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ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENCE IN CHILDREN AGED 5–6 YEARS AT PAUD TARUNA ELIM

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Abstract

Background: *Independence is a fundamental developmental competence in early childhood because it supports children's self-care, decision-making, responsibility, and confidence. Despite its importance, many children aged 5–6 years continue to rely heavily on teachers and parents during daily learning activities, indicating that independence has not yet developed optimally.* ***Objective:*** *This study aimed to analyze the profile of independence among children aged 5–6 years by examining four dimensions of independence: self-care, simple decision-making, responsibility toward oneself and the environment, and self-confidence at PAUD Taruna Elim.* ***Method:*** *This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through structured classroom observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews with two classroom teachers, and documentation of learning activities and children's developmental records. The participants consisted of two teachers and five children aged 5–6 years selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. The credibility of the findings was ensured through source and technique triangulation.* ***Results:*** *The findings revealed that children's independence had not yet developed uniformly across the four dimensions. The strongest achievement was observed in simple decision-making, followed by responsibility, while self-care and self-confidence remained at the developing stage for most participants. Daily habituation practices, opportunities for autonomous participation, and positive teacher reinforcement contributed to the gradual development of children's independence, although several children still required continuous teacher guidance and emotional support.* ***Novelty:*** *This study demonstrates that children's independence develops through the interaction of structured habituation, child-centered learning, teacher scaffolding, and supportive social environments.* ***Conclusion:*** *Children's independence can be strengthened through systematic habituation, meaningful opportunities for autonomous participation, consistent teacher scaffolding, and collaborative support between schools and families.*

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, Independence, Self-Confidence, Teacher Scaffolding, Habituation*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education serves as the primary foundation for shaping children's character and potential from birth to six years of age. This developmental stage is widely recognized as the golden age or diamond age, during which children experience rapid growth in brain development and psychosocial functioning (Amseke et al., 2024; Amseke, 2023; Suyadi, 2021). Experiences and stimulation provided during this period have a significant influence on children's future learning, behavior, and overall development.

To optimize children's development, educational stimulation should be delivered through a holistic and integrative approach. Early childhood education is expected to support children's physical-motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral, and religious development in a balanced manner. Such comprehensive stimulation is essential for preparing children to enter formal education with adequate developmental readiness (Pristiwanti et al., 2022; Sujiono, 2013).

One of the most important developmental objectives for children aged 5–6 years is the development of independence. Independence is considered a key developmental competence because it enables children to function effectively in everyday activities and social interactions. Children who develop independence are generally better prepared to adapt to new learning environments and challenges.

Independence is not merely the physical ability to perform tasks without assistance. Rather, it refers to a condition in which children possess self-awareness, self-confidence, initiative, and responsibility in making decisions and directing their own actions (Nawangsasi & Kurniawati, 2022; Wiyani, 2021). According to Sumarmo (2010), independent learning encourages children to regulate, direct, and control their own activities without relying entirely on adults.

Despite the recognized importance of independence, evidence from educational settings often indicates a gap between expected developmental outcomes and actual conditions. A preliminary study conducted at PAUD Taruna Elim revealed that many children had not yet achieved an optimal level of independence. This finding suggests that independence remains a developmental challenge requiring further attention from educators and parents.

Among the 20 children aged 5–6 years enrolled in PAUD Taruna Elim, approximately 12 children (60%) were identified as having suboptimal independence. Many children continued to depend heavily on teachers or parents for daily activities such as organizing school materials, putting on their shoes, eating without being fed, and choosing learning activities. These behaviors indicate that independence in self-care, decision-making, responsibility, and confidence has not yet developed consistently across children.

Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth the profile of independence among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Taruna Elim. The analysis is based on the four primary dimensions of independence proposed by Yuliani (2019): (1) self-care independence, (2)

independence in making simple decisions, (3) responsibility toward oneself and the environment, and (4) self-confidence. By investigating these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of children's independence and contribute to the development of educational strategies that more effectively foster independence in early childhood.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research method to explore the independence of children aged 5–6 years in an early childhood education setting (Sugiyono, 2018). The research was conducted at PAUD Taruna Elim. The study was carried out over a one-month period, from April 20, 2026, to May 20, 2026, enabling researchers to observe children's daily learning experiences and interactions within their natural classroom environment.

The research participants consisted of two classroom teachers, identified as HF and NT, and five children aged 5–6 years who were selected through purposive sampling. The participating children were identified using the initials AB, JA, LA, RM, and ST. Purposive sampling was chosen because these participants were considered capable of providing rich, relevant, and meaningful information regarding the development of children's independence, classroom learning behaviors, and teacher support during everyday educational activities.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation using three complementary techniques to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Structured observations were conducted to examine children's independent behaviors during classroom routines, learning activities, and play sessions. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with classroom teachers to explore instructional strategies, children's independence development, and the challenges encountered in fostering independence. Documentation included photographs of learning activities, children's developmental records, daily lesson plans (RPPH), and institutional profile documents

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Hilmawan, 2021), which consisted of three systematic stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, categorizing, and organizing information related to the four dimensions of children's independence. The organized data were presented descriptively to facilitate interpretation, while conclusions were continuously verified throughout the analysis process to ensure the credibility, consistency, dependability, and overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

1. Children's independence profile

Structured observations were conducted with five children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Taruna Elim from April 22 to April 28, 2026. The observations were carried out during daily classroom routines, learning activities, and play sessions to obtain a comprehensive understanding of children's independence development. The assessment focused on four dimensions of independence: self-care independence, independence in making simple decisions, responsibility toward oneself and the environment, and self-confidence. The overall achievement of each child across these four dimensions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Achievement of independence indicators among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Taruna Elim

Child	Self-care	Decision-making	Responsibility	Self-confidence
AB	Developing	Expected	Expected	Developing
JA	Expected	Not yet	Expected	Expected
LA	Developing	Expected	Developing	Not yet
RM	Developing	Expected	Developing	Expected
ST	Developing	Expected	Not yet	Not yet

Note: Not yet developed (BB), developing (MB), developed as expected (BSH).

As shown in Table 1, children's independence had not yet developed uniformly across the four dimensions. Most participants demonstrated stronger performance in decision-making and responsibility than in self-care and self-confidence. Four children reached the developed as expected category in decision-making, while responsibility showed moderate variation across participants. In contrast, self-care independence was generally categorized as developing, and self-confidence remained inconsistent, with two children classified as not yet developed. These findings indicate that independence develops progressively and varies across developmental domains, reflecting differences in individual readiness, classroom experiences, and the level of support provided by teachers and the learning environment.

2. Self-care independence

The observation findings indicate that children's self-care independence was generally categorized as developing. Four children (AB, LA, RM, and ST) demonstrated emerging independence in organizing their school bags, putting on their shoes, washing their hands, and eating independently during daily classroom routines. However, these children still required occasional verbal prompts, reminders, or minimal assistance from teachers, particularly when completing activities that required greater consistency and responsibility. In contrast, JA

consistently managed personal care activities independently without teacher intervention and was therefore categorized as developed as expected.

Direct classroom observations revealed that children increasingly attempted to complete self-care activities without relying on adults. They showed greater initiative in managing personal belongings and completing routine tasks independently. As illustrated in Figure 1, children independently put on their shoes and ate during classroom activities with minimal teacher support. These behaviors indicate that repeated practice, daily routines, and consistent classroom habituation played an important role in fostering children's self-care independence. The findings suggest that regular opportunities for independent practice gradually strengthen children's autonomy, responsibility, and confidence in managing their personal needs within the early childhood education environment.



Figure 1. Children Wear Their Own Shoes And Children Eat By Themselves.

3. Independence in making simple decisions

Children demonstrated the highest level of achievement in the dimension of making simple decisions. Four of the five participants (80%) reached the developed as expected category, indicating that they were able to choose play areas, select coloring materials, decide which storybooks to read, and determine the learning activities they wished to participate in independently. These children generally made their own choices confidently without depending on their peers' decisions. In contrast, JA remained in the not yet developed category because the child frequently waited for teacher guidance or peer direction before making decisions during classroom activities.

Classroom observations revealed that children became more actively engaged when they were given opportunities to make their own choices during learning activities. They showed enthusiasm in selecting materials, expressing preferences, and initiating participation in various classroom tasks. As illustrated in Figure 2, a child independently selected colors while completing a coloring activity, demonstrating initiative and decision-making ability. These findings suggest

that child-centered learning practices provided meaningful opportunities for autonomy, encouraged independent thinking, and strengthened children's confidence in making simple decisions during everyday learning experiences.



Figure 2. Child Is Coloring

4. Responsibility toward oneself and the environment

Responsibility toward oneself and the environment showed moderate variation among the participants. AB and JA independently returned learning materials after activities, arranged classroom equipment, organized chairs, and disposed of waste appropriately without teacher reminders, thereby meeting the criteria for the developed as expected category. LA and RM were categorized as developing because they were generally willing to complete classroom responsibilities but still required occasional reminders from teachers. In contrast, ST remained in the not yet developed category because the child frequently left learning materials unattended and required continuous teacher guidance to complete classroom responsibilities consistently.

The observation findings indicate that responsibility was developed through structured daily routines, teacher reinforcement, and repeated participation in classroom management activities. Children who were regularly encouraged to organize learning materials and maintain classroom cleanliness demonstrated greater awareness of shared responsibilities. As illustrated in Figure 3, children arranged classroom chairs after learning activities, reflecting cooperative behavior and responsibility for the classroom environment. These activities appeared to strengthen children's self-regulation, accountability, and care for their shared learning environment through consistent habituation and positive teacher support.



Figure 3. Child Tidying Up Chairs

5. Self-confidence

Self-confidence was the most varied dimension across the five participants. JA and RM reached the developed as expected category, as they confidently led morning prayers, answered teachers' questions clearly, volunteered to perform in front of classmates, and actively participated in classroom discussions and group activities. AB was categorized as developing because the child occasionally expressed opinions and participated in front of peers but still required encouragement from teachers. In contrast, LA and ST remained in the not yet developed category because they were hesitant to speak publicly, reluctant to answer questions, and avoided participating in classroom leadership or presentation activities.

Classroom observations demonstrated that children who frequently received positive reinforcement, appreciation, and opportunities to participate were more willing to express themselves and engage in social interactions. As illustrated in Figure 4, a child confidently led the morning prayer in front of classmates, reflecting an important indicator of self-confidence and emerging leadership skills in early childhood. These findings suggest that supportive teacher interactions and opportunities for active participation play a crucial role in strengthening children's confidence and independence. Overall, the results indicate that children's independence was strongest in the dimension of simple decision-making, followed by responsibility, whereas self-care and self-confidence required further development. This pattern highlights the importance of structured habituation, autonomous learning opportunities, and consistent teacher support in promoting comprehensive independence among children aged 5–6 years in early childhood education settings.



Figure 4. Children Leading Prayer

DISCUSSION

The findings on self-care independence indicate that the daily habituation practices implemented at PAUD Taruna Elim were effective in reducing children's dependence on adults. Most participants were categorized as either developing or developed as expected in this dimension. Children who reached the developed as expected category, such as JA, were able to put on their shoes, store their school bags properly, and organize their personal belongings

without requiring substantial teacher encouragement. Meanwhile, children in the developing category, including AB, LA, RM, and ST, demonstrated emerging independence in activities such as washing their hands and organizing learning materials, although they still required occasional verbal prompts or minimal teacher assistance. These findings suggest that self-care independence develops progressively through repeated opportunities for autonomous practice within everyday classroom routines.

This finding supports Hidayat's (2023) argument that self-care independence is a psychomotor competence that develops through internal awareness and accumulated learning experiences. Routine school practices, such as placing school bags in designated lockers and cleaning eating areas after meals, help children internalize essential activities of daily living. Furthermore, the effectiveness of school-based habituation is closely related to the consistency of parenting practices at home. Amseke (2025) demonstrated that parental support has a positive and significant influence on the development of independence in early childhood. Consistency between teacher guidance at school and parental reinforcement at home creates a supportive developmental environment that accelerates children's physical autonomy and independent functioning (Siregar & Ritonga, 2022).

Regarding independence in making simple decisions, most children reached the developed as expected category. Four of the five participants (AB, LA, RM, and ST) independently selected play activities, coloring materials, and peer groups without relying on teacher direction, while JA remained in the not yet developed category. The freedom to choose learning materials and activities appeared to provide meaningful cognitive stimulation and opportunities for autonomous decision-making. Children who were allowed to make personal choices demonstrated greater initiative and engagement during classroom activities, indicating that decision-making opportunities contribute to the development of autonomy and independent thinking.

These findings are consistent with Putra (2023), who argued that children's dependence can be reduced by actively involving them in everyday decision-making processes, thereby strengthening critical thinking and problem-solving abilities from an early age. The findings also align with Montessori's concept of guided freedom, which emphasizes that children should be given responsible freedom within a structured environment to maximize the development of autonomy (Montessori, 2020). In the context of PAUD Taruna Elim, teachers functioned as facilitators by providing diverse learning centers and allowing children to choose activities according to their interests. The case of JA, who remained in the not yet developed category, suggests that some children require more intensive psychological encouragement and emotional support to confidently express personal preferences and make independent decisions.

In the dimension of responsibility toward oneself and the environment, the variation across developmental categories indicates that children's self-regulation was still in the process of development. AB and JA independently organized toys, returned books to their proper places, and maintained classroom order after activities, reflecting the developed as expected category. LA and RM were categorized as developing because they required occasional teacher reminders, whereas ST remained in the not yet developed category due to inconsistent responsibility for classroom materials and routines. These findings demonstrate that responsibility is closely associated with children's emerging capacity for behavioral regulation and social awareness.

Ramdani (2023) described responsible behavior as an expression of contributive character, in which individuals with stronger self-regulation gradually expand their responsibility from personal needs to the surrounding environment. Classroom behaviors such as disposing of waste properly, organizing learning materials, and maintaining classroom cleanliness represent important manifestations of this developmental process. Teacher stimulation and structured guidance were central to facilitating this transition. Efriana (2025) emphasized that direct stimulation, modeling, a supportive classroom environment, and practical life skill activities are essential strategies for developing responsibility in young children. Through scaffolding, teachers gradually reduce external assistance as children become increasingly capable of understanding classroom rules and social responsibilities independently (Utami, 2026).

The findings related to self-confidence indicate that positive teacher validation played a significant role in encouraging children to participate actively in classroom interactions. JA and RM reached the developed as expected category because they confidently answered teachers' questions, expressed opinions, and led morning prayers in front of classmates. AB was categorized as developing because the child was willing to participate but still required encouragement, while LA and ST remained in the not yet developed category due to hesitation, anxiety, and reluctance to perform publicly. These results suggest that self-confidence is strongly influenced by both individual emotional readiness and the quality of social support within the classroom environment.

These findings support Hartono (2023), who argued that children's self-confidence is shaped by internal validation and the appreciation of personal effort rather than external praise alone. A safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment enables children with lower confidence to gradually overcome anxiety and fear of failure. Consistent teacher appreciation for children's efforts strengthens their sense of competence and self-efficacy, which in turn increases their willingness to participate in social and learning activities (Handayani, 2024). Overall, the development of independence among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Taruna Elim was influenced by the interaction of external factors, including teacher stimulation and modeling

(Meilyana, 2023) and supportive parenting practices (Amseke, 2025), as well as internal factors such as cognitive ability and emotional readiness in regulating behavior and making independent decisions (Daud, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Main Findings: This study found that the independence of children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Taruna Elim had not yet developed evenly across self-care, simple decision-making, responsibility, and self-confidence. Decision-making showed the strongest development, while self-care and self-confidence remained at the developing stage for most children. Daily habituation, autonomous participation, and teacher support contributed to independence development, although several children still required guidance. **Research Contribution:** This study provides qualitative evidence that children's independence develops through structured classroom routines, child-centered learning, teacher scaffolding, and social support. **Theoretical and Practical Implications:** The findings support constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, indicating that independence grows through guided participation and repeated practice. Teachers should provide structured habituation, opportunities for autonomous choices, and gradually reduce assistance to strengthen responsibility and self-confidence. **Research Limitations and Future Directions:** Because the study involved a small sample from one preschool, the findings have limited generalizability. Future studies should include larger samples and examine scaffolding and family-based interventions across different early childhood education settings.

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