

The Role of Foster Parents in Shaping Children's Social Interactions at the Bojongsoang Orphanage in Bandung

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Abstract: This study examines the role of foster parents in shaping the social interactions of children living in the Indonesian Orphanage Foundation (PYI) Bojongsoang, Bandung. The background of the study lies in the social adaptation challenges experienced by children upon entering the orphanage environment. The objectives of the study are to (1) describe the characteristics of children's social interactions in the orphanage, and (2) analyze the role of foster parents in the process of developing these social interactions. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data was collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with three foster parents and seven foster children, as well as documentation of daily orphanage activities. Data analysis followed the reduction–display–verification cycle (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña). The main findings include: (1) new children's social interactions initially tend to be passive, isolated, and influenced by habits formed prior to entering the orphanage; (2) foster parents implemented several strategies, namely (a) ritual modeling (joint religious practices), (b) habituation through daily tasks (promoting independence), and (c) providing guidance and emotional reinforcement; (3) the combination of these strategies effectively increased children's social interaction frequency, self-confidence, and cooperative skills, although the adaptation process requires time and individualized approaches. The study concludes that the role of foster parents is significant in facilitating children's social transitions within the orphanage. Practical recommendations include the development of adaptation-orientation programs, parent training for foster parents, and further research using a mixed-methods approach.

Keywords: foster parents, social interaction, child adaptation, orphanage, caregiving

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menelaah peran orang tua asuh dalam membentuk interaksi sosial anak di Asrama Yatim Panti Yatim Indonesia (PYI) Bojongsoang, Bandung. Latar belakang penelitian adalah tantangan adaptasi sosial yang dialami anak ketika memasuki lingkungan asrama. Tujuan penelitian adalah (1) mendeskripsikan karakteristik interaksi sosial anak di asrama, dan (2) menganalisis peran orang tua asuh dalam proses pembentukan interaksi sosial tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-struktural dengan tiga orang tua asuh dan observasi kepada tujuh anak asuh, serta dokumentasi kegiatan harian asrama. Analisis data mengikuti siklus reduksi–display–verifikasi (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña). Temuan utama: (1) interaksi sosial anak baru awalnya bersifat pasif, terisolasi, dan dipengaruhi oleh kebiasaan

sebelum masuk asrama; (2) orang tua asuh menerapkan strategi: (a) keteladanan ritual (pengajaran ibadah bersama), (b) pembiasaan tugas harian (kemandirian), dan (c) pemberian arahan serta penguatan emosional; (3) kombinasi strategi tersebut efektif meningkatkan frekuensi interaksi sosial anak, rasa percaya diri, dan keterampilan kerja sama, namun proses adaptasi memerlukan waktu dan pendekatan individual. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa peran orang tua asuh signifikan dalam memfasilitasi transisi sosial anak di asrama; rekomendasi praktis disarankan berupa program orientasi adaptasi, pelatihan pengasuhan bagi orang tua asuh, dan penelitian lanjutan dengan pendekatan mixed methods.

Kata Kunci: foster parents, social interaction, child adaptation, orphanage, caregiving

Introduction

Children are the most beautiful gift that Allah SWT has given to parents. Through marriage, couples not only seek sakinah or tranquility in life, but also strive to have children. Children are one of the goals of marriage, which completes happiness and gives deeper meaning to the journey of life with a partner. Allah SWT says:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

“And those who pray, ‘Our Lord! Grant unto us Wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes and give us (the grace) To lead the righteous.’ (Q.S. Al Furqan: 74)

This verse contains a prayer for offspring who will always obey Allah, so that their hearts will be at peace seeing their descendants in such a state, both in this world and in the hereafter. Every person who has children wants to care for, raise, and educate them.

Through good care and treatment from parents, children can meet their basic needs. However, there are parents or families who are unable to meet the needs and provide education for their children, so they consider placing their children in orphanages. Children who live in orphanages are not only orphans, but also those who have complete families but are financially disadvantaged (Putri & Yarni, 2023). While living in an orphanage, a child will be involved in various social interactions. Social interaction is a process in which individuals relate to one another, whether between individuals, between individuals and groups, or between groups. When two people meet, social interaction begins. They may greet each other, shake hands, talk, or even argue. All these activities are examples of social interaction (Suhada, 2017).

The role of foster parents is very important during the transition period from home to orphanage to help children adapt to their new environment. This adaptation process begins when children start living in the orphanage and involves how they socialize, behave, and interact. Some children may adapt quickly, while others may need more time to adjust and blend in with other children in the orphanage (Nurhidayah, 2023). With adaptation, it is hoped that children will be able to interact socially. From the above statement, the role of foster parents has a significant impact on the formation of children's social interactions, especially in situations that require adjustment. Foster parents not only serve as substitutes for biological parents, but also as companions who help children socialize in the boarding school environment.

Through the attention and guidance, they provide, they play a role in shaping how children interact with their peers, building self-confidence, and overcoming social challenges that may arise. With the right support, foster parents can help children adapt better and feel more comfortable in their new environment.

The transition of children from their biological families to a boarding school environment is a complex social transition that can potentially cause adaptation difficulties (Santrock, 2019). Children living in orphanages/boarding schools face changes in routine, rules, and new caregivers, all of which can affect their social interactions. At the PYI Bojongsoang Orphanage,-

initial observations indicate that some children exhibit withdrawn behavior, communication difficulties, and resistance to group routines in the early days (field documents, Feb 2024). This situation underscores the need to understand the role of foster parents in the adaptation process and the formation of social interactions

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Many studies discuss children's social development in family and school environments, but empirical studies examining the role of foster parents in the context of orphanages, especially in the early transition phase, are still limited. Previous studies have often emphasized the material well-being or formal education of foster children, while the dynamics of daily social interactions and non-deficit parenting strategies that aid adaptation have received less attention (Rohmatin, 2020; Putri, 2023). Therefore, this study fills the gap by focusing on the actual social processes and the role of parenting practices in orphanages.

The purpose of this study is to describe the social interactions of children at the PYI Bojongsoang Orphanage and to analyze the roles and strategies of foster parents in shaping children's social interactions during the adaptation period.

Social-cognitive theory asserts that children learn through observing models (Bandura, 1986). In the context of boarding schools, caregivers (foster parents) become the primary models who mediate children's norms, social skills, and emotional responses. A role can be defined as a pattern of behavior or behavioral norms expected of a person in a certain position within a social structure (Muslim, 2022). A person can be said to have a role if they have fulfilled their rights and obligations (Rohmatin, 2020).

Basically, parents are the first people in the family to guide and educate their children. However, if parents are unable to fulfill their roles and responsibilities, children have the right to receive what is rightfully theirs, either from their parents or from others such as foster parents. Foster parents are a family that is rebuilt either because the parents have died or divorced, and the family is rebuilt by substitute parents, either step-parents or foster parents, who replace the original parents (Rohmatin, 2020).

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Foster parents can be role models for orphans and strengthen children's character (Putri & Yarni, 2023). Foster parents play a very important role in children's growth and development. This includes the role of foster parents, who replace biological parents and take care of all their needs. This means providing guidance to children, establishing good communication, giving children opportunities, supervising children, motivating children, and providing direction to children (Rohmatin, 2020). Social interaction is a reciprocal process that influences individual behavior in a social context (Ningsih, 2024).

Social adaptation involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects to adjust to new norms and routines (Hurlock, 2000). Social interaction is essentially a process of adjusting to one's social environment, namely how a person should live in a group, whether in a small group or a larger community. A person's interaction with others occurs from birth and continues to develop throughout life (Efendi, et al., 2017). Social interaction is a dynamic and reciprocal social relationship between individuals or groups, and between individuals and groups. Social interaction occurs when a person performs an action that elicits a reaction from others. Social interaction can take the form of positive actions such as cooperation, but also negative actions such as competition and conflict (Pebriana, 2017).

Social interaction is a social process related to how individuals and groups interact in building social relationship systems. Social interaction can connect interactions that occur in communication and social actions, with the aim of influencing each other to achieve certain goals based on the meanings held by other people (Pebriana, 2017).

Metode

This study is a descriptive qualitative study with a phenomenological approach to capture the subjects' experiences related to the social adaptation process. The study was conducted at the PYI Bojongsoang Orphanage, Bandung Regency, from February to May 2024. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, namely three foster parents (primary caregivers) and seven foster children from preschool to high school. The selection was based on the length of stay at the orphanage (four children had been there for less than one month; three children were long-term residents) to observe differences in the adaptation phase. Data were collected through observation of the children and interviews with the foster parents. The analysis followed the model of Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014): data reduction (selection and focus), data display (summary tables and quotations), and verification (triangulation of sources and techniques). Research permission was obtained from PYI management. Parental/guardian consent and verbal consent from children (according to age) were collected. Data was anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Description of Children's Social Interaction at the PYI Orphanage

Based on interview data regarding the description of children's social interactions in the dormitory, respondents revealed difficulties in the process of children's social interactions. The

following is a description of children's social interactions at the PYI orphanage dormitory according to the foster parents at the orphanage, namely:

Early phase

According to foster parents, the quality of interaction between new arrivals and long-term residents varies depending on the characteristics of each child and the social dynamics within the dormitory environment. Children who are new to the dormitory generally exhibit awkward or uncomfortable behavior in the early stages, as they are not yet accustomed to the physical environment, routines, or the people around them. In the first few days, some children experience a difficult emotional transition due to separation from their biological families, resulting in reactions such as prolonged crying.

This is illustrated in the following statement:

"Some of the new arrivals cried from the moment they arrived at the shelter at 9 p.m. until 1 a.m. But let them cry and release all their emotions. Tomorrow, they will be back to normal.." (Interview with Abi, 28 February 2024).

The quote shows that foster parents take an empathetic approach and understand that emotional expression is a natural part of a child's adaptation process to significant life changes. By giving children space to express their emotions naturally and not rushing them to adjust, foster parents help build the sense of security that children need to adapt to their new environment.

When the emotional adaptation process goes well, children tend to be able to adjust to the social environment of the dormitory more effectively. Children who have adequate emotional regulation are usually better able to respond socially to the demands of their surroundings (Wandansari, 2019).

Progress over 2-4 weeks

Children who have just moved into the dormitory are required to adjust to various new habits, including washing and preparing their personal needs independently. This situation is illustrated in the following statement:

"For kindergarteners, Ummi still helps them wash and prepare their belongings. But God willing, in the future, once they understand, it won't be like that anymore. First, there will definitely be obstacles for children to adapt." (Interview with Abi, February 28, 2024).

In addition to the challenges of getting used to daily routines, foster parents also explained that some children who had recently entered the dormitory had previously received insufficient attention from their biological parents or families. This situation had an impact on certain behavioral patterns, such as the use of impolite language and irregular sleeping habits.

This is reflected in the following quote:

"But sometimes the children who were previously outside (new foster children), without parents (lacking parental attention), are too free. At first it was like that, their language was still rough. They also stayed up late, sleeping at 1 or 2 in the morning." (Interview with Abi, February 28, 2024).

In line with this, Fatimah (2019) states that attention and fulfillment of children's rights play an important role in supporting optimal physical growth and psychological development of children. Conversely, a lack of attention and guidance from parents in stimulating children's potential can disrupt their emotional balance and personality development.

The interaction between new children and existing residents in the dormitory shows that the dynamics are influenced by individual characteristics and the social conditions of the dormitory environment. New children generally experience awkwardness and discomfort in the early stages, mainly because they have to deal with environmental changes and separation from their biological families. During this phase, the role of foster parents becomes crucial. They show empathy and understanding of the emotional adaptation process that the child is going through, and provide the support, space, and time necessary for the child to feel safer and more comfortable in the new environment.

In this context, foster children undergo a process of social assimilation, which is a process of adjustment characterized by efforts to reduce differences between individuals and groups. Social assimilation occurs when children adapt to the norms, customs, and patterns of interaction that apply in the boarding school environment (Suhada, 2017). This process is part of an important stage that allows children to gradually blend in with the older residents and adjust to the boarding school lifestyle.

The Role of Foster Parents in Shaping Children's Social Interactions at the PYI Orphanage

The interview results provide a comprehensive picture of the role of foster parents in shaping children's social interactions in the dormitory environment, while also showing how they allocate their time and effort to create a safe, supportive, and conducive atmosphere for children's development. The role of foster parents in dormitories can be identified as follows:

Role modeling

The formation of a child's behavior basically requires a consistent process of habituation. In the early stages of life, children are not yet fully able to understand the long-term consequences or cause-and-effect relationships of an action. Therefore, the role of parents in providing concrete examples and appropriate habituation is very important. This principle also applies to the habit of worship. Parents can involve children in worship activities even if their movements or procedures are not yet perfect. This regular involvement allows children to observe their parents' worship practices in a timely manner, making it easier for them to imitate and not experience difficulties in carrying them out because they have been accustomed to them from an early age (Chomaria, 2023).

Similar practices are implemented by foster parents in dormitories, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

"When invited to pray, some asked, 'Dad, what is prayer?' They didn't know about wudu either. But now, when they hear the call to prayer, they go straight to the bathroom." (Interview with Abi, February 28, 2024).

This statement shows that foster parents guide children in performing religious practices through consistent role modeling and habit formation. They not only teach basic techniques such as how to perform wudu and pray, but also instill a disciplined attitude toward worship. Through a patient, systematic, and attentive approach, foster parents not only develop practical skills, but also foster religious attitudes and positive habits that are embedded in the children's daily lives.

Daily Habits and Tasks (Stimulus for Independence)

Stein and Book explain that independence is an individual's ability to direct and control themselves, both in thought and action, without emotional dependence on others. Meanwhile, according to Lindzey and Aronson, independent individuals tend to show initiative, strive for

achievement, have high self-confidence, rarely seek protection from others, and have a strong drive to improve themselves (Sa'diyah, 2017).

In the context of boarding school parenting, foster parents realize that children who are newly placed in this environment generally do not yet have an adequate level of independence. Therefore, foster parents strive to gradually foster children's independence through a process of consistent habituation and guidance. This is illustrated in the following statement:

"There are children who are still being prepared for their needs. However, it is the foster parents' job to educate the children to become independent. In the future, they will definitely be able to do so and understand." (Interview with Abi, February 28, 2024).

The quote shows that foster parents view independence education as a continuous process. They provide the necessary support while encouraging children to develop self-care skills, understand personal responsibilities, and face various environmental demands independently. This approach is an important foundation in preparing children to adapt, solve problems, and function more independently in the next stage of development.

Guidance and Emotional Support

According to Sari (2024), parents play a central role in instilling discipline in children, whether in terms of worship, dress, time management, or other daily behaviors. This is reflected in the following statement:

"Some children can be guided, while others cannot. However, as parents, we must be patient." (Interview with Abi, February 28, 2024).

This statement shows that although some children can respond well to directions, there are also children who have difficulty following the rules or instructions given. This condition indicates that the discipline process in the dormitory requires an individualized approach, patience, and special attention from foster parents so that children can adapt and build discipline gradually and continuously.

The role of foster parents in boarding schools is essentially similar to that of biological parents, particularly in providing religious and moral education to children. This educational process is carried out through consistent habituation. Foster parents involve children in various worship activities, even though the implementation may not be perfect in the early stages. Exposure to role models through the timely performance of worship is an important means for children to form good worship habits (Chomaria, 2023).

In addition to spiritual guidance, foster parents also strive to foster independence in children. They understand that when children first enter the dormitory, their level of independence is generally still low. Therefore, the educational process is directed at helping children develop the ability to manage and control themselves in their thoughts and actions, as well as reducing their emotional dependence on others (Sa'diyah, 2017).

In addition, foster parents also play a role in providing guidance and discipline. They help children develop discipline in various aspects of daily life, including worship, neatness in dress, time management, and various other routines necessary for shaping children's character and responsibility (Sari, 2024).

Conclusion

In the early stages, children in boarding schools often face various obstacles in social interaction, especially when they have to adjust to a new environment and daily routines that are different from their previous lives. These conditions can cause awkwardness, discomfort, and even emotional reactions such as crying all day due to separation from their biological families and the demands of following new rules imposed in the boarding school environment.

The role of foster parents in shaping children's social interactions at the PYI Orphanage is substantially similar to that of biological parents. Foster parents are not only responsible for providing education and behavioral guidance, but also for providing the emotional support necessary for children to feel safe and accepted. This commitment is realized through guidance that enables children to learn to take care of themselves, manage their time well, and resolve conflicts more independently. Through consistent and adaptive parenting patterns tailored to each child's needs, foster parents strive to create conditions that support children's social development and independence during their adaptation period in the boarding school environment.

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