

# Parents' perceptions of School Readiness in Islamic Kindergarten

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**Abstract.** Entering elementary school is the most important stage in school life of human being. In general, school readiness influenced by child's school readiness, school readiness for child, and parents and communities readiness. In this term, parents play important role in stimulating children's readiness such as physical and motoric, emotion, social, language and interest in learning. Therefore, to investigate parents' opinions about child's school readiness is needed to obtain data for considering to develop a tool for them. Forty three parents involved in this study from three Islamic kindergarten in Demak District and Semarang City. Data were collected by unstructured interview and closed-ended questions. The result showed that there were several misunderstanding in predicting school readiness. Most of them have overestimate in basic thinking skills such as ability to write an essay or a story minimum in 8 sentences and skill to count symbolly up to two digits. Moreover, parents reported emotional regulation ability less important than other and assumed it will increase naturally during learning at school. This misunderstanding lead to over stimulate in cognitive ability and less concern in socioemotional aspect. Furthermore, parents stated that they need handy tools to assess school readiness as the basis for stimulating children at home appropriately. Besides, recognizing Arabian letters is important as a basic knowledge of Islamic Religion for children to learn and recite the Holy Qur'an. In the beginning of education in Islamic elementary school there are many subjects related to this such as Arabian language, Alqur'an hadith, and fiqh.

**Keywords:** School Readiness, Parents' Views, Stimulation, Assessment

## 1 Introduction

Children who have recently entered elementary school, have various conditions due to their school readiness. School readiness is often seen partially, which is limited to how the child is ready to face academic demand such as reading, counting and writing, while other aspects are often overlooked such as how adults prepare them to deal with problems related to social and emotional in transition from kindergarten to elementary school. Misunderstanding about the criteria of school readiness in preschoolers take place in academic knowledge, basic thinking ability, physical ability and motoric development. Consequently, stimulation for school readiness do not match with children needs.

Based on research conducted by Majzub and Rashid (2012) in Malaysia using a multidimensional assessment of School Readiness showed that children scored the highest in moral readiness and lowest in socioemotional readiness. Overall, 377 children at six years showed a medium level of readiness to register a first year in elementary school. Furthermore, there are significant differences in school readiness based on the frequency of father involvement and the amount of time parents were involved in their children's development. The level of school readiness for children whose parents spent more time with their children were higher than children whose parents who spent less time. In relation with socioemotional readiness, a study conducted by Polat and Akyol (2016) in Turkey showed that school readiness had negative relationship between some subscales of readiness and aggression, asocial behaviors, anxiety-fear behaviors, exclusion and hyperactivity subdimensions. These finding can be concluded that preschoolers who show more frequent negative behaviors in peer relations had lower levels in some subscales of school readiness. Epstein (1995) proposes a model of parental involvement which contain 6 dimension: parenting (supporting, nurturing, child-rearing), parent-teacher communication, volunteering (providing assistance at child's school), learning at home, decision making and collaborating with community.

As a result, parental style and parents' involvement in children's school are powerful predictors as well as family characteristic such as structure, size, and educational level. Based on previous findings regarding school readiness, it is known that parents, communities, and teachers play a major role in children adjustment in school life. Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia published that many children who have low achievement in elementary school as indicated by the number of students who repeat or do not go up to the next grade. The data collected in the last three years (from 2017 to 2019) is known that the number of students repeating in Indonesia is mostly in first grade with a percentage of 42.52%, 43.58%, and 42.51% respectively.

Central Java Province, although it is not in the first rank in percentage, has the highest number of students who do not up the class in national data. Therefore there needs sufficient research to be able to find out the root of the problem. Until now, it is suspected that because of children lack the readiness to deal with elementary school situations and academic demands.

Early childhood education institutions play a major role in preparing children for cognitive abilities, social emotion, motor skills, and moral reasoning. Education National Data Summary in 2018/2019 provide evidence the involvement of children in early education institutions in the 3-6 year age group in 2018 was 28.26% and the following year increased to 37.92% but this fact is still far below the 2019 development target roughly 77.2%. According to geographical factor, there is a disparity between urban and rural areas regarding to gross educational enrollment rate, the data shows in urban area is greater than rural, 48.71 per cent and 36.14 per cent sequently. This is different from the gross enrollment rate at the elementary school level which has reached 100%. Moreover, the average length of schooling for Indonesians in 2017 is 8.5 years, it means that the average Indonesian population can only afford to go to secondary school. Limited access to education and school sustainability is still a contributing factor to the nation's low competitiveness.

Based on participation rate as previously explained, government has prominent role in providing early childhood education facilities; however, without parents and teachers support it will difficult to achieve the target of early childhood education involvement. In the term of school readiness, it is important to know the level of parents knowledge regarding tasks demand in primary school and children's ability and skills needed. Having good knowledge makes parents capable to predict the degree of readiness.

Davies, et al. (2016) states that it is important to take holistic measurements of school readiness, namely in the cognitive and non-cognitive areas. These measurements can help to understand early achievement and prevent the potential for low achievement in children when sitting in school. The condition of preschool education can affect children's school readiness.

Almost all instrument to evaluate school readiness require professionals in administrating and interpreting. One of the tests that is widely used to measure children's school readiness is the NST (nijmeegse schoolbekwaamheids test). Mariyati and Affandi (2016) tested the quality of NST empirically based on classical test theory as a measurement instrument in Indonesian context involving 343 early childhood who will enter elementary school. The item analysis results showed that of the 10 NST sub-tests, there were four sub-tests with some of the items having discrimination index below 0.25. Based on the factor analysis to test the construct validity, it is known that among the NST subtests have significant correlation. In addition, the reliability alpha obtained 0.851. However, this test can only be administered by trained personnel and interpreted by a professional, in this case a psychologist. Another measuring tool but not familiar to use in Indonesia is Early Development Instrument (EDI) that has been developed and used extensively is the measurement of learning readiness by Janus and Offord (2007) who develop a measurement administered by teachers to evaluate school readiness by testing five domains namely physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and communication, cognitive development and general knowledge.

Fayez, Ahmad, Oliemat (2016) developed a School Readiness Questionnaire which is based on six aspects of learning readiness, namely academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, socio-emotional maturity, physical abilities and motoric development, self-discipline and communication skills. This measuring instrument was filled in by the teacher containing 42 statements in the form of a Likert scale with a range from 1 to 5, the rating range 1 = not important to 5 = very important. This measuring instrument has been tried to be adapted into Indonesia context by Sholihah (2018). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis obtained 34 statements that have lamda values below 0.5 in the Indonesian context. The results of the reliability test of 34 statements for each aspect, namely for the 6 aspects, obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.814 to 0.933.

I am therefore interested in investigating the parents' view related to school readiness and need of school readiness screening tool for parents. It can lead to the appropriate understanding regard to school readiness and become better guide for parents to stimulate their children. Conversely, lack of understanding of parents regarding the concept of children's readiness to go to school will lead to a lack of parental involvement in stimulating children.

## **2 Method**

The qualitative research method chosen in this research is descriptive narrative approach. The subjects selected in this study were 43 parents from three Islamic kindergartens in Semarang City and Demak Regency. Data were collected through interviews with parents and / or caregivers of children aged 5 to 6.3 years. The interviews were conducted using unstructured interviews and closed-ended questions. The credibility of the data in this study was carried out through participation extension and triangulation.

Retrieval of data through interviews with parents was based on aspects of children's readiness for school. The aspects and indicators of children's learning readiness which are then described in the form of an interview guide based on the opinions put forward by NEJP (Mazjub, 2009) are:

- a) Cognitive aspects; reasoning, comprehension, and pre-numerical skills
- b) Emotional and social aspects; willingness to pay attention, managing emotions, willingness to follow instructions, willingness to build relationships with peers, teachers, and other adults, and social reasoning
- c) Aspects of language and literacy; communicating fluently, having adequate vocabulary, recognizing symbols such as letters and numbers symbols, recognizing surrounding objects and being able to call them,
- d) Physical and motor wellbeing aspects; having no difficulty in performing general movements (motor coordination), being able to sit quietly, have fine motor skills, and not experiencing serious illness that interferes with learning activities.
- e) Aspects of learning attitudes; task persistence, class attention, creativity, initiative, curiosity.

A questionnaire regarding children's readiness for school was compiled by researchers based on aspects of school readiness according to Fayeze (2016), namely academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, social emotional maturity, physical abilities and motoric development, self-discipline and communication skills. Moreover, to receive sufficient data, beside interviewing participants and administering questionnaires containing closed-ended questions, focus group discussions (FGD) were also conducted to investigate the views of parents regarding school readiness, the factors that influence, and the forms of stimulation provided and the need for measuring children's school readiness.

### **3 Result and Discussion**

The following are the results of descriptive statistical analysis regarding parents knowledge on aspects of academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, social emotional maturity, physical abilities and motor development:

#### **a) Academic knowledge**

Aspect of academic knowledge is revealed through 8 statements regarding the condition of the child being ready to learn. In general, 91% of the sample correctly knew the criteria for children's readiness to enter school based on this aspect. However, the other side related to the ability to remember number symbols and sort numbers, there were as many as 88.57% of the sample that was overestimated, namely that it was important for children to be able to count up to 100. The existence of such a view makes parents continuously encourage children to memorize sequences of numbers up to a hundred. In addition, 94, 28% of parents view their children as being able to read Arabic letters up to three letters as provisions for their children to enter Islamic primary schools and 80% think that children are ready to go to school if they already know the five senses and their functions, the remaining 20% think it is not important that children understand the function of the five senses.

#### **b) Basic Thinking Skills**

The aspect of basic thinking skills is expressed through 6 statements regarding thinking skills such as being able to group objects based on a single dimension, being able to retell a story containing 4-5 sentences with the help of pictures, being able to explain the sequence of events, distinguishing the shape of objects from various forms around them, understand the

relationships between objects, and be able to solve simple count problems. Based on the results of data analysis, it is known that 80% of parents know the forms of basic abilities that children need to be ready to enter primary school.

In addition, in the aspect of basic thinking skills, there are abilities that should not be required of children, but parents think that in order to be ready to enter school, children must be able to compose a story at least 8 sentences. As many as 49% answered that this ability is important and that children are stimulated to be able to make it. Meanwhile, 40% of the sample answered that they did not know whether the ability was important or not.

Furthermore, parents have inappropriate views about cognitive abilities related to numeracy. As many as 54% of parents consider it important that children can operate numbers up to two digits such as  $15 + 17$ , 32% said they did not know whether the ability was important or not as a reference that the child was ready to learn, and 14% considered that ability was not important.

### **c) Social and Emotional Maturity**

Regarding emotional maturity, such as an indication of wanting to play with other children, being able to respond to other children's feelings well such as being happy, sad, afraid, and expressing their emotions appropriately. In addition, they have a willingness to help others such as completing simple household tasks such as making the bed and washing dishes.

Eighty per cent parents know the importance of indications of emotional maturity which can be used to evaluate whether children being ready to enter elementary school or not, 11% do not know what indications are the basis for determining children's readiness for school and 9% consider indications of social and emotional maturity not important in assessing school readiness. However, there are misperception of inappropriate emotional expression, namely assuming that acceptable if children still expresses angry rudely towards everyone who makes him angry and exhibits aggressive behavior such as hitting, kicking, pushing and biting others. Sixty six percent parents think it is natural for their children to still do such things and are not considered important as an indicator of children's readiness to go to school and 11% said they do not know whether this indicator is important or not.

### **d) Physical Ability and Motor Development**

Physical abilities and motoric development of children that are considered as conditions that are mature enough for children to be ready for school include being able to hold a pencil properly, using scissors, wearing and taking off their own clothes, being able to do activities in their own bathroom, able tying shoelaces, agile movements. and standing on one leg for at least 3 minutes. It is known that 8% of parents do not know the indications of children's readiness for school and 6% think that the indications from this aspect are not important. Furthermore, it is known that 77% of parents asses overestimate by considering that children must be able to write at least 8 lines and can read at least 5 consecutive sentences and only 11% thinks this ability is not important, 12% participants said they did not know whether it was important or not.

### **e) Self-Discipline**

The ability of self-discipline referred to being able to sit quietly in class, not distracting class processes, completing assignments on time, cleaning items and returning them to their original places after using, and moving from one activity to another smoothly.

Based on participants responses, it is known that 80% are considered important for the ability of self-discipline to determine school readiness, 6% perceive as insignificant about the ability of self-discipline and respond not knowing that indicators.

### **f) Communication Skill**

Communication skill is one of the most important abilities in the learning process. Indicators of communication maturity in school-ready children include the ability to communicate in two directions, convey feelings in the right words, maintain eye contact when speaking, do not interrupt other people's conversations, be able to speak in simple sentences that are correct and easy to understand. Eighty three per cent of parents have opinion that communication skill is important and only 9 % thinks this skill is not important.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis was conducted on the data from in-depth interviews and FGDs. It was found that there were several themes regarding the criteria for school readiness and the ways in which to stimulate children.

The themes regarding school readiness are that children have basic academic skills such as recognizing letters and numbers, can read simple sentences, write their own names, able write simple words and simple sentences. In addition, it recognizes minimum numbers up to 30 and able to operate simple counts either by using tools (props) or pictures and using numeric symbols. The second theme is readiness in terms of motor skills, both fine and gross motor skills. Fine motor skills are characterized by good letter writing results, writing numbers correctly and being able to write medium-sized words. Meanwhile, gross motor skills include the ability to walk fast, run, jump, climb stairs, tiptoe, kick a ball, and so on.

The next theme is social and emotional readiness. Indications of social and emotional readiness include children being able to establish and maintain social relations with their peers, willing to talk or answer when spoken to, willing to share, showing politeness. Meanwhile, with regard to emotions, children are able to express their emotions appropriately and understand the emotional expressions of others. In addition, it is able to manage emotions such as when angry or upset, they are no longer angry or tantrums. Moreover, children already know and are able to follow class rules, able to queue, sit quietly, respect friends and respect teachers. Other indicators related to morality are also considered important, such as not taking things from friends at will, asking permission when leaving the room.

Regarding the stimulation given in order to achieve a ready-to-school condition, parents spend time in the afternoon and some are at night to train their children to read, write and count for those who still have difficulty in these three things and it is carried out regularly 2 to 3 times a week during the second semester in the second year of kindergarten. Parents who were busy working outside the home between 7 to 9 hours and have more than 1 school age child chose to invite private tutors to provide tutoring. In addition, parents who have difficulty disciplining their children, because they are seen as too spoiled, also choose tutors to assist their children in learning. Regarding the emotional, social and language aspects, there was no special attention to stimulate it. Meanwhile, the attitude aspect towards learning is raised by familiarizing children to read and write and to practice arithmetic using paper and pencil. This

habit is also seen as a way to foster discipline in children. Discipline is also associated with a child's ability to wake up early and a willingness to go to kindergarten.

The result of the research revealed that there are several overestimate and underestimate in evaluating children's school readiness such as overestimate in fine motor skills, basic thinking skills and have inappropriate evaluation related to children's social and emotional maturity and self-discipline. This findings different from a study conducted by Rahmawati, Tairas & Nawangsari (2018) found that regarding teachers' and parents' perception of children's school readiness in Indonesian context showed that both parents and teachers have the same perception about factors that affect children's readiness to school, namely cognitive and non-cognitive. Cognitive readiness related to read, write and count ability, while for non-cognitive factors such as social skills, emotion regulation and good self-help.

This facts can be understood by considering the characteristics of respondents. Most of them live in sub-urban dan seventy four per cent of parents are junior high school graduates. A study conducted by Tuncelli & Akman (2013) found the fact that the level of education, work, and age of parents can also influence the readiness of schools in children. Majzub (2009) study showed that geographical locations, socio-economic status, and education levels have influence the degree of school readiness. Moreover, respondents from urban areas have more concern to prepare their children for primary school compared to sub-urban areas.

In addition, Susilo (2015) found that communication between mother and child has a positive relationship with children's school readiness. Besides, research conducted by Commodari (2013) showed that attachment of students to their teachers in kindergarten is related to linguistic development and psychomotor skills that have an impact on school readiness and the risk of learning difficulties. Then, students' experiences during class such as social interactions with teachers and friends also relate to children's readiness in school (Hatfield, et al., 2016). Furthermore, Akman (2017) found that kindergarten and elementary school teachers stated a child's level of school readiness has an impact on classroom management.

Research on teachers' perceptions regarding school readiness has been conducted, for example, a study conducted by Lara-Cinisomo et al (2008) which interviewed kindergarten teachers to investigate their opinions on what is important for children's readiness to enter school. It is found that teachers believe parents' stimulation and relationship between teachers and parents is important aspects in preparing children's school readiness. In addition, it has been identified the domain of child-based characteristics such as health or physical fitness, motivation, self-confidence, and safety. Social skills such as controlling impulse and being able to share with others. Furthermore, basic skills such as colors, shapes, and letters, and reasoning skills such as understanding danger and reflecting on actions.

#### **4 Conclusion**

The results showed that parents have knowledge about children's readiness to go to school is not suitable both in terms of academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, social emotional maturity, self-discipline, physical abilities and motoric development, and communication skills. There are several inappropriate views regarding school readiness occur in many aspects, parents overestimate on basic thinking skills such as the ability to produce sentences in the form of story essays up to a minimum of 8 sentences and the ability to count up to 2 digits. These erroneous view then lead to inaccuracies in stimulating school-ready children. Therefore, the existence of a screening tool for the readiness of school children for children in

the second semester in the second year of kindergarten (roughly at six years of age) is important for parents and teachers in evaluating children school readiness.

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