



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Emotional intelligence and family support in parents' acceptance of children with special needs

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of emotional intelligence, family support, and demographic variables on parental acceptance of children with special needs, specifically those diagnosed with deafness and cerebral palsy. The study involved 183 participants selected using a non-probability purposive sampling method. Measurement instruments included the Parents' Acceptance Scale based on Porter, Johnson, and Medinnus' theory, the Emotional Intelligence Scale following Goleman's (2006) model, and the Family Support Scale adapted from Canavan, Dolan, and Pinkerton (2006). The findings indicate that emotional intelligence and the type of special needs significantly influence parental acceptance, whereas family support dimensions (emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support) and the child's age were not significant predictors. The R-Square value of 0.174 (17.4%) suggests that the independent variables explain 17.4% of the variance in parental acceptance, with the remaining 82.6% attributed to other factors. Although the R<sup>2</sup> value appears modest, it highlights the practical significance of emotional intelligence and special needs type in shaping parental acceptance, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating an extended research period due to lockdown restrictions and limited access to participants. The study underscores the importance of emotional intelligence-based training programs and disability-specific support mechanisms to enhance parental acceptance and resilience. Future research should explore additional psychological and social determinants, particularly in diverse cultural and economic contexts, to develop more comprehensive intervention strategies.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Family Support, Parental Acceptance, Special Needs, COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs require a nurturing, supportive, and adaptive environment to facilitate their optimal emotional, cognitive, and social development. Parents play a central role in shaping this environment, particularly in fostering acceptance and psychological well-being for their children (Canavan, Dolan, & Pinkerton, 2006). However, raising children with special needs presents unique challenges that can be further complicated by external stressors such as economic constraints, societal stigma, and inadequate access to support systems (Lazaro et al., 2019). These factors can significantly impact parents' ability to accept their child's condition, subsequently influencing both parental well-being and child development outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, leading to increased levels of parental stress, disruptions in healthcare and educational services, and a

reduction in social support networks for families with children with disabilities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), global reports indicate that parents of children with special needs experienced heightened levels of anxiety and emotional distress due to lockdown measures, financial instability, and restricted access to intervention services. The pandemic underscored the need for resilience and adaptability among parents, highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence and family support in fostering parental acceptance under adverse conditions.

Parental acceptance of children with special needs is a complex and multidimensional construct that is influenced by various factors, including emotional intelligence, family support, socioeconomic background, and cultural norms (Gusrianti, Winarni, & Faradz, 2018). This acceptance is critical as it shapes the emotional and psychological development of the child, influencing their self-esteem, social adaptation, and overall well-being (Al-Kandari & Al-Qashan, 2010). Research suggests that parents who exhibit high levels of acceptance are more likely to engage in positive parenting practices, which in turn foster adaptive behaviors and resilience in children with disabilities (Guralnick, 2017).

Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in parents' ability to regulate emotions, cope with stress, and maintain a positive perspective on their child's condition (Goleman,

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2006). Emotional intelligence encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, all of which contribute to effective parenting and the ability to support children with disabilities (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Parents with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate challenges, build supportive relationships, and create a nurturing home environment that fosters their child's growth and development (Sitoiu, & Panisoara. 2023). Studies have found that higher emotional intelligence in parents correlates with lower levels of parental stress and greater emotional attunement with their children, leading to improved developmental outcomes (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Furthermore, emotional intelligence enables parents to manage the stigma associated with raising a child with special needs, allowing them to advocate more effectively for their child's inclusion in education and social settings (Petrides et al., 2016).

Family support is another critical determinant of parental acceptance. The presence of a strong, emotionally supportive, and financially stable family network can alleviate parental stress and promote resilience (Whiting et al., 2019). Social support from extended family members, community networks, and professional resources plays a crucial role in buffering the emotional burden experienced by parents of children with disabilities (Hastings, 2016). Studies indicate that parents who perceive higher levels of family support demonstrate better psychological well-being and are more likely to engage in positive coping strategies (Zablotsky et al., 2013).

The Double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) provides a theoretical framework for understanding family adaptation in the face of stressors such as raising a child with special needs. According to this model, family adaptation depends on the interaction of four key components: (A) stressors, (B) available resources, (C) perception of the situation, and (X) crisis adaptation. Families with strong support systems and effective coping mechanisms demonstrate greater adaptability and acceptance, reducing the risk of psychological distress and parental burnout (Weiss, 2002). Moreover, cultural factors influence the way families perceive and respond to stressors. In collectivist societies, where family cohesion and interdependence are highly valued, extended family support plays an essential role in mitigating parental stress (Chao & Tseng, 2002).

Several studies emphasize that targeted interventions, such as family-based therapy and parental training programs, can enhance family resilience and parental acceptance (McConnell, Savage, & Breitzkreuz, 2014). Programs that foster emotional intelligence, stress management, and family cohesion have been found to significantly improve parental well-being and child developmental outcomes (Dardas & Ahmad, 2015). Therefore, understanding the role of family support in parental adaptation is crucial for developing policies and interventions aimed at enhancing parental coping mechanisms and improving the overall quality of life for families raising children with special needs.

This study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which emphasize inclusive education and equal opportunities for children with disabilities (United Nations, 2021). Ensuring parental acceptance is vital for achieving these global objectives, as parents play a key role in advocating for and facilitating their child's participation in educational and social settings. A lack of parental acceptance can hinder children's access to necessary resources and limit their

integration into mainstream educational and community activities.

Despite the well-documented role of emotional intelligence and family support in shaping parental acceptance, empirical studies focusing on these variables within the Indonesian context remain limited. Research in Western contexts has extensively explored how emotional intelligence contributes to stress management, parenting efficacy, and family dynamics (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Petrides et al., 2016). However, cultural, economic, and social differences necessitate localized investigations, as the factors influencing parental acceptance may differ significantly across contexts (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Hastings, 2016).

Additionally, prior studies have predominantly focused on parental stress and coping mechanisms rather than the interplay between emotional intelligence, family support, and acceptance (McConnell, Savage, & Breitzkreuz, 2014; Weiss, 2002). Understanding how these variables interact within the Indonesian socio-cultural framework is crucial in designing interventions that enhance parental resilience and well-being.

This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the extent to which emotional intelligence and family support influence parental acceptance of children with special needs. By integrating theoretical frameworks such as Goleman's emotional intelligence model (Goleman, 2006) and the Double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying parental adaptation and resilience. The Double ABCX model, which emphasizes the interaction between stressors, coping resources, and adaptation, is particularly relevant in exploring how Indonesian families navigate the complexities of raising children with special needs (Weiss, 2002).

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education and disability advocacy, aligning with global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 (United Nations, 2021). Specifically, it addresses Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (Quality Education) by identifying key psychosocial factors that influence parental support and engagement in their children's education and well-being. By shedding light on these critical factors, the findings of this study are expected to inform educators, practitioners, and policymakers in developing targeted programs that foster parental acceptance and improve developmental outcomes for children with special needs.

## METHOD

### Study Design

This research employs a quantitative cross-sectional study design to examine the influence of emotional intelligence and family support on parental acceptance of children with special needs. A structured survey was utilized to collect data from parents in DKI Jakarta, ensuring a systematic approach to measuring the relationships among variables.

### Population and Sampling Technique

The study population consists of parents who have children with special needs residing in DKI Jakarta, Indonesia. A non-probability purposive sampling technique

was applied, allowing for the selection of participants based on predefined inclusion criteria. The eligibility criteria required that participants be parents of children with special needs diagnosed with deafness or cerebral palsy, with the children falling within the age range of 2 to 17 years old. Additionally, participants were required to be currently residing in DKI Jakarta to ensure contextual relevance to the study.

A total of 183 respondents participated in this study. The demographic characteristics of participants, such as age, socioeconomic background, and educational level, were documented to provide contextual insights into the findings.

### Research Instruments

This study employed three validated scales to measure the key variables. The Parents' Acceptance Scale, developed based on the theoretical framework of Porter, Johnson, and Medinnus (1969), assesses the degree of parental acceptance of children with special needs. The Emotional Intelligence Scale, grounded in Goleman's (2006) emotional intelligence model, evaluates parents' ability to regulate emotions and manage stress effectively. Additionally, the Family Support Scale, adapted from the model proposed by Canavan, Dolan, and Pinkerton (2006), measures the perceived emotional and instrumental support provided by family members. Each instrument underwent rigorous validity and reliability testing to ensure measurement accuracy. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed for each scale, confirming internal consistency and the reliability of the measurement tools used in this study.

### Data Collection Process

Data were collected via an online survey using Google Forms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed through various social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Email. Additionally, it was shared within parent networks, special schools, and community groups supporting children with disabilities. To enhance response accuracy, participants were provided with clear instructions, and confidentiality measures were emphasized. Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and informed consent, were ensured throughout the data collection process.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, employing various statistical methods to ensure robust and accurate results. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and key variables, providing an overview of participant characteristics. To examine the influence of emotional intelligence, family support, and demographic variables on parental acceptance, multiple regression analysis was applied, allowing for the identification of significant predictors. Additionally, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, ensuring the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments.

### Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical research principles, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and

confidentiality throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their voluntary participation. To further safeguard participant privacy, anonymity and confidentiality measures were implemented, with all personal data anonymized to prevent identification. Moreover, the study received ethical clearance from an accredited Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring compliance with ethical research standards and guidelines.

## RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that emotional intelligence and the type of children with special needs significantly influence parental acceptance, while family support dimensions (emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support) and the age of children with special needs do not have a significant impact. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a crucial psychological factor in enabling parents to accept and adapt to their child's condition.

The R-Square value of 0.174 (17.4%) suggests that emotional intelligence, family support, and demographic variables together explain only a small proportion of the variance in parental acceptance (table 1). The remaining 82.6% variance is likely influenced by other external factors such as socioeconomic status, social stigma, educational background, and parental mental health. While the model's explanatory power is relatively low, the statistical significance of the regression model indicates that the included predictors still play a meaningful role in parental acceptance.

The ANOVA results ( $F = 5.278$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) confirm that the independent variables collectively have a significant effect on parental acceptance (table 2). This means that emotional intelligence, family support, and demographic variables, when considered together, contribute to understanding how parents accept and adapt to raising children with special needs. However, the individual regression coefficients reveal that only emotional intelligence and the type of children with special needs have a statistically significant impact, while other factors do not.

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis, highlighting the influence of emotional intelligence, family support dimensions, and demographic variables on parental acceptance. The analysis identifies significant and non-significant predictors, providing insights into which factors play a crucial role in shaping parental acceptance.

The results indicate that emotional intelligence has the strongest positive impact on parental acceptance, as reflected by its high beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.282$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that parents with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate greater acceptance of their child's condition. Parents with enhanced emotional intelligence tend to manage stress more effectively, regulate their emotions, and adopt a more realistic yet optimistic perspective regarding their child's abilities. The ability to maintain emotional stability appears to be a crucial factor in enabling parents to provide consistent support and guidance to their children with special needs.

**Table 1**  
**Model Summary Regression Analysis**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.418 <sup>a</sup>	0.174	0.141	0.31912

a. Predictors: (Constant), types of children with special needs, concrete support, emotional intelligence, age of children with special needs, emotional support, advice support, esteem support

**Table 2**  
**Anova Overall Effect of Independent Variable on Dependent Variable**

		ANOVA <sup>a</sup>				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.763	7	.538	5.278	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	17.822	175	.102		
	Total	21.585	182			

a. Dependent Variable: Parents' Acceptance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Types of children with special needs, concrete support, emotional intelligence, age of children with special needs, emotional support, advice support, esteem support

**Table 3**  
**Regression Coefficient**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.361	.160		8.519	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.196	.052	.282	3.773	.000
	Emotional Support	.038	.052	.056	.741	.460
	Advice Support	.031	.058	.043	.531	.596
	Concrete Support	.013	.059	.018	.214	.831
	Esteem Support	.039	.060	.057	.654	.514
	Age of Children with Special Needs	-.001	.001	-.110	-1.525	.129
	Types of Children with Special Needs	.098	.045	.160	2.196	.029

a. Dependent Variable: Parents' Acceptance

Similarly, the type of special needs was found to significantly influence parental acceptance ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ). Parents of children with deafness tend to exhibit higher levels of acceptance, which may be attributed to greater access to communication interventions and social integration opportunities. In contrast, parents of children with cerebral palsy may experience more challenges due to physical impairments, increased caregiving demands, and limited accessibility to specialized interventions. These findings suggest that different disability types present distinct challenges, impacting how parents adapt to and accept their child's condition.

On the other hand, family support dimensions (emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support) were not found to have a significant influence on parental acceptance ( $p > 0.05$ ). This result implies that the presence of family support alone does not necessarily translate into enhanced parental acceptance. Instead, the quality and effectiveness of support mechanisms may play a more critical role. Family support structures that are passive or inconsistent may fail to provide meaningful reassurance for parents navigating the complexities of raising a child with special needs. Additionally, cultural expectations and family dynamics may influence how support is perceived and utilized by parents.

The age of the child with special needs was also found to be an insignificant predictor ( $p = 0.129$ ), suggesting that parental acceptance remains relatively stable across different age groups. This contradicts findings that

associate older children with higher parental stress levels. The results imply that acceptance is not necessarily dependent on the child's age but may be shaped by other psychological, social, and environmental factors that warrant further exploration.

Given the strong influence of emotional intelligence on parental acceptance, developing emotional intelligence-based interventions should be a key priority. Parent training programs focusing on stress management, self-regulation, and resilience-building could provide essential coping mechanisms.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that emotional intelligence and types of children with special needs significantly influence parental acceptance, whereas other factors such as family support dimensions (emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support) and age of children with special needs do not have a significant impact. The findings provide important insights into the psychological resilience of parents and the necessity of strengthening parental emotional intelligence through targeted interventions.

Emotional intelligence was found to have a positive and significant influence on parental acceptance, as indicated by a regression coefficient of 0.196 with a

significance level of 0.000. These findings are consistent with previous research by Eliyanto and Hendriani (2013), which highlighted that mothers with higher emotional intelligence were more accepting of their children with cerebral palsy. Parents who exhibit greater emotional intelligence tend to have enhanced coping mechanisms, allowing them to process emotions, regulate stress, and maintain a positive perspective on their child's condition (Whiting et al., 2019).

Moreover, increased emotional intelligence in parents not only enhances their own well-being but also contributes to better developmental outcomes for children. Research suggests that emotionally intelligent parents promote non-verbal communication, help children regulate emotions, and support their social-emotional development, ultimately improving children's resilience and mental health (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2006; Gottman in Eliyanto & Hendriani, 2013). Given these benefits, community-based interventions that enhance emotional intelligence training for parents, such as programs integrated with local health services (e.g., POSYANDU), should be developed to provide accessible support mechanisms for parents raising children with special needs.

Contrary to expectations, the four dimensions of family support—emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support—were not found to have a significant influence on parental acceptance. This result may be attributed to variability in family dynamics and the quality of support provided rather than the mere presence of support networks. The study found that emotional support from family members was not sufficient to enhance parental acceptance, aligning with research by Bratanegara (2012), which indicated that many families lack active emotional engagement, leaving parents feeling isolated. Similarly, concrete support was found to be ineffective, particularly among families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may receive insufficient material and service-based support. This finding is consistent with studies by Friedman in Simbolon (2017) and Galani in Hadjicharalambous & Demetriou (2020), emphasizing the need for economic empowerment programs to supplement financial and material support for families with children with special needs.

Advice support was also found to be ineffective in influencing parental acceptance, as suggested by the findings of Twistiandayani & Handika (2015). One possible explanation is the passive role of family members in providing constructive advice, which makes it difficult for parents to broaden their perspectives or find effective solutions to their challenges (Priyanti, 2015). Additionally, esteem support was found to be insignificant, contradicting previous findings by Twistiandayani and Handika (2015), which suggested that positive reinforcement enhances parental self-acceptance. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the influence of cultural norms on how families express validation and encouragement. Indirect forms of esteem support may not be perceived as impactful by parents, highlighting the need for culturally adapted interventions that address family support dynamics.

The study also explored the influence of demographic factors on parental acceptance, specifically the age and type of children with special needs. Findings revealed that the age of children with special needs did not significantly influence parental acceptance, contradicting research by Darling (in Eliyanto & Hendriani, 2013) and Hadjicharalambous & Demetriou (2020), which suggested that older children might be associated with greater parental stress. However, the relatively high acceptance rate (86.3%) across different age groups in this study

suggests that parents may develop resilience regardless of their child's age. Meanwhile, the type of special need (deafness vs. cerebral palsy) was found to significantly influence parental acceptance, with a regression coefficient of 0.098 and a significance of 0.029. This aligns with findings by Eliyanto and Hendriani (2013) and Erbas et al. (2016), which found that parents of deaf children exhibited higher levels of acceptance. The greater accessibility of interventions for children with hearing impairments, as well as stronger parental adaptation strategies that facilitate communication and emotional bonding, may explain this trend.

Given the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve parental acceptance of children with special needs in Indonesia. First, developing emotional intelligence training modules can be an effective intervention. Community-based programs that integrate emotional intelligence training into local healthcare services, such as POSYANDU, can provide parents with accessible emotional regulation strategies. Collaborations between mental health professionals and educational institutions should also be encouraged to enhance parents' emotional regulation skills and resilience.

Second, enhancing family support quality should be prioritized. Structured family counseling programs can be designed to improve active engagement and constructive advice from family members, ensuring that emotional and advice support mechanisms are more impactful. Additionally, financial assistance programs should be developed to mitigate economic constraints, ensuring better material support for parents raising children with special needs.

Lastly, addressing rural-urban disparities is crucial for ensuring equitable support for all families. Future research should explore rural areas in Indonesia where access to healthcare, education, and social support is more limited. Policymakers should also expand inclusive education initiatives to ensure that rural families receive adequate resources and support systems for raising children with special needs. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to enhance parental acceptance, reduce stress, and improve developmental outcomes for children with special needs across diverse socio-economic and geographic settings.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, the absence of interviews limited the depth of understanding regarding parental acceptance. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods to capture parents' personal narratives and emotional experiences. Second, the data collection was constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to challenges in sample recruitment. Future studies should ensure offline data collection to diversify participant recruitment. Finally, the broad age range (2-17 years) in this study may have obscured age-specific parental acceptance patterns. Future research should focus on specific developmental stages (e.g., early childhood or adolescence) to obtain more targeted insights.

By addressing these limitations and implementing the suggested interventions, policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers can better support parents in fostering resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptive family environments for children with special needs.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of emotional intelligence and types of children with special needs in shaping parental acceptance, while revealing that family support dimensions (emotional, advice, concrete, and esteem support) and age of children with special needs do not have a significant impact. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that enhance emotional intelligence among parents, as it plays a crucial role in helping them regulate emotions, cope with stress, and foster a positive perspective toward their child's condition. This reinforces the importance of mental health programs, including community-based emotional intelligence training modules integrated with local health services such as POSYANDU to provide accessible and sustainable support for parents.

The study also highlights disparities in family support effectiveness, suggesting that the quality of support—rather than its mere presence—is more influential in shaping parental acceptance. Future family intervention programs should focus on enhancing the engagement and responsiveness of family members, ensuring that support systems are proactively involved in providing emotional and practical assistance to parents of children with special needs.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the importance of contextualizing interventions based on socioeconomic and cultural factors, as families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may require additional financial and material support. Future policies should prioritize economic empowerment programs, ensuring that concrete support mechanisms are available to parents in need.

Given the findings, future research should focus on examining rural populations, as access to healthcare, education, and social support varies significantly between urban and rural areas in Indonesia. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews could provide a richer understanding of parental experiences, offering deeper insights into the complexities of parental acceptance.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, mental health professionals, and healthcare providers—can contribute to fostering resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptive coping mechanisms among parents raising children with special needs. These efforts will ultimately enhance parental acceptance, reduce psychological distress, and improve developmental outcomes for children with special needs, aligning with global disability inclusion initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030.

## DECLARATION

### Consent for publication:

All participants were informed of the objectives and procedures of the study and subsequent publication of the results.

### Availability of Data and Material (ADM):

Data not available because it compromises the anonymity of participants.

### Competing interests:

Authors declare no conflict of interest

### Funding:

Study conducted with own resources

### Authors' contributions:

The authors confirm responsibility for the following - study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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