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Teachers' Strategies for Developing Adaptive Skills in Early Childhood at Kindergarten

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Abstract

Adaptive ability is a fundamental competency that enables young children to adjust to new environments, regulate their emotions, and interact positively with peers and teachers. This article aims to examine the strategies employed by kindergarten teachers in developing the adaptive abilities of early childhood learners. A qualitative library research (studi kepustakaan) method was used, synthesizing theoretical frameworks from books published between 2016 and 2026 and empirical findings from journal articles published between 2021 and 2026. The synthesis shows that teachers develop children's adaptive abilities through several complementary strategies, namely habituation and structured routines, cooperative and rule-based play, cognitive scaffolding through play-based learning, positive emotional-regulation approaches, individualized behavioral interventions for children with diverse needs, value-based habituation, and the integration of these strategies within an adaptive-learning framework that is responsive to each child's developmental level. The findings indicate that adaptive ability develops optimally when teachers combine developmentally appropriate practice with consistent guidance, a warm and supportive classroom climate, and active collaboration with parents. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of adaptive behavior in early childhood education and offers practical implications for kindergarten teachers in designing learning strategies that are responsive to children's individual developmental needs.

Keywords: Adaptive ability; early childhood; kindergarten; teacher strategy; adaptive learning.

1. Introduction

Early Childhood Education (PAUD)—including kindergarten services—is a developmental initiative aimed at children from birth to age six; it involves providing educational stimulation to support physical and mental growth and development, thereby ensuring children are prepared for subsequent stages of education (Suryana & Rizka, 2019)(1). This age range is known as the "golden age," serving as the foundation for the lifelong development of a child's physical-motor, cognitive, emotional, social, linguistic, creative, and artistic capabilities (Mulyani, 2018). It is during this period that children begin to learn how to interact with environments outside the family—such as the school setting—which requires them to adapt to new rules, routines, and social relationships.

A crucial developmental aspect determining a child's success in the school environment is adaptive ability—an individual's capacity to effectively adjust to the demands of their surroundings, whether through independence, communication, or social interaction (Indrijati et al., 2016; Sit, 2017)(2). Children with strong adaptive abilities find it easier to adjust when separating from their parents, following classroom routines, sharing toys with peers, waiting in line, and exercising self-control when faced with situations that do not align with their desires. Conversely, children whose adaptive abilities are not yet optimally developed tend to struggle with adjustment, exhibiting behaviors such as prolonged crying, social withdrawal, or even aggression when confronted with new situations.

The phenomenon of adjustment difficulties in early childhood is closely linked to the maturity of emotional regulation, which is still undergoing development. Caregiving responses—whether from parents at home or teachers at school—

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play a crucial role in shaping a child's ability to manage negative emotions and adapt to their social environment (Herdiana et al., 2023)(3). Consequently, kindergarten teachers hold a highly strategic role: they are not merely instructors delivering academic content but also guides, facilitators, and behavioral role models who assist children in achieving developmental milestones, including adaptive capabilities (Mulyasa, 2017)(4).

Various prior studies have examined teacher strategies for fostering specific developmental aspects in early childhood—such as strategies to enhance cognitive abilities through play-based learning (Ardiana, 2022) (5)or the use of relay games to improve gross motor skills (Tangse & Dimyati, 2021)(6). However, research specifically focusing on teacher strategies to develop adaptive skills in kindergarten children—encompassing the integrated dimensions of independenmmce, socialization, communication, and emotional regulation—remains relatively limited and scattered across disparate research topics. This gap highlights the need for a study that synthesizes various theories and research findings into a more comprehensive strategic framework.

Based on this background, this article aims to conduct an in-depth examination of various strategies that kindergarten teachers can employ to foster adaptive skills in early childhood. This study achieves this through a synthesis of theories from reference books published between 2016 and 2026 and research findings from journal articles published between 2021 and 2026. The study is expected to offer both theoretical contributions to the field of early childhood education and practical contributions in the form of recommended strategies for kindergarten teachers to implement in their daily instructional practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Adaptive Ability in Early Childhood

Conceptually, adaptive ability is understood as an individual's capacity to effectively adjust to environmental demands and changes, encompassing dimensions such as self-help (independence), communication, socialization, and self-control (Indrijati et al., 2016)(2). Sit (2017) (7)emphasizes that early childhood developmental psychology views adaptive ability as an indicator of a child's psychosocial maturity, which develops progressively with age. In kindergarten-aged children, adaptive ability manifests in very concrete ways—such as the ability to follow classroom routines without coercion, separate from parents without excessive crying, share toys and learning materials, wait in line and take turns, and manage emotions during minor conflicts with peers.

Khadijah (2020)(8) adds that adaptive ability is inseparable from a child's cognitive development, as children must first understand and interpret a situation before they can respond appropriately. In other words, adaptive ability results from the interaction between cognitive maturity, emotional maturity, and the social experiences a child gains through interacting with their environment, including the school setting. This understanding serves as a crucial foundation for teachers when designing instructional strategies that focus not only on academic achievement but also on strengthening a child's ability to adapt to their social environment.

2.2. The Role of Kindergarten Teachers in Learning

Kindergarten teachers play a central role in early childhood education. Mulyasa (2017)(4) explains that effective early childhood learning strategies require teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of children's developmental characteristics, enabling them to design learning activities tailored to each child's specific needs and developmental stage. Teachers serve not merely as conveyors of information but also as guides, facilitators, and motivators, as well as behavioral role models whom children emulate in their daily school lives.

Suryana and Rizka (2019) (1)emphasize that the competence of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers—including pedagogical competence regarding the understanding of child development—is a key quality standard for accredited PAUD services. Teachers with a deep understanding of child development stages are better equipped to

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design responsive learning strategies, including those that foster children's adaptive skills, compared to teachers who focus solely on delivering academic content.

2.3 Adaptive Learning as a Conceptual Framework

The concept of adaptive learning represents a strategic innovation for enhancing the effectiveness of early childhood education. Boiliu (2024)(9) explains that adaptive learning is an approach that tailors the learning experience to each child's individual needs, thereby boosting their interest, motivation, and overall learning capabilities. This principle aligns with the child-centered learning approach—a hallmark of early childhood education—in which teachers observe each child's needs and adjust strategies, instructional media, and activity difficulty levels based on the child's readiness (Suryana & Rizka, 2019)(9). This adaptive learning framework serves as a relevant conceptual umbrella for integrating various teacher strategies aimed at developing adaptive skills in young children.

2.4 Factors Influencing the Development of Adaptive Skills

Several factors have been identified as playing a role in the development of adaptive skills in early childhood. First is the pattern of parental responses to a child's emotions. Herdiana et al. (2023) found that a mother's response to a child's negative emotions is closely linked to the emotion regulation abilities of children aged 3–5, which in turn influences their ability to adjust to their social environment. Second is consistent habituation. Mudayanti and Jumiatin (2025) demonstrated that the implementation of routine and structured habituation methods is effective in fostering discipline among kindergarten-aged children—a tangible manifestation of adaptive skills. Third are opportunities for play and social interaction. Wahyuni and Sari (2022) as well as Tangse and Dimyati (2021) emphasize that play activities—whether cooperative games or structured physical play—provide children with the opportunity to practice cooperation, rule-following, and positive peer interaction, all of which are crucial components of adaptive skills.

2.5 Relevant Prior Research

Ardiana (2022)(5) examined teacher strategies for developing the cognitive abilities of children aged 5–6 at Al Ijtihad Kindergarten in Samarinda, employing a qualitative descriptive approach involving interviews, observation, and documentation. The study results indicate that teachers implemented strategies such as learning through play, simple scientific experiments, role-playing, and group games; these activities indirectly trained the children to understand new situations and respond to them appropriately—a crucial prerequisite for adaptive capability.

Tangse and Dimyati (2021)(6) found that relay games are effective in enhancing the gross motor skills of children aged 5–6 years. Beyond the motor aspect, relay games require children to understand and follow rules, wait for their turn, and cooperate with group members, thereby fostering the social dimension of adaptive skills. Similarly, Wahyuni and Sari (2022) (10)reported that the "Make a Match" cooperative play method can improve the social skills of early childhood children—a key indicator of adaptive ability in the context of peer interactions.

Regarding the cultivation of values, Handayani et al. (2026)(11) reveal that teacher strategies—specifically the use of habituation and learning media to instill an understanding of the *salat* (prayer) ritual in early childhood—contribute to shaping children's discipline and their ability to adapt to the socio-religious norms of their environment. Meanwhile, for children with specific characteristics and needs, Pane et al. (2026) (12)demonstrate that the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) approach—grounded in behaviorist theory—is

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effective in enhancing the adaptive capabilities of children exhibiting difficulties with attention and behavioral control, particularly in following instructions, maintaining focus, and engaging in social interactions within the learning environment.

Based on the synthesis of the literature review above, it can be concluded that no single strategy is sufficient to comprehensively develop the adaptive capabilities of young children. Developing these capabilities requires a combination of strategies—including habituation, structured and cooperative play, positive emotional regulation approaches, and individualized or behavioral approaches tailored to each child's characteristics—all integrated within a child-centered adaptive learning framework.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical library research method. This method was selected because the research aims to synthesize theoretical concepts and empirical findings from various literature sources into a coherent framework for understanding teacher strategies in developing the adaptive capabilities of early childhood students in kindergartens, rather than generating new field data.

The data sources in this study consist of two categories. First, primary sources comprising reference books on early childhood developmental psychology and early childhood education (ECE) instructional management or strategies, published between 2016 and 2026. Second, supporting sources comprising national scholarly journal articles published between 2021 and 2026 that discuss teacher strategies, adaptive capabilities, socio-emotional behavior, and adaptive learning in early childhood.

A literature search was conducted using online academic databases such as Google Scholar and Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), as well as relevant national journal portals, employing keywords including "teacher strategies," "adaptive capabilities," "early childhood," "kindergarten," and "adaptive learning." The inclusion criteria for the sources were: (1) thematic relevance to teacher strategies and the adaptive capabilities of young children; (2) alignment with the publication timeframe; and (3) publication by credible publishers or journals with open-access availability.

The data analysis technique employed was thematic analysis, conducted in three stages: data reduction (sorting and focusing on relevant information from each source), data presentation (grouping findings into interconnected strategic themes), and conclusion drawing (synthesizing these themes into a comprehensive framework of teacher strategies). To ensure the study's credibility, source triangulation was performed by comparing concepts from reference books with empirical findings from journal articles, thereby yielding a synthesis that is consistent and academically sound.

4. Results and Discussion

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4.1. Habituation Strategies and Structured Routines

The habituation strategy is one of the most widely implemented approaches by kindergarten teachers to shape children's adaptive behavior. Mudayanti and Jumiatin (2025)(13) demonstrate that the consistent and repetitive application of habituation methods—such as routines involving greeting teachers, tidying up toys after play, and following the sequence of daily activities—is effective in fostering discipline in early childhood. Structured routines provide children with a sense of security and predictability, making it easier for them to adapt to the demands of the school environment. This aligns with the views of Mulyasa (2017)(4), who emphasizes the importance of teacher consistency in

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implementing instructional strategies to ensure that goals regarding children's behavioral development are optimally achieved.

4.2. Structured and Cooperative Play Strategies

Play serves as a primary vehicle for early childhood learning and an effective means of fostering adaptive skills. Tangse and Dimyati (2021)(6) demonstrate that structured relay games designed by teachers not only enhance children's gross motor skills but also teach them to understand rules, wait for their turn, and collaborate within a group. Wahyuni and Sari (2022)(10) add that the "Make a Match" cooperative play method provides children with opportunities for positive peer interaction, social skill development, and learning to complete tasks collaboratively. Teachers play a crucial role in designing the games, establishing clear rules, and guiding children throughout the play process to ensure that values related to adaptability are effectively internalized.

4.3. Cognitive Scaffolding Strategy through Play-and-Learn Activities

A child's adaptive capacity is inextricably linked to their cognitive readiness to comprehend new situations. Ardiana (2022)(5) found that kindergarten teachers employ scaffolding strategies through simple experiments (science activities), role-playing, and guessing games designed to align with the children's developmental stages. Through active teacher guidance, children are gradually led to understand cause-and-effect relationships, solve simple problems, and make decisions during play; this, in turn, strengthens their ability to respond appropriately to new situations—a core component of cognitive adaptive capacity.

4.4. Emotion Regulation and Positive Teacher-Child Interaction Approach

Adaptive capacity is also significantly influenced by the maturity of a child's emotional regulation. Herdiana et al. (2023)(3) emphasize that the responses of adults—including teachers—to a child's negative emotions play a crucial role in shaping the child's ability to manage and express emotions appropriately. Teachers who adopt a warm, responsive, and non-judgmental approach when a child displays negative emotions—such as crying, anger, or refusing to participate in activities—can help the child learn to self-soothe and adjust their responses to the situation at hand. This approach aligns with the principle that kindergarten teachers serve as secondary caregiving figures who contribute to shaping a child's socio-emotional maturity (Sit, 2017)(7).

4.5 Individual and Behavioral Approaches for Children with Diverse Needs

Every child possesses unique characteristics and developmental paces, including those who struggle to follow instructions, maintain focus, or control their behavior. Pane et al. (2026)(12) demonstrated that the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) approach—grounded in behaviorist theory and utilizing step-by-step instruction and positive reinforcement—is effective in enhancing the adaptive skills of children who face challenges with attention and self-control. These findings underscore the importance of kindergarten teachers being sensitive to the diverse characteristics of children in their classrooms and employing individualized approaches rather than relying solely on general, whole-class strategies.

4.6 Instilling Values and Routine Activities Rooted in Religious Culture

Beyond socio-emotional and cognitive aspects, the habituation of values contributes to a child's adaptive capacity to align with environmental norms. Handayani et al. (2026)(11) demonstrate that strategies for habituating religious practices—supported by engaging learning media—can foster discipline, responsibility, and the ability to adhere to the rules and socio-religious norms prevailing in both school and family

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environments. This approach illustrates that the development of adaptive skills can be integrated through value-based and local cultural content, rather than being limited solely to cognitive and social dimensions.

4.7 Adaptive Learning as an Integrative Framework

The six strategies mentioned above can essentially be integrated within the adaptive learning framework proposed by Boiliu (2024)—an approach that tailors the learning experience to each child's individual needs. Teachers applying adaptive learning principles flexibly select and combine strategies such as habituation, cooperative play, cognitive scaffolding, positive emotional approaches, and individual or behavioral approaches, depending on the specific characteristics and needs of the children in their care. This integrative approach aligns with the principle of child-centered learning, which serves as the philosophical foundation of early childhood education (Suryana & Rizka, 2019)(1).

4.8 Discussion: Challenges and Implications

A synthesis of the literature also reveals several challenges in implementing these strategies, including teachers' limited time for providing individual guidance, non-ideal teacher-to-child ratios, insufficient teacher training on supporting children with special needs, and a lack of adequate play facilities. Furthermore, the effectiveness of school-based strategies is maximized when supported by consistent parenting practices at home, given that a child's adaptive capabilities are shaped through ongoing interaction between the school and family environments (Herdiana et al., 2023)(3). Consequently, collaboration between teachers and parents, alongside support for the continuous professional development of kindergarten teachers, represents a crucial area requiring action by early childhood education institutions.

5. Conclusion

Based on the synthesis of the literature review, it can be concluded that developing the adaptive capabilities of young children in kindergarten requires a combination of complementary teacher strategies, including: (1) strategies involving habituation and structured routines; (2) structured and cooperative play strategies; (3) cognitive scaffolding strategies through play-based learning activities; (4) approaches focusing on emotional regulation and positive teacher-child interactions; (5) individual or behavioral approaches for children with diverse needs; (6) the cultivation of culturally and religiously grounded values; and (7) the integration of all these strategies within a child-centered, adaptive learning framework. No single strategy is sufficient to comprehensively develop adaptive capabilities; success relies heavily on the teacher's sensitivity in recognizing each child's characteristics and needs, the consistent application of strategies, a warm and supportive classroom climate, and collaboration with parents.

This study is limited by its nature as a literature review that synthesizes theories and findings from prior research, without involving direct field data collection. Therefore, it is recommended that future research conduct empirical studies—utilizing either qualitative case study or quantitative approaches—to test the effectiveness of the combined strategies synthesized here within specific kindergarten contexts and to develop more standardized instruments for measuring the adaptive capabilities of early childhood children in Indonesia.

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6. Declarations

6.1. Author Contributions

Nopia bears full responsibility for the entire process of writing this article, encompassing the formulation of the concept, the search for and analysis of literature sources, the synthesis of theory and discussion, and the drafting of the final manuscript.

6.2. Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are derived from books and journal articles that have been openly published and are publicly accessible, as fully listed in the reference list.

6.3. Funding

The writing of this article did not receive specific funding from any government, commercial, or non-profit institution.

6.4. Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

6.5. Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

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