

## Preschool: The Contribution of Economic Tokens in Autonomy

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### Abstract

**Background:** The problem of autonomy experienced by preschool-aged children is that they do not fully have autonomy, such as students being assisted by teachers and parents when carrying out learning activities. **Objective:** An economic tokens contribution in increasing student's autonomy. **Method:** This study used an experimental method with a one-group pretest-posttest design. Partisipan used 10 students of Kindergarten grade A. Data collection used the Autonomy Scale. Analysis of the results of the study using the gain score and the Wilcoxon test. **Results:** The study showed that there was a contribution of the economic tokens in increasing autonomy. In the beginning, before the economic tokens was implemented, students were somewhat less autonomy and too dependent on the people around them while studying. After implementing economic tokens in teaching and learning process, students experience changes, namely being more autonomy in the learning process in class. **Conclusion:** The economic tokens is attractive to students because students are eager to learn and feel like trying to learn with rewards after students are able or successful in carrying out the expected behavior.

**Keywords:** Autonomy; economic tokens; preschool; student.

### Abstrak

**Latar Belakang:** Permasalahan kemandirian yang dialami anak usia prasekolah yaitu belum sepenuhnya memiliki kemandirian dalam aktivitas belajar seperti siswa masih dibantu oleh guru dan orang tua saat melakukan kegiatan belajar, telat merespon stimulus guru serta siswa belum bisa mematuhi tata terbit kelas sehingga kelas menjadi tidak kondusif. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kontribusi token ekonomi dalam meningkatkan kemandirian siswa. **Metode:** Penelitian menggunakan metode eksperimen dengan one group pretest-posttest design. Partisipan berjumlah 10 siswa. Pengumpulan data menggunakan Skala Kemandirian. Analisis hasil penelitian menggunakan *gain score* dan uji Wilcoxon. **Hasil:** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kontribusi token ekonomi dalam meningkatkan kemandirian siswa Taman Kanak-kanak kelas A. Pada awal sebelum dilakukan metode token ekonomi siswa masih bergantung pada orang-orang di sekitarnya saat belajar. Setelah diimplementasikan token ekonomi, siswa mengalami perubahan lebih mandiri dalam proses belajar di kelas. **Simpulan:** Metode token ekonomi merupakan metode yang menarik bagi siswa karena metode ini membuat siswa semangat dalam belajar dan rasa ingin berusaha dalam belajar. Dengan adanya *reward*, siswa menunjukkan perilaku yang diharapkan ketika siswa mampu atau berhasil melakukan instruksi yang diberikan.

**Kata Kunci:** Anak usia dini; kemandirian; siswa; token ekonomi.

## Introduction

Children are the next generation of nations to face changes and developments in the world, and education is the main means to prepare them to face these challenges. Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD) is important for forming the basic skills, expertise, and attitudes needed to grow and develop optimally (Rochwidowati & Widyana, 2017). By undergoing education, children obtain provisions to support their growth and development according to their age stages, such as for children aged 3-6 years (Septiani et al., 2016).

The age of 3-6 years is the golden age when stimulation of all aspects of development plays a role in further development. As much as 80% of children's cognitive development is achieved at preschool age. Children's social development includes aspects of their ability to be autonomous, socialize, and interact with their environment (Apriana, 2009). At this stage of child development, children begin to master various physical and language skills, and they also begin to have the confidence to explore their autonomy (Hurlock, 1997).

Autonomy is one of the most important aspects of development in early childhood. Autonomy is a skill that is very much needed by children to live their lives in the future with more confidence and autonomy (Hurlock, 1997). The formation of autonomy in children from an early age has a major influence on their future psychological and social development (Santrock, 2012). Therefore, early childhood education must focus on developing autonomy through various methods and approaches that are appropriate to a child's developmental stage (Djaali, 2017).

The need for autonomy at a child's age hinders the development of maximum autonomy. During this period, children learn to be more autonomous, take care of themselves, develop school readiness skills (following instructions, recognizing letters), and devote a lot of time to play with peers (Santrock, 2012).

Internal and external factors influence a child's success in becoming an autonomous individual. Internal factors include self-concept, motivation, attitude, interest, and learning habits. External factors consist of family, school, and community factors (Djaali, 2017). A good school environment can help shape children's autonomy. By providing targeted and regular stimulation, children will become autonomous faster than children who do not receive enough stimulation.

Children's autonomy is a reason for parents and educators to consider the early childhood education process. In reality, many children do not have autonomy in carrying out school activities. In this case, before the child enters school, there is a discrepancy with his autonomy, especially since the child still needs help and support from his parents. This is supported by research showing that early childhood has poor autonomy (Putra & Jannah, 2013).

Based on the results of the interviews with kindergarten X teachers, he stated that educators were sometimes overwhelmed during the learning process. According to the class teacher, children are very active and creative when learning. Children's activity sometimes creates noise in the classroom during the learning process. In the learning process, children still need assistance, such as when cutting, and some even cut their clothes.

The problem of autonomy experienced by children, especially at the age of 4-5 years who enter kindergarten (TK A) or are called preschool age, do not yet have full autonomy (Putra & Jannah, 2013). This is shown when carrying out learning activities that are still assisted by mothers, late stimulation of teacher stimulation, but children already know which activities are positive or negative.

The problems experienced in early childhood (TK A) in their autonomy certainly need to be addressed. One way that can be used is to modify the behavior. Behavior modification can be interpreted as a way to change and improve behavior by applying learning techniques and principles (Martin & Pear, 2015). There are many ways to modify behavior, including reinforcement, extinction, punishment, stimulus control, respondent conditioning, shaping, encouragement, chains, self-management, and economic tokens (Miltner, 2012). Behavior modification techniques that can improve students' autonomy are shaping (Khotimah et al., 2021; Agustina et al., 2022), self-management (Wahyaningrum et al., 2017; Putri, 2019; Wahyuningsih, 2021; Khairani et al., 2022), and economic tokens (Fitrah, 2020). This study focuses on the economic token technique for improving autonomy in preschool children (TK A).

The token economy, as one of the techniques in behavior modification, has been widely applied in various situations and groups of individuals to change or improve behavior (Martin & Pear, 2015). In giving tokens, various forms, such as stickers, stamps, coins, or other objects, are easy to give after the expected behavior appears. This technique is followed by the term economy because the function of tokens resembles the function of money in everyday life, namely, as an economic exchange system to get something that is desired or needed.

Although this technique has been used in several educational and therapy programs for children in Indonesia, the main challenge in its implementation in PAUD is the lack of understanding and adequate training for educators regarding effective ways to implement the economic tokens system (Fitrah, 2020). The use of tokens as rewards or motivation for children can increase their learning motivation, but its implementation must be carried out carefully not only to focus on material rewards but also to form positive values in children (Hapsari & Chistiana, 2013). In short, the economic tokens is a reinforcement system for managed and changed behavior; a person must be rewarded or reinforced to increase or decrease the desired behavior (Fahrudin, 2012).

This study aimed to identify how the economic token technique can be applied to increase the autonomy of children's learning at an early age. This study is different from previous studies that have examined more autonomy in writing or specific learning aspects in older children, such as 7 years old (Miltenberger, 2012). In addition, this study raises the issue of autonomy more generally, with the hope of providing a more holistic picture of how preschool children can become more autonomous in their learning processes.

## Method

This study used an experimental method with a one-group pretest-posttest design. One group pretest-posttest is an experimental design that involves one group of participants being tested before and after treatment or intervention is given. In this design, participants will undergo a measurement or test (pre-test) before receiving treatment, and then after the treatment is given, they will undergo another test (post-test). The goal was to measure the changes or effects of the treatment on the participants.

This design is used without a control group owing to resource and time constraints that allow only one group of participants to be tested. This is because the purpose of this experiment was to observe changes that occur in one group after the treatment. In addition, the use of a control group is sometimes impractical or unethical, especially if the treatment is considered important or beneficial to all participants (Creswell, 2014; Jannah, 2016).

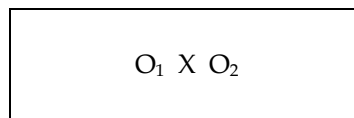


Figure 1. Research Design

Note :

O<sub>1</sub> : Pretest

X : Treatment Economic Tokens

O<sub>2</sub> : Posttest

## Sample

This study included 10 students from Kindergarten Grade A (6 boys and 4 girls). The researcher used a saturated sampling technique to determine the participants. The saturated sampling technique chosen in this study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the characteristics and phenomena being studied. This selection technique is also due to the relatively small population in the study, so all individuals in the population are selected as research samples.

## Procedure

Economic tokens is a form of positive reinforcement. In the tokens provided in this study, stickers in the form of stars were used. Tokens were given after the expected behavior appeared. The procedure for providing economic tokens treatment to increase student autonomy was carried out in several stages.

The stages of this procedure were carried out through learning tasks adjusted to the students' developmental tasks. Martin and Pear (2015) stated that several things needed to be prepared before implementing economic tokens or steps to implement economic tokens, namely, 1) determining target behavior, 2) collecting basic data, 3) choosing the type of token used, 4) choosing supporting reinforcement, 5) identifying available assistance, 6) addressing potential problems, and 7) preparing a manual.

The procedure was performed for 6 weeks. Implementation stages of this research: 1). Determining target behavior: All students in grade A Kindergarten having autonomy target that will be given by economic tokens intervention. 2) Collecting basic data. Data collection from teachers was done by conducting interviews about students' daily lives during the teaching and learning process before carrying out the economic tokens

intervention. 3) Choosing the type of token used. The economic tokens used is to provide star stickers that will be placed on the nameplate that has been made and attached to the front of the class. The nameplate was accompanied by the student's name and star column. Students who successfully collect the most stars are given a reward or prize that is useful to them. 4) Choosing supporting reinforcement. The economic tokens will be more practical if reinforced with other methods. In this case, positive reinforcement will be used, namely verbal reinforcement, for Kindergarten grade A students. 5). Identifying available assistance. Working with the teacher council, especially the Kindergarten grade A teacher, in the process of implementing economic tokens. 6). Overcoming potential problems. Checking from the first step, whether there are things that still need improvement and during the treatment. 7) Preparing the manual. Introducing students and explaining the rules of the game on economic tokens when it is implemented.

### **Data Measurement**

Data collection using the Kindergarten grade A Student Autonomy Scale adapted from Rahmawati (2015) which has been adjusted to the child autonomy indicators of Wiyani (2013). The Autonomy Scale consists of 20 items using two answer choices: YES and NO. If the student shows behavior that is in accordance with the measuring instrument, a cross (X) will be given, and if the student does not show behavior that is in accordance with the measuring instrument, a strip (-) will be given.

### **Data Analysis**

After the research data scoring was completed, the total score obtained by each student was determined. Furthermore, the data are converted into a gain score table so that the final score can be known. In the final gain score, the contribution of economic tokens to increasing student autonomy can be seen. The researcher also conducted a statistical test using the Wilcoxon test. This is because the number of samples was small (<30). Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

### **Result**

The results of the study conducted by applying the economic token treatment based on Martin and Pear (2015) were carried out for six weeks, as follows.

#### **Determining target behavior**

The target behavior to be determined includes the individuals who will be involved, the long-term and short-term goals to be achieved, and the behavioral problems targeted. The behavioral targets that will be given a economic tokens program are Kindergarten Grade A students who are still dependent on others in their learning process or who have low autonomy. To understand the behavior of students to increase their autonomy in learning. To determine the target behavior to be achieved, the researcher conducted observations on students with indicators of autonomy in children proposed by Wiyani (2013).

Based on the results of the observations conducted in the first week, not all students were able to meet the indicators of autonomy. So in terms of needing efforts to increase autonomy in Kindergarten Grade A students.

#### **Preparing the manual**

At this stage, the researcher prepares written or verbal rules to explain how the token operates. Before the economic tokens program is carried out, a discussion is held with parents and class teachers explaining what the economic tokens is, how the process works, and what their goals are. Thus, in the process of implementing the token economy, supporting parties can provide encouragement or motivation to students. This affects the level of student autonomy. In addition to parents and class teachers, an explanation of the program was also given to Kindergarten Grade A students. Thus, students can be motivated to show the expected behavior and compete to collect tokens. This also affects the level of children's autonomy.

#### **Baseline data collection**

Subject behavioral data must be obtained before starting the token economy. After the program was run, the data obtained were compared with the baseline data that determined the contribution of the treatment. The following are the initial data or baseline data on student autonomy before the implementation of economic token below :

Table 1. Autonomy Pretest Score

No	Name	Pretest
1.	A	14
2.	B	10
3.	C	16
4.	D	9
5.	E	13
6.	F	8
7.	G	6
8.	H	6
9.	I	3
10.	J	7

### Selecting the type of token used

Economic tokens was used to improve the autonomy of Kindergarten Grade A students by providing star-shaped stickers that are attached to the nameplate provided in the classroom. Every student who can achieve the expected behavior by the indicators of children's autonomy will get a star and be invited to stick it on the nameplate according to their respective names.

The name of the student who gets the most star stickers every two weeks will be exchanged for the reward of an item. The following is the provision of a reward for an item according to the number of tokens obtained by the student. 1). The student who can collect the most stars gets a crayon or pencil case and two pencils. 2) The student who can collect the most stars (number 2) obtains a pencil case. 3) The student who can collect the most stars (number 3) obtains a set of stationery. 4) The student who can collect the least stars gets a pencil and sharpener or two pencils.

Table 2. Student Performance of Economic Tokens

No	Name	Star Total
1.	A	6
2.	B	7
3.	C	7
4.	D	4
5.	E	6
6.	F	4
7.	G	3
8.	H	5
9.	I	3
10.	J	4

### Selecting supporting reinforcement

Reselect the method that is the same, namely, to strengthen behavior. To support the economic tokens is to provide verbal reinforcement, such as praise, when the child can fulfill one of the indicators of autonomy. This aimed to encourage and motivate the children in the learning process.

### Identifying available assistance

In the first week, while conducting observations, discussions were held with parents or guardians of Kindergarten Grade A students about the program that would be run to improve the autonomy of Kindergarten Grade A students. The aim was for parents to motivate their children to continue to be enthusiastic about learning and to understand the development of their children's autonomy.

In addition to parents, class teachers also play an important role as supporters of the economic tokens programme. This is because the class teacher is the main actor in the class. This aims to stimulate students to be able to do their assignments and to be more autonomous in the teaching and learning process. With the help of people around them, such as class teachers and parents, students can be more motivated and encouraged to improve their autonomy.



### Overcoming potential problems

When planning the implementation of economic tokens, it is best to anticipate potential problems. In the implementation of a token economy, several problems often arise, such as the problems that often arise and how to overcome them. 1) Confusion in the first few days after the start of the token economy. The implementation of the economic tokens begins in the second week after observations are made on students. To overcome confusion on the first day after the economic tokens is carried out, it is necessary to determine the target behavior of students based on the indicators of autonomy in children put forward by Wiyani (2013): a) Students dare to answer questions from the teacher. b). Students can do assignments in class. c). Students can determine their answers and colors when given assignments by the teacher. d). Students can do assignments themselves without the help of others. e). Students can be responsible for the behavior they do. f). Students can get to know teachers and friends in class intimately. g). Students do not depend on friends, teachers, and parents. h). When students in the learning process can fulfill one of the indicators of autonomy, they are entitled to get a star and stick it to the paper available in the classroom. This applies every day during treatment.

The second potential problem is lack of staff and assistants. To overcome this, a discussion was held with parents and class teachers about the economic tokens treatment that would be implemented. Thus, it can stimulate and motivate children to be enthusiastic in carrying out the teaching and learning process.

The third potential problems is individual efforts to obtain a economic tokens. Students can get tokens, and assistants and teachers stimulate them to obey the teacher's rules and orders so that the learning process in the classroom runs orderly and smoothly. Thus, by stimulating students to obtain tokens, they become enthusiastic and continue to try their best.

The fourth potential problems is Individuals manipulate tokens such that they continue to increase. The tokens used were plastic stars. Thus, tokens cannot be imitated and manipulated in the collection process. Each token award is adjusted according to the child's autonomy indicator.

The fifth potential problems is failure to provide reinforcement. The reinforcement given to students to support the economic token treatment was verbal reinforcement to students. However, some students ignored and did not care about the teacher. Therefore, their behavior is difficult to control and disturbs their friends in the class. However, there are times when he obeys and is willing to follow the rules and orders of the teacher. When students can fulfill the orders and tasks given by the teacher, verbal reinforcement such as praise will also be given to the students.

After the economic tokens treatment was completed, the researcher conducted data collection (post-test) to determine the contribution of the economic tokens treatment to student autonomy. The following post-test data can be seen in the table below.

No	Name	Pretest	Posttest	Gain Score
1.	A	14	20	6
2.	B	10	20	10
3.	C	16	20	4
4.	D	9	18	9
5.	E	13	20	7
6.	F	8	18	10
7.	G	6	15	9
8.	H	6	18	12
9.	I	3	12	9
10.	J	7	16	9
Mean		9,2	17,7	8,5

Based on the gain score results above, economic tokens contributes to increasing autonomy in Kindergarten grade A students. This is indicated by the average pretest score of 9.2 and the average posttest score of 17.7. From the average score, it can be seen that the average results obtained increased between the pre-test and post-test.

Following information using statistical analysis below

Table 4. Ranks Score

	<i>Mean Rank Sum of Ranks</i>		
<i>Post – Pre Negative Ranks</i>	0 <sup>a</sup>	,00	,00
<i>Positive Ranks</i>	10 <sup>b</sup>	5,50	55,00
<i>Ties</i>	0 <sup>c</sup>		
<i>Total</i>	10		

The results of the statistical analysis show that the negative rank value or negative difference between students' autonomy in the pre-test and post-test is 0, both in the N value, mean rank, and sum of ranks. A value of 0 indicates that there is no decrease from the pre-test value to the post-test value.

The positive rank value or positive difference between students' autonomy in the pre-test and post-test was 5.5. This means that there is an average increase of 5.5 from the pretest and posttest results. The sum of the positive ranks is 55.

Ties are the similarities in pre-test and post-test values. In this study, the ties value is 0, so it can be said that there are no similar values between the pretest and posttest.

Table 5. Result of Statistical Analysis

	<b>Post - Pre</b>
<i>Z</i>	-2,823 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,005

\*)Significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

The results of the Wilcoxon test showed a sig. Value of 0.005 ( $<0.05$ ). This can be interpreted as a difference in students' autonomy before and after being given economic token treatment. Based on the results of the gain score and Wilcoxon test, it can be concluded that economic tokens contribute to increasing autonomy in Kindergarten grade A students.

## Discussion

An economic token is a technique that uses tokens or desires to provide them as soon as possible if the desired behavior appears. The pieces collected will be exchanged for gifts that are beneficial to the individual. Thus, using an economic token can form, develop, and improve desired behavior (Purwanta, 2015).

An economic token stimulates the development of children's attitudes and morals. The development of children's attitudes and morals is an important aspect of the development process. The development of attitudes and morals aims to create positive attitudes. Pujiati and Dahlan (2017) argued that the use of economic tokens behavior modification is effective in increasing responsible behavior and improving all aspects of responsible behavior in children.

The average value or gain score in this study showed an increase between the pre-test and post-test. In addition, statistical tests with the Wilcoxon test also showed the same thing, namely that there was a difference in student autonomy before and after being given the economic token treatment. In line with the opinion of Chotim et al. (2013), the economic token method is effective in increasing the autonomy of kindergarten students.

The results of observations or observations on the autonomy of Kindergarten grade A students experienced developments in autonomy as reviewed from the indicators of children's autonomy by Wiyani (2013). Reviewed from the gain score table, Kindergarten grade A students experienced progress in autonomy in each indicator, as can be seen from the scores in the pretest and posttest tables, which increased. Giving rewards with the economic token treatment can be applied to early childhood, and the use of rewards with the economic token treatment is effective in increasing the discipline of early childhood (Mufidah, 2012).

The economic token can shape the desired behavior. In the world of education, prizes can be used as a motivational tool to shape children's behavior (Arifatun, 2015). Behavior will be formed if there are habits that are often done, by providing understanding, and there is a role model in behaving. The economic token is one of the combination procedures that can improve, teach, reduce, and maintain various behaviors (Hadi, 2007). This can be seen in children who are more diligent and no longer lazy in doing assignments because they are happy and motivated by prizes or awards obtained (Devita & Mulyadi, 2019).

The economic tokens has been widely used in the world of education to change and improve expected behavior. As was done in this study, which wanted to increase autonomy in Kindergarten grade A students. Anita (2019) revealed that children aged 4-5 years who had just entered school, had a high egocentric nature, and were still at the age of playing, when learning they were still reluctant and thought about playing. Therefore, in the learning process, they still depend on the people around them and need guidance from their parents, in particular. This is in line with the opinion of Izzaty (2005) that kindergarten children are still attached or excessively dependent on the presence of others in doing something. Children who are not autonomous or dependent can include both physical and mental aspects and will find it difficult to make decisions. In this case, children are accustomed to doing things themselves, letting them make their own decisions and choosing what they like. To change behavior that depends on others, especially when learning in Kindergarten grade A using the token-economy technique. Based on observations and research results conducted, namely by using token economy, autonomy can be increased in Kindergarten grade A students.

The economic tokens, in addition to contributing to increasing student autonomy (Chotim et al, 2013), attention (Irianjani & Rohmah, 2020), motivation (Hudachek, 2021), student learning motivation (Rohmaniar & Krisnani 2019; Ahkam, et al., 2020; Mahastuti & Sarwindah, 2021), learning concentration (Aziz & Yasin, 2018; Mustafia, et al., 2022), discipline (Mufidah, 2012; Arifatun, 2015; Aprilianti & Mulyasari, 2017; Ratnasari, et al., 2020), discipline in obeying the rules (Mardina & Santoso, 2017), prosocial behavior (Sholihah, et al., 2016), aggressiveness (Handayani & Hidayah, 2014), compliance in carrying out tasks (Devita & Mulyadi, 2019), and responsible behavior (Pujiati & Dahlan, 2017).

## Conclusion

Before the economic tokens was implemented, students showed lower levels of autonomy and were too dependent on those around them when learning. This was evidenced by the pre-test results. After the implementation of the economic tokens in teaching and learning, students showed increased autonomy in the learning process, as reflected in the post-test results.

These findings suggest that implementing a economic tokens in early childhood education is an effective strategy to foster autonomy. Educators and parents can integrate a structured reinforcement system to encourage independent learning behaviors in young children. This study was conducted over a short period (six weeks) and in one educational setting. Future research should explore the long-term impact of the economic tokens on autonomy and examine its effectiveness across different age groups and educational settings.

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