Cakrawala Dini:
Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini
Journal homepage: https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/cakrawaladini

Parents' Perceptions of Democratic Parenting as a Support for Early Childhood Cognitive Development

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ABSTRACT

Parental perceptions of parenting practices at home are associated with early childhood cognitive development. This study aimed to examine the relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting practices at home and early childhood cognitive development. A quantitative approach using a correlational method was employed, involving 30 parents of children at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency. Data were collected using a questionnaire that had undergone validity and reliability testing. The results showed that parents perceived the parenting practices implemented at home as reflecting democratic parenting. Parents' perceptions of democratic parenting were categorized as very strong, with a mean score of 3.41, with affection and warmth emerging as the most dominant aspect. Meanwhile, early childhood cognitive development was also categorized as very strong, with a mean score of 3.18, with logical thinking and problem-solving abilities emerging as the most prominent aspects. The relationship between the two variables was strong and positive, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.775 and a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that more positive parental perceptions of democratic parenting practices are associated with better early childhood cognitive development. Democratic parenting practices characterized by affection and warmth, open communication, and opportunities for children to develop within appropriate boundaries may therefore serve as supportive practices for children's cognitive development.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Submitted/Received 20 Jun 2026
First Revised 10 Aug 2026
Accepted 30 Oct 2026
First Available online 19 Nov 2026
Publication Date 01 Nov 2026

Keyword:
Cognitive development,
Democratic parenting style,
Early childhood,
Parenting style.

1. INTRODUCTION

Young children are in a "golden age," a critical period characterized by rapid brain development that requires appropriate stimulation from their immediate environment, particularly the family (Aini et al., 2024). One of the essential aspects of early childhood development is cognitive development, which refers to children's ability to think, understand, remember, process information, and solve problems (Rahmi & Murni, 2023). Cognitive development is a crucial aspect, as it relates to a child's ability to receive and process information, make simple decisions, and adapt to their surrounding environment. According to Anggriawan et al., (2024) cognitive development significantly impacts aspects of language development. Children find it easier to understand and use language in complex ways as their cognitive abilities improve. A child's intellectual capacity, memory, and reasoning skills form the foundation for understanding word meanings, constructing sentences, and communicating with their surroundings. Cognitive development also enables children to grasp concepts regarding objects or events before using language to express them. Conversely, well-developed language skills support children in processing information and solving simple problems (Rahma & Padilah, 2025).

Cognitive development also contributes to children's socio-emotional development, particularly in their ability to understand situations, regulate emotions, and respond appropriately to social interactions. Children with well-developed reasoning skills are generally better able to understand cause-and-effect relationships and find appropriate solutions when faced with problems or conflicts (Rusdiana et al., 2025). Optimal cognitive development further enables children to understand basic concepts and prepares them to face subsequent levels of education. Therefore, early childhood cognitive development requires serious attention from the child's immediate environment, particularly the family, which serves as the child's first educational environment (Kristina & Sari, 2021).

The family is the first environment in which children gain early experiences that shape their ways of thinking and behaving (Lubis, 2023). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, the family is part of the microsystem, which has a direct influence on children's development (Ibda, 2022). One way in which families support children's development is through the implementation of appropriate parenting practices (Ariani & Amelia, 2023). Parenting refers to the ways in which parents educate, guide, and direct their children throughout their developmental process (Nuraeni & Lubis, 2022). Positive parenting practices can help children develop their thinking abilities, social interactions, and capacity to adapt to their environment (Fadhil et al., 2024). One parenting style considered effective in supporting children's development is democratic parenting, which is characterized by open communication between parents and children, freedom accompanied by supervision, and warm and harmonious relationships (Sinansari & Hasibuan, 2021). Democratic parenting provides children with opportunities to express their opinions and participate in problem-solving, thereby encouraging them to develop independent and logical thinking skills. Thus, democratic parenting is considered to play an important role in supporting early childhood cognitive development.

Several previous studies have demonstrated an association between parenting practices and early childhood development. Katimenta et al., (2023) found a significant relationship between parenting practices and early childhood cognitive development. Similarly, Lestari

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

(2026) reported a significant positive relationship between democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development. Fadhil et al., (2024) also found a significant relationship between democratic parenting and the critical thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years. Furthermore, Katimenta et al., (2023) reported that children raised through democratic parenting generally demonstrated more optimal cognitive development compared with those raised under other parenting styles. In addition, Hayati et al., (2025) emphasized that democratic parenting can enhance children's creativity and analytical abilities. These findings collectively strengthen the view that democratic parenting is associated with optimal cognitive development in early childhood.

However, previous studies have been limited in examining democratic parenting as a supportive factor in early childhood cognitive development from the perspective of parents' perceptions. Most previous studies have focused on parenting practices in general or have assessed children's development directly through observation and developmental tests (Katimenta et al., 2023). In addition, studies specifically examining parents' perceptions of democratic parenting as a supportive factor in early childhood cognitive development within a single educational institution remain limited. Therefore, a research gap remains that warrants further investigation.

A study conducted at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, found that, based on parents' perceptions, the parenting practices implemented at home tended to reflect democratic parenting. Parents perceived themselves as actively involved in accompanying their children, establishing open communication, listening to their children's opinions, and providing freedom within appropriate supervision. These practices are consistent with the characteristics of democratic parenting, which emphasizes open communication, warmth, and opportunities for children to express their opinions (Gusita et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, children's cognitive development showed some variation. Some children demonstrated well-developed cognitive abilities, such as the ability to classify objects based on specific categories and solve simple problems. The abilities to classify objects, think logically, and solve problems are important components of early childhood cognitive development that require stimulation appropriate to children's developmental stages (Hapsari, 2020). In contrast, some children continued to experience difficulties in classifying objects and demonstrated less-developed logical thinking skills, even though their parents perceived the parenting practices implemented at home as relatively similar.

Based on these circumstances, this study aims to examine parents' democratic parenting practices, early childhood cognitive development, and the relationship between democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development based on parents' perceptions in Group B at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency. This study is important because it is expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the relationship between democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development from the perspective of parents' perceptions, while also contributing to parents and educators in supporting children's optimal development.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to examine the relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting and early

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

childhood cognitive development. A correlational method was used to analyze the relationship between the variables through numerical data and statistical hypothesis testing (Mweshi & Muhyila, 2024). This study was conducted at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, Indonesia. A total sampling technique was employed, meaning the entire population served as the study sample. The sample consisted of 30 parents, comprising 22 mothers (73.3%) and 8 fathers (26.7%). In terms of age, the majority of respondents fell within the 31–40 age range (53.3%). Regarding educational background, most respondents were graduates of senior high school or vocational high school (66.7%), while the largest proportion of respondents were homemakers (46.7%). Further details concerning the characteristics of the respondents including age, educational background, and occupation—are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics by age, educational level, and occupation

Category	Frequency	Total (N)
Mother	22 (73,3%)	
Father	8 (26,7%)	30
Parent's Age		
20–30 years	10 (33,3%)	
31–40 years	16 (53,3%)	30
41–50 years	4 (13,3%)	
Parental Education		
Junior High School	1 (3,3%)	
Senior High School/Vocational High School	20 (66,7%)	30
Diploma (D3)	4 (13,3%)	
Bachelor's Degree (S1)	5 (16,7%)	
Parents' job		
Housewife	14 (46,7%)	
Self-employed	6 (20%)	30
Merchant/Trader	3 (10%)	
Private Sector Employee	3 (10%)	
Teacher	2 (6,7%)	
Other	2 (6,7%)	

Data were collected using questionnaires designed to measure two research variables: parental perceptions of democratic parenting (Variable X) and the cognitive development of young children (Variable Y). The questionnaire for Variable X consists of 29 valid items covering indicators such as open communication, affection and warmth, granting autonomy with supervision, and parental guidance. Meanwhile, the questionnaire for Variable Y comprises 20 items measuring logical thinking, problem-solving skills, and symbolic thinking. Both instruments utilize a four-point Likert scale with the following response options: Never, Rarely, Often, and Always.

Data on cognitive development were obtained based on parental perceptions of their children's development, rather than through direct assessment of the children themselves. The questionnaires were distributed directly to the respondents as printed forms to be completed independently by the parents. Participants were given one week to complete the questionnaires, after which they were collected by the established deadline. Prior to data collection, both instruments underwent validity and reliability testing. The validity test results

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p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

showed item validity coefficients ranging from 0.407 to 0.834. The reliability coefficients were 0.929 for the democratic parenting variable and 0.933 for the cognitive development variable, indicating a very high level of internal consistency for the instruments.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 29 through several statistical procedures. First, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the distribution of each research variable. Second, a normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method was conducted to determine the data distribution; the results yielded a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the data are normally distributed. Furthermore, the linearity test yielded a significance value of 0.690 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the relationship between the two variables is linear. Third, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test was employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between parental perceptions of democratic parenting styles and the cognitive development of early childhood children. The results show a correlation coefficient of 0.775 with a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Hypothesis testing was also conducted using a t-test, which resulted in a t-value of 6.494 exceeding the critical t-table value of 2.048. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.601 indicates that the relationship between the two variables accounts for a 60.1% contribution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the normality test showed a significance value of 0.200 > 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Furthermore, the linearity test yielded a significance value of 0.690 > 0.05, indicating that the relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting as a supportive factor in early childhood cognitive development was linear.

Parents perceive their parenting practices as tending to reflect a democratic parenting style. This is evidenced by the overall average score across various indicators of democratic parenting, which reached 3.41 a figure categorized as "very strong." Based on parents' perceptions of their own practices, the aspects of affection and warmth received the highest average scores compared to other dimensions. These findings indicate that parents view attentiveness, emotional closeness, and warm communication as crucial components of parenting practices that foster child development within the family environment, as shown in the partial analysis results presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Partial analysis of democratic parenting aspects

No	Indicator	N	Mean	Description
1	Affection and Warmth		3,49	Very Strong
2	Two-Way Communication		3,41	Very Strong
3	Controlled Freedom	30	3,38	Very Strong
4	Parental Guidance		3,37	Very Strong
Total			**3,41**	**Very Strong**

Early childhood cognitive development was categorized as very strong, with an overall mean score of 3.18. Based on parents' perceptions, logical thinking and problem-solving abilities were the most dominant aspects, each with a mean score of 3.19. This finding

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

indicates that, according to parents' perceptions, children were able to understand cause-and-effect relationships, apply simple reasoning, and solve problems in accordance with their developmental stage. Meanwhile, symbolic thinking ability was also categorized as very strong, indicating that children were perceived to be capable of recognizing symbols, numbers, and simple representations in their daily activities. The results of the partial analysis are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Partial analysis of early childhood cognitive development indicators

No	Indicator	N	Mean	Description
1	Logical Thinking Ability	30	3,19	Very Strong
2	Problem-Solving Ability		3,19	Very Strong
3	Symbolic Thinking Ability		3,17	Very Strong
Total			**3,18**	**Very Strong**

The analysis yielded a significance value of 0.001 < 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.775 indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables. This finding suggests that more positive parental perceptions of the parenting practices implemented at home are associated with better cognitive development in early childhood, based on parents' perceptions. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Correlation test

Correlations			
		X	Y
X	Pearson Correlation	1	**.775****
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**<,001**
	N	30	30
Y	Pearson Correlation	**.775****	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**<,001**	
	N	30	30
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The regression coefficient test showed that democratic parenting obtained a t-value of 6.494, while the critical t-value at a 5% significance level with 28 degrees of freedom was 2.048. Since the calculated t-value was greater than the critical t-value, H_o was rejected and H_a was accepted. These results indicate a positive relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development in Group B at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency. The results of the test are presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Regression coefficient

Coefficients[a]					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.131	9.673		.117	.908
X	.634	.098	.775	**6.494**	<,001

The analysis showed a correlation coefficient (*R*) of 0.775, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the *R Square* value of 0.601 indicates that

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

democratic parenting, based on parents' perceptions, accounted for 60.1% of the variance in early childhood cognitive development, while the remaining 39.9% was attributable to other factors outside the variables examined in this study. The results of the coefficient of determination test are presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Coefficient of determination test

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.775[a]	**.601**	.587	2.798

a. Predictors: (Constant), X

b. Dependent Variable: Y

The findings showed that most parents implemented democratic parenting through warm relationships with their children, open communication, freedom accompanied by parental supervision, and clear and consistent guidance. These findings are consistent with the core concept of Baumrind's parenting theory, which states that democratic parenting is characterized by a balance between responsiveness and demandingness, namely parents' warmth and responsiveness accompanied by clear rules and guidance (Zahra & Harahap 2023). Democratic parenting provides children with opportunities to express their opinions, explore their environment, and learn to make decisions within appropriate boundaries. This finding is also consistent with Sari et al., (2020) who stated that democratic parenting is characterized by warm relationships between parents and children and the provision of freedom under parental supervision. Through such parenting practices, children are given opportunities to develop their thinking abilities and understand various learning experiences gained from their surrounding environment. This finding is further supported by Wilda et al., (2023) who found that democratic parenting is widely practiced by parents in raising their children.

The warmth and affection demonstrated by parents throughout the parenting process play an important role in supporting children's growth and development. Positive emotional relationships established through attention, physical affection, and warm interactions can foster a sense of security and comfort (secure attachment) in children within the family environment (Annisa, 2022). Warm interactions between parents and children may also increase oxytocin levels, which are associated with feelings of security, emotional closeness, and children's self-confidence, while helping reduce cortisol levels associated with stress (Tarsha & Narvaez, 2023). Positive emotional conditions can further support brain functions involved in memory, comprehension, and concentration (Dwistia et al., 2024). In addition, two-way communication between parents and children can help develop language skills, confidence in expressing opinions, and logical thinking abilities through question-and-answer interactions and discussions with parents. Providing freedom within appropriate supervision, accompanied by clear and consistent parental guidance, is also important for fostering independence, responsibility, simple decision-making skills, understanding of rules, and self-regulation from an early age (Ganiadi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the early childhood cognitive development of children in Group B at RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, was also categorized as very strong, with a mean score of 3.18. This finding is consistent with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that children aged 5–6 years are in the preoperational stage, during which they begin to use symbols, develop imagination, understand simple cause-and-effect relationships, and demonstrate emerging logical thinking (Zega & Suprihati, 2021). This finding is also in line with

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

Irawan et al., (2025) who emphasized that critical thinking is an important aspect of the development of thinking abilities in early childhood. At this stage, children require an environment rich in stimulation, effective communication, freedom within appropriate boundaries, and stable emotional support. Kadir et al., (2024) stated that early childhood cognitive development is essential because it serves as a fundamental basis for children's thinking abilities, problem-solving skills, and lifelong learning. Children with well-developed cognitive abilities tend to adapt more easily to their surroundings and demonstrate greater capacity to cope with problems and challenges encountered in everyday life.

In line with this, Khoidah et al., (2024) stated that children with optimal cognitive development tend to be better able to understand others' perspectives, regulate their emotions, and interact positively with peers. These abilities support children in developing greater empathy and adapting more easily to their social environment. Furthermore, Yulianti et al., (2022) emphasized that strong cognitive development provides an important foundation for children's academic achievement. Children who possess critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and are able to understand new concepts tend to demonstrate greater success in learning and achieve better academic outcomes.

Cognitive development is also related to the patterns of interaction and guidance provided by parents in children's daily lives. The use of symbols, signs, and simple instructions during the parenting process can help children understand meaning, recognize relationships between objects, and develop symbolic thinking abilities. This process plays an important role in the development of children's thinking abilities, particularly in understanding abstract concepts through concrete experiences. From Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, parental interactions involving guidance through symbols, language, and simple instructions serve as scaffolding, namely gradual support that helps children develop an understanding of their surrounding environment (Kurniati, 2025). Parents point to an object while naming it or teach simple gestures, children not only learn to recognize symbols but also learn to connect language and meaning through everyday experiences. This process gradually supports the development of symbolic thinking, conceptual understanding, and information-processing abilities in early childhood (Lo & Wang, 2024).

The findings also showed a positive and significant relationship between democratic parenting and early childhood cognitive development based on parents' perceptions, with a correlation coefficient of 0.775 and a significance value of $0.001 < 0.05$. The hypothesis test yielded a calculated t-value of $6.494 >$ the critical t-value of 2.048, indicating that the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

This finding is consistent with Baumrind's concept, which suggests that democratic parenting characterized by parental attention and warmth, controlled freedom, open communication, and parental guidance is associated with the development of children's cognitive abilities, including logical thinking, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, appropriate decision-making, and independent problem-solving (Sukaisih, 2023).

This finding is consistent with Akbar & Fauziah (2025) who reported that children raised through democratic parenting tended to demonstrate more optimal cognitive development due to a warm and supportive parenting environment that provides opportunities for children to explore their thinking abilities. Parenting practices that allow children to ask questions, express opinions, and make choices can provide meaningful stimulation for their intellectual development. In addition, Sumirat et al., (2025) found a positive correlation between democratic parenting and children's cognitive development, indicating that higher-quality democratic parenting practices are associated with better thinking abilities as demonstrated in children's daily activities.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination of 60.1% indicates that democratic parenting, based on parents' perceptions, accounted for 60.1% of the variance in early childhood cognitive development, while the remaining 39.9% was associated with other factors beyond the variables examined in this study. This finding is also supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, which emphasizes that children's development is shaped by their immediate environments, including the family and school (Ibda, 2022). Therefore, the implementation of democratic parenting within the family, accompanied by appropriate learning stimulation in the school environment, may be associated with more optimal cognitive development in early childhood.

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that, based on parents' perceptions, democratic parenting has a strong relationship with early childhood cognitive development. Consistent implementation of democratic parenting through open communication, responsible freedom, and clear guidance may support children in developing their thinking abilities optimally.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, parents' perceptions of democratic parenting at the group B level of RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, are categorized as very strong, with an average score of 3.41; meanwhile, the cognitive development of the young children is also categorized as very strong, with an average score of 3.18. The analysis reveals a positive and significant relationship between parents' perceptions of democratic parenting and the children's cognitive development, with a correlation coefficient of 0.775 and a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.601 indicates that 60.1% of the variance in cognitive development scores can be statistically explained by the model linking parents' perceptions of democratic parenting to the children's cognitive development, while the remaining 39.9% represents variance not accounted for by the model. Thus, a more positive perception of democratic parenting is associated with higher cognitive development scores, as assessed by the parents. Consequently, parents are encouraged to continue implementing democratic parenting in their daily interactions by fostering open communication, granting freedom balanced with appropriate guidance, and providing consistent support to stimulate their children's cognitive development.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted at only one educational institution, involving a relatively small sample of 30 parents, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, data on children's cognitive development were obtained solely from parents' perceptions rather than direct assessments of the children. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger sample from multiple educational institutions and combine parental questionnaires with direct observations or assessments of children's cognitive development to obtain more comprehensive findings.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung for providing academic support and the opportunity to complete this research. The author also extends sincere appreciation to RA Al-Falah Pangalengan, Bandung Regency, for granting permission and providing support throughout the research process. Special thanks are extended to all parents who participated as respondents and contributed their time and information to this study. The author would also like to thank the academic

supervisors and all parties who provided guidance, assistance, and support throughout the completion of this research.

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17509/cd.v17i2.102568
p- ISSN 2087-1317 e- ISSN 2621-8321