

## School Readiness of Prospective Cimanggis Character Elementary School Students Before and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract:

A child's readiness to be ready for elementary school is the most important thing in the education system. During this period, a child undergoes a transition in both their learning and social environments. School readiness tests aim to assess a child's current abilities and developmental maturity. This helps parents and school

officials understand various aspects of a child's development, such as basic abilities, skills, and maturity. However, during the pandemic, most students engaged in remote learning from home. Certain aspects of a child's development were not optimally stimulated because the learning process occurred remotely without face-to-face interaction. This article aims to provide an analysis of the school readiness of prospective students at Cimanggis Karakter Elementary School before and after the pandemic. The research method used is descriptive quantitative, employing a t-test on the School Readiness Test results of prospective students at Cimanggis Karakter Elementary School from 2019 and 2021. The results of the study indicate that the School Readiness Test scores of students prior to the pandemic demonstrated a higher level of readiness compared to those after the pandemic. Students who took the test after the pandemic were kindergarten B students who were unable to participate in face-to-face learning because instructional activities were conducted online.

### Abstract :

Kesiapan anak dalam memasuki masa sekolah dasar merupakan hal terpenting dalam sistem pendidikan. Pada masa ini, seorang anak sedang melewati perubahan dalam lingkungan belajar dan lingkungan sosialnya. Tes kesiapan sekolah bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemampuan dan kematangan perkembangan anak saat ini. Hal ini dapat membantu orang tua dan pihak sekolah untuk mengetahui berbagai aspek perkembangan anak seperti kemampuan dasar, keterampilan, dan kematangan. Namun, di masa pandemi sebagian besar siswa melakukan pembelajaran dari rumah. Terdapat beberapa aspek dalam diri anak yang tidak terstimulasi secara optimal karena proses pembelajaran dilakukan melalui jarak jauh tanpa bertatap muka. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memberikan gambaran analisis kesiapan sekolah calon siswa SD Karakter Cimanggis sebelum dan sesudah masa pandemi. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dengan menguji perbedaan data hasil TKS (Tes Kesiapan Sekolah) calon siswa SD Karakter Cimanggis pada tahun 2019 dan 2021. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hasil TKS siswa sebelum masa pandemi memiliki tingkat kesiapan yang lebih tinggi dibandingkan kesiapan siswa setelah masa pandemi. Siswa yang mengikuti TKS setelah masa pandemi merupakan siswa TK B yang tidak sempat mengikuti proses pembelajaran secara tatap muka karena kegiatan belajar mengajar dilakukan secara daring.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation of a nation's development of superior human resources (Husain & Kaharu, 2020). Basic education in Indonesia is a continuation of Early Childhood Education (PAUD), which begins at age 6–12. During elementary school, students experience rapid development, spanning physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. To optimize students' learning experiences in elementary school, individual readiness for learning is a key factor (Hijriati, 2021).

School readiness is defined as the development of individuals who are ready to learn certain materials (Pangestuti et al., 2018). Readiness in this case refers to the standards of physical, intellectual, and social development that enable children to meet school requirements and carry out the process of assimilating the school curriculum. Lewit & Baker (1995) stated that there are three dimensions of school readiness: child readiness, school readiness, and family readiness (Miller & Kehl, 2019). On the other hand, Hurlock (Hurlock, 2004) argues that children's school readiness consists of six dimensions: communication skills, basic thinking skills, academic skills, physical-motor development, social-emotional development, and independence.

In general, readiness is the overall state of an individual that makes them ready to respond in a certain way to a given situation (A. W. Septiana et al., 2021). This state includes optimal physical and psychological readiness to support each other in the learning process. The criteria commonly used to detect a child's readiness to enter elementary school is the Nijmeegse Schoolbekwaamheids Test (NST). School readiness has been shown to correlate with a child's developmental maturity (S. A. Schmitt et al., 2015).

Elementary school age development is a development in which gross motor skills become more refined, fine motor coordination has developed so that children are able to write smaller letters than before, master fundamental skills such as counting, writing, and reading, communication and language development, motivation to gain knowledge, development with memory or memory especially with things that have been heard and seen, able to understand themselves, increased self-esteem, and emotional development (Pandia, 2022). Children who attend Early Childhood Education have a tendency to develop themselves more maturely compared to children who do not attend PAUD (Bakken, 2017). Children who are ready for school have advantages and progress in their further development. While children who are not ready will generally experience obstacles if placed in an academic environment (T. Van Huizen & Plantenga, 2018).

The world of education faced challenges during the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted children's school readiness. As is known, by March 2020, the COVID-19 virus had spread widely, prompting the government to issue a policy requiring all activities to be conducted at home, including student learning activities (S. Wulan & Fridani, 2021). Changes to the school learning system, including early childhood education, occurred. Early childhood learning, previously conducted face-to-face, was forcibly shifted to technology-based learning via distance learning (A. P.

Satrianingrum et al., 2021). The pandemic has had a significant impact on children's readiness to continue to the next level of school, both positive and negative.

Online learning, as something new for some children, is enjoyable because students do not need to wake up early and come directly to school. However, there are also other obstacles faced by children, such as not achieving the learning process, which hinders their growth and development. Children become less independent because most of the support is carried out fully by parents at home, children easily feel anxious, lack focus, frustrated, and have difficulty adapting to their environment (A. W. Septiana et al., 2021). In addition, limited interaction between teachers and students, even interaction between students, is feared to cause learning loss, namely academic decline due to the extended gap that is the impact of the discontinuity of the educational process over a long period of time (J. J. Cerelia et al., 2021).

Social restrictions and distance learning have had numerous impacts, including child abuse, neglect in childcare, and excessive use of gadgets at home (Suyadi & Selvi, 2022). This is compounded by the unpreparedness of early childhood teachers to teach children remotely (T. A. Hastuti et al., 2022; P. P. Sibagariang & S. Pandia, 2021), and the dilemma of dealing with the impact of learning loss and the coronavirus (Amri, 2021).

Several studies have shown the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's school readiness for elementary school. Research by Setiowati & Warmansyah (Setiowati, 2023) found that preschool children's school readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic was below 60%. Children's stimulation was also reduced because many parents did not provide stimulation for their children at home. Furthermore, many children experiencing mental health issues did not receive support or support from teachers due to distance learning constraints (Pfefferbaum, 2021).

Karakter Elementary School is a private school located in Cimanggis, Depok, West Java, that has felt the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only in terms of distance learning readiness, but Karakter Elementary School also experienced changes in the readiness of their prospective students to enter elementary school compared to the years before the pandemic. This is the basis for researchers to determine the differences in the school readiness of prospective students at Cimanggis Karakter Elementary School before and after the pandemic. Therefore, the research question is: How does the school readiness of prospective students at Karakter Elementary School compare before and after the Covid-19 pandemic? The goal of this study is to check how ready the students are for school, as seen by the Principal and Teachers at Karakter Elementary School.

This study should give us some ideas about what factors affected how ready children were to start school during the Covid-19 pandemic, so that this study can be useful for science in order to provide additional information and insight regarding readiness to enter elementary school, and can make a good contribution to handling the readiness of school students at Character Elementary School.

## **METHOD**

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The research design was cross-sectional (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was conducted at Character Elementary School in Depok City. The school was selected purposively *because* the school had School Readiness Test data before the pandemic (2019) and during the pandemic (2021). The School Readiness Test conducted at Character Elementary School uses standardized measurement tools that can only be administered by psychologists. These test tools are *the NST (Nijmeegse Schoolbekwaamheids Test)* and *CTM (Colored Progressive Matrices)*.

One of the tests to measure school readiness in Indonesia since 2010 until now is *the NST "Nijmeegse Schoolbekwaamheids Test"*. The test was developed by Prof. Dr. FJ Monks, Drs. H. Rost and Drs. NH Coffie. The NST was developed in Nijmegen - Netherlands and is a processing of the Gopinger test from Germany. This test aims to determine the level of maturity of children when entering elementary school, predict student school achievement, and determine the child's abilities and maturity. This makes this test often used to measure the maturity of prospective elementary school students. The NST is a psychological test tool to measure individual readiness to enter the real world of school (Susilarini, 2021). The NST aims to identify and help kindergarten students who may encounter difficulties in their first grade in elementary school. Basically, this section explains how the research was carried out. The main parts of this section include: (1) the research design; (2) the population and sample (which are people or things being studied); (3) data collection techniques and instrument development; (4) and techniques used to analyzed the data. When a study uses tools or materials, it is necessary to write down the details of those tools and materials. The tool specs explain how advanced the tools are, and the material specs tell what kind of materials were used.

Sampling used a saturated sampling method, namely making all students who took the school readiness test at Karakter Elementary School in 2019 and 2021 a total of 144 respondents. The data collected were primary data, namely child characteristics (age, gender, pandemic conditions), IQ (Intellectual Quotient), psychological aspects, and readiness to enter elementary school. IQ data is in the form of score and category data. The IQ category consists of 7 categories, namely very superior ( $\geq 130$ ), superior (120-129), high average (110-119), average (90-109), low average (80-89), borderline (70-79), and mentally retarded ( $\leq 69$ ). Psychological aspect data is in the form of score and category data. The school readiness category consists of 5 categories, namely very poor (1), poor (2), sufficient (3), good (4), and very good (5). Data on readiness to enter elementary school is in the form of categorical data. The readiness category to enter elementary school consists of 3 categories, namely less ready (1), quite ready (2), and ready (3).

The obtained data was first processed through editing, coding, scoring, data entry, data cleaning, and data analysis. Then, the data was presented in tabular form and analyzed descriptively and inferentially. The data analyzed using descriptive statistics included: 1) Child characteristics (age, gender, and pandemic conditions); 2) IQ data; 3) Psychological aspects data; and 4) Elementary school readiness data. Inferential statistics

were used to generalize the research results and sample data. The Mann-Whitney t-test was used to examine differences in average IQ scores, psychological aspects scores, and school readiness categories before and during the pandemic.

## RESULT

The respondents consisted of 144 students, with a greater number of boys than girls. The majority of respondents were aged 5-6, with only one respondent aged 7. The number of respondents who took the student readiness test in 2019 (before the pandemic) was 76 students, and the number of respondents who took the student readiness test in 2021 (during the pandemic) was 68 students. This is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Respondents Distributions According to Child Characteristics**

| Child Characteristics | Category            | Amount |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------|
| Gender                | Man                 | 81     |
|                       | Woman               | 63     |
| Age                   | 5 years             | 96     |
|                       | 6 years             | 47     |
|                       | 7 years             | 1      |
| Pandemic Conditions   | Before the Pandemic | 76     |
|                       | During the Pandemic | 68     |

Table 2 shows that all respondents' IQs before the pandemic were average or above average, with none falling below average. However, during the pandemic, the number of respondents with above average IQ decreased and the number of respondents with below average IQ increased.

**Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by IQ Category**

| Pandemic Conditions | IQ Category   | Amount | %  |
|---------------------|---------------|--------|----|
| Before the Pandemic | Above average | 21     | 28 |
|                     | Average       | 55     | 72 |
|                     | Below Average | 0      | 0  |
| During the Pandemic | Above average | 5      | 7  |
|                     | Average       | 59     | 87 |
|                     | Below Average | 4      | 6  |

Table 3 shows that before the pandemic, all respondents had adequate and good psychological well-being. However, during the pandemic, some respondents had poor psychological well-being, and the number of respondents with good psychological well-being decreased.

**Table 3. Distribution of Respondents according to Psychological Aspect Category**

| Pandemic Conditions | Psychological Aspect Category | Amount | %  |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------|----|
| Before the Pandemic | Less than once                | 0      | 0  |
|                     | Not enough                    | 0      | 0  |
|                     | Enough                        | 41     | 54 |

|                     |                |    |    |
|---------------------|----------------|----|----|
| During the Pandemic | Good           | 35 | 46 |
|                     | Very well      | 0  | 0  |
|                     | Less than once | 0  | 0  |
|                     | Not enough     | 2  | 3  |
|                     | Enough         | 60 | 88 |
|                     | Good           | 6  | 9  |
|                     | Very well      | 0  | 0  |

Table 4 shows that more than half of respondents were ready to enter elementary school before the pandemic. However, during the pandemic, the number of respondents ready to enter elementary school decreased to less than half.

**Table 4. Distribution of Respondents According to Elementary School Readiness Category**

| Pandemic Conditions | Elementary School Readiness Category | Amount | %  |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|----|
| Before the Pandemic | Not Ready                            | 1      | 1  |
|                     | Quite Ready                          | 24     | 32 |
|                     | Ready                                | 51     | 67 |
| During the Pandemic | Not Ready                            | 2      | 3  |
|                     | Quite Ready                          | 38     | 56 |
|                     | Ready                                | 28     | 41 |

Based on the results of the t-test, Table 5 shows a difference in the average IQ score (sig <0.001\*\*\*), psychological aspect score (sig <0.001\*\*\*), and school readiness category (sig 0.002\*\*) before and during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, the average IQ score, psychological aspect score, and readiness to enter elementary school of respondents were higher than during the pandemic.

**Table 5. Results of the Difference Test for Average IQ Scores, Psychological Aspect Scores, and School Readiness Categories**

| Variables                  | Before the Pandemic | After the Pandemic | Difference Test |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| IQ score                   | 107,671             | 98,632             | <0.001          |
| Psychological Aspect Score | 3,374               | 3,050              | <0.001          |
| School Readiness Category  | 2,658               | 2,382              | 0.002           |

## DISCUSSION

From the results, we can see concluded that there is a significant difference in school readiness between elementary school children who attend kindergarten and those who do not attend kindergarten, Elementary school kids who went to kindergarten before the pandemic are more ready for school than those who did not attend kindergarten (Halimah & Kawuryan, 2010). This is because during the Covid-19 pandemic, kindergarten students did not receive optimal education because many participated in online activities. Online learning activities for early childhood have many weaknesses such as uncontrolled learning activities, lack of parental knowledge about how to teach

children, and less responsiveness from parents to teacher instructions (Listiana et al., 2022).

These findings are consistent with a number of recent studies that specifically highlight the long-term impact of early childhood education disruptions caused by the pandemic. Longitudinal studies comparing the school readiness of children whose preschool education was disrupted by the pandemic with their pre-pandemic counterparts found gaps of 11 to 18 percentage points in basic math skills, social-emotional skills, and executive function (Le et al., 2025). In line with this, other research has found that preschoolers showed lower mastery during the pandemic, particularly in early language skills, particularly in children with fewer face-to-face days (Lynch et al., 2023; Nevo, 2024).

Theoretically, these findings can be explained through an ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten, which emphasizes that a child's readiness to enter elementary school is determined not only by the child's individual maturity but also by the quality of interactions between the child and their proximal environment, such as family, teachers, and peers (Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). When these interactions are disrupted as occurred during online learning during the pandemic, the child's cognitive, language, and socio-emotional stimulation processes are suboptimal. This aligns with the developmental principle that a child's early experiences have the potential for long-term impacts across developmental domains (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). Therefore, disruptions during critical periods of early childhood, such as those experienced by groups of children during the Covid-19 pandemic, risk having lasting effects until the child enters the next level of education if not adequately intervened.

Various learning obstacles during the pandemic era have resulted in low student comprehension, passive learning, and poor social skills due to minimal interaction and behavioral examples (Temaja & Romadon, 2022). Research based on the School Readiness Test shows that more students before the pandemic achieved above-average IQ scores (28%) compared to students during the pandemic with the same IQ score (7%). This demonstrates that *learning loss* during the pandemic has resulted in decreased cognitive abilities and concentration (Arzaqi et al., 2022). Several factors contributing to *learning loss* during the pandemic, which have led to decreased cognitive abilities in kindergarten students, include distance learning, which results in no interaction with teachers and classmates, thus affecting the process of absorbing learning materials. Furthermore, distance learning results in a lack of social-emotional interaction, language stimulation, and motoric stimulation, which are crucial for the development of kindergarten students.

School readiness depends not just on how mature a child is physically, but also on the natural skills they are born with and early experiences also have a strong influence (Pangestuti et al., 2018). Papalia (Mariyati, 2017) explains that indications of a child's readiness to enter elementary school can be seen from three aspects, namely physical development, mental/cognitive processes, and social emotional maturity. According to

(Pratiwi, 2018), children who are ready to enter elementary school are generally seen from three aspects of development, namely the physical motor aspect such as the child's ability to go up and down stairs, throw and catch a ball, hold a pencil well, and so on. The cognitive aspect is seen from the child's ability to classify objects, retell stories, find cause and effect relationships, and so on. Meanwhile, the social emotional aspect can be seen from their ability to socialize, dare to interact, feel safe and comfortable in a new environment, and be able to follow applicable rules.

The maturity of the developmental aspects of kindergarten students when they want to enter the next level of school, namely elementary school, can be seen from various maturity categories, namely fine and gross motor maturity, cognitive ability maturity, social and emotional maturity, and independence of learning attitudes. Physical motor development is the initial foundation for kindergarten students to continue to the next level, good physical activity stimulation will affect physical growth and development, while motor development is a development that affects the maturity of body movement control and the brain as the center of movement. Social emotional development is a process of developing maturity in interacting.

In general, the development that needs to be considered to prepare kindergarten students to enter elementary school is the development of physical motor skills, cognitive abilities and social emotional abilities (Pratiwi, 2018), generally children at the age of seven are ready to learn and ready to learn academic skills (Supartini, 2006). However, this is different from the results of the School Readiness Test obtained from field data in the post-pandemic period where around 3% of students were declared not ready to enter elementary school. Various aspects needed to support readiness to enter school were not optimally trained during the pandemic, thus affecting the level of readiness to enter school for students affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The online learning system affects most aspects of child development so that several aspects of development experience a decline, some of these aspects of development include cognitive, language, arts and social emotional aspects, while the social emotional aspect is the aspect of development that is most affected in kindergarten students during the Covid-19 pandemic (Usman et al., 2021).

The results of the t-test in Table 5 show that there are significant differences in the average IQ scores, psychological aspect scores, and school readiness of kindergarten students who took the School Maturity Test at Karakter Elementary School before and during the pandemic. The first difference is in the average IQ score, where the results of the study show a significant difference in the average IQ score of students in the School Readiness Test conditions before and during the pandemic (sig <0.001 \*\*\*). Before the pandemic, kindergarten students who took School Readiness Test had a higher average IQ score than kindergarten students who took the School Readiness Test during the pandemic. Based on this, it can be concluded that there is an effect of the pandemic on the cognitive abilities or intellectual abilities of kindergarten students.

Based on the results of the t-test difference test in Table 5, it also shows that there is a significant difference in the psychological aspect scores of students in the School Readiness Test conditions before the pandemic and during the pandemic (sig <0.001 \*\*\*). Before the pandemic, kindergarten students who participated in School Readiness Test had higher psychological aspect scores than kindergarten students who participated in School Readiness Test during the pandemic. Based on this, it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on limiting social interactions, causing increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty, thus impacting students' psychological aspects.

The t-test in Table 5 also shows a significant difference in the school readiness category of students in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic (sig 0.002 \*\*). Before the pandemic, kindergarten students who participated in School Readiness Test had higher readiness to enter elementary school compared to kindergarten students who participated in School Readiness Test during the pandemic. Based on this, it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on limiting social interactions, causing increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty, thus impacting students' psychological aspects.

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the maturity and readiness of kindergarten students for the next level of education, elementary school. School readiness among kindergarten students before the pandemic was higher than among those who participated in kindergarten after the pandemic. Restrictions on social interaction during the pandemic led to a decline in social-emotional development in kindergarten students, which is one of the causes of the decline in school readiness among kindergarten students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused *learning loss*, impacting the developmental aspects of kindergarten students needed for the transition to elementary school. This includes students' low ability to understand material, passive learning during learning, and a decline in cognitive abilities. This is evident in research showing that the average IQ score of kindergarten students affected by the pandemic is lower than before the pandemic.

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