The Utilization of Digital Communication Media in Early Childhood Parenting: A Phenomenological Approach in Purwakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

A mother should have a good understanding about early childhood parenting. To be able to apply good parenting, a mother should know about early childhood development. In the 4.0 industrial revolution era, mothers have easier access to information and knowledge about early childhood development by using digital communication media, such as Instagram. This research aims to explore how mothers utilize digital communication media to get the knowledge of early childhood development. It adopted the phenomenological approach with interview to five mothers. The information that they get from the digital communication media include that about children's developmental tasks, the appropriate age to attend school, how to create educative games suitable for children's developmental stages, and how to facilitate children to play and learn. Nevertheless, not all knowledge obtained is applied in their parenting, because the participants tend to believe that conservative parenting is the best.

Keywords: digital communication media, parenting, early childhood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children's first interaction occurs in the family. Hence, family, especially parents, has a vital role in the growth and development of children to achieve their physical and psychological maturity. Through interaction between parents and children, a certain kind of parenting is established in the forms of providing guidance, direction, and education for children.

In this digital era, the role of parents experiences a shift in line with the times. Their role is no longer limited to caring for, guiding, and educating children; rather, parents are also expected to stimulate and optimize all aspects of children's development. Santosa lists twelve (12) roles of parents as a 'coach' in educating children in this digital era, namely parents as advisor, assessor, counsellor, demonstrator, friend, facilitator, fact finder, fountain of knowledge, mentor, motivator, role model, and supporter. [1]

Parents, particularly mothers, should have a good understanding of early childhood parenting. One of the requirements to be able to apply a good parenting is by knowing the concepts of early childhood development. Mothers should search for information and knowledge and learn about the possible problems in early childhood education and how to solve them. Mothers with the necessary skills, understand, and act upon parenting- related information has the potential to increase their ability to cope with the demands of suitable children's

developmental stage, she will be able to optimize her children's development. [2]

In this 4.0 industrial era, mothers have greater opportunities to obtain knowledge about early childhood development through digital communication media such as Instagram. Through gadgets, mothers can easily utilize the digital communication media to gain information about the various aspects of early childhood development that they can subsequently apply in their parenting. Based on the results of research Flujas-Contreras, et al. stated that parenting intervention with technology shows large effect size for parental knowledge and can be beneficial for psychological and physical cildren's health. [3] The digital communication media provides an exciting opportunity for delivering evidence-based parenting support to a broad range of parents. [4]

However, in reality, many mothers still apply a certain type of parenting without first learning about the stages in early childhood development, but only based on what is taught by their parents. Mothers have not really maximized their gadgets as a tool to search for information about the stages and aspects of early childhood development, and how to apply them in parenting. Therefore, the writers would like to find out how mothers utilize digital communication media to obtain knowledge about early childhood development. In addition, the writers would like to know how the mothers implement the knowledge they gain through the media in their parenting of young children.

2. PARENTING THEORIES

Parenting is defined as the process of taking care of, guiding, and protecting children. It is a continuous interaction between parents and children. The two main roles of parents are to form intimate relationships with and set restrictions for children. [5] Parenting is highly influenced by the philosophy of life gained from parents when they were young, their religious beliefs, and the examples from the environment. Besides, lived experiences of parents can shape different parenting types of each parent.

In parenting, there are two important factors: parental support and parental control. [6] Parental support is linked to how parents give affection, care for children, and are close to them. Parents who have low support for their children usually criticize, punish, and ignore children; in fact, they often show their insensibility for children's emotions. On the other hand, parental control is concerned with how parents apply rules to children and how they discipline the children. Parents who have lack of control will be much less demanding, tolerant, and less strict.

Baumrind's research shows that every parent is different in terms of the two dimensions. His research to children in two different settings, at home and in school, divided into three groups, found that there were three different parenting styles applied by the parents in the three groups. Baumrind reveals that the most frequently applied parenting by the parents were the authoritarian, permissive, and democratic styles. [7]

Authoritarian parenting is defined as a kind of parenting in which parents are strict, show a lack of affection, and do not act sympathetically to children. [8] These parents always give commands and create rules for children and ask their children to obey the rules. On the other hand, permissive parenting is one in which parents do not strictly control their children's behaviors. [9] Parents with this type of parenting let their children do whatever they wish. Finally, democratic parenting is defined as a kind of parenting in which parents encourage their children to be independent but at the same time restrict and control their children's behaviors. [9]

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological approach is an approach in qualitative research methods aimed to understand a phenomenon from the first person's point of view. [10]

The research was conducted in Purwakarta, West Java, Indonesia. Purwakarta was chosen as the research location because of its proximity to Bandung, as the capital city of West Java Province (50 km), and it is a regency with the seventh highest minimum wage in the province. [11] In this regency, many mothers are still found to have low academic background. In several sub-districts, some mothers only completed primary school.

Data were collected with the technique of semi-structured interviews to five participating mothers. The five mothers had young children, with different levels of education. The participants were selected using a snowball sampling

technique. In this technique, the first participant introduces the researcher(s) to the next participant(s). [12] In this research, the first participant introduced the researchers to the other four participants. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Indonesian. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, each of them is given a pseudo name.

Data were analyzed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). [13] The stages of IPA include: 1) Reading and re-reading; 2) Initial noting; 3) Developing emergent themes; 4) Searching for connections across emergent themes; 5) Moving to the next cases; and 6) Looking for patterns across cases. Based on the results of data analysis, two big themes emerged, namely the utilization of digital communication media to gain information about early childhood development and the implementation of the knowledge in parenting.

4. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Purwakarta is a regency in West Java Province, Indonesia. The capital of this regency is Purwakarta Sub-District, located approximately 80 km southeast of Jakarta. The regency borders with Karawang Regency on the north and west, Subang Regency on the east and some part on the north, Bandung Barat Regency on the south, and Cianjur Regency on the southwest. Purwakarta Regency has 183 villages under the regency, 9 villages under the city, 8 districts and 11 sub-districts.

Purwakarta Regency is strategically situated at the intersection of three main corridors of traffic, namely, Purwakarta-Jakarta, Purwakarta-Bandung, and Purwakarta-Cirebon. Its area is 971.72 km² or around 2.81% of the total area of West Java Province, with a population of 845.509, and an average annual population growth of 2.28%. The population consisted of 420,380 males and 425,129 females. [14]

Similar to the people living in the center of West Java, the people in Purwakarta Region are predominantly Sundanese. In line with the times as marked by the development in ICT, the people of Purwakarta are also affected by foreign cultures. Nevertheless, Sundanese culture remains the dominant culture with Islam as the religion of the majority. In other words, Purwakarta people are religious.

Purwakarta is popularly known as a place that gives birth to some statesmen and great leaders of West Java in the early establishment of the Republic of Indonesia. Among them are the national hero Kusumah Atmaja (the first Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia) and Ipik Gandamana (the first Regent of Bogor Regency, West Java Governor, and Minister of Home Affairs).

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Utilization of Digital Communication Media to Gain Information about Child Development

The findings show that all mothers interviewed utilized digital communication media through their gadget to search for information about child development. As stated by Ina in the following interview excerpt:

"I often see a lot of information about parenting on Facebook. Like now, when my child is three years old, there is always information about a child's developmental tasks. I often find more about if from there (Facebook). Especially now as I am expecting the second child, I read more frequently. Because I like reading, I don't like looking at other people's statuses." (Ina)

Ina's statement is supported by Sinta and Anna who conveyed that they also utilized digital communication media to obtain information about educative games, child development, and early childhood parenting.

"There is this WhatsApp group of kindergarten teachers. In this group, there are frequently seminars, information about educative games for young children with various themes. There is also information about child development." (Sinta)

"I have for communication WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. I also like reading about parenting through Instagram dan Facebook." (Anna)

The digital era makes it easy for parents to gain information about child development and the appropriate parenting to stimulate early childhood development. Through digital communication media, useful and necessary information can be obtained through gadgets. Digital communication media that have turned into a "public room" have actually been considered qualified to be a means of discussion and sharing of experiences and thoughts. [15] For example, there are Facebook groups whose members include experts such as physicians and psychologists. Hence, information is obtained directly from people competent at early childhood development, in this context.

Information obtained through digital communication media is not only in writing and images, but it can also take the form of video. One of the video-based digital communication media to share information is YouTube. YouTube is a popular video-sharing website, where all users can upload, watch, and share videos for free. YouTube is currently one of the most popular digital communication media because users can upload video for free with unlimited duration. As revealed by Ayu, she utilized Youtube to gain information about how to educate young children according to their developmental stages.

"I only have WhatsApp and Youtube (accounts). I often watch interesting videos on Youtube to enrich my knowledge about how to educate children according to their age." (Ayu)

The Implementation of Information about Early Childhood Development in Early Childhood Parenting

The findings also demonstrate how the parents implement the information about early childhood development in their parenting. The mothers interviewed mostly gained information about children's development from digital communication media. This finding is confirmed by Ima in her interview:

"Child development, such as when is the best time to send children to school, is applied. Other information is like when children are playing with their friends and then get into a fight, it is not allowed to say, "don't fight' to them." (Ima)

Ima's statement corresponds to that of Ayu who also revealed that she implemented information about early childhood parenting that she gained from digital communication media in her parenting.

"In teaching children, well you know, for example, we can't say 'don't'. I guess like that because I already know that each child is different in their development, so I don't really restrict my children and demand them to be able to do this or that. So, we can only facilitate children to learn and play. We can't force them." (Ayu)

According to Hurlock, parenting is a disciplinary method applied by parents to children. [16] Parenting in the family means the habits of parents (usually father and or mother) in leading, taking care of, and guiding children. Parents' knowledge about parenting is very important to determine the appropriate parenting in accordance with a child's stage of development that will optimize his/her growth and development. In this digital era, easier and broader access to information offers an opportunity for mothers to explore information and be literate about early childhood parenting. Interaction between parents and children in parenting aims to support the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual development in children since they are still conceived until they grow into adults. This argument is reinforced by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 35 of 2014, Article 26, concerning the obligations and responsibilities of parents in the family, namely: (1) to nurture, care, educate, and protect children; (b) to grow and develop children according to their abilities, talent, and interest; (c) to prevent child-marriage; (d) to give character education and inculcate values and morals in children. [17] Parents' obligations and responsibility take the form of parenting and begin since early childhood until adulthood.

Early childhood is the beginning phase in an individual's life, and the development at that phase will strongly determine the development at the next phases. With regard to age, early childhood refers to newborn up to six-year old children. [18] Early childhood development is a scientific study of various processes of change and stability throughout the life span of early childhood, which is 0-6 years. [19]

One of the important aspects in early childhood development is the integration of all aspects or domains of development, including: physical, social-emotional, and cognitive. Appropriate parenting for a child's developmental stage is vital because early childhood is the golden period of an individual's life. This argument is in line with Santrock's assertion that early childhood is the early period of an individual's life that will determine the individual's attitudes, values, behaviors, and personality in the future [20]

The findings also show that not all mothers participating in this research implemented the information they gained about early childhood development in their parenting. As expressed by Anna, although she had gained information about early childhood development, she did not always practice the information in her parenting and chose the conservative parenting instead.

"The point is I don't apply anything I get from the internet because the methods applied by the people in the past are actually good because they have practiced the methods. Gadgets can be used (to get information), but we have to be able to filter information" (Participant 3). Parenting is highly influenced by the life philosophy attained when parents were young from their own parents, parents' religious beliefs, and examples from the environment. In addition, different experiences of parents will create different ways of nurturing children. Hence, although a mother has obtained information about early childhood development, it does not necessarily mean that she will apply it in her parenting.

6. CONCLUSION

The research aims to explore how mothers utilize digital communication media in early childhood parenting. The findings reveal that the mother respondents in this research utilize digital information media such as *WhatsApp group*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, dan *YouTube*, to get information about early childhood development. The majority of the information is applied in their parenting.

The information about early childhood development includes that about developmental task, the appropriate age to send children to school, how to create educative games appropriate for children's developmental stages, and how to facilitate children to play and learn.

Based on these findings, although most of the mother respondents apply the information obtained from digital communication media, not all of the information is applied in their parenting due to their beliefs and preference to apply conservative parenting.

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