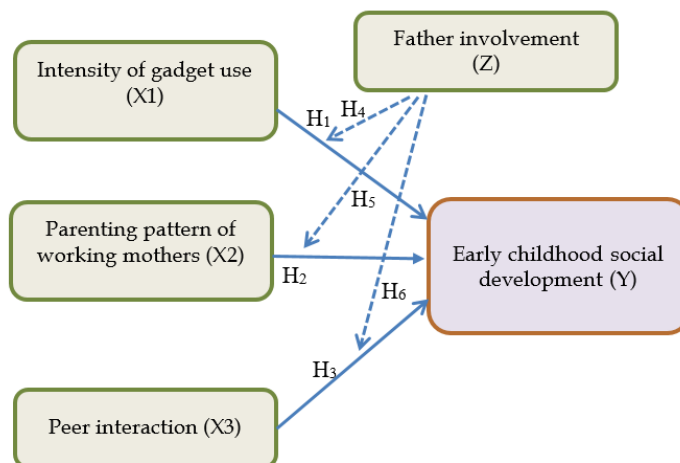


Figure 1. Schemes follow the same formatting

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

Hypothesis testing of the research uses multiple regression analysis techniques that have prerequisite analysis tests, consisting of normality tests, multicollinearity tests, linearity tests, and heteroscedasticity tests (Ghozali, 2011). The normality test is carried out to test whether the residuals are normally distributed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov. The criteria for the normality test are that the data follows a normal distribution if the significance value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S) > 0.05.

Table 1. Normality Test Results

N	K-S Statistics	Sig	Conclusion
100	0.072	0.200	Normal

Based on Table 1, the significance value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is greater than 0.05, indicating that the residuals of the regression model are normally distributed. The next assumption test conducted is the multicollinearity test, which aims to assess whether the independent variables are free from multicollinearity—that is, to ensure that there is no strong correlation or significant linear relationship among the independent variables.

Table 2. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variables	Tolerance	VIF	Conclusion
Intensity of gadget use (X1)	0.990	1.010	Non-Multicollinearity
Parenting pattern of working mothers (X2)	0.378	2.643	Non-Multicollinearity
Peer interaction (X3)	0.410	2.439	Non-Multicollinearity
Father involvement (Z)	0.421	2.373	Non-Multicollinearity

Table 2 indicates that the variables—intensity of gadget use (X1), parenting patterns of working mothers (X2), peer interaction (X3), and father involvement (Z)—have Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below 10 and tolerance values above 0.1. These results suggest that multicollinearity is not present in the regression model, confirming that the independent variables are statistically independent of one another.

The third assumption test conducted is the linearity test, which assesses whether a linear relationship exists between each independent variable and the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Linearity Test Results

Relationship of Variables	F value	Sig.	Conclusion
X1-Y	0.671	0.786	Linear
X2-Y	1.008	0.479	Linear
X3-Y	1.042	0.426	Linear
Z-Y	1.205	0.268	Linear

Based on the linearity test summary presented in Table 3, the relationship between the intensity of gadget use and working mothers' parenting patterns with early childhood social development is confirmed to be linear, as indicated by significance values greater than 0.05.

The fourth assumption test is the heteroscedasticity test, which assesses whether there is unequal variance of residuals across observations in the regression model. The results show that the data points are randomly scattered and do not form a specific pattern, with distributions appearing both above and below the zero point on the Y-axis. This indicates that the model is free from heteroscedasticity.

With all assumption tests satisfied, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS for Windows version 26 to evaluate the research hypotheses. The results of the analysis are displayed in Table 4.

The findings from the first hypothesis test reveal that the regression coefficient for the effect of gadget use intensity on early childhood social development is -0.568, with a t-value of -2.058 and a significance level of $p = 0.042$ ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the intensity of gadget use has a statistically significant negative effect on children's social development. Therefore, it can be concluded that increased gadget use is associated with poorer social development outcomes in early childhood, supporting the acceptance of the first hypothesis.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Test Results

	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.022	3.588		1.121	0.263
Intensity of gadget use (X1)	-0.568	0.276	-0.483	-2.058	0.042
Parenting pattern of working mothers (X2)	0.119	0.048	0.458	2.479	0.015
Peer interaction (X3)	0.126	0.061	0.325	2.066	0.040
Father involvement (Z)	0.179	0.084	0.480	2.131	0.036
X1*Z	0.002	0.001	0.812	1.423	0.184
X2*Z	0.008	0.004	0.402	1.997	0.047
X3*Z	0.002	0.002	0.226	0.756	0.449
Dependent Variable: Early childhood social development (Y)					
R = 0.877					
R square = 0.769					
Adjusted R square = 0.765					
F value = 50.274					
Sig. = 0.000					

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research by Kartika et al. (2022), which demonstrated a strong correlation between the intensity of gadget use and the social development of children. Similarly, Berliana et al. (2022) reported a negative impact of excessive gadget use on children's social interactions, noting that children who frequently use gadgets tend to be less responsive to their surroundings. Setiawati (2019) also highlighted that gadget use can produce both positive and negative effects, depending on how it is managed. To minimize the adverse outcomes, Rahayu, Elan, and Mulyadi (2021) emphasized the importance of parental supervision, suggesting that parents should actively accompany and guide their children during gadget use to help them engage with content appropriately and maintain healthy social behaviors.

The findings of this study are supported by the results of interviews with parents of students with the initials AA, which are presented in the following excerpt:

"I think my child watches videos or plays games on gadgets for more than 2 hours every day. On the one hand, gadgets provide benefits such as introducing children to colors, numbers, and letters. However, I feel there are negative impacts too. When using gadgets too often, children become less interested in playing with their friends. I have to encourage them to play outside more often so they can learn to share and interact with other children." (Results of the interview on September 23, 2024, with the parent of a student with the initials AA)

The results of the second hypothesis test showed that the regression coefficient of the influence of working mothers' parenting patterns on the social development of early childhood was 0.119, t value = 2.479 and $p = 0.015$ ($p < 0.05$), so it can be stated that the working mother's parenting variable has a positive effect on the social development of early childhood. Based on the results of these tests, it can be said that the better the parenting pattern of working mothers, the better the social development of early childhood. Thus, the second hypothesis can be accepted.

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies by Irawan et al. (2019); Badar et al. (2021); Cahyani & Saroinsong (2023), and Zen et al. (2021), showing that there is a significant relationship between working mothers' parenting patterns and the social development of preschool children. There is a significant relationship between parenting patterns and children's social-emotional development (M. A. W. Wardani, Surani, & Jannah, 2023). The time spent together between children and working mothers is shorter than with mothers who do not work. Therefore, parents need to apply

the right parenting style for their child's developmental stage in order to form good character (Andani, Yulianto, & Kusumaningtyas, 2023). Azizah et al. (2022) explained that the mother's employment status has a positive effect on children's education both in the short and long term.

The results of the third hypothesis test show that the regression coefficient of the influence of peer interaction on the social development of early childhood is 0.126, t value = 2.066 and $p = 0.040$ ($p < 0.05$), so it can be stated that the peer interaction variable has a significant effect on the social development of early childhood. Thus, the third hypothesis can be accepted. Good interaction between children and peers is very important because it can provide many feelings, experiences and learning socially and emotionally, thus enabling children to have a high level of social-emotional development (Melinda & Izzati, 2021).

The results of the fourth hypothesis test show that the regression coefficient of the moderating effect of father involvement on the relationship between the intensity of gadget use and the social development of early childhood is 0.002, t value = 1.423 and $p = 0.184$ ($p > 0.05$), so it can be stated that the variable of father involvement does not moderate the relationship between the intensity of gadget use and the social development of early childhood. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is rejected. This finding can be explained by the fact that many fathers may not always have full control over their children's gadget use or set consistent rules for gadget use. Without a consistent approach, the negative impact of the intensity of gadget use on children's social development may continue without effective moderation from father involvement.

The results of the fifth hypothesis test show that the regression coefficient of the moderating effect of father involvement on the relationship between working mothers' parenting patterns and the social development of early childhood is 0.008, t value = 1.997 and $p = 0.047$ ($p < 0.05$), so it can be stated that the variable of father involvement can moderate the relationship between working mothers' parenting patterns and the social development of early childhood. This means that the greater the involvement of the father, the stronger the influence of the working mother's parenting pattern on the social development of early childhood. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is accepted. This finding is supported by previous research by Hayat (2022), which states that there needs to be good communication between husband and wife in determining the priority scale between work and parenting because it has an impact on the child's cognitive and affective development.

Fathers have consistently taken on a movement-oriented role, while mothers have been more likely to provide emotional support and satisfy children's curiosity (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Fathers who are actively involved in providing guidance and teaching to children can strengthen the positive effects of maternal care and create a supportive family environment, so that children's social development becomes more optimal. If fathers are actively involved, the positive effects of working mothers' parenting on children's social development are strengthened.

In an interview with a father who has an early age child in one of the schools, it can be seen that as a father he is aware that the role of his wife as a mother who also works is very heavy. Therefore, he tries to help with his wife's duties in childcare.

"I see my role as my wife's primary partner in raising our children. Since my wife works, I take part in many of the responsibilities at home, such as helping our children get ready for school, reading books together before bed, or simply accompanying our children to play. This is also my way of ensuring that our children continue to feel close to both of us." (Results of the interview on September 23, 2024, with the Father of a student with the initials TS)

The results of the sixth hypothesis test show that the regression coefficient of the moderating effect of father involvement on the relationship between peer interaction and early childhood social development is 0.002, t value = 0.756 and $p = 0.449$ ($p > 0.05$), so it can be stated that the father's involvement variable does not moderate the relationship between peer interaction and early childhood social development. This means that father involvement cannot strengthen or weaken the influence of peer interaction on the social development of early childhood. Thus, the sixth hypothesis is rejected.

This can be explained by the fact that when with peers, children are freer to express themselves and practice social skills in a different way from interactions guided by parents. Therefore, father involvement may not always moderate the impact of peer interactions because the role of peers is more direct in the social situation.

The role of the father must be as a role model, a motivator for children to be more actively involved in the social environment (E. Wardani & Lestari, 2023). However, when fathers have limited time to interact with their children due to work or other responsibilities, they may be less able to directly influence their children's behavior. If fathers are not consistently involved in their children's activities, such as playing or teaching, their influence on their children's behavior, including social interactions and screen time, is likely to be limited.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the intensity of gadget use, parenting patterns of working mothers, and peer interaction significantly influence early childhood social development. Additionally, father involvement was found to strengthen the impact of maternal parenting patterns, although it does not moderate the effects of gadget use or peer interaction on children's social development. The study highlights the importance of parental supervision and balanced involvement, especially in guiding children's gadget use and promoting active social engagement through play and structured group activities. Schools are encouraged to develop collaborative programs—such as group games, arts, and sports—that enhance social interaction and communication skills among young children. Furthermore, institutions should initiate counseling programs for parents, particularly working mothers, focusing on time management, quality interactions, and healthy gadget usage. However, this research is limited by its sample, which was restricted to the Mayong area in Jepara, making it less generalizable to broader populations. Future research should consider a wider demographic scope and explore additional variables such as family support and parent-child communication, which may also play significant roles in children's social development.

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