



A sociological exploration of the parents' educational constructions for children afflicted with hearing loss

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Article info	Abstract
Keywords: Children, deaf, education, inclusive education	Inclusive education is essential, but many people still discriminate against children with special needs, including deaf children. At first glance, deaf children are no different from other children. Therefore, their parents also want their children to grow and develop like others. This study aims to explore this issue using qualitative methods to understand parents' social constructions regarding their children's education. The research was carried out at SLB Sri Mujinab Pekanbaru, one of the oldest special schools in Pekanbaru. Participants were selected purposively, employing interaction analysis techniques. This study found that deaf children also achieve various milestones and are not intellectually inferior. Their parents hope that their children grow and develop like typical children. The widespread use of social media and services for children with special needs has compelled parents to learn extensively to support their children's growth and development so that they can become independent.

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1. Introduction

Special needs education is tailored for students with physical, emotional, mental, or social disorders that make it difficult for them to participate in the learning process. However, these students often possess exceptional intelligence and talent. Therefore, their educational standards typically differ from those of neurotypical individuals. This is why children with special needs usually attend schools specifically designed for them. This educational model is aimed at children with disabilities and is separate from mainstream education for typically developing children. The cost of this education varies from that of regular education. The number of such schools is limited and unevenly distributed in Pekanbaru, a significant city in

Riau Province. As a result, access to these schools creates barriers for some community members. As a large city in Riau Province, Pekanbaru has few schools and is not located throughout all areas. Therefore, accessing education can be challenging for some residents. Conversely, children with special needs are not influenced by the socioeconomic status of the community; anyone can have such a child. There are various types of children with special needs, including deafness, a form of disability.

According to data from the Pekanbaru Education Office, there are currently only 15 special schools to accommodate students with special needs, and only one school is owned by the local government, with the rest managed by private parties. The data is presented in more detail below:

Table 1. Distribution of Special Schools (SLB) in Pekanbaru

No	Subdistricts	School Status	
		State	Private
1	Tenayan Raya	1	2
2	Tampan	0	3
3	Marpoyan Damai	0	3
4	Rumbai Pesisir	0	2
5	Sukajadi	0	1
6	Payung Sekaki	0	1
7	Rumbai	0	1
8	Sail	0	1
Sub Total		1	14
Total		15	

Source: Pekanbaru Education Office, 2024

The table above shows that these special schools are not spread across all subdistricts in Pekanbaru (there are 12 subdistricts in Pekanbaru). This means that there are still four subdistricts that do not have special schools. Therefore, access to these special schools should be available to all communities. However, not all communities are able to enjoy these services, either due to cost or distance to the school. In addition, children with disabilities do not always come from economically well-off communities (Purba, 2016).

The oldest special school is SLB Sri Mujinab. It is located on Jalan Dr. Sutomo in Pekanbaru and was founded in 1981 by the Permata Bunda Foundation. It was established by Sri Mujinab, the wife of Riau Governor Imam Munandar (1980-1988). The school's name was taken from its founder. This means it was founded well before the government-run special education school, SLB Negeri Pembina, which opened on January 29, 1998, with Establishment Permit Number 13a/O/1998. Since 2023, the school's status has changed to a public school per the Riau Governor's Decree number KPTS. 6951/VIII/2023.

Additionally, student services focus partly on deaf children with special needs. This educational approach for deaf children is separate from the education of typical children, often called special schools or Special Schools (SLB). The school provides various educational programs for children with special needs, including those with hearing impairments. Deafness refers to hearing loss; in severe cases, it is similar to complete hearing loss. Deafness is generally classified as mild (a hearing impairment), moderate, or profound (deafness). Medically, deafness is the inability to hear caused by damage to some or all hearing organs. From an educational perspective, deafness is a hearing impairment or loss that creates

developmental barriers and requires specialised guidance and instruction. Deafness significantly affects children, especially in language, personality, and social development.

As individuals, deaf children are similar to other people; they need self-growth, food, work, friendship, knowledge, and morality. Deaf children often have trouble understanding abstract ideas. From a social perspective, the author believes that deaf children face the most significant challenges in social interaction compared to individuals with other disabilities. In addition to the challenges faced by deaf children, their parents also face difficulties. Parents of children with disabilities inevitably face difficulties and bear social and economic burdens, social stigma, and concerns about their children's future. Therefore, this study aims to understand parents' attitudes toward their children with hearing impairments.

2. Method

This research was conducted at Sri Mujinab Special School (SLB) located on Jalan Dr. Sutomo in Pekanbaru because, based on various information obtained by the author, Sri Mujinab Special School (SLB) is the oldest special school in Pekanbaru. Established in 1981, it has many achievements, making it one of the most well-known special schools (SLB). Since 2023, the school's status has changed to a public school based on the Riau Governor's Decree number kpts. 6951/VIII/2023.

This school is similar to other elementary schools, with a six-year study period from grade 1 to grade 6. However, as a special needs school for deaf students, the number of students is limited, and not all grades are available. Additionally, the cost of education and the economic capabilities of families with special needs children vary. According to data obtained from the school, the number of deaf students is as follows:

Table 2. Number of students

No	Class	Students
1	1	2
2	2	4
3	3	2
4	4	3
5	5	0
6	6	0
Total		11

Source: SLB Sri Mujinab, 2024

Informants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. Informants were selected based on the researcher's judgment that they were representative. In purposive sampling, the sample size was determined by the information obtained. Furthermore, once the data collection process no longer required additional information, the researcher did not need to look for new informants, and the information-gathering process was considered complete. The sample size was adequate when it reached the stage of redundancy, or when data were saturated and additional samples no longer provided new information. There are not many students in special schools due to various reasons, including: (1) uneven access to schools; (2) relatively high tuition fees compared to public schools; and (3) due to social stigma, oarents are reluctant to send their children with special needs to school.

There were 11 deaf students at the elementary school level. However, based on the above criteria, four parents of deaf students could not be communicated with and refused to be interviewed. The parents of two deaf students could not be contacted by the researcher for triangulation. Therefore, only five informants were selected.

This qualitative study collected data through observation, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, which were then analysed using an interactive model.

3. Results

Generally, students who start elementary school at SLB Sri Mujinab were older than those in formal schools for normal children. Although they were still at the elementary school level, these deaf children typically start school between the ages of 8 and 14. Various factors cause this delay in starting school, such as: (1) parents initially feel confused about where to send their children to school; (2) their children do not want to go to school due to feelings of inferiority and anxiety; and (3) parents feel ashamed to send their children to school.

Deaf children generally appear normal like other children; there are no physical differences between them and other children. Their parents were generally young and belonged to the middle class. A similar pattern emerged from the five informants in the study: the average age of the couples was between 39 and 47, and they worked as government officials, private sector employees, merchants, and bankers.

They typically have 1–2 children. Among those with two children, not all have deaf children. Only one child was deaf, while the others were typical. Conversely, for those with one child, that child was deaf. The children they have vary; some are male and some are female. Regarding the education of the parents of the students, almost all of them were university graduates. This means they are educated and literate. Currently, the average level of education in Indonesia has been steadily increasing.

Their income as parents varied between Rp 6,000,000 and Rp 9,500,000 per month. This income is insufficient to cover their children's education and other household expenses. Since most parents work, they need to hire helpers to look after their children at home and pick them up from school. They are satisfied with their children's performance at school. From this, it can be seen that the parents' economic status falls into the middle class. This is understandable, as the costs of enrolling and educating their children differ somewhat from those of other normal children. However, this does not mean that no children from lower-middle-class families are deaf. It is certainly possible, but it was not widely detected in this study. This is one of the limitations of this study, but it implies that even middle-class families still find it burdensome to cover the costs of their children's education.

During the research process, interviews were conducted by making prior appointments with the parents of the students. Data on the parents was obtained from the school. To meet with the parents, the researcher initially waited for them (the parents and/or those who drop off and pick up their children) to come to school. From there, the researcher requested permission to conduct an interview and asked for a time to meet on another day, adjusted to their free time. The interview was conducted once the appointment was confirmed, but the researcher contacted them by phone.

Almost all interviews were conducted at home or in public places such as cafés, school grounds, or while children were enjoying recreational activities with their families. However, the mothers were always willing to be interviewed, while the husbands or fathers of these children with special needs were mostly silent or only occasionally added comments. Since this study

focused on deaf children who were still in elementary school, interviews and conversations with the children were not conducted.

Furthermore, a similar pattern was found in the triangulation results and interviews with only five informants in the field. The parents understood the meaning of their children's special needs, and initially felt disappointed and hopeless. This was reflected in the results and statements of informant Purnamawati, a 41-year-old mother of two children, whose first child happened to have this problem. For example, she said:

“From the beginning, I didn't know that my child was deaf, because when he was born, he was like any other normal child. I felt something was strange when my child didn't respond when called or when he heard a sudden noise. I took him to a paediatrician for a consultation, where he was tested with a device and various other tests, and it turned out that my child was deaf. Since then, my husband and I have felt devastated and sad, and I've felt that sadness for nearly a year. Because I can't communicate with my child the way I can with other children.”
(Interview with Purnamawati, 41 years old, July 20, 2024)

The same situation was encountered in an interview with Nurmi, a 39-year-old mother with one child, whose first child has hearing issues. The informant shared her story with a slightly sad expression, but ended with various smiles. She stated as follows:

“The first time, I didn't believe in this child. I often blamed God and thought He was unfair. I was so ashamed of my child, especially since she was a girl. My family was also saddened after hearing the doctor's diagnosis about this child. I tried various modern and traditional medical treatments to cure my daughter, but there was no change. Until now, I have been afraid to have another child. Although I don't use birth control, on one hand, I want to have a normal child, but on the other hand, I'm afraid of getting the same thing. Over time, I began to accept my child's condition, and I feel my child also has her own uniqueness. God hasn't wronged me or my child. I want to educate my child until she succeeds” (Interview with Mrs. Nurmi, 39 years old, July 21, 2024).

Mrs. Yohana, a neurologist, shared a similar complaint. She is 46 years old and has two children. Her husband is a government official. She felt that as a healthcare professional, she was unable to treat and manage her second child on her own. She thinks her knowledge is impractical, but Mrs. Yohana has begun adapting to the situation and her child. She is confident that her child has good potential, and she strives to give the best for her child. All of this is supported by her husband and her first child, who is now an adult. In fact, her older child strongly supports the development and achievements of her younger sibling. Currently, her deaf child has achieved many accomplishments. She is highly talented in the world of painting, not only winning colouring competitions but also being skilled in painting. For this purpose, she has specially hired a private art teacher to hone her child's talent at home every week.

Those are some excerpts from interviews conducted with five informants in the field. However, in general, the patterns of responses obtained by the author from them can be summarised as follows:

Table 3. Characteristics of informants and responses to deaf children

Socioeconomic and demographic	Age	Education	Occupation	Income
Characteristics	39- 47	Bachelor's degree	Private sector, trader, civil servant, banking	6.000.000 until 9.500.000 IDR
Understanding Deaf Children	Initially unaware that their children had hearing problems	The need for their children to receive the same education and opportunities as other children	The need for supportive education so that children can work in the future	Must have the ability to live in the future without depending on others.
Disappointment	At first, they felt disappointed in their child and guilty. They wondered what they had done wrong to have such a child.	This feeling spreads across all levels of parental education.	This feeling spreads to all types of parental work.	This feeling spreads across all income types.
Satisfaction	Parents are generally in the productive age category, but they fear having more children. They are afraid of having the same child again. Nevertheless, they are satisfied with their children's achievements and consider them normal.	They want their deaf child to have the same education as his siblings, ensuring that he can fully participate in classroom activities and receive the same educational opportunities as his non-disabled peers.	It is related to their children's education. They hope that there will be no discrimination against their children.	Hoping to be able to live in the future with various social pressures.

Source: Research Findings, 2024

Findings from interviews with several informants explain that having a child with hearing impairment is not without challenges and disappointment. They experience these feelings at the beginning of their difficult times. Children are considered to be the continuation of the family line, but they have physical problems. They worry that their children will have problems in their future lives. As parents, they feel disappointed, afraid, and anxious about their child's abilities. That is why they strive to educate their child in various ways and provide them with the facilities they can afford. They view their child as a trust that must be protected and nurtured, even though initially they felt sad and blamed God for being unfair to them, wondering why they were given a child with limitations? The author then asked one of their teachers about this, and he explained:

“Deaf children are not stupid; they simply have limitations in interacting. They have difficulty hearing, so they also have difficulty speaking. However, their thinking is not impaired. Initially, there is a psychological burden on them because what they want to convey may not be understood by others. But for children who are deaf from birth, they are usually already accustomed to it and can interact well” (Interview with Mrs. Ws, Age 49, July 29, 2024)

The interview excerpt above shows that learning difficulties arise due to hearing impairments. Therefore, deaf children face challenges with educational approaches that emphasise hearing abilities. According to her, the methods employed should instead focus on visual functions. The learning process for children with special needs always faces these limitations. Learning for deaf children should be more focused on observing and paying attention. Visualisation methods are the primary choice in learning activities for deaf children. Otherwise, they are normal human beings.

4. Discussion

The study results explain that education is a good investment for a child's future. In this case, school becomes a place to gain knowledge and improve emotional intelligence. A child's potential is honed to become the basis for interacting in society. This connection will build a bridge to an exciting life for students, open the door to their success, and help them discover their interests.

As children, deaf children have different desires depending on their interests. However, due to their different structure from normal people, the desires they wish to achieve are not the same as those of normal children of the same age. Nevertheless, deaf children certainly also have aspirations they want to achieve. Parents fully understand this. As parents of children with such characteristics, research findings indicate that parents still viewed education as the gateway to their children's future. This understanding is rooted in their education and upbringing, shaping their perspective on the importance of education for their children's future.

Economically, they were educated and had income, albeit relatively modest. They continued to strive to fulfil their children's aspirations. Some parents even prioritised their deaf children's needs over fulfilling their primary responsibilities as parents. This situation is illustrated in the following example:

Table 4. Analysis of meaning construction patterns in the education of deaf children

Informant	The construction of meaning in the education of deaf children	Equations	Difference	Analysis of patterns
Nurmi	Education is essential for the present, and we must learn how to support it. Sign language courses are available. We should learn alongside our children.	Education is vital, and we should find ways to support it effectively. Sign language courses can help us learn alongside our deaf children. It's crucial	Some parents feel anxious and fearful about their children's future. They worry about what will happen to their children when they grow up and are no longer around.	Education is crucial, and we should find effective ways to support it. Taking sign language courses can help us learn with our deaf children. It's essential to help them achieve their dreams without discrimination and ensure they have the same education level as us. As parents, we must give our children the best
Purnamawati	We need to fulfil our children's dreams, without discriminating between them.	to help our children achieve their dreams without discrimination. They should have at least the same education level as their parents. As a parent, I am	Will their children be able to survive and build successful careers?	
Yohana	My children must have at least the same level of education as their parents.			
Delima	Despite my child's			

Informant	The construction of meaning in the education of deaf children	Equations	Difference	Analysis of patterns
	limitations, my responsibility as a parent is to provide them with the best possible opportunities.	responsible for giving my child the best opportunities, regardless of their limitations. They are my children, and they inspire me.		chances, no matter their challenges. They inspire us. Some parents worry about their children's future and whether they can succeed when they grow up and are no longer around.
Budiari	After all, they are my children, and he is my hero.			

Source: Research Findings, 2024

Parents who have deaf children desire the same things as those who have normal children. For them, children are still children whose needs must be met. Every child has hopes and a future that must be prepared for. Parents must fulfil these needs, even though they may initially feel sad and hopeless. However, as time passes and they enrol their children in special schools, they discover a new community. They are not alone; they find many others like them. Together, they watch their children grow with joy. Their children also achieve various accomplishments, which become hopes for their future. According to them, all children must have their needs met to adapt and not depend on others. Now, they hope they can interact effectively through education and various social media platforms.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Deaf children are no different from other children. They have hopes and facilities that they can obtain for the present. However, inclusive education is still limited in terms of facilities and infrastructure. The relatively high cost of education means that not all communities can afford this education. Those who can afford this education are primarily from the middle class. From this, the author recommends implementing inclusive education more widely and reaching all segments of society. Education for the community should be intensified; there is no need to feel ashamed of having a child with special needs, as they certainly have their strengths.

Another implication is that this study is limited to elementary schools that are special schools with a small number of students, namely, 11 students. The approach used is qualitative. Of course, this study cannot yet provide a general picture of the many other phenomena that have not been revealed, both in terms of the number of schools and the number of students. Therefore, a broader study covering a more diverse number of schools and students is needed.

This study also explains that deaf children are not stupid; they have the same abilities as normal children. They can achieve many things, so policies are needed to provide schools, teachers, and students with more opportunities to develop in the future, with policies that favour them. Inclusive education is very necessary.

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