

## Parents' Perceptions and Dilemmas in Children's School Readiness: Vygotsky's Cognitive Approach

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### Abstract

*Parental perceptions of elementary school readiness refer to parents' views and assessments of their children's cognitive, social-emotional, language, motor, and independence abilities. This study aims to explore parents' perceptions of their children's readiness for elementary school, with a particular focus on differences between fathers' and mothers' perspectives within the same family and the child's cognitive abilities. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research involved the parents of an 8-year-old boy (RD). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal notable differences between the father's and mother's perceptions of RD's readiness for elementary school. These differences are influenced by three main factors: parents' understanding of school readiness, their past educational experiences, and their expectations for the child's future education. The study concludes that parental perceptions of school readiness are subjective and shaped by internal and social factors, highlighting the importance of open communication and collaboration between parents in educational decision-making. The findings also indicate that RD is a gifted child whose academic abilities exceed those of his peers, and whose discomfort and demotivation in elementary school stem from the inadequate fulfillment of his learning needs within a regular school environment.*

**Keywords:** Elementary School Readiness, Parental Perceptions, ZPD

### Abstrak

Persepsi kesiapan memasuki sekolah dasar merupakan pandangan dan penilaian orang tua terhadap kemampuan anak yang mencakup aspek kognitif, sosial-emosional, bahasa, motorik, dan kemandirian. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi orang tua terhadap kesiapan anak memasuki sekolah dasar dengan fokus pada perbedaan persepsi antara ayah dan ibu dalam satu keluarga serta kemampuan kognitif anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus dengan subjek orang tua dari seorang anak laki-laki berusia 8 tahun berinisial RD. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan persepsi antara ayah dan ibu RD terkait kesiapan anak memasuki sekolah dasar. Perbedaan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh pemahaman orang tua tentang kesiapan sekolah, pengalaman pendidikan masa lalu, serta harapan terhadap masa depan pendidikan anak. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa persepsi orang tua bersifat subjektif dan dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal dan sosial, sehingga komunikasi terbuka dan kolaborasi antarorang tua menjadi penting dalam pengambilan keputusan pendidikan anak. Selain itu, RD merupakan anak berbakat dengan kemampuan akademik di atas rata-rata teman sebayanya, namun mengalami ketidaknyamanan dan demotivasi di sekolah dasar karena kebutuhan belajarnya belum terpenuhi secara optimal di lingkungan sekolah reguler.

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**Kata Kunci:** Kesiapan Sekolah Dasar, Persepsi Orangtua, ZPD

## INTRODUCTION

Readiness for elementary school is an important consideration for parents in terms of their child's abilities. A child's readiness for school includes the qualities and characteristics that a child should have in order to have an enjoyable experience and be an indicator of academic success throughout elementary school (Syahidah et al., 2021; Wahyuningrum, 2025). There are several aspects of a child's readiness to enter elementary school, namely: school maturity, which is related to physical motor development (bones, muscles, neurons), and school readiness related to specific skills or abilities such as cognitive, social, and independence skills. This readiness is an important foundation for a child's success in facing the formal learning process at the next level (Faqumala & Kurniawati, 2020; Mariyati, 2019; Ratin et al., 2020).

In early childhood, the part of the brain that develops rapidly is the emotional center, not the thinking center, which means that children aged 0-8 years need to play and form attachments. This is the basis for parents to pay attention to their children's happiness, not just their cognitive abilities (Faqumala & Kurniawati, 2020). According to Piaget, children under the age of 7 are in the pre-operational stage of cognitive development. At this stage, children's learning is still focused on playing and developing motor skills. If children are forced to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, there is a concern that they will lose their enthusiasm for learning (Rifai & Fahmi, 2017). Vygotsky's theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how children develop thinking skills through social interaction and their surroundings.

According to Vygotsky (Wahyuningrum, 2025; Warmansyah et al., 2023), cognitive development is greatly influenced by experiences and social interactions, such as support from adults or peers, to develop more complex abilities. Learning occurs when individuals interact with their surroundings, which channel cognitive functions through social and symbolic mediation (Torres & Alchundia, 2024; Xue, 2023). Vygotsky emphasized the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the distance between a child's current abilities (achieved independently) and their potential abilities (achieved with the help of more capable adults or peers). The ZPD is described as the space between what a child can already do on their own and what they can achieve with the guidance of a more competent person, so that teaching must "precede" actual development in order to encourage further development (Wass & Golding, 2014). It is within this zone that the most meaningful learning process occurs, because learners are ready to develop, but are not yet fully capable of doing so on their own.

Lev Vygotsky, in his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), emphasizes the importance of social interaction in supporting children's cognitive achievement. He argues that children need support from adults or peers to develop more complex abilities. This process is called scaffolding, where the mentor provides gradual assistance until the child is able to complete the task independently. In addition, language plays an important role in cognitive development because through

communication, children can internalize knowledge and thinking strategies (Damanik et al., 2025; Wahyuningrum, 2025). Scaffolding can take the form of instructions, examples, prompting questions, step-by-step guidance, or verbal support that encourages learners to think and try (Margolis, 2020). This assistance is not permanent but is tailored to the needs of the learner and gradually reduced as their learning abilities and independence increase.

The ZPD is key to a child's readiness to enter elementary school, where children acquire new skills through scaffolding, which is guidance tailored to the child's developmental needs. The application of Vygotsky's theory in the context of entering primary education provides an understanding that a child's readiness to enter primary school is the result of a dynamic social process, with the environment, teachers, and family playing an important role in optimally shaping the child's learning abilities (Damanik et al., 2025; Fuadi, 2021). ZPD and scaffolding cannot be separated in the learning process. ZPD forms the basis for understanding the readiness and potential of students, while scaffolding serves as a bridge connecting initial abilities with higher abilities (Suhendi et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2025).

One external factor that plays a role in determining a child's readiness is parental perception, given their central role in the child's daily life. Perception is a person's view based on physical experiences, values, a set of ideas and attitudes, and the human ability to distinguish, categorize, and direct thoughts toward a particular object or situation and interpret it (Amalia et al., 2023). Parents' views on their child's readiness are usually influenced by their understanding, personal experiences, and expectations of their child's educational process.

Parents who have the right knowledge and perceptions tend to be better able to provide maximum support in preparing their children, both in terms of basic skills and social-emotional readiness. Conversely, a lack of understanding can cause pressure on children, which can lead to difficulties in adjusting to the school environment. Parents' concerns when enrolling their children in elementary school are their writing, arithmetic, and reading abilities, which leads parents who want their children to be able to write, count, and read to rush to enroll their children in tutoring or private literacy classes. In line with research (Dian Pertiwi et al., 2021; Syahidah et al., 2021), parents should not only focus on literacy skills for elementary school entrance exam preparation, but also on communication skills and religious values, which need to be prepared with knowledge and skills in recognizing Hijaiyah letters and memorizing short surahs from the Quran.

Harvard Medical School research in 2018 study showed the negative effects of sending children to school too young. In the United States, for example, children must be 5 years old by September 1 to enter kindergarten. Children who start school before the age of 5 are more likely to be diagnosed with and receive treatment for ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), (Mariyati, 2019; Wahyuningrum, 2025). Research by experts at the University of Florida Toronto in 2017 stated that children who start school too early have poorer elementary school entrance test scores, are less

likely to continue college, and are at risk of being imprisoned for committing crimes underage. When children receive education that is not appropriate for their developmental level, they may feel incompetent, anxious, and confused because they cannot meet academic and behavioral expectations, resulting in them being labeled as having ADHD, learning disorders, or developmental delays (Wahyuningrum, 2025).

There is a perception that the younger the age of children (5-6 years) entering elementary school, the more proud their parents will be and the more extraordinary it will be (Wahyuningrum, 2025). Parents feel proud that their children are great and genius for being able to attend elementary school at a young age, even though this contradicts the policy of the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 51 of 2018 concerning the Acceptance of New Students, which states that prospective new students for grade 1 of elementary school must be 7 years old or at least 6 years old on July 1 of the current year, except for those who are at least 5 years and 6 months old on July 1 of the current year, which is intended for prospective students who have special intelligence or special talents and psychological readiness, as evidenced by a written recommendation from a professional psychologist, and not by a teacher (Faqumala & Kurniawati, 2020; Wahyuningrum, 2025). From a developmental perspective, children aged 5–6 years are still in the preschool development phase, where their main needs are to play, explore, build social-emotional skills, and develop self-control (Althen et al., 2020; Suhendar et al., 2025).

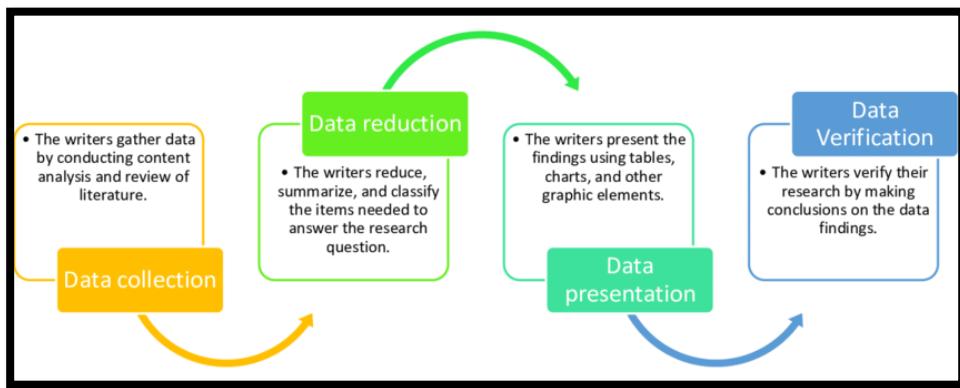
This is in line with the concerns of Mrs. ES and Mr. FT regarding their child who will enter elementary school at the age of less than 6 years old. Mr. FT feels that his son RD is ready to enter elementary school because RD's cognitive abilities exceed the average for his age group, but Mrs. ES feels that RD is not yet ready in terms of his social and emotional development, because RD is still shy when meeting friends his own age. This is the difference in perception between Mrs. ES and Mr. FT in terms of their child's readiness to enter elementary school. Based on this background, this study aims to examine parents' perceptions of their children's readiness to enter elementary school, based on their understanding, personal experiences, and expectations regarding their children's education.

## METHODS

### Research Design and Participants

This study uses a case study approach, exploring in depth parents' perceptions of their children's readiness to enter elementary school by looking at several background experiences, parents' education, and the local socio-cultural context. The research subjects were two parents and one child. Both parents were 39 years old, the mother with the initials ES, and the father with the initials FJ, and RD was the child, a 8-year-old boy. Mother ES was a lecturer with a doctoral degree in education, and father FJ was an educator with a doctoral degree in education. The research was conducted over a period of 6 months from January to June 2025 in Batang Anai District, Padang

Pariaman Regency. Data collection techniques used observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques used the Miles and Huberman technique.



Picture 1. *Analysis Interaktive Model* (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Based on the interview with Mr. FT, the perception that RD is ready to enter elementary school at the age of 6 is the right choice, because RD has better logical thinking skills than his peers. Mr. FT's consideration is that RD has been prepared for a long time to be able to start school early, and he even intends to enroll RD at the age of 5 so that RD can complete his formal education faster by choosing an accelerated program. This is the basis for Mr. FT's decision because he himself entered elementary school at the age of 5 and completed his formal education faster than his peers. Another belief is that since the age of 3, RD has been enrolled in a playgroup and has been stimulated with scientific thinking, as RD asks questions typical of children with a high level of curiosity.

Another supporting factor that convinced Mr. FT that RD should enroll at the age of 5 was that since the age of 2.5, RD had always been brought to campus when his parents were pursuing their doctoral studies. RD was always surrounded by academically-minded adults, which gave him a more critical mindset and a greater enthusiasm for learning new things. Mr. FT has tried various methods to help RD develop a more logical and critical mindset. This is evident in Mr. FT giving RD math problems every night, ranging from easy to difficult, and even teaching RD simple mathematical formulas and scientific terms and Latin biology terms, in line with Mr. FT's educational background in biology.

This contrasts with the results of an interview conducted with Mrs. ES, who wanted her child to enter elementary school at the age of 7. Mrs. ES's consideration for RD to enter at the age of 7 was so that RD would be more prepared and mature in facing tasks at school. Mrs. ES's concern was that when RD met friends of the same age, he felt less confident and withdrew, not wanting to join in playing with his peers. Conversely, when RD meets adults, RD feels confident and self-assured in asking

various questions, which sometimes overwhelm the other person with RD's barrage of critical questions and intense curiosity.

Statement from Mr. FT and Mrs. ES when they discussed the matter directly with the principal, considering that RD could not be accepted at any of the public elementary schools in Batang Anai Subdistrict. Even if RD enrolled in elementary school before the age of 6, he could attend a private elementary school, but with the risk that RD would have to complete 12 years of education, which means RD would have to wait 1 year until he is 12 years old, in the sense of taking a 1-year leave of absence from school. Hearing the explanation from the principal, Mrs. ES and Mr. FT decided that RD would continue kindergarten for another year and enroll RD in elementary school at the age of 7.

Based on observations, RD is a favorite among his friends at school and is liked by his teachers. RD is always responsive to his teachers' instructions, such as leading prayers during congregational prayers at school, carrying the flag during flag ceremonies at school, and always helping his friends who are unable to do their work. RD helps his friends who are having difficulties, which makes his teachers happy. RD is also a sensitive child. When his friends around him feel sad, he also feels concerned. For example, when his friend falls down, RD does not laugh like other children, but RD helps his friend and tells other friends not to laugh at the friend who fell down. RD is also responsive when the teacher has difficulty carrying game equipment outside the classroom. RD offers help to his teacher.

RD has a good memory, such as Surah Yasin, Surah Ar-Rahman, and other short surahs (Al Ikhlas, An-Nas, Al-Kafirun) and the Ayat Kursi, which he can recite fluently. RD is also able to answer and explain questions given by his teacher, such as "why do we have to be orderly when riding a vehicle?" RD answered with logical reasons and recounted his experience of having flown several times and traveled by ship from Surabaya to Ternate. RD recounted his experiences of accompanying his father and mother back and forth to the island of Seberang for further studies. This is what always makes RD feel confident with the experiences he has had.



Picture 2. RD Becoming an imam during the practice of the dhuha sunnah prayer in congregation



Picture 3. RD accompanied Mrs. ES to college



Picture 4. RD is waiting for Mrs. ES at the digital library.

## Discussion

The difference in opinion between RD's mother ES and father FT regarding their child's readiness to enter elementary school is influenced by the understanding and experiences of each of RD's parents. Mr. FT, with his experience of entering elementary school at the age of 5 and not attending kindergarten, decided that his son RD should follow in his footsteps, considering that RD would be much younger than his peers, so

that RD could focus on his future career development, and RD was also cognitively ready.

Contrary to Mrs. ES's perception of her child's readiness for elementary school, Mrs. ES's experience of entering elementary school at the age of 7 and attending kindergarten for 3 years made her feel more confident and independent than her peers in elementary, junior high, and high school. This is what Mrs. ES considered when deciding to enroll RD at the age of 7, with the reasoning that RD would be more psychologically and cognitively prepared, allowing RD to enjoy their playtime at kindergarten, because once they enter elementary school, their playtime will begin to decrease.

This is in line with Perception Theory in psychological studies, which discusses how humans receive, interpret, and understand information from the environment through the five senses. Perception is not merely a process of receiving stimuli, but also involves interpretation based on experience, knowledge, and context. The experiences and knowledge gained by Mr. FT and Mrs. ES have led them to have different perceptions regarding their child's readiness to enter elementary school. Gestalt theory, which supports perception, has the main principle that humans tend to see the whole before the parts. In the context of perception, a person does not view small elements separately, but sees a meaningful whole pattern. Parents often assess their child's readiness based on a general picture of the child, rather than on an in-depth evaluation of each aspect of their development (cognitive, social-emotional, motor, language, and so on).

The difference in perception based on the experiences of Mr. FT and Mrs. ES in Gestlak's Theory of understanding a child's readiness to enter elementary school tends to have an overall scheme formed from their social experiences (discussions with teachers and reading parenting books) which can be more flexible or, on the contrary, too generalized. This is in line with the statement by Mr. FT and Mrs. ES that they agreed to send RD to school at the age of 7. After RD started first grade, when picking up his semester report card, RD's teacher informed Mr. FT and Mrs. ES that RD was a gifted child because he had above-average academic abilities. This was evident from his quick thinking and ability to solve problems quickly and accurately. This statement was confirmed by RD's parents, who said that RD had mentioned feeling bored and unmotivated to go to school because he was not learning anything new from his friends and felt that the lessons taught by his teacher were too easy.

In line with the results of research (Qori, 2023) that gifted children can provide scaffolding-based learning by paying attention to four components, namely: 1) Assessment, the first step in determining actual development as knowledge or the initial condition of children in terms of their knowledge and mental attitude. 2) Collaborative, where the teacher focuses on the child's adjustment to the learning material in the context of the child's interpersonal relationships with the teacher and peers. 3) Independent learner, at this stage, children already know the scope of the material to be discussed in problem-based learning, and teachers provide ample space for children to

elaborate on the learning material content and be independent in responding to problem discussions. 4) Building self-regulation, teachers act as motivators and facilitators so that learning runs well and according to plan, teachers act as supervisors, providing clues, encouraging, and guiding students.

Vygotsky's theory in the context of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is very relevant when RD helps his friends who are having difficulty learning or completing tasks such as: telling friends how to arrange blocks to form a castle, helping friends who are still stuttering when reading, helping friends when learning the Hijayyah alphabet and reciting the Quran. The ZPD is the distance between the actual ability (lower limit) of what a child can do without help, and the potential ability (upper limit) of what a child can do with the help of others or those who are more skilled (parents, teachers, and peers). This means that RD, who helps friends in difficulty, acts as a scaffolder or learning support. RD facilitates his friends so that they can achieve abilities that they have not yet fully mastered themselves. The child being helped is at the upper limit of their ZPD, meaning they are not yet able to complete the task on their own, but with the help of the RD, they can complete it. This assistance becomes a bridge from the upper limit to the lower limit.

ZPD describes psychological functions that are still "partially mature" and will develop if there is appropriate social support, not just what the child has already mastered (Nardo, 2021). Vygotsky's scaffolding is the provision of social, cognitive, and material support tailored to the ZPD, which is then gradually removed until the learner becomes independent. Research in various contexts (early childhood education, inclusive education, language, nursing, medicine, higher education) consistently shows that planned, gradual, and ZPD-sensitive scaffolding increases motivation, learning outcomes, and self-regulation skills (Nardo, 2021; V. Zaretsky, 2024; V. K. Zaretsky, 2021). Thinking and speaking abilities improve rapidly in early childhood; according to Vygotsky, cognitive development is highly dependent on the development of language skills (Hanifah & Farida, 2023). Using group activities/collaborative learning to build cognitive and social skills (empathy, cooperation, respect for others' opinions) (Andriani et al., 2025).

The social meaning of ZPD according to Vygotsky is that social interaction is the key to cognitive development(Poehner & Lantolf, 2021). When RD helps his friend, a two-way learning process occurs, which helps him acquire new skills, while the helper strengthens his understanding. The formation of a collaborative culture in the learning environment occurs. The meaning of ZPD in this context is that children do not learn alone, but through social support that enables them to exceed their actual abilities. Children who help their friends act as "ZPD actors" who encourage their friends to reach their potential (Abtahi, 2021; Gehlot, 2021). Scaffolding: gradual assistance (guidance, guiding questions, modeling) that is then reduced as children become more independent is a key mechanism of ZPD (Tigere et al., 2025).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that differences in parents' perceptions of their children's readiness to enter elementary school are not always the same, even within the same family. Mr. FT emphasizes cognitive aspects as the main indicator of school readiness and believes that RD is academically ready, while Mrs. Es considers that the child's psychological and emotional readiness is also very important, so she prefers to delay entering elementary school until the age of 7 so that the child is more mentally mature. The importance of open communication and collaboration between parents in making decisions about their child's education, as well as the need for support from the school or professionals in helping to identify the child's readiness holistically. RD is a gifted child, as evidenced by his above-average grades in first grade, his critical thinking skills, and his ability to complete class assignments very quickly and accurately. RD's discomfort and demotivation stem from his feeling that his learning needs as a gifted child are not being optimally met in a regular school environment.

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