



## Parenting Strategies to Develop Pre-Literacy Skills In Early Childhood: A Study In Ngada Regency

Yasinta Maria Fono<sup>1)</sup>, Elisabeth Tantiana Ngura<sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1)2)</sup>STKIP Citra Bakti, Ngada, Indonesia\*

### ABSTRACT

Pre-literacy is a fundamental foundation for early childhood academic development; however, delays in its acquisition remain common due to limited stimulation in the home environment. This study aims to explore effective parenting strategies to support pre-literacy skills in children aged 4–6 years. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study was conducted in Ngada Regency, Indonesia, involving 15 parents as participants. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that democratic parenting through shared reading, storytelling, and daily conversations significantly supports children's vocabulary development, letter recognition, and early communication skills. Supporting factors include active parental involvement and access to reading materials, while constraints involve limited parental time and low awareness of verbal interaction importance. This study highlights the importance of integrating pre-literacy practices into daily parenting routines to strengthen early literacy development in Indonesian family contexts.

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Contact Corresponding: Yasinta Maria Fono  
Email: [yasintamariafono@gmail.com](mailto:yasintamariafono@gmail.com)

### 1. Introduction

Pre-literacy skills in early childhood are essential foundations for language, cognitive, and social development that support children's success in later stages of education. Pre-literacy includes abilities such as letter recognition, story comprehension, language use, and participation in literacy activities like reading and storytelling (Wong, K.M. & Neuman, 2016). Children who are introduced to these activities early on tend to exhibit better vocabulary development, memory, and logical thinking skills.

However, many young children still experience delays in acquiring pre-literacy skills. According to various studies, this issue is generally caused by a lack of stimulation within the home environment, particularly due to limited parental involvement in children's literacy activities. Many parents place the full responsibility for literacy development on formal educational institutions, overlooking the fact that the family is the child's first and foremost learning environment. This lack of awareness is compounded by parents' limited knowledge of the importance of literacy-based parenting and restricted access to age-appropriate reading materials (Lili et al., 2025).

Several studies have emphasized the importance of parental involvement. A meta-analysis by (Madigan S, Prime H, Graham SA, Rodrigues M, Anderson N, Khoury J, 2019) demonstrated that intensive verbal interaction has a significant impact on children's language development. The frequency and quality of shared reading with children are also correlated with improved reading skills (Jannah et al., 2025). However, previous research has not thoroughly examined how parenting strategies are applied in everyday life to support pre-literacy, nor what factors hinder or facilitate their implementation in family contexts (Otoluwa, 2022).

This study offers several solutions: (a) identification and analysis of parenting strategies that promote pre-literacy skills, particularly democratic parenting which encourages verbal interaction and reading habits at home; (b) practical recommendations for parents in the form of simple yet meaningful activities to incorporate into daily routines (such as storytelling, light discussions, and creating simple storybooks with children); and (c) mapping of inhibiting and supporting factors that can inform policy formulation or training programs for parents and early childhood educators (Azzahra et al., 2025)(Farantika et al., 2024) & (Howard, 2018).

This research provides a unique contribution by integrating literacy-based parenting into daily family practices, examining both barriers and supports to its implementation, and formulating contextual and applicable

strategies for Indonesian families. Using a phenomenological approach, the study explores parents' real-life experiences and offers empirical foundations for the development of family-based literacy policies.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore parents' lived experiences in implementing pre-literacy-based parenting strategies. The study was conducted in Ngada Regency, Indonesia, involving 15 parents of children aged 4–6 years selected through purposive sampling. The participants consisted of mothers and fathers with diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring varied perspectives on parenting practices.

Data were collected through: (1) in-depth interviews exploring daily routines and parenting strategies, (2) participant observation of parent-child interactions during reading and play activities, and (3) documentation, including photographs, activity logs, and reading materials used at home.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2021), including: transcription, initial coding, theme identification, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting findings.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied data triangulation (interviews, observations, and documentation) and member checking, where participants reviewed and validated the findings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants throughout the research process.

## 3. Result And Discussion

### 3.1. Result

The findings of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations of daily parent-child interactions, and documentation of pre-literacy activities at home. Based on thematic analysis, three main themes emerged that reflect parenting practices and their influence on young children's pre-literacy skills:

#### 1. Democratic Parenting Encourages Meaningful Literacy Activities

Most respondents demonstrated that democratic parenting characterized by open two-way communication and involving children in simple decision-making greatly contributes to the development of literacy habits. One mother shared: *"I let my child choose the bedtime storybook, and then we read it together. Sometimes, he wants to tell the story back to me."* Activities such as nightly storytelling, role-playing based on stories, and providing space for children to ask questions and express opinions were consistently observed in families practicing democratic parenting.

#### 2. Verbal Interaction as a Primary Stimulus for Language and Narrative Skills

The study found that daily verbal interaction between parents and children, even in simple forms such as recounting daily events, significantly stimulates children's language development. Children who regularly engage in dialogue with their parents exhibit broader vocabularies, better sentence structure, and improved story comprehension. One observation noted: *"After being read a story, the child immediately asks why the character was angry or sad he tries to analyze the story."*

This indicates that interactive reading combined with open-ended questions and discussions fosters children's narrative understanding.

#### 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Literacy-Based Parenting

##### Supporting Factors:

- a. Parental Awareness: Parents who understand the importance of early literacy are more proactive in engaging their children in reading and conversation.
- b. Access to Reading Materials: Availability of books at home, either purchased or obtained from community libraries, plays a crucial role.
- c. Time and Emotional Involvement: Parents who allocate dedicated time for literacy activities and enjoy the moments with their children show better outcomes.

##### Inhibiting Factors:

- a. Limited Time: Full-time working parents struggle to find time for shared reading.
- b. Lack of Age-Appropriate Books: Some families reported not having enough suitable reading materials at home.
- c. Formal Education Paradigm: Some parents still believe that teaching reading is solely the responsibility of preschool teachers.

One parent statement: *"I thought kids only started learning to read once they entered kindergarten. I didn't realize it should begin much earlier."*

Some parents have started using digital media such as storytelling apps and educational videos as alternatives to physical books. While this offers variety, not all parents are aware of the importance of supervision during digital media use to ensure effective language stimulation.

**Table 1. Summary Tables For Themes.**

Theme	Key Findings	Impact on Pre-Literacy Skills
Democratic Parenting	Shared reading, storytelling, child involvement	Enhances engagement, comprehension, and literacy habits
Verbal Interaction	Daily conversations, open-ended questioning	Improves vocabulary, sentence structure, narrative skills
Supporting & Inhibiting Factors	Awareness, time, resources, beliefs	Determines consistency and effectiveness of literacy practices

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore parenting strategies that support the development of pre-literacy skills in early childhood through a phenomenological approach. The findings reveal that democratic parenting, intensive verbal interaction, and a supportive home literacy environment play a significant role in shaping children’s pre-literacy development. These findings are interpreted and contextualized with relevant studies as follows.

##### 1. Democratic Parenting Encourages the Formation of Literacy Habits

The findings indicate that democratic parenting fosters active engagement in literacy activities such as shared reading, storytelling, and discussion. Children who are given opportunities to choose books and express their thoughts tend to show higher motivation and participation. This supports the concept of democratic parenting proposed by (Alfaeni & Rachmawati, 2023), which emphasizes two-way communication and respect for children’s autonomy. However, this study extends Baumrind’s perspective by showing that such parenting is not only relational but also directly shapes daily literacy practices and children’s intrinsic motivation to engage in reading activities (Kurniawan, H., Handayani, W., & Daryanto, 2019), (Chambers et al., 2016) & (Prastiti & Adi, 2024).

##### 2. Verbal Interaction Enhances Narrative and Language Skills

This study demonstrates that consistent verbal interaction is a key mechanism in developing children’s vocabulary and narrative abilities. Children who frequently engage in conversations are better able to interpret stories and express ideas. This finding aligns with the meta-analysis by (Madigan S, Prime H, Graham SA, Rodrigues M, Anderson N, Khoury J, 2019) which highlights the significant role of parent–child verbal interaction in language development. In addition, (Maria Lily, N. ., Sukartiningsih, W. ., & Khotimah, 2024) emphasize that activities such as asking questions, encouraging children to retell stories, and engaging in exploratory dialogue support narrative thinking. The present study reinforces these findings by showing that even simple daily conversations can effectively stimulate early literacy development.

##### 3. Literacy-Rich Environment: Beyond Access to Books

The findings reveal that access to reading materials contributes to pre-literacy development; however, availability alone is insufficient. The quality of interaction during literacy activities plays a more decisive role. This is consistent with findings by (Kennedy et al., n.d.) (2024) who argue that adult literacy behaviors are stronger predictors than the number of books at home. Similarly, (Mol, Suzanne & Bus, Adriana & Sikkema - de Jong, 2009) found that interactive reading has a significant effect on children’s vocabulary and print knowledge. Furthermore, the concept of the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) developed by (Silinskas et al., 2020), (Hamilton et al., 2016) & (Maulida, 2018) emphasizes that literacy development is shaped not only by resources but also by parental attitudes and routines. The current study confirms this by showing that active engagement, such as discussion and storytelling, enhances literacy outcomes even in resource-limited settings.

##### 4. Barriers in Literacy-Based Parenting

Parental time constraints and limited awareness were identified as key barriers. Many parents perceived literacy development as the responsibility of schools, reducing early stimulation at home. This finding is consistent with (Sénéchal M, 2002), (Silinskas et al., 2020) & (Kennedy et al., n.d.), who highlights that lack of parental involvement and understanding can hinder early literacy development. The results of this study emphasize that without active parental engagement, children may miss critical opportunities for language development during early childhood.

##### 5. The Role of Digital Media in Literacy Development

The use of digital media presents both opportunities and challenges. While storytelling applications and videos offer alternative literacy resources, their effectiveness depends on parental guidance. This finding aligns

with (Elmanora et al., 2015), who emphasize the importance of parental mediation in digital learning. Without supervision, digital media tends to become passive and limits verbal interaction, which is essential for literacy development (Wasik, B. and Hindman, 2011). Conversely, guided digital use can support interactive learning similar to shared reading practices.

#### 6. Contextual Contribution: Indonesian Family Setting

This study contributes to the literature by providing insights from the Indonesian context, particularly in families with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Unlike studies conducted in high-resource settings, this research shows that literacy development can still be effectively supported through culturally embedded practices such as storytelling and daily conversation. This finding supports (Rose, J., Roman, N., Mwaba, K., & Ismail, 2018) who emphasize the importance of context-sensitive family literacy approaches.

#### 7. Home Literacy Environment and Socioeconomic Context

The study also shows that while families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) have better access to literacy resources, families with limited resources can compensate through strong verbal interaction. This finding aligns with (Yusuf et al., 2024) who argue that the quality of interaction is as important as the quantity of resources. In addition, (Wong, K.M. & Neuman, 2016) highlights that literacy-rich environments foster both cognitive and emotional development. The present study extends this understanding by showing that social and cultural capital, such as storytelling traditions, can also support literacy development in rural contexts (Pranawati & Maimunah, 2025) & (Landry, S. H., Smith, K. E., Swank, P. R., & Weir, 2017).

#### 8. Emotional Climate in Literacy Activities

An important insight from this study is the role of emotional climate in literacy engagement. Children were more responsive and engaged when parents showed warmth, patience, and enthusiasm. This supports the findings of (Wasik, B. and Hindman, 2011), who emphasize the role of positive emotional interaction in language development. The results suggest that early literacy is not only a cognitive process but also a relational and emotional experience.

### 5. Conclusion

Democratic parenting, active verbal interaction, and a supportive literacy environment are key elements in shaping pre-literacy skills in early childhood. This study reinforces previous findings and expands the understanding of the critical role of families within the Indonesian context. To optimally support children's literacy development, a comprehensive approach is needed—one that integrates parent education, access to literacy resources, and strong collaboration between families and educational institutions.

The findings suggest that parents should actively engage in simple yet consistent literacy practices, such as shared reading, storytelling, and daily conversations. Early childhood educators can support this by providing guidance to parents on how to implement interactive literacy activities at home. In addition, the use of digital media should be accompanied by active parental involvement to ensure meaningful language interaction.

Policymakers are encouraged to develop community-based family literacy programs that focus on increasing parental awareness and skills in supporting early literacy. Providing accessible reading materials through community libraries or early childhood centers can help reduce disparities in literacy resources. Furthermore, integrating family literacy education into early childhood education programs can strengthen the synergy between home and school environments.

Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance generalizability. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches could be employed to measure the effectiveness of specific parenting strategies on pre-literacy outcomes. In addition, further research is needed to explore the role of digital literacy and culturally responsive parenting practices in different socio-economic and regional contexts.

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