

## Connectionn Feeding Patterns with Picky Eater Behavior in Preschool Children Aged 4-5 Years

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### Abstract:

Picky eating behavior is a common problem in preschool children that can affect nutritional intake and growth. Understanding the relationship between feeding patterns and picky eating behavior is important to help parents develop better feeding strategies. This quantitative study used a correlational analytical design with a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted among 70 preschool children aged 4–5 years at KB-TK Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency. A total of 60 children were selected using proportionate random sampling. Data were collected using the Child Eating Behavior Questionnaire (CEBQ) and a picky eater questionnaire. Statistical analysis was performed using the Chi-Square test. The findings showed that 45 children (75%) exhibited picky eater behavior, while 15 children (25%) did not. The Chi-Square test result showed a p-value of 0.030, indicating a significant relationship between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior. There is a significant relationship between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior in preschool children. Children with good feeding patterns are less likely to exhibit picky eating behavior. Therefore, parents should recognize their children's eating patterns and provide a variety of foods to prevent picky eating tendencies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical period for growth and development, particularly during the toddler years when brain cells develop rapidly. However, many children experience growth and behavioral challenges, such as picky eating, which can affect nutritional intake and overall development (Kemp et al., 2025). Understanding factors that influence picky eating behavior, including feeding patterns, is essential to support optimal child growth. However, issues such as picky eating can hinder this process (Chiu et al., 2025). Picky eating is a habit in which children prefer certain types of food

and tend to avoid new foods, limiting the intake of nutrients essential for their growth and development (Astuti et al., 2023).

The prevalence of picky eating in Singapore, classified as frequent, was 49.6% of 407 respondents, and the study showed the highest proportion of picky eaters in children aged 3-5 years at 29.9% (Taufiq, 2021). The Gateshead Millennium Babies study, 2014 in (Loka et al., 2018) stated that 20% of parents in the UK reported their children experiencing eating problems, with the highest prevalence being children who only ate certain foods. Meanwhile, the proportion of picky eaters in Indonesia was highest at 60.3% in toddlers. A study of preschool children aged 4-6 years in Jakarta found a prevalence of eating difficulties of 33.6%, and 44.5% of them suffered from mild to moderate malnutrition. 79.2% of the study subjects had suffered from eating difficulties for more than 3 months (Purnamasari & Adriani, 2020). From the results of the study on preschool children in Suci Village, Kec. Panti, Jember Regency, found that 46.2% were picky eaters (Devotion & Science, 2016). Based on a preliminary study in four kindergartens in Summersari District, Jember Regency, it was found that the prevalence of picky eating in Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah kindergarten was higher than in the other three. Interviews with 10 mothers and teachers revealed that 90% of the children were picky eaters. These children tended to dislike foods with rough textures such as meat, fruits with strong odors, and vegetables. They ate three meals a day but often chose their preferred foods.

According to Istiany (2014) in (Noviana, 2019) there are internal and external factors that influence the occurrence of picky eating in preschool children. Internal factors include appetite, while external factors are related to parents, such as a history of exclusive breastfeeding, education, maternal employment status, number of children, parent-child interaction, and feeding patterns. According to IDAI (2015) in Noviana (2019), picky eating can also be caused by physiological factors such as stomatitis or digestive disorders, as well as psychological factors, such as rejection of disliked foods. Parents can create a pleasant atmosphere, not force children, pay attention to and vary the child's favorite foods. Adequate nutritional support is essential for Supporting child growth (Astuti et al., 2023). According to Hananto (2014) in Noviana (2019), picky eaters are at risk of micro- and macronutrient deficiencies, which can hinder physical growth and IQ, as well as impact a child's intelligence. Therefore, eating problems must be addressed appropriately (Bursali & Touray, 2024) (Barbosa et al., 2023).

The government's efforts to address the problem of picky eating include health promotion, one of which is the Healthy Living Community Movement (GERMAS) program, which promotes daily consumption of fruits and vegetables (Ministry of Health, 2016). Furthermore, parents, especially mothers, play a crucial role in teaching children to eat healthy foods. To address picky eating, parents can create attractive food presentations, encouraging children to consume nutritious foods. Research shows that giving children the freedom to try new foods and family support can help overcome food aversions (Permatasari & Kurniawati, 2020) (Widyaningsih et al., 2024).

Based on the above issues, it can be concluded that picky eating behavior can affect children's growth and development. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting research to determine whether there is a relationship between feeding patterns and picky eating in preschool children at the Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Kindergarten (KB-TK) in Summersari District, Jember Regency.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational analytical research design and a cross-sectional approach. The data collection tools used were the Child Eating Behavior Questionnaire (CEBQ) and the picky eater questionnaire. Both

instruments underwent validity and reliability testing, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported to ensure internal consistency and measurement accuracy. The population in this study was all preschool children aged 4-5 years at KB-TK Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency. The population taken in this study was 70 children. The sample determination using the Slovin technique found a total of 60 respondents. The sampling technique used in this study was probability sampling using the Proportionate Random Sampling method.

The research location was KB-TK Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency. This research was conducted from February to December 2024. The data processing method consisted of editing, coding, scoring, and tabulating stages. The data obtained were analyzed using univariate and bivariate techniques. In health research, every research must obtain permission from the Health Research Ethics Commission with stages namely ethical clearance, research permit, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

## RESULTS

### A. General Data

#### 1. Exclusive Breastfeeding

Table 1. Frequency distribution of preschool children based on the provision of exclusive breastfeeding by parents

<b>Breast Milk</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Exclusive	28	46.7
Breastfeeding Not Exclusive	32	53.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on Table 1 presents data on breastfeeding practices among respondents. Out of a total of 60 participants, 28 mothers (46.7%) practiced exclusive breastfeeding, while 32 mothers (53.3%) did not practice exclusive breastfeeding. This indicates that non-exclusive breastfeeding was slightly more common among the respondents than exclusive breastfeeding.

#### 2. Parental education

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Parents of Preschool Children Based on Last Education

<b>Education</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Basic Level	0	0
College Level	7	11.7
Middle	53	88.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on table 2 shows the educational background of 60 respondents. The majority of participants, 53 individuals (88.3%), had a college or middle-level education, while 7 respondents (11.7%) had a basic level of education. There were no respondents (0%) without formal education. This indicates that most participants had attained at least a moderate level of education.

### 3. Parental occupation

Table 3. Frequency distribution of parents of preschool children based on occupation.

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Work	46	76.7
Doesn't work	14	23.3
Total	60	100

Based on table 3 presents the employment status of 60 respondents. The majority, 46 respondents (76.7%), were employed, while 14 respondents (23.3%) were not employed. This indicates that most participants were actively working at the time of the study.

### 4. Parity Amount

Table 4. Frequency distribution of mothers of preschool children based on parity

<b>Parity</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
1st child	23	38.3
Child to >1	37	61.7
Total	60	100

Based on table 4, it shows that of the 60 parents of preschool children, the majority have more than one child, namely 37 mothers (61.7%).

## B. Specific Data

### 1. Feeding Pattern

Table 5. Frequency distribution of preschool children based on feeding patterns

<b>Feeding Pattern</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Not enough	0	0
Enough	38	63.3
Good	22	36.7
Total	60	100

Based on table 5 displays the distribution of respondents based on their feeding patterns. Out of 60 participants, 38 respondents (63.3%) demonstrated an adequate feeding pattern, while 22 respondents (36.7%) showed a good feeding pattern. There were no respondents (0%) categorized as having an insufficient feeding pattern. This suggests that the majority of respondents maintained at least an adequate level of feeding behavior

### 2. Picky eater eating behavior

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Preschool Children Based on Eating Behavior

<b>Picky eater behavior</b>	<b>( f )</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<i>Picky eater</i>	45	75
Not a picky eater	15	25
Total	60	100

Based on table 6 presents the distribution of respondents based on picky eater behavior. Among the 60 participants, 45 respondents (75%) were identified as picky eaters, while 15 respondents (25%) were not picky eaters. This indicates that picky eating behavior was relatively common, with three-quarters of the respondents exhibiting selective eating habits.

### 3. Bivariate Analysis

Table 7. Relationship between feeding patterns and picky eating behavior in preschool children aged 4–5 years.

Giving Pattern Eat	Picky eater behavior				Total		P Value
	Picky eater		Not a picky eater		(f)	(%)	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	
Enough	32	53.3	6	10	38	63.3	0.030
Good	13	21.7	9	15	22	36.7	
Total	45	75	15	25	60	100	

Based on table 7, it shows that of the 60 preschool children, the majority have picky eating behavior with a sufficient feeding pattern, namely 32 preschool children (84.2%). The results of the analysis of the relationship between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior in preschool children through SPSS software using the Chi Square test, it is known that the resulting probability value is 0.030. These results indicate a probability value <level of significance (alpha (α = 5%)), so it can be concluded that H0 is rejected, so H1 is accepted, so that there is a significant relationship between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior in preschool children aged 4-5 years at KB-TK Al- Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Feeding Pattern

This study found that more than half of the mothers, 38 respondents (63.3%), implemented a feeding pattern in the adequate category. This means that more mothers implemented a feeding pattern in the adequate category than mothers implemented a feeding pattern in the good category. Eating habits reflect how a person's nutritional needs are met and are reflected in the types of food they consume, the amounts they eat, and the frequency of their meals. Preschoolers are undergoing a non-physical developmental process, where they are trained to be independent, behave in harmony with their environment, develop various skills, and engage in various other activities, all of which contribute to physical health. Therefore, good health, supported by nutrition, is the most important prerequisite for optimal child growth and development (Białek-Dratwa & Kowalski, 2024) (Nelson & Holub, 2025).

According to researchers, healthy eating patterns are highly dependent on fundamental economic factors. Based on research data, most mothers work, so their involvement in the workforce has a significant impact on the family's economic structure (Lukitasari, 2020). When mothers work, family income tends to increase, allowing them to purchase more quality and nutritious food. With higher incomes, families also have access to healthier and more varied food products, such as fresh vegetables, quality meats, or more nutritious processed foods (Messenger et al., 2025).

According to the researchers' analysis, this is also closely linked to maternal education. Higher education provides mothers with better knowledge of their children's nutritional needs and how to choose the right foods (Lubis & Tioman Deliana, 2024). They are better able to plan balanced menus, including all essential nutrients to support optimal growth and development (Fitriana et al., 2020). Furthermore, educated mothers

tend to better understand the importance of dietary variety and are better able to recognize signs of malnutrition in children (Ompusunggu, 2025).

## 2. Picky eater eating behavior

The results of this study, picky eating behavior in preschool children aged 4-5 years at KB-TK Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency, showed that 45 children (75%) experienced picky eating behavior and 15 children (25%) were not picky eaters. Based on these data, it shows that children with picky eating behavior are more numerous than children with non-picky eating behavior. Picky eating behavior occurs when a child only consumes a limited number of foods, prefers familiar foods, and has difficulty trying new foods (Kucuksucu & Kilincaslan, 2024). This can lead to a child not enjoying the food served, putting them at risk of malnutrition. A child's freedom to refuse new foods that don't meet their expectations and are considered harmful to them and their health. This includes foods that are visually unappealing, have a bitter taste, a hard texture, or an unpleasant odor (Xing, 2023) (Cerdasari et al., 2017).

According to researchers, more than half of children are not exclusively breastfed. This can affect the eating behavior of preschoolers, especially those who become picky eaters (Xiaoli et al., 2022). Children who are not exclusively breastfed miss out on the opportunity to experience the variety of flavors in breast milk, which impacts their openness to new foods in the future (Booker et al., 2022). This is in line with research (Noviana, 2019) which shows that children who are not exclusively breastfed have a higher incidence of picky eating than children who are exclusively breastfed, with 53 children (84.1%).

According to the researchers' analysis, this is also influenced by the mother's working status. Based on the researchers' data, more working mothers than unemployed mothers are involved, impacting the time needed to interact and adapt to their children's daily eating habits. Therefore, a mother's working status can impact children's poor eating behaviors (Mori et al., 2021) (Zozaya et al., 2022).

## 3. The Relationship Between Feeding Patterns and Picky Eating Behavior

Based on the results of data analysis in this study using the Chi Square statistical test, a relationship was found between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior with a probability value of 0.030. These results indicate that feeding patterns influence picky eater behavior in preschool children aged 4-5 years at KB-TK Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah, Summersari District, Jember Regency. Of the 45 children who have picky eater eating behavior, 32 children (84.2%) of them received sufficient feeding patterns while the remaining 13 children (21.7%) received good feeding patterns. When viewed from this study, sufficient feeding patterns can influence children experiencing picky eater behavior. The role of parents in providing feeding patterns is very influential and important as a role model for children about how good feeding patterns are (Hayati & Amran, 2022). This is in line with research which shows that there is a relationship between feeding patterns and picky eater behavior in toddler-aged children, good feeding patterns by mothers include food variations, positive parent-child interactions, the creation of a good social environment in shaping children's emotions, assistance during meals, a positive atmosphere at home related to the quantity and quality of children's food intake tends to form good eating behavior in children (Rozianna & Humaroh, 2025). Another study conducted by (Yulianti Rahmah, Khairuna, 2017) on preschool children aged 3-5 years, showed that there is a significant relationship between feeding and picky eater behavior.

The findings suggest that better feeding patterns are associated with reduced picky eating behavior, as early exposure to a variety of healthy foods encourages

children to accept diverse tastes and textures (Winkler et al., 2022). This may occur because consistent parental modeling and positive mealtime environments shape children's eating habits and preferences (Dewi et al., 2023). These results align with previous studies showing that responsive feeding and food variety can decrease selective eating behavior, highlighting the importance of early dietary experiences in shaping long-term eating patterns (Brown et al., 2022). There are parents who have implemented good feeding patterns but their children still experience picky eating, because based on research data, more than half of children do not receive exclusive breastfeeding at the age of 0-6 months, which can be a factor in the occurrence of picky eating in preschool children (Hastrup, 2024).

According to data, more mothers work than do not, which affects the time available to interact with and adjust to their children's eating habits. Data also shows that more than half of mothers have more than one child. Mothers with higher parity tend to have more knowledge and experience, which can influence how they care for their subsequent children (Indrasari et al., 2024) (Solmaz & Başkale, 2024).

In addition, there are some mothers who are not optimal in serving a variety of foods containing nutrients according to their children's needs, some mothers have children who refuse if given food with a rough texture such as meat and children refuse food, especially fruit with a strong smell such as durian, so with the rejection of certain types of food, it is hoped that mothers are able to serve a variety of foods that are acceptable to children so as to minimize the occurrence of children experiencing picky eating (Ostende et al., 2024). More varied types of food and sufficient nutritional value are very important to prevent children from malnutrition. Good feeding patterns must be carried out from an early age by providing a variety of foods and providing information to children about good meal times. Thus, children will get used to healthy eating patterns (Purnamasari & Adriani, 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that most preschool children aged 4–5 years in the study had adequate feeding patterns, and the majority also exhibited picky eating behavior. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between feeding patterns and picky eating behavior among preschool children, where those with good feeding patterns showed lower levels of picky eating, while those with adequate feeding patterns tended to display higher levels of such behavior. In light of these findings, it is suggested that parents become more proactive in seeking information and understanding the importance of balanced nutritional intake for their children. For future researchers, it is recommended to adopt a qualitative research approach, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, to explore parental attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to child feeding practices. Such an approach could provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing picky eating behavior that may not be captured through quantitative methods.

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