**CASE STUDY OF PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN SEMARANG**

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***Abstract***

*Parental acceptance is crucial to optimise students’ education with disabilities. This study aims to reveal what factors support and prevent parental acceptance of students with disabilities in Semarang. The study was conducted with a qualitative design, using a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with four informants, consisting of two Psychologists and two Psychological Counsellors at Rumah Duta Revolusi Mental (RDRM) in Semarang City, which runs psychological assessment services for students with disabilities in inclusive schools. Data were analysed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. This study revealed seven factors that supported and hindered parents' acceptance of students with disabilities based on the perspective of implementing psychological assessments. Factors that support acceptance include (a) Knowledge; (b) Proactive and Open Attitude; (c) Social Support; (d) Financial Support and Capability; (e) Availability of Facilities and Service Access; (f) Experience; and (g) Spirituality. In contrast, the factors that hinder parental acceptance are (a) Negative Stigma; (b) Anxiety about the Future; (c) Lack of Knowledge/Literacy; (d) Maladaptive Beliefs; (e) Negative Experience with Prior Services; (f) Limited Financial Resources and (g) Limited Access and Infrastructure. These results indicate the importance of the Semarang City Government's role in developing relevant innovations and policies to increase the acceptance of parents of students with disabilities, including (a) more effective psychoeducation and outreach, (b) facilitating access and improving the quality of services for students with disabilities, especially for parents with economic limitations and (c) policies that support the fulfilment of the education rights of children with disabilities through the implementation of inclusive education in the city of Semarang.*

***Keywords:*** *Parental Acceptance, Persons with Disabilities, Students, Inclusive Schools*

**INTRODUCTION**

Students’ development is a collaboration between the role of the educator and the closest environment, namely the family, especially parents. The role of parents in educating students is one aspect of providing basic needs. The family can be seen as the most fundamental institution in fulfilling needs, especially in developing the personality of the students (Dahlan, 2014). The needs of the students are not only related to meeting physical needs but also psychological conditions, such as a sense of security and affection. One of the crucial things in the students’ personality development process is the parent’s acceptance of the child's condition, such as physical, intellectual and other factors, including children with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities can be interpreted as individuals who have specialities or disabilities. Disability is interpreted as an individual's inability to do something or reduced individual capacity to carry out activities in a certain way (Mangunsong, 2009). The types of persons with disabilities are related to physical specificity and many other particular aspects, such as intellectual abilities, behaviour, and emotions. So, appropriate treatment for students with disabilities also needs cooperation between various parties, starting from the closest environment, namely the family.

The number of persons with disabilities in Semarang City recorded in 2022 is 6,340 people (Pemerintah Kota Semarang, 2022). It shows that people with disabilities are very close to everyday life, and we must consider their existence and well-being. One example of the government's concern for students with disabilities is the establishment of *Rumah Duta Revolusi Mental* (Mental Revolution Ambassadorial House, RDRM).

RDRM is a free psychological service unit under the auspices of the Semarang City Education Department, which provides services to the school community. RDRM itself was initiated by Ir. Hj. Hevearita G Rahayu, M.Sos as a follow-up to President Joko Widodo's instructions No. 12 of 2016 concerning the National Mental Revolution Movement No. 3. i.e., Orderly Indonesian Movement Program point h namely growing a family environment, educational units, work units, and communities that are friendly and free of violence.

One form of the program implemented at RDRM is a psychological assessment of inclusion for students indicated to have special needs. This psychological assessment not only stops when students have received the results of a psychological examination but also educates parents about these results so that they can play an optimal role in accompanying the development of students with disabilities.

Some of the critical roles of parents in dealing with students with disabilities are building communication, providing social support, providing health services, and providing alternative education services (Indahni *et al.,* 2023). Parents should be more intensive in supporting their children, espescially to the children with special needs so that their academic achievement and motivation can be enhanced (Bariroh, 2018). One form of alternative education that parents can provide to students with disabilities is to provide access to education in schools that suit children's needs to get optimal education and teaching according to the abilities possessed by children.

Based on the results of a preliminary study conducted through interviews with psychologists at RDRM-Semarang City Education Department, it was found that several parents of students still needed help to accept if their children were recommended to continue their education at Inclusive Schools. Some parents also still need time and support to accept the condition of students with special needs so that they need further services.

The process of self-acceptance of parents towards children with disabilities requires struggle. This is because they had yet to imagine this would**.**. This is a natural process that every parent experiences when they first receive information that their child has a disability. More specifically, the processes and obstacles experienced by parents with children with disabilities vary.

Hurlock (2017) defines self-acceptance as an individual's ability to accept everything in oneself and is willing to improve things that are deemed lacking or need to be corrected. Matters related to oneself are not only things that exist within oneself but also circumstances that are inherent in oneself even though they are outside of oneself. These conditions can include socio-economic status, education, or family conditions, such as children classified as persons with disabilities.

There are various kinds of reactions raised by parents when they find out that they have a child with a disability. Parents are considered to have achieved a process of self-acceptance when they can discuss the child's condition easily, provide balanced treatment between independent efforts and love, can collaborate professionally, pursue interests that are not related to the child's condition, exercise discipline in children and do not show excessive love or overprotective behaviour (Mangunsong, 2011).

The stages of the self-acceptance process, according to Livneh and Antonak (2005) in Gultom and Budisetyani (2018), namely: 1) Initial reaction. If the initial response is unacceptable, shock or disbelief, anxiety and panic will appear; 2) Intermediate Reaction. After the initial response occurs, the individual will enter the depression phase with feelings of hopelessness, silence, crying and feeling discouraged. Then there is a feeling of anger towards the situation or event; 3) Final Reaction. At this stage, if a person can manage and process positive self-acceptance, the anger will subside and begin to get used to the risks that occur.

The process of self-acceptance is inseparable from various factors that influence individual self-acceptance. There are at least ten factors that influence self-acceptance according to Gultom and Budisetyani (2018), namely: self-understanding, realistic expectations, absence of environmental barriers, appropriate social behaviour, lack of emotional stress, memories of previous successes, identifying people who have reasonable adjustment, self-perspective, good childhood parenting, and a stable self-concept.

Furthermore, several factors play a role in the process of self-acceptance of a mother who has a child with special needs, such as education, social support, family and parenting (Islami & Ansyah, 2020).These factors can stand alone or be related to one another, which is quite influential in the process of parents towards self-acceptance of the conditions experienced by children. This also shows that the factors that affect self-acceptance come not only from within the parents but also from the environment, such as extended family, social environment, to the environment in the educational unit.

One of the critical influences in the process of parents' self-acceptance of the condition of children with disabilities is environmental factors, such as social pressures (Budiarti *et al*., 2016). Some still do not understand people with disabilities, so they often get harmful stereotypes, such as cursed illnesses, due to parents' mistakes (Wicaksono, Suryandari, & Camelia, 2021). This also contributes to the process of self-acceptance in parents.

The results of a study conducted in 2016 stated that there were still parents who had negative acceptance of the condition of children who experienced developmental disorders because they did not meet expectations and were embarrassed and afraid when other people found out about the conditions experienced by their children (Faradina, 2016)**.**. So that there are thoughts sufficient to influence parental self-acceptance concerning factors originating from within the child and the surrounding environment.

The large number of students with disabilities in Semarang and many parents who have difficulty accepting the situation is an indicator that requires more attention to determine what factors hinder and support self-acceptance in parents with children with disabilities. Supporting factors can be increased while inhibiting factors can be reduced. Therefore, this study is critical when it can find these factors to help the self-acceptance of parents with children with disabilities who incidentally are also students with disabilities so that cooperation from various parties is needed. The benefits of this study are expected to provide an overview of the importance of community and government support in giving attention to students with disabilities.

**METHOD**

This article is qualitative-based research with a case study approach. The research participants included two Psychologists and two Psychological Counselors at Rumah Duta Revolusi Mental (RDRM) in Semarang. The selection of research participants considered suitability with the needs of research data, bearing in mind that all participants were officers who carried out the psychological assessment process for students with disabilities in Semarang City daily. In this psychological assessment process, the research participants interacted directly with students with disabilities and their parents.

The data were collected from in-depth interviews and observation. The data were later analysed according to qualitative data analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman (1994), which consisted of three stages: data reduction, data display and conclusion. The study's credibility was carried out according to Creswell (2014), including by triangulating research data and member checking on research participants.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Description of Research Participants**

The participants in this study were Psychologists and Psychological Counselors at RDRM. RDRM is a psychological service unit under the Semarang City Education Department. One of the services of a psychology service unit is to provide psychological assessments for students with disabilities (RDRM, 2023). This psychological assessment is intended for students in the educational unit environment who show indications of special needs/disabilities. This service is free, especially for students from underprivileged families.

The participants in this study consisted of two psychologists and two psychological counsellors. Psychologists who participated included a psychologist and a doctor in psychology, and a psychologist with an educational background of Masters in the Clinical Psychological Profession. Meanwhile, two psychological counsellors have undergraduate degrees in psychology. All research participants have experience conducting psychological assessments on students with disabilities for at least three years.

**Factors Supporting Parental Acceptance of Students with Disabilities**

After the researchers conducted data analysis by grouping the data, several themes emerged related to the factors that support parental acceptance of students with disabilities. These factors are as follows:

a. Parental Knowledge;

The knowledge in question is about how parents have sufficient insight and literacy regarding students and disabilities in general. Based on the research participants' information, parents with a higher educational background can accept their children. Parents' behaviour, for example, is marked by seeking information from experts, be it teachers who teach their children, psychologists or doctors of child development related to the condition of the disability they are experiencing. In addition, some parents get information about success stories and inspiration from people with disabilities, either through television or social media, so that parents understand that a child's disability is not a "verdict" that a child cannot be successful and independent in the future. Parental understanding, obtained through experts and the media, is one factor that shapes the attitude of acceptance towards children.

b. Proactive and Open Attitude;

Based on the information from research participants, some parents who showed acceptance showed an open and proactive attitude. The open attitude in question is open to information or suggestions related to the child's condition while being proactive means how parents actively try to provide optimal assistance according to their knowledge regarding children's disabilities. This open attitude can be observed through the willingness of parents to ask questions, discuss, listen and share experiences related to their children with teachers and experts. This proactive attitude is manifested in how active parents check the growth and development of their children, carry out therapy, accompany learning, participate in parenting or be engaged in parents' associations of children with disabilities.

c. Social Support

The next factor that also supports parental acceptance is social support. This social support mainly comes from family members, the school environment (teachers, students and parents of other students), to support groups such as the association of parents of students with disabilities. This social support is mainly manifested in the moral support and encouragement given to parents. Among the many supports provided, one that research participants observed was support from family members, in this case, spouses, siblings, grandparents and extended family. Family members who accept, do not give negative stigma, encourage and facilitate that make parents more accepting of children's conditions as they are. In the school context, an inclusive and mutually supportive environment between teachers and parents is the support that also influences how parents accept students with disabilities.

d. Financial Support and Ability;

Based on this study's findings, financial ability undeniably plays a vital role in supporting parental acceptance of students with disabilities. Stable financial conditions allow parents to pay more attention to aspects of child development. Based on the information of research participants, more stable financial capabilities make parents focus more on facilitating children, both in terms of education and health. Even so, parents who experience financial difficulties continue to show acceptance, especially those connected with financial assistance. The financial aid includes scholarships, health insurance to support health services, and other government and donor assistance.

e. Availability of Facilities and Service Access;

Another factor affecting parents' acceptance of students with disabilities is the availability of facilities and access to services. This factor relates to the availability of disability services and representative infrastructure that parents can easily access and reach, mainly social services, education and essential health. Based on the information from research participants, parents who are used to accessing psychological services and getting help accessing services tend to show more appreciation and acceptance. This indicates that the availability of facilities and services can stimulate parental acceptance of students with disabilities.

Also, in Semarang, services that parents of students with disabilities can easily access include consulting services, psychological assessment services, counselling and psychotherapy services, to free health services, especially for underprivileged families. In addition, all elementary and junior high schools in Semarang are now inclusive schools that accept and facilitate students with disabilities according to their needs.

f. Experience

According to the research participants' perspective, parents with previous experience with disabilities also tended to show more acceptance of their child's disability. For example, some parents do have other family members who are persons with disabilities. Some parents work in the health sector daily related to disability services, so when their baby shows indications of a disability, parents become proactive in accompanying them. In addition, positive experiences with service providers also influence how parents accept their child's condition. According to research participants, parents who previously had routinely checked their child's growth and development and then had a positive perception of the service were more likely to show acceptance behaviour.

g. Spirituality

One of the characteristics observed by research participants in parents who show acceptance is spirituality. The spirituality referred to is mainly seen from the existence of meaning and gratitude for the child's condition. According to research participants, several parents said that God had entrusted this child so that they would take care of him as best they could and not judge the child's condition. Some other parents feel grateful for the presence of kids because many parents are not blessed with them. Research participants also said that parents who accept children's conditions look calmer, more mature and able to manage their feelings more adaptively. This reflects parents' spirituality as a factor that cannot be left behind when discussing parental acceptance of students with disabilities.

**Factors Preventing Parental Acceptance of Students with Disabilities**

In addition to finding factors that support acceptance, researchers also found several factors that prevent the process of parental acceptance of students with disabilities. The factors in question include:

a. Negative Stigma

One of the inhibiting factors found in this study is the existence of stigma regarding children with disabilities and their parents. This negative stigma can come from family, educational unit environment, neighbours and friends. According to the participants' statements, some parents told how the stigma and negative labels were given to them, such as 'failed child', 'stupid child', and even considered a 'disgrace of the family', which had to be covered up. According to the participants, these stigmas are one of the main obstacles to parental acceptance.

b. Anxiety about the Future

Excessive anxiety from parents about their child's condition was also found to hinder acceptance. Although anxiety about the future of children with disabilities is commonplace, this study found that excessive anxiety is counterproductive to parental acceptance. According to research participants, parents who worry too much are often surrounded by unrealistic views, for example, "If other people find out that my child has a disability, then my child will be hurt" or "What will happen to my child's future if he does not recover and goes to a special school." According to the research participants, these views lead to denial. This is commonly observed in the psychological assessment process, in which parents become less open about their child's condition because they worry too much about the psychological assessment results.

c. Lack of Knowledge/Literacy

The next factor is the lack of parental knowledge and literacy about disability issues. This study found that this lack of knowledge has a background of several things, namely the low educational background of parents, not optimal socialisation for parents and teachers regarding disabilities, to limited access to information. This lack of knowledge and literacy has implications for many things, including the closed attitude of parents, parenting patterns that are not in accordance with the needs of children, to the fulfilment of children's education that is not in accordance with the needs of the children.

d. Maladaptive Beliefs

The maladaptive beliefs found in this study are related to thoughts or views inconsistent with science but firmly rooted in parents of children with disabilities. According to the statement of research participants, when meeting some parents who tend to be less accepting of their child's condition, it can be observed that these maladaptive beliefs exist. For example, parents feel that supernatural/mystical things cause their child's disability, so parents often take their children to *'wong pinter'* (a person with unique abilities to cure diseases). In addition, some parents firmly believe their child's condition will improve. For example, when a child is indicated to have a speech delay, parents are found to be sure that the child will be able to speak fluently all the time.

e. Negative Experience of Prior Services

Another thing that hindered the process of parental acceptance was the lousy experience of parents with disability services in the past. Based on the perspective of research participants, negative parental perceptions of a history of previous examinations or therapy often make them feel reluctant in the process of psychological assessment and treatment. This problem is encouraged by several reasons, including the attitude or quality of services that are less than excellent from disability service providers, parents' frustration with the child's developmental progress that has not been significant so that the cost of services is not affordable for parents. In education, the attitudes and treatment of unscrupulous teachers who do not accept and accommodate the fulfilment of the educational rights of students with disabilities also become an obstacle to parents' acceptance of their children's conditions.

f. Limited Financial Resources

Unstable financial conditions were also a barrier to the acceptance process. Family financial limitations hinder many parents from accessing various services for children with disabilities. According to research participants, this condition makes parents focus more on meeting the family's primary needs, so interaction with children becomes limited. In the end, parents find obstacles in understanding and accepting the condition of their child's disability.

g. Limited access and infrastructure

The next preventing factor for parental acceptance is limited access and infrastructure. Based on the information from research participants, one of the reasons why parents do not conduct assessments/examinations on children from an early age is related to access. Long distances, transportation barriers to service points and costs are complaints from parents. On the other hand, not all service places for persons with disabilities are equipped with disability-friendly and representative infrastructure.

**Further Discussion**

Based on this study's results, researchers saw a link between each supporting and preventing factor. This linkage provides an overview of dynamics that occur in parental acceptance of students with disabilities in inclusive schools from the perspective of the psychological assessment team at RDRM.

The first link can be seen in how parents have adequate knowledge of disability issues themselves. Correct and sufficient knowledge support for parental acceptance. On the other hand, a lack of knowledge and literacy hinders parental acceptance of a child's disability. Several research findings also support this analysis. Good parental understanding of children's characteristics has many benefits, including being an indicator of parental resilience (Widyawati, Scholte, Kleemans & Otten, 2022) and also increasing the participation of children with disabilities in their life situations for growth, development and a more meaningful life (Arakelyan *et al*., 2019). This aspect of knowledge is essential because it can be a support or a constraint. Therefore efforts to increase parental knowledge through psychoeducation, outreach and campaigns about disability need to be encouraged so that people have more knowledge about children with disabilities with proper understanding.

According to the researchers' opinion, this knowledge is also related to other factors, namely related to the attitudes and beliefs of parents. Based on the results of this study, it is known that the proactive attitude of parents is a supporting factor for acceptance. On the other hand, maladaptive beliefs deter parental acceptance of a child's disability. Good parental knowledge and literacy can certainly lead parents to be proactive and open. Contrarily, a lack of knowledge and literacy makes parents have maladaptive beliefs far from scientific facts. This is reflected in the presence of parents who believe more in alternative medicine and traditional healers to deal with children's disabilities. In fact, disability is not a disease. It cannot be cured, moreover, through methods without a scientific basis.

Knowledge can also be linked to parental experience. What parents have experienced or witnessed regarding disabilities can also determine how parental knowledge ultimately influences parental acceptance of a child's condition. According to our findings, parents' experiences, whether they have siblings with disabilities or positive experiences in accessing services, support acceptance. On the other hand, the negative experiences that parents receive regarding previous service history can hinder parental acceptance of students with disabilities in inclusive schools.

Regarding services for students with disabilities, researchers also found a link between supporting factors and preventing factors. Apart from experience, it turns out that adequate facilities and cheap access to disability services are essential factors in supporting parental acceptance. The existence of access and services makes parents closer to getting psychoeducation, information and various other forms of services so that they become a catalyst for the acceptance process. Conversely, limited infrastructure and limited access to services are factors that hinder the acceptance process. This is supported by other research facts, including the Poernomo study (2016), one of which states that there are physical barriers that can be found in inclusive schools in the form of infrastructure, such as access to stairs to classrooms, laboratories and libraries.

Services for students with disabilities are related to availability, ease of access, and financial resources. The findings of this study state that parents' financial support and ability are factors supporting acceptance, while the limited financial resources of parents are factors that also hinder acceptance. Rajan, Romate & Srikrishna (2016) stated that as children with disabilities mature, the obstacles faced by parents are also increasing, including career adjustments, stigma, concern for the future of children and increasing financial burdens. Stable financial conditions provide flexibility for parents to access health services, education and make efforts to stimulate children's growth and development. Therefore, families or parents who are underprivileged need to be given free access to health and education services.

Support for parents of children with disabilities is, in fact, not enough only through financial support or the availability of resources alone. Social support from the family and environment also greatly supports the process of parental acceptance of students with disabilities. Dasuki (2017) states that family support is vital for parents, considering that caring for children with disabilities, especially mentally retarded, can make them feel inferior and burdened. The same thing was found that in Central Java, social support was the most dominant factor influencing parental acceptance of children with disabilities (Gusrianti *et al.,* 2018).

Ironically, in society, many negative stereotypes or stigmas still target children with disabilities, which leads to social isolation or bullying, including at school. These results are in line with Poernomo's study (2016), which states that there are still many students with disabilities who experience non-physical barriers in inclusive schools, which include emotional isolation, bullying and discrimination from teachers. The negative stigma itself is an obstacle to acceptance. Therefore, measures to increase knowledge regarding disability conditions will not be effective if they only target parents. The school community as a whole, especially in the city of Semarang, should also be equipped with knowledge and awareness of disabilities to avoid negative stigma.

Having children with disabilities can also affect the psychological condition of parents. It is found that parents of children with disabilities, especially those with developmental disabilities, tend to experience stress and coping difficulties compared to parents without developmental disabilities (Suzuki *et al*., 2013). This study found that one of the preventing factors for parents in accepting their child's condition is excessive anxiety about their child's future. Of course, this anxiety is something natural, but it should be managed wisely. This study also found that parental spirituality is a supporting factor for acceptance. Spirituality is how parents constructively show positive meaning, gratitude and management of emotions, including anxiety. In line with the results of this study, Pandya (2017) also uncovered that spirituality is one of the instruments used by many practitioners in European countries, America, Australia, to Canada to help parents accept, cope and resilience of children with disabilities.

**CONCLUSION**

 This study concludes that the supporting and preventing factors of parental acceptance of students with disabilities in Semarang are related, according to the Psychological Assessment Team's perspective. This connection illustrates how parental acceptance is dynamic and is determined by many factors. These factors are mainly related to knowledge, resources, availability and access to services, the presence or absence of social support and parental spirituality.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The results of this study have implications for how the Semarang City Government can provide a constructive response to increase parental acceptance of students with disabilities for psychological well-being. So far, the Semarang City Government has owned *Rumah Duta* *Revolusi Mental* (RDRM) as a unit that provides psychological services for students with disabilities in inclusive schools free of charge for underprivileged residents.

Of course, this step needs to be strengthened by empowering various regional apparatuses, namely the Education Department, Social Affairs Department, the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Department and related stakeholders in efforts to (a) more effective psychoeducation and outreach, (b) facilitate access and improve the quality of services for students with disabilities, especially for parents with economic limitations and (c) policies that support the fulfilment of the education rights of children with disabilities through the provision of increasingly inclusive education in the City of Semarang.

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