

## Self-Acceptance of Parents Who Have Children with Special Needs at Benpasi State Special School

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**Abstract.** Children with special needs are children with mental, intellectual, physical, behavioral, emotional and communication limitations which can have an impact on the child's growth and development, making them different from other children their age. The importance of self-acceptance by parents of ABK in order to optimize the potential and development of ABK through the stages of acceptance according to Germer (2009), namely: Aversion, Curiosity, Tolerance, Allowing, Friendship. This research aims to describe the self-acceptance process of parents who have ABK at SLBN Benpasi. The research design uses a qualitative research approach with phenomenology with 5 subjects based on criteria determined using a purposive sampling technique. The data collected was analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological analysis techniques and produced 3 main themes, namely, the challenge of acceptance, the process of facing reality, and coming to terms with reality. The process of self-acceptance by ABK parents experienced a positive acceptance process. Each participant was successful and able to go through each process well in different ways.

**Keywords:** *self-acceptance, parents, children with special needs*

**Abstrak.** Anak berkebutuhan khusus adalah anak-anak dengan keterbatasan secara mental, intelektual, fisik, perilaku, emosional, dan komunikasi yang dapat berdampak pada pertumbuhan dan perkembangan anak tersebut, sehingga berbeda dengan anak lain seusianya. Penting adanya penerimaan diri orang tua ABK untuk dapat mengoptimalkan potensi dan perkembangan ABK melalui tahapan penerimaan menurut Germer (2009) yaitu: *Aversion, Curiosity, Tolerance, Allowing, Friendship*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tentang proses penerimaan diri orang tua yang memiliki ABK di SLBN Benpasi. Desain penelitian menggunakan penelitian kualitatif pendekatan fenomenologi dengan 5 subjek berdasarkan kriteria yang ditentukan menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data-data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis fenomenologi hermeneutik dan dihasilkan 3 tema utama yakni, tantangan penerimaan, proses menghadapi kenyataan, dan berdamai dengan kenyataan. Proses penerimaan diri orang tua ABK mengalami proses penerimaan yang positif. Setiap partisipan berhasil dan mampu melalui setiap proses dengan baik dengan cara yang berbeda-beda.

**Kata kunci:** *Penerimaan Diri, Orang Tua, Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus*

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## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of children with disabilities (ABK) is no longer unfamiliar. According to the findings from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), international data indicates that 42 out of 240 million children worldwide have disabilities (Luthi, 2021). In Indonesia, statistical data from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture shows that, as of 2021, 3.3% of children aged 5-19 years have disabilities, representing a population of 66.6 million people. This results in an estimated 2,197,833 children with disabilities in Indonesia (Novrizaldi, 2022).

Data from the 2020 Long Form Population Census, provided by the East Nusa Tenggara Province Central Statistics Agency (Kale, Souri, Abel, Raga, 2023), shows that there were 14,649 children with disabilities aged 5-19 years in East Nusa Tenggara Province as of 2020. In Kupang City, the number was 2,753; in East Flores Regency, 2,686; in South Central Timor Regency, 3,949; in Belu Regency, 2,323; and in North Central Timor Regency, 2,938.

At the Benpasi State Special School in TTU Regency, NTT Province, the number of students with disabilities in 2023 was 125, including 59 elementary school students, 53 middle school students, and 13 high school students. This data illustrates that the number of children with disabilities who have received inclusive education in TTU Regency is significantly smaller compared to those who have not.

For this reason, Darmono (2015) stated that it is important to accept the self-acceptance of parents who have ABK in order to optimize the potential of ABK in the

family, because parents are the main coaches and educators of ABK so that parents in particular have a big role in the development of ABK, the main companions of ABK, advocate for the rights of ABK, source of information regarding the condition of ABK, education of ABK and observer of the characteristics of ABK.

The role of parents is very large in handling ABK, so Heward (in Trisnadewi, 2023) stated that the success of handling for ABK is very much determined by the role and full support of the family, especially parents. This is supported by previous research by Refiany, Rafli and Rusli (2023) which found that as parents of ABK, you should always provide social support to your children. The most important source of strength for ABK is support from parents.

Seeing the importance of parental acceptance in optimizing the potential of ABK, the author was interested in conducting research on "Self-Acceptance of Parents Who Have Children with Special Needs (ABK) at the Benpasi State Special School".

### **Method**

This method of research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research according to (Safarudin, Zulfania, Kustati, Sepriyanti (2023) is a type of educational research in which researchers rely on the perspective of participants or informants. The phenomenological approach is an approach model in qualitative research that describes a person's experience or more about a phenomenon, with a focus on the way individuals interact with the world of that phenomenon (Hanurawan, 2016). The participants in this research were parents of children with special needs at the Benpasi state special school. There were five research participants, each representing five characteristics of special needs at SLBN Benpasi. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is a sample collection method using certain considerations and through predetermined participant criteria, namely:

- 1) parents who have children with special needs at SLBN Benpasi,

- 2) biological parents, fathers or mothers who have direct involvement with the child (not a caregiver) and understanding and following the child's growth and development,
- 3) able to speak Indonesian well,
- 4) willing to sign informed consent.

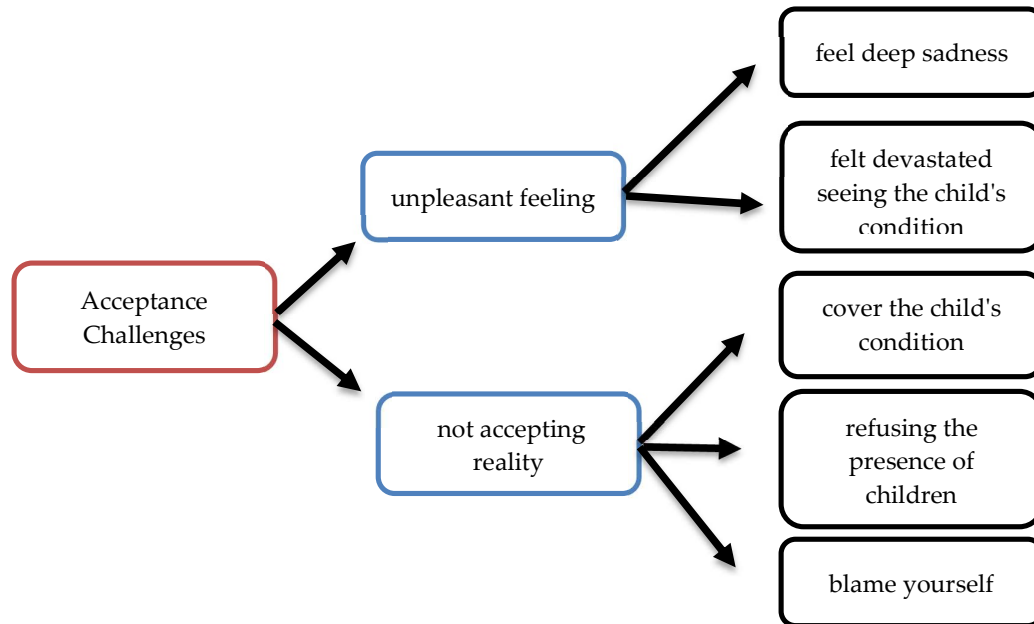
Data collection techniques in this research used in-depth interviews. The data analysis technique in this research uses hermeneutic phenomenological analysis techniques (Creswell, 2014). The steps in hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis are:

- 1) structural description; search for and find interesting phenomena that are suitable for this data analysis technique.
- 2) horizontalization; find statements about how this phenomenon can occur using in-depth interviews.
- 3) clusters of meaning; grouping interview results in verbatim interview form and grouped based on themes and sub-themes or other units of meaning.
- 4) essential structure invariants; focus on the unit of meaning, then describe it.

## **Result**

The aim to be achieved in this research is to describe the self-acceptance process of parents who have children with special needs (ABK) at the Benpasi State Special School. The process of self-acceptance for parents who have ABK at SLBN Benpasi experienced a positive acceptance process. Based on Germer's theory, the five participants were able to go through the process of self-acceptance well, namely through stages such as avoidance, curiosity, tolerance, allowing and friendship, which were shown in three main themes, namely the challenge of acceptance, the process of facing reality, and making peace with reality.

### Theme 1 Acceptance Challenges



Acceptance challenges in the context of parents who have children with special needs, refer to various things that make it difficult for parents to accept children's conditions that do not meet expectations. When a child is born or in the process of development experiences obstacles and is categorized as having special needs, parents react in the form of:

a) Unpleasant Feeling

Unpleasant feelings are disturbing negative emotions and are usually expressed as a person's dislike of something. In the context of parents who have children with special needs, unpleasant feelings arise such as anger, guilt, sadness, fear, disappointment, and other negative emotional expressions due to parents' dislike or non-acceptance when they find out that their child has special needs and are expressed as a form of dislike. and parents' non-acceptance of the child's condition.

This was felt by participants who have children with special needs and was expressed as follows:

*"Ouch, sister, the first time I realized he is not like children his age, I am very sad."*

*"I feel completely devastated. No parent wants to see their child having a deficiency like this. I am very sad.."*

*"...people talking about it made me so angry and frustrated. I was really hurt, sad, and kept yelling at everyone."*

*"I was afraid when I was born. My mind was disturbed. My hand is missing, and my private part is like this, so I was thinking about it."*

*"We actually feel burdened. It's sad to see our child in this condition, so slow compared to other children of the same age... it's really heartbreaking. It hurts."*

b) Not Accepting Reality

Not accepting reality is a condition when someone ignores the facts that occur, especially when these facts do not match their expectations. It cannot be denied that parents who have children with special needs will have reactions that do not accept reality, such as rejecting the child's presence, feeling embarrassed because of the child's condition, blaming themselves and avoiding or trying to cover up the fact that they have a child with special needs. This was expressed by participants as follows:

*"There was once a remark from outside like this: "Oh, poor child, they're deaf, can't speak, and the husband runs away, leaving them behind." That really hurt my feelings, and I didn't want to leave the house either. I even blamed myself, thinking maybe this is God's way of correcting me.."*

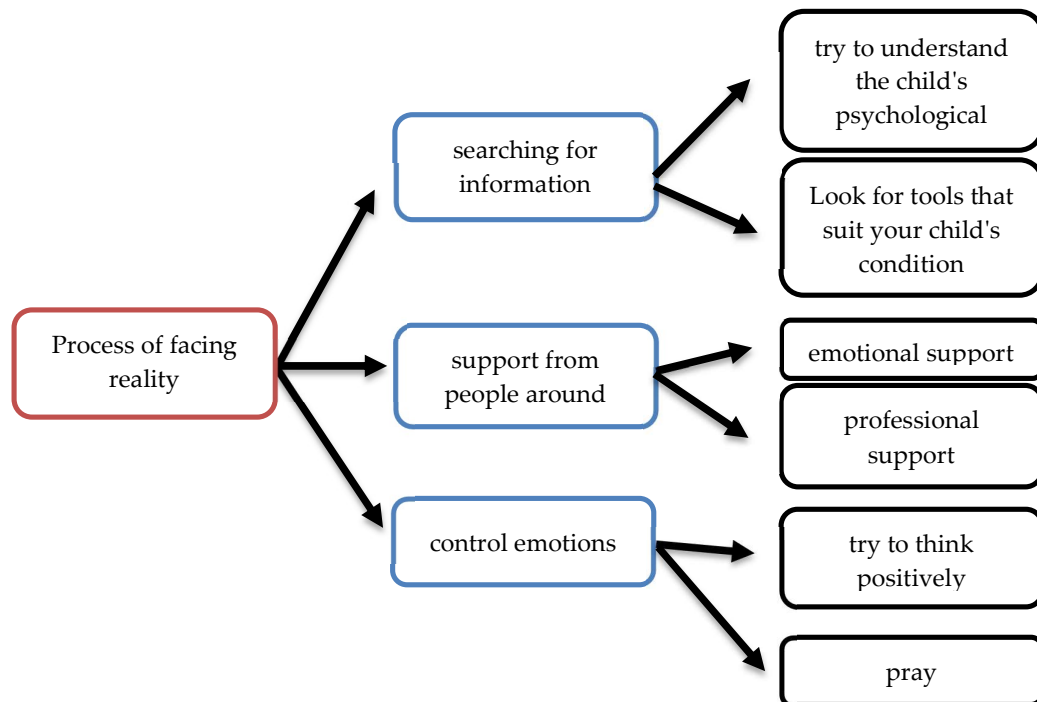
*"...if people ask where does he/she go to school? I can't answer if he/she goes to SDLB (Special School for Children with Disabilities). If people say, 'Is he/she in junior high or senior high?' I say he/she is in junior high. I just don't feel ready to say he/she goes to SDLB,*

*because people will immediately assume that he/she must be disabled, that's why he/she goes there.."*

*"At first, I wanted to abandon him, but in the end, the nurse came and said to let the child live. I didn't want the child to be born like that. I was scared to see him at first. I was really confused. I didn't want to look at him, just the thought of it. At first, I wanted to abandon him, but I didn't go through with it.."*

Based on this statement, it can be seen that the participants expressed deep feelings of sadness and felt devastated, angry and frustrated when they found out that the participants' children had special needs. Participants also expressed that they did not accept reality, such as trying to cover up the crew member's condition, rejecting the presence of the crew member who did not meet expectations and blaming themselves for mistakes made in the past which caused the crew member to be born with this condition.

### Theme 2 Process of facing reality



a) Searching For Information

The process of seeking information is a process that parents of ABK go through in facing reality by digging in-depth information about the condition of their ABK. In the process of searching for information, participants emerged who were highly curious and also those who did not want to look for it at all. Look for information so that participants know the extent of their child's condition or whether there is anything else that can help their child. This was also expressed by participants as follows:

*“At that time, the school was providing hearing aids as well. I found out what it was, and it turned out to be very helpful for children with hearing impairments. However, according to the school, this was only available for families who could afford it, so I couldn't receive assistance for the hearing aid. I found out from the school that I should contact a doctor in Kupang. I took my child to Kupang to find the hearing aid. But the price was also quite high, but I did everything I could for my child..”*

*“I took him to the eye doctor for a check-up, and after that, we found out that this child needs to check his eyes every month because as he grows older, his eyesight is changing. They said his eyes need to be checked every month. He doesn't have nearsightedness, it's just to check his focus. That's all. Because if he doesn't wear glasses, he might bump into things while walking. If the light is bright like this, he can't see. The light also affects his focus. So, if we want to walk and move faster, we have to hold him, otherwise, he'll keep bumping into things and falling.”*

b) Support From People Around

Support from people around you is a form of attention, appreciation and assistance provided by people closest to you such as partners, family, friends and the surrounding community. The form of support from people around them received by participants was in the form of emotional support and professional support. This emotional support takes the form of active listening and providing appropriate advice.



Meanwhile, professional support takes the form of assistance provided by an expert in the field or medical assistance that addresses mental or physical health problems such as doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists. This was also expressed by participants as follows:

*“Since I was little until I have children now, my parents have never abandoned me. That’s what keeps me going for my children, because even though I make many mistakes and disappoint them, my mom and dad still accept me and have always been by my side until now.”*

*“Friends who said it’s okay to accept him. The family as well, my mother gave me strength. My husband also said to just accept him. His father has passed away. He passed away. The one now is his second father. The priest and nun also said to take care of him. They said just take care of this child because this child brings blessings..”*

*“The family that always supports. My husband, my children, they know that this sibling is blind, but they show that they love this sibling.”*

c) Control Emotions

Controlling emotions is a condition when parents try to avoid expressing negative emotions that arise. When they receive negative things from the environment such as ridicule and insults, parents will try to control negative emotions and try to think positively and pray for spiritual strength from God. This was also expressed by participants as follows:

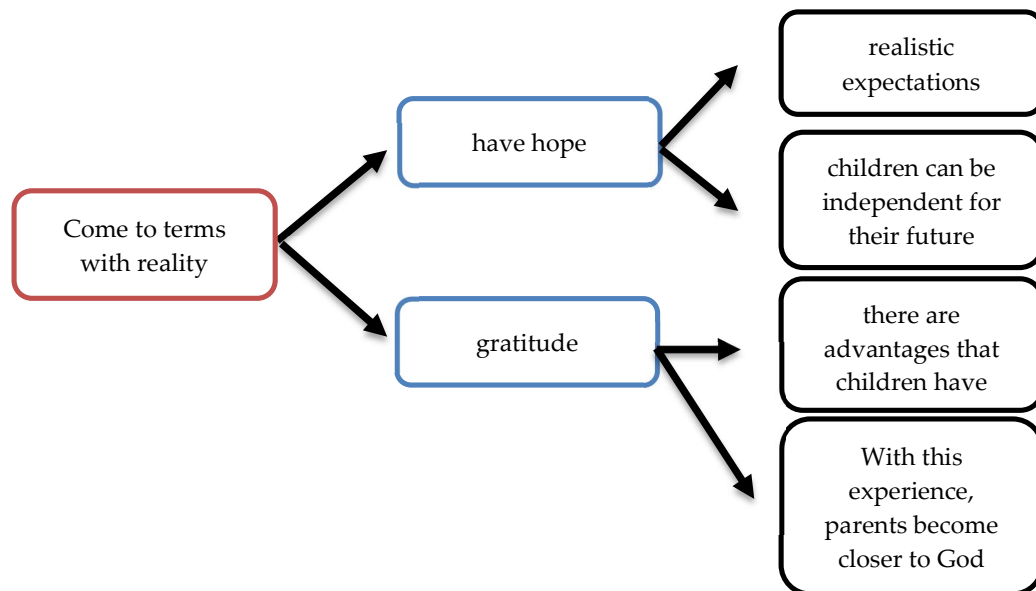
*“People, when they talk, I just smile. I just accept it. I always pray, “Lord, may You strengthen my heart to always be patient.” Sad, of course, I feel sad. Before, I could cry in front of people. Now, if I want to cry, I cry only in prayer. I believe the Lord will see and hear my prayers.”*

*“When people around here started to know that my child is blind and goes to a special needs school (SLB), I used to feel very ashamed to say it. But now, I am proud that my child goes to SLB because there, he has the chance to develop. There are many things he can now do. I always say this: maybe you think SLB is just for people with*

*disabilities, but try going there and see for yourself. Outside, people might look down on them, but inside, they have many hidden talents..”*

Based on this statement, participants revealed that participants looked for information by trying to understand the psychological condition of ABK and looking for information about tools that could help ABK according to ABK's condition. In the process of facing this reality, participants received support in the form of emotional support in the form of being listened to and given appropriate advice from family and friends, while the professional support they received was in the form of assistance provided by medical personnel such as doctors. Apart from that, in the process of facing reality, participants can control the negative emotions that arise by trying to think positively and asking God for spiritual strength through prayer.

### Theme 3 Come To Terms with Reality



#### a) Have Hope

Having hope is when participants feel that there is hope for the future for their child with special needs. Not expecting to be normal, but expecting to be better than the current condition and be able to live

independently with existing limitations. This was expressed by participants as follows:

*"Yes, my hope for him is that before I die, he will have a job. He can work for himself, for his own future, without me. That's all."*

*"He can read, he can write, and his dream is to become a singer. So, he likes singing. I hope that with the existence of this school, it can help him, even though he's not perfect, but there can be some positive changes for him."*

b) Gratitude

Gratitude is an expression of gratitude for all the blessings and gifts that have been given by God. Being grateful for parents who have ABK and have accepted their child's condition means that parents learn to see the positive side in everyday life. This includes gratitude for the child's existence, happiness in small moments, as well as recognition of the support received from those around him. This was expressed by participants as follows:

*"Yes, I am grateful because she is always healthy. Even though she doesn't work or help me with anything, the important thing is that she is healthy. She has gone to school up to high school without any school fees, and she has become independent. The teachers at school also say that she is quite smart. She also likes to play on the laptop, she said. But I haven't been able to afford one yet, so she usually uses the school laptop. She can use a phone with her feet. She also went to sing at church earlier. She joins in. Whatever the teachers say, she joins in. She is independent, but by independent, I mean she is not working for money, but she can take care of herself. She can manage herself, do her own laundry, and take care of everything by herself. But when it comes to earning money or buying things, I still buy them for her. She likes to go to church, to pray, and pray the rosary. Despite her condition, she is enthusiastic about praying and grows up in a good environment.."*

Based on this statement, participants revealed that they did not expect ABK to become normal or change to be perfect, but hoped that ABK could live

independently for a better future. Participants also expressed feelings of gratitude because despite their limitations, ABK had advantages. Parents also feel grateful because they are given the opportunity to experience the valuable experience of having ABK which makes parents feel closer to God through prayer and gratitude every day.

### **Discussion**

This research aims to describe the self-acceptance process of parents who have children with special needs at the Benpasi State Special School, using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach. Based on the results of the analysis, 3 main themes were found, namely the challenge of acceptance, the process of facing reality, and making peace with reality. Acceptance challenges are various things that can make parents of ABK find it difficult to accept their child's condition which does not match the family's expectations. This acceptance challenge refers to feeling unpleasant and not accepting reality. When parents hope for the birth of a perfect child without physical or psychological deficiencies, but in fact the child is born with developmental problems and falls into the category of special needs, this is a challenge that must be faced by parents of ABK.

According to Garmer's (2009) theory, the initial stage in the process of self-acceptance is aversion or avoidance. In this stage, individuals when faced with situations that do not meet expectations will produce uncomfortable reactions, unpleasant feelings and avoid reality. Individuals will try to cover up negative events that occur by avoiding them. Based on this theory, it was found in the results of participant interviews that when they found out that children were born with special needs, participants reacted with sadness, anger, covered up the child's condition and rejected the presence of ABK. Participants also expressed rejection and did not accept the presence of crew members. This is in line with research conducted by Syaputri & Afriza (2022). The expressions of participants in this research show that before reaching the stage of self-acceptance, a person will feel a great inner war with himself,

which is shown by attitudes of rejection, disbelief, sadness, disappointment and anger towards the situation he is experiencing. This is a challenge and the first step that parents of ABK must go through to be able to make peace with themselves, accept all the shortcomings, uniqueness and advantages that ABK have with grace towards a happy life (Wardani, 2023).

Subsequent research also confirmed the results of participant interviews that parents' initial reactions when they found out that their child had special needs were shock, sadness, anger, disbelief, sadness, embarrassment, feeling very disappointed because their child was classified as having special needs and did not match what the parents expected. previously. It is not easy for parents to sincerely accept their child's condition. Parents go through several phases to reach the acceptance stage (Islami & Ansyah, 2020). To reach the acceptance stage, parents go through a process of accepting reality where in this process parents will have experiences full of inner war. When they find out that a child has special needs, parents will feel curious and look for information about the child's condition. The process of seeking information is a person's action to dig up in-depth information about events that have happened to them (Okemo et al, 2020). Individuals in this stage will investigate an important event to get more information about what has happened, even if it makes them feel stressed (Germer in Samawati and Nurchayati, 2021).

Based on the results of participant interviews, it was revealed that as parents who have ABK, participants felt curious and sought information about the conditions experienced by their children by finding out the child's psychological condition, connecting the child with medical personnel regarding the child's condition, trying to understand the condition of the ABK and connecting the child with inclusive schools for better child development. Participants seek information or learn about their child's condition through parties who have more knowledge such as special school teachers or doctors. The theory of the self-acceptance stage of curiosity by Germer (2009) explains that at this stage individuals will experience curiosity about the conditions and situations they face by learning more about the condition of ABK in other people

even though this will have the effect of excessive anxiety. In contrast to the interview results, participants did not express feelings of anxiety when looking for information about the condition of the crew members and feeling significantly more relieved and calmer because it turned out that there was help for the conditions experienced by the crew members, both physically and psychologically.

When parents know that there are tools that can support the development of children with disabilities and understand the psychological conditions of children with disabilities, parents feel calmer and relieved in facing daily challenges. This understanding not only gives parents hope, but also strengthens their belief in their child's potential to adapt and develop optimally, thereby reducing feelings of anxiety and stress that generally arise due to uncertainty in caring for children with special needs (Kusumastuti & Winta 2023). This is in line with previous research which states that when parents receive information and understand that ABK can achieve good and optimal growth because of good treatment support from therapists and child psychologists, parents tend to feel various positive emotions such as: gratitude and hope, a sense of relief and reduced stress, as well as increased self-confidence as a parent (Khasanah & Hidayah, 2023).

Support from people around is a form of attention, appreciation and assistance given by people closest to them to help ABK parents who are in the process of facing the challenges of having ABK. Support from people around them such as partners, family and friends can make ABK parents feel better and try to accept the reality of what is happening. The form of support from people around them received by participants was in the form of emotional support and professional support. Emotional support such as active listening and giving appropriate advice. Meanwhile, professional support such as assistance provided by doctors. This makes participants stronger because they do not feel alone in facing situations that do not meet expectations. In contrast to Germer's self-acceptance process theory, there were no stages of support from people around or social support. However, the participants' statements in the interviews were supported by previous research which stated that

the support of people around them, especially family support, can be a support for parents of ABK.

Individuals who have high social support will be more successful in facing and overcoming problems compared to individuals who do not have social support (Rusdiana 2018). Social support from family and those closest to them can influence the self-acceptance of parents who have ABK. The higher the social support received, the better the self-acceptance of ABK parents (Elisa & Girindani, 2022). Family support, namely parents, partners and siblings in the form of information support, instrumental support, emotional support and material support can influence individuals with ABK to have positive self-acceptance. If this is not done by the family, it will cause the individual to have negative self-acceptance and the child can be neglected (Twistiandayani & Ratnahandika, 2015).

In the process of facing the reality that parents of children with special needs (ABK) go through, they inevitably encounter ridicule, insults, negative expressions, and other forms of unpleasant treatment. Participants revealed that when faced with such ridicule and insults, they attempt to respond positively. Their strategies include using the ridicule as motivation, cultivating positive thoughts, adopting a "completely ignorant" attitude toward the insults, praying, or seeking spiritual support from the Creator to increase their patience. Achieving good self-acceptance requires effective emotional management or emotional control by parents. Individuals who can manage their emotions well are often characterized by good self-acceptance (Hasibuan & Sahputra, 2023). This is supported by subsequent research, which suggests that patience is a form of self-control, involving restraint of one's words and avoiding complaints in the face of adversity (Moawad in Sumarno et al., 2023). According to Germer's (2009) self-acceptance stage theory, individuals at the tolerance stage endure unpleasant feelings while maintaining hope that their current situation will improve. Further supporting this, Catama, Del Castillo, Espino, et al. (2017) emphasized that hope is a vital source of self-acceptance. Despite the obstacles

and challenges they face, hope and trust in God, which serve as the main sources of joy through prayer, help individuals experience calm and peace in their lives.

After participants went through the process of facing this reality, participants entered the acceptance stage, which was indicated by participants having hope and feeling grateful for their experience as parents of ABK. Based on the results of the interview, participants revealed that they had hopes for the future for their crew members. Not expecting to be normal, but expecting to be better than the current condition and be able to live independently with existing limitations. Realistic expectations are expectations that are based on reality, taking into account capabilities, limitations and external factors.

The expectations formed by parents can influence parents' parenting behavior towards their children. When realistic expectations are formed, the parenting behavior provided by parents is adjusted to the child's needs (Nur & Jafar, 2022). With realistic expectations, ABK parents can more easily find gratitude in every progress achieved and appreciate the ongoing process. ABK parents will easily see the advantages their children have and make the process they have gone through as a valuable experience from God. This strengthens the concept of the Friendship acceptance stage theory by Germer (2009) which states that at the stage of accepting this situation, the individual will recover from the unpleasant feeling and be able to make peace and accept the situation that has happened to him by feeling grateful for the benefits obtained from the situation.

Gratitude for ABK parents can be shown in one way, namely appreciation for the child's condition and focusing on the positive side behind parenting difficulties. Being grateful is an important thing that parents of ABK must have because being grateful can make life more satisfying and avoid emotions, disappointment and frustration (Nura & Sari, 2018). This is supported by previous research which states that gratitude has a very important role in self-acceptance by parents of ABK. Finding gratitude in seeing ABK's strengths can help parents appreciate every precious moment, thus increasing self-acceptance and giving them



the strength to continue their journey with better ABK (Partini et al, 2023) Research conducted by Tekola, Kinfu, Bayouh et al (2022) in Ethiopia also shows that parents feel more grateful when they experience the process of self-acceptance by having ABK. Parents also feel more grateful for the blessings that God has given, which has an impact on the parents' positive outlook, and are more focused on looking at the abilities of ABK, and trying to optimize the development of ABK.

### **Conclusion**

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that in the process of self-acceptance by parents who have children with special needs at SLBN Benpasi, the five participants went through a good self-acceptance process, namely through stages such as avoidance, curiosity, tolerance, permission and friendship, which are shown in The three main themes are the challenge of acceptance, the process of facing reality, and coming to terms with reality. In the acceptance challenge, participants expressed unpleasant feelings such as feeling deep sadness and feeling devastated by the ABK's condition, as well as not accepting reality such as covering up the ABK's condition, rejecting the ABK's presence, and blaming themselves.

After that, participants went through a process of facing reality, namely seeking information about the condition of the crew members, getting emotional and professional support from those closest to them, and being able to control their emotions well through prayer and trying to think positively, to be able to reach the stage of making peace with the reality shown by the participants. have realistic expectations regarding the development of crew members, and be grateful for the advantages that crew members have. Even though each participant reached each stage in a different way, each participant was successful and able to accept the situation they faced.

Based on literature research conducted by the author, several interesting new findings were found. The author found that parents of children with special needs in

the process of facing reality did not express feelings of anxiety when looking for information about ABK, but felt feeling significantly more relieved and calmer because the parents knew what the psychological condition of ABK was and tried to learn about this condition, and knew that there were tools that could help. crew activities are getting better.

This research also found that emotional support such as parents feeling actively heard and getting the right advice, as well as professional support such as help provided by a doctor, can help parents go through the process of self-acceptance well. This is because the support received from the surrounding environment, including from family, friends and partners, contributes to parents' ability to achieve positive self-acceptance.

Parents also expressed their gratitude because the condition of ABK they had was considered better compared to the condition of other ABK, which could increase parents' sense of self-acceptance, as well as strengthen emotional ties with their children, so that parents could go through the process of self-acceptance more optimally and full of hope.

### *Suggestion*

For parents, it is recommended to joining group counseling with other children with special needs parents can also provide valuable support and information exchange, enhancing self-acceptance. Actively seeking resources and knowledge on children with special needs can improve parents' confidence and acceptance, and professional help should be sought if needed.

For the school, creating supportive programs for parents, such as training on children's needs and support groups, can foster an inclusive atmosphere that benefits both parents and children.

Future research should explore the stages of parental acceptance and the factors that aid parents in overcoming challenges, providing insights for better support programs.

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