



The Role of Parents in Supporting Children with Special Needs In Larantuka Subdistrict, East Flores Regency, and Its Implications for Counseling Children with Special Needs

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to determine the role of parents in supporting children with special needs in Larantuka Subdistrict, East Flores Regency, and its implications for counseling children with special needs. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The subjects of this study were eight parents of children with special needs. Data were collected through structured interviews. Data analysis included data collection, data reduction, and data presentation. The results indicate that parents play a crucial role in supporting the development of children with special needs. This role is manifested through parents' active involvement as primary caregivers, advocates, sources of information, teachers, and diagnosticians.*

Keywords: *The role of parents; children with special needs; child counseling*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan adalah untuk mengetahui peran orang tua dalam mendampingi anak berkebutuhan khusus di Kecamatan Larantuka, Kabupaten Flores Timur dan Implikasinya bagi konseling anak berkebutuhan khusus. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah orang tua yang memiliki anak berkebutuhan khusus yang berjumlah 8 orang. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara. Wawancara yang digunakan adalah wawancara terstruktur. Analisis data meliputi pengumpulan data, reduksi data dan penyajian data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang tua memiliki peran yang sangat penting dalam mendampingi perkembangan anak berkebutuhan khusus. Peran tersebut diwujudkan melalui keterlibatan aktif orang tua sebagai pendamping utama, advokat, sumber informasi, guru, dan diagnostisi.*

Kata kunci: *Peran orang tua; Abk; konseling anak*

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Introduction

Children are the greatest gift to a family and are eagerly awaited by every married couple. The presence of an intelligent, healthy, and strong child is the hope of every family. The birth of a baby not only brings happiness but also raises hopes for a bright future. In general, families expect their children to be born healthy and without disabilities. However, in reality, some families have children who are born with special needs.

Sunarya et al. (2018) stated that children with special needs (CSN) are children who experience limitations or barriers in physical, mental-intellectual, social, or emotional aspects, such as children with autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioral disorders, and physical disabilities. These conditions cause their growth and development processes to differ from those of other children of the same age. Furthermore, Setiawan (2020) stated, "Compared with their peers, children with special needs require special education and services."

Mohammad (2013) explained that the differences between children with special needs and children in general can be observed in their growth and development processes, which involve abnormalities or deviations in physical, mental, intellectual, social, or emotional aspects.

To achieve their potential to the fullest, children with special needs require support, services, and specialized facilities that are adapted to their individual needs (Herlina & Syafrudin, 2023).

Parents who are aware of these conditions will strive to support the successful growth and development of children with special needs. Through active involvement, parents can help enhance their children's self-confidence and provide educational support appropriate to their needs. Children's behavior does not develop automatically but rather through a continuous process of interaction (Normirani, 2020).

This is reinforced by various research findings highlighting the importance of parental roles in assisting children with special needs. A study conducted by Lilawati (2020) revealed that parents play a highly important role as the primary educators and companions of their children during the learning process at home, particularly in developing discipline and responsibility and supporting the learning development of children with special needs. This is consistent with the view of Hasbullah (2012), who stated that parents are the first and primary educators in the lives of children with special needs.

Based on the results of interviews conducted online through WhatsApp on February 11, 2026, with two parents of children with special needs, specifically

children with hearing impairment and intellectual disability, in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency, it was found that the role of parents in supporting children with special needs was still not optimal. This condition was indicated by parents' difficulties in establishing communication with their children. The children had difficulty understanding the directions given, responded slowly during conversations, and experienced difficulties in expressing their needs or feelings. In addition, parents had limited understanding of how to provide appropriate assistance to children with special needs because their needs differ from those of children in general. Parents also felt that they had limited understanding of the potential possessed by their children with special needs, resulting in difficulties in determining the appropriate forms of motivation to provide.

Parental and family support and acceptance have a significant impact on the development of children with special needs. When children feel accepted and supported, they develop the energy and self-confidence to try new things, including important life skills for their future. Such support also encourages children to achieve according to their capacities and potential (Kelana, 2022). The findings of Romadhani et al. (2022) showed that the role of parents in providing a safe environment, educating children, introducing them to their surroundings, serving as good role models, guiding, supporting, motivating, introducing responsibility, paying attention to their abilities, protecting them, and fulfilling their needs can greatly assist children in developing their independence and potential.

In addition, the findings of Putra (2024) revealed that insufficient parental involvement in the lives of children with special needs can result in various negative impacts on their growth and development and may contribute to emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, and aggressive behavior. Children with special needs who do not receive adequate attention and assistance from their parents tend to be less active in socializing, reluctant to participate in group activities, and have low motivation.

According to Gunarsa (2008), "Parental involvement in guiding and assisting children has a significant influence on their personality, social, and emotional development. Therefore, the role of parents needs to be carried out optimally and continuously so that children can achieve positive development." This is further supported by research findings emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in assisting children with special needs. As stated by Rahmawati (2021), the role of parents has an important influence

on the successful implementation of counseling services for children with special needs.

According to Kustawan (2013), "Counseling for children with special needs is a process of providing assistance that is carried out in a planned and continuous manner to help children develop their potential and overcome the problems they face." Furthermore, Kustawan (2013) explained that in its implementation, the success of counseling is not determined solely by the counselor's intervention but is also strongly influenced by parental involvement as the child's closest environment.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the role of parents in assisting children with special needs is an important issue that requires attention, particularly in supporting their development, independence, potential, and the success of counseling services for children with special needs. Therefore, this study aims to determine the role of parents in assisting children with special needs in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency, and its implications for counseling for children with special needs.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth description of the role of parents in assisting children with special needs in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency. The study was conducted over a six-month period, from January to June 2026.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The participants in this study consisted of eight families, represented by fathers or mothers who had children with special needs. The participants were selected based on the consideration that parents are the individuals closest to their children and have a direct understanding of their children's conditions and development in everyday life. The selection of parents as participants was therefore considered appropriate for obtaining information regarding parental roles in assisting and supporting children with special needs.

Instruments and Measures

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by an interview guide. The interview guide was used to explore information regarding the role of parents in assisting and guiding children with special needs, efforts made to support children's development, communication practices, and various challenges encountered in carrying out their parental roles.

The operational focus of the study was the role of parents in assisting children with special needs, which included assistance, communication, provision of support, motivation, guidance, attention to children's development, and efforts to fulfill children's needs.

Procedure and Research Ethics

Data were collected through interviews with parents of children with special needs. The interviews were conducted to obtain information concerning the parents' roles in assisting and guiding their children, efforts to support children's development, ways of communicating with children, and challenges experienced in carrying out these roles. The interview data were subsequently organized and examined according to the focus of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, member checking was conducted by discussing the research findings with the informants. This process was intended to confirm that the findings accurately reflected the information provided by the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, data display, and data verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and organizing information relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then displayed in descriptive form to present the role of parents in assisting children with special needs. The final stage involved data verification to assess the consistency and accuracy of the information and to draw conclusions based on the research findings. Member checking was used as a verification strategy to ensure the credibility and conformity of the findings with the information provided by the informants.

Results and Discussion

Results

Parents play a highly important role in supporting the development of children with special needs. This role is demonstrated through parents' active involvement as primary assistants, advocates, sources of information, teachers, and diagnosticians. The following presents a description of the roles of parents of children with special needs (CSN) in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency, in 2026.

1. Parents as Primary Assistants

As primary assistants, parents provide attention, affection, guidance, and emotional support. In addition, parents assist children in carrying out daily activities, accompany them during learning activities at home, encourage communication, provide learning aids such as picture-based media, communicate with children through body gestures to facilitate their understanding, and train children to become more independent at home.

OK stated:

"As parents, we always accompany our child at home by providing attention and affection. We encourage our child to talk so that when playing with friends, the child becomes accustomed to communicating. While talking, we also use body

gestures so that our child can more easily understand what we are saying.”

This was also stated by SK:

“We always provide assistance to our child with affection, attention, motivation, and emotional support. We encourage the child to talk and train the child to become independent, such as putting away their own toys, and we assist them using body gestures.”

2. Parents as Advocates

As advocates, parents are responsible for advocating for the rights of children with special needs, such as enrolling their children in special schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa or SLB) so that they can receive education appropriate to their needs, be accepted in both the home and school environments, and learn in a comfortable environment.

AK stated:

“As parents, when we see that our child has special needs, we try to provide the same and equal rights as other children without disabilities. For example, we enrolled our child in a special school so that our child could have the same opportunities to learn, interact, and socialize with peers, teachers, and the school environment.”

ML also stated:

“Of course, we advocate for our child’s rights, including education that is appropriate to the child’s needs, which is why we enrolled our child in a special school. In addition, I also communicate the child’s needs to the school and teachers so that the learning process can be adjusted to the child’s condition and abilities.”

3. Parents as Sources of Information

Parents serve as the most comprehensive source of information regarding their children’s conditions. As the primary source of information, parents monitor their children’s development every day, observe activities that children are able to perform independently, and monitor their emotional conditions. Thus, parents can openly communicate to teachers any obstacles or difficulties experienced by their children.

YK stated:

“We always observe our child’s development every day, communicate with the child, and follow every change that occurs. Through regular observation, we can identify changes in the child’s abilities, behavior, and emotional condition over time. In addition, continuous communication with teachers helps us as parents understand the child’s needs, feelings, and difficulties.”

This was similarly expressed by AS:

“We actively pay attention to our child’s progress and encourage the child to carry out activities independently. For example, after playing, we

immediately guide the child to put away the toys independently. One of the main concerns that I frequently communicate to the teachers at school regarding my child’s development is the child’s limited ability to interact with others. I always communicate openly with the school regarding my child because every stage of the child’s development is important in supporting positive changes.”

4. Parents as Teachers

As the first and primary teachers of their children, parents provide guidance, establish positive behavioral habits, teach life skills, and instill moral and social values. Parents accompany children while studying at home, help them review materials learned at school, train their communication skills with the assistance of body gestures and sign language, and assist them in completing school assignments.

AS stated:

“As parents, we do not allow our child to study alone without assistance. We provide attention and guidance when the child experiences difficulties in completing school assignments. We try to explain the materials or instructions in a way that is easy to understand according to the child’s abilities. We teach the child to always behave politely and independently, encourage the child to interact with others, and also assist the child while studying at home by providing media appropriate to the needs of the assignments, such as picture-based media.”

LK stated:

“We use body gestures as a means of communication to help the child understand information better, and we assist the child in completing school assignments. The habits we teach include consistently guiding the child and teaching simple forms of communication. We also help by teaching and providing learning media that are easy for the child to understand, such as picture-based media and word cards.”

5. Parents as Diagnosticians

Parents strive to recognize changes in their children’s behavior, development, and special needs through continuous observation. Parents can identify signs of difficulties experienced by their children and promptly seek professional assistance from psychologists, doctors, or therapists. As diagnosticians, parents attempt to recognize, understand, and identify their children’s special needs and developmental conditions from an early stage through continuous observation. Parents pay attention to changes in behavior, communication abilities, social interaction, and learning development, and subsequently confirm their observations through consultation with professionals such as doctors, psychologists, or therapists.

KT stated:

"I identified my child's special needs through daily observation and monitoring of the child's growth and development, which appeared to differ from those of other children. From this, I was able to recognize when there were differences or difficulties experienced by the child, and I immediately communicated them to the school."

This was similarly expressed by AS:

"I identify my child's special needs by paying attention to the child's growth and development. From this, I can recognize and understand the child's needs and difficulties. After observing the child and determining that further action was necessary, I consulted with the school to ensure that my child's needs were properly addressed."

Discussion

Based on the research findings, parents of children with special needs in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency, have carried out their roles as primary assistants, advocates, sources of information, teachers, and diagnosticians in supporting their children's development. These five roles were performed actively and continuously according to the individual needs of each child. Parents demonstrated a high level of concern for their children's development through assistance, supervision, and involvement in their children's educational processes.

The most dominant parental roles were those of primary assistants (as aids) and teachers (as teachers). Parents intensively accompanied their children in daily activities, assisted them in the learning process, taught communication skills, trained social abilities, and guided them toward greater independence. Various strategies were employed by parents, including the use of body gestures, picture-based media, word cards, and repeated practice to help children better understand the information provided. These findings indicate that parents are the individuals who are closest to and have a significant influence on the development of children with special needs. In addition, parents also acted as advocates, sources of information, and diagnosticians by advocating for their children's educational rights, establishing cooperation with schools, monitoring their children's development on a daily basis, and identifying their children's special needs through observation.

The findings of this study indicate that active parental involvement is a major factor supporting the development of children's communication, social, emotional, academic, and independent living skills. Therefore, the success of education and counseling services for children with special needs cannot be separated from the role and support of parents in their children's everyday lives.

These findings are consistent with the theory of Hewett and Frenk in Khoirunisa et al. (2024), which explains that parents have five important roles in the

management and provision of services for children with special needs, namely as aids, as advocates, as resources, as teachers, and as diagnosticians. These five roles are reflected in various forms of parental involvement in supporting children's development both at home and in the school environment.

The findings are also consistent with Fauziah et al., (2024), who found that parents serve as the primary guides in the education of children with special needs. The study showed that parental involvement can contribute to improving the quality of children's education and development. This finding is consistent with the results of the present study, which demonstrate that parents actively assist their children in learning, communicating, and developing independence.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are supported by Az Zahra et al., (2024), who stated that parents of children with special needs serve as primary assistants, advocates, sources of data, teachers, and diagnosticians in the children's educational process. The study emphasized that parental involvement contributes to increasing the independence and development of children with special needs.

The findings show that parents in Larantuka District, East Flores Regency, fulfill roles as primary assistants, advocates, sources of information, teachers, and diagnosticians. These findings imply that counseling services for children with special needs should actively involve parents as collaborative partners in the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of services. Parents can provide information about their children's conditions and development, support the implementation of interventions at home, advocate for their children's educational needs, and assist in monitoring their development.

Therefore, counselors need to strengthen parental involvement and capacity through strategies for assistance, communication, advocacy, and developmental monitoring. Continuous collaboration among counselors, parents, and schools is expected to make counseling services more responsive to children's needs and support the development of their potential and independence.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that parents of children with special needs in Larantuka District have carried out their roles as primary assistants, advocates, sources of information, teachers, and diagnosticians according to the needs of children with special needs. These findings indicate that active parental involvement is an important factor in supporting the development of children with special

needs and the success of educational and counseling services for children with special needs.

The implications for counseling children with special needs indicate that the success of counseling services is influenced by the active involvement of parents as key partners in the assistance process. Therefore, counseling services need to be implemented through collaboration among parents, teachers, and professionals so that assistance at home and at school can be carried out continuously. Through such collaboration, counseling services are expected to optimally support children's development in communication, social interaction, independence, emotional regulation, and potential.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

The main author contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data analysis, and writing of the original draft. Dhiu Margaretha and Rosa M. Bulor contributed as supervisors by providing academic guidance, supervision, evaluation, and review and editing of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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