



School Adjustment in Early Childhood

Anayanti Rahmawati ^{1□}, Warananingtyas Palupi ², Adriani Rahma Pudyaningtyas ³, Nurul Kusuma Dewi ⁴, Vera Sholeha ⁵, Muhammad Munif Syamsuddin⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶ Early Childhood Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

School adjustment is a condition that reflects the extent to which a child feels comfortable, interested, involved, and thriving in the school environment. Children need to have school adjustment since preschool because school adjustment significantly supports children's academic and social development in the future. This study aims to determine the condition of school adjustment possessed by kindergarten children. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The research sample consisted of 266 children. The sampling technique used was cluster random sampling. Data collection is based on teacher reports using the adaptation of the Short-Form Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment (Short-Form TRSSA). Data analysis used SPSS descriptive statistics. Result analyses show that a majority of school adjustment achievements that children can achieve are at the ability and skill level, not yet at the competence level. This condition indicates that the majority of children still need help. There are still a few children who already have the competence to do tasks independently without help. In general, there is almost no difference in school adjustment achievements between boys and girls, which means that boys and girls have a relatively similar level of mastery of school adjustment. The study's conclusion shows that most school adjustment achievements in children are not optimal. Efforts are needed to improve school adjustment because it is the foundation for children to adjust to school. When children have been able to adjust well to school, school achievement will be easier to achieve optimally.

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Contact Corresponding Author: Anayanti Rahmawati
Email: anayanti_r@staff.uns.ac.id

1. Introduction

Schooling for children starts early, through the preschool education level. The majority of children today, especially in big cities, have attended preschool education level, starting from playgroup to kindergarten. Children beginning school from preschool have become a primary need for society. Preschool in Indonesia is organized through Early Childhood Education Institutions, which is an effort to foster children from birth to six years of age, carried out through the provision of educational stimulation to help physical and spiritual growth and development, so that children are ready to enter further education (Law of the Republic of Indonesia, 2003). Preschool activities aim to improve children's early skills, including physical motor skills, language, and social skills (Hanley et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2003). Preschool learning also prepares children to master other, more complex skills (Konca & İlhan, 2021).

Children entering preschool will be faced with many new situations. The child's new identity as a preschool student requires children to adapt to the changes encountered at school (Dockett & Perry, 2002). Adaptation to the changes that occur will be successful if an adjustment to the surrounding environment is made. Karaman (2022) states that individuals must be able to make adjustments to maintain balance with their environment. Changes in situations and atmosphere experienced by children, from the home environment to school, require school adjustment.

Many experts define school adjustment as a condition that reflects the extent to which a child feels comfortable, interested, involved, and thriving in the school environment (Ladd, 1996; Perry & Weinstein, 1998; Ladd et al., 2002; Önder & Gulay, 2010). Betts and Rotenberg (2007) stated that aspects of school adjustment include (1) On-Task Classroom Involvement, which is the child's ability to comply with teacher requests and be involved in school tasks; (2) Positive Orientation, which is the child's ability to respond to school tasks and face teachers with a positive attitude and (3) Maturity reflects the child's mature attitude related to social competence at school.

Children need to have school adjustment since preschool because school adjustment is a significant supporter of children's academic and social development (Demirtas-Zorbaz, 2016). Children with reasonable school adjustment tend to have more careful, participative, and active characteristics and can work independently and communicate better with peers and teachers (Bart et al., 2007). The form of children's self-perception (social role, identity, expectations, and participation in society) is also positive (Dockett & Perry, 2016). Positive characteristics possessed by children with reasonable school adjustment will also positively impact children's adjustment in the future (Onder & Gulay, 2010). Conversely, children who have not had a school adjustment are likely to experience problems in school life (Ladd & Price, 1987). Children with problems with school adjustment are likely to have difficulty communicating, obeying rules, social relationships, and self-control (Campbell, 1995). Other forms of behavior that appear in children who have not yet adjusted to school can be school fear (Johnson et al., 1941; Karaman, 2022), school rejection (King & Bernstein, 2001), or adjustment in later life periods (Walker, 2009). These explanations show the importance of school adjustment for children before elementary school. The relationship between school adjustment and school readiness for elementary school can be seen in Figure 1 below.

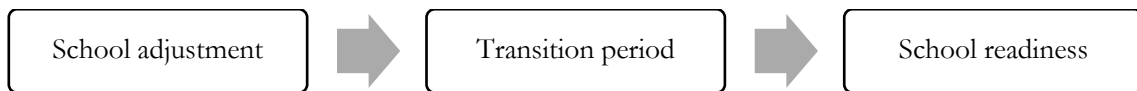


Figure 1. *The relationship between school adjustment, transition period, and school readiness*

Examining the results of research conducted in Indonesia regarding school adjustment, it turns out that it is still rarely done. Tracking school adjustment conditions can be seen in several research results related to school readiness, including the results of Nurhayati's (2017) research in 12 provincial regions in Indonesia, namely Lampung, Papua, West Papua, Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), Jambi, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Banten, East Java, North Maluku, Bangka-Belitung and West Nusa Tenggara which showed that social-emotional school readiness was still not optimal. Other studies related to social-emotional school readiness in Central Java province (Rahmawati et al., 2018; Rahmawati, 2018; Sembiring, 2012), West Java province (Kustimah et al., 2008), and East Kalimantan province (Kurniasari, 2015) also showed suboptimal achievement conditions.

The absence of data related to school adjustment needs attention, because achieving school adjustment is the basis for realizing school readiness. If school adjustment is not achieved, achieving school readiness will also be difficult. The learning period at the preschool level in Indonesia generally lasts 2 years, which is implemented through kindergarten education. Children's school adjustment is expected to have begun to form in the first year after the child enters kindergarten. Furthermore, in the second year, equipped with a school adjustment that has been formed well, it is expected that children can begin to undergo a transition period. Dockett and Perry (2014) stated that transition is a condition when individuals change roles in a community. The transition period for children who attend kindergarten begins in the second year and lasts about one year before the child enters elementary school. If conditions go according to expectations, then after undergoing a suitable transition period, children will be ready to enter elementary school.

The low condition of social-emotional school readiness experienced by most children is caused by the transition period not running smoothly because the child needs reasonable school adjustments. The completion of social-emotional school readiness needs to be addressed at the root of the problem, namely, school adjustment. If the child's school adjustment has been made well, then the child can go through the transition period smoothly. If the transition period can take place smoothly, then it is certain that the children will have good social-emotional school readiness. Considering the crucial conditions of children's school adjustment, which will later affect the transition period until school readiness is realized, this study aims to determine the conditions of school adjustment in early childhood.

2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The location of the study is in the Soloraya area, which consists of 7 districts, namely Surakarta, Sukoharjo, Sragen, Wonogiri, Boyolali, Karanganyar, and Klaten. The population of this study was kindergarten children aged 5-6 years in the Soloraya area. The research sample was based on the characteristics determined by the researcher, namely, children aged 5-6 years who had received education in kindergarten for 1 year, considering that the 1-year study period is a sufficient condition to determine the child's ability to adjust to school. The sampling technique used was cluster random sampling because the population area was huge, and the population conditions were heterogeneous. The sampling stages in this study can be seen in the following chart:

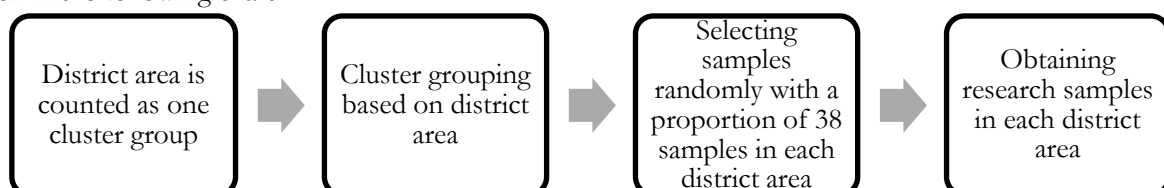


Figure 2. *Sampling stages based on the cluster random sampling technique*

Based on sample selection by cluster random sampling, the following data were obtained on the number of samples in each district:

Table 1. The number of samples in each district

District	Sample		Total
	Boy	Girl	
Surakarta	19	19	38
Sukoharjo	22	16	38
Sragen	23	15	38
Wonogiri	23	15	38
Boyolali	16	22	38
Karanganyar	17	21	38
Klaten	24	14	38
Total	144	122	266

The research data collection used an adaptation of the Betts & Rotenberg (2007) questionnaire, namely the Short-Form Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment (Short-Form TRSSA), which consists of three subscales, namely (1) On-Task Classroom Involvement consisting of 6 statement items, which assess the extent to which children comply with teacher requests and are involved in school tasks (e.g., 'Follows teacher's directions'); (2) Positive Orientation consisting of 5 statement items that assess the extent to which children respond to school tasks and teachers with a positive attitude (e.g., 'Approaches new activities with enthusiasm') and (3) Maturity consisting of 5 statement items, which assess the extent to which children demonstrate maturity and social competence at school (e.g., 'Is a mature child'). The total statement items on the Short-Form TRSSA scale is 16. The scale assessment system uses a 3-point Likert scale that moves from 1 (Never applies), 2 (applies), and 3 (Certainly applies). Betts (2012) stated Internal consistency, On-Task Classroom Involvement (0.89), Positive Orientation (0.87), and Maturity (0.74). Short-Form TRSSA, before being used for data collection, was tested with internal consistency results, On-Task Classroom Involvement (0.87), Positive Orientation (0.62), and Maturity (0.79). The research data collection technique was carried out through teacher reports because teachers are the closest people to children at school and understand the children's condition best. The teacher who conducted the assessment was the class teacher who had taught the child since the beginning of the new school year (at the time of data collection, had been teaching for 10 months). Child data protection is carried out strictly through teacher and researcher control, and is anonymous and limited to research only. The original author granted permission to use the research scale via email to the researcher on June 11, 2024. Data analysis used SPSS descriptive statistics. The results of the descriptive data analysis were then compared between the average values (mean scores) on each subscale.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the questionnaire distribution, the following information was obtained regarding school adjustment in early childhood:

3.1. Descriptive Statistical Data

The research data were used to get a more specific picture regarding school adjustment in early childhood. The results of the analysis of descriptive statistical calculations are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic

Descriptive Statistic	On-Task Classroom Involvement	Positive Orientation	Maturity
N	266	266	266
Mean	15,50	12,56	12,66
Median	16,00	13,00	13,00
Mode	18	15	13
Std. Deviation	2,386	2,120	1,594
Variance	5,692	4,496	2,542
Range	9	8	7
Minimum	9	7	8
Maximum	18	15	15
Sum	4122	3342	3368

3.2. Categorization Data for Each Subscale

Research data scores can be grouped based on subscales into three levels: high, medium, and low. The preparation of categorization norms is based on Azwar's (2017) opinion, based on a formula that can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Categorization Norms

Formula	Category	Meaning
$X < (\bar{x} - 1\sigma)$	Low	The child can already do tasks with help
$(\bar{x} - 1\sigma) \leq X < (\bar{x} + 1\sigma)$	Medium	Children already have the skills to do tasks with a little help
$(\bar{x} + 1\sigma) \leq X$	High	Children already have the competence to do tasks independently without help.

Information:

\bar{x} = mean or average score

σ = standard deviation

Based on the categorization norm formula, the following is the categorization of research data for each subscale.

Table 4. Categorization of on-task classroom involvement subscale data

Range	Category	Total	Percentage
$X < 13,114$	Low	44	16,54 %
$13,114 \leq X < 17,886$	Medium	138	51,87 %
$17,886 \leq X$	High	84	31,57 %

Table 5. Categorization of positive orientation subscale data

Range	Category	Total	Percentage
$X < 11,066$	Low	39	14,66 %
$11,066 \leq X < 14,254$	Medium	140	52,63 %
$14,254 \leq X$	High	87	32,70 %

Table 6. Categorization of maturity subscale data

Range	Category	Total	Percentage
$X < 10,44$	Low	19	7,14 %
$10,44 \leq X < 14,68$	Medium	178	66,91 %
$14,68 \leq X$	High	69	25,93 %

3.3. Comparison of The Mean Scores of Each Subscale for Boys and Girls

Data collected based on gender can be seen in the following table.

Table 7. Comparison of the mean scores for boys and girls

Subscale	Boys	Girls
On-Task Classroom Involvement	15,08	15,98
Positive Orientation	12,61	12,72
Maturity	12,47	12,68

3.4. Comparison of The Mean Scores of Each Subscale for Boys and Girls

The answers to each statement item for boys and girls can be seen in the following table.

Table 8. Comparison of the mean scores of the on-task classroom involvement subscale statement items

No.	Statement items	Boys	Girls
1	Follow the teacher's directions	2,55	2,64
2	Uses classroom materials responsibly	2,50	2,66
3	Listens carefully to the teacher's instructions and directions	2,44	2,65
4	Is interested in classroom activities	2,67	2,81
5	Responds promptly to teachers' requests	2,46	2,65
11	If a child's activity is interrupted, he/she go back to the activity	2,47	2,57

Table 9. Comparison of the mean scores of the positive orientation subscale statement item

No.	Statement items	Boys	Girls
6	Is cheerful at school	2,69	2,66
7	Approaches new activities with enthusiasm	2,67	2,72
8	<i>Is slow to warm up to the teacher</i>	1,81	1,85
12	Laughs or smiles easily	2,74	2,71
13	Is comfortable approaching the teacher	2,70	2,78

Table 10. Comparison of the mean scores of the maturity subscale statement item

No.	Statement items	Boys	Girls
9	Notices when other kids are absent	2,52	2,56
10	Seeks challenges	2,39	2,21
14	Is a mature child	2,41	2,58
15	Enjoys "playing school"; imitates the teacher	2,58	2,69
16	Interested in the teacher as a person	2,56	2,64

4. Discussion

The research results can be explained based on the achievement of each subscale. First, the achievement of the on-task classroom involvement subscale relates to how children comply with teacher requests and engage in schoolwork. The analysis shows that most children still fall within the low and medium levels, meaning most still require assistance with their teacher's schoolwork. Not many children reached the high level, meaning that not many children can independently complete the learning tasks assigned by teachers in class. Second, the achievement of the positive orientation subscale, which refers to how children respond positively to schoolwork and teachers, shows that most children still fall within the low and medium levels, meaning most children lack enthusiasm for schoolwork and teachers. Children's interest in the schoolwork teachers give has not yet developed sufficiently. Children can complete schoolwork assigned by teachers, but they still merely do it, not showing enthusiasm or deep interest. Third, achieving the maturity subscale relates to how children demonstrate maturity and social competence in school. The analysis shows that most children still fall within the low and medium levels. This condition indicates that most children are not yet mature, as indicated by suboptimal social-emotional abilities (personal maturity and social competence).

Based on the categorization of the three subscales, namely on-task classroom involvement, positive orientation, and maturity, the achievements of most children are still at the ability and skills stage, not yet at the competency level. Ability is a child's natural capacity or potential to perform tasks or behaviors, which can be developed over time (Santrock, 2019). Ability is a characteristic that enables a person to accomplish something, encompassing the physical, mental, financial, or legal capacity required to perform a task or activity (Carroll, 1993). Children who adapt to school can make school adjustments despite needing help.

An ability that continues to be honed has the potential to become a skill. Ability is a means for the formation of skills. Children who can already adapt to school can carry out assignments even though they still need help. Children's abilities can develop into skills. Santrock (2021) explains that skill refers to the ability of a child to perform specific tasks or behaviors acquired through learning, practice, and experience. The ability in school adjustment that children have when allowed to learn and practice can be developed into skills. Children with school adjustment skills can do assignments with little help.

Furthermore, the skills that children have can be developed into competence. Schneider (2019) explains that competence is the ability to successfully fulfill individual or social demands or perform an activity or task effectively. Children who have competence in school adjustment will be able to do tasks independently without assistance. Competency is the practical application of human abilities. Children with competence, whenever and wherever, can carry out tasks independently and be aware of carrying out tasks without prompting or assistance.

Further data analysis will be done by looking at the comparison of achievements based on gender. The data shows that girls have a higher mean score when compared to boys, although the difference is minimal. This condition indicates that the level of mastery of school adjustment between boys and girls as a whole is almost no different, which means that boys and girls have a relatively similar level of mastery of school adjustment.

Paying more attention to the differences in achievement between boys and girls by paying attention to the details of the answers to each statement item, several differences were found. *The first* difference is in the mastery of the on-task classroom involvement subscale, showing that the overall mean score of girls is slightly higher than that of boys. This condition indicates that in doing tasks in class and obeying teachers, girls are more agile and more obedient in following teacher orders than boys. This condition can occur due to gender differences in behavior. Some studies suggest that girls are often socialized to be more compliant and cooperative than boys, who may be encouraged to be more independent or assertive. This can lead to observable differences in behavior. For example, girls are often praised for being quiet, obedient, and focused, while boys may be praised for being adventurous or assertive (Lytton & Romney, 1991). Parenting Styles also contribute to the differences between girls and boys. Parents might be more likely to enforce rules and expectations for girls, leading to greater compliance. Conversely, boys may be given more leeway regarding behavior (Baumrind, 1991). Regarding Expectations attached to girls and boys, there are also differences: Boys are often encouraged to be more active and exploratory. In contrast, girls may receive more reinforcement for sitting still and focusing on tasks (Eccles, 2011). Given these differences in agility and compliance, teachers are advised to employ gender-inclusive learning strategies. Teachers are advised to develop balanced skills, including compliance and independence, in classroom assignments. Tasks given to children should be equal and free from gender bias, and there should be tangible recognition when children complete tasks.

The second difference, in the mastery of the positive orientation subscale task on the statement item "approaches new activities with enthusiasm (item no. 7), shows that girls have a slightly higher mean score than boys. This condition indicates that girls tend to be more enthusiastic when faced with new activities given by teachers. Chaplin & Aldao (2013) explained that girls exhibit more extraordinary positive and negative emotional expressions, particularly for emotions like sadness and fear, than boys. A competitive strategy can be used in class to motivate boys to respond enthusiastically to teacher assignments. Most boys are more enthusiastic when they feel challenged, so competition is expected to inspire and increase enthusiasm. Assignments can be given in groups or individually.

For example, a group could compete to build the tallest block tower without falling. The purpose of competitive assignments is to inspire enthusiasm and prevent children from feeling burdened by the task.

The third mastery of the maturity subscale task on the statement item "seeks challenges (item no. 10)" shows that boys have a higher mean score than girls. This condition indicates that boys prefer challenges compared to girls. The higher mean score achievement in girls is on the statement items "is a mature child (item no. 14)" and "enjoys playing school; imitates the teacher (item no. 15)" and "interested in the teacher as a person (item no. 16)". This condition indicates that girls tend to be more mature, can enjoy their time at school more and can have more pleasant relationships with teachers, compared to boys. Boys tend to be more active than girls. Research shows that girls' brains tend to mature more quickly than boys' (Newcastle University, 2013). This condition results in many conditions where girls achieve higher levels of achievement compared to boys. Teachers can motivate boys more by providing more space for movement, especially in exploring various stimuli in the classroom, so boys feel more at home in class activities. The hope is that boys can follow lessons and complete assignments in class just as well as girls.

The fourth on the positive orientation subscale, "Is slow to warm up to the teacher" (item 8), showed the lowest score for both boys and girls compared to the average score for the other items overall. This indicates that children still have difficulty establishing closeness with their teachers. Pianta (2001) explains that the teacher-child relationship is an intense interaction between a teacher and a particular child. The teacher-child relationship reflects the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the child. Some children take a long time to adapt to situations; a lack of trust or confidence in the teacher can cause this. Ladd and Burgess (2001) state that closeness reflects a positive relationship between the teacher and the child. Closeness between the child and the teacher must be cultivated early because the teacher is the child's second parent. This figure is expected to be ready to help with the child's difficulties at school. This finding highlights the importance of building trust and a positive relationship between teachers and children. This close relationship between the teacher and the child can be achieved, among other things, by creating a warm and nurturing classroom atmosphere. Support and provide opportunities for students to interact positively with teachers.

The results of the descriptive data analysis show that school adjustment in children has not been achieved optimally. School adjustment can be described as a complex process involving permanent, dynamic, and didactic interactions between students and members of the school community, which support children in adapting to a new environment by assimilating information and understanding their status and role within the school (Magdalena, 2013.) Children need reasonable school adjustment before entering elementary school to adjust well. When children have school adjustments, it will significantly help them go through their school days. Children with reasonable school adjustment will not experience difficulties adjusting to school, can do schoolwork more smoothly, have an optimistic view of school, and can establish relationships with teachers more comfortably and freely. Mastery of school adjustment in children before entering elementary school allows children to achieve better school achievements.

5. Conclusion

The study results show that the achievement of school adjustment in most children is still not optimal. Considering the achievement results, it is essential to carry out further stimulation so that children can reach the level of competency of school adjustment. It is hoped that children will not encounter difficulties when they enter elementary school by achieving school adjustment competency. School adjustment is the beginning of achieving optimal school achievement. The contribution of the theoretical early childhood education study based on this research is to demonstrate a relationship between school adjustment, transition, and school readiness. That school adjustment is the basis for supporting school readiness. Future research is expected to encompass a wider sample size and follow up on these findings by providing treatment or designing interventions to improve school adjustment in children. Longitudinal research is also recommended to document the contribution of treatment to improving school adjustment skills, and which ones directly contribute to improving school readiness.

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