

The Role of Teachers in Fostering Independence in Children Aged 5-6 Years

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain the role of teachers in fostering the independence of children aged 5-6 years. The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' roles in fostering independence among children aged 5-6 years. Children's independence is an important aspect of development closely related to problem-solving skills and the formation of a responsible, confident character. This study uses a qualitative case study approach. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings of this study show that teachers serve as facilitators, role models, encouragers, and consistent rule-makers to instill independent habits in children. The steps taken include providing real examples, providing verbal encouragement, positive appreciation, and providing opportunities for children to complete tasks independently. Simple activities such as eating, putting on shoes, buttoning clothes, and tidying up toys are practical for developing a sense of responsibility and problem-solving skills. This study emphasizes the importance of consistency in habituation, a supportive environment, and cooperation between teachers and parents to increase children's independence from an early age.

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in parenting and educational patterns today show that many educators and parents do not provide children with opportunities to learn independently in daily activities, such as eating, buttoning, putting on shoes, or tidying up toys (Aprilia et al., 2024). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, direct experience through real activities is the basis for the development of thinking and problem-solving skills in early childhood. Self-care activities, such as putting on one's shoes, are examples of problem-based learning, which involve problem recognition, situation analysis, strategy selection, and outcome evaluation. From a behaviorist perspective, regularly performed habits can form independent behavior and improve self-regulation skills. At the same time, attachment theory shows that overprotective parenting patterns can actually hinder the development of initiative, confidence, and children's ability to overcome challenges (Ermawati & Sumanto, 2023; Fitri et al., 2024). In the context of global social changes, the increasing complexity of modern societal challenges also reinforces the urgency of cultivating fundamental life skills such as independence from an early age, as children are expected to adapt to a world shaped by issues of power relations and social justice (Zawawi & Setiawan, 2025). Therefore, the habituation of independence is not just a habit, but an important step that directly contributes to the child's cognitive, social-emotional, and problem-solving development. The early period of child development is often considered a valuable stage by educators. This precious period is a critical stage for individual growth because it offers significant opportunities to build independence and self-development. In this case, the relationship between *problem-solving* and cognitive skills can foster a sustainable unity through habituation,

increasing children's independence in wearing their own shoes (Hidayanti et al., 2023). Habituation is often considered trivial, even though it helps children learn to engage in positive activities in the future. Habituation occurs through continuous repetition, making an action or behavior more automatic. With this, independence will form habits that lead to solutions to be addressed in the future (Aliyudin & Alvionita, 2025).

Independence needs to be instilled in children from an early age. This is especially important because many parents today tend to overprotect their children. While parental protection is important, it's important to note that overprotection can be a problem. The attitude that must be instilled by parents is to provide ample opportunities for children to grow and learn. Parental intervention should be carried out only when the child really needs support to improve independence by providing trust, habituating positive behaviors according to his developmental stages, such as throwing garbage in its place, meeting personal needs, washing hands, and communicating, and explaining the concept of independence in easy-to-understand language, accompanied by discipline through consistent supervision and guidance from parents (Ningtyas et al., 2024). In this case, successful individuals have generally developed independence from an early age. They are already familiar with various obstacles and difficulties (Hopper et al., 2020). This independent character is what helps them stay strong in facing various challenges, so that they finally achieve success. In daily life, not all children have the opportunity to build independence from an early age. There are still many problems such as children's dependence on parents or teachers in doing simple things, such as wearing shoes, buttoning clothes, eating alone, and tidying up toys. This situation often arises because parents and educators tend to be in a hurry or impatient, thus taking over the tasks that the child is supposed to do. This results in children losing the opportunity to learn independently, practice problem-solving skills, and hone their confidence in facing small challenges that they should be able to overcome according to their developmental stages (Adriana et al., 2022; Khasanah et al., 2023).

Research conducted shows that children's independence in daily activities, including eating alone, wearing their own shoes, can improve children's ability to make simple decisions and practice responsibility for themselves. The results of the study showed that children who were used to doing independent activities had better problem-solving skills compared to children who were always assisted by adults. In addition, research found that the habituation of independence through *self-care activities* such as wearing one's own clothes and shoes is closely related to children's cognitive development, especially in the aspect of *problem-solving* (Lombardi & Drew, 2025). Children who are trained consistently show improved ability to find solutions when faced with difficulties, for example when shoes are not properly fitted. Research conducted by Hidayanti et al (2023) and Susilawati and Diana (2024) shows that children's habits of being independent in daily activities, especially in aspects of self-care such as eating alone, wearing clothes, and wearing shoes, play an important role in children's cognitive development, especially in the ability to solve problems and make simple decisions. Children who often practice independently tend to have responsibility for themselves and the ability to find solutions when facing challenges. However, there are problems that still arise, namely the low self-esteem of some children due to overly protective parenting styles and inconsistent support from the school and family environment. In addition, both studies also had limitations, including a limited focus on specific self-care activities, a lack of analysis of the roles of teachers and parents as key supporters in the formation of independence, and a lack of in-depth research on the long-term impact of children's independence on social-emotional and academic development. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on teachers as key agents in fostering independence among children aged 5–6 years in an international context, namely Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur. Unlike previous studies that emphasize parental roles or specific self-care activities, this study highlights how teachers systematically support independence through classroom practices and habituation, while also considering the interaction between school and home environments in a cross-cultural setting.

METHOD

The research method used is qualitative, using a case study approach (Viera, 2023). This research was conducted at an Indonesian school in Kuala Lumpur through direct observation to identify a problem to be explored in greater depth and studied by the researcher. The data collection technique involved conducting observations at one of the Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur, followed by an in-depth interview with the classroom teacher about the role of teachers in fostering children aged 5-6's independence in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur (Lofland et al, 2022; Subhaktiyasa, 2024). After conducting an interview, the researcher will document the activities through recordings or photos. Data analysis in qualitative research using a case study approach is carried out continuously from data collection through to research completion, using data reduction. In this study, triangulation is used in data collection. This method checks data by collecting information from various sources, using different techniques, or at different times to obtain a more

comprehensive understanding and ensure the accuracy of research findings. The main goal is to improve the accuracy and reliability of results by reducing the likelihood of bias arising from a single source or method.

In the data reduction stage, the data collected through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation of children's activities were sorted and focused on information relevant to the roles of teachers and parents in supporting children's independence aged 5-6 years. Examples include data on how teachers help children tidy up toys, train children to eat on their own, and the forms of support and challenges faced. The reduced Data Display data is then presented as a descriptive narrative, a matrix, a Table, or a chart. This presentation aims to make it easier for researchers to identify patterns, such as teachers' school habits, parents' home habits, and similarities or differences between the two contexts: conclusion: Drawing and Verification. Based on the data presented, the researcher interprets the data and identifies patterns related to teachers' and parents' roles in fostering children's independence. Interim conclusions will continue to be verified through source triangulation (comparing data from teachers and documentation) and technical triangulation (comparing observations, interviews, and documents). This process is carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. By applying this interactive analysis technique, it is hoped that this study can provide a comprehensive picture of how teachers and parents contribute to fostering independence of children aged 5-6 years through daily routines, as well as identifying patterns of practical cooperation between school environments

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Teachers in Fostering Independence in Children Aged 5-6 Years

The role of the teacher in fostering the independence of children aged 5-6 years includes a series of professional tasks in which the teacher functions as a facilitator, a modeler (modeling), a gradually reduced scaffolding provider, and a learning environment manager who gives the child the opportunity to try, practice, and take initiative in doing daily tasks. Systematic teacher intervention includes establishing a consistent routine, arranging play activities that support self-regulation, providing positive feedback, and engaging in collaborative communication with parents to accelerate the development of children's independence and self-regulation skills, which, in turn, increase school readiness and children's confidence. The emphasis on theory or practice in the role of the teacher is not only to teach practical skills, but also to facilitate the development of self-regulation (attention, emotional control, action planning) through daily classroom practices such as support in play, routine rules, and gradual reduction of assists.

From the results of the research conducted, the role of teachers in fostering the independence of children aged 5-6 years at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur can be applied well to children even though there are some children who are still not independent when completing the tasks given by the teacher and there are some children who are still independent in completing the tasks given by the teacher, but some children who are still not independent when completing the tasks of the teacher's role here have a way to overcome The problem is helped slowly so that the child can solve it and supervise until the child finishes. This is done by the teacher so that the child has the awareness to complete the tasks given by the teacher even though the completion is a bit slow. According to the role of teachers in fostering children's independence, it is not only limited to providing teaching, but also through gradual assistance (scaffolding) that allows children to learn to complete tasks independently with minimal support. Teachers act as facilitators who create a conducive learning environment, provide enough time, and foster children's confidence to try to be independent. In addition, research conducted shows that consistent habituation and giving children the opportunity to complete daily activities independently can improve problem-solving skills. (Qadafi et al., 2023) (Tin Surtini et al., 2025)

The results of observations related to the role of teachers according to teachers have a strategic role in shaping children's independence through the provision of direct learning experiences that allow children to be actively involved in daily activities such as eating themselves, wearing their own shoes, and cleaning toys which are then strengthened by direct observation in schools where the role of teachers in fostering independence of children aged 5-6 years in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur is emphasized The importance of providing enough time for children to complete activities independently. For example, children are given the opportunity to put on their own shoes without rushing, and teachers motivate children to clean toys after use. Pipin's mother said that *"the teacher acts as a patient companion, not directly helping unless the child is really struggling"*. In addition, the classroom environment has also been arranged to support children's independence, such as providing a place to wash hands according to the child's height, as well as a dining room that is easy to reach. This helps children get to know their routines and responsibilities towards the environment. The complete summary of the research reviewed during the observation regarding the role of teachers in fostering independence in children aged 5-6 years is as follows in table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the Reviewed Teacher Role Study

Aspects that in Observation	Review	Yes/No
<i>Role as a Facilitator (Providing Environment)</i>	Provide facilities/infrastructure that are easily accessible to children (e.g. low shelves, easy-to-open drinking bottles, bags in affordable places)	✓
	Allow enough time for the child to complete tasks on their own (e.g., putting on shoes, cleaning toys) without rushing	✓
<i>Role as a Giver Example (Model)</i>	Prepare a physical environment to support independence (e.g., appropriate hand washing, a well-organized dining room)	✓
	Involves direct self-help actions (cleaning props after use, putting things in their place)Using	✓
<i>Role as a Giver Motivation and Appreciation</i>	language that promotes independence (for example: if after eating, we put a hole in the laundry, yes)	✓
	Give specific verbal praise for the child's self-help efforts (e.g., wow, it's great that you can wear your own clothes)	✓
	Give non-verbal appreciation (e.g., high fives, applause) when the child succeeds in doing something independently	✓
<i>Role as a Creator and Consistent Rule Keeper</i>	Use motivational phrases when the child fails (e.g., it's okay, try again slowly, the teacher is friendly)	✓
	Explain the rules of the routine clearly and consistently (e.g., toys that have already been used, must be returned)	✓
Direct Strategy	Give constructive reprimands, not judgments, when the child forgets the rules (e.g.: where do we want to keep books, huh?)	✓
	Give your child a routine task (e.g., watering plants, distributing books, leading prayers)	✓
	Give your child a simple choice to practice decision-making (e.g., "Do you want to draw with crayons or markers?")	✓
	Let the child try to solve the problem first before the teacher intervenes (scaffolding)	✓

The results of the above review show that the role of teachers is very influential in children's habituation while in the school environment. Currently, the environment at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur is rehabilitating the school and temporarily the school is moving to a rented building. In the role of facilitator, this seems very effective because children have room for exploration and responsibility (Eriksen, 2025). The right physical environment is an important factor (Hawrot & Nusser, 2025; Wang, 2025) in the success of a child's habituation of independence. In addition to being a facilitator, the role of teachers is also an example or commonly called a model (Bosire, 2024; Wu et al., 2024) that is always applied by teachers in schools by providing direct examples, such as cleaning props after use and returning items to their original place (Smith et al., 2024). In this case, children get used to cleaning the toys in place when the teacher gives direct instructions to sensitive children to clean their toys (Vera et al., 2024). Providing real and consistent examples of teacher behavior (Alautry, 2025) has an important role in instilling independent habits. Children learn directly through observation (Gastaldi et al., 2024) and imitation (Mukai et al., 2024), so that the teacher becomes the main model in the formation of independent character (Green, 2025). In this case, the role of teachers is very, very dominant in shaping children's independence through a supportive environment, such as learning motivation, consistent rules, and direct habituation strategies to children. An approach carried out directly by one of the teachers in an Indonesian school in Kuala Lumpur shows that early childhood independence is not a spontaneous result, but the result of habituation habituation (Besschetnova & Mayorova-Scheglova, 2023), emotional support (Ul Hassan et al., 2024), and a conducive environment at school.

Independence of Children Aged 5-6 Years at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur

Based on the results of an interview (see table 2) with one of the classroom teachers regarding the independence of children aged 5-6 years in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur, teachers' views on the importance of children's independence are one of the important aspects that must be developed from an early age, especially at the age of 5-6 years. As the teacher explained in this Indonesian school in Kuala Lumpur, children who become independent will be better prepared to face the next level of education and have high confidence in completing simple tasks through habituation, examples, and providing opportunities to try on

their own. The teacher also stated that *"the process of building independence cannot be momentary but requires an environment that supports a consistent routine, as well as positive communication between teachers, children, and parents so that this habituation of independence can run effectively"*. Independence for children aged 5-6 years is the ability of children to organize, direct, and control themselves in carrying out various daily activities without always relying on the help of adults. This independence includes several aspects of development such as physical, emotional, and cognitive, which develop through habituation, opportunity, and positive environmental support (Nurwita & Syaputra, 2024).

Table 2. Summary of Child Independence Study Reviewed

Aspects that Observed	Indicator	Score			
		1	2	3	4
Eat Alone	Children can eat well and eat food without help				✓
Buttoning the Shirt	Children can button their clothes without assistance			✓	
Wearing Shoes	Children can wear shoes correctly				✓
Tidying up toys	Children can return toys to their place of origin				✓
Hand Washing	Children can wash food before and after meals				✓
Littering	Children can throw away trash instead				✓
Toilet Training	Children can urinate/defecate in the toilet (with light supervision from the teacher)			✓	

In table 2, it is shown that score 1 is marked as Not Progressing, score 2 is marked as Starting to Progress, Score 3 is marked as Progressing as Expected, score 4 is marked as Progressing Very Good. Where it is explained that not all children in school are very good judging from the results of interviews with class teachers. One of them is the independence of children in daily activities at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur when eating. The results of the interviews showed that most of the children in the classroom could eat on their own without the help of the teacher, with this the teacher applied the strategy of giving enough time and avoiding direct intervention. The child is used to finishing his own food, and the teacher only helps if the child is really struggling. Additionally, verbal compliments such as "Wow, great, you ate yourself today!" are used to reinforce positive behaviors. Dining activities are also carried out in a pleasant atmosphere with neat arrangements and sitting facing friends. This makes it easier for children to learn independently while maintaining etiquette at mealtimes. After the independence of eating in Indonesian schools, Kuala Lumpur is also used to being independent in dressing and buttoning clothes where most children have started to be able to button their own clothes after playing or exercising. However, there are some children who still need help, especially when the buttons are too small and difficult to reach. The role of the teacher here helps the scaffolding approach to give direction gradually while showing the right path, not directly replacing the child's role in completing his task, which is to button the shirt. In addition, at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur conducts fine motor training activities, such as inserting buttons into holes or playing by pinning clothes in this case can help children to practice hand and finger coordination. Button-down activities also include role-playing activities or dressing up like dolls which are used as learning media to hone children's skills. The next activity that can foster children's independence in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur with the habit of wearing and taking off shoes. From the results of observations and interviews, children have begun to get used to wearing and taking off their own shoes, especially activities before and after outside the classroom. The role of teachers here is always to familiarize themselves with children to practice the independence of wearing and taking off their own shoes by giving special time and not rushing to help them and for children who are still having difficulties, teachers take steps to wear shoes correctly while providing motivation so that children want to try on their own. In some cases, peers also play a helpful role, creating an atmosphere of mutual help and support.

The independence applied in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur is the independence of tidying up toys, the habit of tidying up toys after use has begun to form in children. Teachers use positive reinforcement-based strategies, such as giving collective applause or group praise when all children manage to clean the toys on time. In addition, teachers also make the activity of tidying up toys part of the closing routine of each play session, so that children will get used to doing it after use. The habit of washing children's hands has also shown awareness to wash their hands before and after eating, children will wash their hands immediately if after learning and will continue to eat. Then independence in children's habit of throwing garbage, children are also used to throwing garbage instead, but in this case there are still children who must be reminded, especially after eating. The role of the teacher here is to instill this habit as a direct example, for example by showing how to dispose of garbage. The independence instilled in Indonesian schools in Kuala Lumpur is the independence of using toilets, children in the classroom can generally use the toilet independently, including asking permission from teachers before going to the toilet. However, of course, in this case some children still need help to open their pants or flush the toilet after use. The role of teachers here is to accompany children who are still in the toilet training stage by providing verbal direction

and guidance from a safe distance, without taking over the child's responsibility. In addition, teachers also teach personal hygiene routines, such as washing hands after coming out of the toilet.

In an interview with Mrs. Pipin as a classroom teacher at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur, she stated that *"the development of children's independence does not only depend on individual abilities, but is also greatly influenced by the role of teachers who are active as role models, facilitators and encouragers"*. Pipin also said that *"children's independence skills show improvement over time. Where children who used to be very dependent are now able to complete tasks independently, show confidence, and be more responsible for goods and the classroom environment."* Habituation that is done regularly can make children more independent, caring and more aware of the independence that is carried out without feeling pressured. These results are in line with Montessori theory and an experiential learning approach that emphasizes the importance of giving children the opportunity to practice performing daily tasks to develop a sense of responsibility and confidence. Simple activities such as eating, dressing, or washing hands are effective ways to increase independence while building a child's positive character. In the process of independence in Indonesian schools Kuala Lumpur, of course, there are challenges for teachers to parents of children who have not supported children's independence even though there are one or two parents of children who still enjoy the habit of independence at home. In this case, Mrs. Pipin said that *"The solution is to convey the habit of children's independence while at home by informing parents when parents consult once every three months a year"*.

The findings of this study indicate that teacher roles play a central role in fostering children's independence through structured habituation within the school environment. Evidence from classroom observations and teacher interviews shows that independence is not an innate ability but a developmental outcome (Ibri & Çupi, 2025) shaped by consistent exposure to routine practices and supportive interactions. Teachers in Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur actively design learning situations (Kangas et al., 2025) that encourage children to engage in self-help activities (Marçalo et al., 2026), such as eating, dressing, and tidying up. These practices reflect a pedagogical shift from teacher-centered instruction to facilitative learning environments that prioritize child agency. As a result, children gradually develop confidence and responsibility in completing daily tasks independently.

Furthermore, the teacher's role as a facilitator is reflected in the creation of a supportive learning environment that encourages exploration and responsibility. Research indicates that providing children with opportunities to act independently fosters higher levels of engagement (Rakap & Balikci, 2025) and self-confidence (Delfosse et al., 2023). A well-structured physical and social environment (Scheiner, 2026) enables children to practice autonomy through everyday activities and routines. The allocation of sufficient time (Ding & Xu, 2025) and the avoidance of premature intervention (Özyıldırım & Şencanlı, 2026) are critical strategies that allow children to complete tasks independently. Consequently, facilitative teaching practices are essential in promoting both functional independence and self-regulated behavior in early childhood settings.

In addition to facilitation, teachers function as role models whose behaviors are imitated by children through observational learning. Studies highlight that teacher modeling (Jiang et al., 2025) significantly influences children's behavioral development and character formation in early education contexts. Children tend to replicate behaviors (Xiao & Li, 2025) demonstrated by teachers, particularly when these behaviors are consistently reinforced through daily routines. The integration of modeling with direct instruction and positive reinforcement (Saeki et al., 2025) enhances the internalization of independent behaviors among children. Thus, teacher modeling serves as a fundamental mechanism for transforming expected behaviors into habitual actions that support independence.

Moreover, the development of independence is strengthened through the implementation of direct instructional strategies such as scaffolding, habituation, and motivational support. Research shows that gradual guidance combined with reduced assistance enables children to transition from dependence to autonomy effectively (Shi & Chen, 2024). Positive reinforcement and supportive communication further increase children's willingness to engage in independent tasks. However, inconsistencies between school and home environments may hinder the sustainability of independent behaviors. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial to ensure the continuity of independence development across different contexts. The contribution of this study lies in highlighting the central role of teachers in fostering children's independence through structured habituation, scaffolding, and modeling within daily classroom practices. This study also provides evidence that independence develops through consistent routines and supportive environments, while emphasizing the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents, particularly in an international school context.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, observations, and interviews conducted, the role of teachers is highly influential in fostering the independence of children aged 5 to 6 years at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur. Children's independence does not appear suddenly, but through a continuous process of habituation, mentoring, and modeling from teachers. Teachers function not only as instructors but also as supporters and encouragers who provide emotional support and opportunities for children to carry out various activities independently. In their daily routines, teachers have applied several habituation methods to develop independence in activities such as eating, buttoning clothes, putting on shoes, washing hands, using the toilet, and cleaning toys. Through a patient approach and minimal intervention, teachers guide children gradually so they can solve problems and learn from the process. This approach helps children become accustomed to thinking independently, taking initiative, and being responsible for themselves and their surroundings. Challenges remain, particularly differences in support between school and home, as some parents still overindulge their children. Teachers address this by maintaining communication with parents, providing updates on children's development, and encouraging consistent independent practices at home. Overall, the teacher's role is vital and multifaceted, requiring the integration of modeling, motivation, habituation, and a supportive environment. The independence developed through real-life school experiences forms an essential foundation for children's future character, responsibility, and social skills, supported by strong collaboration between teachers and parents.

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