

**EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING SCHOOL READINESS: A  
QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*School readiness is critical in supporting children's educational development. Language, physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional readiness, alongside parental and teacher support, significantly influence this transition. This study aims to identify the factors affecting children's readiness to enter primary school and the challenges encountered. This qualitative study employed in-depth interviews involving nine parents and teachers in two kindergartens in Lamongan Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Thematic analysis was conducted using coding techniques to identify significant categories. Five main themes were identified: (1) language readiness, (2) physical readiness, (3) cognitive readiness, (4) socio-emotional readiness, and (5) the role of teachers and parents. Key challenges included insufficient language stimulation at home, limited collaboration between parents and schools, and disparities in parenting practices. This study highlights the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in preparing children for primary education. Interventions focused on cognitive stimulation, socio-emotional strengthening, and inclusive learning environments should be optimized.*

**Keywords:** *Child; preschool; school readiness; education; primary; qualitative research*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Children are the nation's future generation, with significant opportunities to develop their abilities outside the family environment, particularly in school. Parents must enroll their children in school with adequate preparation to ensure a smooth and effective educational process. Insufficient preparation for school can lead to school failure. School readiness refers to a child's readiness to learn according to physical, intellectual, and social development standards, enabling them to meet the standards set by the school curriculum (Soetjningsih; Ranuh, 2013).

Three dimensions influence school readiness: the child's readiness for school, the school's readiness for the child, and the family's and community's readiness for school (Britto, 2012). Children not ready for school will likely encounter learning achievement problems, contributing to higher school failure rates. The youngest children in a class are at greater risk of school failure, such as being candidates for grade retention (Bedard & Dhuey, 2006) or being classified as children with learning difficulties (Dhuey & Lipscomb, 2010).

Experiencing school failure can have an impact on a child's mental health. Children may face anxiety and depression due to their inability to adapt to their new school environment. Early mental health problems can lead to long-term consequences, including developmental delays and reduced quality of life. Mental health issues affect millions, even billions, of people worldwide. These problems may result in decreased productivity, economic burdens, and other challenges if left unaddressed. Mental health issues must receive special attention to be prevented and managed through promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative efforts (Pratama, A. A & Senja, A, 2022). This study aims to identify the factors influencing children's readiness to enter primary school and the challenges they face.

## **METHOD**

### **Study design and setting**

This formative research used a qualitative design. All authors were experienced in qualitative research. The first author (AI) was a female midwife. HS, IQ, and SM were trained in public health research. This research involved two kindergartens in Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia.

### **Sample**

The study was conducted from October to December 2024, with nine participants selected using purposive sampling techniques to identify and select information-rich participants related to school readiness in pre-schoolers. Four of these participants were teachers, and five were parents. All participants and research team members had yet to meet each other before the study. No one dropped out during data collection in the study. No one else was present besides the participants and researchers.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected face-to-face from October to December 2024 via nine in-depth interviews in the kindergarten conducted by the first author (AI). The average time of each in-depth interview was 45–60 min using a reliable guide, were conducted in Bahasa (Indonesian language) and voice recorded. Field notes were made during and after each data collection.

### **Data analysis**

Audio recorded data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to themes within the data using open code 4.02 (ICT Services and System Development and Division of Epidemiology and Global Health, 2015). We followed the six stages of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It included generating initial codes from participant transcripts, grouping codes with similar semantic meanings, and grouping to form themes. We used explicit or surface meaning of transcript content to form themes rather than through interpretation by the research team. Two coders (AI and SM) generated code, and all authors participated in categorizing and determining the theme. The research team discussed and refined the themes until we reached a consensus. Data were further collected and examined using the same step until the data was saturated. The report followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007).

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

| No | Initial | Participant Category | Age (years) | Gender | Last Education                                 | Experience (years) | Occupation           |
|----|---------|----------------------|-------------|--------|--|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1  | GN      | Kindergarten Teacher | 35          | Female | Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) | 12                 | Kindergarten Teacher |
| 2  | AD      | Kindergarten Teacher | 40          | Female | Bachelor's in Education                        | 15                 | Kindergarten Teacher |
| 3  | RS      | Kindergarten Teacher | 28          | Female | Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) | 6                  | Kindergarten Teacher |
| 4  | LN      | Kindergarten Teacher | 32          | Female | Diploma in Early Childhood Education (PAUD)    | 8                  | Kindergarten Teacher |
| 5  | MR      | Parent               | 30          | Female | High School                                    | -                  | Housewife            |
| 6  | HS      | Parent               | 28          | Female | Diploma  | -                  | Entrepreneur         |
| 7  | NK      | Parent               | 30          | Female | High School                                    | -                  | Housewife            |
| 8  | AL      | Parent               | 34          | Female | Bachelor's                                     | -                  | Private Employee     |
| 9  | DI      | Parent               | 34          | Female | High School                                    | -                  | Housewife            |

All participants are women, consisting of 4 kindergarten teachers and five parents aged between 28 and 40. The kindergarten teachers have relevant educational backgrounds (Bachelor's/Diploma in Early Childhood Education) and 6–15 years of experience, while most parents have a high school education and are housewives.

Key Themes

After analyzing the qualitative data, five main categories were identified: (1) language readiness, (2) physical readiness, (3) cognitive readiness, (4) socio-emotional readiness, and (5) the role of teachers and parents.

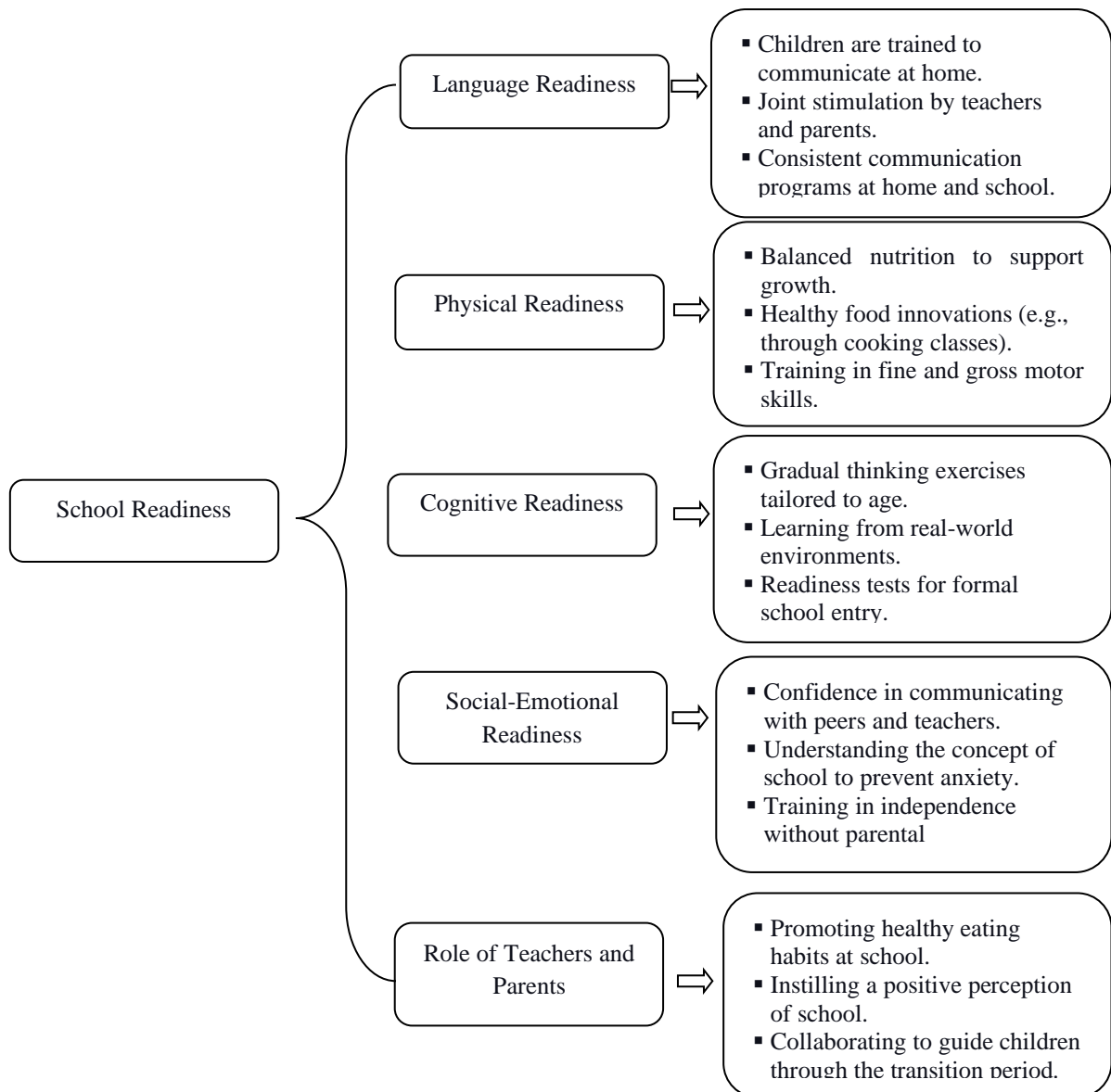


Figure 1. Early Childhood Readiness for Formal Education

**Language Readiness**

Children who have attended informal schooling are expected to interact with others, including peers and teachers, and use language for communication.

*"I always tell my child at home to answer when the teacher asks questions, to be brave if asked to share stories or stand up, and to speak kindly to friends, not argue or tease, and always be polite" (Parent, 34 years old).*

Parents prepare their children for social interactions through communication practices at home.

*"At home, I interact with my children daily, talking about their activities. This practice will prepare them better for communication at school since they are already trained at home"* (Parent, 28 years old).

Language readiness can be enhanced through collaborative programs between teachers and parents.

*"Preparation must involve both school and home stimulation. Having aligned programs between teachers and parents helps children excel"* (Teacher, 40 years old).

### **Physical Readiness**

Children's health must be maintained by providing nutritious and balanced food, essential for growth and energy needs.

*"For health, I provide nutritious meals because children need energy and proper growth. Sometimes my child dislikes vegetables, so I try to persuade them to eat healthy"* (Teacher, 32 years old).

Some children are picky eaters, so innovative approaches, like cooking classes, encourage them to eat nutritious food.

*"Sometimes parents say their children will not eat vegetables or fruits. We organize cooking classes where children and parents prepare meals together. Afterward, the children become more willing to eat healthy food"* (Teacher, 35 years old).

Preparing children physically for school requires consistent communication and support from both teachers and parents.

*"We prepare children by improving fine and gross motor skills and enriching vocabulary through parental support and teacher communication"* (Teacher, 40 years old).

### **Cognitive Readiness**

Children's thinking abilities should be gradually developed with age-appropriate activities.

*"Problem-solving skills should be fostered by providing tasks and situations where children can practice and develop solutions"* (Parent, 28 years old)

Learning is not limited to the classroom; the environment offers real-life learning experiences.

*"For example, teaching traffic light colors and their functions or guessing the number of wheels on vehicles during a commute enhances their awareness"* (Teacher, 32 years old)

School readiness can also involve formal assessments, particularly for children transitioning to formal schooling.

*"A readiness test for 6–7-year-old children, including those with special needs, helps parents and teachers identify areas for improvement"* (Teacher, 35 years old).

### **Social-Emotional Readiness**

Parents gauge their children's social-emotional readiness by observing interactions with neighbors and friends.

*"If my child is already comfortable communicating with neighbors and friends, I believe they can interact well with classmates and teachers"* (Parent, 30 years old).

Parents can alleviate school anxiety by positively framing the concept of school.

*"We prepare our children mentally and emotionally for school by explaining what school is and addressing their fears positively"* (Parent, 34 years old).

An important milestone in readiness shown by the child's independence like going to school without parental accompaniment

*"Training children to attend school independently and confidently interact with teachers is essential for their development"* (Teacher, 28 years old).

### **Roles of Teachers and Parents**

Support from schools and parents is vital in preparing children for the school environment, emphasizing communication and collaboration.

*"Schools should conduct socialization about healthy food, which parents can complement at home to ensure children's well-being"* (Teacher, 40 years old).

Parents should convey positive messages to children to build confidence in new environments.

*"I tell my child that the new school environment, teachers, and classmates will be welcoming, creating a positive perception"* (Parent, 34 years old).

Collaboration between parents and teachers is crucial for guiding children from kindergarten to elementary school.

*"Parents must be proactive in guiding children, and teachers must be patient with first graders transitioning from kindergarten. Collaboration is key"* (Teacher, 35 years old).

## **DISCUSSION**

Children's readiness to transition into formal education is a multifaceted process influenced by various factors. These factors, encompassing language readiness, physical preparedness, cognitive skills, social-emotional development, and the role of parents and educators, significantly contribute to a child's holistic development. This study highlights the interconnection of these factors and their collective impact on early education outcomes.

### **Language Readiness**

Language skills are crucial in effective communication and interaction within the school environment. Children exposed to structured and supportive communication at home tend to demonstrate better language readiness when entering formal education. Interestingly, research shows that using a home language does not hinder the development of English in bilingual children. Bilingual education is as effective as monolingual English education in enhancing children's vocabulary skills (Kekejian et al., 2024; Kilpi-Jakonen & Alisaari, 2022).

The quality of parent-child interactions and the frequency of shared activities, such as reading books, greatly influence children's language development. These factors are often shaped by the family's socio-economic status, which serves as a differentiating factor in many cases (Attig & Weinert, 2020). Additionally, interactions designed to stimulate language use, such as storytelling, have been shown to positively impact children's language abilities, especially in English (Lewis et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2021).

Children from families with higher socio-economic status are more likely to receive complex and diverse language support, which contributes to their readiness for school (Haft et al., 2022; Neuman, 2000). In this regard, effective collaboration between parents and teachers in developing language programs can further enhance children's linguistic abilities, ensuring a smoother transition to formal education (Forget-Dubois et al., 2009; Luo et al., 2021).

### **Physical Preparedness**

Optimal physical health and nutritional intake are foundational in children's readiness for school. Adequate nutrition, including a balanced diet rich in essential vitamins and minerals, supports physical growth and cognitive development. Children with high nutrition risks in early childhood are more likely to experience vulnerabilities in school readiness,

particularly in language, cognitive, and communication skills (Omand et al., 2021). Early childhood nutrition programs can improve academic performance by enhancing learning productivity per year of education (Glewwe et al., 2001).

Children with better nutrition tend to perform better academically, partly because they start school earlier and have higher learning productivity (Glewwe et al., 2001). Iron deficiency, which leads to anemia, can hinder academic performance, but this can be corrected with iron therapy (Taras, 2005). School feeding programs in low- and middle-income countries have been shown to increase height, weight, and school attendance (Wang et al., 2021). School-based nutrition interventions in Asia have demonstrated a reduction in body mass index (BMI) and BMI z-scores in children (Pongutta et al., 2022). Lastly, school-based nutrition education in China has increased nutrition knowledge and healthy food intake among children (Xu et al., 2022).

### **Cognitive Skills**

A child's cognitive readiness, which includes problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt to new learning environments, is an important factor in school readiness. Research shows that structured cognitive stimulation at home and in informal settings significantly impacts children's problem-solving skills and logical reasoning. Cognitive readiness, measured through instruments such as the Early Development Instrument (EDI), strongly correlates with later academic performance, particularly in reading, writing, and mathematics (Davies et al., 2016). Good cognitive readiness at the start of school can enhance long-term academic abilities.

Additionally, the shared environment contributes more significantly to school cognitive readiness than genetic factors in core school readiness abilities (Lemelin et al., 2007). A child's life experiences can affect their neurocognitive development, which can be influenced through targeted educational interventions (Noble et al., 2005). In addition to cognitive aspects, school readiness also depends on social-emotional readiness, which can support academic and social success in school (Rahmawati, 2019). Educational programs designed to enhance cognitive readiness, such as corrective and developmental programs, have proven effective in improving various aspects of cognitive readiness, including long-term memory and auditory perception (Pechatnova & Nekrasova, 2021).

### **Social-Emotional Development**

Social-emotional readiness is vital to school readiness, influencing children's overall academic success and well-being. This readiness includes children's ability to interact positively with peers, manage emotions, and adapt to new environments. Research indicates that early social interactions facilitated by parents and caregivers play a crucial role in building children's confidence and emotional resilience. Social-emotional skills (SEL), such as emotional literacy, empathy, and communication skills, directly contribute to school readiness and academic success. Socially competent children tend to perform better academically, while poor social skills can predict academic failure (Denham & Brown, 2010; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

Parental involvement is also a key factor in enhancing preschool children's social-emotional competence, including attachment and initiative, which are essential for school readiness (Sheridan et al., 2010). A supportive environment emphasizing positive relationships, empathy, and positive reinforcement is critical for developing social competence (Hemmeter et al., 2006). Moreover, early intervention programs focusing on young children's social and emotional health have shown significant evidence of improving social-emotional outcomes. For example, programs like *Incredible Years* teach social and problem-solving skills to strengthen social, emotional, and academic competence (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Models such as the *Teaching Pyramid* further emphasize the importance of building positive relationships, designing supportive environments, and teaching social-emotional skills to foster children's holistic development (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

### **Role of Parents and Educators**

The partnership between parents and educators plays a crucial role in preparing children for formal education, with research showing that effective collaboration between the two parties can enhance educational outcomes and children's school readiness. A strong partnership between families and educational professionals leads to positive educational outcomes, particularly for children who are vulnerable or at risk (Nyarambi & Nkabinde, 2021). Positive relationships between parents and schools improve children's readiness, strengthen family engagement in child-centered programs, and build trust among all stakeholders (Ngadni & Shuang, 2024; Nyarambi & Nkabinde, 2021). Through intensive interactions, classroom teachers and parents can collaboratively identify and resolve issues

in child-rearing, ultimately enhancing children's social and personal development (Ryabova, 2024).

Open and respectful communication between teachers and parents is key to building effective partnerships (Ngadni & Shuang, 2024). Parental involvement, both at home and in school, significantly positively impacts children's learning outcomes (Hadley & Rouse, 2021; Ma et al., 2016). In this regard, teachers and principals play a central role in facilitating partnerships by providing resources and opportunities for professional development (Ngadni & Shuang, 2024). However, many teachers' education programs have yet to fully prepare prospective teachers to establish effective partnerships with families, particularly those from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018). Moreover, the literature on family-educator partnerships often lacks consistency in defining "partnership," creating ambiguity and less effective approaches (Hadley & Rouse, 2021). By fostering a more structured collaboration and a shared understanding of partnership, the relationship between parents and educators can be enhanced to optimally support children's development across various educational and social dimensions.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study underscore the importance of a holistic approach to school readiness, integrating language, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional preparedness. Policymakers and educators should focus on designing comprehensive early childhood education programs that address these dimensions. Furthermore, public health campaigns emphasizing nutrition and parental involvement can play a vital role in enhancing children's overall readiness for school.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in preparing children for primary education. Interventions focused on cognitive stimulation, socio-emotional reinforcement, and inclusive learning environments should be optimized.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, the Lamongan Education Office, and the Head of the Kindergarten School for their contributions to the writing of this manuscript.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher declares that they have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interests discussed in this manuscript.

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International Conference on Health, Education, Social-Economic, Science, and Technology

Makassar, Indonesia | Universitas Megarezky

ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | 20–21 January 2025

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International Conference on Health, Education, Social-Economic, Science, and Technology

Makassar, Indonesia | Universitas Megarezky

ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | 20–21 January 2025

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