

A Case Study of the Impact of Parenting Styles on Independence in Early Childhood

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ABSTRACT

Independence is a crucial aspect of early childhood development that contributes to the formation of self-regulation, decision-making, and responsibility. This study aims to examine the influence of parenting styles on early childhood independence through a case study of Child A, a five-year-old child. The research employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews with parents and teachers, and documentation. The findings indicate that Child A's independence has not yet developed optimally, particularly in the emotional, behavioral, and value-based aspects. Child A demonstrates a high level of dependence on adult assistance in carrying out daily activities both at home and at school. This condition is closely related to a permissive parenting style characterized by excessive assistance and a lack of consistent responsibility training from an early age. These findings align with Hurlock's (1993) view that children's independence develops through opportunities, habituation, and developmentally appropriate support. Therefore, active collaboration between parents and teachers is essential to provide appropriate guidance and opportunities to foster independence in early childhood.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Early Childhood Independence, Early Childhood, Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a critical period in human development characterized by rapid and foundational growth across multiple domains. Generally defined as the age range of 0–8 years, this stage is frequently referred to as the “golden age” due to the accelerated development of brain structures, cognitive capacities, personality formation, and socio-emotional competencies. In Indonesia, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System defines early childhood as children from birth to six years who require educational stimulation to optimize physical and psychological development in preparation for further education. Similarly, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognizes early childhood as encompassing children aged 0–8 years who experience significant developmental changes and require developmentally appropriate learning experiences (NAEYC, 2020; Republic of Indonesia, 2003).

From a cognitive developmental perspective, early childhood corresponds to Piaget's sensorimotor and preoperational stages, during which children begin forming symbolic thinking, initiative, and emerging autonomy (Piaget, 1952). One essential developmental outcome during this period is independence. Independence refers to the ability to carry out tasks without excessive reliance on others and to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Steinberg, 1995; Melda et al., 2020). In early childhood, independence manifests in daily self-help activities such as eating independently, dressing, organizing toys, and completing simple responsibilities appropriate to developmental levels (Reicks et al., 2015; Susanto, 2018). These early competencies serve as foundational skills for later academic readiness and social adjustment.

Steinberg (2014) conceptualizes independence as comprising three interrelated dimensions: emotional independence, behavioral independence, and value independence. Emotional independence involves reduced emotional overdependence on parents; behavioral independence refers to the ability to make and take responsibility for decisions; and value independence relates to the formation of personal principles guiding judgments of right and wrong (Husna, 2018; Steinberg, 2014). This multidimensional view highlights that independence extends beyond physical self-sufficiency and includes psychological maturity and internalized values.

Erikson's psychosocial theory further explains that early childhood corresponds to the stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt. During this stage, children strive to assert control over their actions and environment. When caregivers provide appropriate support and opportunities for exploration, children develop autonomy and confidence. Conversely, excessive restriction or criticism may result in feelings of doubt and dependency (Erikson, 2010). This theoretical framework underscores the central role of parenting practices in shaping independence outcomes.

Parenting style has long been recognized as a significant environmental factor influencing children's socio-emotional development. Baumrind (1971) identified authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, each characterized by different levels of responsiveness and control. Research consistently shows that authoritative parenting, which balances warmth and structure, is positively associated with autonomy, self-regulation, and adaptive independence, whereas authoritarian or overly permissive patterns may hinder independent functioning (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001). Despite extensive research on parenting styles and child development, limited case-based qualitative studies specifically explore how parenting styles influence independence development in early childhood within localized educational contexts.

In Indonesia, the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 146 of 2014 concerning the 2013 Early Childhood Education Curriculum emphasizes independence as a core component of self-habitation and socio-emotional competence development (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). Independence is considered essential for fostering children's confidence, adaptability, and readiness for formal schooling. However, disparities in parenting approaches and home environments may contribute to varying levels of independence among children.

Preliminary observations conducted on December 10, 2025, in Class B of TK X revealed that one child exhibited persistent dependence on teachers for daily classroom tasks and demonstrated limited initiative in completing activities independently. This phenomenon raises important questions regarding the role of parenting styles in shaping early independence. Therefore, the present study aims to examine how parenting styles influence independence development in early childhood through an in-depth case study approach. By providing contextualized empirical evidence, this research contributes to the existing literature by offering nuanced insights into the interaction between parenting practices and independence formation in early childhood settings, thereby informing both educational strategies and parental guidance practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The case study method was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context. A case study focuses on investigating a bounded system comprehensively and contextually, allowing researchers to understand complex interactions between variables in natural settings (Rowley, as cited in Ridlo, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant in early childhood education research, as children's developmental outcomes are closely intertwined with family and school environments (Ilma'nunah et al., 2025). Through this design, the study aimed to obtain a holistic understanding of how parenting styles influence independence development in early childhood.

Subjects, Population, and Sample

The primary subject of this study was Child A, a student in Class B at Kindergarten X. The participant was selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, namely observable difficulties in independent behavior and a distinctive parenting background compared to peers. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative case study research because it prioritizes depth and richness of information rather than the number of participants (Putri et al., 2023). In this context, Child A was chosen to provide detailed insights into the relationship between parenting practices and independence development. Additional informants included Child A's parents and the classroom teacher to ensure comprehensive data from multiple perspectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected systematically through direct observation and semi-structured interviews. Observation was conducted in the natural school setting while Child A participated in classroom learning activities and daily routines. The observation focused on manifestations of independence, including self-care skills, the ability to complete tasks without assistance, compliance with classroom rules, and social interactions with teachers and peers. Direct observation enabled the researcher to gather authentic and contextual

data reflecting the child's actual behavior (Hidayat et al., 2023). Field notes were recorded during each observation session to ensure accurate documentation.

In addition to observation, interviews were conducted with Child A's parents and classroom teacher. The same interview guideline was used to maintain consistency and comparability of responses. Interview questions explored parenting styles, daily routines at home, parental expectations, and teachers' perceptions of the child's independence development at school. Interviews are essential in qualitative research for capturing participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations that may not be observable directly (Ilma'nunah et al., 2025). All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an interactive model that began during data collection and continued until conclusions were drawn. The first stage involved data organization, including compiling observation field notes and interview transcripts into a structured format.

The second stage was data reduction, which involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Data unrelated to parenting styles and independence development were excluded. Relevant data were categorized based on dimensions of independence, including emotional independence, behavioral independence, and value independence. This process facilitated the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships within the data (Putri et al., 2023).

Next, the data were presented in descriptive narrative form, integrating findings from observations and interviews. Narrative presentation allows for comprehensive and contextual explanation of qualitative findings, enabling readers to understand the phenomenon holistically (Hidayat et al., 2023).

The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verification. Conclusions were developed through careful interpretation of recurring themes and patterns and were continuously verified by cross-checking consistency across data sources. This iterative process ensured that conclusions were grounded in empirical evidence and accurately represented the research context.

Data Credibility

To enhance trustworthiness, this study applied source triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from parents, classroom teachers, and direct observations of Child A. According to Sugiyono (2022), source triangulation strengthens validity by cross-verifying data from different informants and methods. When information from multiple sources demonstrated consistency, the data were considered credible.

This strategy is supported by Rahmawati and Suyadi (2021), who emphasized that triangulation is particularly effective in early childhood research to obtain a comprehensive understanding of children's behavior across home and school environments. Therefore, the

use of source triangulation in this study enhanced the reliability and credibility of findings regarding the influence of parenting styles on early childhood independence.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Main Results

Based on classroom observations conducted at Kindergarten X, Child A demonstrated a low level of independence during daily school activities. Child A was unable to independently perform basic self-care tasks such as taking a drink or putting on shoes and required direct assistance from the teacher. During structured learning activities, the child waited for teacher instructions before initiating tasks and did not independently begin assigned work.

During transitions between activities, Child A frequently stopped ongoing tasks before completion and showed difficulty maintaining focus. The child required repeated prompts from the teacher to continue participation. In peer interactions, Child A did not engage in independent play and sought teacher assistance during social activities.

Interview data obtained from parents indicated similar patterns at home. Parents reported that Child A regularly received assistance in daily activities. According to parental statements, at approximately two years of age, Child A was frequently carried and had limited opportunities to practice independent walking. Parents also reported continued assistance in routine daily activities as the child grew older.

Across both school and home settings, data from observation and interviews consistently showed dependence on adult assistance. Findings were categorized into three aspects of independence: emotional, behavioral, and value-based independence.

In terms of emotional independence, Child A required the teacher's presence to feel secure during learning activities. The child sought reassurance before attempting new or challenging tasks and did not proceed without adult support.

Regarding behavioral independence, Child A did not consistently complete tasks independently. The child waited for further instruction before continuing assigned work and demonstrated difficulty sustaining attention during activity transitions. Tasks were frequently left unfinished without teacher intervention.

In relation to value-based independence, Child A showed limited ability to make simple decisions independently. The child depended on teacher direction when determining actions and did not independently initiate participation in peer activities. Responsibility for assigned tasks was not consistently demonstrated without adult prompting.

Overall, the collected data indicate that Child A exhibited limitations in emotional, behavioral, and value-based independence in both school and home environments.

Data Visualization

Table 1 Observation Results of Child A's Independence at School

Aspect of Independence	Observed Behavior	Frequency of Adult Assistance
Self-care skills	Unable to put on shoes or get drinks independently	Frequent
Task initiation	Waited for teacher instructions before starting tasks	Frequent
Task completion	Stopped activities before finishing	Frequent
Emotional regulation	Required teacher presence for reassurance	Frequent
Peer interaction	Unable to engage in independent play	Frequent

Table 2 Interview Findings on Independence at Home

Aspect	Parent Report
Early motor independence	Frequently carried at age ± 2 years
Daily routines	Regular assistance in self-care tasks
Decision-making	Dependent on parental direction
Responsibility	Tasks completed with parental guidance

This Results section presents factual findings only and avoids interpretation, consistent with research reporting standards. If you would like, we can now proceed to the Discussion section, where interpretation, theoretical integration, and linkage to parenting styles will be developed systematically.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

Independence is a central developmental task in early childhood, reflecting a child's ability to regulate behavior, initiate actions, and assume responsibility for decisions. Steinberg (1995) defines independence as the capacity to perform tasks without reliance on others, while Steinberg (2014) further categorizes it into emotional, behavioral, and value-based dimensions. The findings of this study indicate that Child A demonstrated limitations across these three dimensions in both school and home environments. When compared with developmental expectations for children aged five years, Child A's independence appeared below age-appropriate milestones, particularly in task initiation, task completion, emotional regulation, and decision-making.

From a psychosocial perspective, Erikson (1963) explains that children aged 4–6 years are in the stage of initiative versus guilt, during which they actively explore their environment and develop initiative. The limited independence observed in Child A suggests that opportunities for autonomous action may not have been sufficiently supported. Erikson (1963) emphasizes that when children receive appropriate encouragement to act

independently, they develop confidence and responsibility; conversely, excessive control or assistance may lead to dependency and hesitation.

The findings also indicate that early caregiving patterns influenced Child A's independence development. Santrock (2003) identifies parenting style and environmental factors as major influences on children's socio-emotional growth. Interview data revealed that Child A frequently received assistance in daily activities from an early age, limiting opportunities to practice self-help skills gradually. This pattern appears to have affected the development of independent behaviors across contexts.

Relationship to Literature

The parenting characteristics described by Child A's parents resemble permissive parenting as conceptualized by Hurlock (1999). Permissive parenting is characterized by high responsiveness but low demands and limited structure. Research suggests that children raised in permissive environments may experience difficulties in developing self-discipline, responsibility, and independent decision-making skills. The present findings are consistent with this perspective, as Child A exhibited dependence on adults for guidance and task completion.

Hurlock (1993) emphasizes that independence develops through consistent practice and habituation rather than continuous assistance. Similarly, Santrock (2011) highlights that structured guidance combined with opportunities for choice fosters self-regulation and autonomy in early childhood. The findings of this study align with these theoretical perspectives, showing that limited habituation of independent tasks may correspond with reduced independence development.

Furthermore, Erikson's (1963) framework supports the importance of environmental support during early childhood. The results of this study are consistent with previous research indicating that balanced parental guidance and clear expectations are associated with stronger autonomy development, whereas inconsistent boundaries may hinder initiative and responsibility formation (Santrock, 2011).

Limitations of the Study

This study employed a qualitative case study design focusing on a single participant. Consequently, the findings are contextual and cannot be generalized to broader populations. The limited duration of observation means that the data reflect Child A's independence within a specific timeframe and may not represent long-term developmental patterns.

Additionally, although triangulation was conducted through observations and interviews with parents and teachers, the findings remain partially dependent on participant reports. Subjectivity in interpreting independence-related behaviors cannot be entirely eliminated. Variations in classroom context, teacher expectations, and situational factors may also have influenced observed behaviors.

Implications

Despite these limitations, the findings highlight the significant role of parenting style in shaping early childhood independence. Practically, parents are encouraged to provide structured opportunities for children to perform daily tasks independently, accompanied by consistent expectations and positive reinforcement. Teachers may also collaborate with families to design classroom strategies that gradually strengthen emotional, behavioral, and value-based independence.

For future research, studies involving larger samples and extended observation periods are recommended to obtain broader and more comprehensive insights into the relationship between parenting styles and independence development. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also complement qualitative findings to enhance empirical robustness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the level of independence of Child A at the age of five has not yet developed optimally. Limitations were identified across emotional, behavioral, and value-based dimensions of independence. These limitations were reflected in the child's consistent reliance on adult assistance when performing daily activities, both in school and home environments. The findings indicate that Child A demonstrates a high level of dependence in initiating tasks, completing responsibilities, regulating emotions, and making simple decisions independently.

The results further suggest that the observed low level of independence is closely associated with parenting practices characterized by excessive assistance and limited habituation of responsibility from an early age. Such patterns are consistent with permissive parenting characteristics, which may reduce opportunities for children to gradually practice autonomy and self-regulation.

Independence is a fundamental component of early childhood development, as it contributes significantly to the formation of self-regulation, decision-making abilities, and personal responsibility. Hurlock (1993) emphasizes that children who develop independence are better able to manage daily activities, adapt to environmental demands, and solve problems without excessive reliance on adults. Therefore, strengthening Child A's independence requires collaborative efforts between parents and teachers. Providing structured opportunities for independent action, encouraging consistent practice of daily responsibilities, and offering developmentally appropriate guidance are essential strategies to support autonomy development.

Through sustained support and consistent stimulation across home and school settings, Child A is expected to gradually achieve independence levels aligned with age-related developmental expectations, thereby promoting more optimal social, emotional, and behavioral growth.

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