A Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research on Developing Independent Living Skill in Children with Special Needs through Collaborative Educational Efforts

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Abstract. This research focused to explore a collaborative approach in children with special needs, emphasizing the involvement of all stakeholders within educational institutions, including principals, classroom teachers, subject teachers, and parents. Using a phenomenological approach, the study sought to understand how this collective effort contributes to fostering their independent living skill. The research involved a sample of 1 principal, 6 teachers, and 10 parents, offering diverse perspectives on the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in cultivating independence. The research reported that developmental process was supported through three key phases: firstly, pre-learning activities involving routine habits outside the classroom; secondly, during learning sessions using prompts, regular and consistent repetition, independence training and continuous verbal reinforcement; and thirdly, post-learning activities involving relaxation routines outside the classroom. It was also reported that the success of this process relied on thorough supervision, which included establishing independence standards, structured activity monitoring, and collaboration with parents. However, challenges such as parents' inability to maintain school-established routines at home and issues with school attendance often delay the progress of independence training. To address these challenges, educational institutions should implement collaborative strategies to guide and remind parents to consistently practice these routines and reinforce discipline at home.

Keywords: children with special needs; collaborative approach; continuous verbal reinforcement; independence training; independent living skills

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1. Introduction

The development of independence in children with special needs has become a critical focus in educational initiatives. In 2021, Indonesia's population aged 5-19 years was approximately 66.6 million, with around 3.3% identified as children with special needs, totaling approximately 2.2 million children. However, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture *(Kemendikbud)* released in August, 2021 showed that only 269,398 children with special needs were enrolled in formal education, representing just 12.26% of the total population of children with special needs (Irawati, 2023; Kemendikbud, 2021). This indicated a significant gap in access to educational services, despite the legal framework emphasizing equal educational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities, as outlined in Indonesia's Child Protection Act No. 23 of 2002.

Ensuring equal access to education for children with special needs is not just a legal requirement, but a moral and societal obligation (Faizin & Jafar, 2024; Kasiyati & Wahyudi, 2021; Maholmes et al., 2012). Every citizen has the right to quality education, as enshrined in the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia (Article 31, Paragraph 1). For children with special needs, one of the most critical areas for development is independent living skills. This includes building good habits, behavioral values, and communication skills that are essential for their daily functioning and long-term quality of life. Research by Subu et al. (2024) found that only 41.66% of children with special needs at State Special Elementary School Seduri could perform basic toileting independently, revealing a low level of autonomy in daily activities and a heavy dependence on others for routine tasks.

Developing independence in children with special needs should be initiated from an early age, as early childhood is a golden period for cognitive and physical growth (Hakiman et al., 2022). During this period, the brain develops rapidly and absorbs information at an accelerated rate. According to Gilmour et al. (2024), children in this developmental phase are highly sensitive to external stimuli and educational interventions from their environment. Neurological studies further support this, showing that by the age of four, brain cell development reaches 50%, and by age 8, it reaches 80% (Lintorf & Schürer, 2023; Rivera, 1997). Therefore, stimulating children through good habits and fostering independence during this golden period is crucial for optimal development.

From both medical and psychological perspectives, early childhood is a vital period for neurological development, making it an ideal time for early interventions for children with special needs. These interventions not only support the child's physical and mental development but also provide long-term benefits to their families and society as a whole (Lederman, 2011). Independence in children with special needs is particularly important because it equips them to handle life's responsibilities, allowing them to live according to societal norms and reducing their dependence on others. Independence is closely tied to the future quality of life for children with special needs, as it affects their ability to compete with peers without disabilities. Although there are affirmative opportunities in employment, children with special needs who have not developed independence will find it challenging to seize these opportunities

(Ghaffari et al., 2020; Hailemariam et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of educational institutions is crucial in aligning the development of independence with the strengths and potential possessed by each child. This alignment ensures that children with special needs can adapt effectively and meet the demands of daily life. Educational institutions provide structured environments and specialized programs that foster self-reliance and equip children with essential life skills, making them better prepared to navigate their surroundings (Alnaim, 2023; Meda et al., 2023). However, despite their importance, institutions catering to children with special needs are often perceived as burdensome, particularly from a financial perspective. Many parents view these institutions as ineffective or even counterproductive, leading them to prefer at-home care, which they believe provides a more personalized and familiar approach (Faradina, 2016; Rizka, 2022). This perception highlights the need for educational institutions to address these concerns by demonstrating their value, offering affordable programs, and working closely with families to ensure the holistic development of children with special needs.

Like all children, those with special needs go through developmental stages, from infancy to adolescence and adulthood. However, due to their specific challenges, they require tailored facilitation and support to achieve independence. Preparing them for the future means providing the necessary guidance to help them become more self-reliant and less dependent on others (Dubrovina & Naboichenko, 2018). In practice, this development can be achieved through collaborative teaching methods that address the unique needs of children with special needs (Çelik & Tomris, 2024; Parkinson & Humphrey, 2008; Singh et al., 2023). Collaborative teaching involves the active partnership between educators, specialists, and even parents to create a comprehensive and supportive learning environment. By combining the expertise of various professionals such as special education teachers, therapists, and parents, collaborative teaching ensures that the child's individual learning styles, strengths, and challenges are recognized and accommodated (Nnamani, 2024). For example, teachers can work closely with speech therapists to integrate communication skills into daily classroom activities or collaborate with occupational therapists to adapt learning materials that support motor skill development (Kaegon et al., 2013). Parents also play a vital role in this approach, as their involvement provides continuity between school and home, reinforcing learning and ensuring consistency (Çelik & Tomris, 2024). By prioritizing communication and teamwork, collaborative teaching not only enhances the child's academic abilities but also promotes social, emotional, and practical skills, enabling them to thrive in various aspects of life.

Despite the advantages of a collaborative approach, many educational institutions still rely on conventional methods. Traditional approaches tend to emphasize merely being present with children with special needs, prioritizing care over fostering essential social and interactive abilities (Kvande et al., 2019; Quar et al., 2024). This neglect limits their growth, as collaborative and interpersonal skills are crucial for navigating social environments, building relationships, and achieving greater independence (Arinushkina et al., 2023; Maznichenko et al., 2021). Collaborative skills, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, are

critical for fostering independence and social adaptability. For instance, engaging children in group projects, peer learning, or interactive activities can teach them how to navigate social situations, resolve conflicts, and work cooperatively toward shared goals. Institutions that neglect this aspect limit the potential of children with special needs, confining their development to isolated academic achievements rather than equipping them for holistic success. Based on the explanation above, this research aims to explore how the collaborative approach of stakeholders within educational institutions contributes to the development of independent living skills in children with special needs, using a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of all parties involved.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Forms of Independence in Children with Special Needs
Independence in children with disabilities is a multidimensional concept that spans various aspects of their lives, including physical, emotional, cognitive, and social capabilities (Kerins et al., 2018; Prima, 2016). Physical independence, for example, involves the ability to perform daily self-care tasks such as dressing, eating, and personal hygiene without relying heavily on others (Simon et al., 2022). For children with disabilities, achieving physical independence often requires adapted tools or strategies, such as using assistive devices or learning modified motor skills. Building physical independence is crucial because it enhances the child's sense of autonomy and enables them to participate more actively in everyday life.

Emotional and cognitive independence are equally vital, though they focus more on internal development (Molchanova et al., 2022). Morris (2017) also stated that emotional independence refers to a child's ability to regulate their emotions and handle challenges without excessive emotional reliance on caregivers. This involves helping children with disabilities develop self-esteem and coping mechanisms to face social and academic pressures. Cognitive independence involves decision-making, problem-solving, and the ability to think critically (Almeida et al., 2019). This aspect is especially important in fostering self-reliance in academic and social settings, as children with cognitive independence are better equipped to face challenges and make choices that align with their personal goals and needs.

Social and functional independence address the child's ability to interact with their surroundings and manage their daily responsibilities. Social independence includes forming friendships, communicating with peers, and navigating social situations, which can be challenging for children with disabilities, especially those with social or communication impairments (Tan et al., 2016). Functional independence, on the other hand, encompasses the ability to manage time, organize personal responsibilities, and complete essential life tasks such as getting to school or managing a schedule (Hastuti et al., 2022; Leitner et al., 2007; Myklebust & Båtevik, 2022). Fostering functional independence often requires the use of assistive technologies or specific interventions that allow the child to navigate daily routines successfully (Almeida et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2024). Together, these forms of independence empower children with disabilities to lead

more autonomous and fulfilling lives, promoting their integration into society and fostering long-term success.

2.2 Methods and Tools in Developing Independence for Children with Special Needs

There are several methods for fostering independence in children from an early age. The first method is by trusting children with responsibilities. This involves encouraging children to participate in daily activities with the confidence that they are capable of performing tasks independently (Marlow et al., 2017; Viezel et al., 2022). Instilling this sense of responsibility from a young age is crucial for the early formation of independence. By entrusting children with tasks, they are motivated to explore their capabilities, and this early empowerment is foundational in building their confidence in performing tasks without assistance (Laklija & Brkić, 2022). The second method focuses on developing good habits in children, tailored to their age and developmental stage. Simple activities such as throwing trash in the bin, serving themselves, washing their hands, and tidying up their toys help create a routine that promotes responsibility and self-sufficiency (Cluskey & Schwend, 2015; Yang et al., 2024). Consistently reinforcing these habits through repetition helps children internalize these behaviors, thereby fostering a positive character. According to Ar et al. (2008), practicing these habits consistently and from an early age ensures that a child's independence develops in a natural and progressive manner. The third essential method is effective communication, which plays a significant role in promoting independence. Communication with children should be simple and easy to understand, using language that matches their developmental level (Babkina & Ponomareva, 2022; Simon et al., 2022). Clear instructions, basic commands, and direct language help children grasp what is expected of them. Communicating effectively is key in guiding children to make independent choices and follow through with tasks without needing constant (Sankar & Monisha, 2020). The fourth method is to teach discipline, defined as adherence to rules and regulations with a sense of joy and responsibility. Discipline is closely tied to the development of independence, as it reinforces the ability to act in a structured, self-reliant manner (Ispulova et al., 2023; Myklebust & Båtevik, 2022). Teaching discipline to young children requires consistency, and through continuous practice, children are better prepared to act independently as they grow older. Discipline strengthens their capacity to follow routines and manage responsibilities without external prompts.

In addition to the four previously mentioned methods, numerous studies on children with special needs emphasize the use of modern tools in their education, such as Augmented Reality (Ajitha et al., 2023), computer technologies (Kumar et al., 2024), audio and video reality (Mehrotra et al., 2024), and IoT-based applications (Rahmalisa et al., 2022). These tools have become a significant trend in contemporary learning, offering innovative ways to engage and support children with special needs in achieving academic goals. However, as technology advances, there seems to be a growing tendency to overlook the fundamental necessity of equipping these children with the skills to live independently and interact effectively within their social environments. Social integration is crucial, as children with special needs will eventually live within and contribute to society. The ability to collaborate, communicate, and build relationships is vital

for their acceptance and inclusion in the community. Developing these social skills enables them to navigate societal norms, foster connections, and demonstrate their value as active members of the community. The collaborative approach is considered a viable solution to bridge this gap, providing children with opportunities to interact, cooperate, and build relationships. This approach not only fosters acceptance but also empowers them to thrive socially, ensuring they are well-prepared for a fulfilling and inclusive life.

2.3 Collaborative Approach in Developing Independence for Children with Special Needs

Developing independence in children with special needs requires a collaborative approach, as the complexity of their needs demands input from multiple stakeholders. In educational institutions, this typically involves teachers, therapists, and parents working together to create an environment that supports the child's learning and independence (Codina & Robinson, 2024). Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering both cognitive and value-based independence by designing classroom activities that promote decision-making, problem-solving, and responsibility. Examples include assigning age-appropriate tasks, encouraging self-regulation, and creating opportunities for peer collaboration to enhance both academic and social skills (Dada et al., 2024; Hansen et al., 2020). Parents extend this learning at home by reinforcing the skills children acquire in school. This can involve assigning household responsibilities, encouraging independent daily routines, and providing opportunities for children to make simple yet meaningful choices (Agaj & Suhodolli, 2024). Through these practices, parents ensure that learning and independence development remain consistent across settings, creating a cohesive developmental environment (Meuser et al., 2023; Rahmah et al., 2022). Therapists further complement these efforts by addressing specific developmental challenges such as motor, communication, and sensory difficulties through targeted interventions. They also act as guides for both teachers and parents, ensuring that strategies are effectively integrated into daily routines in both school and home settings. Their expertise helps bridge gaps, ensuring children's needs are met holistically and consistently (Meuser et al., 2023; Wardani & Suharto, 2021). This coordinated effort, characterized by open communication, shared goals, and regular assessments of progress, is vital to creating a seamless experience that supports children's journey toward greater autonomy. The collaboration among teachers, parents, and therapists ensures that children with special needs are equipped to navigate challenges, develop essential skills, and succeed independently in various environments.

Besides, emotional independence is another crucial component of autonomy for children with special needs, as many struggle with emotional regulation due to cognitive or social-emotional difficulties. Teachers and therapists must collaborate closely to develop strategies that help these children build coping mechanisms and self-regulation skills (Sajid et al., 2024). With emotional independence, children learn to manage frustrations, express their feelings appropriately, and handle social interactions without excessive reliance on adults for emotional support. This gradual development of emotional resilience enables them to engage more confidently with their environment (Murphy et al., 2024). Besides, cognitive independence focuses on helping children make decisions and

solve problems on their own, with minimal guidance. Teachers encourage this by fostering critical thinking and providing opportunities for children to take initiative in their learning (Roslan, 2022). Over time, these children develop the confidence to approach challenges and make decisions independently. Similarly, value-based independence is about helping children form their own principles and make ethical decisions grounded in personal beliefs. Both teachers and parents play a crucial role in guiding children through real-life situations where they can practice moral decision-making, reinforcing their individuality and autonomy (Nnamani, 2024). Lastly, discipline is foundational in cultivating independence, particularly when it is taught in a structured and consistent manner. Clear rules and boundaries help children understand expectations, while disciplined practice enables them to manage their responsibilities and adhere to routines independently (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Collaboration among teachers, therapists, and parents ensures consistency in both discipline and reinforcement of independent behaviors across settings. This holistic and unified approach not only fosters long-lasting skills in independence but also prepares children with special needs to thrive in their daily lives and future endeavors.

3. Methodology
This study utilized a hermeneutical phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers, therapists, and other key stakeholders involved in the development of independence in children with special needs at an Inclusive Early Childhood Education School in Kartasura, Indonesia. The approach allows for a deep understanding of how individuals perceive and experience the process of fostering independence, capturing the subjective interpretations and personal insights of those directly involved in this educational (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Phenomenology was particularly well-suited to this study, as it emphasized the lived experiences of individuals and seeks to uncover the essence of phenomena as experienced by the participants themselves (Cresswel & Cresswell, 2022). The subjects of the research included special needs teachers and students at the school, specifically in the special education sector. In addition to the students and teachers, data were gathered from other informants such as classroom assistants, therapists, and the school principal, all of whom played active roles in the children's developmental journey. Their perspectives were invaluable in understanding the challenges and successes in nurturing independence among children with special needs, particularly in an inclusive educational setting. According to van Manen (2017), gaining insights from individuals directly involved in the phenomenon provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences that shape these children's educational outcomes. Data were collected using a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure a comprehensive view of the developmental process. First, in-depth interviews were designed with open-ended questions to allow participants special education teachers, classroom assistants, therapists, and the school principal to provide rich, detailed insights into their experiences and practices. Observation protocols were developed to systematically capture real-time interactions and behaviors in naturalistic settings, such as classrooms and therapy sessions. Document analysis included reviewing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs),

progress reports, and school policies to triangulate findings from the interviews and observations (MacDonald, 2016).

Observations were carried out to collect direct, real-time data on how learning and independence development activities are implemented in the classroom. By observing the interactions between teachers, therapists, and students, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of how independence is taught and practiced in the daily educational setting. Observational data provide valuable context and help to triangulate the insights gained through interviews (Cresswell, 2012). Documentation provided an additional layer of data, including institutional profiles, vision and mission statements, annual program plans, daily teaching modules, and assessment records. These documents helped to clarify the formal and structured approaches taken by the institution to support the development of independence in children with special needs. Analyzing institutional documents ensures that the research captures both the practical and administrative dimensions of the educational process (Bowen, 2009). Besides, a combination of interviews and direct classroom observations observed cognitive, functional, and other types of independence in children with special needs.

To provide more clarity about the sample size and characteristics of the participants, the research involved various stakeholders: 1 principal, 6 teachers, and 10 parents, all of whom were directly involved in the educational development of children with special needs. These participants were selected to offer diverse perspectives on the topic. The principal contributed insights into institutional policies and administrative support, while the teachers shared their experiences and strategies in fostering independence among these children. The parents provided valuable input about the continuity of this development at home. This triangulated approach, combining interviews, observations, and document analysis, ensured a comprehensive and consistent understanding of how independence is cultivated in children with special needs (Denzin, 2017).

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data condensation phase, interview transcripts and field notes were systematically reviewed and organized to highlight key themes and dimensions relevant to the development of independence. This step allowed the researcher to focus on the most meaningful aspects of the data while discarding irrelevant or redundant information. In the data display phase, the condensed data were presented in a narrative format, which facilitated the analysis process and allowed both the researcher and readers to easily follow the progression of insights. Finally, the conclusion drawing phase involved synthesizing the insights gained from the data and forming clear and concise answers to the research questions. This step aimed to generate new understanding about the effectiveness of various strategies for fostering independence in children with special needs, contributing to the broader body of knowledge on inclusive education. By following this rigorous, methodical approach, the study ensured that the unique experiences of each participant were accurately captured and reflected in the findings, providing practical implications for educators and policymakers alike.

4. Result and Discussion

The involvement of various stakeholders in fostering independence among children with special needs was well-organized to prevent overlaps in roles and responsibilities, ensuring a cohesive and effective approach to students' development. At the school, the development of independence was structured not just around the teachers but also included school principal, therapists, and all of whom played specific roles in supporting the learning activities of children with special needs. The school principal serves as the primary leader and coordinator of all school-related activities. Specifically, in the development of independence for children with special needs, the principal plays a central role in monitoring the performance of classroom teachers, subject teachers, and therapists. Through an interview, the principal stated:

> "*Saya bertindak sebagai koordinator utama, memastikan koordinasi guru dengan siswa dan guru dengan orang tua siswa terjalin dengan baik. Ini penting agar tujuan pembelajaran dapat dilakukan secara inklusif di sekolah dan di rumah*" ("I act as the main coordinator, ensuring effective coordination between teachers and students as well as between teachers and parents. This is crucial for achieving inclusive learning goals both at school and at home").

This underscores the principal's pivotal role in fostering collaboration and alignment among stakeholders. Based on the observation, this organizational structure could be mapped out as follows: First, the school principal is responsible for leading and coordinating all school-related activities. In the context of developing independence, the principal played a key role in monitoring the performance of classroom teachers, subject teachers, and therapists. Second, the classroom teachers acted as the core instructors for their respective classes. They assisted the subject teachers with tasks related to fostering independence in children with special needs, managed daily activities like welcoming children, communicated updates to parents through class WhatsApp groups, and delivered morning lessons based on the theme. Third, subject teachers supported classroom teachers in conducting daily lessons. In the context of independence development, subject teachers prepared and utilized educational tools for each learning center. Fourth, therapists provided regular therapeutic services to all children with special needs based on a pre-determined schedule. The well-organized involvement of various stakeholders in fostering independence among children with special needs ensured a cohesive and effective approach to their development (Fasting & Breilid, 2024). Pamungkas et al. (2023) also underline the structured roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder school principal, classroom teachers, subject teachers, and therapists enabled efficient collaboration and minimized overlaps. Thus, the school principal provided leadership and oversight, ensuring all activities aligned with the school's objectives.

This task distribution strategy employed by the Inclusive Early Childhood Education School was highly strategic, as responsibilities were allocated according to the expertise of each stakeholder involved. This ensured that the institution's goals were achieved effectively and efficiently. The division of tasks, authority, and responsibility should be aligned with each individual's experience,

skills, interests, knowledge, and personality to maximize their effectiveness (Patton et al., 2015). In addition to the organizational structure, the strategy for developing independence must be carefully considered. As observed at the school, their approach involved three key stages: pre-learning activities, learning activities, and post-learning activities. These stages can be broken down as follows:

4.1 Pre-Learning Independence Development

Routine habit reinforcement for children with special needed highlights the gradual acquisition of independent skills through repeated practice and guidance. At the school, specific tasks like greeting the teacher, washing hands, and storing personal items were systematically taught to children with special needs. Initially, these children might rely heavily on teachers for assistance due to developmental delays or cognitive challenges, but through consistent guidance, they began to exhibit signs of growing independence. This aligns with the findings of Wythe (2022), who emphasized the importance of early intervention in skill development.

Figure 1: Building interaction

Based on the observation above, a teacher and an assistant teacher lead the children through structured task that were designed to build independence while creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. The session typically began with the teacher greeting the students and leading a prayer, which not only helps set the tone for the day but also encourages the children to engage in routines that are rooted in social and moral values. As Dada et al. (2024) said in a research that interactive communication is a key component of this phase, as the

teacher frequently asks the children questions, encouraging them to participate actively. By asking simple, open-ended questions, the teacher fostered a dialogue that helped the children feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and engaging in the classroom activities. This dialogue helped in building cognitive independence, where children start to think critically and respond in a way that reflects their understanding (Hermanto & Pamungkas, 2023). Additionally, the process of responding to the teacher's prompts helped them to gain confidence in their ability to communicate, a vital skill for developing emotional and social independence. Throughout these pre-learning activities, children were encouraged to perform simple tasks independently, such as putting away their bags, organizing their personal items, or preparing for the lesson. These small, consistent actions not only helped to build physical independence but also instill a sense of responsibility and routine. The role of the teacher and the assistant was to guide and support the children while gradually reducing their direct involvement, allowing the children to take greater ownership of these tasks over time. This structured yet nurturing approach lays the foundation for continued independence throughout the learning process.

An illustrative example was the case of a student with Down syndrome who, after three months of consistent routine training, became able to independently put on socks and shoes. This progress underscores the effectiveness of repetitive practice, a core principle of behaviorist theory, which posits that learning occurs through reinforcement and consistent repetition. Based on the interview with the parent, it was observed that over time, the child successfully internalized the routine, gradually requiring fewer external prompts and less assistance, showcasing meaningful progress toward independence. This gradual move toward independence reflects the successful adaptation of educational strategies tailored to the child's unique learning pace (Abdulkabir, 2023; Gökbulut et al., 2024). This example demonstrates that with appropriate methods and sustained effort (Morrissey et al., 2024), children with special needs can acquire essential life skills, highlighting the potential for growth when individualized approaches are applied. Furthermore, the importance of habit-building extends beyond practical skills, as it contributes significantly to character development and self-confidence. The ability to complete tasks independently not only fosters autonomy but also strengthens the child's sense of achievement, which is crucial for their emotional and social development (Allen et al., 2024; Torte-Chiche, 2011). These routines, when adapted to the child's capabilities, create a foundation for further educational achievements and life-long independence, showing the critical role of structured learning environments in early childhood education for children with special needs.

4.2 Independence Development during Learning

Independence development during lessons was carried out in three phases: lesson opening, core activities, and lesson closing. Classroom teachers, subject teachers, and therapists collaborated using various methods that support the development of independence in children with special needs. These methods include: First, prompts, which are learning strategies that provide cues (verbal, visual, physical, or model) to help children with special needs complete tasks or understand

concepts. Second, the habitual repetition approach involved children with special needs engaging in repeated and consistent practice to develop routines and enhance independent skills. Third, the consistent verbal instruction approach entailed teachers providing continuous verbal guidance to support children in understanding and successfully completing tasks. The combination of these methods was essential because children's learning speeds vary. For instance, children with Down syndrome might require more tailored approaches due to developmental delays, making differentiated teaching methods crucial.

Figure 2: Implementing interactive methods

Recent evidence above suggested that building rapport with children with special needs was crucial for fostering trust and confidence, which in turn supports their overall development. Teachers and therapists at the school used interactive methods such as role-play in daily activities, creating an engaging and supportive environment. By immersing themselves in the children's world, as emphasized by teacher Amelia, teachers were able to break down communication barriers and build strong connections with their students. This approach was supported by research from Rizqi (2023) and Skovlund (2014), which highlighted that such rapport-building techniques were essential for promoting independence and emotional security in children with special needs.

Moreover, disciplined and consistent communication strategies, such as maintaining eye contact and using clear and supportive language, were key to fostering a sense of trust in these children. Teacher Ambar's emphasized on eye contact during therapeutic sessions underscores the significance of non-verbal cues in reinforcing children's confidence. This rapport not only strengthened the teacher-child bond but also contributes to the development of self-reliance (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). As children begin to trust the adults in their environment, they felt more secure in attempting tasks independently. Over time, this structured and consistent approach builds a foundation for children with

special needs to live more autonomously in the future, demonstrating that emotional support is as crucial as practical skill development in their journey towards independence.

4.3 Post-Learning Independence Development

Post-learning independence development focused on routine habits, such as performing the five daily prayers, practicing putting on shoes, picking up bags, patiently waiting for pickup and any other activities. To prevent boredom while waiting, children were provided with safe play facilities that allow them to engage independently. Allowing children to meet their own needs, including playing with toys on their own without direct supervision, helps instil confidence and autonomy. As Samaneein et al. (2012) highlighted, giving children opportunities to perform daily activities independently motivates them to realize their capabilities. This practice should be introduced early to promote independence from a young age. Post-learning independence development was an essential phase in fostering a child's ability to manage daily tasks on their own, particularly tasks that were carried out after formal learning activities.

Figure 3: Performing daily activities

Post-learning independence development was an essential phase in fostering a child's ability to manage daily tasks on their own, particularly tasks that were carried out after formal learning activities. According to observation, the activity above illustrated how students can engage in practicing routine activities, which are vital in building their sense of autonomy and responsibility. One such activity was performing the five daily prayers, a common task often practiced by children at home. In this context, the teacher no longer directly guided the students but instead took on the role of a facilitator, enabling them to perform the prayers independently. This activity not only depended a child's understanding of their religious obligations but also served as a valuable tool for integrating essential life skills. Through the discipline of adhering to prayer times, children developed time management skills, learning to allocate specific moments within their day to

fulfil this responsibility. Additionally, the consistent practice fostered a sense of accountability, as they begin to recognize the importance of fulfilling their commitments both to themselves and their faith. By consistently engaging in these tasks after learning sessions, children learnt to internalize habits that they could transfer to other areas of their daily lives, including at home and within their communities. Allowing children to perform these tasks without direct supervision helped nurture their confidence (Nnamani, 2024; Roslan, 2022). It empowered them to take initiative and complete responsibilities that may seem small but hold significant value in terms of character development. Over time, these post-learning routines helped children grow more self-sufficient and capable of managing their personal environments, contributing to their overall journey toward independence. A parent shared;

> "*Anak terkadang sulit mengerjakan perintah orang tua, namun cukup mudah untuk mengerjakan perintah guru*" ("Children sometimes struggle to follow parental instructions but find it easier to follow teacher's directions").

This highlights the importance of parents adopting the role of facilitators at home, guiding their children in completing routine tasks. This aligns with Hsieh et al. (2025) perspective that teachers and parents can shift roles depending on the setting, ensuring a cohesive approach to supporting children's development.

To ensure that all activities related to the development of independence for children with special needs were carried out as planned, constant monitoring and supervision by all stakeholders is required (Alekhina & Shemanov, 2023). According to the interview and data documentation, monitoring and supervision were conducted in three stages: First, establishing standards by setting the independence criteria outlined in the school's syllabus. Second, scheduled monitoring, which included regular evaluations and supervision of educational and administrative staff on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis. Third, collaborative monitoring is carried out with parents through WhatsApp groups to maintain effective communication between the school and parents. These three stages of supervision, as noted by the researcher, are crucial for ensuring that the goals of the independence development program are achieved. The establishment of standards and the preparation of assessment tools to measure the attainment of these standards were essential steps for educational institutions (Bumin et al., 2024; Tsaoussi et al., 2023). By having these tools in place, institutions could systematically compare actual performance against the set standards. The role of supervision is vital, as it highlights the effectiveness of a collaborative approach in supporting children's development. However, it requires meticulous effort from all stakeholders, including the principal, teachers, therapists, and parents. Specific strategies employed by teachers and therapists included designing personalized learning plans, integrating independence-focused activities into daily routines, and using positive reinforcement to motivate children (Arinushkina et al., 2024). Therapists can incorporate play-based and task-oriented exercises to strengthen practical skills, while teachers ensure that classroom activities are structured to gradually increase the children's autonomy.

This multifaceted approach underscores the importance of teamwork and a shared commitment to the children's progress.

Empirical analysis of the strategies for developing independence in children with special needs also highlighted the importance of therapeutic services, early assessment, and collaboration between various professionals. Therapeutic interventions were crucial in teaching children key behaviors such as compliance and attention focus, which form the foundation for their independence in both academic and social contexts. These services helped children regulate their actions and developed skills that were essential for participating in classroom activities. The role of early detection and assessment, as conducted in collaboration with psychologists, could not be understated. It provides a personalized framework for each child, ensuring that their individual needs were met through targeted interventions (Babkina et al., 2023). By identifying specific areas of need early, these tailored programs allow children to progress at their own pace while focusing on the skills most critical for their independence. Besides, according to (Lisdiana et al., 2024), another key factor was the collaborative competency strategy, where teachers from diverse backgrounds education, health, therapy, and psychology worked together to provide comprehensive support. This multidisciplinary approach ensured that children with special needs received well-rounded guidance, fostering their independence across various domains. Additionally, the physical environment played a significant role in this development. Facilities such as outdoor play areas and specially designed desks at the school supported the children's ability to practice independent actions without constant supervision, allowing them to gradually build self-reliance (Beckmann & Reyneke, 2021). The combination of therapeutic services, professional collaboration, and supportive facilities forms a holistic strategy that effectively nurtured the independence of children with special needs, allowing them to engage more freely in both structured and unstructured activities.

In addition to preparing the necessary components to support independence development, inclusive educational institutions must proactively address potential challenges that could hinder progress. One key factor is the inconsistent reinforcement of school routines at home, as many parents face difficulties maintaining the practices introduced in school. A common reason cited by parents is a lack of patience. One parent shared;

> "*Jujur saya sering emosi, capek mengajari anak seperti di sekolah. Karena saya bekerja dan melakukan pekerjaan rumah*" ("Honestly, I often get frustrated and exhausted teaching my child like they do at school because I have to work and manage household chores").

This highlights the need for schools to provide practical guidance and support for parents, helping them balance their responsibilities while effectively reinforcing their child's routines at home. Collaborative strategies, such as simplified training for parents, clear communication of expectations, and access to resources or tools, could help bridge this gap and ensure that children receive consistent reinforcement of their independence-building practices in both settings. This lack of continuity could impede a child's progress toward independence by disrupting

the consistency needed for skill development (Jaspers-van der Maten & Rommes, 2024). Another significant challenge was irregular attendance and discipline issues, particularly in occupational therapy sessions. Inconsistent attendance often interrupts therapy programs, requiring therapists to repeat exercises and ultimately slowing the child's progress. To mitigate these challenges, inclusive early childhood education institutions had established clear agreements with parents, emphasizing the critical importance of maintaining school routines at home in a consistent and sustained manner. This approach aligns with the findings of Haynes et al. (2024), which highlighted the success of collaboration between parents and therapists in pediatric physiatry care. Furthermore, schools must work closely with parents to ensure regular attendance and active participation in therapy sessions, as any disruptions in these areas could significantly delay the child's journey toward independence. These collaborative measured underscore the importance of unified efforts across all stakeholders in promoting consistent and effective independence training.

5. Conclusion
The implementation of independence development for children with special needs in inclusive early childhood education has demonstrated positive outcomes, highlighting the effectiveness of a well-structured and collaborative approach. The organized process, involving the school principal, classroom teachers, subject teachers, parents, and therapists, ensures that each stage of development is consistently supported. Pre-learning activities, such as routine habit formation, have proven to build a strong foundation for independence, enabling children to develop familiarity with essential daily tasks. During learning activities, the use of prompts and regular, consistent repetition has been shown to help children follow instructions correctly and internalize skills over time. Continuous verbal instructions further ensure that children comprehend and gradually perform tasks independently. Post-learning activities, aimed at reinforcing routine habits, have successfully helped children retain and apply learned behaviors in different settings. Furthermore, the supervision process has been instrumental in maintaining progress. Setting clear independence standards in the school syllabus has provided a structured framework, while regular evaluations and educational staff supervision have ensured accountability and ongoing improvement. Collaborative oversight with parents through communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups has strengthened home-school partnerships, ensuring consistency in the application of routines and strategies across environments. As a result, children have shown measurable progress in various areas of independence, such as managing simple daily tasks, following instructions, and demonstrating self-regulation. This success underscores the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders and the need for consistent, organized efforts to promote independence in children with special needs.

It is recommended that parents recognize and trust the capabilities of inclusive schools in providing services that enhance the independence of children with special needs. Schools should continue to implement structured independence development programs through collaborative approach. By incorporating routine

habit formation, consistent prompts, and verbal instructions during learning both at school and at home, consistency in fostering children's independence across all environments can be effectively ensured. Further research could explore the long-term impact of such structured developmental programs on the independence of children with special needs as they progress through different stages of education. Additionally, future studies could assess the effectiveness of parental involvement in reinforcing routines at home and its correlation with a child's independence development. Lastly, it would be beneficial to investigate how digital tools, beyond WhatsApp groups, could enhance collaboration between schools and parents in monitoring and supporting the independence development of children with special needs.

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