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Development of Adaptive Skills as an Effort to Increase Early Childhood Independence

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Abstract

Early childhood is at a developmental stage that requires the opportunity to learn to do various activities gradually and according to ability. Adaptive skills are one of the important foundations because they are related to the ability of children to carry out daily activities, adapt behavior to environmental demands, regulate themselves, and participate more independently. This article aims to analyze the development of adaptive skills as an effort to increase early childhood independence based on a study of several relevant scientific sources. The method used is a literature study by analyzing three main sources, namely the study of factors that affect early childhood adaptive behavior, a longitudinal study on the development of adaptive behavior in children with autism, and research on the performance of daily life activities in preschool-age children. The results of the study show that adaptive skills do not stand alone, but are influenced by physical conditions, personality, education, exercise, environment, religion, and culture. Activities such as eating, personal hygiene, clothing, and daily functioning are concrete parts of skills that support independence. The development of these skills needs to be done through habituation, provision of opportunities, gradual exercises, environmental support, and contextual assessments. Thus, the development of adaptive skills can be placed as an integral part of early childhood learning to help children become better able to take care of their own needs and participate in the environment appropriately.

Keywords: adaptive skills; independence; early childhood; daily activities; early childhood

1. Introduction

Early childhood is an important period in development because various basic skills begin to form and become the foundation for the next stage of development. Balqis (2021) explained that children's success in completing developmental tasks at one stage will help the next stage run smoothly. One of the images that can be used to see the suitability of children's development with the demands of their environment is adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is related to the ability of individuals to behave in accordance with the demands, norms, and standards that apply in the environment and carry out daily activities using personal and social skills (Balqis, 2021). In the context of early childhood education, this concept has a strong relationship with independence. Children who get the opportunity to try, practice, and repeat a skill will have a greater chance of developing the ability to take care of themselves gradually.

Independence in early childhood does not mean that children have to do everything without adult help. Independence is more precisely understood as the ability of children to take part in activities that are appropriate to their age and developmental level, for example, eating, maintaining personal hygiene, dressing, tidying up things, following routines, and responding to simple changes in activities. Research by Barrios-Fernández et al. (2026) places activities of daily living as important components of children's development and participation. The study measures eating, personal hygiene, dressing, and daily functioning as aspects of functional performance in preschoolers.

The need for adaptive skill development is also seen from the longitudinal research of Farmer et al. (2018). The study showed that the development of adaptive behavior in children with autism is heterogeneous. In the study sample, there were groups with low and declining adaptive ability trajectories and groups with more moderate and relatively stable

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abilities. These findings show the importance of paying attention to the development of adaptive skills from preschool and monitoring changes in children's abilities over time.

Based on this description, the development of adaptive skills needs to receive attention in early childhood learning. Teachers and parents can create learning experiences that give children the opportunity to perform daily tasks gradually, provide assistance as necessary, and reduce assistance as the child's abilities develop. Therefore, this article discusses how adaptive skills can be developed as an effort to increase early childhood independence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Adaptive Skills in Early Childhood

Adaptive skills can be understood as the ability of children to use personal and social skills to carry out daily activities and adjust their behavior to the demands of the environment. Balqis (2021) explains adaptive behavior as the ability to behave according to the standards of personal freedom and respond to the environment according to the expectations of cultural and age groups. This definition places adaptive behavior as a functional and contextual ability.

In early childhood life, adaptive skills appear in simple but meaningful behaviors, such as eating regularly, using personal equipment, maintaining personal hygiene, putting on and taking off clothes, tidying up things, following the order of activities, asking for help appropriately, and adjusting when simple changes in routine occur. Barrios-Fernández et al. (2026) specifically group daily living activities into eating, personal hygiene, dressing, and daily functioning. On the scale of daily functioning, the aspects assessed also related to the ability to initiate activities when given directions and adjust behaviors when the sequence of activities changed slightly.

Thus, adaptive skills are not only related to physical abilities. Children also need the ability to self-regulate, follow the sequence of actions, understand the demands of the situation, and use simple strategies when facing change. This shows that the development of independence needs to combine motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and daily habit aspects.

2.2 Factors Affecting the Development of Adaptive Skills

Balqis (2021) outlined several factors that affect the self-adjustment process, namely physical condition, personality, education, environment, and religion and culture. These factors can be a framework to understand why children's adaptive abilities develop at different speeds and patterns.

First, physical condition. Health conditions and body functions can affect children's ease of doing activities and adjusting. Balqis (2021) emphasized that a healthy physical condition supports self-acceptance and confidence, while poor physical condition can be an obstacle in the process of self-adjustment.

Second, personality and self-regulation. The willingness to change, the ability to self-regulate, self-realization, and intellectual capacity are referred to as elements related to self-adjustment (Balqis, 2021). In early childhood learning, these aspects can be developed through routine activities that provide limited choices, opportunities to make simple decisions, and the habit of completing tasks completely.

Third, education and practice. Balqis (2021) emphasized that learning, experience, and practice play a role in the formation of self-adjustment skills. Practice that is done consistently can help change skills or habits. This principle is important for early childhood education because independent skills are not enough to be explained verbally, but need to be practiced repeatedly in real-life situations.

Fourth, the family, school, and community environment. The environment is a place where children get behavioral models, trial opportunities, rules, and support. School can be an environment that allows the development of children's

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social, intellectual, values, attitudes, and moral abilities (Balqis, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to provide a safe environment but not take over too much of children's tasks.

Fifth, religion and culture. Religious and cultural values provide a framework for habits, responsibilities, procedures for interaction, and behavior that are considered appropriate. The development of adaptive skills will be more meaningful if it is associated with the habits that apply in the child's family and environment.

2.3 Adaptive Skills as the Basis of Independence

Children's independence develops when children get the opportunity to do activities that were previously always assisted by adults. In the framework of adaptive skills, daily activities are concrete training spaces. Children not only learn to complete tasks, but also learn to manage steps, use tools, follow sequences, understand the consequences of actions, and take responsibility for their own needs.

Barrios-Fernández et al. (2026) show that basic activities such as eating, personal hygiene, and dressing are an important part of the development of independence and participation. The study also suggests that the performance of daily activities may be related to executive function, including the ability to initiate activities and adjust behaviors when small changes in routine occur. These findings reinforce the view that independence is not just a motor skill, but also requires the ability to organize behavior.

Meanwhile, Farmer et al. (2018) showed that adaptive behavior development can follow different trajectories in children with autism. In the study, about three-quarters of the sample belonged to the low/descending trajectory group, while the other group showed a moderate/stable trajectory. The findings cannot be generalized to all children, but they provide an important reason to monitor the development of adaptive skills periodically and not to consider adaptive skills as something that develops automatically without support.

Based on this synthesis, the development of independence can be directed to skills that are functional, meaningful, and close to children's lives. Examples are getting children used to taking eating utensils, opening and closing containers, washing hands, storing shoes, wearing simple clothes, cleaning toys, and following the order of activities before and after play. These activities can be carried out in stages according to the ability of each child.

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2.5 Adaptive Skills Development Strategies in Early Childhood Education

The development of adaptive skills should be done gradually and consistently. Some strategies that can be applied are as follows.

a. Provide opportunities to try. Teachers do not immediately take over when children experience minor difficulties. Children are given time to try first so that success experiences can be formed.
b. Provide examples and step-by-step help. Teachers can model the steps of the activity, then provide verbal or physical help as needed. As the child begins to be capable, the help is gradually reduced.
c. Using a consistent routine. Routines help children understand the sequence of activities. However, according to the findings of Barrios-Fernández et al. (2026) regarding daily functioning and flexibility to small changes, children also need to be gradually introduced to simple changes in order to be able to adjust behavior.
d. Integrate adaptive skills into play and learning. Activities such as role-playing as a cashier, preparing simple meals, playing around the house, tidying up the classroom, or doing personal hygiene simulations can be a means of practice without eliminating the element of play.
e. Provide positive reinforcement. When children succeed in doing certain parts of the task, the teacher can give specific appreciation, for example by saying that the child is able to store his own items. Reinforcement is directed at effort and process, not comparison with other children.
f. Establish consistency between school and family. Skills will be easier to form if the habits practiced at school also have the opportunity to be practiced at home. Communication between teachers and parents is needed to determine the skills that are being the focus and the form of assistance provided.
g. Conduct contextual assessments. Assessments can use observations, anecdotal notes, checklists, documentation of activity results, and information from parents. Assessments should look at the process and changes in children's abilities in real-world situations, not just the results of a one-time activity. Barrios-Fernández et al. (2026) also emphasize the importance of context-sensitive assessments and the use of information from different environments.

2.6 Examples of Early Childhood Learning Implementation

The development of adaptive skills can be designed through a daily routine. At the beginning of the activity, children can be trained to keep bags and shoes in place. When eating, children are given the opportunity to prepare cutlery, eat in an orderly manner, and clean the area when they are finished. After playing, children are invited to group and return the toys to their original places. In the cleaning activity, children can practice the sequence of washing their hands. At the end of the lesson, children are given the opportunity to recheck personal belongings before going home. Teachers can use a gradual approach: children look at examples, try with the teacher, try with a little help, and then try independently. Every child does not have to achieve the same level of independence at the same time. The principle of individualization is important because the development of adaptive behavior can differ between children, as shown by the variation in developmental trajectories in the study of Farmer et al. (2018). Developmental indicators can be formulated simply, for example: children are able to pick up personal equipment as needed; the child is able to follow two to three steps of the routine; the child is able to complete simple tasks with minimal assistance; the child is able to tidy up objects after use; and the child is able to adapt to simple changes in activities. These indicators can be adjusted to the child's age, ability, and context.

2.7 The role of teachers and parents

Teachers act as facilitators who provide opportunities, models, environments, and feedback. The teacher's role is not to replace the child in completing tasks, but rather to help the child achieve a higher level of independence gradually.

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The classroom environment needs to provide tools and spaces that are easily accessible to children so that children can carry out activities without always waiting for adult help. Parents have an equally important role because most adaptive activities occur in everyday life at home. The habits of eating, bathing, dressing, tidying up things, and keeping clean are natural opportunities to practice independence. Consistency between demands at home and school will help children understand that these skills are not just schoolwork, but part of everyday life. Teacher-parent cooperation is also necessary to recognize skills that have already been mastered, skills that are developing, and parts that still need help. This approach allows support to be provided as needed and avoid overly high demands or overly much help.

3. Conclusion

Adaptive skills are an important part of early childhood development because they are related to the ability of children to carry out daily activities and adjust their behavior to environmental demands. A study of the sources used shows that the development of adaptive behavior is influenced by various factors, including physical condition, personality and self-regulation, education and exercise, environment, and religion and culture (Balqis, 2021). Daily life activities such as eating, personal hygiene, dressing, and daily functioning can be concrete targets for the development of independence (Barrios-Fernández et al., 2026). The development of adaptive abilities can also show different patterns between children so that regular monitoring of development and support tailored to the needs of the child are important (Farmer et al., 2018). Thus, the development of adaptive skills in early childhood education can be carried out through habituation, trial opportunities, modeling, gradual exercises, gradual reduction of assistance, positive reinforcement, and cooperation between schools and families. Children's independence should be built through real activities that are close to the child's life and adjusted to the stage of development of each child. The next study can develop field research on the effectiveness of certain adaptive skills habituation programs in early childhood in the context of early childhood education.

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