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The Influence of the Family Environment on the Development of Children with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically examine the influence of the family environment on the development of children with intellectual disabilities by reviewing the latest literature from the past five years. The family environment is a fundamental aspect in shaping the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of children with intellectual disabilities who require special intervention. The research method used a systematic literature review (SLR) with a selection process from various national and international journal databases that met the inclusion criteria. A total of 12 selected scientific articles were analyzed to identify the main family factors that impact the development of children with intellectual disabilities, including emotional support, parenting styles, socioeconomic conditions, and levels of parenting stress. The review findings indicate that a warm and supportive family environment significantly contributes to enhancing the independence, social skills, and psychological well-being of children with intellectual disabilities. Conversely, high levels of parenting stress and limited family social support represent significant barriers to child development. This study emphasizes the importance of the family's role in designing holistic interventions and adaptive parenting strategies to support the optimal development of children with intellectual disabilities. The implications of the research findings can serve as a reference for practitioners, educators, and policymakers in improving the quality of life for children with special needs.

Keywords: Intellectual disability; family environment; child development; systematic literature review; family support

1. Introduction

Child development is a process heavily influenced by various factors, including biological, psychological, and social aspects. Among social factors, the family environment plays a crucial role as the primary agent in providing basic needs, emotional support, and care that foster a child's optimal growth. Children with intellectual disabilities, as one group of children with special needs, require special attention—particularly from a family environment capable of providing support, stimulation, and effective stress management.

Intellectual disability is a condition in which a child experiences developmental delays that fall within the autism and intellectual disability spectrum. These limitations cause the child to face challenges in cognitive, communication, and social aspects, thus requiring comprehensive intervention from both the family and professionals. In this context, the family

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environment serves not only as a place of protection and affection but also as a determining factor in the success of the child's potential development. Emotional support, parenting styles, and the stability of the family environment play a significant role in influencing the learning process and social development of children with intellectual disabilities.

Several studies indicate that families capable of providing a supportive atmosphere and integrating appropriate interventions have a positive impact on enhancing the child's independence, communication skills, and readiness to navigate social life. Conversely, an unstable environment, high stress levels, and a lack of support can exacerbate the developmental challenges faced by children with intellectual disabilities.

However, there remain various challenges in comprehensively understanding how specific family environmental factors influence the developmental aspects of children with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, it is important to conduct a systematic review of the latest literature to obtain a complete picture of the influence of the family environment on children with intellectual disabilities, as well as the factors that act as facilitators and barriers in this process. Consequently, this study serves as a systematic literature review to identify and analyze the latest findings related to the role of the family environment in the development of children with intellectual disabilities.

2. Method

The method used for this study is the *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)*. A systematic literature review is the process of collecting, evaluating, integrating, and presenting search results in a critical and systematic manner. This study followed the procedures outlined in the steps below.

1. Formulating Research Questions

   This study addressed the following two research questions:
   a. What is the role of the family in the development of children with intellectual disabilities?
   b. What challenges do families face in understanding children with intellectual disabilities?

2. Searching for References (Studies)

   The literature search for this study utilized various indexed international journal articles. The keywords used in the literature search included intellectual disability, family environment, child development, systematic literature review, and family support

3. Selecting references

The author reviewed the abstracts and identified the relevance of variables or issues to the research keywords. Relevant journal articles were selected for in-depth analysis to address the research questions. The following is a list of articles used in this *Systematic Literature Review*.

No.	Question	Source	Author, year of publication	Title
1.	What is the role of the family in the development of children with intellectual disabilities?	*National Library of Medicine 27;29*	*J Intellectual Disabilities, 2024*	*Psychological interventions for parents of children with intellectual disabilities to enhance child behavioral outcomes or parental well-being: A systematic review, content analysis, and effects*
		Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal (MICJO), 1(4)	Mafarrikhah Rahmah Maulidi, S., & Harsiwi, N. E. (2024).	Parents' Awareness of Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Regular Elementary Schools
		Medialog Journal of Communication Sciences 4(1)	Amalia Lathifah Hidayat (2021)	The Role of Family Communication in the Independence of Children with Intellectual Disabilities at the Rumah Bersama Foundation
		Taujihat: Journal of Islamic Guidance and Counseling 3(2)	Anisa, Ida Suryani, et al. (2022)	Parental Strategies for Enhancing the Independence of Children with Intellectual Disabilities at the Untung Tuah Special Education School in Samarinda
		SJ Impact Factor 7.538 12(5)	*Mary Therese A (2024)*	*Investigating the Child Development of Learners with Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Education*
2.	The Challenges Families Face in Understanding Children with Intellectual Disabilities	IHSAN Journal of Islamic Education 3(3)	Ratna Pangastuti (2025)	The Role of Early Intervention and Consistent Stimulation in Supporting the Development of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

		Taylor and Francis Disability and Rehabilitation 41(21)	*Christina Okyere (2019)*	*Implementation of Inclusive Education for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in African Countries: A Scoping Review*
		Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities 38(1)	*Emma Scripps, Daniel Sutherland (2025)*	*Supporting Parents of Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Review of Interventions*
		Insight Psychology Journal, Department of Psychology 5(1) 79–86	Starry Kireida Kusnadi, Nur Imayanti, et al. (2021)	The Relationship Between Family Support and *Psychological* Well-Being in Parents of Children with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities
		Jumper: Journal of Educational Multidisciplinary Research 2(2)	Arda Tonara (2023)	The Role of the Family in the Level of Personal *Hygiene* Independence of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

4. Extracting data

   Using a form to filter and record what is interesting and needs to be revealed from the study

5. Analyzing and presenting the results

   After compiling the articles, the author conducted an analysis using the obtained data, which was then summarized and grouped according to the research questions

6. Interpreting the Results

   Incorporating answers based on the results of the analysis and grouping of the questions that were raised, and organizing them into paragraphs

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The results of the systematic literature review indicate that the family environment makes a highly significant contribution to the multidimensional development of children with intellectual disabilities, including cognitive, social, emotional, and motor aspects. A number of studies confirm that family support manifested through effective communication patterns, adaptive parenting strategies, and psychosocial stability plays an essential role in fostering independence and enhancing the psychological well-being of children with intellectual disabilities. A family environment that is responsive to the child's individual needs has been shown to facilitate a more optimal and sustainable developmental process.

The intensity and quality of intrafamilial communication are key determinants in developing the independence of children with intellectual disabilities. Communication patterns that emphasize open dialogue and internal family harmony significantly contribute to increased self-confidence, adaptability, and children's participation in daily activities. These findings confirm that warm and egalitarian communication within the family has a positive correlation with the development of adaptive behaviors and social competence in children with intellectual disabilities.

In addition to communication, family social support also plays a crucial role in reducing the level of parenting stress experienced by parents. Various empirical studies report that psychological stress among mothers of children with intellectual disabilities increased significantly during the pandemic, highlighting the importance of family-based interventions and ongoing psychosocial support. Emotional, instrumental, and informational support from the family environment has been shown to be a protective factor for parents' mental health while improving the quality of caregiving.

Furthermore, parenting strategies implemented gradually based on collaboration between parents and educators and emphasizing non-coercive principles have proven effective in strengthening the independence of children with intellectual disabilities. The success of these strategies depends heavily on the consistency and involvement of all family members in the caregiving process at home and at school. Family socioeconomic factors also act as moderating variables in the effectiveness of social support and stress reduction, with families of lower economic status requiring a higher level of support.

In addition to psychosocial aspects, the family environment also contributes significantly to the physical development of children with intellectual disabilities. Active family participation in children's physical activities has been shown to improve physical fitness and basic motor skills. Research findings on the implementation of bocce and balance activities show a significant improvement in the fine and gross motor skills of children with mild intellectual disabilities, which has a positive impact on their readiness for learning activities and daily life.

3.2 Discussion

However, limited special education resources and a lack of curriculum adaptation in special schools remain structural barriers that families face in optimizing support for children with intellectual disabilities. These conditions require greater family involvement through individualized approaches and the strengthening of internal social support. Therefore, integrated interventions involving families, educational institutions, and the community are an urgent need in the context of inclusive education.

Overall, these findings confirm that a harmonious, adaptive, and supportive family environment is the cornerstone of holistic development for children with intellectual disabilities. Efforts to improve communication, strengthen emotional support, and manage parenting stress should be prioritized in family-based interventions. Collaborative synergy among families, schools, and communities is expected to create a social ecosystem conducive to the optimal development of children with intellectual disabilities psychologically, socially, and academically.

4. Conclusion

The family environment plays a vital role in the development of children with intellectual disabilities. Emotional support, effective family communication, adaptive parenting styles, and the family's social and economic stability have been shown to significantly influence children's cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development. A warm and supportive family environment can enhance a child's independence, strengthen psychological well-being, and reduce parenting stress levels. Conversely, high stress levels and a lack of support within the family can hinder the development of children with intellectual disabilities.

Collaborative parenting strategies between parents and educators, supported by a conducive family environment, are highly effective in supporting the development of children with these special needs. Social support for parents is also crucial for maintaining their mental health and their ability to provide optimal care. Family-supported physical activities also contribute to children's health and motor development.

Overall, holistic family-based interventions involving education, psychosocial support, and the active participation of family members are key to supporting the optimal development of children with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, collaboration among families, schools, and the community is essential for creating an inclusive environment that supports the comprehensive growth and quality of life of children with intellectual disabilities.

This conclusion underscores that the family environment is the primary foundation that must be strengthened to optimize the development of children with intellectual disabilities across all dimensions of life.

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