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Parenting Patterns for Dreadlocked Children: A Local Culture-Based Study among Muslim Farmers in Dieng, Wonosobo

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Abstract

Local traditions play a pivotal role in shaping parenting practices and early childhood development in rural Indonesian communities. This study explores the beliefs, values, and daily parenting practices surrounding dreadlocked children at an early age within Muslim farming families in Dieng, Wonosobo. Employing an ethnographic qualitative design, the research investigates how Islamic teachings and local traditions intersect to shape caregiving patterns for children aged 2–7 whose dreadlocks are perceived as sacred signs of spiritual and ancestral connection. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and life history narratives with 25 key informants including parents, kyai, and community elders. Findings reveal that dreadlocked children are regarded as culturally blessed, with parenting approaches characterized by emotional attentiveness, permissiveness, and ritualized social inclusion. The practice of *ruwatan*—a ceremonial haircut accompanied by prayers and offerings—emerges as a key event in cultural learning and early character development. These parenting patterns reflect a model of culturally responsive education that emphasizes identity formation, moral values, and communal integration. The implications underscore the necessity of redefining special needs education to accommodate culturally distinct child-rearing practices. However, as the study is context-specific and based on qualitative methods, its findings require further exploration through comparative and longitudinal research. The research contributes to a growing discourse on inclusive and localized approaches to early childhood education in multicultural societies.

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Introduction

Parenting, as a socio-cultural and developmental institution, plays a foundational role in shaping individuals and society across diverse contexts. Increasing attention has been directed toward the integration of cultural heritage in early childhood development, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, where traditional practices intersect with modern pedagogical paradigms (Baumann et al., 2019; Poulsen et al., 2010; Sherr et al., 2022). In this regard, culture-based parenting becomes especially relevant in societies undergoing negotiation between global norms and local wisdom, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Alam et al., 2023; Raval, 2023). A unique and underexplored case lies in the parenting practices of Muslim farming communities in Dieng, Wonosobo, Indonesia, where dreadlocked children—considered spiritually significant—receive culturally distinct care and upbringing. Investigating such patterns is crucial to understanding how local parenting practices contribute to inclusive early childhood

education, cultural resilience, and identity preservation in the face of homogenizing global trends.

The influence of local culture, religious beliefs, and socio-economic factors strongly shapes parenting practices in rural settings (Karsten, 2015; Pham, 2024; Rahim et al., 2022). In the Dieng highlands, the phenomenon of dreadlocked children—perceived as bearers of ancestral blessings—has led to distinct parenting behaviors that blend Islamic teachings with traditional rituals (Amelia & Green, 2023; Georgopoulou et al., 2023; Kadir & Ahmed, 2023). These children are raised with careful observance of spiritual-symbolic rituals, including alms-giving and communal prayers prior to hair-cutting ceremonies, which signify gratitude and communal bonding (Jones & Smith, 2022; Rahim et al., 2022). Such practices exemplify the hybridization of religious ethics and indigenous customs in parenting, creating a form of cultural pedagogy deeply embedded in community life. The parenting of dreadlocked children thus reflects a broader trend in which indigenous identities are enacted and sustained through intergenerational caregiving practices.

Parenting reflects and responds to social structures, environmental factors, and cultural narratives (Foy-Phillips & Lloyd-Evans, 2011; Keller, 2018; Visser et al., 2015). In many rural communities, parenting is grounded in communal rituals and spiritual meanings that help instill social values in children (Silonsaari et al., 2024; Stevenson & Beck, 2024). In the Dieng region, these practices manifest through symbolic actions—such as honoring ancestors or performing rites of passage—that imbue children's development with sacred meaning and societal roles. Comparable parenting frameworks are found among Aboriginal families in Australia and rural communities in Panama, where caregiving is inseparable from traditional knowledge systems (Andersson et al., 2024; Mejia et al., 2016). These examples highlight how child-rearing practices are embedded within broader cosmologies and social imaginaries.

The convergence of culture, religion, and education in parenting can be seen in culturally grounded interventions and digital media use by parents (LaMonica et al., 2022; Oh et al., 2012; Strickland & Lyutykh, 2020). In Dieng, families use cultural rituals to pass on moral values, spiritual responsibilities, and communal ethics to their children (Amelia & Green, 2023; Jones & Smith, 2022; Kadir & Ahmed, 2023). Similar patterns emerge in families negotiating indigenous or diasporic identities, such as Mexican-American households striving for social mobility while preserving cultural traditions (Shanley et al., 2024; Stevenson & Beck, 2024). Parenting tools co-designed with local communities also benefit from cultural adaptation, showing that effective parenting education must be grounded in culturally specific ways of knowing (Alam et al., 2023; Rodrigo et al., 2018).

Localized parenting approaches contribute meaningfully to children's socio-emotional and cognitive development from early childhood (Daglar et al., 2011; Jinnah & Stoneman, 2016; Talbot, 2013). In Dieng, spiritual narratives and community rituals foster a nurturing environment that strengthens children's sense of identity, security, and social belonging (Georgopoulou et al., 2023; Kadir & Ahmed, 2023; Rahim et al., 2022). This aligns with findings from other contexts, where culture-based parenting leads to greater parental engagement and more adaptive child outcomes (Okafor et al., 2013; Shih, 2019; Winarso, 2022). Parenting practices rooted in indigenous pedagogies—through traditional games or collective ceremonies—also enhance holistic development and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Backstrom, 2025; Parry et al., 2022; Weber et al., 2021).

Despite growing attention to culture-based parenting, studies focused on Southeast Asia—especially those dealing with spiritually significant children—are still relatively rare

(Puspitasari et al., 2020; Raval, 2023; Shanley et al., 2024). The uniqueness of Dieng's dreadlocked children has largely been portrayed through folkloric or anthropological lenses, with limited inquiry into daily caregiving routines, parental values, or implications for early education. Meanwhile, much of the international research concentrates on parenting technologies or structured interventions, often overlooking organic, community-based forms of upbringing (Asiimwe et al., 2023; Green & Smith, 2007; Holloway et al., 2024). Little effort has been made to analytically integrate religious teachings with traditional practices in a unified parenting framework, even though such a fusion is central to rural Muslim families (Langston, 2016; Oh et al., 2012; Pham, 2024). In this light, the case of parenting dreadlocked children in Dieng opens up important inquiries into the coalescence of indigenous wisdom, spirituality, and early childhood education.

This study aims to examine the parenting patterns of early childhood dreadlocked children in the Muslim farming community of Dieng, Wonosobo, by exploring parental worldviews, cultural-religious values, and daily practices within a framework of inclusive, locally relevant early childhood education. Through qualitative engagement with family routines, rituals, and belief systems, this research seeks to illuminate how spiritual-cultural constructions shape the caregiving of children seen as sacred. The findings will contribute to scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy by foregrounding an underrepresented community and highlighting how religion and tradition coalesce in rural parenting. Additionally, the study responds to calls for decolonizing parenting science through epistemologies that arise from the Global South and honor community-based expertise (Keller, 2018; Raval, 2023; Weber et al., 2021). Ultimately, it offers a foundation for designing early childhood interventions that are not only educationally effective but also culturally dignified and spiritually grounded.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing an ethnographic approach to explore local culture-based parenting patterns among Muslim farming families of dreadlocked children in Dieng, Wonosobo. The descriptive nature of ethnography facilitated an in-depth investigation of how the intersection between Islamic values and local customs shapes the parenting of children aged 1–7 with natural dreadlocks. The selection of Dieng—particularly the Kejajar and Wonosobo city areas—was based on its unique sociocultural context, where dreadlocked children are perceived as possessing spiritual or ancestral significance. As ethnography seeks to capture the cultural meanings and lived experiences of a community through sustained engagement and observation, researchers immersed themselves within the community to understand how childcare practices are embedded in tradition and religion (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data sources included key informants from various social groups—parents, extended family, local kyai and ustaz, village elders, and educators—which enabled triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of caregiving practices shaped by socio-religious values.

Data collection employed several techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), document analysis, and life history narratives. Researchers conducted direct observations of daily parenting behaviors, rituals, and communal practices associated with the dreadlock tradition. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 participants comprising parents, grandparents, kyai, and traditional leaders to elicit perceptions, beliefs, and decision-making processes

surrounding childrearing. FGDs with community members and local educators were organized to explore collective narratives and community norms. Document analysis included review of oral folklore, ritual texts, and community archives relating to dreadlock practices. Additionally, the life history method was used to reconstruct individual parenting trajectories and intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model of qualitative analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Validity and reliability were ensured through methodological triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, and detailed documentation of all procedures to support transferability and confirmability of findings. The research process was guided by ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity.

Result

The Views of the Muslim Farming Community in Dieng Wonosobo Towards Children With Dreams at an Early Age

The Muslim farming community in Dieng Wonosobo generally perceives a child as having dreadlocks when the hair naturally forms into tangled and matted locks without external interference. This phenomenon typically emerges during infancy or early childhood, often between the ages of two and seven. Once the hair is ritually cut in the *ruwatan* ceremony, the dreadlocks do not grow back, and the child is regarded as returning to a "normal" state. The emergence of dreadlocks is seen as a divine or natural sign, not a result of grooming practices. Consequently, the child receives distinct recognition and treatment within the family and community.

One defining characteristic is the spontaneous appearance of dreadlocks without any clear cause. Parents observe this change in hair texture as something unexplainable and special. It is often interpreted as a spiritual indication that the child possesses unique qualities. Children with dreadlocks are believed to display notable traits such as cheerfulness, stubbornness, or spiritual sensitivity. These perceptions are supported by oral traditions that associate dreadlocks with ancestral gifts or extraordinary potential.

The acknowledgment of dreadlocks involves not just the family but also the broader community. Neighbors and relatives pay special attention to the child, reinforcing the social perception of their uniqueness. One pivotal moment in the child's experience is the emergence of a specific request prior to the hair-cutting ritual. These requests are believed to stem from the child's spiritual energy or connection to the metaphysical. Failure to fulfill these requests is thought to bring misfortune, revealing how religious beliefs and cultural customs are closely intertwined in local parenting.

The Dieng Muslim community reflects a harmonious integration of Islamic teachings and local traditions in responding to the dreadlocks phenomenon. Islam does not explicitly prohibit dreadlocks but emphasizes hygiene and neatness. A local religious figure explained: *"In Islam, our appearance reflects our faith. As long as the dreadlocks are kept clean, there is no problem in the eyes of Islam."* (R1). This perspective affirms the community's efforts to respect cultural expressions while remaining faithful to Islamic values. Such a balance is crucial in raising dreadlocked children amidst contemporary social changes.

Local beliefs attach spiritual significance to dreadlocks, often associating them with identity and blessing. One parent remarked: *"We believe that dreadlocks bring blessings to our children. This is part of our identity in Dieng."* (R2). These beliefs are expressed through

religious rituals, such as prayers before the ceremonial haircut. A father shared: *"We hold a prayer together before cutting their hair. This is our way of asking for Allah's blessing so that our children grow up well."* Religious educators also stress the importance of teaching children that dreadlocks are a respected tradition, but that moral character remains the core of Islamic education.

The community's treatment of dreadlocked children also varies by gender, reflecting broader social and cultural norms. Boys are typically given more freedom to explore and engage in outdoor activities. They are educated with values of leadership and responsibility, often by involving them early in farming and mosque activities. Girls, by contrast, are more protected and taught politeness and obedience more strictly. Their involvement is more domestic, with religious education focusing on manners and moral obligations.

The concept of "children with special needs" (ABK) is conventionally defined through biological, physical, cognitive, or psychological limitations. However, in the Dieng Muslim cultural context, children with dreadlocks are regarded as "culturally special needs" due to their unique societal status. These children are not seen as deficient but as possessing distinct spiritual qualities. Their perceived connection to ancestral or supernatural powers leads to parenting styles that differ from conventional norms. For instance, they are rarely reprimanded, and their requests must be fulfilled before their hair is cut.

The belief in the spiritual significance of dreadlocked children often results in more permissive parenting. Their requests are treated as sacred, and any failure to comply may bring misfortune to the family or village. One mother stated: *"We cannot treat this child carelessly. There is a belief that they bring blessings as well as responsibilities."* A local *kyai* reinforced this notion by saying: *"In Islam, all children have the right to be raised well, but children with dreadlocks in Dieng have an additional dimension in their upbringing because the community believes that they are different."*

Socially, dreadlocked children receive heightened attention and respect from those around them. A farmer shared that his dreadlocked child often received more care and recognition from neighbors than his other children. This special regard is rooted in cultural beliefs that assign unique roles to these children within the community. From a broader perspective, if the definition of special needs includes children requiring distinct forms of parenting and education, then dreadlocked children qualify as "culturally special needs children." Their upbringing is shaped by traditions and expectations that differ from normative child-rearing practices.

Children with culturally defined special needs exhibit several unique characteristics. First, they are seen as carriers of blessings and are believed to hold potential for greatness within the community. During cultural or religious ceremonies, these children are often given central attention. The hair-cutting ritual, for instance, marks a symbolic transition into a new stage of life. Second, they maintain strong ties to both religious and customary values.

In families with dreadlocked children, parents consistently emphasize adherence to religious obligations and traditional customs. These children are raised to honor the moral and spiritual codes of the community. Third, they are expected to develop a strong sense of responsibility from an early age. This is demonstrated through participation in farming, religious practices, and communal life. Therefore, dreadlocked children in Dieng are not only recognized for their physical appearance but are deeply embedded in the preservation of the region's cultural and religious heritage.

Muslim Farming Community's Views Underlying Parenting Patterns for Children With Dreadlocks at an Early Age

Early childhood development among children with dreadlocks in Dieng reveals distinct patterns shaped by cultural and religious values. In this community, dreadlocks are not merely a physical trait but a marker of cultural and spiritual identity. During early childhood, children begin developing cognitive abilities such as understanding their environment, communicating with peers and adults, and engaging in symbolic learning. This phase is enriched by culture-based education, particularly through rituals like the *ruwatan* ceremony. Through such experiences, children learn not only religious doctrines but also moral and social values deeply rooted in tradition.

The ritual of dreadlock cutting offers opportunities for children to engage in social and educational experiences. They are included in ceremonial preparations, such as arranging offerings and learning the meaning behind each component. This practice provides experiential learning that enhances cognitive growth through participation, storytelling, and religious guidance. As one mother, Narni, shared: *"We explain to the children that this is our way of showing gratitude to Allah. We teach them that tumpeng rice is a symbol of prayer for a better life."* (R3). Such involvement nurtures an understanding of gratitude, spirituality, and the symbolic meaning of tradition in the child's worldview.

Parenting practices for dreadlocked children go beyond ceremonial contexts and extend to daily life infused with Islamic and cultural teachings. Children are taught to be honest, perform daily prayers, and read the Qur'an from an early age. They also learn the value of charity by sharing harvests or food with neighbors, reinforcing empathy and communal responsibility. Folktales and songs are commonly used to teach the origins of dreadlocks and their significance in local heritage. These media are effective tools for internalizing moral values and instilling pride in local identity among young children.

The involvement of dreadlocked children in communal life strengthens their social-emotional development. Through participation in events like religious gatherings, communal prayers, and neighborhood clean-ups, children learn to navigate social roles and build empathy. These interactions help them recognize emotions, practice cooperation, and develop a sense of belonging. The cultural parenting approach in Dieng instills a strong connection to identity and heritage, helping children feel valued and supported. Consequently, they grow up with a balanced sense of individuality and social responsibility.

Physical development is also closely linked to cultural and traditional life in Dieng. Children often engage in farming activities alongside their parents, which supports both gross and fine motor skill development. Tasks such as harvesting vegetables, carrying tools, and watering crops provide valuable physical exercise. These experiences not only promote physical growth but also teach the values of labor and resilience. In interviews, many parents affirmed the benefits of involving children in agriculture from a young age.

One mother shared her observations about her six-year-old child's physical growth through farming activities. She explained: *"My child has started helping in the fields since he was 4 years old. Although at first he only helped carry tools or collect small crops, I saw that he was getting stronger and more skilled at moving. This helps his physical development."* (R4). These accounts highlight how culturally integrated physical tasks provide developmental benefits. The farming lifestyle encourages active engagement with the environment, fostering both strength and discipline. This contributes holistically to the physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being of children with dreadlocks in Dieng.

Relevance of Culture-Based Parenting Patterns for Early Childhood Education Patterns Development

Culture-based parenting is highly relevant to the development of early childhood education (ECE) programs, particularly those emphasizing character and identity formation. In this framework, parenting practices that draw upon local cultural values help instill discipline, respect, social awareness, and moral consciousness in young children. In the Dieng region, culture-based parenting enables children to build a strong sense of self through close interactions with parents, family, and the broader community. This early socialization process supports the internalization of cultural identity and ethical behavior. As a result, the cultural environment becomes a vital context for nurturing holistic development in children.

Parents in Dieng actively integrate local traditions into daily educational experiences, which reinforces children's understanding of their cultural identity. One example is the ritual of cutting dreadlocks, where children are taught to appreciate the significance of family traditions and spiritual practices. Through such events, children learn respect for community norms and their role within the collective. According to several parent interviews, these rituals serve as an avenue to teach children values such as gratitude, obedience, and humility. Thus, parenting rooted in cultural norms not only shapes moral character but also fosters a deep emotional connection to heritage.

Children from farming families and religious households in Dieng receive an education that blends Islamic values with local customs. They are trained in acts of sharing and service, which are considered both religious duties and social responsibilities. A local *kyai* emphasized this by stating that children should be taught to "respect their parents, share with others, and preserve traditions." Such a model exemplifies culturally responsive pedagogy that promotes both academic and character development. In doing so, children not only become literate in school subjects but also in cultural values that sustain community cohesion.

This approach aligns with established child development theories, such as those of Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, and Piaget, which highlight the importance of cultural and social context in shaping learning. Education grounded in local culture supports cognitive, emotional, and social growth by contextualizing learning in everyday experiences. Children engage in active learning through participation in traditional rituals, stories, and community events. These activities provide opportunities to develop problem-solving skills, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Simultaneously, this model contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Culture-based parenting also plays a crucial role in sustaining traditions that risk being eroded by modernization. As children learn values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), reverence for ancestors, and local wisdom, they become bearers of cultural continuity. Parents serve as cultural mediators who transmit knowledge and ensure that younger generations remain rooted in their heritage. This strengthens cultural identity in an increasingly homogenized global environment. Moreover, such parenting fosters resilience and adaptability, qualities that are essential in navigating modern societal challenges.

In the context of ECE, the integration of local culture serves as a powerful tool for contextual learning. Through exposure to folklore, rituals, and traditional arts, children learn in ways that are relevant and meaningful to their lived experience. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports this approach by underscoring the role of social interaction

in cognitive development. Parents act as the primary facilitators of cultural learning, modeling behaviors and guiding children's participation in community life. This hands-on method builds not only knowledge but also emotional intelligence and a sense of cultural pride.

In today's increasingly multicultural world, culture-based parenting provides children with the skills to appreciate diversity while remaining grounded in their own identity. Children raised with a strong sense of cultural self-awareness are better prepared to engage respectfully with other cultures. This foundation supports the creation of inclusive, tolerant societies that value pluralism and mutual respect. In formal education settings, such integration encourages teachers to incorporate local culture into the curriculum. Ultimately, this contributes to the formation of a generation that is both intellectually capable and culturally conscious.

Early Age Parenting Practices for Children With Dreams Among Muslim Farmers in Dieng Applied in Daily Life

Parenting Practices for Early Childhood Dreadlocks in Kyai/Islamic Boarding School Caregivers

Parenting practices among *kyai* and Islamic boarding school caregivers in Dieng combine Islamic religious teachings with the preservation of local cultural traditions. Interviews and field observations show that *kyai* families play a central role in preserving the dreadlock tradition while instilling deep religious values in their children. Emphasis is placed on worship, respect for elders, and social compassion rooted in Islamic ethics. Dreadlocks are perceived not as ordinary hair, but as a trust from Allah that must be honored until the proper time of cutting arrives, which is determined by a child's own request. One *kyai* stated, *"We see dreadlocks as a gift from Allah. Haircuts are done after the child asks for it himself, accompanied by prayers and alms so that the child grows into a useful person,"* while his wife added, *"We involve children in religious studies from an early age, so that they understand that this tradition is part of gratitude to Allah."*

Children with dreadlocks are treated with special care in daily life due to the belief that they are spiritually gifted and require more attentive parenting. A mother in Dieng noted, *"If this child asks for something, we try to give it to him. If his wishes are not fulfilled, he could get sick or be cranky. We make sure that he is always happy."* This reflects a more permissive parenting style, allowing children autonomy in daily decisions such as choosing food or clothing. A father of a dreadlocked child explained, *"These dreadlocked children are different. We let them play as they please, as long as it is not dangerous. We also never force him to do things he doesn't like."*

The child's hair is considered sacred and cannot be cut without a specific request from the child, which adds another layer of cultural discipline. A traditional elder and grandfather explained, *"The hair is not ours. If you want it cut, you have to wait for the child to say he wants it cut. If not, it could bring bad luck."* Parents also begin introducing cultural values from an early age, including the history and significance of dreadlocks. One mother shared, *"We teach our children to join in prayers together during village rituals. Their dreadlocks are a cultural symbol, so they must know their origins."*

Religious and moral education is central in these households, with children being taught generosity, discipline, and respect for ancestors. Parents highlight the importance of early moral development as the foundation of a good Muslim and a respectable member of society. These educational practices are often linked with Islamic rituals, such as charity

and communal prayer. The kyai's household thus demonstrates a model of parenting where religion and tradition coexist in harmony. Their approach affirms that cultural expressions like dreadlocks are compatible with Islamic teachings, as long as the rituals avoid superstition and remain within the bounds of faith.

Early Childhood Care Practices for Dreadlocked Children in Farming Families

Among Muslim farming families in Dieng, care for dreadlocked children shows a seamless integration between local traditions and Islamic teachings. Islamic values are introduced informally through daily routines, such as bedtime prayers and blessings before meals. Charity is also emphasized, often through the practice of sharing food or crops with neighbors. Mrs. Narni explained,

"This is important, so that children remember Allah in all their activities. We also always teach them to share, even if only a little."

These values are deeply embedded in farming life and transmitted through lived experiences.

Farming parents often take their children to the fields, creating opportunities for experiential learning tied to values of hard work and gratitude. Children are exposed to the rhythms of agricultural life, from preparing the land to harvesting crops, which enhances their appreciation of family labor. As Mrs. Narni elaborated, *"The children join us in the fields even though they don't do much work. They see how hard we work for the family, so they learn to appreciate what they have."* These moments are not only educational but also help children bond emotionally with their caregivers. Learning is thus contextualized within everyday life and closely aligned with the values of diligence and cooperation.

Children gradually develop basic skills such as planting and identifying local plants, which contribute to their cognitive and physical development. Through these tasks, children learn the value of sustainability, responsibility, and connection to the natural world. The education is largely oral and modeled through imitation, making it highly accessible for early learners. It also promotes environmental stewardship, a principle that is increasingly relevant in discussions of sustainable development. The farming context, therefore, becomes a dynamic space for culture-based early childhood education.

Parenting Practices for Dreadlocked Early Childhood in Trader Families

Trader families in Dieng apply unique parenting practices that blend traditional values with the demands of a market-based economy. Children are introduced to the concept of hard work and financial responsibility through everyday exposure to business activities. Parents often involve children in simple tasks, such as organizing merchandise or helping with customer service, which cultivates independence and confidence. One parent shared, *"We want children to learn that success requires effort. They can play, but they must also know the value of hard work from a young age."* These practices help children internalize values such as self-reliance and perseverance.

Parenting styles among trader families tend to be democratic, allowing children to express opinions while maintaining religious and moral discipline. Islamic teachings about prayer, almsgiving, and ethical behavior are central in shaping character. Flexible work schedules also allow trader parents to spend more time with their children, offering more opportunities for interaction and bonding. However, the nature of trade—especially during peak seasons—can sometimes reduce the amount of quality time spent with children. Despite these challenges, trader families strive to balance tradition with the economic pressures of their profession.

Parents reported that fluctuations in income and busy periods can affect their capacity to focus on their children's development. Nevertheless, they remain committed to providing a nurturing environment that supports both educational and spiritual growth. Trader families recognize the importance of cultural rituals, such as dreadlock cutting, and incorporate them with Islamic values and contemporary parenting strategies. This dynamic approach highlights the adaptability of cultural parenting within the framework of modern economic life. It also illustrates how diverse livelihood backgrounds influence parenting practices without eroding core cultural values.

Early Childhood Care Practices of Dreadlocked Children in Civil Servant (PNS) Families

Civil servant (PNS) families in Dieng exhibit parenting practices that reflect a synthesis of modern, formal education values with respect for local cultural heritage. Their access to formal knowledge systems and digital information tends to influence a more rational and structured approach to child-rearing. While they continue to value dreadlocks as cultural heritage, they often emphasize the symbolic and educational rather than mystical dimensions. For example, dreadlock-cutting rituals are preserved but carried out with Islamic prayers and minimal reliance on superstitious interpretations. These families see the practice as cultural identity rather than spiritual necessity.

Religious education is prioritized, with a focus on moral formation through practical examples in daily life. Children are taught to donate to social causes, respect community elders, and observe religious obligations as part of their ethical foundation. These values are reinforced by the parents' own involvement in village activities and community service. Civil servant parents often adopt an authoritative parenting style, marked by warmth and clear boundaries. Their children are guided to understand tradition not just through obedience, but through critical reflection and meaning-making.

By fostering both emotional intelligence and cognitive development, civil servant families promote balanced and future-oriented parenting. Children are encouraged to explore, ask questions, and connect traditional values with their formal education. This reflects a forward-thinking model of cultural parenting that prepares children to function effectively in both traditional and modern social environments. Despite their formal roles and structured routines, civil servant parents remain committed to preserving local culture through intentional and reflective parenting. As a result, they embody a model of culturally conscious modern parenting that harmonizes ancestral legacy with educational progress.

Discussion

The exploration of culture-based parenting among Muslim farming communities in Dieng Wonosobo, particularly in the context of dreadlocked children at an early age, addresses a unique intersection between local tradition and religious observance. The phenomenon reflects a broader discourse on how indigenous practices and Islamic values converge to shape child development in culturally specific ways (Amelia & Green, 2023; Kadir & Ahmed, 2023; Rahim et al., 2022). Culturally embedded parenting approaches, such as those observed in Dieng, reinforce both individual identity and communal harmony, aligning with theoretical frameworks that emphasize sociocultural contexts in cognitive and emotional development (Keller, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Dreadlocked children are seen not through a pathological lens but as culturally special, necessitating distinct educational and emotional nurturing aligned with community beliefs (Jones & Smith, 2022; Rahim et al., 2022; Sinaga, 2022). This study contributes to the discourse by revealing the nuanced

integration of ritual, spirituality, and early childhood education within a Muslim agrarian society.

In Dieng, dreadlocks in children are viewed as sacred and naturally occurring, symbolizing divine favor or ancestral connection, thereby placing such children in a culturally distinct category (Backstrom, 2025; Georgopoulou et al., 2023; Oh et al., 2012). Parents adopt a more permissive yet spiritually vigilant style of parenting, characterized by respect for the child's autonomy and fulfillment of ritual demands (Daglar et al., 2011; Jinnah & Stoneman, 2016; Stevenson & Beck, 2024). Gendered parenting is evident, where boys are afforded greater physical freedom and social responsibility, while girls are nurtured within domestic and moral frameworks (Foy-Phillips & Lloyd-Evans, 2011; Sarni et al., 2024). Participation in farming and religious life contributes to holistic development, encompassing cognitive, social, spiritual, and physical domains (Alam et al., 2023; Pham, 2024; Puspitasari et al., 2020). These outcomes underscore a parenting model that is both traditional and developmental, rooted in a cultural ontology of sacred childhood.

Local cultural beliefs play a significant role in fostering children's sense of identity and emotional security (Raval, 2023; Rodrigo et al., 2018; Shanley et al., 2024). Similar to Indigenous and rural contexts elsewhere, Dieng parents seek to preserve tradition while also adapting to Islamic ethical norms (Andersson et al., 2024; Mejia et al., 2016; Poulsen et al., 2010). The ritual emphasis before dreadlock cutting echoes communities where metaphysical attributes in children require specific forms of care (Karsten, 2015; Rahim et al., 2022; Talbot, 2013). Parallel parenting dynamics are found in African, Emirati, and rural American communities where ancestral values persist despite modern influences (Green & Smith, 2007; Langston, 2016; Strickland & Lyutykh, 2020). The Dieng case reflects this broader trend in sustaining symbolic and spiritual dimensions in early upbringing.

Unlike secular models of early childhood education, Dieng's approach prioritizes character and identity formation through culturally ritualized learning. This affirms the value of localized pedagogy in early development (Baumann et al., 2019; LaMonica et al., 2022; Winarso, 2022). Practices surrounding hair and ritual expression find similarities in Kenya and Panama, where culturally tailored parenting programs have improved developmental outcomes (Asiimwe et al., 2023; Parry et al., 2022; Weber et al., 2021). In contrast to perspectives that highlight marginalization of minority traditions in formal education (Holloway et al., 2024; Visser et al., 2015), the Dieng context showcases an integration of local values into religious learning. While globalization presents challenges (Pham, 2024), the community actively negotiates continuity within changing educational landscapes—offering a model of adaptive cultural parenting with policy implications.

The cultural logic that frames dreadlocks as signs of divine favor or ancestral linkage plays a central role in shaping parenting roles and expectations within families (Amelia & Green, 2023; Kadir & Ahmed, 2023; Rahim et al., 2022). This perspective elevates children's symbolic status and encourages a style of parenting that balances permissiveness with spiritual reverence. While supportive of emotional and social growth, this model may warrant caution to prevent misinterpretation or overindulgence (Asheer et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2012; Shih, 2019). Encouraging accountability and structured guidance is key as children begin to navigate broader social environments. Hence, cultural parenting rooted in metaphysical belief needs to be both celebrated and critically examined.

Daily integration of farming and religious rituals represents a form of experiential learning that enriches multiple domains of child development, resonating with contextual learning theories (Keller, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Involvement in symbolic acts such as

ruwatan facilitates growth through narrative and moral reflection. However, the reliance on oral tradition poses documentation challenges, limiting the scalability of these methods (Okafor et al., 2013; Rygaard, 2024; Sherr et al., 2022). For broader educational application, institutional support and culturally inclusive policies are required to validate such practices without diluting their integrity.

The insights emerging from this case invite broader consideration of inclusive policy frameworks in early education that affirm the legitimacy of indigenous parenting systems (Alam et al., 2023; Pham, 2024; Weber et al., 2021). The recognition of dreadlocked children as culturally special rather than developmentally deviant calls for a shift in educational and psychological frameworks toward cultural pluralism. Culturally responsive pedagogy grounded in the lived realities of communities like Dieng offers a path toward equity and relevance in education (Karsten, 2015; Puspitasari et al., 2020; Raval, 2023). Moreover, parenting practices centered on spirituality and community promote resilience and emotional intelligence—key assets in lifelong learning. Embracing such localized systems has the potential to redefine early childhood education on a more inclusive and sustaining foundation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the beliefs, values, daily parenting practices, and cultural relevance of caring for dreadlocked children at an early age among Muslim farming communities in Dieng, with a focus on contributing to inclusive early childhood education rooted in local wisdom. The findings reveal that dreadlocks are viewed not merely as a physical condition but as a spiritual and cultural sign, resulting in unique parenting patterns that combine Islamic teachings with ancestral traditions and emphasize affection, permissiveness, and communal involvement. These practices nurture moral character, cultural identity, and emotional resilience, highlighting the importance of integrating culturally grounded approaches in early childhood education frameworks. The study also suggests that dreadlocked children should be understood as culturally special rather than developmentally deficient, challenging conventional definitions of special needs and affirming the educational value of localized knowledge systems. Although limited by its qualitative and context-specific scope, the study offers meaningful implications for culturally responsive pedagogy and calls for further research across diverse cultural settings, including longitudinal and comparative studies, to support the development of inclusive education policies that respect and incorporate indigenous parenting traditions.

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