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## Parents' Perceptions of Children's School Readiness During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT:** Children's school readiness is important to discuss because learning loss is an obstacle in preparing early childhood to enter elementary school. This study aims to look at parents' perceptions of their children's readiness for school during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses a quantitative descriptive survey research design to collect measurable data for statistical analysis from a population sample. The results show that preparing children for school during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is very different from the usual practice. Parents are required to provide appropriate stimulation to children at home to replace the role of teachers at school and restore the motivation and willingness of children to enter elementary school. The perception of parents is certainly very influential on the stimulation that will be given to children.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, parents' perceptions, school readiness

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 epidemic, a significant socio-historical incident, still seriously disrupts people's lives today (Benner & Mistry, 2020). At periods where traditional developmental turning points occur, such as when a kid starts school at age four, the impact of such cultural events is considerably more significant (Benner & Mistry, 2020). Our research focuses on the developmental losses experienced by kids who entered the school during the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures are perhaps the most significant cause of disrupting young children's lives in the context of COVID-19, and they are typically to blame for the learning losses that have afflicted 94% of learners globally. It is, however, impossible to separate the effects of school closures on the loss of learning or development (Hevia et al., 2022). Instead, we should view the pandemic as a variety of interactive factors causing difficulties for young learners due to the pandemic's effects on children's families, teachers, social lives, and access to services.

However, studies have shown that routine summer school cancellations result in learning deficits even without the additional load of societal catastrophes (Alexander et al., 2007). Overall, we anticipate that the current pandemic environment will have a detrimental effect on young children's preparation for school, although, to our knowledge, no research has been done on the subject. The impact of the pandemic on early childhood development must be a focus for researchers considering this significant gap (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

School readiness is often assessed at the start of the school year and focuses on aspects associated with children's future achievement in the physical, socio-emotional, linguistic, and cognitive domains (Cushon et al., 2011). The Pandemic period causing children not to be sufficiently prepared to learn is a worrying condition because early childhood developmental problems may increase without meaningful intervention. Recent research suggests that the epidemic has a detrimental effect on older children's and adolescents' academic performance. In the Netherlands, when elementary schools were closed for 8 weeks, students lost the equivalent of 20% of what they would have learned in a normal school year (Engzell et al., 2021). Another study looked at the reading and math proficiency of three million primary school students. The scientists discovered that math scores plummeted 5%–10% between youngsters exposed to the pandemic and a control group who weren't, although reading levels were not statistically different (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

In addition, teachers grew weary of spending more money on quota purchases and returning to the classroom right away rather than staying at home. Making learning materials and providing feedback takes a lot of effort, and it is impossible to keep track of students' academic progress. To create instructional materials and support their online students, teachers put in long hours throughout the day and on the weekend (Jandrić, 2020). Where are the parents at? The ability of parents to offer their children online learning resources is limited. Because parents must care for kids while working, economic productivity has decreased. Learning at home is recommended since families may be

quite concerned about their financial future when Covid-19 locks them in their houses. Learning at home is difficult when households are imprisoned in their houses by Covid-19 because parents and caregivers may be very concerned about their financial future (Skulmowski & Rey, 2020). This is especially true for kids with low motivation. Because internet access is necessary for online learning, parental costs have gone up.

Parents are the most important figures in the process of child development. Early childhood education starts with the family at home, which is the first and main educational institution. Based on the background of the problem above, the researchers are interested in conducting survey research on ions of their children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic and parents' perception at the age of 5–6 years. This research will be conducted in the district of North Bekasi.

## 2 THEORETICAL STUDY

### 2.1 *School Readiness*

Research has found that preschool-aged children affected by the epidemic suffer adverse effects across several developmental categories. We are the first, to the best of our knowledge, to document the impact on preschool children's readiness for school. This is consistent with the existing literature documenting learning losses in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic among school-age children (Maldonado & De Witte, 2022). Although we cannot directly attribute the developmental loss to school closures, our results are consistent with studies showing negative effects on learning that occur when schools are closed during summer vacation (Bao et al., 2020) or because of an emergency (Araújo et al., 2021).

Another study discovered that children's attitudes toward learning were suffering more than their cognitive and motor development. Self-projection, language, and logical-mathematical skills revealed the highest decreases within cognitive functioning, while the impact sizes were small. Nevertheless, these losses can be a hazard to future academic success. For instance, early math and literacy proficiency is a substantial predictor of academic results in primary school, according to research on school preparedness (Duncan et al., 2020). Decades later, the effects of health and economic disasters may still be felt (Benner & Mistry, 2020).

Stay-at-home policies resulted in a sharp decline in physical activity (Gobbi et al., 2020), which may help to explain why motor skills are not developing as they should. It would be pertinent to conduct further research on the subject among preschool-aged children as there have been few to no studies on the influence of the pandemic on these developmental areas. Most early childhood surveys have concentrated on how the epidemic has affected socioemotional development. We also took prosocial, externalizing, and internalizing behaviors into account. According to the results of our study, internalizing behaviors like anxiety and avoidance had a minor but substantial detrimental effect due to the COVID-19 environment.

## *2.2 Parent Perception during Covid-19 Pandemic*

Perception is a cognitive process that allows a person to understand the surrounding environment and process information. Atkinsonová et al., (1995) state that perception is an investigation into integrating sensation into perceptual processes and using them to recognize the world. (Nevid, 2012) explains that perception is the process by which the brain interprets sensory information, turning it into a meaningful picture of the world. Through perception, the human brain tries to interpret the collection of sensory stimuli that impinge on the sensory organs.

Parents are a component of the family, consisting of a father and a mother. The family is the smallest social unit possessed by humans in their lives as social beings. The family is the source of their children's traditions and culture, forming their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in an environment that influences the lives of their children in their next life. Parents are the legal marriage bond between two people. Furthermore, Friedman et al., (2003) explain that parents are older or older people, consisting of fathers and mothers, who are teachers and main examples for their children because parents interpret the world and society for their children. A child's first educators are his or her parents. Children get their first education, starting with the family. A mother is the first madrasa for a child. Parents are the first educators of children at home and are the first to interact with them. Parents, as the figures who play the biggest role in the child's growth and development process, should give everything their best.

Prior studies revealed that parents are more likely to feel worried when they have trouble promoting their kids' academic success during the pandemic (Spinelli et al., 2020). Our findings indicate that parents worry in general because of class suspension and the lack of access to in-person school services, even though there is no direct evidence linking anxieties to the challenges that kids and parents encountered with distance learning. These results collectively imply that improved parental guidance of their children's learning can lessen parents' stress.

In fact, parents gave a high rating to a variety of supports, including employment and governmental regulations as well as school procedures, as helpful in sustaining their families. More parental support and perceived control during the pandemic can act as a protective factor against perceived stress and negative parenting during the pandemic, according to previous studies (Colizzi et al., 2020; Griffith, 2020). Families who report feeling unsupported by their social network and community also report higher levels of parental stress (Brown et al., 2020). These results show that effective intervention options to lessen parental stress during COVID-19 may include parental support and strengthening their sense of control.

Currently, there is a COVID-19 pandemic. Many activities are limited on health grounds. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only happening in Indonesia, but all parts of the world are in the same condition. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly had an impact on the education sector. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face learning has been changed to long-distance learning. Regarding education, the COVID-19 pandemic

has disrupted the lives of children as students in various ways, and this is a special challenge for children, parents, and teachers, of course. Living side by side with COVID-19 is the new reality of life today. This epidemic threatens health and safety at any time, so everything is done by prioritizing appropriate health protocols to assist the government in suppressing the increase in positive numbers in Indonesia.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), as many as 68 million more students, ranging from early childhood education to senior high school in Indonesia, were also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are forced to study from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused changes in patterns of interaction and activity in almost all aspects of human life, including the education sector. All learning activities for early childhood are adapted to current conditions based on health factors. Agree or disagree, like it or not, schools must adjust learning management, shifting from conventional classes to long-distance learning.

The closure of many schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on online learning that is carried out at home. Long-distance learning itself has contributed to the increasing burden on parents or families, economically, psychologically, and socially. The burden is felt not only by parents but also by teachers. All parties must be able to adjust and adapt to the current learning system. In general, children are happier and like face-to-face learning in class than learning at home with online learning (e-learning), because it is easier to understand the material when the teacher explains it face-to-face. The education system is to adapt to the new requirements by revising the terms and conditions of learning and taking necessary regulatory actions, as per UNICEF (2020).

### 3 METHOD

This research was conducted using a quantitative descriptive survey design (Creswell, 2015) to find out a complete picture of parents' perceptions of their children's readiness to attend school during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years in North Bekasi Regency. The sample in this study was 120 people from the population of parents who have children aged 5–6 years in the North Bekasi District. The sampling technique that will be used is the purposive random sampling technique.

#### 3.1 *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data collection technique used a questionnaire that was circulated in April–July 2021 through a Google form whose link was distributed through a WhatsApp group for PAUD teachers and parents. The data is also complemented by in-depth interviews via voice applications on WhatsApp and video calls. The Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or group of people about social phenomena with quantitative and descriptive data analysis techniques. The data was obtained from the score sheet for assessing children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic aged 5–6 years in North Bekasi Regency based on the statements contained in the research instrument. The percentage technique is used to determine the percentage

that shows in certain categories and states information about parents' perceptions of their children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years. The number obtained from the calculation of the percentage is the level of parental perception used as a measuring tool for respondents in the study.

### 3.2 Instrument

Table 1. Parental Perception Instrument Grid

| Aspect or Scope                                    | Indicator   | Statement Item Number                                | Many Items |
|--|---|--|------------|
| Parents' Perception of Children's School Readiness | Children attend ECE in preparing school readiness   | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, 9,10,11                             | 11         |
|  | Parents provide support and facilities to support children's school readiness                   |  |            |
| Stimulation given during a pandemic Covid19        | Parents accompany long distance learning their children at home to prepare for school readiness | 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17,18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24,25 | 14         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       |   |  | <b>25</b>  |

## 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey regarding parents' perceptions of their children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years in the North Bekasi District were 120 parent respondents who answered a questionnaire with 25 statements. The instrument for the parental perception of children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years in the North Bekasi District has 25 questions or statements. The instrument has a scale of 4,3,2, and 1. Furthermore, based on the results of the data above, the researchers grouped teacher respondents into 3 categories. The scores obtained by the respondents were grouped and categorized into 3 groups of categories, namely good, enough, and less. This grouping will facilitate the information in this study. The following is a group score category to express parents' perceptions of their children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years in the North Bekasi District.

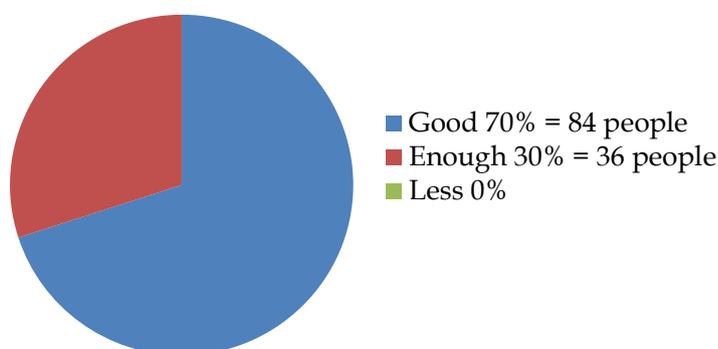


Figure 1. Graph Result of Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's School Readiness

Parents as respondents who were in the "good" category were 84 people or 70% of the total respondents. Furthermore, parents respondents who were in the "enough" category were 36 people or 30% of the total respondents in this study. In this study, there were no parents who were in the "less" category. Thus, it can be said that parents' perceptions of their children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic at the age of 5–6 years in the North Bekasi District are in the "good" category (see Figure 1). This, of course, is influenced by several supporting factors. Several factors that influence the perception of good parents are the existence of factors that come from themselves and factors that come from outside through information received from outside. Parental perception is certainly a process formed by various supporting factors. In social interactions, an individual interacts to form certain patterns of attitudes and thoughts towards various psychological objects they face. Everyone has their own view of an existing problem. Parents' perceptions can also be formed due to a change in the situation from face-to-face learning to long-distance learning.

The tendency of parents to have a good perception can be seen in the calculation based on indicators from each aspect. The aspect or scope of this research is divided into two, namely: (1) parents' perception of children's readiness for school and (2) stimulation provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the aspect of parents' perception of children's school readiness consists of two indicators, namely: children attending PAUD in preparing for school readiness and parents providing support and facilities to support children's school readiness. While the stimulation aspect provided during the COVID-19 pandemic consists of one indicator, namely, parents accompanying long-distance learning children at home to prepare for school readiness. Parents' perceptions are quite influenced by the norms and sociocultural factors that apply in an environment so that parents are included in the "good" category. In addition, local characteristics, emotions, and culture are also factors driving the formation of parental perceptions. The understanding and experience experienced by parents are behind the answers from each parent when perceiving the school readiness of children during the COVID-19 pandemic in children aged 5–6 years.

School readiness prepared by parents at home and teachers at school will provide training experiences for children to carry out life at the next level. It has been clarified that parental support, especially from a mother for children, will support children's school readiness, which in turn will improve their learning achievement (McDowell et al., 2018). Every activity given to children must provide good stimulation for children's growth and development. Later, the child will be independent and able to help himself with the results of the debriefing obtained at preschool age. In line with this, the opinion explains that school readiness is also the ability of children to be ready to be trained, ready to be taught, and interact with others so that when children enter elementary school, they easily follow and understand lessons and can interact well in school.

In the preschool setting, the results of the study found that the effects of the pandemic on the loss of school readiness varied widely. This fluctuation is in line with research on

the loss of offline learning and school closures due to the COVID-19 epidemic (Engzell et al., 2021). Aspects of online learning during school closures, such as frequency of video conferencing, parental support for distance learning, and bandwidth availability and quality, as well as aspects of school reopening, such as space restrictions to comply with social distancing protocols and safety protocols due to potential COVID-19 cases or confirmed, varies to some extent across schools in the current context. The level of developmental stimulation provided at home may also differ between families and school districts. Parental knowledge is still minimal about assisting children during online schooling is the biggest obstacle in the findings of this study.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The pandemic period has changed teaching and learning activities from face-to-face to long-distance learning. This certainly has an impact on parents, teachers, and, of course, on children as students. Preparing children for school readiness at the age of 5–6 years requires encouragement and assistance from various parties. The readiness in question means that children are ready to enter the next level of education by having the provision of various skills obtained in preschool education, namely kindergarten and early childhood. Preparing children for school during the COVID-19 pandemic is very different from normal times. Parents are required to provide appropriate stimulation to children at home to replace the role of teachers at school. The perception of parents is certainly very influential on the stimulation that will be given to children.

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