

Christian Parenting and Children's Character Development: A Study in Indonesian Context

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the influence of parenting patterns in Christian families on the behavioral development of elementary school children. Recognizing the family as the first and foremost environment for moral and religious formation, this research seeks to understand how different parenting styles shape children's character and daily conduct.

Method: The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with field observation, interviews, and documentation as the main techniques of data collection. The study involved parents and teachers at SD Inpres 25 and SD Elim Malanu in Sorong. Data were analyzed through thematic interpretation, focusing on the relationship between Christian parenting practices and the development of children's behavior at school.

Findings: The results reveal that parenting patterns significantly influence children's behavior. Authoritative and democratic parenting styles tend to produce positive outcomes, such as discipline, respect, and responsibility, while permissive or neglectful approaches are associated with negative behaviors, including disobedience, indiscipline, and inappropriate social interactions. The findings also highlight the role of Christian values (prayer, moral guidance, and parental example) in shaping children's character.

Significance: This study contributes to the discourse on religious education and child development by emphasizing the central role of Christian parenting in nurturing moral values and social behavior. The findings suggest that strengthening parental involvement and faith-based practices can enhance children's behavioral outcomes, offering insights for educators, religious leaders, and policymakers in developing family-centered strategies for character education.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the first and foremost social institution responsible for shaping a child's character from an early age. Parents serve as the primary educators who instill moral, social, and religious values in children. Previous studies confirm that parenting practices strongly determine the direction of children's personality development (Baumrind, 2013). Children who receive positive guidance from their families are more likely to develop discipline, empathy, and responsibility. Conversely, inconsistent parenting often results in deviant behaviors and difficulties in social adjustment (Bornstein, 2019). This highlights that the family is not merely a biological unit but also a central hub for value-based education. Hence, understanding the role of families in shaping children's behavior is of paramount importance. This recognition underscores the need for further research on parenting.

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Parenting styles are commonly categorized into authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (or democratic). Each style has distinct consequences for the behavioral development of children. Empirical studies demonstrate that authoritative parenting is more effective in fostering independence, responsibility, and social competence (Steinberg, 2001). Children raised in authoritarian households often struggle with self-expression and self-confidence (Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). In contrast, permissive parenting tends to produce impulsive and undisciplined behaviors (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). These findings emphasize the critical role of choosing appropriate parenting practices. Thus, awareness of the behavioral outcomes associated with each parenting style is essential. Parenting, therefore, is a vital instrument in family-based education.

Beyond general parenting approaches, religious values serve as a foundation for children's moral development. Research has shown that the integration of religious education in families strengthens children's self-control and moral awareness (King & Boyatzis, 2015). Children raised with strong religious values tend to display greater empathy and social responsibility (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2008). This is because religion provides an ethical orientation that guides everyday decision-making. In the Christian context, parents are viewed as representatives of God who bear the moral responsibility to guide their children (Smith & Denton, 2005). Practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and parental modeling are tangible forms of religious education. These values not only shape spiritual identity but also direct children's behavior in alignment with accepted social norms. Therefore, integrating parenting with religious values is a highly relevant area of study.

The social and educational context in Indonesia adds further complexity to parenting practices. Many Christian families face challenges in instilling discipline and moral values amid rapid societal changes. The 2022 PISA report highlighted Indonesia's relatively low performance in socio-emotional skills, including self-regulation (OECD, 2023). Technological and media developments also exert strong influences on children's behavior, which sometimes conflict with family values (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). This situation increases the responsibility of parents to provide supervision and guidance. Formal schooling alone is often insufficient to address behavioral problems without parental support. Therefore, collaboration between family, school, and community education is crucial. These conditions make research on parenting practices within Indonesia particularly urgent.

Although many studies have explored parenting and child development, most remain general and overlook the religious dimension. A large body of research emphasizes the relationship between parenting and academic achievement or psychological outcomes, yet pays little attention to faith and spirituality (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). In the Indonesian context, particularly within Christian families, studies examining the integration of parenting with religious education are limited. This is striking given the significant role of religion in shaping children's moral and social behaviors. Such a gap suggests a need for research that incorporates religious perspectives in parenting. Therefore, this study addresses a neglected area of inquiry by situating parenting within a faith-based framework.

This study provides novelty by focusing specifically on parenting patterns in Christian families and their influence on the behavioral development of elementary school children. The analysis extends beyond psychological and social aspects by incorporating the religious dimension that characterizes Christian households. By doing so, the research offers a new understanding of how faith-based parenting shapes children's behavior. Furthermore, the study situates its findings in the Indonesian context, which is marked by cultural and religious diversity. This local focus enriches the global discourse on religious parenting practices. The outcomes are expected to contribute not only to academic literature but also to practical strategies for parents, educators, and church leaders. Thus, the study is both contextually relevant and theoretically significant for interdisciplinary religious scholarship.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the relationship between Christian parenting practices and children's behavioral development. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth of parental experiences, values, and practices in raising their children. Unlike quantitative methods, which emphasize numerical data, this design focuses on rich descriptions and interpretations of human behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive nature of the study allowed the researcher to identify patterns of parenting styles and their implications for children's conduct. Observations and interviews served as the primary strategies to gather authentic insights from participants in their natural settings. By grounding the study in real-life contexts, the design aimed to highlight the role of faith-based parenting within Christian families. Overall, this research design provided the flexibility needed to address the objectives of the study.

Participants

The participants in this study were parents and teachers from two elementary schools, namely SD Inpres 25 and SD Elim Malanu in Sorong, Indonesia. The sample consisted of parents of Christian background whose children were enrolled in these schools. Teachers were also involved to provide additional perspectives on children's behavior in educational settings. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants were directly relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The final sample included 15 parents and 5 teachers, representing a diverse range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. This diversity enabled the study to capture variations in parenting practices and their impact on children. By involving both parents and teachers, the research obtained a more comprehensive understanding of children's behavior.

Instruments

The primary instruments used in this study included observation sheets, semi-structured interview guides, and documentation analysis. Observation sheets were utilized to systematically record children's behaviors as they appeared in school and family contexts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and teachers to elicit their views on parenting practices and behavioral outcomes. This instrument allowed

flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues while maintaining consistency across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Documentation, such as school records and family notes, was also examined to triangulate findings and enhance validity. All instruments were developed based on previous research on parenting and child behavior. Piloting was conducted with two parents to refine the clarity and reliability of interview questions. These instruments ensured that data collection addressed the multifaceted nature of parenting and child development.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes across interviews, observations, and documentation. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its flexibility and suitability for capturing both explicit and latent meanings in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining them in relation to the research objectives. NVivo software was used to support coding and organization of large datasets, ensuring systematic analysis. Triangulation across multiple data sources enhanced the credibility of findings, while member checking with participants improved trustworthiness. The analysis also incorporated constant comparison to refine themes and ensure coherence. Through this process, the study was able to draw meaningful insights into how Christian parenting influences children's behavioral development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study revealed that parents in Christian families at SD Inpres 25 and SD Elim Malanu applied diverse parenting styles, predominantly authoritative and permissive. Authoritative parents emphasized discipline, dialogue, and mutual respect, aligning with Christian values of love and responsibility. This approach fostered children's independence and obedience both at home and in school. On the other hand, permissive parenting was also observed, characterized by leniency and a lack of firm boundaries. Teachers reported that children from permissive households often exhibited impulsive behavior and low self-discipline in class. Such differences highlight the direct correlation between parenting practices and children's behavioral outcomes. The findings confirm that authoritative parenting tends to yield more positive child behavior compared to permissive practices.

Children from authoritative Christian families demonstrated greater discipline, respect toward authority, and responsibility in completing tasks. Teachers observed that these students were more cooperative, punctual, and respectful in interpersonal interactions. Conversely, children from permissive or inconsistent households displayed patterns of disobedience, reduced focus, and reluctance to follow school rules. Interestingly, several parents with authoritarian tendencies also reported difficulties, as excessive control led to children's withdrawal and lack of confidence. This aligns with previous studies that link authoritarian approaches with restricted emotional growth (Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). Overall, the results suggest that balanced guidance combined with religious values encourages more adaptive behavioral development.

The influence of Christian values was consistently identified as a moderating factor in shaping children’s behavior. Practices such as daily prayer, family Bible reading, and parental role modeling enhanced children’s moral awareness. Parents who actively practiced their faith were able to transmit values of respect, honesty, and responsibility more effectively. Teachers confirmed that students from such families displayed empathy and willingness to help peers. In contrast, families that practiced religion more nominally had less impact on behavioral development, regardless of parenting style. This suggests that faith-based practices provide moral reinforcement beyond structural parenting approaches. The integration of Christian values with authoritative parenting emerged as the most effective combination in nurturing positive child behavior.

Table 1. Parenting Styles and Observed Behavioral Outcomes

Parenting Style	Key Characteristics	Observed Child Behaviors	Teacher Observations
Authoritative	Balanced discipline, dialogue, respect	Disciplined, respectful, responsible	Cooperative, punctual, respectful toward teachers
Authoritarian	Strict rules, limited flexibility	Obedient but withdrawn, low confidence	Less engaged in class discussions
Permissive	Lenient, lack of boundaries	Impulsive, undisciplined, low responsibility	Frequently late, disobeys school rules
Faith-based	Integration of prayer, Bible reading, parental example	Respectful, empathetic, value-oriented	Demonstrates empathy, helpful toward classmates

Discussion

The findings of this study support the notion that parenting styles significantly influence children’s behavioral outcomes. Children raised in authoritative households demonstrated discipline, responsibility, and social competence, echoing Steinberg’s (2001) conclusion that authoritative parenting fosters independence and adaptability. In contrast, permissive households produced children with impulsive tendencies and poor self-regulation, consistent with Pinquart and Kauser’s (2018) findings on the risks of permissive parenting. The limited effectiveness of authoritarian approaches observed in this study also aligns with previous research, which has linked rigid discipline to children’s lack of confidence and restricted emotional growth (Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). These consistencies with international literature validate the applicability of parenting theory in the Indonesian Christian context. Therefore, the present study strengthens the cross-cultural evidence on the role of parenting in shaping child behavior.

A key contribution of this study lies in its demonstration of the moderating role of Christian values in parenting outcomes. Families who practiced daily prayer, Bible study, and religious rituals were more successful in instilling empathy and respect in children. This resonates with Bartkowski, Xu, and Levin (2008), who argued that religiosity fosters children’s moral awareness and social responsibility. Similarly, King and Boyatzis (2015) emphasized that religious values provide a framework for ethical decision-making in childhood development. The current findings highlight that religious practices do not

function independently but amplify the positive effects of authoritative parenting. This integration offers a richer explanation of why some children exhibit stronger prosocial behaviors despite similar parenting structures. Hence, religious values are a unique dimension that must be incorporated into models of child development.

The Indonesian context presented unique challenges that reinforced the importance of parental involvement. Parents and teachers noted that children's behavior was increasingly influenced by technological and media exposure, consistent with the observations of Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020). In addition, the PISA 2022 report confirmed that Indonesian children often struggle with socio-emotional skills, such as self-regulation (OECD, 2023). These external pressures limit the ability of schools to manage children's behavior without parental reinforcement at home. The findings of this study therefore suggest that parenting practices must adapt to a rapidly changing society while retaining strong moral and religious foundations. By situating parenting in this context, the research demonstrates the urgent need for holistic approaches to child education in Indonesia. Such insights emphasize that family-based strategies cannot be separated from broader social and cultural dynamics.

While prior studies have examined the general effects of parenting styles, this research contributes novel insights by explicitly situating the discussion within Christian households in Indonesia. The role of Christian faith in reinforcing moral guidance is underexplored in existing literature, which often focuses on secular or generalized parenting frameworks (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). By integrating faith-based practices into the analysis, this study shows how parenting and religiosity together shape children's character. This finding broadens theoretical models of parenting by highlighting the intersection of religious commitment and behavioral development. Moreover, the inclusion of both parental and teacher perspectives strengthens the robustness of the findings. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution, connecting theology, psychology, and education.

The practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant for Christian families, educators, and religious leaders. Parents can be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting styles while simultaneously embedding Christian practices in daily routines. Schools may collaborate with parents to create consistent behavioral expectations that reflect both academic and moral goals. Religious leaders, such as pastors or Sunday school teachers, may provide guidance to parents on how to integrate faith into parenting strategies. These applications align with Smith and Denton's (2005) call for faith communities to play a central role in shaping the religious lives of children. By applying the insights of this study, stakeholders can develop comprehensive programs that address not only cognitive learning but also moral and behavioral growth. This integration ensures that child development is approached holistically.

This study also addresses a notable gap in parenting literature by exploring how Christian values interact with parenting styles in shaping children's behavior. Previous research often overlooked religious dimensions, focusing instead on psychological or academic outcomes (Baumrind, 2013; Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). By situating the study within the Indonesian Christian context, this research provides evidence that faith-based practices significantly enhance behavioral outcomes. Nevertheless, further research is

needed to explore the role of parenting across different religious traditions in Indonesia. Comparative studies could enrich the understanding of how various faiths influence child-rearing and behavioral development. Future inquiries may also benefit from employing mixed-methods approaches to strengthen generalizability. In conclusion, this study advances both theoretical and practical knowledge by filling a gap in the literature and pointing toward future directions in religious parenting research.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that parenting styles, particularly authoritative approaches integrated with Christian values, play a crucial role in shaping children's behavioral development. Children raised in families that consistently practiced faith-based parenting showed higher levels of discipline, empathy, and responsibility compared to those from permissive or authoritarian households. The findings highlight the importance of integrating religious practices into daily parenting as a moral compass for children's behavior. Situated within the Indonesian context, the study contributes both theoretical insights and practical strategies for families, educators, and faith leaders. Ultimately, the research emphasizes that nurturing children's behavior requires not only effective parenting techniques but also the reinforcement of spiritual values.

AUHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Feronika Lapon conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, wrote the initial draft of the manuscript, and edited the final manuscript for submission.

Paulina Iwanggin Collected data through field observations and interviews, contributed to data analysis, and revised the methodology section.

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