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THE ROLE OF FATHERS IN SHAPING THE INDEPENDENT CHARACTER OF CHILDREN AGED 5–6 YEARS

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Abstrak

Kemandirian merupakan salah satu karakter penting yang perlu ditanamkan sejak usia dini karena menjadi dasar bagi kemampuan anak dalam mengambil keputusan, bertanggung jawab, dan menghadapi berbagai tantangan kehidupan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami pengalaman hidup (lived experience) ayah dalam membentuk karakter mandiri anak usia 5–6 tahun di Kelompok B TK Al-Hikam Purwakarta. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas tiga ayah yang dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan metode *Colaizzi*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan lima tema utama, yaitu ayah sebagai figur penting dalam pembentukan kemandirian anak, kehadiran emosional ayah sebagai penguat kemandirian, pemberian ruang untuk eksplorasi dan pengambilan keputusan, kolaborasi ayah dan ibu dalam pengasuhan, serta faktor pendukung dan penghambat pembentukan kemandirian. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa keterlibatan ayah melalui teladan, dukungan emosional, dan pemberian kesempatan belajar secara mandiri berperan penting dalam membentuk karakter mandiri anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: *Peran Ayah, Kemandirian, Pengasuhan.*

Abstract

Independence is an important character trait that needs to be instilled from an early age because it forms the basis for children's ability to make decisions, take responsibility, and face various life challenges. This study aims to understand the lived experiences of fathers in shaping the independent character of 5–6-year-old children in Group B of Al-Hikam Kindergarten, Purwakarta. The study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological design. The participants consisted of three fathers selected through a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Colaizzi method. The results of the study revealed five main themes: fathers as important figures in shaping children's independence, fathers' emotional presence as a reinforcement of independence, providing space for exploration and decision-making, father-mother collaboration in parenting, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of independence. The research findings confirm that fathers' involvement through role models, emotional support, and providing opportunities for independent learning plays a significant role in shaping the independent character of early childhood children.

Keywords: *Father's Role, Independence, Parenting.*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a golden age.[1] During this phase, character inculcation is highly critical.[2] Experts argue that character building at this stage establishes an essential foundation. In his research, Supiyardi emphasizes that the primary key to nation-building lies in character cultivation.[3] In Indonesia, there are eighteen-character values. These values comprise religiosity, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, independence, hard work, discipline, creativity, national spirit, patriotism, democracy, curiosity, appreciation of achievement, environmental care, friendliness or communicativeness, peace-loving nature, a passion for reading, and social care.[4]

One of the character values that must be instilled from an early age is independence. Independence does not merely pertain to physical capabilities such as eating or dressing unaccompanied; rather, it reflects a psychological readiness to confront challenges and make decisions. This is consistent with the view that independence is an attitude and behavior characterized by the ability to complete tasks without relying on others.[5] It encompasses the ability to think, act, solve problems, and make

[1] Putri Kharisma Dewi, 'Peran Aktivitas Fisik dalam Meningkatkan Koordinasi dan Keseimbangan Anak Usia Dini', *JIKAD*, 6.1 (2026), p. 55.
[2] Ramdani *et al*., 'The Role of Character Education in the Digital Era', *The Future of Education Journal*, 5.2 (2026), p. 2400.
[3] Supiyardi , Zul Andrivat, Mimin Tjasmini, and Aan Hasanah, 'Pendidikan Karakter: Membangun Fondasi Moral dan Etika melalui Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini', *ARJI: Action Research Journal Indonesia*, 6.2 (2024), p. 78.
[4] Heri Kurnia, Felisia Lili Dasar, and Intan Kusumawati, 'Nilai-Nilai Karakter Budaya Belis dalam Perkawinan Adat Masyarakat Desa Benteng Tado Kabupaten Manggarai Barat Nusa Tenggara Timur', *Satwika: Kajian Ilmu Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial*, 6.2 (2022), p. 315.
[5] Gia Nikawanti, Hayani Wulandari, Idat Muqodas, Jojor Renta Maranatha, Lulu Mamluatul Adibah, and Neng Maspupah, 'Pola Asuh Orang Tua dalam Menanamkan Nilai-Nilai Multikultural pada Anak Usia Dini', *Murhum: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5.1 (2024), p. 985.

decisions, aimed at fostering intellectually, emotionally, and socially independent individuals.[6] Independence implies the capacity to perform actions based on one's own abilities. True independence is characterized by an individual's capacity to attain mental and psychological autonomy through their own inner strength rather than relying on others.[7] Consequently, an independent character must be nurtured from an early age; it is not solely the responsibility of parents but also demands a broader social response. This is congruent with the perspective of Putra et al., who argue that in guiding early childhood to foster an independent attitude, understanding social values and regulatory boundaries is a shared responsibility of the surrounding environment. [8]

Fundamentally, independence is the seed of resilience that allows children to self-regulate their emotions when facing minor failures. When children are accustomed to exercising autonomy over their actions, they learn to understand consequences and build a sense of responsibility from an early stage. Independence is influenced not only by school education but also by family parenting practices.[9] This does not mean leaving children unsupervised; instead, it involves providing space for them to try, make mistakes, and rectify them. This process naturally fosters a positive self-concept before they enter more complex stages of life, making parental involvement indispensable in shaping a child's independent character.

Parenting is a dynamic interactive process between parents and children that encompasses fulfilling physical growth needs, stimulating mental

[6] Siti Maisaroh and Dwi Qurrotul A'yun, 'Pendidikan dalam Perspektif Ki Hajar Dewantara: Antara Kebebasan, Kemandirian, Kebudayaan', *JMA: Jurnal Media Akademik*, 2.12 (2024), p. 4.
[7] Haris Maiza Putra, Armelia Prakasa, and Pat Kurniati, 'Internalisasi Nilai Kemandirian Anak melalui Parenting', *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6.5 (2022), p. 3847.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Maria Cerlina Isa Kajo, Marsianus Meka, Angelina Kurnia Juita, and Karmelia Rosfinda Meo Maku, 'Implementasi Parenting terhadap Kemandirian Anak Usia Dini 4–6 Tahun di TK Satu Atap Lebijaga', *Bunayya: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak*, 12.1 (2025), p. 143.

development, and building character. Both mothers and fathers have distinct roles in caregiving. While the mother is frequently regarded as an emotional sanctuary, the father acts as a catalyst encouraging the child to courageously embrace challenges and make decisions. The presence of a father is critical in parenting practices aimed at developing a child's independent character. Wahyuni notes that young children require male role models in their daily lives, underscoring the vital nature of a father's involvement.[10] Consistent and active paternal participation can stimulate various developmental dimensions in children, including physical, cognitive, emotional, social, religious, and moral domains.[11] The theory of father involvement identifies three primary dimensions: engagement (direct interaction), accessibility (availability), and responsibility. Through these three dimensions, fathers help children develop self-confidence, responsibility, decision-making skills, and independence.[12] Fathers who interact actively, remain accessible when needed, and assume responsibility for their child's development provide the necessary role modeling and support essential for independent character building.

Data released by BKKBN in April 2025, based on UNICEF findings, indicated that 20.9% of children in Indonesia experience *fatherlessness*, a condition in which many fathers are physically present but psychologically absent.[13] This phenomenon may contribute to juvenile delinquency, alter children's perceptions of marriage, encourage them to seek surrogate father figures, and increase their dependence on others.[14]

[10] Annisa Wahyuni, Syamsiah Depalina Siregar, and Riris Wahyuningsih, 'Peran Ayah (Fathering) dalam Pengasuhan Anak Usia Dini', *AL IHSAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 2.2 (2021), p. 58.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Sri Mulyani and Eka Danik Prahastiwi, 'Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini dalam Perspektif Gender: Keterlibatan Ayah di Kelompok Bermain Pusposari', *Tinta Emas: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 5.1 (2026), p. 17.

[13] **Humas Kemendukbangga**, '20,9 Persen Anak Indonesia Tumbuh Tanpa Peran Ayah', *Kementerian Kependudukan dan Pembangunan Keluarga/Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional*, 11 July 2025.

[14] Najwa Annisa, 'Dampak Fatherless terhadap Perkembangan Anak Perempuan', *JBPK: Jurnal Pelayanan Bimbingan dan Konseling*, 7.1 (2024), p.104

Although extensive research has been conducted on independent character development, most studies focus predominantly on the roles of mothers or teachers within learning environments, largely overlooking paternal involvement. Furthermore, studies integrating the Father Involvement theory with independent character traits remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to strengthen previous scholarship by analyzing paternal involvement in shaping the independent character of children aged 5–6 years. The novelty of this study lies in its application of the father involvement theory from the paternal perspective regarding character development in children aged 5–6 years. This research not only examines the phenomenon empirically but also offers a conceptual approach connecting social and cultural dimensions.

B. METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative method with a phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of fathers in parenting and shaping the independent character of early childhood. The phenomenological approach was selected because it focuses on the subjective meanings constructed by individuals based on firsthand experiences The phenomenological approach seeks to describe the shared meaning of individuals' lived experiences concerning a particular phenomenon.[15] Through this approach, the researchers could understand how fathers perceive their roles, the forms of involvement they practice, the challenges they encounter, and their experiences in instilling independent values. Hence, phenomenology was considered the most appropriate design to deeply uncover the subjective experiences of fathers and provide a comprehensive understanding of father involvement in early childhood character building.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as phenomenological research requires individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon under

[15] Creswel, 'Research Design - Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches' (California: SAGE Publication 2009) 30.

study. The inclusion criteria were: (1) biological fathers residing with their children, (2) having a child aged 5–6 years currently enrolled in Group B of Al-Hikam Kindergarten, Purwakarta, (3) actively involved in daily parenting, (4) willing to participate in the interview until completion, and (5) obtaining confirmation from the school regarding their involvement in the child's education. The exclusion criteria included fathers who did not live with their children, had highly limited caregiving involvement, or refused to be audio-recorded during the interview. The final number of participants was three fathers, which is considered sufficient in phenomenological research due to its emphasis on data depth rather than population representation.[16]

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes, which were recorded with the participants' consent. The audio recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis; this step was taken to enhance data credibility and minimize interpretive errors.

Data analysis followed Colaizzi's method, which commenced with reading the transcripts repeatedly, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. The final stage involved member checking to ensure that the interpretations aligned with the participants' actual experiences. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and an audit trail. The application of these techniques aimed to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research results so that the findings are scientifically accountable.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of fathers in shaping

[16] Heri Supandi, Lina Herlina, and Reina A. Hadikusumo, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif Pendidikan* (Tuban: Yayasan Pendidikan Hidayatun Nihayah, 2025), p. 85.

the independent character of children aged 5–6 years in Group B of Al-Hikam Kindergarten, Purwakarta. Based on the phenomenological analysis of the in-depth interviews with three participants (I, M, and R), five essential themes emerged, illustrating the perspectives and experiences of fathers in parenting.

1. Fathers as Pivotal Figures in Shaping Children's Independence

All participants viewed parenting not merely as the mother's responsibility but as an endeavor requiring the father's active involvement. The fathers believed that their presence provided a vital contribution to shaping the child's independent character by offering guidance, support, and role modeling in daily life. Participant I noted that an open and trusting relationship between father and child serves as an essential foundation for the growth of child independence.

> *"If a child already trusts their father, they will be brave enough to share stories and make their own decisions because they feel supported..."*

Participants M and R also asserted that paternal involvement helps children learn to face challenges and builds courage to try new things. This aligns with the findings of Zheng et al., who state that a father's presence has a positive impact on a child's socio-emotional development, playing a vital role in fostering emotional well-being, social competence, and emotion regulation during childhood.[17]

2. Fathers' Emotional Presence as a Reinforcement of Independence

In addition to physical presence, the fathers emphasized the importance of emotional presence in the parenting process. Emotional presence was manifested through warm communication, listening to children's stories, offering appreciation, and being a source of support when children faced difficulties. Participant M explained that time constraints due to work did not prevent him from

[17] Que Zheng, Liman Cai, Peishan Huang, Wei Huang, and Yushan Ni, 'Father's Involvement Is Critical in Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood: A Meta-Analysis', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 74 (2026), p. 27.

remaining emotionally engaged with his child.

> "*I utilize the time spent picking up and dropping off from school, as well as before bedtime, to chat with my child. Although brief, what matters is the quality.*"

Participant I added that positive responses to children's questions and stories can boost their self-confidence and courage to act independently. This finding is consistent with the view that fathers perceive emotional presence as a crucial aspect of parenting. Emotional presence is demonstrated through warm communication, a willingness to listen to children's accounts, appreciation, and support during difficulties. [18] This form of involvement helps children feel secure, valued, and supported in their developmental process. Recent studies indicate that the quality of father involvement—including warmth, responsiveness, and emotional support—contributes positively to children's socio-emotional development and emotion regulation skills in early childhood.

3. Providing Space for Exploration and Decision-Making

It is critical to offer children opportunities to try, explore, and solve problems independently. The fathers believed that direct experience is the primary vehicle for children to learn responsibility and develop decision-making skills. Participant R provided an example from when his child learned to ride a bicycle.

> "*I let him try first. If he struggles, only then do I help. So, the child learns from his own experience...*"

Participants I and M also stressed the importance of avoiding over-restriction and granting freedom of choice, provided it remains within safe boundaries and conforms to family rules. This finding is consistent with evidence indicating that parental autonomy support promotes positive psychological development, whereas excessive parental control is associated

[18] Nilo Puglisi, Valentine Rattaz, Nicolas Favez, and Hervé Tissot, 'Father Involvement and Emotion Regulation During Early Childhood: A Systematic Review', *BMC Psychology*, 12.1 (2024), art. 675.

with adverse outcomes for children.[19] Furthermore, parenting practices that promote children's autonomy contribute to the development of self-regulation and enhance their capacity to act independently.[20] These findings indicate that the fathers strived to nurture independence by avoiding over-protection and offering choices within safe parameters and family norms. This practice reflects autonomy-supportive parenting, wherein children are given opportunities to learn to make decisions and take responsibility for their choices while still receiving guidance from parents. Research shows that supporting child autonomy contributes positively to the development of independence and self-regulation.

4. Father-Mother Collaboration in Parenting

The participants maintained that the successful development of an independent character cannot be decoupled from cooperation between the father and mother. Alignment in parenting styles was deemed essential so that children receive consistent guidance. Participant R stated that the roles of the father and mother must complement each other:

> "*Fathers and mothers must share the same goals in educating the child so that the child does not become confused and receives consistent examples...*"

This finding shows that paternal involvement does not occur in isolation; rather, it is part of an integrated family parenting system. This finding supports the view that fathers and mothers contribute in distinct ways to children's experiences, thereby fostering development across all developmental domains.[21]

5. Impediments and Supporting Factors in Shaping Children's Independence

[19] Joeri Van der Kaap-Deeder, Maarten Vansteenkiste, Bart Soenens, Joke Brumagne, and Bart Duriez, 'A Moment of Autonomy Support Brightens Adolescents' Mood: Autonomy Support, Psychological Control and Adolescent Affect in Everyday Life', *Child Development*, 94.6 (2023), p. 1661.
[20] Emily Day, Catherine R. McGillion, Susan M. Graham, and Jessica E. Faulkner, 'Effect of the Partners in Play Intervention on Parents' Autonomy-Supportive Guiding Behaviour and Children's Self-Regulation', *Children*, 14.9 (2024), p. 930.
[21] Desy Ayuningrum, 'Hubungan Keterlibatan Ayah dalam Pengasuhan Anak dengan Kemandirian', *Jurnal Inovatif Ilmu Pendidikan*, 1.1 (2019), p. 62.

The fathers identified several factors supporting the formation of an independent character, namely parental upbringing styles, parenting knowledge, and the child's social environment. Conversely, several obstacles were experienced by all participants, including parental ego, excessive gadget use, and the influence of the surrounding environment. Participant I admitted that the desire to always protect the child can inadvertently lead parents to become overly restrictive.

> "*Sometimes we want to protect the child, but without realizing it, we end up prohibiting too many things and preventing the child from developing*..."

Meanwhile, participants M and R highlighted the importance of controlling gadget usage because it can reduce a child's opportunity to learn independence through direct experience. Excessive gadget use may reduce children's willingness to engage in everyday physical activities.[22]

The results demonstrate that fathers conceptualize their involvement as a vital component in the process of shaping a child's independent character. This finding is consistent with the theory of father involvement, which conceptualizes paternal involvement as encompassing direct interaction, emotional accessibility, and responsibility for the child's development. Research indicates that fathers serve as figures who model courage, perseverance, and the ability to cope with failure.

The experience shared by Participant I in helping his child understand the meaning of losing in a competition demonstrates that fathers do not merely teach practical skills but also shape a mindset that supports independence. This finding is consistent with the view that children acquire behaviors through observing and imitating significant figures in their social environment. Thus, paternal involvement becomes an important source of social learning for independent character development.

[22] Amalia Rabiatul Adwiah and Raden Rachmy Diana, 'Strategi Orang Tua dalam Mengatasi Dampak Penggunaan Gadget terhadap Perkembangan Sosial Anak Usia Dini', *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7.2 (2023), p. 2465.

Additionally, this study found that the quality of time is more vital than the quantity of time. Despite facing time constraints due to professional obligations, the fathers consistently endeavored to build emotional proximity through meaningful communication.

This finding is noteworthy as it indicates that father involvement is not solely determined by the duration of time spent with the child, but rather by the quality of the interactions. This outcome reinforces various previous studies showing that paternal emotional warmth contributes to the development of self-confidence, emotion regulation, and the child's capacity to act autonomously.

On the other hand, fathers consistently emphasized the necessity of providing opportunities for children to try, make choices, and learn from mistakes. This finding can be interpreted in light of the theory of psychosocial development, particularly the stage of initiative versus guilt, which emphasizes the importance of encouraging children's initiative during early childhood. At this stage, children require opportunities to take initiative and perform various activities independently. When given room to try, they develop a sense of self-confidence and competence. Conversely, excessive restrictions can inhibit the development of a child's initiative. Moreover, this finding aligns with the concept of authoritative parenting, which emphasizes a balance between granting freedom and maintaining parental supervision.

Furthermore, one interesting finding of this study is the emergence of the father's role as a *backup system*. The fathers did not immediately take over when the child encountered difficulties; instead, they allowed the child to try first before offering assistance. This finding demonstrates a form of support distinct from mere supervision or direct instruction. Operating as a backup system enables children to develop problem-solving skills while maintaining a sense of security, knowing that their parents stand ready to assist if necessary. This finding potentially constitutes a new contribution to the literature, as it has not been extensively or specifically discussed in research concerning father

involvement and early childhood independence.

The research results show that the formation of an independent character is influenced by the interaction of various factors within the caregiving environment. A supportive environment, positive family communication, and father-mother collaboration reinforce the process of independence building. Conversely, parental ego can give rise to overprotective behaviors that restrict children's opportunities to learn autonomously. Uncontrolled gadget use can also decrease the frequency of direct experiences that children need to develop problem-solving and decision-making capabilities.

These insights imply that a child's independence is not shaped by a single isolated factor, but is rather the product of interactions between parenting quality, family relationships, the social environment, and the opportunities afforded to children to learn from everyday experiences.

This study makes three significant empirical contributions to the literature on father involvement and early childhood development. First, it demonstrates that the quality of father–child interactions is more influential than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children, underscoring the importance of meaningful engagement over mere physical presence. Second, it identifies the father's role as a *backup system*, in which fathers provide guidance, encouragement, and emotional support without taking over the child's learning process, thereby fostering independent problem-solving. Third, the findings highlight the importance of parental self-restraint by showing that minimizing ego-driven and overprotective parenting behaviors creates opportunities for children to develop autonomy, self-confidence, and independent decision-making. Collectively, these findings enrich the literature on father involvement in early childhood parenting, particularly by providing empirical evidence on how paternal involvement contributes to the development of independence among children aged 5–6 years.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that paternal involvement plays a crucial

role in shaping the independent character of children aged 5–6 years in Group B of Al-Hikam Kindergarten, Purwakarta. The findings reveal that fathers serve as role models for independence by exemplifying positive behaviors, provide emotional support through warm and responsive communication, and act as facilitators who afford children opportunities to explore, make decisions, and complete tasks according to their capabilities.

The development of an independent character is further bolstered by effective collaboration between fathers and mothers in implementing consistent parenting. Conversely, parental overprotection, parenting egos, and excessive gadget use constitute prominent factors hindering the development of child independence. The results of this study imply the importance of enhancing paternal involvement in caregiving and highlight the need for early childhood education institutions to encourage parental cooperation in character building.

This study has limitations as it only involved three participants with relatively homogeneous characteristics. Therefore, future research is advised to engage a more diverse sample of participants and utilize alternative approaches to enrich the understanding of the father's role in developing children's independent character.

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