



Strategies of Kindergarten Teachers and Parents in Preparing Children's School Readiness: Academic, Social, and Emotional Perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the strategies employed by kindergarten teachers and parents in preparing children's school readiness in the Batang Angkola District, considering the local context and related social dynamics.

Design/methods/approach – Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, the research combines a descriptive approach to outline existing phenomena with a qualitative approach to explore the meanings and interpretations of the strategies used. Data were collected through direct interviews with several kindergarten teachers and parent representatives in kindergartens and surrounding areas in the Batang Angkola District. Additionally, secondary data related to supporting theories on children's school readiness were utilized.

Findings – The findings reveal that both kindergarten teachers and parents are not fully prepared for children's school readiness. This is evidenced by the non-alignment of teachers' educational backgrounds with early childhood education and the parents' primary focus on academic readiness, often neglecting other critical aspects such as social and emotional development. Furthermore, the strategies implemented by kindergarten teachers and parents fail to holistically address the needs of children during the transition process.

Research implications/limitations – The study is limited to the Batang Angkola District and may not be generalizable to other regions. These findings highlight areas in educational practices that require improvement and suggest the need for further research to develop more effective strategies for holistic school readiness preparation.

Practical implications – The insights gained from this study provide guidance for the development of more holistic and integrated school readiness preparation programs that can better support children during their transition to school. These programs should aim to balance academic learning with social, emotional, and physical development to ensure well-rounded preparedness.

Originality/value – This research sheds light on the specific challenges faced by kindergarten teachers and parents in the Batang Angkola District, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to school readiness that includes academic, social, and emotional aspects. By addressing these challenges, the study contributes to the broader understanding of effective strategies for early childhood education in similar contexts.

Keywords Preschool teacher strategies, Parental role, School readiness

Paper type Case study

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Received: 23 May 2024; Revised: 25 June 2024; Accepted: 26 June 2024

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14421/al-athfal.2024.101-06>

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental need and a right for every individual, as established by Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. This law aims to develop children's potential for the benefit of themselves, society, and the nation (Harahap, 2021; Siregar, 2016). Early childhood education, particularly kindergarten, plays a crucial role in this development by helping children acquire the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and creativity needed to adapt to their environment.

The formative years in kindergarten are essential as they lay the groundwork for a child's future learning and development. During this period, children are exposed to structured learning environments for the first time, which helps them build foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social interactions. Additionally, kindergarten provides opportunities for children to develop their emotional intelligence, fostering resilience, empathy, and cooperation. These early experiences are vital in shaping a child's ability to succeed in subsequent educational stages and in life. By ensuring that children are well-prepared for school, we contribute to their long-term academic and personal success, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a critical phase in a child's development. It involves not only academic readiness but also social, emotional, and physical preparedness (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Research indicates that school readiness is influenced by various factors, including physical health, age, intelligence, and environmental stimulation (Fahmi et al., 2021; Pianta et al., 2020; Vitiello et al., 2020). However, there are significant challenges in ensuring that children are adequately prepared for this transition.

One major challenge is the disparity in early childhood education quality and access, which can lead to uneven levels of preparedness among children entering primary school. Additionally, children from low-income families or those with limited access to stimulating environments may face greater difficulties in achieving school readiness. Teachers and parents often need to address diverse needs, including language barriers, special educational needs, and varying levels of prior knowledge and experience. Furthermore, the pressure on academic achievement sometimes overshadows the importance of social and emotional development, leading to an imbalance in the holistic development of children. To tackle these challenges, comprehensive strategies involving parents, educators, and policymakers are required to create supportive and inclusive learning environments that cater to all aspects of a child's development.

Despite the recognized importance of this phase, there are gaps in the understanding and practices of kindergarten teachers and parents. highlight a lack of specific training and awareness among teachers and parents regarding the developmental needs of children during this transition (Jiang et al., 2021; Sands & Meadan, 2024) This gap is also evident in the Batang Angkola District, where the educational backgrounds of many primary school teachers do not align with early childhood education requirements.

In the Batang Angkola District, a significant challenge is the mismatch between the formal education backgrounds of primary school teachers and their roles in early childhood education. Observations from pilot studies indicate that most teachers have completed higher education but lack specific training in early childhood education. This mismatch affects the quality of preparation provided to children for primary school (Lin et al., 2003).

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach involving both teachers and parents. Effective strategies must consider the unique developmental needs of children and provide adequate support and training for educators and parents. Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial in creating a supportive and stimulating environment for children during this transition.

This research aims to understand and analyze the strategies used by kindergarten teachers and parents in preparing children's school readiness in the Batang Angkola District. It seeks to identify best practices, obstacles, and factors influencing this process. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the local context and the use of qualitative descriptive methods to delve deeply into the phenomena. This study is expected to provide new insights into school readiness

preparation practices at the local level and serve as a basis for developing more effective educational strategies in the future.

2. Methods

The qualitative descriptive research method was employed to investigate the strategies of kindergarten teachers and parents in preparing children's school readiness in the Batang Angkola District, considering the local context and related social dynamics (Baucom et al., 2023). This method combined a descriptive approach to depict existing phenomena with a qualitative approach to delve into the meanings and interpretations of the strategies used.

The subjects of this research included kindergarten teachers and parents in the Batang Angkola District, specifically representatives from several kindergartens and parents of children enrolled in these kindergartens. These subjects were selected to provide a comprehensive perspective on the practices and strategies used in preparing children for primary school entry.

Firstly, the researcher conducted observations and direct interviews in kindergartens and surrounding areas in the Batang Angkola District. The observations focused on the practices and strategies employed by teachers and parents in preparing children for primary school. The direct interviews, conducted with kindergarten teachers and parent representatives, aimed to gain a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental context in which children's school readiness preparation took place.

Additionally, secondary data was utilized to support the analysis (Hains et al., 1989). This secondary data included supporting theories about children's school readiness, early childhood learning strategies, and factors influencing the transition to primary school. Sources of secondary data comprised academic literature, textbooks, journals, and previous studies relevant to the research topic. By integrating primary and secondary data, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategies used by kindergarten teachers and parents in preparing children's school readiness in the Batang Angkola District.

The data analysis involved several steps to ensure a thorough understanding of the collected information (McIntyre et al., 2007). Firstly, the interview transcripts and observation notes were transcribed and organized. Then, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. This involved coding the data and grouping similar codes into categories that represented the key aspects of the strategies and practices used by kindergarten teachers and parents. The analysis aimed to identify best practices, obstacles, and factors influencing the process of preparing children for primary school entry (Baucom et al., 2023; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The integration of primary and secondary data provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

3. Result

The results of the research regarding the strategies of kindergarten teachers and parents in preparing children's readiness for school in the Batang Angkola District can be elaborated into two main sub-categories of discussion: the reality of the readiness of kindergarten teachers and parents in the Batang Angkola District and the strategies prepared by both kindergarten teachers and parents for children's readiness for school in the Batang Angkola District.

3.1. The Readiness of Kindergarten Teachers and Parents in Preparing School Readiness in Batang Angkola District

In general, the interview results with kindergarten teachers and parent representatives indicate forms of unreadiness. This research explores the reality of the readiness of kindergarten teachers and parents in the Batang Angkola District, focusing on academic aspects and the development of early childhood. The interview results reveal unreadiness on both sides, reflected in the lack of preparation for non-academic aspects such as social, emotional, and motor development. In the context of school readiness, there is a tendency to focus more on academic aspects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, while other aspects such as social and emotional development are rarely

prioritized. Kindergarten teachers tend to focus their school entry readiness strategies on letter recognition, numbers, and writing, with limited available tools in the school environment.

A statement from a kindergarten teacher in the Batang Angkola District revealing that their undergraduate background is not aligned with early childhood education illustrates this issue:

"In fact, my undergraduate background is not directly related to early childhood education. I have a different educational background and not in Early Childhood Education, but after some time, I chose to work in the field of early childhood education because it is needed here."

Analysis of this statement indicates that many kindergarten teachers in the Batang Angkola District may have educational backgrounds that are not directly related to early childhood education. This can affect their readiness to face specific demands and challenges in the kindergarten environment (Spergel, 2015). Although they may have general expertise in education, the lack of knowledge and experience in early childhood education may hinder their ability to provide optimal education for preschool children. Therefore, it is important to provide additional support and training to kindergarten teachers to enhance their professionalism and ensure better quality education for children in kindergarten.

The non-linearity of the educational backgrounds of kindergarten teachers with early childhood education has significant impacts, especially in understanding the transition phase from kindergarten to elementary school. Observations of kindergarten teachers in the Batang Angkola District show that many of them have less understanding of the importance of this transition phase, so their focus tends to be only on academic readiness. This lack of understanding may be due to the mismatch of educational backgrounds with the specific field of early childhood education. With educational backgrounds not directly related to Early Childhood Education, kindergarten teachers may be less exposed to specific concepts related to the development of early childhood, including the important transition phase from kindergarten to elementary school.

The impact of this lack of understanding is a too-strong focus on academic preparation alone, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, without considering other important aspects such as social, emotional, and psychological readiness of children. Teachers may be less aware that the transition from kindergarten to elementary school is not only about mastering academic skills but also about social adaptation, self-confidence, and the ability to interact with a new school environment. In this context, it is important for kindergarten teachers to receive additional training or professional development related to early childhood education. This training should include a better understanding of the transition phase from kindergarten to elementary school and the importance of supporting the overall development of children in their preparation for the next level of education.

Furthermore, collaboration between kindergarten teachers, parents, and elementary school authorities is crucial. By sharing information and understanding the needs of children during the transition period, they can work together to create an environment that supports and prepares children well to face challenges in elementary school. A better understanding of the transition phase from kindergarten to elementary school and an emphasis on the holistic development of children will help kindergarten teachers in the Batang Angkola District enhance their professionalism and provide a more comprehensive education for children during this transition period.

From the parents' perspective, school readiness is often marked by preparing school supplies and focusing on reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. This viewpoint reflects the common belief that numeracy and literacy skills are the primary indicators of a child's readiness for elementary school. Although these skills are important, this perspective may overlook other aspects of school readiness, such as social, emotional, and motor development. This contradiction is reflected in the interview results with one of the parents:

"I am confident that my child is ready for elementary school because he is quite good at counting and reading. I always provide support and reading materials at home to train my child's reading skills, and I also often play counting games with him. I believe these skills will help him succeed in elementary school."

However, there is also an awareness of the importance of children's mental readiness before entering school, with efforts to monitor and pay attention to the overall development of children. The importance of broadening the view of school readiness to include non-academic aspects such as social, emotional, and motor skills is one of the main findings of this research. Teachers and parents need to be aware of the importance of preparing children holistically, not just academically, so that they are ready to face learning challenges in elementary school and build a solid foundation for their future development.

This research illustrates the need for increased awareness and knowledge from both teachers and parents about the importance of children's overall readiness, as well as the need for more holistic strategies in preparing them for the next level of education. With a better understanding of the needs of early childhood, it is hoped that a more supportive educational environment can be created for the optimal development of children in the future. Interview results with kindergarten teachers and parents indicate a gap between the strategies implemented and the needs of children's school readiness.

3.2. Strategies Employed by Kindergarten Parents in Preparing School Readiness in Batang Angkola District

Parents in the Batang Angkola District also tend to focus predominantly on academic readiness and material preparations for their children. From interviews with parents, it is evident that their strategies are oriented towards academic and material aspects, with little attention given to non-academic development. One parent expressed their approach:

"To prepare for primary school, my strategy initially involves enrolling the child in kindergarten to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. Afterwards, I buy school supplies like clothes, books, and so on."

This statement underscores the trend of prioritizing academic abilities and material readiness over other forms of development. While preparing school supplies is necessary, it does not address the holistic needs of a child entering primary school. Academic preparation is undoubtedly important, but it should be balanced with efforts to develop the child's social, emotional, and motor skills.

Interestingly, not all parents hold the same view. Some parents recognize the importance of mental readiness before focusing on material preparations. One parent emphasized:

"I focus more on mental readiness first, because that's essential. I'm worried my child won't want to go to school. After that, I prepare his school supplies. At home, I also monitor his progress at school and review the material he learns."

This approach reflects a more balanced understanding of school readiness, highlighting the need for mental and emotional preparation alongside academic skills and material readiness. Mental and emotional preparation, alongside academic skills and material readiness, is crucial for a child's successful transition to school. While academic skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy are essential, they must be complemented by emotional resilience and mental readiness. This involves teaching children to recognize and manage their emotions, cope with stress, and develop a positive attitude toward learning.

Emotional preparation helps children navigate social interactions, build relationships, and develop empathy and cooperation skills, which are vital for a positive school experience. Mental readiness, on the other hand, involves fostering a mindset of curiosity, perseverance, and

confidence in their abilities to tackle new challenges. Material readiness, such as having the necessary school supplies, is also important, but it should not overshadow the need for comprehensive development. Ensuring children are emotionally and mentally prepared helps them adapt to the structured environment of school, engage actively in learning, and handle the social dynamics of the classroom.

Parents play a critical role in preparing their children for school. Beyond academic tutoring, they can foster an environment that supports social and emotional learning. Encouraging children to interact with peers, teaching them to manage their emotions, and involving them in physical activities are essential strategies for holistic development. Parents can also work closely with teachers to align on strategies that support their child's readiness for school in all aspects.

Moreover, parents should be aware of the various developmental needs of their children and seek to address them through diverse activities at home. Storytelling, role-playing games, and outdoor play can significantly contribute to a child's social, emotional, and motor development. Resources such as parenting workshops and community programs can also provide valuable support and guidance for parents.

3.3. Strategies Employed by Kindergarten Teachers in Preparing School Readiness in Batang Angkola District

The strategies employed by kindergarten teachers in the Batang Angkola District regarding children's school readiness primarily focus on academic aspects such as numeracy, reading, and writing. However, a significant finding of this study is the lack of emphasis on social, emotional, and motor development. Many teachers have not prioritized these aspects in preparing children for primary school. One kindergarten teacher shared their experience, stating:

"During my time teaching in kindergarten, the strategy I used when children entered primary school was the introduction of letters, numbers, and writing. We utilized available aids in the school environment."

This statement indicates a predominant focus on academic strategies, particularly in introducing letters, numbers, and writing. The reliance on the limited resources available in the school environment suggests that there may be constraints in the methods and materials used to teach these concepts.

Analysis of this statement reveals a significant concentration on academic preparation, which, while essential, might lead to an oversight of non-academic aspects such as social, emotional, and motor development. The overemphasis on academic skills can neglect the holistic needs of children, who require a well-rounded development to thrive in primary school. Another teacher's approach was:

"My strategy focuses more on the introduction of letters and numbers, without pushing too hard on academics. Teachers must collaborate with parents to prepare children. Nevertheless, we do not rule out teaching academics; we simply emphasize the introduction of letters and numbers. We do not force it, just slip it in without exerting undue pressure."

This shows a balanced approach where the introduction of academic concepts is gentle and collaborative with parents. Yet, even this strategy does not sufficiently address the development of social, emotional, and motor skills. The academic-centric strategies reflect a broader trend where readiness for primary school is narrowly defined. Teachers' practices show a significant gap in addressing non-academic developmental needs. Social skills, such as cooperation and communication, emotional regulation, and motor skills, are crucial for a child's overall school readiness and ability to adapt to the structured environment of primary school.

To enhance school readiness comprehensively, kindergarten teachers need to integrate activities that foster social interactions, emotional understanding, and physical coordination. Group activities, play-based learning, and motor skill exercises should be incorporated into the

curriculum. Training programs for teachers could also be beneficial to equip them with strategies and resources to support holistic child development.

4. Discussion

From the research results we analyzed, particularly regarding the strategies employed by teachers and parents in preparing children for school in Kabupaten Batang Angkola, it is evident from the interviews that both groups often focus on academic preparation such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. While these are important aspects, our analysis, outlined through two subcategories—the reality of kindergarten teacher and parent readiness in Kabupaten Batang Angkola and the strategies employed by these groups—reveals that there is insufficient focus on non-academic aspects in preparing children. As a result, children may lack direction in social, emotional, and physical preparation beyond the academic scope, indicating that the current approach to child preparation strategies is inadequate.

The findings of this study indicate that kindergarten teachers and parents in Kabupaten Batang Angkola are inadequately prepared to ready children for school, particularly in non-academic aspects. Both parties tend to focus on academic skills, neglecting the social and emotional development crucial for a smooth transition to primary school. The strategies implemented are less holistic and overly emphasize academic preparation. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness and knowledge among teachers and parents about the importance of comprehensive child readiness. Recommendations for future research include developing and testing intervention programs that can enhance children's social and emotional readiness, as well as exploring ways to strengthen collaboration between teachers, parents, and primary schools.

Practices related to children's transition from kindergarten to elementary school are perceived by parents as predictors of school readiness (Fatonah et al., 2024; Hanifah & Euis Kurniati, 2024; Intan Prastihastari Wijaya, 2023; Puccioni et al., 2020; Reza et al., 2023). Conveyed similar findings about this transition period, forming a theory that readiness is a holistic concept and cannot be understood solely from an academic perspective (Sands & Meadan, 2024). This implies that the transition is a crucial period for children, and parents' understanding of school readiness is essential knowledge for both parents and teachers.

The holistic nature of school readiness encompasses not just academic skills but also social, emotional, and physical development. Parents and teachers must recognize that a child's ability to adapt to the new school environment involves more than just cognitive preparation (Wang et al., 2023). Social skills, such as the ability to cooperate with peers and communicate effectively, are essential for building relationships and functioning well in a classroom setting. Emotional readiness, including resilience and the ability to manage stress, helps children handle the new challenges and expectations they will encounter in primary school. Physical readiness, including fine and gross motor skills, supports children in activities ranging from writing to participating in physical education (Quirk et al., 2024).

By focusing only on academics, parents and teachers may neglect these critical areas, leading to children who are academically prepared but struggle with other aspects of school life. Therefore, a balanced approach that includes activities and strategies to develop all areas of readiness is crucial (Heitzer et al., 2023). This might involve more play-based learning, opportunities for social interaction, emotional learning exercises, and activities that enhance physical coordination and strength.

Moreover, the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents cannot be overstated. Effective communication and shared strategies ensure that both parties are working towards the same goals and providing consistent support for the child. This partnership can be strengthened through regular meetings, workshops, and the use of communication tools that keep parents informed and involved in their child's development and school readiness activities.

The lack of appropriate approaches in preparing children for school is due to a lack of holistic understanding by teachers (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Kasih et al., 2023) and parents (Bumiayu, 2024; Lestari, 2023; Wulandari & Fachrani, 2023), compounded by diverse competencies and backgrounds, particularly among teachers whose professional expertise may not align with early

childhood education (Hatcher et al., 2012). This results in many limitations. From the teachers' perspective, their competency influences the appropriateness of the approach used. The evaluation of school readiness preparation shows a negative trend in non-academic aspects. However, an alternative solution to this problem is to provide training or education for teachers, utilizing literature and material reviews conducted by experts or alumni (Kang et al., 2024). From the parents' perspective, societal influences can affect views on school readiness, indicating that majority opinions shape common perceptions of school preparation (Liu et al., 2024). The research results show that parents' roles in preparing children consistently demonstrate a trend where non-academic aspects are not considered. Parents' understanding of school readiness is as influential as teachers', with parents' diverse backgrounds reducing awareness of the importance of non-academic school preparation. This gap is evident as some parents understand academic preparation well, benefiting children through appropriate approaches due to comprehensive parental understanding. Additionally, children's school readiness is influenced by balanced correlations between teachers and parents.

This study also reveals minimal communication between parents and schools (teachers), resulting in rare discussions about the awareness of school readiness (Bierman et al., 2023; Neel et al., 2022; Sri Rika Amriani.H et al., 2023). Differences in understanding between teachers and parents regarding school preparation are noticeable, with teachers generally prioritizing academic material over non-academic aspects, while some parents view mental aspects as critical. Parents with a better understanding cannot express their views for implementation in school preparation (Jackson et al., 2021; Pratiwi, 2024).

Thus, the implications of this research for teachers indicate the need for comprehensive training for those whose competencies are not naturally aligned with school preparation, such as providing material reviews on school preparation to enhance teachers' understanding. From a management perspective, implementing a system to recruit more competent teachers in this field can add value. For parents, similar to teachers, providing understanding or education on school preparation through seminars or workshops is recommended. Furthermore, to make school readiness comprehension more comprehensive, good communication between teachers and parents is essential, allowing for two-way discussions. This can be implemented through a community or meetings facilitated by teachers and the willingness of parents to collaborate.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that kindergarten teachers and parents in Kabupaten Batang Angkola are inadequately prepared to ready children for school, particularly in non-academic aspects. Both parties tend to focus on academic skills, neglecting the social and emotional development crucial for a smooth transition to primary school. The strategies implemented are less holistic and overly emphasize academic preparation. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness and knowledge among teachers and parents about the importance of comprehensive child readiness. Recommendations for future research include developing and testing intervention programs that can enhance children's social and emotional readiness, as well as exploring ways to strengthen collaboration between teachers, parents, and primary schools.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Lisda Yuni Mardiah conceived the idea, conducted data collection, and performed the analysis. Sri Wulan developed the theory of teacher and parents strategies. Zarina Akbar developed the theory of early childhood education. All authors engaged in discussions regarding the findings and made contributions to the final manuscript.

Funding statement

This research did not receive funding or grants from any public, commercial, or nonprofit funding agencies.

Data availability statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement


All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

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