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Equity in Early Childhood Education Services in a Community-Based Rural Playgroup

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ABSTRACT
Equity in Early Childhood Education (ECE) services is commonly associated with facilities, material resources, and institutional quality. Consequently, rural community-based ECE centers are often perceived as lower in quality than urban ones. However, equitable services are also shaped by the quality of social relationships within educational communities. This study examined equity implementation in a community-based rural playgroup and the role of social capital in supporting it. A qualitative case study was conducted at KB Pelita Kasih, Ngroto Village, Cepu District, Blora Regency, Indonesia. Participants were three parents and two teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and documentation, then analyzed thematically using NVivo 15. Findings show equity was reflected in equal learning opportunities, consistent school rules, and instruction tailored to each child's needs. These practices were supported by social capital, particularly trust between teachers and parents, social networks strengthening family participation, and close teacher–child relationships. Such social capital fostered open communication, deepened teachers' understanding of children's needs, and enabled responsive services regardless of family background. The study concludes that equity is shaped not only by material resources but also by social capital connecting schools, families, and communities; strengthening it is key to inclusive rural ECE.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is widely recognized as a formative period for learning and development. Evidence from economics and neuroscience indicates that experiences in the early years shape later cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as health and productivity (Knudsen et al., 2006). Structural neuroimaging shows that the brain reaches roughly 80% of its adult weight by about two years of age and approximately 90% of adult size by age five (Lenroot & Giedd, 2006). These figures describe brain growth in size, not the overall maturation of brain function, which continues to be refined through childhood and adolescence; they are cited only to illustrate why the early years attract sustained policy attention. In Indonesia, this attention is reflected in the 13-year compulsory education programme (Wajib Belajar 13 Tahun), which adds one year of pre-school education for children aged five to six to nine years of basic and three years of secondary education (Antara News, 2026; Peraturan Presiden No. 12 Tahun 2025, 2025). Because this policy targets the pre-school year, it provides the broader policy context rather than a direct regulation of playgroups (Kelompok Bermain, KB). In the Indonesian education system, KB is classified as a non-formal early childhood education (ECE) service, distinct from formal ECE institutions such as kindergartens (Taman Kanak-Kanak, TK) and Islamic kindergartens (Raudhatul Athfal, RA). KB generally serves children before they enter kindergarten or primary school. ECE should not be understood merely as an initial stage of formal learning but also as an essential component of children's developmental environments (Makeleni & Ndu, 2025). In this regard, the quality of ECE services depends not only on the educational activities provided but also on the extent to which institutions ensure that every child has meaningful opportunities to participate, learn, and develop.

The importance of ECE is closely connected to the environments in which children grow and interact. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes that children's development is shaped by interconnected environmental systems, including families, educational institutions, and communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Within this perspective, ECE institutions function as important settings in which interactions among teachers, children, parents, and the surrounding community influence children's everyday learning experiences (Avari et al., 2026). In Indonesia, ECE services are delivered through various formal and non-formal institutions, including Kelompok Bermain (playgroups), which provide educational opportunities for young children before entering primary education. As ECE services continue to develop in different geographical and socioeconomic contexts, attention to educational equity becomes increasingly important. Although institutional facilities, financial resources, and administrative capacity are relevant to educational provision, these factors alone do not fully explain whether children receive fair and responsive educational services. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of social, economic, and community-related factors in shaping educational provision and quality (Neuman & Okeng'o, 2019; Wahyuni & Winarti, 2024).

In this study, educational equity is understood as the provision of educational opportunities and support that respond to children's developmental characteristics and learning needs, rather than simply providing identical treatment to all children. This understanding distinguishes equity from equality: equality emphasizes the provision of the same treatment or opportunities, whereas equity recognizes that children may require different forms of support to participate and benefit meaningfully from educational activities. In early childhood settings, equity can be examined through several dimensions, including access and affordability, equal learning opportunities, responsiveness to individual needs, fair and consistent treatment, and the representation of families in educational activities. However, the present study focuses on three dimensions that can be examined through the experiences and accounts of participants at a single institution: (1) equal learning opportunities and non-discrimination in relation to children's family backgrounds, (2) the consistent application of school rules to all children, and (3) instructional practices that respond to children's individual characteristics and learning needs. These dimensions provide an analytical basis for examining how equity is understood and practiced in everyday educational interactions. They also prevent educational equity from being treated as synonymous with institutional quality, parental satisfaction, or positive relationships alone. Importantly, these dimensions are examined through the reported perceptions and experiences of five informants, comprising three parents and two teachers. They therefore reflect participants' accounts of institutional practices rather than an objective assessment or systematic audit of equity experienced by all children at the institution.

The realization of educational equity is particularly relevant in community-based rural playgroups, where educational services are often closely connected to family participation and local community resources. One such institution is KB Pelita Kasih, located in Ngroto Village, Cepu District, Blora Regency, Indonesia. The institution serves 13 children and is supported by three teachers. Its community-based setting provides an opportunity to examine how educational relationships are established and maintained within a relatively small ECE institution. The selection of KB Pelita Kasih as the research site is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of educational practices within a specific institutional and community context, rather than to represent all rural ECE institutions. Its relatively small learning environment also offers a relevant context for exploring interactions among teachers, children, and parents. Previous studies have highlighted the potential of playgroups to facilitate parent–child interactions, strengthen parenting practices, and provide opportunities for families to develop social relationships and obtain social support (Barata et al., 2026; Warr et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the extent to which these relationships contribute to equitable educational practices requires examination through the experiences and practices of the people directly involved.

One theoretical perspective that helps explain these relationships is social capital. Social capital refers to resources embedded within social relationships, networks, trust, and reciprocal interactions that facilitate cooperation and the achievement of shared objectives (Alkaher & Gan, 2020; Lin, 2001, 2002; Mikiewicz, 2021). In educational settings, social capital can operate through relationships between teachers, parents, and communities, enabling the exchange of information, mutual support, and participation in educational activities(Miller et al., 2024; Rafiei et al., 2021). In the context of ECE, these resources may support equitable services through several interconnected mechanisms. First, trust can encourage parents to communicate their children's developmental needs and concerns openly with teachers. Second, social networks can facilitate the exchange of information and strengthen family participation in institutional activities. Third, close social relationships between teachers and children can enable teachers to become more familiar with children's individual characteristics, thereby informing more responsive instructional practices. These mechanisms can be examined in relation to the three dimensions of equity addressed in this study: learning opportunities, consistent treatment, and responsiveness to individual needs. This perspective is also consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, which recognizes that children's developmental experiences are shaped by interactions among family, school, and community environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Although previous studies have discussed the contribution of trust, social networks, and community participation to educational relationships and institutional effectiveness (Alkaher & Gan, 2020; Mishra, 2020), understanding how these resources operate in everyday ECE practices remains important, particularly in community-based rural settings. Specifically, the relationship between social capital and educational equity needs to be examined

not only in terms of the existence of positive relationships but also through the mechanisms by which these relationships influence learning opportunities, the treatment of children, and the responsiveness of educational services. This study addresses this issue through an in-depth examination of a single community-based playgroup, focusing on the experiences of parents and teachers and the educational practices described in the research data. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study aims to contribute contextual insights into the relationship between social capital and educational equity within a rural ECE institution.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how social capital contributes to the implementation of educational equity in KB Pelita Kasih, Ngroto Village, Blora Regency. Specifically, it explores how trust between parents and teachers, social networks supporting family participation, and social relationships between teachers and children are reflected in everyday educational practices. The analysis focuses on how these forms of social capital relate to equal learning opportunities, the consistent application of school rules, and instructional responsiveness to children's individual needs. Through this qualitative case study, the research seeks to provide a contextual understanding of the role of social capital in supporting equitable ECE services and to offer insights into the management of partnerships among teachers, families, and communities in community-based early childhood education.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative, instrumental single-case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017), to examine how social capital supports equitable service practices in a community-based rural playgroup. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate for exploring the experiences, perspectives, and interactions of individuals involved in the educational process, while the case study design enabled an in-depth examination of the phenomenon within its specific institutional and community context. The research was conducted in June 2026 at KB Pelita Kasih, located in Ngroto Village, Cepu District, Blora Regency, Indonesia. The institution serves 13 children and is supported by three teachers. This relatively small institutional setting provided a context for examining interactions among teachers, children, and parents. However, the teacher–child ratio was also considered a contextual factor that could influence the intensity of these interactions.

Five participants were selected through purposive sampling, consisting of three parents (P1, P2, and P3) and two teachers (G1 and G2). Parents were selected based on their experience accompanying their children in playgroup activities, involvement in school activities, and willingness to provide information relevant to the research. Teachers were selected based on their direct involvement in educational services and daily interactions with children and parents. Participants were invited to take part in the study based on these selection criteria. The inclusion of both groups enabled comparison of perspectives from different stakeholders. The five participants were considered appropriate for this focused case study because they provided relevant accounts of trust, social networks, social relationships, and educational equity practices within the institution. The adequacy of the information was therefore considered in relation to the research objectives and the relevance of participants' experiences, rather than through a claim of data saturation. Nevertheless, the selection of parents who were involved in school activities may have limited the representation of less-active parents' experiences. The characteristics of the research participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Participants	Status	Age
P1	Parents of Students	35 years old
P2	Parents of Students	33 years old
P3	Parents of Students	30 years old
G1	Teacher	27 years old
G2	Teacher	36 years old

Nevertheless, selecting parents partly on the basis of their school involvement may have resulted in greater representation of actively engaged families, while the perspectives of less-active families may not have been fully captured. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted within the context of this particular case and the experiences of the five participants, rather than as representative of all families served by the institution. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and documentation. The interview questions were guided by the study's concepts of social capital trust, social networks, and social relationships and educational equity, particularly equal learning opportunities and non-discrimination, consistent application of school rules, and instructional responsiveness to children's individual characteristics and needs. The interviews explored participants' experiences of parent–teacher communication, family participation, teacher child interactions, and educational practices within the institution. Interview recordings were transcribed into written data for analysis. Documentation was used as supporting material to provide contextual information and complement the interview accounts. The documentary evidence was considered alongside the interview data rather than treated as a substitute for participants' experiences.

Data were analyzed thematically through familiarization with the transcripts, coding, grouping related codes into categories, and developing and reviewing themes in relation to the research focus and supporting data. The analysis considered both the study's conceptual dimensions and patterns emerging from participants' accounts. NVivo 15 was used to organize the transcripts and manage the coding process; it served as an analytical support tool rather than as a basis for automatically determining the findings. Data credibility was supported through source

triangulation by comparing the accounts of parents and teachers and examining similarities and differences in their perspectives. Participants' identities were protected through the use of codes, and the findings were presented without disclosing personally identifying information.

3. Result And Discussion

The findings indicate that social capital plays an important role in supporting educational equity in early childhood education services at KB Pelita Kasih, Ngroto Village. Based on in-depth interviews with three parents and two teachers, supported by documentation, the analysis identified five interrelated themes: trust, social networks, service equity, social relationships, and perceived benefits of the playgroup. These themes were developed through an iterative process of examining interview transcripts, identifying meaningful statements, assigning codes, grouping related codes into categories, and reviewing emerging themes in relation to the research objectives. The findings illustrate how these themes are connected in everyday educational practices. For example, parents reported feeling comfortable communicating with teachers and receiving information about their children's development. This communication provides opportunities for teachers and parents to exchange information about children's needs. From the teachers' perspective, G1 explained that "*The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child.*" Together, these accounts illustrate how communication and teacher responsiveness may support educational equity through greater attention to individual children's needs. NVivo 15 was used to assist with data organization and coding management; however, the identification and interpretation of themes remained the responsibility of the researchers.

The five themes represent three related but conceptually distinct aspects of the findings. Trust, social networks, and social relationships reflect the dimensions of social capital explored in this study. Service equity represents the educational practices through which fairness is experienced, particularly in terms of equal learning opportunities, non-discrimination, consistent application of school rules, and responsiveness to children's individual characteristics and needs. Meanwhile, the perceived benefits of the playgroup represent outcomes described by parents and teachers based on their experiences, rather than independently measured effects of the educational services. The relationship among these themes is presented in Figure 1.

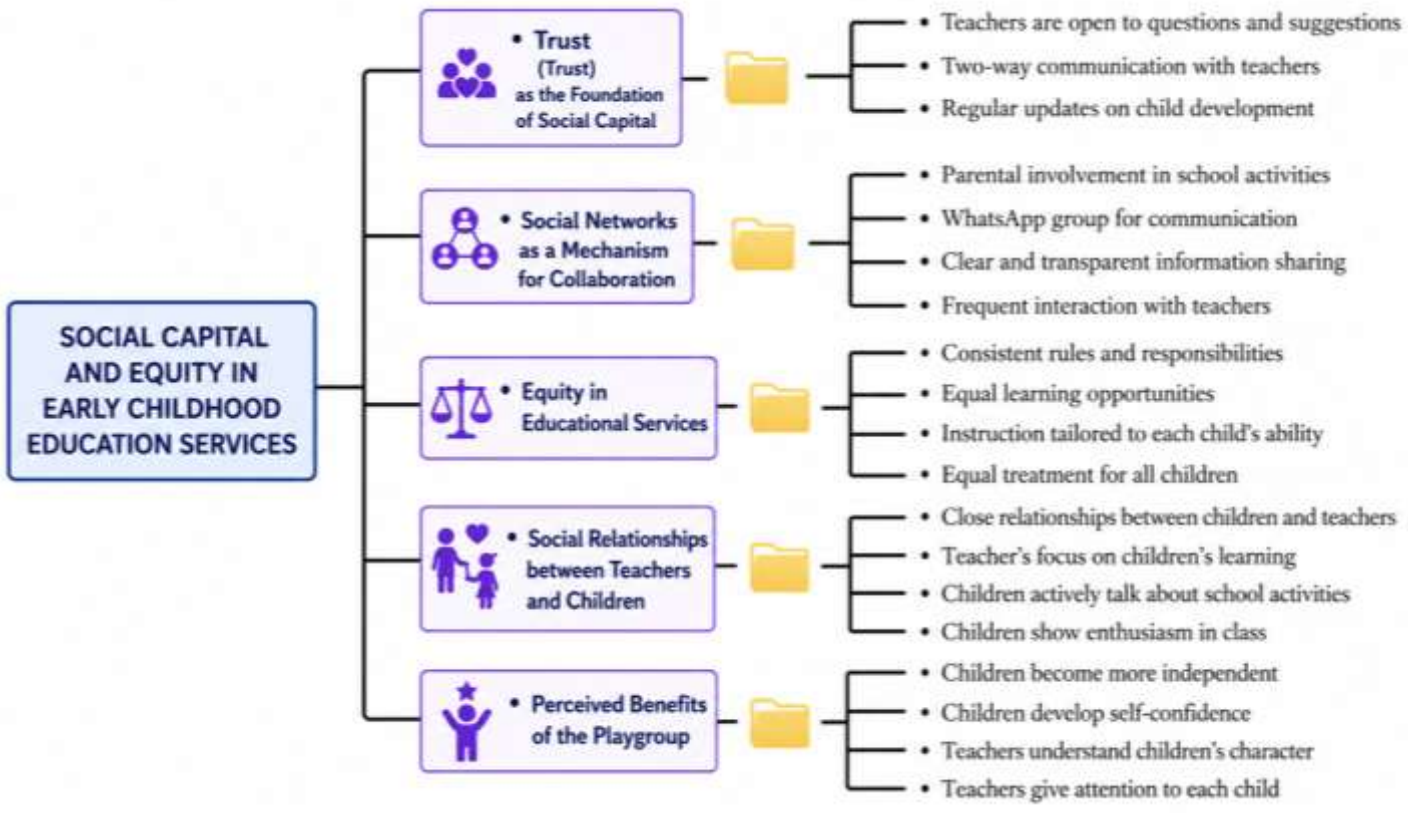


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Role of Social Capital in Realizing Equity in Early Childhood Education Services in KB Pelita Kasih Ngroto Village

Based on the results of data coding, a number of sub-themes were found that described how social capital develops in daily educational practices. The results of the complete thematic analysis are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Themes, Codes, and Supporting Evidence from Interviews

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Description	Supporting quotes
Trust	Teachers are open to input and questions	KP1	Teachers build open communication with parents regarding children's development	"Teachers here are open to input and questions from parents." (P2)
Trust	Targeted communication with teachers	KP2	Parents feel comfortable discussing with teachers about their child's development	"Alhamdulillah, it's comfortable. I find it easy to communicate with teachers." (P1)
Trust	Regular Updates on Children's Development	KP3	Teachers routinely provide information on children's development to parents	"Teachers often provide information about children's development." (P3)
Social Networks	Parental involvement in school activities	JS1	Parents are involved in various school activities	"There are outbound activities, outing classes, and swimming together." (P1)
Social Networks	School WhatsApp groups	JS2	WhatsApp is used as a communication medium for school and family	"Communication is also carried out through WhatsApp groups." (P3)
Social Networks	Clear information delivery	JS3	School information is delivered openly and easily accessible	"School information can be received quickly." (P3)
Social Networks	Regular interaction with teachers	JS4	Communication occurs when dropping off or picking up children	"Almost every day we communicate." (G1)
Equity in educational services	All children follow the same rules at school	KL1	All children follow the same rules at school	"All children get the same rules." (P1)
Equity in educational services	Equal learning opportunities	KL2	All children have equal opportunities in learning	"Teachers provide equal opportunities to all children." (P2)
Equity in educational services	Learning according to children's abilities	KL3	Teachers adjust the approach based on the needs of the child	"The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child." (G1)
Equity in educational services	Equal treatment	KL4	No discrimination based on family background	"We do not discriminate against children based on economic or family conditions." (G2)
Social Relations	Child's closeness to the teacher	RS1	Children have a close and comfortable relationship with teachers	"Children are very familiar with teachers." (P1)
Social Relations	Focus on children's learning	RS2	Closeness to teachers helps children learn more comfortably	"Children feel safe to learn and play." (G1)
Social Relations	Children actively talk about school	RS3	The child shows a positive attachment to the school	"My son often tells me about his teacher at home." (P2)
Social Relations	Children's enthusiasm at school	RS4	Children show enthusiasm for participating in learning activities	"Children look happy when they go to school." (P3)
Benefits of Play Groups	Child independence	MK1	Children become more independent in daily activities	"Children can already wear their own shoes." (P1)
Benefits of Play Groups	Children's confidence	MK2	Children become more courageous and confident	"Children become more confident." (P2)
Benefits of Play Groups	Teachers understand children's character	MK3	The teacher recognizes the needs and character of each child	"The teacher really understands the character of each child." (P1)
Benefits of Play Groups	Teachers' attention to children	MK4	Teachers give personal attention to students	"Teachers give attention that suits the needs of children." (P3)

Note: All interview quotations originally expressed in Indonesian were translated into English for publication. Culturally specific expressions, such as "Alhamdulillah," have been retained where appropriate to preserve the original meaning and cultural context of participants' statements.

The findings presented in Table 2 highlight three prominent dimensions of social capital in the participants' accounts: trust, social networks, and social relationships. These dimensions are interconnected and contribute to a social mechanism that supports the provision of equitable educational services. The interview data illustrate how trust is reflected in open communication between parents and teachers, how social networks facilitate information exchange and parental participation, and how social relationships shape interactions within the educational environment. These findings suggest that the quality of educational services at KB Pelita Kasih is shaped not only by physical facilities but also by the social relationships developed among teachers, children, and parents. However, this interpretation is limited to the experiences and perspectives of the five participants in this particular institutional context.

4. Discussion

1. Trust as the Foundation of Social Capital

The findings indicate that trust constitutes the primary foundation of the relationship between the school and families. Parents expressed a high level of confidence in the teachers, largely because they observed positive changes in their children's behavior after participating in educational activities at KB Pelita Kasih. One parent stated:

"*I trust the teachers. Thank God, I have seen many positive changes. My child used to stay at home most of the time, but now has become more disciplined and is able to socialize well with friends.*" (P1)

In addition, parents reported feeling comfortable communicating with teachers about their children's development. Teachers were perceived as being open to parents' questions, concerns, and suggestions. This trusting relationship was further strengthened through regular communication about children's developmental progress, allowing interactions between teachers and parents to extend beyond administrative matters and develop into ongoing partnerships. These findings suggest that trust does not emerge spontaneously but is gradually developed through consistent interactions between schools and families. From the perspective of social capital, Putnam (2013) identifies trust as a fundamental component that enables individuals to cooperate more effectively in achieving shared goals (Putnam, 2013). Trust also serves as an important foundation for meaningful community participation in educational processes. These findings are further supported by Lin's (2001, 2002) social capital theory, which conceptualizes social capital as resources embedded within social relationships that can generate benefits for the actors involved. In the context of this study, trust functioned as a social resource that facilitated information exchange between teachers and parents, potentially enabling a better understanding of children's developmental needs (Lin, 2001, 2002). Consequently, trust appeared to strengthen collaborative relationships between the institution and families. Parents also reported positive experiences regarding their children's learning and development; however, these accounts reflect participants' perceptions and should not be interpreted as evidence of a direct causal effect of the institution's services on children's developmental outcomes.

2. Social Networks as an Educational Collaboration Mechanism

The second theme that emerged was social networks. The results of the study showed that communication between teachers and parents took place intensively, both through direct interaction and through school WhatsApp groups. One of the teachers explained:

"*Almost every day we communicate, both when dropping off or picking up children and through WhatsApp groups.*" (G1)

In addition to regular communication, parents were involved in various school activities, including outing classes, swimming activities, holiday celebrations, and other school events. This involvement indicates that the institution's educational activities extend beyond classroom interactions and provide opportunities for collaboration between teachers and families. Communication through WhatsApp groups also served as a channel for sharing information and maintaining contact between the institution and parents. From the perspective of social capital, Lin (2002) explains that social capital operates through networks of relationships that enable individuals to access social resources (Lin, 2002). In the school context, these networks extend beyond the institutional environment through relationships with families and the wider community. Similarly, Liu (2020) conceptualizes school–parent relationships as part of external school social networks that can support school effectiveness (Liu, 2020).

Nevertheless, the use of WhatsApp as a communication channel does not automatically ensure equal access to information for all families. The interview data available in this study do not provide sufficient evidence to establish whether all parents had equal access to digital devices and internet connectivity, experienced similar levels of digital literacy, or encountered barriers when using the platform. The study also did not specifically examine data privacy practices in WhatsApp-based communication. Therefore, WhatsApp is interpreted as an existing communication channel that facilitates information exchange, rather than as evidence that digital access and information privacy have been equally ensured for all families. These limitations highlight the importance of considering digital accessibility and privacy when examining the contribution of social networks to equitable early childhood education services. The

findings of the study show that WhatsApp groups, daily communication, and parental involvement in school activities are tangible forms of social networks that support the educational process. The network allows for rapid information exchange, increases parental participation, and strengthens a sense of belonging to educational institutions.

3. Service Justice in Early Childhood Education Practice

Service equity emerged as an important theme in this study. The interview findings indicate that fairness in educational services at KB Pelita Kasih can be examined through three related aspects: the consistent application of school rules, non-discriminatory treatment, and instructional responsiveness to children's individual characteristics and needs. These aspects represent different dimensions of educational fairness and should not be interpreted as interchangeable. One parent stated that "*All children get the same rules*" (P1), suggesting that the institution applies consistent rules to all children. This reflects equality in institutional treatment, although equal rules alone do not necessarily demonstrate that every child receives the support needed to participate and learn effectively. From the teacher's perspective, G2 stated that "*We don't discriminate against children based on economic or family conditions*," indicating an emphasis on non-discriminatory educational practices. Furthermore, G1 explained that "*The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child*," suggesting that teachers recognize individual differences in their instructional practices. Taken together, these accounts provide indications that educational fairness at KB Pelita Kasih involves both equal treatment and responsiveness to children's individual needs. However, the available interview data do not establish whether all children experience equal learning opportunities across every aspect of the educational service. Therefore, the findings are interpreted as evidence of equity-supporting practices within this particular institution, rather than conclusive proof that educational equity has been fully achieved.

Participants described practices at KB Pelita Kasih that were consistent with the concept of educational equity, particularly teachers' efforts to respond to children's individual characteristics and learning needs. As G1 explained, "*The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child.*" This account suggests that teachers recognize the importance of adapting their instructional approaches to individual children's needs. Although the consistent application of school rules reflects equality, responsiveness to individual needs provides a further indication of equity-oriented practices. However, these findings should be understood as participants' accounts of practices consistent with educational equity, rather than as evidence that all children received fully individualized support or achieved optimal development.

4. Social Relations between Teachers and Children

Social relations is the next theme that shows how social capital works in daily educational practices. Parents consider that children have a close relationship with teachers and feel comfortable in the school environment.

One of the parents said:

"*The children are very familiar with the teacher.*" (P1)

Other parents also explained that children often tell about their school experiences when they are at home.

"*My son often tells me about his teacher at home.*" (P2)

From the teachers' perspective, this closeness was associated with the frequent interactions that occurred in their daily activities. The institution's relatively small enrollment, with 13 children supported by three teachers, may also have provided teachers with greater opportunities to become familiar with each child's characteristics and needs. This institutional condition represents an alternative contextual explanation for the close relationships and individualized attention described by participants. Therefore, these practices should not be attributed solely to social capital, as the relatively small teacher–child ratio may also facilitate more intensive interactions and responsive educational practices. At the same time, the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of teachers and parents, whose accounts may be influenced by their respective roles and relationships within the institution. Teachers may emphasize their efforts to provide appropriate services, while parents' assessments may be shaped by their experiences and expectations. The possibility of differences in power and perspective between teachers, parents, and children should therefore be considered when interpreting these findings. Since children's perspectives were not directly obtained, the study cannot establish whether all children experienced these relationships and practices in the same way.

An educational environment characterized by emotional closeness, a sense of security, and a positive relationship between educators and learners will result in a more meaningful learning experience. The findings of this study reinforce this view. The closeness between teachers and children makes students more comfortable to learn, interact, and express themselves during the learning process.

5. Benefits of Play Groups for Children's Development

The findings indicate that parents perceived several positive changes in their children's everyday behavior after participating in activities at KB Pelita Kasih. The benefits most clearly reflected in the interview accounts were children's independence and confidence. One parent described an example of increased independence in the child's daily activities: "*Children can already wear their own shoes and are more independent*" (P1). Another parent also perceived a positive change in the child's confidence, stating that "*Children become more confident than ever*" (P2). These accounts illustrate how parents perceived changes in their children's everyday behavior. P1's statement refers to the child's ability to perform a simple self-care activity independently, while P2's account reflects the parent's perception of increased confidence. Although these experiences provide meaningful insights into the benefits perceived by families, they do not constitute direct measurements of children's developmental progress.

In addition to the changes perceived by parents, the interview findings also revealed teachers' perspectives on their interactions with children. Teachers described the importance of understanding each child's individual characteristics and providing attention according to their respective needs. G1, for example, explained that "The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child." This account suggests that teachers perceive individualized attention as an important part of their educational practice. When considered alongside parents' accounts, these findings illustrate two complementary perspectives: parents described changes they perceived in their children's everyday behavior, while teachers emphasized their efforts to understand and respond to individual children's needs.

These findings are consistent with (Hamre & Pianta, 2001), who examined the relationship between teacher–child relationships and children's subsequent school outcomes, as well as El Nokali et al. (2010), who reported associations between parental involvement and children's social and academic functioning (El Nokali et al., 2010). These studies provide a broader theoretical context for understanding the importance of relationships in early childhood education. Nevertheless, the present study does not establish that participation in KB Pelita Kasih directly caused improvements in children's development, as no standardized developmental assessments or systematic before-and-after measurements were conducted. Rather, the findings suggest that parents valued the changes they perceived in their children, while teachers emphasized the importance of responsive interactions in supporting children's learning experiences. Thus, the perceived benefits of the playgroup extend beyond the delivery of learning activities to include the quality of relationships and interactions developed among teachers, parents, and children.

6. Social Capital as the Foundation of Equity in Early Childhood Education Services

Overall, the findings suggest that trust, social networks, and social relationships operate as interconnected forms of social capital that can support more responsive educational practices at KB Pelita Kasih. Their contribution can be understood through specific mechanisms in everyday school activities. First, trust creates a supportive basis for communication between teachers and parents. Parents' accounts of feeling comfortable communicating with teachers, together with their perceptions that teachers are open to questions and suggestions, indicate that trust can facilitate the exchange of information about children's experiences and needs. Second, social networks provide channels through which this communication can be maintained and parental involvement can be facilitated. For example, WhatsApp groups and parents' participation in school activities, such as outing classes and swimming activities, provide opportunities for families to remain connected to the institution and participate in children's educational experiences. Third, social relationships developed through frequent interactions enable teachers to become more familiar with children's individual characteristics. As G1 explained, "*The approach is tailored to the character and needs of each child.*" This statement illustrates how close teacher child interactions may support teachers' efforts to adjust their instructional approaches to individual needs. The relatively small number of children in the institution (13 children supported by three teachers) may also contribute to these opportunities for interaction and individualized attention.

Taken together, these mechanisms indicate that social capital may support educational responsiveness by connecting information exchange, family participation, and teachers' understanding of children. However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that all children experience equal learning opportunities or that every individual need is fully accommodated. The study primarily captures the perspectives of three parents and two teachers; children's perspectives and systematic assessments of their learning experiences were not included. Moreover, the relatively small teacher child ratio represents an institutional condition that may also explain the close interactions observed, rather than attributing these practices solely to social capital. This qualification is important because social relationships and institutional resources may operate together in shaping educational practices.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with Lin's (2001, 2002) conceptualization of social capital as resources embedded in social networks that can be accessed and mobilized through relationships. This study extends the discussion by illustrating how such resources may operate in the management of a community based early childhood education institution: trust supports communication, networks facilitate parental participation, and interpersonal relationships provide opportunities for more individualized interactions. Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies in highlighting social capital as a relational resource for strengthening school family partnerships and supporting responsive service management in a rural playgroup context. Rather than suggesting that social capital alone determines service quality, the findings indicate that strengthening communication, maintaining accessible channels for parental involvement, and fostering meaningful teacher child interactions can be considered as complementary strategies in managing community-based early childhood education services.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that trust, social networks, and social relationships were perceived by participants to facilitate educational equity practices at KB Pelita Kasih. These elements were described as supporting communication between teachers and parents, parental participation, and responsive interactions with children. Participants also reported practices involving non-discriminatory treatment, consistent application of school rules, and attention to children's individual needs. However, these findings are limited to a single case involving five informants and are largely based on parents' and teachers' perceptions, rather than direct assessments of all children's experiences. Therefore, they cannot be generalized to other institutions or establish causal relationships. Similar

playgroups may consider strengthening school–family communication and parental participation as practical approaches to supporting equitable services. Further studies involving multiple institutions, diverse stakeholders, and direct observations of children's learning experiences are needed to explore these relationships in greater depth.

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