

## **Can The Inconsistency of Rules Between Parents and School Create Children's Behavioral Problems? A Case Study of an Indonesian Kindergarten School**

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***Abstract:** Smart School (pseudonym), a kindergarten in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is established based on an ideology in which students are stimulated not only to be successful in their academic achievements but also to develop positive behavior. However, some parents report still encountering problems related to their children's behavior at home. This case study research explores the reasons for behavior problems that happen to children to find a possible solution. The data was collected through observation and interviews. Findings showed that inconsistent rules resulting from the permissive parenting style implemented by parents can be the reason for children's behavior problems. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should communicate with parents to find information on whether the progress of their children's behavior at school can also be observed at home. Collaboration between the school and parents is also needed, particularly in the consistency of rules between the school and the children's home to encourage positive behavior development and reduce children's behavioral problems.*

***Keywords:** behavior problems; children; inconsistent rules; parenting style*

## INTRODUCTION

Smart School (pseudonym) is a private early childhood education school in Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia. It has been running kindergarten classes for children aged 4-6 years old since the year 2000. Smart School is established based on an ideology in which students are stimulated to succeed in their academic achievements and develop their positive behavior. The school believes that behavior significantly contributes to children's academic achievement. Therefore, teachers work collaboratively to develop positive behavior in children and to reduce their behavior problems. Gradually, the fruits of the efforts are beginning to be seen. Children can show their positive behavior at school. For instance, they can share toys with their friends, wait for their turn when playing together with others, and show independence in doing their toilet training. However, from the conversations with parents, the school realizes that there is a problem. The parents report that their children show some behavior completely different from what they have shown at school.

This article attempts to explore the possible reasons for behavior problems happening to children. The focus of this article will be the reasons for problem behavior in Smart School, and it is emphasized on kindergarten children aged 4-6 years old. This article will first discuss some literature related to the topic. Then, it will be followed by a discussion of some research conducted by scholars related to the reason for children's behavior problems in early childhood education. Then, as the main discussion of this essay, the type of parenting style will be explored to find the contribution of inconsistent rules between parents and school to children's behavior problems in Smart School.

It should be taken into account that it is common for all young children to exhibit behavior problems, such as aggression, disobedience, tantrums, hitting, yelling, and anger outbursts. For example, children who cry, kick their teachers, and show a tantrum when they must be separated from their parents on the first day they learn in kindergarten or when they hit and are angry with their friends and their siblings because they take their toys. These problems, which usually occur in a short period, can be managed by adults easily, and they do not cause negative effects on children, their peers, or adults. However, behavior problems discussed in this essay are related to some children who may exhibit challenging behavior that can be a risk or lead to a negative impact on themselves and others. These children rely on their behavioral problems to obtain what they desire or respond to by their parents or teachers. Therefore, what is the meaning of behavior problems?

Some scholars provide different interpretations of the notion of behavior problems. For instance, Powell et al., (2007) have defined problem behavior as “any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults” (p. 83). Zarkowska and Clement as cited in Ural and Kanhkihcer (2010) argue that problematic behavior is defined as “the behavior which prevent the individual from learning a new skill, causing him or her to become lonely, harming himself or herself and others, maladaptive to the social norms of the individual's society” (p. 52). Other scholars Kaiser and Rasminsky (2007) interpret challenging behavior as “any behavior that interferes with children's learning, development, and success at play, harmful to the child, other children, or adults and puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school” (p. 9).

Despite the differences in the way of interpreting behavior problems mentioned by some scholars above, the researchers argue that they share some similarities. Behavior problems result in negative influences on children as well as on others. For children, behavior problems can be an obstacle for them to socialize with others and to make progress in their learning. For others who interact with the children, behavior problems of children also lead to an unexpected effect, or it can put others in danger. For example, children who like throwing an object or pushing their friends when angry may hurt their friends.

Nevertheless, in relation to the context of this study and based on the story at the beginning of this essay, another definition can be used to define behavior problems. Children's behavior

problems may also be defined as a gap or mismatch between the behavior expected by adults, such as teachers and parents and the behavior that is exhibited by children. For example, parents or teachers expect their children to be able to ask properly when they want something. However, their children yell or even cry to obtain their willingness instead of asking properly as expected. This gap creates a problem for parents and teachers.

Early childhood education is a critical stage where children are taught how to behave accordingly (Goldstein & Boxer, 2013). Therefore, young children who demonstrate behavior problems can be a challenge for their teachers, peers and others that have relations with the children. As a result, understanding the reason for behavior problems in early childhood education or in a kindergarten is considered as necessary. First, it is aimed to find the possible solution and to prevent the problem becoming permanent and insolvable. Lulla et al., (2019) explain that behavior problems are very common in children because this is the way they adjust to the new environment. However, Lulla et al., (2019) argue that the problems should be addressed appropriately before the behavior problems “persist into adolescence and adulthood” (p.170).

Second, behavior problems of children can be stressful for parents. Third, for children, behavior problems can be an obstacle for them to achieve their success at school and optimize their potential (Domina, 2005). This argument has similarity with the belief possessed by Smart School that children’s behavior affects their academic achievement. Therefore, it can be inferred that children with behavior problems will make slow progress in their academic achievement. On the other hand, children with less behavior problems will make good progress in terms of their academic achievement.

In relation to the context of the school, although the problem behavior of children occurs at home, it possibly influences their behavior at school. This argument is also supported by (Snyder et al., 2005) who mention that behavior problems of children at home can be “carried over to school” (p. 39). As a result, children’s progress in their behavior at school is not significant. Children with behavioral problems also create an undesirable condition for teachers and other children. The teacher should spend extra time dealing with their behavioral problems. Hence, the teacher’s attention to other children in the class might be diminished.

In relation to peers, children with behavioral problems have the potential to be imitated by other children. For example, children who like to push their friends to get their first turn to play, may provoke their friends to push them back. Children with behavioral problems might also be rejected by their peers since they are afraid that the children may hurt them. Therefore, behavioral problems of children may risk them to be socially isolated. Last, children’s behavior problems might influence the level of parents’ trust to the school or teachers since parents are not able to observe the progress of their children, particularly in their behavior at home.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The method of this study is qualitative research with a case study approach. Research participant, in this case, Smart School was selected using a purposive technique. Through purposive technique, the researcher chose research participant and research location based on the purpose of the study to understand the main problem to be studied as suggested by Herdiansyah (2012) as cited in Ananda & Kristiana (2017). The data was collected using interviews and observations.

The next step was analyzing the data. Three stages analysis proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994) was used to analyze the data. The three stages were data reduction, data display, and conclusion. In the first stage, in data reduction stage, the researchers tried to summarize the data gained from the interviews. From that, code was created based on the research questions. This process was done back and forth (Miles & Huberman (1994). The second stage was called the presentation of data or data display. The researchers started to compile and present the information from the first stage. Last, the third stage is conclusion drawing or verification.

The process of drawing conclusions at this stage was not rigid. It could change after analyzing

the data in more detail. In drawing conclusions, the researchers also verified it by re-reading the interview transcripts of participants and re-reading the references related to the topic, and the findings from this research. Rijali (2019) explains that there are several ways to verify research results including re-reading written research results, reviewing field notes again, discussing with colleagues to seek mutual agreement regarding conclusions, and looking for additional literatures related to topics that can enrich the conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It has become a tradition in Smart School that teachers report the progress of their children orally when parents pick up their children. During this time, teachers discuss the children's progress in their academic performance and in their behavior. Teachers reported that their children could eat their meal and did toilet training by themselves. When playing with their friends, their children also could share the toys and wait for their turn.

Bierman and Furman as cited in Yoleri (2013) believe that children with behavior in early childhood have a higher potential to continue their behavioral problem in their later age development. Considering this reason, some studies are conducted to investigate the reasons of behavior problems in early childhood education or in kindergarten to find the possible solution and to suggest early intervention. Yoleri (2013) investigates the reason of behavior problem of Turkey children in preschool. His findings show that children's problem behavior in early childhood education happens because of lack of adjustment in a new environment, in this case, schools. Perhaps his findings are influenced by a consideration that early childhood education is the first formal education stage where children interact with the school. Yoleri (2013) argues that children who adapt well in the new environment tend to show minimum behavior problems. On the other hand, children who show lower adjustment toward their new school have a high potential to demonstrate behavior problems. While, Sutherland et al., (2010) believe that behavior problems of children are determined by their interaction with a teacher. Positive child-teacher relationship will reduce children's behavior problems. In contrast, negative child-teacher relationship will increase behavioral problem of children (Sutherland et al., 2010).

Despite the similarity in term of the setting of the study which is in preschool or kindergarten and the age range of the children, the argument mentioned by those researchers above cannot be applied as the reason of children problem behavior in the context of this article for some reasons. When the reason of behavior problems is caused by the lack of adjustment, it means the behavior problems possibly only appears in the school not at home. While, in this research the situation is on the contrary. Children exhibit problems in their behavior at home while at school they do not show behavioral problems.

El Nokali et al., (2010) explain that consistent disciplines between parents and school contribute to children positive behavior outcomes. Consistency of rules is considered important in developing children's positive behavior and social skills. Therefore, based on those statements, I argue that inconsistent rules or disciplines between parents and school are possibly the reason of children's problem behavior that happens in my school. The factor of parenting style can be the evidence to support the findings.

## **PARENTING STYLES**

Based on the interview and observation to parents in Smart School, parents tend to help their children in doing their needs, for example when their children eat, they still feed the children. Another example was at home parents helped their children to clean after their children went to the toilet. Their reason for helping is because they think their children are still too young to do that by themselves. Another reason is because they doubt that their children can clean themselves well.

Kaiser and Rasminsky (2007) argue that "inappropriate parenting practices continue to increase the risk of challenging behavior as children grow older" (p. 33). It can be inferred that

parenting style can be a factor that influences children's behavior problems. This argument is in line with Sumargi et al., (2015) who believe that there is a significant relation between parenting style and children behavior problems.

According to Baumrind (1991) there are four types of parenting styles, namely: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and rejecting-neglecting. Each parenting style share differences in terms of discipline, demands and expectation to children's behavior and how they respond to their children's needs. The first type is authoritative parenting style. Authoritative parents provide equal balance between demands and responds to the children's needs. They are responsive regarding their children's needs, but they also communicate what they expect from children related to their behavior. Authoritative parents are disciplined but not strict. They do not employ punishment to teach discipline to their children. The second type is authoritarian parenting style. This type of parenting style has similarity with authoritative parents. Both are demanding. However, unlike authoritative parents that are responsive to their children's needs, authoritarian parents tend to be directive. They are strictly disciplined. They demand their children obey their rules without providing opportunity to discuss or compromise the rules with children. They control and strictly supervise the activities of their children. The third type is permissive parenting style. Permissive parents are more responsive toward the needs of their children, but they require a few demands to their children's behavior. In terms of discipline, they are extremely flexible since permissive parents prefer to avoid confrontation with their children. The last type is rejecting-neglecting or disengaged parenting style. Parents that belong to this style neither show demand nor respond to their children's needs. They tend to ignore and show a lack of responsibility toward their children. Based on Baumrind's four parenting styles, the parenting style adapted by parents who participated in this study is permissive parenting style. They tend to be responsive to their children's needs and less demanding in terms of rules.

At school the rules are usually applied firmly for all children. For example: at school children are trained to eat or to do toilet training by themselves while at home considering permissive as the type children's parenting style, parents may think that their children still need their assistance in doing those activities. This condition may lead to inconsistent rules or discipline between parents and school and cause problem behavior to children. Children can be independent at school while at home they will be dependent to their parents. My argument is emphasized by Hakim et al., (2012). They mention that Javanese mothers are protective toward their children. Frequently Javanese children "feel overprotected" (Hakim et al., 2012, p. 12).

Another example is at school children are taught to take turn or to share when they have the same willingness with their friends in the same toys. Although children use some strategies such as yelling, crying, or tantrum in order to get what they want, those strategies might not work successfully since the teacher will be consistent to apply the school's rules, such as the rule about sharing and taking turn. While at home, children can use those strategies in order to obtain what they want from their parents as explained above by Baumrind (1991) that permissive parents prefer to avoid confrontation with their children. It means parents may provide what their children want in order to make their children stop their crying, yelling or tantrums. As a result, children may use the same strategies to obtain their willingness next time. It may lead problem behavior of children when this condition occurs in longer time.

Inconsistent rules or discipline between school and parents can cause children problem behavior. Consequently, children may be able to develop their positive behavior at school. While at home, parents may not observe the children progress in their behavior since they still encounter some problem in relation with the behavior of their children.

A study conducted by Cheatham & Santos (2005) argue that children problem behavior in one setting, such as different behavior showed by children between at home and at school is caused by different expectation between the school and parents. However, this argument is questioning and may not be applicable to the context of this study. Cheatham and Santos (2005) conducted their study with immigrant parents in the U.S. school. Hence, the culture of parents in their study is different from the culture of the U.S. school since they are immigrants. While in the context of this essay, the culture of the school is similar with the culture of parents. The other

reason is their findings mentioned that different expectations are the cause of behavioral problems happening to children. If these findings applied in this study, it means that parents in my school do not expect their children to be able to take turns, share, or eat by themselves as expected by the school.

I argue that parents in my school also share the same expectation with the school in the study conducted by Cheatham & Santos (2005). They expect their children to be able to take turns, share, eat or do toilet training by themselves otherwise they will not complain about the problem behavior of their children as mentioned in the story at the beginning of this essay. Therefore, considering the type of parenting style of Javanese parents, I argue that inconsistency rules or discipline is the reason of problem behavior happen to children in my school instead of different expectation between the school and parents.

## CONCLUSION

Problem behavior provides a negative contribution for children as well as for others around the children. Consequently, understanding the reason of problem behavior in early childhood education is considered necessary to find the solution and to make early intervention. Children problem behavior in my school may happen because of inconsistent rules between the school and parents. It is influenced by the factor of parenting style implemented by parents, which is permissive. Therefore, teachers should be proactive to communicate with parents to find information from parents whether the progress of children in their behavior at school can also be seen at home. Collaboration between the school and parents is also needed, particularly in the consistency of rules between the school and at home to encourage the development of positive behavior and reduce children's behavioral problem. However, the journey of collaboration with parents may find a challenge since some parents still put emphasize more on the academic achievement of their children and not in their behavior although based on the research, behavior has significant relation with children academic achievement. Perhaps it is influenced by the factor that they should prepare their children to pass the academic test as requirement in some elementary schools in Indonesia. Another barrier is instead of working collaboratively, some parents still believe that the school is the most responsible element to educate children both in their academic and behavior, particularly in a private school since parents expect a good service as replacement of their payment to school.

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