

Parental Perspectives Limit Disabled Children's Future in Indonesia Higher Education

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Abstract

Ensuring equitable access to education for children with disabilities (CWD) is essential to maintaining their fundamental right to learning. Despite strides made in inclusive education, there remains a need for more cohesive efforts, as evidenced by a review in other research mentioning the lack of readiness and management. This research explores the factors influencing parents' intentions regarding the pursuit of higher education for their disabled children, framed within the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to explain the underlying behavioral drivers. The study indicates that parental attitudes play a significant role in shaping these intentions, with knowledge as a background factor, showing a moderate significance level. Emphasizing the pivotal role of cultivating positive attitudes towards inclusive higher education, the study underscores the critical importance of parental awareness regarding disability inclusion in higher education. Accordingly, efforts to strengthen parental understanding of inclusive education options are essential. The study advocates for collaborative actions between parents and educational institutions to establish nurturing and inclusive learning environments for disabled students. Its findings highlight the necessity for targeted interventions through communication strategy to enhance parental awareness and foster positive attitudes towards inclusive education, thus driving the accessibility and quality of education for CWD.

Keywords: Disability inclusion; higher education; parental perspectives; TRA; communication strategy

Abstrak

Memastikan akses yang setara terhadap pendidikan bagi anak-anak dengan disabilitas sangat penting untuk mempertahankan hak dasar mereka untuk belajar. Meskipun telah ada kemajuan dalam pendidikan inklusif, masih ada kebutuhan akan upaya yang lebih terkoordinasi, seperti yang dibuktikan oleh tinjauan dalam penelitian lain yang menyebutkan kurangnya kesiapan dan pengelolaan. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi niat orang tua mengenai upaya pendidikan tinggi untuk anak-anak disabilitas mereka, dengan menggunakan TRA sebagai kerangka teoretis untuk menjelaskan alasan-alasannya. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa sikap orang tua memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk niat ini, dengan pengetahuan sebagai faktor latar belakang yang menunjukkan tingkat signifikansi yang moderat. Menekankan peran penting dalam membangun sikap positif terhadap pendidikan tinggi inklusif, studi ini menekankan pentingnya kesadaran orang tua mengenai inklusi disabilitas dalam pendidikan tinggi. Oleh karena itu, upaya untuk memperkuat pemahaman orang tua tentang opsi pendidikan inklusif sangat diperlukan. Studi ini mendorong tindakan kolaboratif antara orang tua dan institusi pendidikan untuk menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan mendukung bagi siswa disabilitas. Temuan ini menyoroti perlunya intervensi yang terfokus melalui strategi komunikasi untuk meningkatkan kesadaran orang tua dan membangun sikap positif terhadap pendidikan inklusif, sehingga mendorong aksesibilitas dan kualitas pendidikan bagi anak-anak dengan disabilitas.

Kata Kunci: Inklusi disabilitas; pendidikan tinggi; perspektif orang tua; TRA; strategi komunikasi

INTRODUCTION

Education is a universal right for all children, including those with disabilities, who often face unusual challenges in obtaining equal education (Hasugian et al., 2019). Education options are divided between segregated and inclusive schools to fulfil their rights. Segregated schools often create stigma and lead to disintegration in society. Whereas through inclusive schools, children with disabilities (CWD) will integrate in academic, social, cultural and curriculum participation with children without disabilities to gain shared experiences, thus managing stigmatization. That stigma can be minimized by making inclusivity uniform at any level of education as a result of shared awareness (Hasugian et al., 2019; Krischler et al., 2019).

Despite progress in inclusive education, many Indonesian universities remain unprepared to admit and support students with disabilities due to inadequate management, facilities, and campus accessibility (Riswari et al., 2022). According to the Ministry of Education and Culture as cited in Hasugian et al. (2019), only 925 schools in Indonesia offered inclusive education programs in 2008, while data from the WHO shows people with disabilities constitute about 10% of the global population, with over 120 million being children and adolescents. In Indonesia, there were an estimated 4.2 million CWD in 2017, and this number is growing (Sari et al., 2022).

Despite efforts to provide more inclusive access to education, there are still significant gaps. Data shows that only 26% of students with disabilities completed high school, compared to 62% of students without disabilities (UNICEF, 2020). This challenge is also reflected in the lack of acceptance of students with disabilities in higher education (Grimes et al., 2021; McKinney & Swartz, 2022; Mosia & Phasha, 2017). Although some laws accommodate inclusive education, such as Republic Indonesia Law No. 70 Year 2009 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2009), only a few universities in Indonesia are ready to accept students with disabilities (Riswari et al., 2022). In fact, according to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, by 2024, only 93 universities own a disability service unit for students, indicating their readiness to accommodate students with disabilities.

Although some negative stances and attitudes that parents with disabled children have been also significant obstacles to supporting inclusive education (Hasugian et al., 2019), there is an increasing trend of positive parental attitudes toward inclusive education because it provides opportunities for CWD (Amka, 2019). Marking this positivity comes from parents of non-disabled children. Hence, overcoming these views requires increased socialization and publicity on the benefits of inclusive education (Suhendri, 2020). This requires strong commitment and coordination from local governments, ministries, educators, parents, and communities. A systems approach involves shared responsibility among all stakeholders, including government officials, education managers, service providers, and students themselves (Krischler et al., 2019).

Significantly, in many Asian countries—including Indonesia, China, Hong Kong, and Turkey, the decision to pursue higher education often aligns more with family expectations and needs than individual preferences, as filial piety and respect for elders heavily influence cultural norms (Bodycott, 2009; Ho & Law, 2021; Koçak et al., 2021). Consequently, parental decisions often shape or influence individual preferences regarding higher education (Bodycott, 2009). Parents, being the closest social circle, significantly influence children's decisions to pursue higher education (Bahagia et al., 2022). Positive parental attitudes towards higher education increase the likelihood of children continuing their studies (Bahagia et al., 2022). However, Bahagia et al. (2022) revealed many parents view higher education primarily as a means to secure employment rather than to gain knowledge, they also believe that higher education does not necessarily guarantee job prospects for their children.

Previous studies indicate that fathers significantly influence decision-making as the heads of families (Bahagia et al., 2022). While the decision to pursue higher education is not directly linked to employment, it is related to income. Parents who are farmers value education for its potential to improve life aspects, whereas those with low economic status are less likely to send their children to

higher education. However, the context differs for parents with disabled children, where the decision-making process regarding higher education may vary.

When issues involve personal interests or values, such as health or children's futures, they drive higher involvement and information-seeking, leading to increased consumer knowledge about higher education (Bang et al., 2000). Previous research shows that parents utilize various sources for information (Bodycott, 2009). Exhibitions and education fairs are considered vital, despite being crowded. Other sources include friends or relatives, university agents, career advisors or teachers, and specialized magazines. The reliance on friends and relatives is linked to close kinship. Parents seek information to assess future benefits, college support, and costs, making understanding these sources crucial to comprehending their knowledge and attitudes toward higher education for CWD.

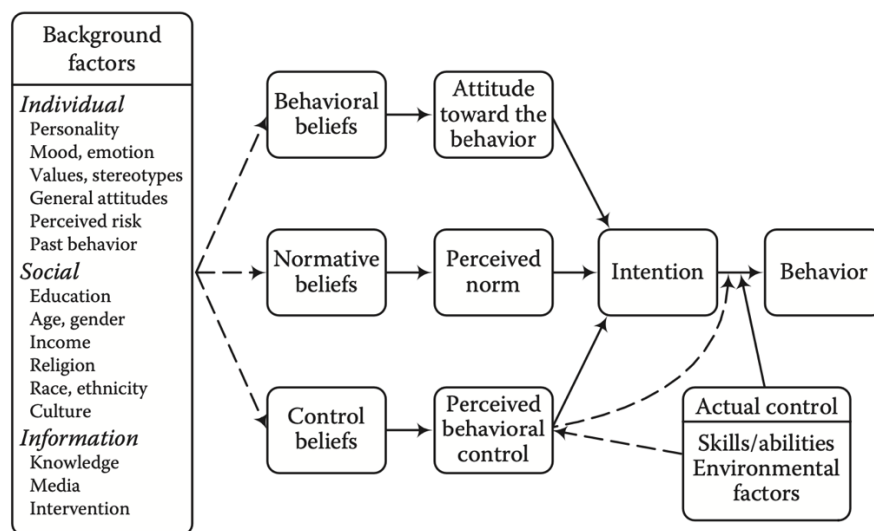


Figure 1. The reasoned action model in schematic form (Source: Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), as illustrated in Figure 1, initially developed in social psychology, has become a foundational framework in communication studies. It posits that behavior is influenced by intention, which is shaped by attitudes and subjective norms. By examining how communication—interpersonal, mediated, or organizational—shapes beliefs and drives intentions, it provides a lens to understand behavioral change (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). This theoretical foundation underscores the critical role of communication in structuring and influencing beliefs, evaluations, and ultimately, actions. In this study, beliefs and evaluations were excluded, with knowledge serving as a background factor. Accurate knowledge is hypothesized to foster positive attitudes, increasing the intention to engage in a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Specifically, parents' knowledge about inclusive higher education is expected to shape positive attitudes and increase their intention to support their children's participation in such education. Although TRA has been widely applied in various fields, it has not yet been applied in the context of disabled students' higher education, making this study a novel contribution.

Knowledge, derived from information transmitted through communication channels such as interpersonal exchanges and media, is contextualized within ethical and intellectual frameworks to become enduring and actionable (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1969; Reitz, 2017; Shera, 1970). In the context of inclusive higher education, knowledge encompasses information about benefits, opportunities, program quality, and institutional readiness. This information often originates from teachers, structured communication campaigns, peer interactions, and family or community experiences. By linking knowledge acquisition to communication strategies, this study emphasizes the importance of targeted messaging in fostering positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

Based on preliminary research on 21 December 2023, a principal of a state special school and a professor from a public university in Bandung emphasized the importance of raising awareness and engaging parents to support their disabled children in pursuing higher education: “Our students are determined and possess a strong will to pursue higher education. However, there is the parents’ perspective [to consider]. This means that raising awareness among parents is equally crucial, particularly in allowing their children to attend university, even if it means being far from home.”; “Often, it is not the students themselves but their parents. Many parents do not understand... Therefore, it is crucial to provide parents with information to help them understand their child's circumstances and position within the academic environment.” Many parents express concerns about the challenges their children may face, highlighting the need for advocacy initiatives within schools to provide understanding and reassurance: “The primary and most important aspect is engaging with the parents, as many parents of individuals with disabilities still experience significant fear or apprehension.”; “...this highlights the need for advocacy efforts at schools.” This insight underscores the critical role of special schools and universities as communication intermediaries, bridging gaps in parental awareness and advocacy for inclusive higher education.

Numerous studies have discussed attitudes toward inclusive education, yet few have examined parents' knowledge on the subject (Martins et al., 2018; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Radojichich & Jovanova, 2014; Stevens & Wurf, 2018). Factors influencing parental attitudes remain under-researched. This study reviews prior research on knowledge to examine parents' future intentions, specifically investigating how knowledge-derived attitudes influence their decision to pursue inclusive higher education for their disabled children.

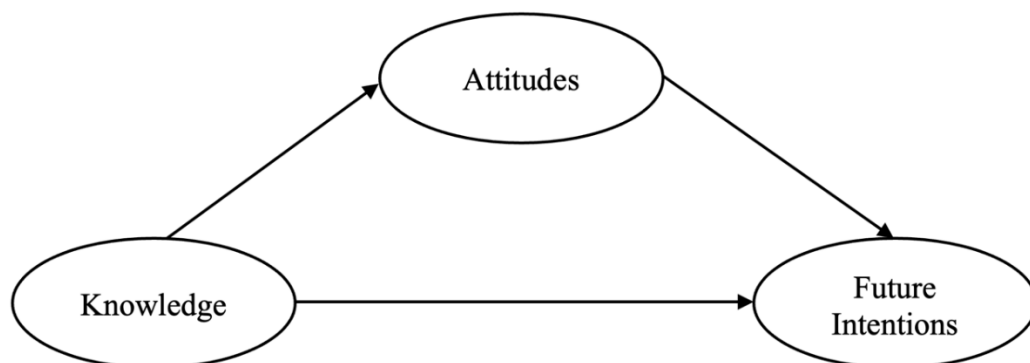


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework (Source: Author, 2024)

Based on Figure 2, four hypotheses were formulated accordingly: (1) Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' attitudes; (2) Attitudes toward inclusive higher education significantly influence parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education; (3) Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education; (4) Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education mediated by their attitudes.

METHOD

This study used a cross-sectional design to describe and analyze parents' knowledge, attitudes, and intentions regarding higher education for students with disabilities. Primary data were collected via a self-administered paper questionnaire, distributed by visiting 41 Schools of Special Needs using convenience sampling. This method was selected for its affordability and efficiency, relying on participants who were available, willing, and cooperative at the time of data collection (Crano et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2017). This study used non-probability sampling techniques due to the fact that it can produce a favorable estimate of the characteristics of the population, so that the statistical

power can be adequate (Crano et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2017). The choice of non-probability sampling technique in this study also considers the difficulty of making random choices from a comprehensive list (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). Data collection took place over eight weeks, from January 15 to March 8, 2024. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale with "neutral" as the midpoint to avoid bias (Jeong et al., 2015). Measurement items were adapted and modified for the context of parents' perceptions of their disabled children pursuing higher education. Items for information (2), benefits and opportunities (1), and perceived value (2) were from Tarrant and Dodgson (2007). Items for quality (2), program variety (1), environment (5), and culture (1) were from Bodycott (2009). Future intentions were measured using five items from Tarrant and Dodgson (2007), ensuring the instrument's reliability and validity. Furthermore, participants were presented with five concise biographical questions aimed at collecting demographic details and information regarding the type of disability their child has.

The research participants were parents of CWD enrolled in public and private special schools in Bandung City, Indonesia. Parents were invited to complete the self-administered questionnaires at the school premises, either before or after school hours, to maximize participation. Each parent received an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose and ensuring anonymity. The school administration staff facilitated the distribution and collection of questionnaires, ensuring minimal researcher interference to reduce social desirability bias. Of the 46 special schools, 12 declined, five were permanently closed, and 29 participated. This urban sample was chosen for its diverse social, economic, occupational, and educational backgrounds (Muhaimin et al., 2022; Yulianti et al., 2019). Out of the 888 questionnaires distributed, a total of 538 responses were returned. Following a thorough screening process, 40 responses were deemed invalid and excluded from the analysis due to incomplete answers or instances where respondents provided multiple answers to a single item. Consequently, the final dataset comprised 498 valid responses, ensuring the integrity and reliability of the analysis. This response rate of 56.08% was deemed sufficient for analysis and reporting (Irimia-Diéguez et al., 2023).

This study employed partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis to examine descriptive data and test hypotheses (direct, indirect, and mediated effects), suitable for both confirmatory and exploratory research (Hair et al., 2022). Additionally, PLS-SEM does not require normality of data, which is advantageous given the diversity in the sample (Hair et al., 2022). The data from paper-based questionnaires were first tabulated into an Excel spreadsheet, followed by a validation check by a second researcher. The data was then converted into a CSV file and analyzed using SmartPLS 3.2.9 to test the measurement and structural models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the 498 valid responses, 64% of the respondents were female and 31% were male, with a notable majority being mothers. This gender disparity reflects cultural norms in many Asian societies, including Indonesia, where mothers often serve as primary caregivers and are deeply involved in their children's education and overall well-being (Bennett, 2024; Stall et al., 2023). Their central role in caregiving naturally extends to educational decision-making, positioning them as a critical demographic for targeted communication strategies. Nonetheless, the inquiry lacks clarification on who ultimately holds the decision-making authority regarding a child with disabilities' pursuit of higher education.

The respondents' ages ranged from 26 to over 65 years, with the majority between 36–45 years (38%) and 46–55 years (32%). The educational attainment of respondents reveals significant barriers to higher education. The largest group of respondents had completed senior high school (31%), followed by those with no formal education (16%) or only elementary-level education (20%). Diploma holders (4%) and undergraduates (11%) comprised the smallest groups, reflecting limited access to higher education among the respondents themselves. This educational background may influence their perceptions of higher education's value, feasibility, and relevance, especially for their

CWD. This underscores the need for communication policies that emphasize the accessibility and benefits of higher education for CWD, targeting parents with lower educational backgrounds through simplified and relatable messaging (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018; Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

In terms of occupation, most respondents (63%) identified their occupation as "others," which, in open-ended responses, was often specified as housewives or laborers. Private employees (16%), self-employed individuals (14%), and civil servants (3%) constituted the remaining occupational groups. This occupational distribution highlights a predominantly informal workforce, where financial instability and limited social mobility may further constrain their ability to invest in higher education for their children (Alfers, 2016; Tyler et al., 2021). The predominance of informal workforce roles highlights the economic challenges these parents face. Additionally, 56% of households reported a monthly income between Rp1,000,000 and Rp3,000,000, reflecting a predominantly lower-income demographic which indicates unique barriers to higher education access for disabled children in this demographic (Odeh & Lach, 2023). Policymakers and educational institutions must develop targeted messaging that assures parents of the affordability and long-term benefits of inclusive higher education. Effective communication strategies should address these realities by promoting financial aid programs, government support, and institutional accommodations that lower economic barriers to higher education (Mariga et al., 2014; Odeh & Lach, 2023).

Regarding children's disabilities, cognitive barriers were predominant with neurodivergence (50.60%) and mental disability (18.67%). Sensory disabilities (deafness, blindness, speech impairment) accounted for 22.29%, and physical disabilities (paraplegia, cerebral palsy, dwarfism) 8.84%. The total percentage exceeds 100%, indicating some children have multiple disabilities.

Teachers (51%), internet searches (50%), and social media (46%) emerged as the most influential communication channels shaping parental knowledge and attitudes toward inclusive higher education. This finding highlights the dual importance of interpersonal and digital communication in awareness-building efforts. In many Asian contexts, teachers are not only educators but also trusted community leaders and advisors, whose guidance is often pivotal in shaping family decisions (Mariga et al., 2014; Odeh & Lach, 2023). This reinforces the idea that teachers serve as strategic intermediaries in promoting inclusive education. The significance of teachers' influence is further supported by the two-step flow of communication model, which posits that individuals are more likely to be influenced by interpersonal interactions with opinion leaders than by direct exposure to media according to Littlejohn et al. (2017) as cited on Muttamimah and Irwansyah (2023). Policymakers and institutions should capitalize on this trust by equipping teachers with targeted communication training, inclusive education resources, and storytelling tools to advocate effectively—such as through teacher-led workshops, school-based parent engagement programs, and campaigns featuring success stories of disabled students (Mariga et al., 2014; Odeh & Lach, 2023).

At the same time, the growing reliance on internet searches and social media underscores the increasing role of mediated communication in disseminating information. In countries like Indonesia, where internet penetration is rapidly expanding (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021; Kemp, 2023; World Bank, 2019), it is essential for universities and government institutions to strengthen their digital presence. This includes optimizing inclusive websites for accessibility, leveraging search engine optimization (SEO), running culturally relevant social media campaigns, and collaborating with local digital influencers.

Following the advice in the literature, this study assessed the measurement model using both formative and reflective measurement approaches (Hair et al., 2022). The results indicated that the measurement model met the recommended reliability and validity standards. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha (CA) values for all reflective constructs surpassed 0.88, with CA values for attitude (0.915, $p < 0.01$), future intentions (0.938, $p < 0.01$), and knowledge (0.929, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, the composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.88 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory reliability and strong internal consistency in the PLS-SEM analysis (Cheung et al., 2021; Irimia-Diéguez et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2020). The average variance extracted (AVE) also showed strong convergent validity, with

AVE values for attitude (0.864, $p < 0.01$), future intentions (0.895, $p < 0.01$), and knowledge (0.799, $p < 0.01$).

The structural model was tested to examine the relationships between parents' knowledge, attitudes, and future intentions. The outcomes of this analysis are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypothesis test result

Hypothesis	β -values	f^2	t -values	p -values	Result
H1:					
Knowledge \rightarrow Attitudes	0.547	0.426	10.716*	< 0.01	Accepted
H2:					
Attitudes \rightarrow Future Intentions	0.678	0.717	18.414*	< 0.01	Accepted
H3:					
Knowledge \rightarrow Future Intentions	0.105	0.017	2.608*	< 0.01	Accepted

* t -values > 1.96

H1. Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' attitudes.

The results supported this hypothesis, revealing a strong and significant relationship between knowledge and attitudes ($\beta = 0.547$, $t = 10.716$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that parents who possess greater knowledge about inclusive higher education are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward their children pursuing it. These findings underscore the importance of clear, accessible, and targeted communication in increasing awareness and shaping favorable parental attitudes toward higher education for CWD.

H2. Attitudes toward inclusive higher education significantly influence parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education.

This hypothesis was also supported by the results, with a strong and significant effect of attitudes on behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.678$, $t = 18.414$, $p < 0.01$). Notably, the effect size of attitudes on intentions was larger than that of knowledge on attitudes, indicating that while knowledge serves as a foundation, attitudes play a more decisive role in shaping parents' future intentions. Therefore, communication strategies should not only inform but also engage with parents' emotional, cultural, and social contexts to effectively foster supportive intentions regarding inclusive higher education.

H3. Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education.

The results also supported this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 2.608$, $p < 0.01$), although the effect size was smaller than the direct effect of attitudes on future intentions. This suggests that while knowledge has a direct influence, its impact on parental intentions is relatively limited when not accompanied by positive attitudes. These findings highlight the need for communication strategies that not only disseminate accurate information but also actively foster supportive attitudes, enabling knowledge to be translated into meaningful behavioral intentions.

H4. Knowledge of inclusive higher education significantly influences parents' future intentions toward pursuing higher education mediated by their attitudes.

The mediation analysis revealed a partial mediation effect, indicating that knowledge influences future intentions both directly and indirectly through attitudes, as shown in Table 2 ($\beta = 0.371$, $t = 9.877$, $p < 0.01$). This finding confirms the proposed mediation model, suggesting that while knowledge is a key factor, its impact on parents' future intentions is predominantly shaped by the attitudes that arise from that knowledge. The partial mediation highlights the pivotal role of attitudes as an intermediary mechanism linking knowledge to behavioral intention.

Table 2. Mediation test result

Total Effect		Direct Effect		Indirect effect of Knowledge on Future Intentions						
β -values	p-value	β -values	p-value	Hypothesis	β -values	SD	t-values	p values	Result	
0.476	< 0.01	0.105	< 0.01	H4: Knowledge \rightarrow Attitudes \rightarrow Future Intentions	0.371	0.038	9.877	< 0.01	Partial Mediation	

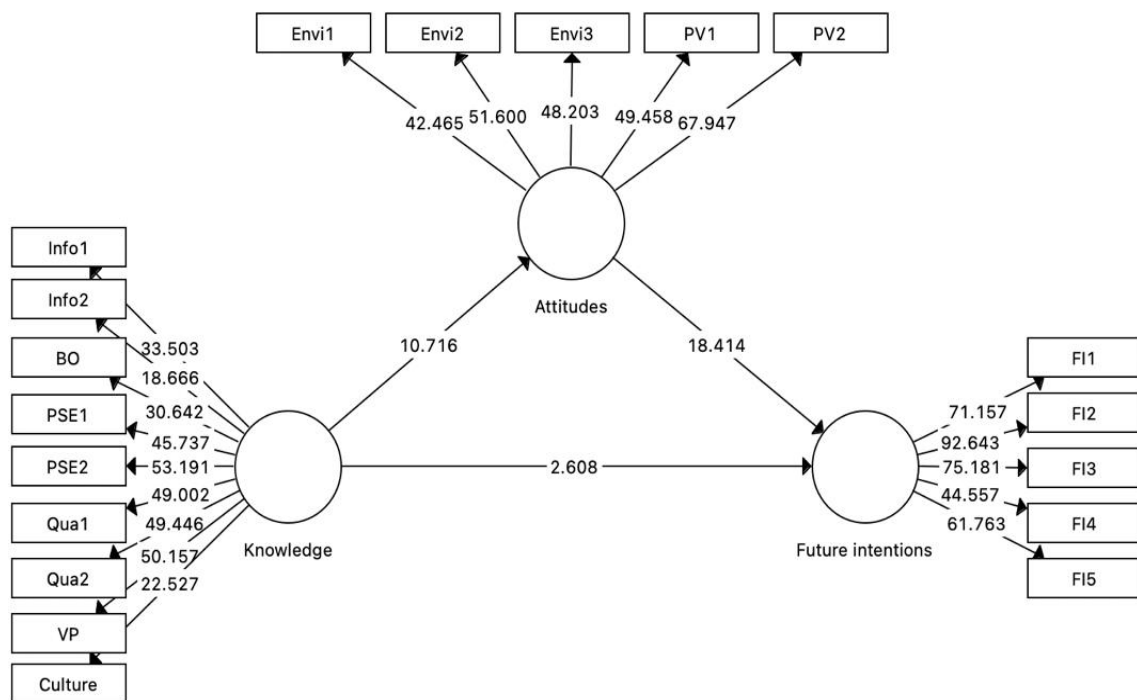


Figure 3. Structural Model (Source: Author, 2024)

Additionally, the structural model, as illustrated in Figure 3, explains 29.9% of attitudes and 55% of parents' future intentions to support higher education for their CWD. These R^2 values indicate that while knowledge and attitudes are significant predictors, other unmeasured factors also influence parental decision-making. The model demonstrates moderate explanatory power (Sultan et al., 2021), which is appropriate given the behavioral complexity involved. Interpreting these values reinforces the model's validity, as attitudes are central to forming behavioral intentions. Accordingly, the variances explained highlight the relevance of knowledge and attitudes in shaping parental intentions toward inclusive higher education.

The findings of this study specifically highlight aspects concerning inclusivity and support for students with disabilities. The areas such as information about programs for disabled students, understanding of laws and regulations supporting inclusive education, awareness of universities with quality support for disabled students, and knowledge of available programs exhibit weaker statistical significance. This proves that information accessibility plays a major role for parents and summarizes the need for targeted interventions through communication to aim at enhancing parental knowledge about many things especially the legal and regulations supporting inclusive education. Ahadzadeh and Sharif (2017) in their study also agree that intervention programs will likely motivate information-seeking when people have such a misperception. It is parallel with what Tomasevski (1999) as cited in Michael (2020) found about the availability and accessibility feature for student support. Parents should be aware that governmental laws and regulations exist, especially the Indonesia Law No. 70

Year 2009 to ensure the rights of students with disabilities to access education are upheld. A study by Ardningrum and Sulistyowati (2022) found that the legal awareness of students with disabilities regarding the fulfillment of accessibility rights for persons with disabilities is quite high. With a small sample, they indicate the factors influencing their awareness such as the level of curiosity, engagement with reading materials, and the nature of the organizations they are affiliated with. Thus, not only parents' intervention is needed but also the students with disabilities.

The hypotheses presented in the study suggest a hierarchical structure that seeks to illustrate the relationships between knowledge, attitudes, and future intentions regarding parents' future intentions for their children's education. Firstly, the hypothesis positing the direct influence of attitudes on future intentions as the highest suggests a fundamental tenet of the TRA. According to this theory, individuals' attitudes toward a behavior significantly shape their intentions to engage in that behavior. Therefore, it is postulated that parental attitudes toward their children's higher education would employ the strongest direct impact on their intentions regarding future educational pursuits, this result is highly aligned with a study by de Kok et al. (2020) and Seman et al. (2020) whose research found a positive finding for attitudes as its mediating variable. Secondly, the hypothesis proposing a direct influence of knowledge on attitudes acknowledges that knowledge about higher education may play a significant role in shaping parental attitudes. This hypothesis suggests that an increase in knowledge regarding higher education is likely to lead to more positive attitudes toward it. Education levels among parents are associated with their knowledge, with average educational attainment in Bandung being at the high school level. Consequently, the research infers that parents with higher levels of education possess greater knowledge (Martins et al., 2018; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Radojichich & Jovanova, 2014; Stevens & Wurf, 2018). There are many studies that reveal the level of parental education emerges as a significant factor in children's caregiving patterns. This is evidenced by the substantial impact of parental education on student achievement at MTs N 4 East Lombok and the significant influence of parental education and attention on student discipline at SMP Negeri 3 Barru. Furthermore, the research outcomes underscore the positive and significant effects of parental income, parental education, peer environment, and self-efficacy, both collectively and individually, on students' interest in pursuing higher education at SMK Kabupaten Nias (Alam, 2020; Aprilia, 2021; Lase, 2020; Miyati et al., 2021). While attitudes are recognized as the primary driver of intentions in the TRA framework (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), this hypothesis highlights the importance of knowledge as an antecedent to attitude formation.

Thirdly, the hypothesis involving a sequential relationship between knowledge, attitudes, and future intentions posits that knowledge influences attitudes, which subsequently influence future intentions. This hypothesis extends beyond the direct influence of attitudes on intentions by proposing that knowledge acts as an antecedent to attitude formation, which, in turn, impacts future intentions. It acknowledges that knowledge serves as a foundational element that shapes parental attitudes, ultimately influencing their intentions regarding their children's educational interests. Lastly, the hypothesis suggesting the lowest direct influence of knowledge on future intentions recognizes that while knowledge about higher education may contribute to shaping attitudes and intentions, its impact is likely to be less prominent compared to attitudes. This hypothesis acknowledges that knowledge alone may not suffice to significantly influence parental intentions regarding their children's higher education. As Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) suggest that different background factors influence behavior. While knowledge is crucial as it represents an individual's beliefs about a topic or behavior. And the translation of knowledge into behavior is often mediated by the individual's environment, including external stimuli. The role of stimuli is such as communication interventions or exposure to targeted information can shape beliefs and reinforce the learning process. Moreover, teachers in this study were viewed as credible. It is believed a consistent sources of knowledge, and their insights may have a significant impact on parents' decision-making. By incorporating teachers as key messengers in communication interventions, the effectiveness of influencing parents' behavior will be achieved.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that parents—predominantly mothers—rely on teachers as the most credible and trustworthy sources of information about higher education for their CWD, while internet searches and social media also play significant roles. The findings show that most CWD are neurodivergent, which may be perceived by some parents as limiting their cognitive abilities to pursue higher education. However, parents' intentions to support their CWD in accessing higher education are high, even though this does not necessarily translate into actual behavior. Knowledge and attitudes remain crucial background factors and should be prioritized as targets for interventions.

This research highlights the need for government policies to create pathways for CWD to access higher education, for instance by developing applied programs rather than solely academic ones. Additionally, standardized terminology—such as “disability service unit” and “disability-friendly accommodations”—should be implemented across universities to improve information accessibility for parents, including inclusive university websites.

Although this study demonstrates moderate explanatory power, it underlines the significance of enhancing parental knowledge and attitudes to effectively foster their behavioral intentions regarding their CWD's education. Future research could employ qualitative methods to explore how parent-teacher communication and engagement might boost the confidence of CWD in pursuing higher education.

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