

Millennial Parents' Skepticism Toward Modern Parenting Approaches in Early Childhood Education

Ansharul Fuqaha'

Institut Kariman Wirayudha Sumenep Madura, Indonesia
email: ansharulofficial@gmail.com

Abstract

Keywords:
modern parenting;
skepticism;
personal experience;
local culture;
millennial parents

In the midst of shifting parenting paradigms, early childhood has become a critical arena where millennial parents must navigate between traditional expectations and modern approaches. This study aims to explore the skepticism of millennial parents toward modern parenting science and to examine the influencing factors, including personal experiences, traditional cultural norms, media exposure, and the psychological impacts that arise. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving fifteen millennial parents living in a traditional community setting. The findings reveal that childhood experiences serve as a primary reference point in evaluating the effectiveness of modern parenting approaches. Local cultural values that emphasize collectivism, physical closeness, and family hierarchy reinforce resistance to new parenting paradigms. Meanwhile, exposure to digital media provides broad access to parenting information but also leads to confusion due to the overwhelming and often contradictory content. This skepticism results in inconsistent parenting practices, social pressure, and internal conflicts that contribute to emotional fatigue and psychological strain among parents. The study concludes that skepticism toward modern parenting science is not a form of outright rejection, but rather an adaptive response to the mismatch between theoretical ideals and the socio-cultural realities faced by parents. Therefore, the dissemination of modern parenting approaches must be contextualized, participatory, and sensitive to the lived experiences and cultural values of millennial parents.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci:
Pengasuhan modern;
skeptisisme;
pengalaman pribadi;
budaya lokal;

Di tengah pergeseran paradigma pengasuhan, masa kanak-kanak awal menjadi arena penting di mana orang tua milenial harus menavigasi antara ekspektasi tradisional dan pendekatan modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi skeptisisme orang tua milenial terhadap ilmu pengasuhan modern serta menelaah faktor-faktor

orang tua milenial

yang memengaruhinya, termasuk pengalaman pribadi, norma budaya tradisional, paparan media, dan dampak psikologis yang muncul. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi terhadap lima belas orang tua milenial yang tinggal di lingkungan masyarakat tradisional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman masa kecil menjadi tolok ukur utama dalam menilai efektivitas pendekatan pengasuhan modern. Nilai-nilai budaya lokal yang menekankan kolektivisme, kedekatan fisik, dan hierarki keluarga memperkuat resistensi terhadap paradigma pengasuhan baru. Sementara itu, paparan terhadap media digital memberikan akses luas terhadap informasi pengasuhan, namun juga menimbulkan kebingungan akibat konten yang beragam dan seringkali kontradiktif. Sikap skeptis ini berdampak pada praktik pengasuhan yang tidak konsisten, tekanan sosial, serta konflik internal yang berujung pada kelelahan emosional dan tekanan psikologis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa skeptisisme terhadap ilmu pengasuhan modern bukanlah bentuk penolakan mutlak, melainkan respons adaptif terhadap ketidaksesuaian antara idealisme teoretis dan realitas sosial-budaya yang dihadapi orang tua. Oleh karena itu, diseminasi pendekatan pengasuhan modern perlu dilakukan secara kontekstual, partisipatif, dan peka terhadap pengalaman hidup serta nilai-nilai budaya orang tua milenial.

Received : 30 January 2026; Revised: 20 February 2026; Accepted: 27 February 2026

<http://doi.org/10.19105/kiddo.v7i1.23965>

Copyright© Ansharul Fuqaha'
With the licenced under the CC-BY licence



This is an open access article under the [CC-BY](#)

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, parenting particularly during early childhood has become increasingly complex, especially for millennial parents who are navigating between traditional cultural expectations and the growing influence of modern parenting philosophies. (Batini, F., Costanzo, M., & Giovannini, D., 2020). Early childhood, as a critical period for emotional, cognitive, and social development, demands parenting approaches that are both nurturing and developmentally appropriate. Modern parenting emphasizes empathy, emotional validation, child autonomy, and open communication principles widely disseminated through books, social media, and parenting communities. These approaches are often rooted in developmental psychology and Western pedagogical frameworks, which promote child-centered learning and emotional intelligence as key outcomes of effective parenting during the formative years.

In many traditional communities in Indonesia, including Madura, modern parenting approaches often clash with cultural norms that emphasize obedience, family hierarchy, and collective values. Early childhood practices are shaped by beliefs about discipline and respect,

with grandparents frequently holding greater authority than parents. Acts such as spoon-feeding toddlers while carrying them, discouraging active play, and praising quiet, passive behavior reflect ideals of affection, safety, and restraint. Parents who attempt modern methods often face resistance from older generations and social environments, manifested through criticism or subtle exclusion, which undermines their confidence and consistency in applying new strategies during this sensitive developmental phase.

Field observations and informal discussions with parents in Madura reveal a recurring pattern: many millennial parents initially express enthusiasm for modern parenting concepts, often inspired by online content or parenting seminars. Yet, when these approaches fail to produce immediate or visible results such as improved behavior or academic performance they begin to question their effectiveness. This leads to a sense of disappointment, guilt, and confusion, a phenomenon that has been widely observed among millennial parents navigating the pressures of modern parenting ideals (Gilmour, 2023). In some cases, parents revert to traditional parenting styles that feel more familiar and socially accepted, even if they previously questioned their relevance.

The Madurese context offers a unique perspective on early childhood parenting, particularly in how gender roles shape developmental expectations. In many Madurese families, basic life skills such as cooking or cleaning are often not introduced to boys, based on the belief that such skills are unnecessary for males. This gendered assumption can limit boys' early development in self-help and socio-emotional competencies. These practices are deeply rooted in local wisdom and social hierarchies, as highlighted in studies on Madurese ethnoparenting (Fitroh et al., 2024; Sexton & Lebow, 2015).

This phenomenon reflects a deeper issue: the psychological and cultural dissonance experienced by parents who are caught between two paradigms. Individuals tend to model behaviors based on their own upbringing and social reinforcement (Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977). Culturally embedded beliefs about what constitutes good parenting what Harkness and Super refer to as "parental ethnotheories" also influence how parents interpret and apply parenting strategies (Sara Harknes, 2002). In the context of early childhood, this dissonance becomes even more pronounced. The early years are a critical period for forming secure attachments, developing emotional regulation, and establishing foundational learning habits. Consistent and responsive caregiving during this phase is essential for fostering a child's sense of safety and trust (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). The Nurturing Care Framework also emphasizes the importance of stable, emotionally supportive environments in promoting optimal development (World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank, 2018). However, when parents are caught between modern ideals such as encouraging autonomy and emotional expression and traditional expectations that value obedience and restraint, they may experience internal conflict and uncertainty. This tension can undermine their ability to implement Developmentally

Appropriate Practice (DAP), which advocates for aligning parenting approaches with the child's developmental stage, individual needs, and sociocultural context (Carol Copple, 2013). As a result, skepticism toward modern parenting during the early years is not merely a matter of preference, but a reflection of deeper emotional and cultural negotiations that directly impact the child's developmental trajectory.

From a community engagement perspective, this issue is highly relevant. Parenting is not only a private matter but also a social practice shaped by cultural narratives, peer influence, and institutional norms (Pinquart, 2017). Programs aimed at improving parenting practices must therefore go beyond simply transferring knowledge; they must also address the emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of parenting (Patil, 2025). Research by Martínez emphasizes that culturally responsive education must be rooted in the values, worldviews, and lived realities of families (Martínez, 2020). Building on this, Aguayo and colleagues highlight that parenting programs are most effective when they incorporate parents' own cultural perspectives and expectations, ensuring that interventions resonate with their everyday experiences (Aguayo, 2025). These perspectives provide a theoretical foundation for this study, emphasizing that the effectiveness of parenting programs depends not only on the content delivered but also on how well these programs resonate with the emotional and cultural realities of millennial parents within their communities.

Parenting knowledge is essential in today's dynamic world, especially during early childhood when development is most rapid. Outdated practices may no longer align with what children truly need. The *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP) framework emphasizes that caregiving must match a child's developmental stage and cultural context (Carol Copple, 2013), while Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* reminds us that children grow within ever-changing environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As one parent put it, "Parenting knowledge is important because life is dynamic; what was once considered the best may no longer be relevant especially if it was based on misconceptions." This awareness reflects a shift toward more reflective and informed parenting.

Despite the growing body of literature on parenting in the digital age, there remains a gap in understanding how skepticism toward modern parenting emerges and evolves in traditional communities. While numerous studies have explored parenting practices across cultures, few have specifically examined how personal history, cultural identity, and social dynamics intersect to shape parenting choices in contexts where traditional norms remain strong (Novianti et al., 2023; Zhou & Chung, 2022). Moreover, the psychological toll of navigating conflicting parenting paradigms between inherited cultural expectations and contemporary approaches has received limited empirical attention, particularly in non-Western or collectivist societies (Dana Golden, 2021).

This article examines the experiences of millennial parents in traditional Madurese communities who are skeptical of modern

parenting, showing how personal upbringing, cultural values, and social environment shape decisions and create emotional challenges such as guilt and self-doubt. Unlike studies in multicultural contexts, this research highlights cultural dissonance in tightly knit communities, revealing how continuity and strain coexist amid shifting norms. By centering Madurese parents' voices, it offers insights for designing early childhood programs that are educational, empathetic, and culturally grounded helping parents reconcile tradition with modern expectations and build confidence in their parenting roles.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore millennial parents' skepticism toward modern parenting, focusing on lived experiences, cultural influences, and psychological dynamics within a traditional community. Rather than seeking numerical generalizations, the case study emphasizes meaning, context, and interpretation, capturing how personal history, cultural values, media exposure, and emotional responses interact in shaping parental attitudes.

The study was conducted between March and June 2025 across three districts of Madura Island Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep selected for their strong adherence to traditional parenting norms alongside growing exposure to modern discourse through digital media. The diversity of rural, coastal, and island communities provided a rich context for understanding how millennial parents negotiate between inherited practices and contemporary expectations.

The research was conducted from March to June 2025 across Sumenep, Pamekasan, and Sampang, with each month dedicated to site-specific fieldwork and concluding with preliminary analysis and participant validation. The researcher, as the primary instrument, engaged directly through interviews, observations, and documentation, ensuring contextual depth and rapport. Ethical standards were upheld by securing informed consent, respecting local values, and maintaining confidentiality, allowing for a nuanced understanding of culturally embedded parenting beliefs and emotional experiences.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation with fifteen millennial parents (aged 25-40) selected via purposive sampling each having at least one child aged 0-6, active use of digital media, and skepticism toward modern parenting. Semi-structured interviews in homes and community spaces explored experiences, beliefs, and emotions, while observations during daily routines and activities captured real-life practices. Supporting documents such as family records, parenting notes, and digital content were also gathered to triangulate findings.

This study was embedded in a broader community initiative that enhanced parental awareness and adaptability by incorporating principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Local stakeholders were actively involved through reflective parenting discussions, digital literacy workshops, and culturally grounded seminars, which served both as platforms for data collection and as

interventions to help parents navigate tensions between traditional and modern parenting, fostering mutual trust and learning.

The community engagement program revealed important patterns: parents showed a gradual shift toward nuanced openness to modern parenting, expressed emotions such as guilt and frustration that fostered empathy and solidarity, and actively blended traditional and modern practices into hybrid strategies shaped by cultural background and practicality. Group sessions also strengthened social support, creating micro-communities of trust that sustained parents' motivation to continue experimenting with new approaches despite ongoing pressures.

Data analysis followed the interactive model, consisting of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, 2014). Coding produced key themes such as cultural resistance, media influence, emotional fatigue, and adaptive strategies, conducted continuously to align findings with the research focus. Validity was ensured through triangulation across sources, methods, and time, as well as member checking with participants. By integrating empirical fieldwork with community engagement, the study captures nuanced realities of parenting skepticism and contributes to developing culturally responsive parenting education programs.

3. Result and Discussion

This study found that skepticism among millennial parents toward modern parenting is shaped by a complex interplay of personal experiences, cultural norms, media exposure, and emotional dynamics. Parenting experiences and perceptions of those raising children aged 0-6 are presented thematically, integrating field data and theoretical interpretation, and closely tied to the outcomes of the community engagement program. All interview excerpts included in this section have been translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English for clarity and accessibility.

The Gap Between Theory and Practice

A central theme that emerged was the disconnect between the ideals of modern parenting and the realities of daily life. While many parents expressed interest in applying modern parenting techniques such as avoiding negative language, encouraging autonomy, and validating emotions they often struggled to implement them consistently.

One mother reflected on her efforts to incorporate positive routines at home, particularly through shared reading activities intended to strengthen emotional bonding and literacy development. She described how she consistently tried to read storybooks to her child every night as part of implementing what she understood to be a recommended modern parenting practice. However, she also expressed uncertainty and self-doubt when these efforts did not immediately yield the expected outcomes, especially when her child continued to show a stronger preference for playing with a mobile phone. She stated:

"I've tried reading storybooks to my child every night, but they still prefer playing with the phone. It makes me doubt whether this is really effective." (Interview, Informant 3)

Similarly, a father articulated his aspiration to practice two-way communication as a reflection of more democratic parenting values. He recognized the importance of dialogue, listening, and mutual understanding in building a healthy parent-child relationship. Yet in practice, he found that open communication sometimes led to prolonged negotiations or what he perceived as excessive excuses from his child. Faced with time pressure and the desire for immediate compliance, he admitted occasionally reverting to more traditional, authoritative methods because they produced quicker results. As he explained:

"I want to apply two-way communication, but sometimes my child just ends up giving more excuses. In the end, I go back to the old way it's quicker and they obey right away." (Interview, Informant 10)

These experiences reflect what Vygotsky described as the challenge of internalizing new values when the tools of communication especially language are not aligned with the intended behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). The use of familiar phrases like 'don't' or 'watch out, you'll fall' are deeply embedded in daily interactions and difficult to replace without sustained support.

Observations confirmed that while some parents attempted to apply modern techniques, they often abandoned them when faced with resistance or when results were not immediate. For example, in one household, the researcher observed a mother attempting to use a calm tone during a child's tantrum. However, after several minutes without change, she reverted to raising her voice and threatening punishment. This behavior illustrates social learning theory: when new behaviors do not yield expected outcomes, individuals fall back on familiar, previously reinforced patterns (Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977).

The community engagement program addressed this by facilitating role-play sessions and reflective discussions. Parents were encouraged to share their struggles and brainstorm context-sensitive alternatives. This helped reduce the pressure to apply modern parenting in a rigid, textbook manner and instead adapt it to their lived realities.

These findings resonate with broader cross-cultural research on parenting in collectivist societies. For instance, in collectivist cultures such as those in South and Southeast Asia, parents often prioritize obedience and conformity over autonomy, especially during early childhood when children are expected to internalize social norms (Patil, 2025). Similarly, while modern parenting emphasizes emotional validation and child agency, traditional parenting in many communities still relies on hierarchical authority and immediate compliance (Mwamfupe, 2025). This mirrors the experiences of Madurese parents who, despite initial interest in modern approaches, revert to

conventional methods when faced with resistance or delayed outcomes. These comparative insights underscore that the gap between theory and practice is not merely a matter of knowledge, but also of cultural alignment, emotional readiness, and the perceived efficacy of parenting strategies during the formative years of a child's development.

Personal Experience as a Benchmark

Personal upbringing emerged as a dominant filter through which parents assessed the relevance and effectiveness of modern parenting. Many participants viewed their own childhood experiences as benchmarks for evaluating new methods. This tendency suggests that past experiences especially those perceived as formative are not only remembered but also legitimized as effective parenting models. Parents often equated the discipline they received with personal success, reinforcing the belief that replicating such methods would yield similar outcomes in their children.

"I was raised strictly, but I feel that's what made me disciplined. So I use the same approach with my child." (Interview, Informant 6)
"I was often scolded as a child, but I knew it was because my parents loved me. So I don't mind scolding my child either." (Interview, Informant 2)

These narratives reveal an emotional attachment to familiar parenting practices, which can create resistance to adopting unfamiliar approaches. The comfort derived from these internalized models often outweighs the appeal of new methods, especially when those methods challenge long-held beliefs. This phenomenon reflects how individuals internalize early experiences into enduring dispositions that shape their worldview and behavior, as explained by experiential learning theory and the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1992; Kolb, 1984).

When modern parenting strategies such as gentle parenting fail to produce immediate results, parents may experience emotional dissonance. One mother, who initially embraced a non-authoritarian approach, expressed frustration after several weeks:

"I tried not to yell, but my child became even harder to manage. I felt like a failure." (Interview, Informant 11)

This response illustrates how unmet expectations can lead to self-blame and disillusionment. Rather than attributing the outcome to contextual challenges such as a lack of support or the novelty of the method parents may conclude that the approach itself is ineffective or that they are personally inadequate. This tendency aligns with attribution theory, which posits that individuals often explain failures based on internal rather than external factors (Weiner, 1985).

These findings align with comparative studies that highlight how personal childhood experiences continue to shape parenting practices across generations. In traditional early childhood care settings, parents often rely on intergenerational wisdom and personal upbringing as primary references, especially when formal parenting education is limited (Mughakali, 2025). Similarly, in many collectivist societies, the legitimacy of parenting strategies is often derived from their perceived

success in the past, rather than from empirical evidence or developmental science (Mwamfupe, 2025). This mirrors the experiences of Madurese parents who equate strict discipline with positive outcomes in their own childhood, reinforcing the belief that similar methods will yield success in their children. In the context of early childhood, this reliance on personal experience can hinder the adoption of developmentally appropriate practices, particularly when new approaches challenge deeply internalized notions of what "good parenting" looks like.

The community engagement program played a pivotal role in helping parents reframe these experiences. Through shared storytelling and peer dialogue, participants began to recognize that their skepticism was not a sign of failure but a natural part of the adaptation process. This shift in perspective fostered emotional resilience and encouraged a more open, reflective stance toward change, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive and emotionally supportive interventions in parenting education.

Cultural Norms and Social Pressure

Cultural expectations and social norms were found to exert significant pressure on parenting choices. In Madurese society, parenting is not a private matter but a communal concern, with extended families and neighbors often acting as informal enforcers of tradition.

One mother described her experience of introducing what she considered a gradual step toward fostering independence by having her child sleep in a separate bed at the age of three. For her, this decision was aligned with modern recommendations about encouraging autonomy and self-regulation. However, the reaction from her own mother was immediate and critical, framing the decision not as a developmental strategy but as an act of emotional neglect. She recalled:

"I once had my child sleep in a separate bed starting at age three, but my mother said I was being cruel. She said young children should sleep with their parents so they feel loved." (Interview, Informant 6)

Another parent shared a similar experience regarding emotional regulation strategies. Attempting to allow the child space to self-soothe when crying, the parent intended to encourage resilience and independence. Yet this approach was quickly challenged by the mother-in-law, who interpreted the action as indifference and a lack of compassion. The parent recounted the moment of confrontation, saying:

"When my child cried, I let them calm down on their own. But my mother-in-law immediately said, 'How could you be so heartless? Your child is crying and you just ignore it?'" (Interview, Informant 4)

These experiences illustrate the tension between modern parenting ideals such as promoting independence and emotional regulation and local values that prioritize physical closeness and

immediate responsiveness. The theory of cultural scripts explains how these norms define acceptable parenting behaviors (Sara Harknes, 2002).

Field observations supported these accounts. In one village, the researcher observed a grandmother intervening when a mother attempted to let her child calm down independently, insisting that the child be comforted immediately. This reflects social control theory, where strong community bonds discourage deviation from shared norms (Hirschi, 1969).

The community engagement program addressed this by inviting extended family members to participate in discussions. This inclusive approach helped reduce intergenerational conflict and opened space for dialogue about evolving parenting practices.

These findings are consistent with broader research on how cultural norms shape parenting practices, particularly in early childhood. Parenting behaviors are deeply embedded in cultural scripts that define what is considered appropriate caregiving, especially in collectivist societies where family and community expectations carry significant weight (Lansford, 2025). In such contexts, deviation from traditional norms can be perceived as a threat to communal cohesion, leading to social sanctions or emotional pressure from extended family members. These insights reinforce the experiences of Madurese parents, who often face intergenerational tension when attempting to implement modern parenting strategies that prioritize autonomy and emotional regulation.

Media Exposure: Between Empowerment and Overload

Digital media emerged as a significant factor influencing how parents construct and negotiate their parenting perspectives. Its presence in everyday life has transformed the way information is accessed, discussed, and interpreted. On the one hand, social media platforms and online resources provide unprecedented convenience, allowing parents to learn about child development, emotional regulation, communication strategies, and educational practices without formal training. This accessibility empowers parents to explore alternatives beyond traditional knowledge passed down through family structures. On the other hand, the abundance of information often comes without clear guidance, filtering, or contextualization. Instead of clarity, parents are sometimes confronted with conflicting viewpoints, differing expert opinions, and polarized debates that generate uncertainty rather than confidence. Consequently, digital media functions not only as a source of knowledge but also as a space of negotiation, comparison, and, at times, confusion.

One informant described her routine of consuming parenting-related content through social media, particularly short-form videos. While she appreciated the ease of access and the practical tips offered, she admitted feeling overwhelmed by the contradictory nature of the advice presented by different content creators. The lack of consensus left her unsure about which guidance was most appropriate for her situation. She explained:

"I often watch parenting videos on Instagram. But sometimes one person says A, and another says B. It gets confusing, I don't know which one to follow." (Interview, Informant 1)

Another parent highlighted a slightly different dimension of digital engagement. She mentioned that she enjoyed light, humorous, and relatable parenting content because it felt entertaining and emotionally supportive. However, she also noted that the comment sections frequently contained harsh judgments and mutual blame among users, which sometimes triggered self-doubt. Instead of feeling reassured, she occasionally felt questioned about her own parenting choices. As she stated:

"I enjoy light and funny content, but sometimes it makes me feel unsure because the comments are full of people blaming each other." (Interview, Informant 12)

This aligns with the theory of information overload and the spiral of silence theory. When parents encounter conflicting advice and public criticism, they may withdraw from engaging with new ideas (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Noelle, 1974).

Documentation of WhatsApp parenting groups revealed that advice was often shared without context or critical evaluation. Some parents reported feeling judged when they shared their experiences online, leading to self-censorship and increased skepticism.

These findings are supported by recent studies on digital parenting, which highlight the paradoxical role of media in early childhood care. While digital platforms provide unprecedented access to parenting knowledge, they also expose parents to a flood of conflicting information that can lead to confusion, anxiety, and decision paralysis (Choy, 2024). In the context of early childhood, where parents are especially sensitive to developmental milestones and behavioral cues, the pressure to "get it right" is intensified by curated content and judgmental online discourse (Labibah, 2024). This aligns with the experiences of Madurese parents, who reported feeling overwhelmed and hesitant to engage with digital parenting content due to fear of criticism or misinformation. These dynamics underscore the importance of fostering critical media literacy among parents, enabling them to navigate digital spaces with confidence and cultural awareness.

However, the community engagement program helped mitigate these effects by fostering critical media literacy. Parents were guided to evaluate sources, discuss content collectively, and contextualize advice within their cultural and familial realities. This empowered them to make informed decisions rather than blindly following trends.

Emotional Strain and Psychological Fatigue

Another recurring theme across the interviews was the emotional burden experienced by parents as they navigated competing expectations from modern parenting ideals, cultural traditions, and social judgments. Parenting was not described merely as a set of techniques or strategies, but as an emotionally demanding process that required continuous self-regulation, reflection, and adaptation. Many

parents expressed an internal struggle between their aspiration to become more patient, empathetic, and reflective caregivers and the practical pressures of daily responsibilities. When their efforts did not align with societal approval or did not produce immediate behavioral changes in their children, feelings of guilt and inadequacy often surfaced. Over time, this tension contributed to emotional exhaustion and self-doubt, revealing the psychological cost of parenting in a context marked by rapid social and digital transformation.

One father articulated this emotional strain by describing his sincere intention to cultivate greater patience in his parenting approach. He viewed patience as a core element of modern fatherhood and wanted to embody a more emotionally present and understanding role. However, he acknowledged that personal fatigue and external criticism sometimes made this goal difficult to sustain. Instead of feeling supported, he occasionally felt blamed by those around him, which intensified his sense of frustration. He shared:

"I want to be a more patient father, but sometimes I get exhausted myself, especially when people around me end up blaming me instead." (Interview, Informant 9)

Similarly, a mother expressed a deep sense of disappointment in herself after attempting to apply modern parenting methods that she had learned about, yet perceiving little improvement in her child's behavior. Rather than attributing the challenges to normal developmental processes, she internalized the difficulties as a personal shortcoming. This internalization led to heightened stress and a diminished sense of competence as a parent. She stated:

"I feel like a failure because I've tried modern parenting methods, but my child is still difficult to manage. It's made me feel stressed." (Interview, Informant 13)

These experiences reflect the concept of self-efficacy. When parents perceive themselves as ineffective, their motivation and confidence decline. Observations confirmed that parents often appeared anxious in public, especially when their children misbehaved (Bandura, *Self-Efficacy The Exercise of Control*, 1997).

Gender schema theory explains that parents often internalize gender-based expectations, which shape how they interpret social feedback and evaluate their parenting performance (Kislev, N., & Saguy, T, 2025).

This reflects the dynamics described in social identity theory, where individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership and are sensitive to group norms and evaluations (Postmes, T., & Branscombe, N. R., 2022) .

The community engagement program provided emotional support through peer discussions and reflective exercises. One participant noted:

"This discussion made me realize that I'm not alone many others are going through the same thing." (Field Note, Parenting Workshop, Pamekasan)

Recent studies have shown that cultural ideals of motherhood continue to demand total devotion, emotional labor, and self-sacrifice from mothers. This phenomenon, often referred to as 'intensive mothering,' places unrealistic expectations on women to prioritize their children's needs above all else, leading to emotional fatigue and internal conflict (Faircloth, 2021).

This sense of solidarity helped reduce emotional strain and fostered a more compassionate view of parenting challenges.

These findings are echoed in recent studies that explore the psychological burden of parenting in transitional cultural contexts. In early childhood parenting, where expectations for emotional attunement and developmental outcomes are high, parents often experience internal conflict when their efforts are not immediately rewarded or socially validated (Faircloth, 2021). This is particularly evident among mothers, who continue to bear the brunt of "intensive mothering" ideals that demand constant emotional labor, self-sacrifice, and perfectionism (Hays, 2023). When modern parenting strategies fail to produce quick results, parents may internalize blame, leading to reduced self-efficacy and heightened psychological fatigue (Chung, 2024). These dynamics align with the experiences of Madurese parents, who reported feeling judged, isolated, and emotionally drained when navigating conflicting expectations from their social environment.

Adaptive Strategies and Selective Integration

Despite their skepticism, many parents did not reject modern parenting outright. Instead, they adopted a selective approach, integrating elements that aligned with their values and discarding those that felt incompatible. One mother illustrated this balanced approach by describing how she maintained core values she considered fundamental, such as teaching politeness and obedience, while simultaneously becoming more attentive to her child's emotional world. For her, embracing modern parenting did not mean abandoning long-held principles, but rather enriching them with greater emotional awareness. She explained:

"I still teach my child to be polite and obedient, but now I'm also learning to listen to their feelings." (Interview, Informant 8)

Another parent similarly emphasized flexibility and contextual adaptation. Instead of striving to implement every recommendation encountered through books or social media, this parent described a more personalized strategy retaining what resonated and adjusting the rest to fit the family's circumstances. This approach highlights the agency of parents as active interpreters rather than passive recipients of parenting discourse. As shared:

"I just take what suits me, and adjust the rest to fit our situation at home." (Interview, Informant 14)

This reflects constructive eclecticism and the concept of cultural brokerage adapting new knowledge to fit local contexts. Observations showed that some parents used storytelling to teach values while also encouraging children to express their feelings, blending traditional and modern approaches (Herbert & Irene, 2013; Rogoff, 2003).

These findings are consistent with research on cultural adaptation in parenting, which shows that parents in traditional communities often engage in selective integration adopting modern strategies that align with their values while modifying or rejecting those that do not (Syed, 2025). This approach reflects what Goldenberg describe as constructive eclecticism, where individuals draw from multiple frameworks to create a personalized, context-sensitive model (Herbert Goldenberg, Irene Goldenberg, 2013). In the context of early childhood, such flexibility allows parents to preserve core cultural values such as respect and obedience while gradually incorporating practices like emotional validation and child-centered communication (Tristiyanto, 2025). The experiences of Madurese parents illustrate this dynamic, as they blend storytelling and emotional attunement with traditional moral instruction, crafting hybrid parenting strategies that feel both authentic and adaptive.

The community engagement program supported this process by validating parents' lived experiences and encouraging them to co-create parenting strategies that honored both tradition and innovation.

The findings of this study reveal that skepticism among millennial parents toward modern parenting is not rooted in outright rejection, but rather in a complex negotiation between internalized experiences, cultural expectations, and the realities of daily life. While modern parenting theories are widely accessible and often appealing, their application is challenged by entrenched communication habits, emotional fatigue, and the absence of immediate results. Parents' personal histories particularly those shaped by authoritarian or traditional upbringings serve as powerful benchmarks, influencing how new approaches are received and evaluated. When modern methods fail to produce quick, visible outcomes, many parents revert to familiar practices that feel safer and more socially validated.

Cultural norms and social pressures further complicate the adoption of modern parenting. (Rosa, E. M., & Tudge, J. R. H., 2013) Parenting does not occur in a vacuum. It is embedded in a web of social, cultural, and institutional influences that shape both parental behavior and child development. This perspective aligns with the bioecological model of human development, which emphasizes the dynamic interactions between individuals and the multiple environmental systems that surround them ranging from immediate family to broader societal structures. In tightly knit communities like those in Madura, parenting is a collective concern, and deviation from traditional norms is often met with criticism or intervention. Practices such as co-sleeping, strict obedience, and physical closeness are deeply embedded in local values and are seen as essential expressions of love and responsibility. Meanwhile, exposure to digital media though empowering in some respects often overwhelms parents with conflicting advice, unrealistic expectations, and public scrutiny. These factors contribute to a form of adaptive skepticism, where parents selectively integrate modern principles while maintaining alignment with cultural and familial expectations.

The community engagement program played a pivotal role in addressing these tensions. By creating a safe, reflective space for dialogue, the program helped parents process their experiences, validate their struggles, and explore hybrid strategies that bridge traditional and modern approaches. This study underscores the importance of culturally responsive parenting education that does not impose rigid models but instead supports parents in developing context-sensitive, emotionally sustainable practices. The table below summarizes the key themes, data sources, and theoretical interpretations that emerged from this research:

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Findings, Field Evidence, and Theoretical Interpretation

Theme	Field Data Highlights	Theoretical Lens
Theory-Practice Gap	Confusion over applying modern techniques; reversion to traditional methods	(Vygotsky, 1978) (Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977)
Personal Experience	Childhood upbringing as a reference point; comfort in familiar methods	(Kolb, 1984) (Akram, 2023)
Cultural Norms & Social Pressure	Criticism from extended family; fear of social judgment	(Sara Harknes, 2002), (Hirschi, 1969)
Media Exposure & Overload	Contradictory online content; viral trends vs. contextual needs	(Mengis, 2004) , (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)
Emotional Strain	Guilt, fatigue, and self-doubt in parenting efforts	(Bandura, Self-Efficacy The Exercise of Control, 1997) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
Adaptive Integration	Selective adoption of modern practices; blending with traditional values	(Fru-Ngongban, 2023), (Rogoff, 2003)

Table 1 shows that millennial parents in Madura negotiate between cultural values and modern parenting discourses. Difficulties in applying approaches like two-way communication often lead them back to traditional methods, reflecting Vygotsky's *scaffolding* and Bandura's *social learning theory*. Childhood experiences strongly shape preferences, consistent with Kolb's *experiential learning theory*, as parents either emulate or seek to improve past practices. Social pressures from extended family further reinforce cultural scripts, illustrating Harkness and Super's concept of the *developmental niche*.

At the same time, exposure to digital media introduces new challenges. The abundance of parenting information often contradictory on social media platforms generates confusion and uncertainty. This phenomenon reflects the cognitive burden of information overload (Mengis, 2004) and the social pressure arising from public commentary, as explained by Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory. The

accumulation of these pressures contributes to significant emotional strain. Feelings of guilt, fatigue, and self-doubt recur throughout the informants' narratives. Bandura emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy in facing such challenges, while Bronfenbrenner reminds us that parenting stress is shaped not only by individual factors but also by broader systemic forces.

Nevertheless, amid these complexities, adaptive integration strategies emerge. Many parents neither fully reject nor wholly adopt new approaches; instead, they selectively apply and adjust practices to suit their family context. This process reflects agency and critical reflection, as articulated by the concept of guided participation and the framework of culturally responsive parenting (Fru-Ngongban, 2023; Rogoff, 2003). In this way, millennial parents in Madura are not passive recipients of change but active agents in shaping parenting approaches that resonate with both their cultural identity and evolving aspirations.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that millennial parents in traditional Madurese communities navigate parenting decisions through a negotiation between personal upbringing, cultural values, and social environment. Childhood experiences act as an internal compass, while traditions such as obedience, physical closeness, and respect for elders continue to shape norms. At the same time, extended families reinforce tradition, whereas digital media exposes parents to diverse philosophies that can empower yet also overwhelm. These dynamics often lead to self-doubt and a tendency to revert to familiar methods when modern strategies fail to yield immediate results.

Despite these challenges, parents demonstrate agency through adaptive integration selectively adopting modern principles that resonate with their values while modifying or discarding those that feel incompatible. This constructive eclecticism reflects a hybrid approach that honors both tradition and innovation. Theoretically, the study extends frameworks such as Vygotsky's and Bandura's by showing how cultural scripts and emotional memory filter learning and modeling, while also supporting concepts of culturally responsive parenting. These findings imply that interventions must move beyond prescriptive models toward empathetic, flexible, and context-sensitive approaches. Limitations remain in the cultural specificity and reliance on self-reported narratives, suggesting future research should explore longitudinal changes or cross-cultural comparisons to deepen understanding of how tradition and modernity intersect in family life.

5. Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all participants millennial parents in Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep who generously shared their time, stories, and insights throughout the research process. Special thanks are extended to the local community leaders and family elders who provided access and cultural guidance during fieldwork.

Appreciation is also due to colleagues and academic mentors who offered valuable feedback during the design and analysis stages of this study. The author acknowledges the assistance of research assistants who supported data collection and transcription, as well as those who contributed to the proofreading and language refinement of this manuscript. The success of the community engagement program would not have been possible without the collaboration of local parenting facilitators and volunteers who helped organize reflective discussions and workshops in each district.

Reference

- Aguayo, D. S. (2025). Parents' Perspectives of Culturally Responsive Practices for Teachers and School Administrators. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 10.1007/s10826-024-03002-9.
- Akram, S. (2023). *Bourdieu, Habitus and Field: A Critical Realist Approach*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Batini, F., Costanzo, M., & Giovannini, D. (2020). Reading Aloud and First Language Development: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 1–12.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York: NY: Basic Books.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Carol Copple, S. B. (2013). *Developmentally appropriate practice*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- Choy, Y. N. (2024). Digital parenting and its impact on early childhood development: A scoping review. *Journal of Education and Information Technologies*, 22147–22187.
- Chung, G. &. (2024). Parental burnout and self-efficacy in the context of intensive parenting norms. *Early Child Development and Care*, 215–230.
- Dana Golden, L. E. (2021). Class, Education and Parenting: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 453–459.
- Faircloth, C. (2021). Intensive parenting and the expansion of parenting. *Sociology Compass*, 10.1111/soc4.12874.
- Fitroh, S. F. (2024). tnoparenting: Madurase Ethnic Women's Parenting Viewed from the Perspective of Social Status. *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Undiksha*, 1–8.

- Fru-Ngongban, A. C. (2023). Eclectic Teaching Method: A Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Pedagogy for an Inclusive Classroom. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 1–6.
- Gilmour, H. (2023). *Raising Gen Alpha: How Millennial Parenting is Impacting the Next Generation*. London: Beano Brain.
- Hays, S. (2023). The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood: Revisited in the Digital Age. *Journal of Family Studies*, 45–62.
- Herbert Goldenberg, Irene Goldenberg. (2013). *Family Therapy: An Overview*. Belmont, California: Cengage Learning.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Kislev, N., & Saguy, T. (2025). The Gendered Toy Choice (GTC): Validating a behavioral measure of gendered parenting . *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1601339.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Labibah, K. N. (2024). Parenting through social media: The information experience of young mothers in East Jakarta. *Kawistara*, 233–248.
- Lansford, J. E. (2025). Theories of parenting and child development in different cultural contexts. *Theory and Society*, 851–865.
- Martínez, P. D. (2020). *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education*. New York: NYU Metro Center.
- Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, M. W. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mengis, M. J. (2004). The Concept of Information Overload: A Review of Literature and a Framework for Research. *The Information Society*, 325–344.
- Miles, H. &. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Mughakali, A. &. (2025). *Traditional vs Modern Approaches to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*. Nagaland, India: St. Joseph University.
- Mwamfupe, R. J. (2025). Examination of Parenting Then and Now: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and . *Global Scientific Journal*, 1726-1738.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion. *Journal of Communication*, 43–51.
- Patil, D., Gautam, G., & Jahagirdar, D. (2025). Parenting Style and Child Development: A Cross-Cultural Perspective. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, DOI: 10.25215/1303.213.
- Pinquart, M. (2017). Associations of Parenting Dimensions and Styles with Internalizing Symptoms in Children and Adolescents: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 802–817.

- Postmes, T., & Branscombe, N. R. (2022). Revisiting social identity theory in the age of social media. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10.1016/j.copsy.2022.101310.
- Ria Novianti, S. N. (2023). Parenting in Cultural Perspective: A Systematic Review of Paternal Role Across Cultures. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 22–44.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosa, E. M., & Tudge, J. R. H. (2013). Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development: Its evolution from ecology to bioecology. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 243–258.
- Sara Harknes, Charles M. Super. (2002). *Culture and Parenting*. Mahwah, New Jersey & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Syed, A. A. (2025). Effectiveness and cultural adaptation of parenting interventions for South Asian families: A mixed-methods systematic review using Bernal's ecological validity model. *Children Journal*.
- Trisetiawati, J. F. (2025). The Local Wisdom of Madura in Ethnoparenting for Shaping Early Childhood Emotions. *Nak-Kanak Journal of Child Research*, 1-9.
- Tristiyanto, E. Z. (2025). *Cultural adaptation in parenting counseling programs: Exploring best practices for multicultural families in rural communities*. Brebes: STAI Brebes.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Weiner, B. (1985). An Attributional Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion. *Psychological Review*, 548–573.
- World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank. (2018). *Nurturing care for early childhood development: A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Zhou, Q. C. (2022). Parenting from a cultural and global perspective: A review of theoretical models and parenting research in diverse cultural contexts. In A. S. Morris, *The Cambridge Handbook of Parenting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

