

Proceeding of The 1st International Conference on Integrated-Holistic Early Childhood Education (ICIHECE)

Islamic Early Childhood Program, Faculty of Tarbiya and Teacher Training
Universitas Islam Negeri Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto
e-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, p-ISSN: XXXX, DOI: 10.24090/icihece

Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness of Children with Special Needs in Purwakarta Regency

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Abstract: The readiness of children with special needs to enter school depends on their physical and mental maturity in receiving learning at school. This study aimed to determine parents' perceptions of the readiness of children with special needs to enter school in Purwakarta Regency, determine what factors affect children's readiness to enter school and find out factors affecting parents' readiness to send children with special needs to school. The method in this study was qualitative with a descriptive type and data collection techniques using interviews, observation, and documentation. The analysis results indicate that children with special needs to enter school are seen in terms of their social, emotional, and moral readiness to enter social situations at school. The factors that affect the readiness of children with special needs are stimulation factors at pre-school age and the condition of parents' readiness to send children with special needs to school.

Keywords: Children with special needs, Perception, Parents

A. Introduction

Children with special needs require special handling due to physical and mental limitations, disorders, and birth abnormalities. According to Desieningrum (2016), children with special needs are those who have limitations in one or several abilities, both physical (such as being blind or deaf) and psychological (such as having autism or ADHD). When viewed from various angles, children with special needs have limitations and disorders at every level of development. In addition, children with special needs usually have disabilities and social and mental dysfunctions. Children with special needs have special characteristics that differ from those without always showing mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the definition of each term is as follows: *Disability* is a limitation or lack of ability (resulting from an impairment) to display activities according to its rules or still within normal limits, usually used at the individual level. *Impairment* is a loss or abnormality in psychological terms or anatomical structure or function, usually used at the organ level. *Handicapping* is an individual's misfortune resulting from impairment or disability that limits or hinders the fulfilment of normal roles in the individual.

Due to the limitations of children with special needs, the involvement of parents as the first caregiver contributes a significant role in the early detection of children with special needs and as the main stimulant of their development. Parents are the most important and first educators for children. So that the success of parents in educating is greatly influenced by the role of parents in their success for their future. The role of parents is needed in the process of growing up a child (Amalina: 2022). Meanwhile, parents are the support system in the first education of children, from starting to provide affection to providing continuous developmental stimulation (Purnamasari et al., 2022). Parents are also a means of teaching children from birth and providing an experience for children's growth and development on an ongoing basis.

In an effort to prepare children with special needs to obtain their rights to obtain an equitable education for every Indonesian citizen, parents are required to monitor aspects of development and delays in their children through early detection from birth. In addition, parents must play an active role in preparing children with special needs to have readiness to enter school. The readiness of children with special needs to enter formal schools is the readiness of children to meet the demands of schools according to the elementary school level.

Gloria (Damayanti: 2020) explains 3 things that form the basis for children's considerations for entering school, namely (1) family values, which are values in life that are important to be firmly held by families including perceptions of academic and affective; (2) Financial condition, this is important because it is used as material for projecting financial plans owned by families in financing school fees to preparation for the next level; and (3) The character of the child, by understanding the potential and needs of the child at this time and possible future predictions.

School readiness is a systemic concept, not just a child's readiness to develop. The readiness of children to enter school is obtained from the process of several elements, namely children, families and schools (Boethel: 2004). Pandia in Damayanti (2023) explains the determinants of the success of institution-based education, namely: the suitability of the program with the learning environment, qualified teachers, good curriculum, the right teacher-student ratio, activities that are appropriate to developmental stages, warm interactions with children, and parental involvement. The elements of the child itself include age, physical, cognitive, religious, moral, and social-emotional development. The family element is the main support system and stimulant for the child's learning process so that it can develop all types of child development. In addition, schools are facilities that can accommodate children's needs to learn more broadly and in a structured manner. Therefore, school readiness includes (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008): (1) Children's readiness for school; (2) readiness of schools to accommodate children's learning needs; and (3) The capacity and commitment of families and communities to provide opportunities for children from an early age. Thus, the readiness of children with special needs to enter the school level is an interactive process or a set of relationships between the child, his family, the community environment and the school interact in a way that supports the process of physical, cognitive and social-emotional development of children with special needs.

According to the website of the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, citing statistical data for 2021, the disability range for children aged 5–19 years is

3.3%. While the population at that age is 66.6 million people; thus, the number of children aged 5–19 years with disabilities ranges from 2,197,833. Meanwhile, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture for 2021 reveals that the participation of students in the extraordinary and inclusive school path is 269,398. Hence, the percentage of children with disabilities who receive formal education is only 12.26%.

Based on field data at two Special schools in Purwakarta, it indicates that there will be no student data at the extraordinary kindergarten level in 2022–2023. It implies that there is no preschool education process at that level due to parents' lack of interest and motivation in sending their children to the extraordinary kindergarten level. It is important to find out how parents feel about sending their children to school and to assess what factors affect the readiness of children with special needs and their parents to enter school.

Research by Mulyanti et al. (2023) states that most people with special needs children in Bungursari Purwakata Sub-district do not understand the essence of inclusive education and junior high school. Likewise, in line with research (Purwani, 2022; Wapiroh, 2023), most teachers and parents in several sub-districts in Purwakarta, namely Pondok Salam, Plered, and Tegal Waru sub-districts, do not fully understand education for children with special needs and inclusion education. Problems in another study, Mahabbati & Nurhayati (2017), ECCE institutions' ability to provide inclusive and early childhood education is still lacking. Only a few ECCE institutions provide inclusion education, while there are children with special needs who also need to get services.

Whereas the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 72 of 1991 article 6 paragraph 1 which regulates special education at the early childhood education level namely Special Kindergarten is a form of education unit for persons with disabilities aged three to six years as an effort to provide early service so that they obtain physical, mental, social and emotional readiness to be able to take part in the education program at Special Elementary Schools.

Departing from the data and the results of these initial observations, it is necessary to examine more deeply the readiness of children with special needs in entering school, as well as exploring parents' perceptions of the readiness of children with special needs to enter school, as well as what factors are obstacles for parents in preparing children with special needs to enter school.

B. Methods

In this study, using descriptive qualitative research with data collection techniques through interviews, observations, and field notes. Data analysis was carried out by coding the results of interviews, field notes, and other materials so that they can be easily understood and the findings can be informed to others.

The population in this study were all parents of children with special needs who send their children to special schools in Purwakarta Regency. The research sample was 12 parents of students with special needs with the sample criteria being selected based on the type of special needs children in the Low Class Special schools. This criterion was chosen based on the consideration that parents of children with special needs with criteria for persons with

disabilities in the high category, namely severe deafness, severe autism and multiple disabilities.

C. Results and Discussion

School readiness for children with special needs relates to the role of parents as the first stimulant in the child's learning process. In addition, the child's experience process is obtained from the family environment which continues to be carried out repeatedly so that it stimulates the development of children with special needs. Child readiness refers to the child's internal processes and the child's interaction with his environment. Therefore in this study, discussing the road map which focuses on the analysis of 3 subjects, namely children, parents, and the school/teacher.

Parents' perceptions of their children's readiness are important to analyze because, in reality, parents have an important role in considering including children with special needs at the school level. Based on the results of interviews with 12 parents of lower-grade students at Special School in Purwakarta, they agreed that the age of 7-8 years was the right age to send children with special needs to school. It is in line with the results of these observations and the Minister of Education and Culture regulation regarding new student admission regulations, which require prospective students to be at least seven or at least 6.5 years old by attaching a letter of recommendation from a professional psychologist.

The parents believe that Special school is a suitable environment to develop the talents of children with special needs. In addition, Special Schools were chosen because children with special needs require special handling in the communication and learning process, considering the background of children with special needs with severe category limitations, severe deafness, autism with heavy categories, and multiple limitations. Eight parents agree that the age of seven years old is ideal for entering children into special schools. While the four parents argued differently, they know the ideal age for children to enter school with normal or non-disabled categories is seven years old, according to government regulations. However, they argued that the age of eight years is the ideal age for children to enter school because, under the age of eight years, children do not want to interact more widely socially, such as interaction at school. Thus, it is concluded that parents know the ideal age for children to enter school. Moreover, due to the obstacles and limitations experienced by their children, they allow parents to enter their children more slowly, namely at the age of eight years, with certain considerations, one of which is the child's unreadiness for social development.

Meanwhile, if seen from the perceptions of teachers at Special schools on the readiness of children with special needs, this can be interpreted from several aspects of child development, the readiness of parents, and the readiness of teachers to facilitate children with special needs for school. Based on the results of interviews with 8 class teachers at special schools, it was stated that children's readiness includes the development of developmental elements, namely physical motor, religious and moral values, social and emotional children. Meanwhile, according to 4 other teachers, the readiness of children to enter school is seen from the aspect of social interaction with other people so that they are ready to accept learning in class. Social skills that must be possessed by children with special needs at least

have independence, courage, responsibility, and the ability to adapt to the surrounding environment.

In addition, 2 of the teachers added that the readiness of children with special needs included self-confidence in displaying talents or interests/hobbies that stood out so that these talents could motivate children with special needs to have confidence and courage in adapting to the school environment. Talents and hobbies of children with special needs are detected through interviews with parents so that teachers can find out the hobbies and interests of these children.

Thus, all aspects of development form the basis of a child's readiness to participate in the learning process at school. 4 teachers have different opinions from 3 other teachers who think that a child's readiness is not only determined by his development but also influenced by the ability of parents to detect early a child's disorder or disability. They argue that early detection by parents influences the pattern of child development, because with early detection by parents, it will determine what stimulation is suitable for children with special needs. A teacher will provide services in the form of stimulation and treatment according to the unique characteristics needed by children with special needs. Furthermore, the 3 teachers stated that the form of teacher service to help each child to achieve their optimal development potential is to study information from parents as the first educators at home as well as references to judgment from doctors and psychologists. In other words, teachers are prepared to have special skills such as therapy skills and also have good patience (Dewi: 2023). This is an integration of readiness between educators and students in carrying out the process of educational services for children with special needs.

In line with what was stated by Boethel (2004) that one of the factors that influence children's school readiness is the process of development and interaction between children and the smallest environment such as the nuclear family, home environment, and place of residence.

On the other hand, according to the results of interviews with 12 parents who have children with special needs said that early detection is the first step to provide stimulation in providing experiences and children's learning processes. However, 7 of them experienced delays in the process of detecting their children's disorders and limitations. So that the process of late detection hinders the development of children in the future. 5 Parents argue that early detection is carried out early by parents so as to allow good stimulation for children such as taking them to a psychologist to do IQ and mental testing of children. Some parents understand the importance of taking their child to a doctor or psychologist to obtain valid information about their child's special needs. From the expert's statement, it is possible to provide interventions in the form of special stimulation in stimulating the development of children with special needs so that they develop more effectively.

Meanwhile, some parents do not know how important it is to have their child examined by a doctor or psychologist when a child's physical or mental disorder or limitations have been detected. They only rely on their senses to detect visible limitations in children. Parents stated that children with special needs did not enter the pre-school level because they were worried that children would be unprepared for learning. In fact, according to Pandia, (Damayanti 2020) explained the importance of education at an early age because early age is a very valuable golden age. At an early age, especially before the age of 5, the human brain

continues to develop. Children have potential, but it is the environment that plays a major role in developing children's positive attitudes, personality and abilities. . A conducive home environment and early school experience will benefit children's intellectual development. Positive early experiences during the early period can completely change the way a child develops. Early education makes children socially, motivationally and cognitively ready to face life outside the home and formal education. In addition, based on the results of interviews with parents, 8 parents stated that they did not prepare their children to enter pre-school age due to confusion in finding schools that were suitable for children with special needs. This is due to the limited knowledge of parents in finding kindergartens for children with special needs. Meanwhile, 4 parents stated that they had the knowledge to send their children to inclusive schools, but many obstacles were experienced by parents to send their children to inclusive schools. Based on the results of interviews with their parents, they have limitations in traveling quite a long distance to reach inclusive schools. Then, parents think that entering an inclusive school requires expensive fees. In addition, 2 parents of students stated that kindergarten schools in Purwakarta were not fully ready to accept children with special needs. The unpreparedness in question includes infrastructure and limitations of human resources. Therefore, all parents agree to send their children to special schools.

School readiness of children with special needs is influenced by parents' readiness to send their children to school, such as aspects that affect school readiness, namely socioeconomic status often interacts with race or ethnicity, children's health, characteristics of family background, especially mother's education, single parent status, and mental health. home and community environment, including risk factors and factors related to illiteracy, and participation in some types of preschool programs. In line with Pandita (Damayanti, 2022) Readiness to send children to school is influenced by social and economic factors. In addition, there are factors that support or hinder the process of preparing children for school, both from individuals, families or communities.

From the above opinion, compared with the results of interviews with parents of students who send children with special needs to school, it is from a financial and economic perspective. They argue that sending children with special needs to school requires a relatively high fee compared to other regular children. The costs incurred to accommodate children with special needs are considered to be more burdensome, because the distance between school and residence is relatively far, which allows for swelling in terms of transportation costs. Besides that, special facilities for children with disabilities require extra costs in learning and learning activities.

Based on the results of interviews on the readiness of parents to send children with special needs to special schools including the physical and mental readiness of parents. Mental readiness is important for parents' readiness, because parents will have to be prepared with various consequences in sending their children to special schools. Parents must be prepared to accept the negative stigma attached to children in society. Parents must be prepared to accept the negative stigma attached to children with special needs in society. In addition, the mental readiness of parents of children with special needs must be able to work together with the school in guiding the development of the child's learning process. In line with this, according to Karwono & Mularsih (2017: 14) suggests that "readiness is an individual condition that allows them to learn". According to Slameto (2015: 113) indicators

of learning readiness are "physical conditions, mental conditions, emotional conditions, needs (motivation) and knowledge.

Thus the readiness of parents to send their children with special needs to school has dimensions from various perspectives. The first examines the condition of the readiness of children with special needs both in terms of physical, motor, social, emotional, values, morals, and cognitive readiness to study in special schools. On the other hand, the readiness of parents includes mental readiness in guiding and directing their children to study at school and at home. Mental readiness of parents to socialize and adapt to their children's learning environment both at school and in the neighborhood. In line with this, Romadhon (2020) states that parents must accept the situation of children with special needs because children are a gift from the Almighty. Based on the results of interviews and observations, some parents have not fully accepted the condition of their children who have special needs. They think that their child is just experiencing developmental delays. However, 70% of them parents have full awareness of their children's limitations.

In addition, based on the results of interviews and observations it was found that parents' readiness was influenced by several factors, namely knowledge of understanding the types of schools for children with special needs, knowledge of how to check children with special needs to doctors and psychology, knowledge of early detection of the development of children with special needs, knowledge of the importance of providing special handling and stimulation for early childhood. The next factor is the awareness of parents to understand the importance of education for children with special needs. In addition, financial readiness factors were also found in sending children with special needs to school.

D. Conclusion

School readiness for Children with Special Needs refers to the readiness needed by children to enter elementary school / Special schools by referring to the competencies needed to support children's success in learning at school. The reference for the readiness of children with special needs to enter school is based on the demands of physical and motor development, cognitive development, and social-emotional readiness for learning at school. The perception of parents in children's readiness for school is not only looking at children from their ideal developmental tasks. However, it is also influenced by parents' readiness to send children with special needs. In addition, three main things considered ready to enter school parents include family values, financial conditions, and children's character to meet the needs of children with special needs to have school readiness.

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