

A Narrative Review of Parenting Styles and Early Childhood Cognitive Development

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive development is a key domain of early childhood development, encompassing abilities related to problem-solving, reasoning, learning, and decision-making. As early childhood is a critical period of development, parenting practices and the home environment may play an important role in shaping children's cognitive experiences. This study aimed to examine the relationship between parenting styles and cognitive development in early childhood through a narrative literature review. Relevant empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 were identified through searches of Google Scholar, Garuda, and other accessible academic sources using predefined keywords and eligibility criteria. Following the screening and eligibility process, 15 empirical studies were included and synthesized using a descriptive thematic approach. The findings showed a recurring pattern in which authoritative or democratic parenting was generally associated with more favorable cognitive outcomes, including problem-solving, reasoning, planning, and independent learning. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting were more frequently associated with less favorable or inconsistent cognitive outcomes. The review also indicated that parental involvement, parental education, socioeconomic conditions, and the home learning environment may influence the relationship between parenting practices and children's cognitive development. These findings suggest that parenting characterized by responsiveness, emotional support, constructive guidance, appropriate boundaries, and opportunities for autonomy may be beneficial for children's cognitive development. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the included studies varied in research design, population, cultural context, and measures of parenting and cognitive outcomes, and no formal meta-analysis or methodological quality assessment was conducted. Overall, this review provides evidence-informed insights for parents, educators, and policymakers in developing parenting and early childhood support programs that promote cognitively supportive home environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period of human development, often referred to as the “golden period,” because experiences and environmental stimulation during these years can have lasting consequences for children's future growth and development. During this stage, brain development progresses rapidly, and the quality of stimulation received by children may influence their learning capacities and developmental achievements. UNESCO notes that rapid brain growth occurs during the early years of life, while UNICEF emphasizes that investment in child development during this period has

long-term value for building high-quality human capital. It is estimated that approximately 50% of a child's intellectual capacity develops by the age of four and increases to around 80% by the age of eight. These conditions highlight the importance of early childhood as a critical period for strengthening cognitive development, including children's abilities in thinking, learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making ([Lestari, 2025](#)).

Despite the importance of this developmental period, many children worldwide do not reach their full cognitive potential. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that more than 200 million children under the age of five have not achieved adequate levels of cognitive development, with a substantial proportion living in Asia. This situation demonstrates that cognitive development is not only an individual concern but also a broader developmental issue requiring attention from multiple stakeholders. Among the various environments that influence children, the family represents the earliest and one of the most influential contexts in which children experience learning, interaction, stimulation, and emotional support ([Hanifah & Oviyanti, 2022](#)).

The family provides children's first educational experiences and plays an important role in shaping multiple developmental domains, including physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development. Parents, as primary caregivers, contribute to children's development through the provision of stimulation, emotional support, supervision, guidance, and a nurturing home environment. Previous research has demonstrated a significant relationship between the quality of parenting and child development, including intellectual and cognitive abilities ([Subarkah, 2019](#)). Parenting practices may therefore influence the extent to which children receive the motivation, stimulation, and support necessary to develop their potential (Fadhil et al., n.d.).

The importance of parenting can also be understood through the close and continuous relationship between children and their family environment. Parents and other significant family members have substantial influence on how children grow and develop, while the family, as the smallest and closest social environment, can shape children's experiences and personality development in ways that differ from broader social settings support ([Anggil Viyantini Kuswanto, 2024](#)). Child development itself is a continuous process involving changes in behavior, increasing maturity, and the development of greater independence. Therefore, parents and educators are expected to actively support children's growth and development by providing environments that encourage children to develop their abilities and independence ([Ganiadi et al., 2025](#)).

However, effective parenting is influenced by changing social and technological conditions. In the current context, caregiving responsibilities are still frequently dominated by mothers, whereas fathers' involvement in direct child-rearing may remain limited and focused primarily on financial provision ([Khalilah et al., 2025](#)). This condition reflects a gap between the ideal of active and shared parental involvement and the reality in which fathers may continue to occupy a secondary role in everyday caregiving ([Riko Putra, 2023](#)). In addition, changes associated with the Industry 4.0 era and increasing parental work demands may reduce the time and attention available for children's care and development. Consequently, parental involvement in supporting all aspects of children's growth may not always be optimal ([Astuti & Triani, n.d.](#)). Nevertheless, technological and social changes should not diminish the responsibility of parents and families to support children's development through appropriate strategies, guidance, and behavioral supervision. Parenting also involves the transmission of values and the development of positive character, including through activities that support children's moral and religious development ([A. Novita, 2018](#)).

To provide effective developmental support, parents need to recognize the importance of their role and understand children's developmental needs from a psychological

perspective. Families that actively support children's growth by providing appropriate care, guidance, stimulation, and opportunities for development may help children reach their potential more fully (Fazriansyah & Sirri, 2025). However, parenting does not take a single form. Parents may adopt different parenting styles, including authoritative or democratic, authoritarian, permissive, and other approaches, each of which may create different patterns of interaction, emotional support, behavioral regulation, and learning opportunities for children.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between parenting and child development, the available evidence is dispersed across studies with different populations, research designs, parenting classifications, and cognitive outcomes. Much of the existing discussion emphasizes the general importance of parental or family involvement, while the specific relationship between different parenting styles and early childhood cognitive development requires clearer synthesis. In addition, factors such as parental involvement, parental education, family circumstances, and home learning environments may interact with parenting practices and influence children's cognitive outcomes. Therefore, a focused review is needed to synthesize the available empirical evidence and identify recurring patterns regarding how different parenting styles are associated with cognitive development during early childhood.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the role of parenting styles in early childhood cognitive development through a narrative literature review. By synthesizing empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025, this review seeks to identify the patterns of association between different parenting styles and children's cognitive outcomes, while also considering contextual factors that may shape this relationship. The findings are expected to contribute to a clearer understanding of the role of parenting in supporting early cognitive development and provide evidence-informed insights for parents, educators, and policymakers.

2. METHODS

This study employed a literature review with a narrative approach to examine, describe, and synthesize previous research findings concerning the relationship between parenting styles and cognitive development in early childhood. A narrative literature review was selected because it enables the integration and interpretation of findings from different empirical studies and provides a broader understanding of patterns, similarities, and differences across the available literature. A transparent review process should clearly describe the search strategy, eligibility criteria, literature sources, and procedures used to synthesize the findings (Turnbull et al., 2023).

The data used in this study were obtained from secondary sources, including scientific articles published in national and international journals and other relevant academic publications related to the research topic. The literature search was conducted from January to February 2025 using Google Scholar, Garuda, and other clearly identified accessible academic databases and scientific journal sources. The search strategy used combinations of relevant keywords, including "parenting style," "parenting practices," "parental caregiving," "cognitive development," and "early childhood," as well as Indonesian keywords such as "pola asuh," "perkembangan kognitif," and "anak usia dini." Boolean operators, including AND and OR, were used to combine the search terms where supported by the search platform. The use of structured search terms and a clear strategy was intended to identify studies relevant to the relationship between parenting practices and children's cognitive development (Razita Hanifah, Nur Aini Farida, n.d.).

The identified studies were subsequently selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) empirical studies examining the

relationship between parenting styles, parenting practices, or parental caregiving and cognitive development in early childhood; (2) studies published between 2020 and 2025; (3) studies available in full-text format; (4) studies reporting clear empirical findings; and (5) studies published in either Indonesian or English. The exclusion criteria included: (1) studies that did not focus on cognitive development in early childhood; (2) studies that did not examine parenting styles or parental caregiving; (3) duplicate publications; (4) articles that were not available in full text; and (5) articles that did not clearly report empirical research findings.

The study selection process was conducted in several stages. Initially, a total of 87 records were identified through the literature search. After removing 12 duplicate records, 75 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. During the screening stage, 42 records were excluded because they were not directly relevant to the relationship between parenting styles and cognitive development in early childhood, did not meet the publication period criteria, or did not provide relevant empirical findings.

Following the initial screening, 33 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. During the full-text assessment, 18 articles were excluded because they did not specifically focus on early childhood cognitive development, did not provide sufficient empirical findings, were not fully accessible, or did not meet the predetermined inclusion criteria. Ultimately, 15 empirical studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final narrative review.

Data from the 15 selected studies were extracted systematically. The extracted information included the author's name, year of publication, research design, participant or sample characteristics, sample size, research instruments or data collection methods, parenting styles or parenting-related variables, cognitive development outcomes, and the main findings relevant to the research objectives. The extracted findings were subsequently compared and synthesized to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences in the relationship between parenting styles and early childhood cognitive development ([Patterns et al., 2020](#)).

The synthesis was conducted using descriptive narrative and thematic analysis. First, the findings of the included studies were organized according to the types of parenting styles examined and their reported associations with children's cognitive outcomes. Second, recurring themes and patterns were identified across the studies. Differences in research design, study populations, parenting classifications, and cognitive outcomes were also considered during the interpretation of the findings. A structured approach to organizing study information and synthesizing contributions can improve the clarity and transparency of a narrative literature review (Williamson et al., 2023).

The results of the literature synthesis are presented in both tabular and narrative forms to facilitate comparison among the included studies and provide a comprehensive overview of the available empirical evidence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The final narrative review included 15 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The studies varied in terms of research design, sample characteristics, cultural settings, measurements of parenting, and indicators of cognitive development. Therefore, the findings were synthesized thematically rather than statistically. Overall, the evidence suggested several recurring patterns: (1) authoritative or democratic parenting was generally associated with more favorable cognitive outcomes; (2) authoritarian and highly controlling parenting tended to be associated with less favorable cognitive outcomes; (3) permissive parenting showed less consistent but generally less favorable associations; and

(4) the relationship between parenting and cognition was influenced by contextual factors, including parental involvement, education, and the home learning environment.

3.1.1 Authoritative or Democratic Parenting and Cognitive Development

Across the reviewed studies, authoritative or democratic parenting emerged as the parenting pattern most frequently associated with positive cognitive outcomes. This style is generally characterized by emotional warmth, responsive communication, appropriate supervision, clear expectations, and opportunities for children to express their ideas and gradually develop independence.

The reviewed evidence indicates that these parenting characteristics may support several aspects of children's cognitive development, including problem-solving, planning, reasoning, intellectual engagement, and independent learning. For example, Wang et al., (2025) found a positive association between authoritative parenting and cognitive development among preschool-aged children, whereas authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with cognitive outcomes. The study also showed that parenting patterns were related to family characteristics, including maternal education and household socioeconomic conditions.

Similar patterns are evident in research examining specific cognitive processes. One study found that authoritative parenting was positively associated with children's prospective memory, episodic foresight, planning, delay of gratification, and overall future-oriented cognition. In contrast, authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with several of these cognitive abilities. Another preschool study reported that authoritative parenting could contribute to more advanced abilities related to theory of mind, particularly when considered alongside children's language development.

The importance of supportive and motivating parenting is also reflected in more recent evidence. Han and Yan (2025), using data from 6,394 parents of preschool children, found meaningful connections between specific parenting dimensions and developmental domains. In their analysis, parental motivation showed one of the strongest connections with children's cognitive development, suggesting that the quality of parental encouragement may be particularly relevant to early cognitive growth.

These findings are consistent with the broader literature suggesting that parenting characterized by responsiveness, sensitivity, and non-harsh guidance can support early cognitive abilities. A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that positive parenting interventions improved children's general mental abilities and language outcomes, although the effects were not equally strong across all cognitive domains.

3.1.2 Authoritarian Parenting and Less Favorable Cognitive Outcomes

A second recurring theme was the association between authoritarian or highly controlling parenting and less favorable developmental outcomes. Authoritarian parenting is generally characterized by high levels of control and obedience expectations combined with limited opportunities for negotiation or autonomous decision-making.

The reviewed evidence does not establish that authoritarian parenting directly causes poorer cognitive development. However, several studies reported negative associations between authoritarian parenting and children's cognitive or related developmental outcomes. Wang et al. (2022), for example, found that authoritarian parenting was negatively correlated with cognitive development among preschool-aged children in rural China.

Likewise, research on future-oriented cognition found negative associations between authoritarian parenting and children's planning and delay-of-gratification abilities. These

findings suggest that parenting environments characterized by excessive control may provide fewer opportunities for children to practice independent decision-making, problem-solving, and self-regulation.

However, the evidence should be interpreted cautiously because the reviewed studies differed in cultural contexts and definitions of parenting styles. [Ren et al. \(2025\)](#), for example, found that parenting patterns among Chinese families did not always fit neatly into conventional Western categories. Their findings suggested that different combinations of strictness and affection may have different implications depending on the cultural context. Nevertheless, authoritarian and moderately supportive profiles were generally associated with poorer developmental outcomes than authoritative parenting in their sample.

3.1.3 Permissive Parenting and the Importance of Structure

The evidence regarding permissive parenting was more heterogeneous. Permissive parenting may provide emotional warmth but relatively limited behavioral guidance, monitoring, and structure. Several reviewed studies suggested that the absence of consistent boundaries may be associated with difficulties in self-regulation and other developmental processes that are relevant to cognitive functioning.

The findings therefore suggest that emotional support alone may not be sufficient to promote optimal cognitive development. Children may also benefit from predictable routines, appropriate expectations, constructive feedback, and guidance that helps them gradually manage increasingly complex tasks. Evidence-based parenting research has similarly emphasized the importance of combining warmth and responsiveness with structure, routines, rules, and coaching.

Accordingly, the findings of this review indicate that the most favorable pattern is not simply “high parental involvement,” but rather developmentally appropriate involvement that combines emotional support with guidance and opportunities for autonomy.

3.1.4 Contextual Factors Influencing the Relationship Between Parenting and Cognition

The reviewed studies also demonstrated that parenting style does not operate independently of the broader family environment. Several factors may influence both parenting practices and children's developmental opportunities.

First, parental education may be associated with parenting practices and children's access to cognitively stimulating experiences. Wang et al. (2022), reported that more educated mothers were more likely to adopt authoritative parenting and less likely to use authoritarian parenting.

Second, parental involvement and the quality of parent child interaction may influence the developmental effects associated with parenting. Supportive interactions can provide opportunities for conversation, questioning, explanation, shared problem-solving, and guided learning. Recent theoretical work on parental socialization of executive function similarly identifies cognitive stimulation, language input, scaffolding, and autonomy support as interconnected parenting behaviors associated with children's executive function development.

Third, family resources and the home learning environment may shape the opportunities available to children. Differences in socioeconomic conditions, parental education, learning materials, and the amount of time available for parent-child interaction may contribute to differences in developmental outcomes. Therefore, parenting style should be understood as one component of a broader developmental environment rather than as the sole determinant of cognitive development.

Although several studies showed a generally favorable association between authoritative parenting and children's cognitive development, the findings were not entirely uniform across all studies. Differences were observed in the specific cognitive outcomes examined, including general cognitive development, future-oriented cognition, theory of mind, language, and executive-function-related abilities. In addition, the evidence regarding permissive parenting was more heterogeneous, indicating that the developmental implications of parenting may depend on children's characteristics, family circumstances, and cultural context. [Ren et al. \(2025\)](#), for example, showed that parenting profiles may involve different combinations of affection and behavioral control that are not fully captured by conventional parenting categories. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as recurring patterns across heterogeneous studies rather than as identical effects across all children and contexts.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this review suggest that authoritative or democratic parenting is generally associated with more favorable cognitive outcomes during early childhood. This pattern may be explained by the combination of emotional responsiveness, appropriate structure, communication, and support for autonomy that characterizes authoritative parenting. Rather than controlling every aspect of children's behavior or leaving them entirely without guidance, authoritative parents may provide a developmental environment in which children can explore, ask questions, make choices, and receive assistance when needed.

One possible mechanism involves cognitive stimulation and guided interaction. Parents who communicate with their children, respond to questions, encourage exploration, and discuss problems may create repeated opportunities for children to practice reasoning and language. These daily interactions can support the development of thinking skills and help children gradually perform more complex cognitive tasks. The evidence synthesized in this review, including the association between parental motivation and children's cognition, is consistent with this interpretation.

A second possible mechanism is the development of autonomy and self-regulation. Cognitive development requires more than exposure to information. Children must also learn to focus attention, remember instructions, plan actions, regulate impulses, and persist when tasks become difficult. Parenting that provides both support and reasonable expectations may allow children to practice these skills within a secure environment. The relationship between authoritative parenting and planning, delay of gratification, and future-oriented cognition provides empirical support for this interpretation.

4.1 Integrating Piaget's Perspective

Piaget's theory is relevant to these findings, but its role should be interpretative rather than descriptive background. Piaget proposed that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. From this perspective, a parenting environment that encourages exploration, questioning, experimentation, and independent problem-solving may provide children with greater opportunities to actively construct knowledge.

The findings of this review are broadly consistent with this perspective. Authoritative parenting may support cognitive development because children are neither excessively controlled nor left without guidance. Instead, they may be given appropriate opportunities to explore and make decisions while receiving support when necessary. This balance can be particularly important during early childhood, when children increasingly develop symbolic thinking, language, and problem-solving abilities.

Thus, Piaget's theory helps explain why autonomy-supportive parenting may be associated with cognitive outcomes. The relevance of the theory lies not in restating the four stages of cognitive development, but in understanding children as active learners whose cognitive growth can be supported through meaningful interaction with their physical and social environment.

4.2 Integrating Vygotsky's Perspective

Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective provides another useful explanation for the findings. According to this perspective, cognitive development is strongly influenced by social interaction, language, and guidance from more knowledgeable individuals. Parents can therefore function as important sources of support by explaining, modeling, questioning, and gradually assisting children as they learn.

The concept of guided support is particularly relevant to authoritative parenting. Parents who are responsive and involved can adjust their assistance to children's developmental needs. Rather than completing a task for the child or demanding that the child perform it independently without assistance, supportive parents may provide guidance and gradually reduce that support as the child's competence increases.

This interpretation is consistent with research highlighting the importance of parental cognitive stimulation, language input, scaffolding, and autonomy support for executive-function development. It also helps explain why parental involvement may influence the relationship between parenting style and cognitive outcomes.

Accordingly, Vygotsky's theory provides a framework for understanding how parent-child interaction may function as a mechanism connecting parenting practices and cognitive development. The theory should therefore be integrated into the interpretation of the empirical findings rather than presented as a separate and lengthy theoretical section.

4.3 Why Might Authoritative Parenting Be More Beneficial?

Taken together, the evidence suggests several possible pathways through which authoritative parenting may support cognitive development.

First, warm and responsive communication may increase children's opportunities to use language, explain their thoughts, and ask questions. Second, appropriate structure and consistent expectations may support the development of attention, persistence, and self-regulation. Third, autonomy support may allow children to practice decision-making and problem-solving. Finally, parental involvement and cognitive stimulation may increase children's exposure to learning opportunities in everyday family life.

These mechanisms are supported by broader evidence on positive parenting. A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that interventions designed to improve parental sensitivity, responsiveness, and non-harsh discipline produced significant improvements in children's general mental abilities and language. At the same time, the effects varied across cognitive domains, indicating that the relationship between parenting and cognition is complex rather than uniform.

4.4 Differences Across Contexts

Although authoritative parenting showed the most consistently favorable pattern in this review, the findings were not identical across all contexts. Parenting practices are influenced by cultural expectations, family structures, socioeconomic conditions, and parental beliefs. [Ren et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that parenting profiles in Chinese families may include combinations of strictness and affection that are not fully captured by conventional parenting categories.

Therefore, the findings should not be interpreted to mean that a single parenting model will produce identical outcomes in every cultural context. Instead, the broader pattern suggests that certain parenting characteristics such as responsiveness, encouragement, constructive guidance, and developmentally appropriate autonomy may be particularly important. The way these characteristics are expressed may differ across families and cultures.

When the findings are compared across the included studies, a general pattern emerges, but the strength and nature of the associations differ according to the outcome being examined. Wan et al. (2022) reported an association between parenting style and general cognitive development, whereas [Sadeghi et al. \(2021\)](#) focused on future-oriented cognition, including planning and delay of gratification. [Khanipour et al. \(2021\)](#) examined theory of mind precursors, while Han and Yan (2025) investigated broader developmental dimensions among preschool children. These differences indicate that the reviewed studies do not measure a single, uniform concept of cognitive development.

Nevertheless, supportive parenting characteristics, including responsiveness, encouragement, constructive guidance, and opportunities for autonomy, appeared repeatedly across studies associated with favorable developmental outcomes. At the same time, the findings from [Ren et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrate that parenting patterns and their developmental implications may vary across cultural contexts. Therefore, authoritative parenting should not be interpreted as a universally identical model, but rather as a pattern of parenting characteristics that may support children's cognitive development under particular developmental and contextual conditions.

4.5 Implications

The findings have implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. Parenting programs may benefit from emphasizing practical strategies that promote responsive communication, cognitive stimulation, constructive discipline, predictable routines, and gradual support for children's independence.

For educators, collaboration with families may be important because cognitive development occurs across both educational and home environments. Schools and early childhood education programs can provide parents with accessible information about developmentally appropriate ways to communicate, guide, and support children's learning.

For policymakers, the findings suggest that parenting interventions should consider broader contextual factors, including parental education, socioeconomic resources, and access to learning materials. Supporting parents may therefore require not only information about parenting styles but also policies that improve families' capacity to provide stable and cognitively stimulating environments.

4.6 Limitations of the Review

This narrative review has several limitations. First, the 15 included studies differed in design, sample characteristics, cultural contexts, and methods of measuring both parenting and cognitive development. Second, no quantitative meta-analysis or pooled effect-size calculation was conducted. Third, the review did not include a formal quality or risk-of-bias assessment. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as patterns of association rather than definitive evidence of causality.

Future research could use systematic review and meta-analytic approaches to estimate the magnitude of the association between specific parenting dimensions and particular cognitive outcomes. Longitudinal and intervention studies are also needed to clarify whether changes in parenting practices lead to long-term improvements in children's cognitive development.

4. CONCLUSION

This narrative review concludes that authoritative (democratic) parenting is the most consistently effective approach for optimizing early childhood cognitive development. Authoritative parents foster an environment rich in verbal interaction, emotional warmth, and constructive boundaries, which enhances children's problem-solving, memory, and logical reasoning. Conversely, restrictive or overly permissive caregiving practices hamper cognitive autonomy and executive functioning. Furthermore, active paternal involvement and adequate home learning resources serve as vital catalysts in accelerating early intellectual milestones.

Educational Implications & Recommendations:

1. For Parents: Families should adopt democratic caregiving habits, prioritizing interactive dialogue, shared reading, and guided play over passive digital screen consumption.
2. For Educators and Institutions: PAUD centers and community health posts (*Posyandu*) should establish integrated parenting education programs (*Parenting Classes*) focusing on cognitive stimulation strategies for both mothers and fathers.
3. For Future Research: Future studies should utilize longitudinal experimental designs to investigate the long-term cognitive impacts of digital parenting interventions.

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