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Development of Adaptive Behavior in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Adaptive behavior refers to a child's ability to adjust to the environment and carry out various daily activities according to their developmental stage and surroundings. In early childhood, adaptive behavior includes the ability to perform activities independently, communicate, interact socially, follow rules, and complete various simple activities in daily life. The development of adaptive behavior is very important because it serves as one of the foundations for children to develop independence, social skills, and readiness to participate in learning activities. This development is influenced by various factors, such as parenting styles, family environment, school environment, stimulation provided, and opportunities for children to engage in activities independently. Therefore, teachers and parents play an important role in providing appropriate stimulation based on children's needs and characteristics. Assessment of adaptive behavior is also necessary to identify children's developmental progress and determine appropriate stimulation. Discussion of adaptive behavior development in early childhood is expected to provide educators and parents with an understanding of the importance of developing adaptive skills from an early age.

Keywords: adaptive behavior, early childhood, independence, child development, stimulation.

1. Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period for growth and development. During this time, children develop across various domains, including physical-motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral, and independence. These developmental aspects are interconnected and form the foundation for how children navigate their daily lives. One essential ability to foster from an early age is adaptive behavior—a child's capacity to adjust to their environment and carry out daily activities appropriate for their age and the demands of their surroundings.

Adaptive behavior encompasses more than just the ability to perform tasks independently; it also includes communicating, interacting with others, following rules, taking care of oneself, and completing simple tasks. These skills enable children to function effectively within their family and school environments. Children who receive appropriate opportunities and stimulation find it easier to learn how to perform various activities independently and adapt their behavior to the situations they encounter.

The development of adaptive behavior varies from child to child. Such differences can be influenced by both internal and external factors, including the child's developmental stage, individual characteristics, parenting styles, family and school environments, and the stimulation provided by adults. Consequently, parents and teachers play a vital role in providing children with opportunities to learn daily tasks, make simple decisions, interact with peers, and understand the rules of their environment.

In early childhood education, the development of adaptive behavior should be nurtured through learning activities tailored to each child's characteristics. Play, routines, group activities, and everyday tasks serve as effective means for

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developing a child's adaptive capabilities. Teachers should also conduct ongoing observation and assessment to identify which skills have already developed and which areas still require further stimulation.

Given the points above, understanding the development of adaptive behavior in early childhood is essential for both educators and parents. A solid grasp of the concepts, components, influencing factors, and methods for fostering and assessing adaptive behavior enables adults to provide the right kind of stimulation, aligned with the specific needs and developmental stage of each child.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Adaptive Behavior in Early Childhood

Adaptive behavior refers to an individual's ability to adjust to environmental demands and carry out the activities necessary for daily life. In early childhood, adaptive behavior is manifested through a child's capacity to perform daily tasks, communicate, interact with others, follow rules, and demonstrate independence appropriate to their developmental stage. Essentially, adaptive behavior is the ability of an individual to conform to the norms or standards prevalent in their environment. If a person can behave in accordance with these norms, they are considered to possess good adaptive behavior. Not everyone is capable of behaving adaptively, as such behavior is influenced by factors including one's environment, intelligence, emotional intelligence, and social support. In early childhood, adaptive capabilities do not emerge spontaneously; rather, they develop through learning processes, habituation, social interaction, and a child's experiences within their family and school environments (Balqis, 2018).

According to Bambang S. Sulasmono, adaptive learning is an instructional approach designed to dynamically tailor learning experiences to an individual's specific needs and abilities. The fundamental concept of adaptive learning is rooted in the understanding that every individual possesses a unique learning style, level of comprehension, and pace of learning (Bambang S. Sulasmono, 2012). Key concepts of adaptive learning, as outlined by Bambang S. Sulasmono (2012), include: 1) Personalization: Adaptive learning provides experiences customized to an individual's needs, encompassing factors such as the difficulty level of the material, learning style, and the degree of conceptual mastery. 2) Use of technology: Adaptive learning utilizes software, algorithms, and artificial intelligence to collect and analyze data on a learner's progress, allowing instruction to be automatically adjusted based on that data. 3) Active engagement. Adaptive learning encourages the active engagement of learners in the learning process, including decision-making, problem-solving, and other activities that stimulate critical thinking (Boiliu & Messakh, 2024).

Cook Klein (2014: 7) stated that adaptive behavior is the ability to adjust to new situations and to possess the skills necessary to navigate those situations (Wulandari, 2014). Children's adaptive abilities are also strongly influenced by the quality of the emotional bond between parent and child, which is shaped by parenting styles at home. Children who experience closeness, attention, and good communication from their parents typically develop a sense of security, making it easier for them to form social relationships with teachers and peers. This aligns with the findings of Fahmawati (2022), which indicate that parenting styles play a role in fostering a child's independence and social readiness upon entering early childhood education (PAUD). Furthermore, according to Lelo (2023), appropriate parenting also supports a child's social-emotional development, which serves as a fundamental basis for the adaptation process within a school environment (Lamaduno et al., 2025).

2.2. Aspects of Adaptive Behavior

Adaptive behavior in children encompasses several interrelated abilities. In general, these include communication skills, daily living skills, socialization skills, and motor skills. These four aspects are interconnected and reflect a child's capacity to function within a social environment and engage in various activities. Communication skills help children express their needs, desires, and feelings. Daily living skills relate to a child's ability to perform

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simple tasks independently. Socialization skills are demonstrated through interactions with peers, teachers, and family members, while motor skills support children in carrying out various physical activities.

2.3 Development of Adaptive Behavior during the Preschool Period

The preschool period is a significant stage in the development of adaptive behavior, as children begin to have more opportunities to interact outside of their family environment. During this time, children start learning to follow rules, cooperate with peers, complete tasks, take care of personal belongings, and perform daily activities with increasing independence. Research by Rašková et al. (2025) indicates that adaptive behavior in preschool-aged children encompasses several domains, including communication, daily living skills, and socialization. The study further highlights that cognitive abilities and executive functions are factors linked to adaptive behavior, particularly among children with autism.

However, the development of adaptive behavior does not follow the same pattern for every child. Children possess different characteristics, experiences, environments, and developmental needs. Therefore, the development of adaptive behavior must be understood in the context of each child's unique circumstances and developmental stage.

2.4 Factors Influencing Adaptive Behavior The development of adaptive behavior is influenced by various factors.

Several elements that can affect a child's adjustment process include physical condition, personality, education, environment, religion, and culture. These factors may interact with one another to shape a child's ability to adapt to their environment. Furthermore, the family environment plays a significant role in the development of adaptive behavior. The school environment also provides opportunities for children to develop adaptive behavior through play activities, the establishment of routines, group work, and interactions with peers. Thus, consistent stimulation provided at home and at school can be a crucial component in supporting the development of a child's adaptive capabilities.
According to Schneiders (cited in Ali & Asrori, 2009: 181–189), there are at least five factors that can influence the adjustment process, one of which is physical condition. A child's physical condition has a strong impact on their adjustment process; if a child's physical state differs in function from that of others, the child may feel excluded and withdraw, which in turn creates obstacles in the development of their adaptive behavior.

Aspects related to physical condition that can influence an adolescent's adjustment include the following: 1. Heredity and physical constitution. In identifying the influence of heredity on adjustment, a physical-based approach is often used, as heredity is viewed as being closely linked to—and inseparable from—physical mechanisms. From this, a general principle emerges: the more closely a personal capacity, trait, or tendency is related to one's physical constitution, the greater its influence on adjustment. 2. Major body systems. The primary body systems that influence adjustment are the nervous, glandular, and muscular systems. A normally and healthily developed nervous system is an absolute prerequisite for psychological functions to operate at their full potential, which in turn positively impacts an individual's adjustment. In other words, the proper functioning of the nervous system is a fundamental condition necessary for effective adjustment. 3. Physical health. It is easier for an individual to achieve and maintain adjustment when in good physical health. A healthy physical state can foster self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-esteem—all of which are highly advantageous for the adjustment process.

Conversely, poor physical health can lead to feelings of inferiority, a lack of self-confidence, or even self-blame, which can negatively affect the adjustment process. b. Personality. Key personality elements that significantly influence adjustment include: (a) the willingness and ability to change, (b) self-regulation, (c) self-realization, and (d) intelligence. Each element is explained as follows:
1. Willingness and ability to change. The willingness and ability to change are personality characteristics that exert a particularly prominent influence on the adjustment process. As a dynamic and continuous process, adjustment requires a propensity for change—manifested in one's willingness, behavior, attitudes, and other similar characteristics.

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Consequently, the more rigid an individual is—and the less willing or able they are to respond to their environment—the greater the likelihood that they will experience difficulties in adjusting.

2. Self-regulation: Self-regulation is as important as the process of adjustment and the maintenance of mental stability; it is the ability to regulate and direct oneself. The capacity for self-regulation can help an individual avoid personality deviations. Furthermore, it enables a person with a healthy personality to achieve self-control and self-actualization.

3. Self-actualization: The capacity for self-regulation implies the potential and ability to move toward self-actualization. The process of adjustment—and the gradual achievement of its outcomes—is closely linked to personality development. If personality development proceeds normally throughout childhood and adolescence, it fosters latent potential—such as attitudes, a sense of responsibility, the internalization of values, self-esteem, appreciation for one's environment, and other characteristics—that contribute to the formation of an adult personality. These are all essential elements that underpin self-actualization.

4. Intelligence: The capacity for self-regulation depends, in part, on another fundamental quality that plays a crucial role in adjustment: intelligence. Often, the quality of an individual's adjustment is determined by their intellectual capacity. Intelligence is vital for the development of ideas, principles, and goals, all of which play a significant role in the adjustment process.

c. Education

1. Learning: The willingness to learn is a key element within an individual, as many of the responses and personality traits necessary for adjustment are acquired through the learning process.

2. Experience: There are two types of experiences that significantly influence an individual's adjustment process: (1) healthy (positive) experiences, and (2) traumatic experiences. Healthy experiences are events that an individual finds pleasant, engaging, and safe enough to want to repeat. Traumatic experiences are events encountered by an individual that are perceived as highly unpleasant, distressing, or even deeply painful—to such an extent that the individual strongly wishes for them never to recur. Those who have undergone such traumatic experiences often become hesitant, lack self-confidence, feel uneasy or insecure, suffer from low self-esteem, or may even experience fear when faced with the need to adapt to a new environment.

3. Practice: Practice is a learning process oriented toward changing skills or habits. Since adjustment is a complex process—encompassing both psychological and sociological dimensions—it requires diligent practice to achieve a successful outcome. It is not uncommon for an individual who initially struggles with adjustment—or who is rigid in their approach—to gradually develop better adaptive attitudes toward a new environment through consistent and earnest practice.

4. Self-Determination: Closely linked to adjustment is the fact that individuals must ultimately determine for themselves whether or not to engage in the process of adjustment. This is significant because self-determination is a powerful force; it can be directed toward positive or negative ends—leading either to complete, successful adjustment or, conversely, to self-destructive behavior. d. Environment: Environmental factors that influence adjustment include:

1. Family Environment: The family environment is the primary setting—arguably the most critical one—in relation to an individual's adjustment.

2. School Environment: Much like the family environment, the school environment can either facilitate or hinder the development of an individual's adjustment process. Generally, schools are viewed as vital mediums that shape a student's life, intellectual growth, social skills, values, attitudes, and morality.

3. Social/Community Environment: The broader community also influences the development of an individual's adjustment. In reality, tendencies toward deviant behavior or juvenile delinquency—which represent poor forms of adjustment—often stem from the influence of the surrounding community. e. Religion and Culture: Religion is closely intertwined with culture. It contributes values, beliefs, and practices that provide profound meaning, purpose, balance, and stability to an individual's life. Consequently, religious factors play a significant role in the development of an individual's adjustment. Apart from religion, culture is also a factor that greatly influences life (Balqis, 2018)

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3. Methodology

This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative descriptive approach. This method is used to examine and analyze the findings of previous research concerning the development of adaptive behavior in early childhood. The data utilized are secondary data, sourced from various scholarly materials, including national and international journal articles, books, and other relevant academic resources. Literature searches were conducted across several databases and academic search engines using keywords such as "adaptive behavior early childhood," "adaptive behavior in early childhood," "independence in early childhood," "social skills," and "adaptive behavior."

The selection of literature was based on the following criteria: (1) the material addresses adaptive behavior or the development of adaptive skills in children; (2) it pertains to early childhood or the preschool age range; (3) it originates from credible, scholarly sources; and (4) it is relevant to the research objectives. Literature deemed irrelevant to the study's focus was excluded as a primary source.

The analysis process involved several stages: identifying sources, selecting literature, reading and comprehending the content, categorizing information by theme, analyzing research findings, and synthesizing the data. The information gathered was organized into several themes: the concept of adaptive behavior, its characteristics, developmental aspects, influencing factors, the roles of teachers and parents, and the assessment of adaptive behavior in early childhood. The results of the analysis are presented descriptively to provide an overview of the development of adaptive behavior in early childhood, based on findings from various previous studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

Based on a literature review of various studies concerning adaptive behavior in early childhood, it is found that adaptive behavior is a crucial capacity that supports children in carrying out daily activities and adjusting to their environment. Adaptive abilities develop gradually through experience, habituation, social interaction, and stimulation provided by the family and school environments.

The results of the review indicate that there are several key aspects of adaptive behavior in early childhood: communication, daily living skills, socialization, and motor skills. Communication skills are reflected in a child's ability to understand and convey information, needs, desires, and feelings. Daily living skills are demonstrated by a child's capacity to perform simple tasks independently, such as eating, washing hands, putting on shoes, and tidying up toys.

Regarding the aspect of socialization, children show development through their ability to play with peers, share, cooperate, take turns, follow rules, and build relationships with others. Meanwhile, motor skills support children in engaging in physical activities and daily tasks appropriate to their developmental stage.

The results of the study also indicate that the development of adaptive behavior is influenced by various factors. These factors include the child's individual characteristics, parenting styles, the family environment, the school environment, interactions with peers, culture, and the stimulation provided to the child. An environment that offers children opportunities to attempt and perform activities independently can support the development of adaptive skills.

Furthermore, it was found that the roles of parents and teachers are crucial to the development of adaptive behavior. Parents play a role by fostering habits and providing opportunities for children to carry out daily activities independently. Teachers contribute by providing stimulation through learning activities, play, the establishment of routines, and social interactions within the school environment.

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The study's results also show that play can serve as a means to develop adaptive behavior. Through play, children gain opportunities to communicate, follow rules, cooperate, share, take turns, solve simple problems, and adjust their behavior to the situations they encounter.

In terms of assessment, adaptive behavior can be gauged through the observation of a child's conduct during daily activities. Such assessment may encompass communication skills, independence, socialization, daily living skills, and the child's ability to follow rules and routines.

Overall, the literature indicates that the development of adaptive behavior in early childhood is a gradual process. This development requires consistent stimulation, opportunities for independent learning, social experiences, and support from both the family and school environments.

4.2. Discussion

The literature review indicates that adaptive behavior is a crucial aspect of early childhood development, as it relates to a child's ability to perform daily activities and adjust to their environment. Adaptive behavior encompasses communication, independence, daily living skills, socialization, adherence to rules, behavioral self-regulation, and the ability to solve simple problems. These skills develop through stimulation and experiences provided by both the family and the school. Teachers and parents play a vital role by setting examples, establishing routines, providing guidance, and offering children opportunities to learn to be independent. Play-based activities can also serve as a medium for developing skills such as communication, cooperation, following rules, and interacting with others. Therefore, the development of adaptive behavior requires consistent support through collaboration between teachers and parents, as well as ongoing monitoring via observation during daily activities.

5. Conclusion

Adaptive behavior is a crucial aspect of early childhood development, encompassing the ability to communicate, act independently, socialize, follow rules, and adjust to one's environment. Its development is influenced by a child's individual characteristics, as well as stimulation provided by their family and school environments. Teachers and parents play a vital role in fostering habits, offering guidance, and providing children with opportunities to learn how to be independent. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to ensure that a child's adaptive behavior develops optimally, in alignment with their developmental stage.

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