

PERSPECTIVE OF INDEPENDENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN 'THE BOOK AKU SUDAH BESAR

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Abstract. Instilling the value of independence in early childhood is an important foundation in the formation of character and social-emotional development of children. Putri Wijayanti's book *Aku Sudah Besar*, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in 2022, presents a simple but meaningful narrative to introduce the concept of independence to children. This study aims to examine the perspective of independence displayed in the book and its relevance to the stages of early childhood development. The method used is qualitative analysis with a child literacy and developmental psychology approach. The results of the analysis show that this book explicitly and implicitly emphasizes the importance of children's ability to carry out daily activities independently. The main characters in this book show physical development and basic abilities such as bathing themselves, eating themselves, and distinguishing themselves from younger siblings. This article discusses the perspective of independence in the book, including strengthening the role of an older brother, a boost in confidence, and an understanding of developmental differences. Through a critical approach, this article also examines the limitations of the book's narrative, such as the lack of conflict and the narrow definition of "being great." This analysis aims to provide practical recommendations for parents and teachers in using books as a tool for learning children's character and independence. The stories and illustrations in the book support the formation of positive self-concept and intrinsic encouragement in children to learn independently.

Keywords: child independence, child literacy, child development.

INTRODUCTION

Children's growth is not only marked by physical changes, but also by the development of self-awareness, independence, and a sense of social responsibility. In the context of early childhood, the strengthening of these values needs to be conveyed through media that is in accordance with their developmental stages, both in terms of language, visuals, and the proximity of the theme to daily life. The book *Aku Sudah Besar* by Putri Wijayanti is one example of children's reading that tries to frame the idea of "becoming big" not only in the context of age or body size, but also in the ability to carry out activities independently. The book "*Aku Sudah Besar*" does not only tell the story of children's physical growth, but more than that, emphasizes the importance of growing self-awareness and independence in daily life. Intended for early children, this book is one of the literacy tools that supports character strengthening from childhood.

Childhood, especially early childhood (0–6 years), is an important phase in the process of character formation and the development of basic abilities of individuals. Children's social-emotional development includes self-awareness, consisting of showing self-ability, knowing one's own feelings and self-control, and being able to adjust to others. (Hidayat & Nurlatifah, 2023). One of the key aspects of early childhood development is independence. Independence not only means being able to do things without assistance, but it also includes the ability to make simple decisions, take responsibility for yourself, and manage emotions in a basic way. The development of this independence is an important foundation for the growth of children's confidence and social capacity in the future. According to Erikson (1963), early childhood is at the stage of autonomy vs. shame and doubt, where they begin to develop confidence in their ability to do things independently. When children are not given the opportunity to try and be supported positively, they tend to grow up with feelings of self-doubt. Meanwhile, Piaget (1962) emphasized that early childhood is in the preoperational stage, which allows them to learn through hands-on experience, including daily activities that stimulate independence, such as eating alone, dressing, and choosing activities.

Independence is also seen as a form of children's readiness to face the wider social world, such as going to school or interacting with peers. As stated by Hurlock (1991), the process of forming independence should be carried out gradually and consistently, through a supportive and safe environment. Thus, the support of parents, teachers, and appropriate learning media (such as children's storybooks) is an important factor in forming this independence. However, there are still challenges in instilling the value of independence, especially when the approach used pays less attention to the stages of child development or places too much emphasis on results rather than processes. Therefore, it is important to look at the perspective of independence more holistically, based on the views of child development experts as well as the social and emotional context of early childhood. Conceptually, the independence of students as an orientation to achieve educational goals is important in order to prepare a generation that is ready and resilient to face the inevitable complexities of life in this modern century. (Maulidin, 2024)

Some studies show that the early childhood phase (around 0-6 years old) is a period when physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development occurs very rapidly so that it greatly determines the next character development. The early childhood phase is very important in character formation because the habits and values formed in childhood will be the foundation of character for life. This is in accordance with Lickona's opinion which states that character education must begin with three main aspects: *moral knowing* (knowing what is good), *moral feeling* (loving the good) and *moral action* (doing good), (Lickona, 1991). He emphasized that institutions (schools) and families must work together in instilling early childhood character, because character is not just the mastery of academic material, but the integration of moral actions. Character cultivation must be done from early childhood, so that the character is firmly rooted in children until adulthood. Early age is a critical period for character formation. (Amini & Mariyati, 2021). Some of the reasons for the importance of the early childhood phase in character formation: This rapid development & high plasticity is because early childhood experiences very rapid physical, cognitive, social-emotional growth. The experience at this stage forms the basic pattern, The formation of these basic habits and values is because the character is formed from *Knowing – loving – doing* good grades. If done from an early age, good habits are easier to form. The influence of the environment is very large, Montessori and Dewantara figures show that the environment, examples, and children's interactions with educators and parents greatly affect character. Prevention from the beginning, Because a strong character in childhood will prevent negative behavior in the future (e.g. responsibility, discipline, honesty), Investing early. This long-term connection is because the character formed at an early age becomes the foundation for later development: academic, social, moral, professional.

At an early age (0–6 years), children are in the stage of basic personality formation. According to the theory of Erik Erikson (1963), children aged 1–3 years are in the stage of *autonomy vs shame and doubt*. If children are given the opportunity to try on their own, they will develop confidence and responsibility; On the other hand, if it is always prohibited or excessively helped, the child will grow up with a sense of incompetence and high dependence. This means that independence is the foundation of healthy personality, social, and emotional development in early childhood. Early childhood education is an educational service that provides a basic framework for the development and formation of the basis of children's skills, knowledge, and behavior. In addition to the learning process, teachers provide stimuli that are able to develop all aspects of children's development as a whole, including cognitive, language, social-emotional, art, moral, religious values, and physical motor aspects. One of the important developmental goals to be stimulated is language development in early childhood in literacy introduction. (Simatupang et al., 2023). Literacy skills are very important to be built from an early age because they are a determining factor in an individual's literacy when he or she is a teenager and adult. (Yansyah et al., 2021). Pre-literacy is a term for the introduction of literacy at the PAUD level where this pre-literacy is related to the introduction of reading and writing. (Nida Ulfadilah & Setiasih, 2024). Studies show that the ability to read and write does not develop in a vacuum, but rather through consistent interaction with language and text in a supportive environment. In this context, the role of parents is very significant. Parents who are actively involved in supporting and developing children's literacy skills contribute to the achievement of better reading and writing skills. (Annisa Nuraisyah Annas et al., 2024)

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a content analysis method. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a research technique to draw inferences that can be replicated from text data into context. The main source of data is the book *"Aku Sudah Besar"* (Wijayanti & Gita, 2022) which consists of 22 pages with illustrations and is included in the category of reading level A (age 4–6 years). Data is collected through: Intensive reading of text and illustrations, Recording of character values that appear in each scene or sentence, Visual documentation of symbols and expressions that describe the character's behavior. The analysis was carried out through three stages: Data reduction, by selecting parts of the text that contain character values, categorization, grouping values according to character indicators according to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017), interpretation, relating findings to character education theories from experts (Lickona, 1991;

In addition, a theory triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of the analysis against the theories of Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Hurlock to strengthen the validity of the findings (Gunawan, 2012). To maintain the validity of the data, techniques are used: Theoretical triangulation: comparing the results of the analysis with several theories of the development of independence, peer debriefing: asking for the opinion of fellow researchers or supervisors to ensure the interpretation of meaning is not subjective, Audit trail: recording the analysis and data collection process systematically. With this method, researchers can find: the values of physical, emotional, social, and moral independence in story characters, how children's books play a role as a medium for learning the character of independence. The relationship between the content of the story and the theories of early childhood development from various experts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of a study of the book *"Aku Sudah Besar"* by Putri Wijayanti (2022), it was found that this book explicitly displays various aspects of the development of early childhood independence. Through a simple narrative and interesting illustrations, the main character in the book is depicted learning to do various activities independently, such as: wearing her own clothes, cleaning up toys after playing, eating without being fed, and helping parents with light activities at home. Each story describes the child's process of understanding the concept of "becoming great" not from age alone, but from the ability to do things on their own with responsibility and confidence. The content analysis shows that this book contains independence values that are in line with the indicators of early childhood development according to Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014, namely the ability to take care of oneself, control emotions, and make simple decisions. In addition, the language used is in accordance with the cognitive characteristics of preoperative children according to Jean Piaget, namely concrete, simple, and repetitive so that they are easy to understand.

Independence is the ability of children to do activities, make decisions, and be able to solve simple problems without always relying on others. Independence in early childhood does not mean that children have to do everything on their own without the help of adults, but show the ability and willingness to make their own efforts according to their developmental stages. An independent child is able to carry out daily activities, control emotions, make simple decisions, and take responsibility for his actions. According to Hurlock (1991), independence is the ability to regulate and control oneself in thinking and acting. Montessori (1967) affirms that the main purpose of children's education is to help them "do something on their own." Thus, independence is not only about being able to eat or clothe oneself, but also includes emotional, social, and moral aspects, such as daring to try, being able to delay desires, and being responsible for one's behavior. Characteristics of children who show independence, from Physical Aspects and Self-Care: Able to carry out daily activities without much assistance, such as eating, wearing clothes, and washing their own hands. Children show fine motor coordination and awareness of responsibility for personal hygiene, dare to try new activities, such as trying to tie shoelaces or pour themselves water. A sign of confidence and curiosity, not always waiting to be fed or helped by an adult. It indicates that children begin to

understand that they are able to do things independently. Emotional Aspect: Being able to control emotions when facing difficulties, for example not crying immediately when failing. Children show good emotional regulation, dare to temporarily separate from their parents while at school. Signs that children have a sense of security and confidence in their environment, are not easily angry or anxious when their desires are not immediately fulfilled. It reflects the ability to delay gratification and self-control. Seen from the social aspect: children want to interact and cooperate with friends without having to be accompanied by a teacher. Demonstrate mature social skills, able to follow simple rules in a play group. A sign of social responsibility, being able to take turns and wait patiently while playing. Demonstrate the ability to respect others and self-discipline. In the Cognitive and Decision Making aspect: children dare to choose their own activities, for example determining the toys they want to use or the colors to be used to draw. It shows the ability to think independently and be confident in decisions, being able to complete tasks or games without always asking for help. Describing perseverance and responsibility, children are willing to try to find solutions when facing simple problems. Demonstrate the ability to think critically early and a sense of responsibility for the outcome. From the aspect of Morals and Responsibility Values: showing awareness of the duties or rules given by the teacher/parent, for example tidying up toys after playing without being told, children understand the consequences of their actions, such as apologizing when making mistakes. A sign of growing moral awareness and empathy, , does not always rely on gifts or praise to do good. Showing the emergence of internal motivation, one of the characteristics of independence maturity.

The difference between physical and emotional independence in early childhood can be seen from several aspects, including in the focus of the development of physical independence, children show the ability to take care of themselves physically, in emotional independence shows the ability of children to manage and express emotions appropriately. The form of physical independence behavior can be seen in the behavior of children who show the ability of the child to eat, dress, bathe, tidy things, write or draw themselves, their emotional independence can be seen when the child does not cry easily, patiently waits for his turn, dares to try new things, does not get angry easily. In the aspects of skills developed through physical independence, it will be possible to see fine and gross motor, body coordination, neatness, physical responsibility, showing emotional regulation, self-calmness, self-confidence, control of impulses. An independent child will show less dependence on adults, especially in terms of physical assistance, such as being fed, and being put on clothes. Their emotional independence also undergoes changes, namely by reducing in terms of emotional support, such as always asking to be accompanied or calmed. The ultimate goal of the development of independence in early childhood is that children are able to take care of their own needs (physical independence) and children are able to face social and emotional situations stably and confidently (emotional independence). According to Putri Wijayanti (2022), children's independence does not appear suddenly, but is the result of a learning process that takes place continuously through interaction with the family and social environment. The book "*Aku Sudah Besar*" shows this process by describing small stages to independence, such as a child who is initially helped by his parents, then tries on his own, and is finally able to do it without help.

The Expert's perspective on the development of early childhood independence can be described as follows: According to Erik Erikson (1963) in the theory of *Psychosocial Development*, it is argued that early childhood (about 1–3 years) is at the stage of development of autonomy vs. shame and doubt. From this theory, there are several main points of thought, namely Children begin to learn to control their own body and environment, such as eating, walking, and dressing without assistance, if adults give them opportunities and trust, children will grow a sense of autonomy, which is a feeling of being able and confident to do things on their own. However, if children are often banned, overhelped, or scolded when they fail, they will feel ashamed and doubt their own abilities. The meaning of early childhood independence can be interpreted as that in this stage it will be the basis for the formation of emotional and physical independence. Children who are given space to try, will have confidence and responsibility for their actions.

According to Jean Piaget (1952), the child will go through the Preoperational stage and Concrete Activity. Children at the age of 2–7 years are in the preoperational stage of their cognitive development. At this stage, the child thinks egocentrically, but begins to be able to use symbols and language. Children learn through concrete activities, which are direct actions that involve the five senses and real experiences. Children do not yet understand abstract concepts, so self-learning is

more effective through hands-on practice, not just verbal instruction. The meaning of early childhood independence is that independence develops when children are directly involved in real activities, such as buttoning clothes, arranging toys, or choosing drawing tools. In this way, children build understanding and confidence through *learning by doing*.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) in *Scaffolding and Social Interaction*, can explain that children's development is greatly influenced by social interaction with adults or peers. He introduced the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. The concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the distance between a child's current abilities and his potential abilities that can be achieved with the help of others. Scaffolding is temporary support provided by an adult or friend who is more capable of helping a child achieve difficult tasks. When this support is gradually reduced, the child learns to do things on his own, this is the beginning of independence. This independence means that the child's independence grows from a gradual guidance process: the child is given adequate assistance, then given the opportunity to be independent. Social interaction becomes a bridge to personal ability.

Elizabeth Hurlock (1991) on Consistency, Safe Environment, and Experience, in her book *Developmental Psychology: A Lifespan Approach*, children's development of independence is influenced by experiences, habits, and family environment. Direct experience is a major factor that shapes a child's independence. Children who are often given the opportunity to do things on their own, such as eating, dressing, or cleaning up toys, will learn to master basic skills and feel capable. Through these experiences, children build confidence and a sense of responsibility. On the other hand, children who are rarely given independent experience will depend on adults and doubt their own abilities. In other words, the more meaningful and repetitive experiences, the stronger the sense of autonomy formed in the child. Hurlock emphasized that consistency in parenting and family rules is essential for the development of independent behavior. Children learn to understand what is expected of them through consistent rules and routines. When parents are stable, for example, always give children the opportunity to try on their own and provide support when they fail, children will feel safe to take the initiative. On the other hand, inconsistencies, such as sometimes being helped and sometimes scolded when trying on their own, make the child confused and reluctant to take the initiative. Consistency helps children build a sense of psychological security, which is the basis for independence. A safe, warm, and accepting environment is an important requirement for children to dare to be independent. This environment provides a sense of security that allows children to try new things without fear of being punished or ridiculed. When children feel accepted and supported, it is easier for them to develop the courage to learn from mistakes. An environment that is too protective or full of criticism actually causes fear and dependence. Therefore, the role of families and educators is to create an atmosphere that provides a sense of security, where every child's efforts are rewarded, not judged by perfect results. The three factors of experience, consistency, and environment, are interrelated and inseparable. Experience gives children the opportunity to learn to do things on their own, consistency gives direction and a sense of certainty in habituation, a safe environment gives children the courage to try and repeat without fear. When the three go in harmony, the child will develop into an independent person in thinking and acting, able to regulate himself, and believe in his own abilities. The development of children's independence is influenced by repeated real-life experiences, consistency of parenting patterns, and a safe and supportive family environment. Children will grow independent if given the opportunity to try, receive stable guidance, and feel emotionally secure. Therefore, families and educators need to provide a positive, consistent, and compassionate learning experience for children to grow up to be confident and responsible individuals. It can be concluded that children need a safe, loving, and consistent environment in order to dare to try new things without fear. Consistency in parent/teacher rules and responses makes children understand boundaries and responsibilities. Direct experience and repeated opportunities strengthen the child's sense of ability and confidence. Independence does not appear suddenly, but through repeated experiences, stable emotional support, and trust from the environment. Children learn that they are capable and valued for their own efforts.

Factors that affect independence can come from several things, including the role of the family. The family is the first and main environment in the formation of children's independence. There are two important things in the role of the family, namely parenting and freedom to try. The parenting style in each family is certainly different. Parental parenting greatly determines how children learn

independently. There are three parenting styles in the family, namely democratic parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting. Democratic parenting (parents give freedom with guidance) tends to produce children who are independent, confident, and responsible. Authoritarian parenting (too restrictive) makes children afraid to try new things and depend on others. Permissive parenting (too liberating without direction) makes it difficult for children to self-regulate and lack responsibility. Of the three existing parenting styles, this democratic parenting style is the most suitable for early childhood development. According to Hurlock (1978:33), *children's independence develops optimally if parents give children the opportunity to learn to do things on their own with reasonable supervision. In the application of the freedom to try, it will be very important for early childhood, because by giving children the opportunity to try, make decisions, and learn from the mistakes they make, this will be the basis for the growth of independence. For example: letting the child choose his own clothes, eat his own food, or clean up his toys, the child learns to take responsibility for his choices and the parents act as companions, not full controllers. Agreeing with Elizabet Hurlock, Erik Erikson (1963), has said that in the *autonomy vs shame and doubt* stage (ages 1–3 years) is an important time for children to develop confidence and independent abilities through the freedom to try.*

The school environment and teachers have a great influence on early childhood development. School is the second place after the family which plays a big role in fostering children's independence. In schools, a teacher plays a very important role as well, because teachers function as facilitators and motivators in children's learning activities. A teacher who gives your child the opportunity to take initiative (e.g. choosing a game or completing an assignment on their own) will help foster confidence and responsibility. Teachers who help too often actually make children dependent. According to Suryana (2016), PAUD teachers need to apply a *child-centered learning* approach, because this method provides space for children to explore and be independent. The school environment also plays an equally important role for early childhood. Schools that support independence have: Clear but flexible rules and routines, hands-on learning by doing, facilities that encourage children to take initiative, such as free play areas and child-accessible props.

The influence of media and children's literacy plays an important role for early childhood. Because media and literacy play an important role in the formation of children's independence in the digital era. The influence of electronic media, such as television, gadgets, the internet, and so on can be positive or negative depending on the supervision and content accessed. Media that can have a positive effect include educational films, children's songs, animation of moral values, which can stimulate curiosity and the ability to think independently in early childhood. Media will be able to have a negative influence if it is not appropriate, for example, media that presents violent, consumptive, passive content will be able to inhibit social interaction and make children less emotionally independent. According to Santrock (2011), the media has a big role in shaping children's behavior through *the modeling* process, children imitate the behavior they see from characters or shows.

Literacy education in early childhood has a very important role in forming the basis of effective reading, writing, critical thinking, and communication skills. The goal is not only to introduce letters and words, but also to foster children's love for the learning process from an early age. (Sakina et al., 2025). Literacy for early childhood has been applied to kindergarten institutions. Literacy activities such as reading (picture stories), listening to stories, and writing pictures will be able to help children develop the ability to think, imagine, and make simple decisions. Reading here can be interpreted in a situation when a child opens a picture storybook, then interprets the existing picture, it has been interpreted as reading in early childhood, even though the child is not good at assembling the letters written into a sentence. Children who are used to reading or being read stories have an easier time understanding cause and effect, and this supports independent decision-making. Literacy also fosters curiosity and the courage to ask questions. According to Musthafa (2014), early literacy activities not only improve language skills, but also help children develop self-control and independent thinking. When an early child opens a storybook, he will observe the pictures, and the letters presented, in the process of observing the child will think a lot about what he sees, which will then encourage great curiosity in the child. To meet the needs of their curiosity, children will ask a lot of questions, from the answers to those questions will motivate children to develop their creative thinking.

To encourage the growth and development of independence in Early Childhood, several strategies are needed, including

1. Provide the opportunity to do it yourself. One of the main strategies in fostering independence is to give children the opportunity to do activities independently, according to their age. For example: Children are invited to wear their own clothes, tidy up toys, or eat without being fed. Through this opportunity, children learn to be responsible, self-regulated, and feel personal success. According to Erikson (1963), at the stage of *autonomy vs shame and doubt* (1-3 years), children need to be trusted to do things on their own in order to grow confidence and autonomy. If children are given the opportunity and confidence to try, then they will develop a sense of autonomy, which is the belief that they are capable of doing things on their own and in control of their actions. On the other hand, if children are banned too often, scolded for failure, or not given space to try, then they can experience shame and doubt about their abilities. This can lead to overdependence and low self-confidence later in life. The role of adults, especially parents and educators, is to provide support, gentle guidance, and trust to children to try new things, without too much intervention or criticism. For example: when the child learns to wear his own shoes, let him try them even if the results are not perfect, when the child spills water, give him the opportunity to clean them while being guided calmly. Through experiences like these, children learn that mistakes are part of learning, and they still feel capable and valued.
2. Provide examples and examples. Early childhood learns through imitating adult behavior. Therefore, parents and teachers need to set an example because they are models of children's independence. For example: The teacher shows how to clean up the toys, the parents show how to prepare personal belongings calmly. Piaget (1952) emphasized that children learn through observation and imitation of their social environment.
3. Assign small responsibilities. Children can be trained independently through simple tasks given by teachers or parents, of course the task must be in accordance with the child's ability, for example: watering plants at home or in the classroom, putting dirty dishes in the washing machine, taking your own stationery and so on. Giving responsibility makes children feel trusted and important, which fosters a sense of responsibility for themselves and their environment. Montessori (1967) emphasized that practical life tasks form children's self-discipline and independence.
4. Encourage Children to Make Decisions. Independence develops when children are given space to choose and make decisions simply according to their developmental level/achievements. For example: choosing the clothes you want to wear, choosing a game or activity you like, determining the color of the image you want to use. This helps children learn to think critically, be confident, and understand the consequences of their choices. According to Santrock (2011), providing children with the opportunity to choose helps foster a sense of internal control (*internal locus of control*), which is the basis for independence.
5. Provide positive support and reinforcement. When a child tries to do something on their own, support and praise are essential. Sincere praise (e.g., "You're great enough to try!") motivates your child to keep trying. Avoid being too quick to reprimand or take over the child's duties, pay attention to the child first, give the child the freedom to do something based on his wishes, give the child confidence that what he is doing is not wrong. Hurlock (1978) emphasized the importance of positive reinforcement in the formation of independent behavior, as rewards encourage the repetition of good behavior.
6. Creating an environment that supports independence. A safe and organized environment will help children practice independently without fear. Example: children's toys and equipment are placed in an easily accessible place, daily activities are organized with a clear routine, such as meal, play, and bedtime. By creating a child-friendly environment, it will provide a sense of security and the opportunity to practice independently naturally. Bronfenbrenner (1979) in developmental ecological theory explains that the child's immediate environment (microsystem) such as family and school greatly influence the formation of independence.
7. Develop experiential learning (Learning by Doing). Early childhood learns best through direct experience, because the child will record in his memory all the things that are experienced. Teachers and parents can design activities such as: gardening, planting, simple cooking, or role-playing. This kind of activity fosters practical skills, a sense of responsibility, and confidence. John Dewey (1938) stated that effective learning for children must be experience-based because that is where children learn to think and act independently.

Reflections in the Context of Early Childhood Education

The book '*Aku Sudah Besar*' by Putri Wijayanti (2022) provides an in-depth overview of the importance of fostering children's independence from an early age through literacy media that is in

accordance with children's development. Through reflection on the content and message of the book, there is an understanding that independence is not an instant result, but a process that is built continuously through family support, real experiences, and a positive learning environment.

Reflection in the context of early childhood education is a deep thinking process carried out by educators, parents, and children to understand learning experiences, assess success, and improve the learning process in the future. According to Schön (1983), reflection is the act of thinking back on experiences that are or have occurred in order to improve professional practice. In Early Childhood Education, reflection helps teachers understand children's emotional, social, and cognitive needs so that learning becomes more meaningful and child-centered. The implementation of reflection in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum can be realized through several ways, including teachers' reflections on the learning process. Teachers conduct daily or weekly reflections to assess the effectiveness of learning activities, children's interactions, and responses to the methods used. For example, teachers review whether role-playing activities have encouraged children's cooperation and independence. This aims to improve the design of activities according to the needs of children's development. Children's reflection through direct experience will give a deep impression. With learning activities that make children have direct experience, teachers can reflect. Early childhood can be invited to do simple reflection, for example by answering questions such as "What do you like today?" or "What would you like to try tomorrow?". This way trains children to recognize feelings, assess their actions, and make small decisions independently. The integration of reflection in authentic assessment in the independent PAUD curriculum, reflection is an important part of *assessment as learning*, where educators assess children's development through observation and documentation, not just the final results. The role of storybooks and play activities in fostering independence is quite large. Children's storybooks as a medium of reflection can be done by the teacher asking questions about the content of the story. The value of picture storybooks such as "*I Can Use Clothes Myself*" or "*I'm Already Grown*" can be a means for children to get to know the concepts of independence, responsibility, and courage. Through stories, children are invited to reflect on the behavior of the characters and relate them to personal experiences. The teacher can ask: "What does a character do when he wants to try it himself? Can you do the same?".

Play activities can be used as a space for experimentation and reflection on actions. According to Jean Piaget (1951), play is a way for children to adapt and assimilate to their environment; Children learn through direct experience with objects and situations around them. Play is a child's natural vehicle for learning and reflecting. When role-playing, children practice decision-making, problem-solving, and assessing the results of their actions. In play, children repeat and review everyday experiences through symbols and roles. For example, a child who is reenacting an incident at home or school is reflecting on what he or she is experiencing. Reflection arises spontaneously, because the child understands what works or doesn't work in the game. For example, when a building from a block collapses, the child will think about why it happened and try a new strategy, this is a form of *reflection-in-action*. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator who encourages children to ask questions and think critically about their playing experience. Teachers can use the moment of play to encourage conscious reflection, by asking questions such as: "Why is your tower of blocks able to stand taller this time?", "How did you feel when you played with your friends earlier?". According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), play is the main vehicle for children to internalize social experiences and develop high-level mental functions through social interaction and reflection. Teachers act as facilitators and reflective observers, not main directors. It creates a play environment that is rich, safe, and open to exploration. Play activities can be used as an authentic assessment tool, because through play observation, teachers can see how children think, react, and express emotions. Play encourages contextual and meaningful learning, because children learn through real experiences, not just instructions. Play is a laboratory of life for early childhood, where they experiment with the physical and social world, while reflecting on their own actions. Through play, children not only learn about the environment, but also about themselves, thinking skills, and how to interact with others. Therefore, educators need to put play at the core of a reflective, creative, and sustainable learning process.

Challenges in the application of reflection include limited time for teachers to conduct deep reflection due to administrative demands, lack of understanding of educators about the concept of reflection which is not just an evaluation of learning outcomes, different children's readiness, so that

an approach that is in accordance with the stage of development is needed, lack of collaboration with parents, even though reflection also needs to be done with the family. A wise approach must be implemented for the success of reflection. Reflection is carried out in an integrated and fun way, for example through light discussions, expressive images, or children's mini journals. In early childhood education, reflection is not carried out separately as is the case at higher education levels. Reflection is carried out in an integrated manner in daily learning activities. This means that the reflection process is carried out naturally in the midst of playing and learning activities. Reflection in early childhood does not require the child to answer formally, but through direct experience, conversation, or creative expression. This reflection can be done before, during, and after the activity, so that children understand the relationship between what they do and the results they get. Teachers play an important role in facilitating reflection by observing, asking open-ended questions, and providing space for children to express themselves according to their abilities. Professional assistance for teachers is carried out through reflective teaching training, school and home collaboration is very necessary, so that reflection on children's behavior and independence is consistent in the two environments. The application of the principle of "experiential learning" can be applied, where reflection is an important step after the child's concrete experience. The concept of "experiential learning" is very relevant in early childhood education because it places direct experience and reflection at the core of the child's learning process. In this approach, children do not just receive information, but build knowledge through active involvement, exploration, and interpretation of real experiences. According to David Kolb (1984), *experiential learning* is a process in which knowledge is created through experiential transformation. That is, learning happens when a person experiences something, reflects on the experience, analyzes it, and applies it to a new situation. Reflection in early childhood learning must be carried out in an integrated, natural, and fun way, so that it becomes part of the play and learning process itself. Through light discussions, expressive images, and simple journals, children learn to recognize experiences, express their thoughts and feelings, and develop self-understanding. Thus, reflection is not just a closing activity, but an important tool to foster awareness of learning and character formation of children from an early age.

From the overall results of reflection, it can be concluded that the book "*Aku Sudah Besar*" by Putri Wijayanti (2022) contains a universal moral message: to be great means to be brave, confident, and responsible for yourself. This reflection invites all parties involved in early childhood education to foster independence through compassion, patience, and trust. This book not only inspires children, but also serves as a mirror for adults to educate by heart, appreciate the process, and humanize childhood as the foundation of future character formation.

CONCLUSION

The main strength of this book "*Aku Sudah Besar*" is its simple presentation of independence and responsibility in the context of brotherhood, which is packed with interesting illustrations and easy-to-understand language. Suitable for the early stages of child development.

Early childhood independence is the result of a continuous developmental process, not a sudden emergent ability. This process occurs through everyday experiences, social interactions, and opportunities for children to try and learn from mistakes. Children learn to be independent when they are given space to explore, make simple decisions, and understand the consequences of their actions. Thus, independence is not only a practical skill, but also the result of character building, confidence, and a sense of responsibility that grows over time.

Conducive environmental support, both family, school, and community play an important role in fostering children's independence. Democratic parenting, teachers who are reflective and sensitive to children's needs, and a safe and challenging learning environment will strengthen the process. In addition, the application of an approach that is appropriate to the child's developmental stage (developmentally appropriate practice) is the key so that the stimulation provided is not too heavy or too easy, but rather challenging in a positive and fun way.

With the right environmental support and a child-centered approach, independence will grow naturally as a result of a continuous, fun, and meaningful learning experience. Children are not only able to do things on their own, but also understand *why* and *how* they do it, which is the essence of true independence in early childhood education.

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