The Teacher's Role in Enhancing Early Childhood Independence Through a Deep Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT

Independence in early childhood is not limited to performing daily tasks autonomously, but also encompasses broader dimensions such as initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, emotional regulation, and social interaction. This study aims to describe the teacher's role in fostering children's independence through a mindful and context-based deep learning approach. The research involved one classroom teacher and 12 children aged 5–6 years in Class B at Trisula Perwari Kindergarten, Purwakarta. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed, using observation, interviews, and documentation for data collection. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that teachers play essential roles as facilitators, motivators, and guides in developing indicators of responsibility, initiative, and adaptability through intentional and contextual learning practices. Furthermore, the partnership between the school and parents is identified as a key factor in ensuring consistent development of children's independence both at school and at home.

Keywords: *Teacher's Role, Independence, Early Childhood, Deep Learning Approach*

INTRODUCTION

Independence in early childhood is an essential developmental process that prepares children for maturity (Norma Gita et al., 2022). For children aged 5–6 years, this stage represents a critical developmental window often referred to as the golden age, during which social-emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities rapidly develop (Purnamasari & Dimyati, 2022). Independence is not limited to performing physical tasks autonomously; it encompasses broader dimensions such as initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, emotional regulation, and the ability to engage in social interactions (Mahmudah et al., 2023). When well-developed, independence becomes a foundational asset that enables children to navigate increasingly complex environments and adapt to broader social demands.

According to Magfiroh et al., (2023), independence is a defining characteristic of a healthy personality, a view also affirmed by (Duana et al., 2022; Muhaemin & Wahyuni, 2021). Consistent with this perspective, children who are independent tend to be active, creative, competent, and spontaneous (Gita et al., 2022). Moreover, children who practice healthy and hygienic routines from an early age are more likely to grow joyfully, develop self-regulation skills, and adjust effectively to their surroundings.

Although numerous studies have examined early childhood independence, limited research has specifically explored the teacher's role in integrating deep learning approaches to foster independence in early childhood settings (Aghniarrahmah et al., 2021; Andhriana & Tanjung, 2021; Fitriani et al., 2023). Existing studies tend to focus on routine habituation strategies without connecting them to meaningful and mindful learning frameworks. Field evidence further shows that many children remain at the "beginning to develop" stage, particularly in areas such as physical ability, confidence, responsibility, discipline, social interaction, sharing, and emotional control (Chairilsyah, 2019; Mujib & Ali, 2022). Lestari & Fathiyah, (S. Lestari & Fathiyah, 2023) similarly found that many children still struggle with basic self-help skills, such as putting on their socks or shoes independently difficulties that often become visible when they enter formal school environments.

These conditions highlight the urgency of strengthening pedagogical practices that intentionally cultivate independence. Teachers play a multifaceted role not only as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators, motivators, and role models who provide graduated support, consistent routines, and positive reinforcement (Ashykin & Trilaksana, 2019; N. Lestari, 2023). Since children learn largely through observation and imitation, teacher modeling becomes essential in shaping independent behavior. Therefore, learning approaches must be engaging, developmentally appropriate, and capable of stimulating children's intrinsic motivation to act independently.

The learning approach selected by teachers significantly influences how children build awareness, prepare themselves before learning, and make sense of their learning experiences. One approach that aligns with these goals is the Deep Learning approach. In educational contexts, deep learning refers to learning processes that are meaningful, mindful, and joyful Diputera & Eza, (2024), emphasizing holistic development through the integration of cognitive, emotional, sensory, and physical experiences. Cahyaningrum & Diana,(2023), argue that deep learning encourages children to think critically, connect learning to real-life contexts, and actively engage in their learning processes. Through these processes, children become active agents capable of making decisions, taking responsibility, and forming long-lasting understanding attributes central to achieving the profile of independent learners (Armawati et al., 2025; Cahya et al., 2025; Febriani et al., 2023).

Given the importance of cultivating independence during early childhood, this study aims to describe the role of teachers in developing independence among kindergarten children through the integration of a deep learning approach. Trisula Perwari Kindergarten, located in the heart of Purwakarta, was selected because it is one of the schools that has systematically adopted deep learning principles in everyday classroom practices(Ishtiaq & J, 2019; Zuama et al., 2025). The school integrates meaningful, mindful, and joyful

pedagogical dimensions into its daily learning activities to support multiple aspects of child development, including independence.

The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth exploration of how teachers apply deep learning principles to cultivate three core indicators of independence responsibility, initiative, and adaptability within the context of early childhood education in Indonesia. While previous research has described independence as an outcome of routine behavior training, this study fills a critical gap by demonstrating how independence emerges from intentional pedagogical design grounded in deep learning. The findings thus contribute both theoretically and practically by offering a refined understanding of teacher roles and providing evidence-based insights for enhancing independence development through meaningful instructional strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore natural settings, capturing social phenomena as they occur without manipulation of variables. The focus of the study was to understand how teachers cultivate independence in young children through a deep learning approach within the authentic context of classroom practice.

The case study design was deemed appropriate because it provides an in-depth, holistic, and context-specific examination of real-life situations. In early childhood education research, case studies are particularly valuable for uncovering complex interactions between teachers, children, learning environments, and pedagogical practices. By concentrating on a single class setting, this study was able to observe how independence is nurtured through daily routines, teacher strategies, and child-initiated actions, enabling a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon being investigated. Therefore, this design aligns well with the objective of revealing detailed patterns and meanings behind the development of independence in children aged 5–6 years at Trisula Perwari Kindergarten.

Research Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at Trisula Perwari Kindergarten in Purwakarta, an institution known for implementing deep learning principles in its daily instructional practices. The participants consisted of one homeroom teacher and twelve children from Class B, all aged between 5 and 6 years. This age group was selected because it represents a developmental stage where independence becomes increasingly prominent and observable, making the context ideal for studying how pedagogical practices influence the growth of autonomous behavior.

The teacher participated as both an informant and instructional practitioner, providing insights into classroom practices, pedagogical decision-making, and strategies used to foster independence. Meanwhile, the children were observed as natural participants whose behaviors, interactions, and responses reflected the outcomes of the implemented deep learning approach. The researcher's role was to collect data in a non-intrusive manner to preserve the authenticity of classroom interactions. The chosen setting allowed the

researcher to capture independence as a lived experience embedded within everyday learning activities.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques: direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. These methods were used to ensure rich, triangulated data, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of findings.

First, direct observation was conducted during learning activities to capture real-time behaviors, teacher–child interactions, routines, and classroom dynamics related to the development of independence. Observations focused on indicators such as responsibility, initiative, and adaptability demonstrated by children during structured and unstructured learning moments.

Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with the classroom teacher to explore pedagogical intentions, reasoning behind instructional strategies, and reflections on children's independence. The interviews provided deeper insights into how the teacher planned, implemented, and evaluated learning activities using deep learning principles.

Third, documentation was used to support observational and interview data. This included photographs of learning activities, classroom artifacts, children's work samples, and written notes from the teacher. Documentation helped contextualize the findings and served as supplementary evidence to strengthen the interpretation of data.

The combination of these techniques enabled a comprehensive understanding of how independence was developed within the classroom environment, while simultaneously reducing potential biases that may arise from relying on a single data source.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model (Sugiyono, 2016), which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This analytical framework was chosen because it accommodates iterative and inductive analysis, essential in qualitative research.

During data reduction, raw data gathered from observations, interviews, and documentation were carefully selected, categorized, and organized to focus on aspects relevant to the teacher's role in fostering independence through deep learning. This process involved transcribing interview recordings, coding behavior patterns observed in children, and identifying recurring themes.

Next, data display involved presenting the organized data in coherent narrative descriptions. These displays allowed the researcher to visualize relationships, patterns, and emerging themes related to responsibility, initiative, and adaptability. The narrative structure helped highlight how instructional practices, routines, and classroom conditions contributed to children's independent behaviors.

Finally, conclusion drawing was undertaken by interpreting the patterns and synthesizing the thematic findings to answer the research questions. Conclusions were drawn by revisiting the data, identifying consistencies across sources, and linking the findings to relevant theories and previous studies. This iterative process ensured that conclusions were grounded in evidence and reflective of the real classroom context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Learning Routines: Circle Time as the Foundation of Independence

Observations showed that the learning process began with a structured morning routine through circle time, which included prayer, attendance checking, and daily storytelling. This activity was not merely a ritual but served as a foundational strategy to build children's self-regulation and focus before entering the core learning session. The teacher facilitated a safe and emotionally warm environment where children could express themselves, listen to one another, and engage in mutual respect (Rizkyani et al., 2020). At the end of the session, the teacher conducted an apperception activity that linked the children's previous experiences with upcoming learning tasks, making the learning flow more meaningful and coherent.

These findings align with Ngaisah et al., (2023), who reported that circle time significantly enhances children's self-awareness, social-emotional skills, and readiness for structured learning. Thus, the routine observed in Trisula Perwari Kindergarten supports existing empirical evidence on the importance of structured early learning rituals.

Figure 1. Circle Time activities at the beginning of class

Indicators of Early Childhood Independence

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at Trisula Perwari Kindergarten, children's independence emerged through three key indicators: responsibility, initiative, and adaptability. These indicators appeared naturally throughout daily interactions between children, teachers, and their learning environment.

Responsibility

Responsibility was expressed when children understood classroom agreements, tidied up their toys, and returned personal belongings to their designated places. The teacher cultivated this habit by creating classroom agreements together with the children. A supporting interview excerpt is as follows:

> *"We first create classroom agreements so children understand that after playing, the toys must be returned. Sometimes friends remind each other too, so without being told they become aware and tidy up on their own." (K1/Teacher Interview, 2024)*

Observations confirmed that this habituation encouraged peer reminding and internalized responsibility without external pressure. This aligns with Wulandari et al., (2025), who found that consistent positive habituation forms early responsibility patterns.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory also supports these findings, emphasizing that modeling and positive reinforcement are central to forming responsible behavior in children.

Figure 2. A child returning toys to their place

Initiative

Initiative developed when children were given opportunities to choose their learning activities freely. The teacher prepared various play options such as cutting, shaping, pattern-making, and sensory-based tasks. Children were encouraged to select activities independently and move to other groups if a space was unavailable.

The teacher explained the following:

"During play activities, we prepare different types of play… children may choose whatever they want. If a group is full, they look for an empty one and return later when there is space." (K2/Teacher Interview, 2024).

These observations revealed that children demonstrated autonomy, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. According to Dwijantie, (2025), such opportunities reflect student agency an essential characteristic of modern 21st-century learning that cultivates initiative and ownership in learning. Research by (Nuraeni, 2019; Roza et al., 2019). similarly showed that autonomy in choosing activities significantly increases children's confidence and initiative.

Figure 3. A Child Independently Choosing an Activity

Adaptability

Adaptability was observed through the teacher's strategy of preparing a flexible safety area as an alternative play space when certain groups were full. This approach trained children to wait, observe, and transition smoothly between activities.

The teacher explained:

"If a group is already full, we prepare a safety area, so the children can play there while waiting. Once there is space available, they can immediately return to their group." (K3/Teacher Interview, 2024)

This strategy reflects scaffolding practices aligned with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enabling children to regulate emotions, respect social boundaries, and adjust to changing group dynamics. Studies by Kartika et al., (2019), support these findings, showing that transitional play areas enhance emotional regulation and adaptive social behavior in early childhood.

Integration of Daily-Life Activities into Independence Learning

Deep learning was also evident in activities tied to children's daily routines, such as tidying toys, storing lunch boxes, and wearing shoes. These everyday practices made learning highly relevant and meaningful because they connected directly to children's real-life needs.

Suryadilaga et al., (2022) emphasized that deep learning enables children to engage in reflective, problem-oriented learning experiences embedded in authentic contexts. This relevance enhances learning quality and promotes critical social skills such as empathy, communication, and cooperation. Similarly, Romiyati et al.,(2023), found that children achieve meaningful understanding when they interpret and reflect on real-life experiences across different contexts, further strengthening their independence.

Figure 4. Children adapt in the Safety Area.

The findings of this study provide practical implications for early childhood educators in designing learning that not only focuses on academic achievement but also develops the character of independence through a holistic approach. The integration of deep learning with positive habituation has proven effective in creating a learning environment conducive to developing children's independence naturally and joyfully.

Early Childhood Independence Barriers

Challenges in implementing deep learning to foster independence in early childhood lie in the need for balance between the roles of the school and the family. A strong partnership between teachers and parents is essential for consistently instilling values of

independence (Febriani et al., 2023; Masykuroh & Kurnia, 2025; Saleha et al., 2022). Teachers are responsible for creating a supportive learning environment, while parents reinforce these habits at home (Farista & Priyanti, 2023; Priyanti & Jhoni Warmansyah, 2021; Thaib et al., 2013). Research shows that collaborative approaches between teachers and parents through intensive communication and democratic parenting can accelerate the development of children's independence (Diani & Yuli, 2025). Thus, deep learning strategies combined with strong home–school partnerships form a crucial foundation for nurturing children who are independent, initiative-driven, and adaptable in various learning situations.

CONCLUSION

A deep learning approach plays an important role in fostering independence in early childhood through the active involvement of teachers as facilitators, motivators, and guides in developing indicators of responsibility, initiative, and adaptability. Mindful, contextual, and meaningful learning processes help children build self-regulation skills and engage in positive social interactions. The success of cultivating independence is also strongly influenced by harmonious partnerships between schools and parents, who together create a consistent learning environment that nurtures children to become confident, responsible, and adaptable to various life situations. Based on the findings, it is recommended that: (1) early childhood institutions integrate deep learning principles into the curriculum to support the development of children's independence; (2) teachers develop consistent and contextual habituation strategies that align with children's characteristics; and (3) future research explore the application of deep learning to other developmental aspects, such as creativity and early literacy.

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