



Family Literacy Parenting Strategies Supporting Children During Preschool to Primary School Transition

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Abstract: The transition from Early Childhood Education (or PAUD in the Indonesian context) to elementary school is a pivotal stage where children shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." This study examines the role of family parenting styles in enhancing children's literacy skills during this critical phase. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explores parents' lived experiences in supporting the development of reading and writing at home. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that democratic parenting styles significantly foster children's intrinsic motivation and independence in literacy. Key practices, such as intensive verbal interactions, dialogic reading, and post-reading discussions, were found to enhance comprehension, narrative skills, and expressive language. Furthermore, purposeful digital media use, combined with active parental mediation, supports multimodal literacy development. Consistent reading routines and strong emotional involvement were identified as vital supporting factors, while limited parental time and a lack of age-appropriate materials emerged as primary barriers. The study concludes that family parenting is a decisive factor in bridging literacy gaps during the transition to elementary school. This research contributes to the literacy transition discourse by establishing a multifaceted family literacy framework specifically tailored for the transition from PAUD to primary schooling. These findings imply the necessity for a family literacy model that integrates democratic parenting, rich verbal interaction, and guided digital literacy to ensure children are prepared for increasing academic demands.

Keywords: family parenting styles, children's literacy, digital literacy, literacy strategies

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Introduction

Children's literacy development during the transition from Early Childhood Education (or PAUD in the Indonesian context) to primary school represents a critical phase in their cognitive and academic growth. At this stage, typically between ages 6 and 8, children shift from learning to read to reading to learn, requiring them to use reading and writing skills to understand information, reason, and solve problems (Duke & Cartwright, 2017). Mastery of literacy at this phase is fundamental, as it strongly predicts later academic success and lifelong participation in learning. During the early primary years, children shift from learning to read to reading to learn, requiring them to use reading and writing skills to understand information, reason, and solve problems (Snow et al., 2016; Tolvanen et al., 2021).

Research in literacy development consistently indicates that many children remain trapped at the level of surface decoding and fail to advance toward deeper comprehension and meaning construction. Paris (2011) conceptualises this phenomenon as a critical shift from learning to read toward reading to learn, a transition that many children struggle to achieve without adequate instructional and environmental support. Similarly, Wasik and Hindman (2011) emphasise that comprehension requires integrating decoding, background knowledge, and inferential reasoning, which are often underdeveloped during the early years of primary schooling.

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Empirical studies further confirm that children's difficulties in constructing meaning from text are closely related to the quality of literacy experiences they receive at home and school. Mol and Bus (2011) demonstrate that children exposed primarily to mechanical decoding practices, without rich discussion and meaning-oriented interaction, show limited growth in comprehension skills. In line with this, Justice et al. (2018) argue that early literacy development must extend beyond phonics instruction to include dialogic engagement and higher-order language use to support comprehension development.

Longitudinal evidence also suggests that early comprehension gaps tend to persist if not addressed during the transition phase. Lonigan et al. (2018) found that children who enter primary school with weak oral language and comprehension skills are at greater risk of long-term reading difficulties, even when basic decoding skills are present. Moreover, Lean et al. (2017) highlight that environmental factors—particularly family literacy practices—play a decisive role in determining whether children successfully progress toward meaning-based reading. Together, these studies underscore that the challenge faced by many children is not merely learning to decode written symbols, but developing the cognitive and linguistic capacity to construct meaning from text. This body of research reinforces the need for literacy approaches that integrate comprehension-focused instruction, rich verbal interaction, and supportive home literacy environments during the early years of primary education (Solichah & Fardana, 2023).

Previous studies have identified several contributing factors to literacy success, including the discontinuity between PAUD and primary literacy practices, the "learning shock" caused by shifts from play-based to academic instruction, and the lack of structured home literacy activities (Silinskas et al., 2020; Wong & Neuman, 2016). While research on the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) consistently highlights the importance of shared reading and emotional support (Hamilton et al., 2016; Silinskas et al., 2020), and recent studies acknowledge the emerging role of mediated digital literacy (Pranawati & Maimunah, 2025; Tatminingsih et al., 2022), a critical gap remains. Most existing research, both globally and in Indonesia, focuses predominantly on the preschool cohort (ages 3–6) or isolated school-based interventions, leaving the specific transitional window of ages 6–8 under-examined.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on the PAUD-to-primary school transition through a family-centered, phenomenological lens that captures the lived experiences of parents—a perspective that remains scarce in current literature (Winarni & Purwandari, 2020). Unlike previous research that often examines variables in isolation, this study uniquely integrates democratic parenting styles, intensive verbal interaction, and guided digital literacy within the specific context of Indonesian cultural practices, such as storytelling. By addressing these intersecting dimensions, the research fills a theoretical and empirical void in understanding how the home environment functions as a bridge during this high-stakes academic shift.

The primary objective of this research is to explore how family parenting strategies support children's literacy development during the PAUD-to-primary transition. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the specific family literacy practices that facilitate reading and writing mastery during this phase, and (2) develop a contextually grounded family literacy model that is responsive to both developmental needs and Indonesia's sociocultural realities. The contribution of this study is twofold: it advances the theoretical integration of developmental psychology and family literacy, and it offers a practical, culturally responsive framework for parents and policymakers to mitigate learning loss and strengthen institutional bridges between home, PAUD, and primary school.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological perspective to address the research objective of exploring family parenting strategies that support the literacy development of children aged 6–8 during the transition from PAUD to primary school. The phenomenological approach is particularly relevant because it enables an in-depth examination of parents' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding family literacy practices. By focusing on subjective experiences, this approach allows the study to capture how democratic parenting, verbal interaction, and guided digital literacy are enacted in everyday family contexts and how these practices influence children's literacy development.

The research was designed as a qualitative case study focusing on family literacy practices within the home environment (Yin, 2014). The case study design allows for a holistic and contextualised understanding of literacy activities as they naturally occur during children’s educational transition. This design is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena such as parenting styles and home literacy environments that cannot be separated from their real-life contexts.

The research procedures were conducted in several stages. First, participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predefined criteria, ensuring relevance to the research objectives. Second, data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of home literacy activities. Interviews were conducted to explore parents’ experiences, challenges, and strategies in supporting children’s reading and writing development. Observations focused on parent–child interactions during literacy activities, while documentation provided empirical evidence and supported data verification. All data collection processes were conducted ethically, with informed consent obtained from participants.

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide that allowed flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives. The interview questions explored parental support strategies, challenges in literacy accompaniment, use of digital media, and verbal interactions following reading activities. In addition, observation guidelines were used to systematically record parent–child interactions during shared reading, writing, drawing, and digital literacy activities. Documentation, including photographs and learning materials, functioned as supporting instruments to strengthen data credibility.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis process began with data familiarisation through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation. Next, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units related to family literacy practices. These codes were then categorised into broader themes, including democratic parenting, verbal interaction, digital literacy integration, and supporting and inhibiting factors. The final stage involved thematic interpretation to synthesise findings and explain how family parenting practices support children’s literacy transition. Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

The flow of the research is illustrated in the following diagram.



Figure 1. Flow of the Research Procedure

Results and Discussion

Results

The results of this study are presented sequentially according to the research objective, namely to identify family parenting strategies that support the literacy development of children aged 6–8 during the transition from PAUD to primary school. Data were obtained from in-depth interviews, participatory observations of parent–child interactions, and documentation of home-based literacy activities.

Thematic analysis identified four main themes relevant to family literacy practices during this transition phase.

1. Democratic Parenting as a Foundation for Independent Literacy

Parents predominantly used democratic parenting, characterised by open communication, emotional warmth, and shared decision-making, during literacy activities. Children were given opportunities to choose reading materials, determine their own reading time, and express their personal responses to texts. This autonomy fostered intrinsic motivation and reduced pressure in learning to read and write.

“My child likes to choose her own book before bedtime, then we read together. Sometimes she rewrites the story she likes,” (Mother).

Observations showed that children in such environments were more confident in reading aloud, writing short texts, and expressing ideas through drawing and storytelling.

2. Verbal Interaction Enhances Reading Comprehension

Intensive verbal interaction after reading emerged as a key strategy for deepening comprehension. Parents encouraged children to reflect on texts through open-ended questions and discussions about characters, events, and moral messages.

“After reading, my child draws the characters and retells the story in her own version,” (Parent).

These dialogic practices strengthened children’s narrative skills, critical thinking, and empathy, indicating that literacy development extended beyond decoding skills toward meaning construction.

3. Guided Digital Literacy Supports Multimodal Literacy

Digital media, including story applications and educational videos, were used to stimulate reading interest. However, effective use depended on active parental mediation.

“If I accompany him while he reads on the tablet, he stays focused,” (Father).

With guidance, digital tools supported vocabulary development and multimodal literacy by integrating text, images, and audio.

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Literacy Transition

Analysis revealed factors influencing the effectiveness of family literacy practices, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Family Literacy Practices

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Parental awareness of literacy importance	Limited parental time
Consistent home reading routines	Lack of contextual reading materials
Emotional support and positive literacy climate	Perception that literacy is solely the school’s responsibility

Overall, the findings demonstrate that family parenting practices play a crucial role in supporting children’s literacy development during the PAUD–primary school transition, particularly through democratic parenting, rich verbal interaction, and guided digital literacy.

Discussion

This study examined how family parenting strategies support the literacy development of children aged 6–8 during the transition from PAUD to primary school. The findings demonstrate that democratic parenting, intensive verbal interaction, guided digital literacy practices, and culturally grounded home literacy environments play a central role in strengthening children’s reading and writing skills during this critical educational transition.

The discussion is grounded in systematic data analysis and interpretation derived from in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. The thematic analysis revealed recurring patterns in parental practices that consistently influenced children’s literacy engagement. Democratic parenting emerged as a dominant theme, characterised by warmth, structured guidance, and open communication. This parenting approach created a supportive emotional climate that encouraged children to participate actively in reading and writing activities. The findings suggest that when children feel psychologically secure and valued, they demonstrate greater motivation and confidence in literacy tasks.

Intensive verbal interaction between parents and children also appeared as a significant factor. Parents who frequently engaged in dialogic reading, storytelling, questioning, and reflective conversations provided linguistic scaffolding that enhanced vocabulary development and comprehension skills. These results indicate that literacy development is not solely dependent on formal instruction but is strongly shaped by meaningful communicative exchanges within the home environment.

Guided digital literacy practices further contributed to children’s literacy growth. Rather than allowing unrestricted screen time, parents who accompanied children during digital learning activities such as educational videos, interactive reading applications, and guided online searches transformed digital tools into structured literacy resources. This finding explains why digital engagement yielded positive outcomes only when mediated by intentional parental involvement.

The emergence of these findings can be interpreted as a reflection of the transitional demands children face when shifting from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” During this stage, children require not only technical reading skills but also emotional support, structured routines, and cognitive scaffolding. The alignment between parenting strategies and transitional literacy needs explains why supportive family practices significantly influence literacy outcomes.

These results directly address the research objective of exploring family parenting strategies that support literacy development during educational transition. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with prior literature emphasising the importance of home literacy environments and parental involvement in early literacy achievement. Previous studies have shown that authoritative or democratic parenting fosters academic self-regulation and intrinsic motivation, while dialogic reading practices enhance vocabulary and comprehension. The present study extends this literature by highlighting the integrated role of parenting style, verbal interaction, digital mediation, and cultural context within a specific transitional period.

Democratic Parenting as a Catalyst for Literacy Autonomy

The findings indicate that democratic (authoritative) parenting serves as a foundational mechanism for fostering children’s motivation and independence in literacy activities. This parenting style balances emotional warmth with autonomy support, enabling children to actively engage in reading and writing without experiencing excessive pressure. Consistent with Baumrind’s theoretical framework on authoritative parenting and child development, autonomy-supportive parenting encourages children to make choices, express ideas, and take responsibility for learning tasks. Empirical evidence from Torppa et al. (2022) and Silinskas et al. (2020) further confirms that parental emotional involvement and autonomy support within the home literacy environment significantly enhance children’s motivation, confidence, and long-term literacy outcomes. In the context of the PAUD–primary school transition, democratic parenting strengthens children’s emerging literacy identity, positioning reading and writing as meaningful, self-directed practices rather than externally imposed academic demands.

Beyond motivational benefits, democratic parenting also facilitates the development of self-regulated learning behaviors that are crucial during the transition to formal schooling. Autonomy-supportive parents tend to scaffold children’s literacy activities by providing guidance that is responsive

rather than controlling, allowing children to internalise reading strategies and problem-solving skills gradually. Research in developmental and educational psychology indicates that such parenting practices promote metacognitive awareness, persistence, and strategic engagement with texts (Pancawati & Widayati, 2024). Furthermore, demonstrate that children who experience supportive, autonomy-oriented parental involvement are more likely to engage in voluntary reading, which, in turn, strengthens reading fluency and comprehension over time (Hamilton et al., 2016). Within the early childhood primary school transition, these self-regulatory capacities are particularly important as instructional demands increase and children are expected to manage learning tasks more independently. Thus, democratic parenting not only enhances immediate literacy motivation but also equips children with the cognitive and affective tools necessary for sustained literacy development across the early primary grades.

Verbal Interaction and Dialogic Literacy Practices

The results underscore the importance of frequent and meaningful verbal interaction between parents and children, particularly through post-reading dialogue. Dialogic literacy practices encourage children to process texts at semantic and reflective levels, facilitating deeper comprehension and narrative understanding. This finding aligns with extensive evidence from Scopus-indexed studies demonstrating that dialogic reading and parent-child discussion significantly enhance vocabulary development, comprehension, and critical thinking (Kennedy et al., n.d.; Nibrosurrahman & Kurniati, 2025). In the Indonesian context, such interactions are often embedded in oral traditions, including storytelling and moral conversations, which further support literacy engagement. Early literacy development is closely linked to identity formation and social-emotional growth, suggesting that verbal interaction serves not only cognitive but also socio-cultural functions during the transition to formal schooling (Rahayu & Mustadi, 2022).

Furthermore, consistent verbal interaction within the family context contributes to the development of academic language proficiency that is essential for early primary learning (Rakhmawati & Mustadi, 2022). This form of interaction supports the transition from oral language to written expression, a key challenge in the early grades of primary school. Complementary findings indicated that dialogic literacy practices foster children's confidence in verbal expression and reduce anxiety toward reading tasks, particularly when literacy activities are embedded in supportive emotional climates (Dewi et al., 2018). Collectively, these findings suggest that sustained parent-child dialogue not only enhances comprehension but also prepares children to meet the linguistic and cognitive demands of formal schooling, reinforcing the home as a critical site for literacy socialisation during educational transitions.

Guided Digital Literacy in the Home Context

The integration of digital media into family literacy practices reflects contemporary learning environments but requires careful parental mediation. The findings reveal that digital tools contribute positively to literacy development only when parents actively guide children's engagement through co-reading, discussion, and reflective questioning. This supports previous findings that guided digital literacy enhances comprehension and critical thinking, whereas unmediated screen exposure limits verbal interaction and reduces literacy gains (Aji & Pujiastuti, 2022). Concerns regarding excessive or unguided screen time, as highlighted by Ratri and Aviyanti (2025), are reaffirmed in this study. These results emphasise that technology should function as a complementary literacy resource rather than a substitute for human interaction, reinforcing the dialogic nature of effective family literacy practices.

Parental mediation in children's digital literacy experiences indicates that when parents actively accompany children during digital reading activities by explaining vocabulary, asking comprehension questions, and relating digital texts to daily experiences, children demonstrate higher levels of reading engagement and understanding compared to those who use digital media independently (Amalia, 2023; Flewitt, 2019). This finding suggests that digital media, when embedded in dialogic interactions, can extend rather than replace traditional literacy practices. Parental guidance ensures that digital tools function as cognitively enriching resources that promote meaning-making and reflective thinking.

Digital literacy practices help children develop early critical literacy skills, such as distinguishing relevant information, interpreting visual-textual relationships, and articulating responses to digital stories (Dewi et al., 2018; Komara et al., 2025). These competencies are particularly important during

the preschool-to-primary school transition, when children begin encountering multimodal texts in formal learning contexts. Without appropriate guidance, however, digital media use tends to emphasise entertainment over learning, reducing opportunities for verbal interaction and deeper comprehension. Thus, parental mediation plays a crucial role in transforming digital exposure into intentional literacy learning experiences.

Digital literacy supports children's motivation and confidence in reading when technology use is aligned with developmental needs and emotional support (Adolph, 2016; Azmin et al., 2022). When parents model positive attitudes toward digital reading and appropriately regulate screen time, children are more likely to perceive digital literacy activities as meaningful and enjoyable (Chambers et al., 2016; Cook, 2009; Solichah & Fardana, 2023). This balanced approach helps prevent cognitive overload and screen dependency, while fostering self-regulation and responsible media use. Collectively, these findings reinforce the idea that digital literacy within the family context should be framed as a guided, interactive, and culturally responsive practice that complements rather than undermines conventional literacy development.

Home Literacy Environment and Cultural Sustainability

This study further highlights the importance of culturally grounded home literacy environments in supporting children's literacy development. Literacy activities embedded in local cultural practices such as storytelling, family narratives, and oral traditions were found to increase children's engagement and comprehension (Karmila et al., 2023). These findings align with the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) framework, which emphasises shared reading, home literacy instruction, and motivational support as key predictors of literacy achievement (Prastiti & Adi, 2024). Research in Indonesian and developing-country contexts also underscores the need to align home, school, and cultural environments to ensure continuity in literacy development (Komara et al., 2025; Nibrosurrahman & Kurniati, 2025). Integrating local wisdom into the HLE framework enhances its contextual relevance and sustainability, ensuring that literacy development is both academically effective and culturally responsive (Yusuf et al., 2024).

Beyond enhancing engagement, culturally grounded home literacy environments also serve as a bridge connecting children's prior knowledge with formal school literacy demands. When literacy practices draw on familiar cultural narratives, symbols, and oral traditions, children are better able to activate background knowledge and construct meaning from texts. This process supports what Mol and Bus (2011) describe as funds of knowledge, where family and community cultural resources become assets for learning. Empirical studies in multilingual and multicultural settings demonstrate that culturally responsive literacy practices improve comprehension, vocabulary development, and reading motivation, particularly during transitional phases of schooling (AlJuhani, 2024; Gazali & Ningsih, 2025). In the Indonesian context, integrating local stories, moral values, and communal storytelling traditions makes literacy instruction more meaningful while also supporting national literacy goals (Prastiti & Adi, 2024; Snow et al., 2016).

Furthermore, culturally sustaining home literacy environments contribute to the long-term sustainability of literacy development by fostering children's sense of identity and belonging. Literacy is not merely a cognitive skill but also a social practice shaped by cultural values and family interactions. Studies have shown that when children perceive literacy activities as aligned with their cultural identity, they demonstrate stronger persistence, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward reading and writing (Azizah & Nalole, 2025; Fono, 2022; Inten et al., 2023). Family-based literacy practices rooted in local wisdom strengthen children's moral development, language confidence, and emotional attachment to reading activities (Kamonthip & Kongprasertamorn, 2009; Suryanti et al., 2020). Thus, embedding cultural sustainability within the Home Literacy Environment not only enhances immediate literacy outcomes but also ensures that literacy development remains inclusive, contextually relevant, and resilient across educational transitions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that family parenting strategies play a crucial role in supporting the literacy development of children aged 6–8 during the transition from PAUD to primary school. The findings

demonstrate that democratic parenting styles provide a strong foundation for independent and motivated literacy learning by fostering emotional support, autonomy, and positive learning experiences. Intensive verbal interactions, particularly through dialogic reading and post-reading discussions, significantly enhance children's reading comprehension, narrative skills, and expressive language abilities.

Furthermore, the study reveals that digital media can effectively support literacy development when integrated with active parental mediation, transforming digital tools into meaningful multimodal literacy resources rather than passive screen exposure. Consistent home reading routines and strong parental emotional involvement emerged as key supporting factors, while limited parental time, insufficient contextual reading materials, and the perception that literacy is solely the responsibility of schools were identified as major barriers.

Overall, this research confirms that literacy development during PAUD to primary school transition is not solely a school-based process but is strongly shaped by family parenting practices within the home environment. By addressing the research objectives, the study highlights the importance of developing a family literacy model that integrates democratic parenting, rich verbal interaction, guided digital literacy, and culturally relevant practices to reduce literacy gaps and support children's successful educational transitions.

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