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## The Urgency of Environmental Adaptation Skills in Early Childhood: A Literature Review

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### **Abstract**

Early childhood children face a dynamic and constantly changing environment. The ability to adapt to the environment at this stage is an important key in their development. This research explores the urgency of environmental adaptability in early childhood in the context of their holistic development. Through a literature review, it is known that environmental adaptability influences various aspects, including cognitive, social, emotional and physical. Children who are able to adapt to their environment tend to have better social adjustment, better learning abilities, and higher levels of overall well-being. Research also highlights factors that influence the ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood, such as family support, interactions with peers, availability of resources, and personal experiences. It was found that an environment that is supportive, responsive and provides appropriate challenges can improve children's adaptive abilities. In conclusion, understanding the urgency of environmental adaptability in early childhood is important to inform effective educational and parenting practices. Interventions that strengthen early childhood adaptation abilities can provide a solid foundation for optimal development in the future. Therefore, research and practice that focus on building environmental adaptation capabilities at this stage need to be given serious attention.

**Keyword:** Environmental Adaptation; Adaptation Skills; Early Childhood; Early Childhood Education; Child Development

## 1. Introduction

In a time of expanding globalization and natural weights, people are required to have ideal natural versatility aptitudes. Adjustment isn't just almost survival but too around viably exploring and flourishing in the midst of progressively complex challenges. The ability of individuals to adapt to their environment is crucial and serves as a key determinant of success and well-being (Ilardo & Nielsen, 2018). This is particularly pertinent in the context of globalization, where human migration in response to environmental pressures, such as climate change (Leonard, 2018), is on the rise (Oakes et al., 2019).

Technological transformation and global dynamics are occurring very quickly in the current era of globalization, good achievement in the 21st century requires more than just academic knowledge. One of the key skills that forms the basis for individuals to navigate today's complexities are flexibility & adaptability (Bayley, 2022; Faber, 2017; Iwata et al., 2020). In accordance with this, Flexibility and adaptability are competencies that support individuals in career and life skills (Rakowska & de Juana-Espinosa, 2021).

In the early stages of development, children are in a phase full of discovery, exploration, and adjustment to their surrounding environment. A dynamic and constantly changing environment becomes the main stage for them to develop adaptive capabilities that are vital for holistic growth and development (Stodden et al., 2021). In the child's development phase, the ability to adapt to the environment has a central role. Child development goes through a sensitive period from the age of 0-6 years, namely when the child is at a young age. Accordance with Montessori's statement that from birth to 6 years of age, children have a high absorption capacity. During this period, children have a high ability to help children learn well and adapt to the environment on their own (Azkia & Rohman, 2020). Children have unique perceptions of the risks they face as well as different knowledge and experiences (Lawson et al., 2018).

Understanding the ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood is crucial in order to design effective intervention strategies to support children's holistic development. Children have a good ability to learn and adapt to their environment if they are given various activities as stimuli for children to learn (Azkia & Rohman, 2020). On the other hand, children with low adaptability often face difficulties in following lessons, interacting with peers, and managing stress (Bau et al., 2022). *The World Health Organization* (WHO) reports that 5-25% of preschool children experience developmental disorders. The incidence of social development problems in children in Indonesia is 13-18%. Brauner & Stephens stated that around 9.5% to 14.2% of preschool children have social problems that have a negative impact on their development and school readiness (Umami et al., 2020). This shows how important it is to develop environmental adaptability in children to support their academic success and personal development.

Thus, through a literature review, the research aims to collect and analyze the results of previous research that has been carried out in the context of the urgency of environmental adaptability in early childhood. This research provides a better

understanding of the urgency of environmental adaptability in the early stages of child development. Through a comprehensive literature review, it gets to be apparent that environmental adaptability essentially impacts various developmental domains.

## 2. Material and Method

This study uses a literature review research method. Research that analyzes and synthesizes an existing body of literature by identifying, questioning, and developing the components of a theory through an examination of several (or more) previous studies (Kraus et al., 2022; Post et al., 2020). This method was chosen because it was based on the research objective, namely reviewing 30 literature on relevant topics. This research examines primary sources from various research results originating from journals published in Indonesian and English. Data source collection methods used include keyword searches on several journal search pages, such as: Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Tylor&Francis, Frontiers, Elsevier, Springer. Researchers only cite references that are relevant to the topic of "environmental adaptation" in the last few years from 2019 to 2024. The data analysis technique for this research is Miles & Huberman analysis: (1) selecting data, (2) displaying the data, and (3) verifying the data. The research flow can be depicted in chart 1.

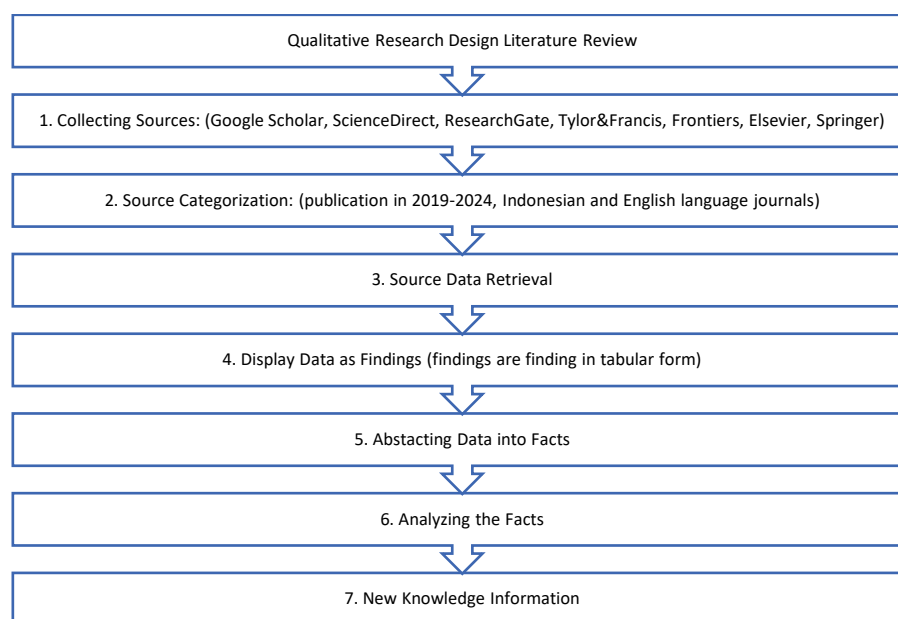


chart 1. Research Flow (Snyder, 2019)

## 3. Result

The research results are based on a literature study approach. The content of the analysis is from primary sources, namely research journals which are categorized based on year of publication from 2019 to 2024. Research findings are produced from the analysis of 30 literature. All literature comes from journal search pages including: Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Tylor&Francis, Frontiers, Elsevier, Springer. The reason for choosing 6 periods is because the researcher wants to review the latest literature on the topic being discussed. The literature studied is literature

that is relevant to the topic "The Urgency of Environmental Adaptation Ability in Early Childhood".

The implementation of the literature analysis process was carried out using a systematic review. This process consists of four stages: (1) Identify Studies: this stage is the first stage when the researcher determines the topic and research objectives. The topic studied in this research is "The Urgency of Environmental Adaptation Ability in Early Childhood", while the research objective is to examine 30 literature that are relevant to the research topic. (2) Determine disabilities of Studies: this stage is the stage of sorting and selecting which literature is relevant to the topic and which is not, so that at this stage the researcher will decide which literature will be used and which will not be used. The selected literature comes from several journal sources in the period 2019 to 2024. This process is carried out by accessing keywords relevant to the topic on the journal source page starting from Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, Tylor&Francis, Frontiers, Elsevier, Springer, then the researcher sets the journal period published in the last 6 years, namely from 2019 to 2024. (3) Abstract data from the studies: this stage is the stage where the researcher identifies 30 journal articles one by one from the results of searching several journal sources over the last six years. The identification criteria for each journal article include: journal source, year, Indonesian and English language journals, and research findings. After 30 journals were identified based on predetermined criteria, the researchers examined one by one the relevance of the research findings to the topic.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Children Environmental Adaptability**

Adaptability, defined as the ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and motivation to change or adapt to different task, social, or environmental features, is a major source of mental resources (Kodden, 2020). Environmental adaptation is the self's ability to adapt to the environment physically and cognitively. Humans can change behavior and strategies according to changing environments (Zheng Jin et al., 2018). Human adaptation is not a static or single response, but is a complex and constantly changing process (Thornton et al., 2019). This capability is critical in rapidly changing environments, such as modern organizations, and is critical to achieving sustainable results. Therefore, it is important for individuals to continue to improve their adaptability (Kodden, 2020). Environmental adaptation as a psychological construct is the way groups and individuals develop their customary and individual behavior as an adaptation to their ecological demands, because they live in a particular ecosystem (enculturation) (Leinyuy & Shiyntum, 2021). A child's ability to adapt to their environment is very important because it has an impact on various aspects of their life. Children who are able to adapt tend to have better social relationships, more effective learning abilities, and higher emotional well-being (Rambe et al., 2023).

### **4.2 Adaptability and Children Development**

Children who are able to adapt well tend to adjust more easily to changes and challenges in the environment around them. The literature states that environmental adaptability has a significant impact on children's development, described as follows.

#### **4.2.1 Kognitive Development**

Children's environmental adaptability is closely related to their cognitive development. Effective environmental adaptation encourages children to develop the cognitive skills necessary to deal with new and complex situations, thereby strengthening their overall intellectual development. According to Piaget's cognitive theory, cognitive insight is the result of adaptation to the environment and development of the brain and nervous system (Hakim & Mustafa, 2023). The ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood plays an important role in forming the basis of their cognitive (the ability to adjust one's passions to adapt to the environment) (Spinelli et al., 2021). Thus, good environmental adaptability can be the main driver in optimizing children's cognitive development. Adaptability helps children develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to face new situations. Children who are able to adapt tend to have more effective learning abilities (Rambe et al., 2023). It is known that children with a higher capacity to change perspectives and adapt to environmental changes show better mathematics and literacy performance (Magalhães et al., 2020).

#### **4.2.2 Social Development**

Adaptation and social abilities are very closely related. Adaptive children tend to get along more easily with peers and have better social skills. The adaptability of children has an influence on social development. Children who are able to adapt to the environment are beneficial in supporting children's social development (Umami et al., 2020). The ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood plays an important role in forming the basis of their social development (the ability to adjust one's passions to adapt to the environment) (Spinelli et al., 2021). Children who are able to adapt tend to have better social relationships (Rambe et al., 2023). Among children with lower levels of resilience, unsociability was significantly and positively associated with peer exclusion and internalizing problems, whereas among children with higher levels of resilience, unsociability was not associated with social adjustment difficulties (Zhu et al., 2023).

#### **4.2.3 Emotional Development**

Adaptability helps children manage their emotions better, reduces stress, and improves emotional well-being. The ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood plays an important role in forming the basis of their emotional development (the ability to adjust one's passions to adapt to the environment) (Spinelli et al., 2021). Children who are able to adapt tend to have higher emotional well-being (Rambe et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence, which is a key component of adaptation, is often expressed indirectly by young children, and can be influenced by their learning environment (Muttaqin, 2021; Sukatin et al., 2020). If the ability to adapt to the surrounding environment is less supportive, it will have an impact on oneself, resulting in emotional aspects resulting in children's low academic achievement (Mansyur, 2022; Yuli Fitria, 2022). Our findings support the buffering role of Trait Emotional Intelligence on the risk of maladaptation in children, but are even more pronounced in girls (Piqueras et al., 2019).

#### **4.2.4 Physical Motor Development**

The relationship between a child's environmental adaptability and physical motor development is very close. Children who are able to adapt well tend to be more active and brave in exploring their surrounding environment, thereby encouraging the development of their motor skills. In this developmental period, children are actively building the foundations of motor skills and which are important for interacting with the world around them (Bukvić et al., 2021). Through various types of games and physical activities, children can develop body balance, movement coordination and muscle strength (Yetti & Syarah, 2021). Children who engage in organized sports have better adaptability and mood, as well as greater emotional intelligence than those who do not (Amado-Alonso et al., 2019). Adaptation to the environment is a dynamic process involving interactions between the individual and his environment, and physical exercise plays an important role in facilitating this adaptation (Ji & Zheng, 2021). Engaging in regular physical exercise promotes the development of a variety of physical and cognitive abilities that contribute to effective adaptation to the environment (de Greeff et al., 2018; Ji & Zheng, 2021). In line with this, playing is a necessity, so it is appropriate for someone to say that playing is a child's world. Playing actively gives children the opportunity to adapt to other people and the environment and has an impact on motor development (strengthening muscles) (Sutapa et al., 2021). Through a variety of physical activities, children hone coordination, balance and muscle strength, all of which contribute to motor maturity. Thus, good environmental adaptability directly supports the improvement of children's physical motor skills. A challenging yet supportive environment encourages healthy physical development.

### **4.3 Factors that Influence Adaptability in Children**

#### **4.3.1 Family Support**

Strong family support plays an important role in influencing a child's ability to adapt to a new environment. Through love, guidance and active involvement, families can provide a sense of security and confidence needed for children to face challenges and changes in their surrounding environment. The quality of the father-child relationship is important for children's peer competence with superior emotional regulation and environmental adaptation. Therefore, educators should help improve parent-child relationships to improve emotional regulation and school adaptation (Cui et al., 2023). Fathers' positive parenting attitudes (emotional warmth and understanding or interference protection) can improve children's peer communication and social adaptability, whereas their negative parenting attitudes (punishment or refusal to deny) can hinder these abilities. For children's mental health well-being, fathers should establish positive parenting attitudes to improve their children's social adaptability and the quality of their peer relationships (Zeming Jin et al., 2023). There is a significant moderate influence between the father's role on social adaptation in early childhood (Al Adawiyah & Priyanti, 2020). Parent-child relationships positively predict learning adaptability (N. Chen et al., 2023). Having a supportive family helps children develop essential social and emotional skills, so they

can better navigate situations and form positive relationships with others around them.

In the dimension of adaptation to a foreign environment, children generally have higher scores and better ability to adapt to a foreign environment. Most young children have a better ability to adapt to unfamiliar environments. 79.1% of children can explore unfamiliar environments with the presence of their parents. 71% of children can continue their original activities in an unfamiliar environment while their parents are away for a short time. They are very happy to see their parents again and separation anxiety is less pronounced (Falck et al., 2019). Revealing the importance of school climate and teacher support for the growth and development of disadvantaged children, so that theoretically it has an important meaning in increasing the achievement motivation of disadvantaged children (Zhao et al., 2023).

#### **4.3.2 Peer Interactions**

Interaction with peers has a big influence on children's environmental adaptability. Positive relationships with peers can help children feel accepted and supported in their social environment, which in turn strengthens their self-confidence and ability to adapt to various situations. Through interactions with peers, children learn to recognize and resolve conflict, share ideas, and build communication and empathy skills. Peer interaction is a key element to enhance children's friendships and positive relationships to foster a safe and respectful classroom environment. It is true, children's friendships contribute to reducing conflict, increasing student participation, and fostering a safe and respectful classroom environment (Khalfaoui et al., 2021). Thus, healthy and positive peer relations factors play an important role in shaping children's environmental adaptability. In line with this, sociability is positively related to peer exclusion and internalizing problems (Zhu et al., 2023). Peer attachment mediates the relationship between parent-child relationship and learning adaptability (N. Chen et al., 2023). Shyness in childhood is associated with rejection or exclusion from peers; Shy children tend to be considered incompetent and deviant and are responded to with negative emotions by their peers (X. Chen, 2019).

#### **4.3.3 Availability of Resources**

Resource availability factors have a significant impact on children's environmental adaptability. Children who have access to adequate resources, such as education, health facilities, adequate nutrition, and a safe environment, tend to adapt more easily to changes and challenges in their environment. Adequate resources provide children with the safety and support necessary for exploration and learning, enabling them to develop the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills needed to adapt effectively. For example, the use of VR databases supported by SQL and Python as an effective educational tool for autistic individuals, helps them adapt to new environments (Richir et al., 2019). The use of Kinetic play sand media can be used as a medium for adapting to new environments in the preschool period because this game requires cooperation so that good and enjoyable interactions are formed for children when they are in a new environment (Umami et al., 2020). Therefore, the availability of adequate resources plays an important role in shaping children's

environmental adaptability. Implications for cultivating students' skills to be able to adapt in low-income contexts (Bayley, 2024).

#### 4.3.4 Personal Experiences

Children's personal experiences have an important role in shaping their environmental adaptability. Good or bad experiences for children will influence their ability to adapt. In research, it is stated that Third Culture Kids (TKCs) tend to have the skills to adapt to new cultures and have high cross-cultural sensitivity. A sharp increase in the number of people living cross-culturally and being mobile is pushing children to live cross-border lives on the move. They are often described as people who develop relationships with all the cultures they live in, but do not have full ownership of any of them. (Tan et al., 2021). In line with this, it is now widely known that children who are exposed to adverse life events in the first years of life have a higher risk of experiencing various neurological, behavioral and psychological sequelae, namely experiences that are expected to occur (to provide survival and adaptation to the environment) does not occur (e.g., lack of care; malnutrition) or is atypical in some respects (e.g., physical violence) (Nelson & Gabard-Durnam, 2020). Experience of early childhood education, school adaptation problems were found to be higher in students who studied in Van province and did not receive preschool education (Cokuk & Kozikoglu, 2020). Through direct experience and learning from mistakes, children develop an understanding of how to overcome new challenges and situations in their environment. Thus, personal experience factors become a strong foundation in shaping children's environmental adaptation abilities.

### 5. Conclusion, Implication, and Recommendation

Understanding the urgency of environmental adaptability in early childhood is important to inform effective educational and parenting practices. Interventions that strengthen children's adaptive abilities can provide a solid foundation for their ideal future development. Therefore, research and practice that focus on building environmental adaptation capabilities at this stage need serious attention. Further research is needed to deepen the study of environmental adaptation and develop more effective strategies in increasing the ability to adapt to the environment in early childhood.

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