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Teachers' Perspectives on the Independence of Children Aged 5–6 Years Under Grandparental Care

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of children being raised by their grandparents due to parental migration, economic hardship, or family separation has raised concerns regarding its impact on children's autonomy and psychosocial development. This study examines teachers' perspectives on the independence of children aged 5–6 years under grandparental care. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, the research assessed 119 children in Cibinong, Bogor, using an adapted version of Iijima's (1985) independence diagnostic test. Four indicators of independence were measured: spontaneity, self-control, autonomy, and self-assertion. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that spontaneity ($M = 57.76$, $SD = 7.78$) and autonomy ($M = 31.30$, $SD = 4.51$) were categorized as high, self-control ($M = 18.73$, $SD = 3.17$) as moderate, and self-assertion ($M = 15.53$, $SD = 2.68$) as low. These findings suggest that while children under grandparental care exhibit independence in daily activities, they struggle with self-assertion, which is crucial for effective social interactions and decision-making. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions, such as role-playing exercises and structured decision-making tasks, to strengthen self-assertion skills. Additionally, parenting workshops for grandparents could help bridge gaps in independence development. Limitations include reliance on teacher-reported data; thus, future research should incorporate observational methods and longitudinal studies to explore the long-term impact of grandparental caregiving on children's independence. Understanding the implications of grandparental care is essential for designing early childhood education strategies and caregiving policies that support holistic child development.

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Introduction

The increasing number of children raised by their grandparents has become a significant social phenomenon, influenced by factors such as parental employment, migration, divorce, and economic hardship (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2020; Pagarwati & Rohman, 2020; Zakaria, 2019). In Indonesia, 14.1% of children live with their grandparents, reflecting a shift in caregiving responsibilities (Arlinta, 2022). Similar trends are observed globally, as seen in China, where intergenerational cohabitation is prevalent (Sun & Jiang, 2017), and Chile, where 52.4% of grandparents live with their grandchildren (Herrera et al., 2022). While grandparental care ensures children's safety and emotional well-being, it also raises concerns about its impact on children's autonomy and developmental outcomes (Chen & Chan, 2016; Cox & Hayslip, 2024). Specifically, early childhood independence, a crucial aspect of psychosocial growth, may be influenced by varying grandparental parenting styles (Rahmaningrum & Fauziah, 2020; Sutiana et al., 2018). However, in practice, grandparental caregiving presents both benefits and challenges that can impact children's development.

Previous studies highlight both the benefits and challenges of grandparent caregiving. Grandparents often provide emotional security, familial stability, and cultural continuity, which are vital for children's development (Moore & Rosenthal, 2017). However, caregiving responsibilities can also impose significant physical, emotional, and financial burdens on grandparents, ultimately affecting the quality of care (Dunham & Flores-Yeffal, 2021; Matovu &

Wallhagen, 2020). Grandparent caregivers with poor health conditions may struggle to meet the developmental needs of children, leading to adverse health and educational outcomes (C. Lu et al., 2024; Wang & Bansak, 2024). In certain circumstances, socioeconomic constraints may lead to a more permissive parenting style, which risks hindering children's independence (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023).

The role of social support in grandparent caregiving has been extensively studied, revealing its influence on both caregiver well-being and child outcomes. Adequate social support can enhance the emotional resilience of grandparents and reduce their stress levels, thereby creating a more stable caregiving environment (Guo et al., 2023; Koh et al., 2024). Conversely, a lack of support increases caregiving stress and the risk of neglectful behaviors, which can impact children's social and emotional development (Beatty et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2022). Additionally, generational differences in parenting beliefs contribute to variations in caregiving approaches, with some grandparents prioritizing affection over discipline (Crapo et al., 2021; Nisskaya & Tsyganova, 2024). As a result, inconsistencies in household rules may arise, affecting children's self-regulation skills (Mavoja et al., 2023; Stephan, 2023).

Apart from generational influences on parenting styles, children's independence is also shaped by their educational and social environments (Nakatsubo et al., 2021; Steed & Shapland, 2020). The "Mimamoru" approach in Japan, which emphasizes non-interventionist supervision, has been shown to enhance child autonomy (Nakatsubo et al., 2021). On the other hand, structured school environments and teacher interventions play a crucial role in reinforcing children's self-regulation and decision-making skills (Fadlillah et al., 2020; Rosmaya et al., 2019). Research also suggests that social interactions, both mobile and face-to-face, contribute differently to children's development. Independent mobility, for instance, enhances peer engagement and social competence (Waygood et al., 2020). However, children raised by grandparents often experience limited mobility and social interactions, which may restrict opportunities to practice independence (Sary & Iriyani, 2022; Simatupang et al., 2021).

Teacher perspectives provide valuable insights into children's independence, as teachers observe children in structured social settings with clear behavioral expectations (Kumayang Sari et al., 2016). In this context, teachers play a key role in detecting developmental delays and behavioral challenges that may not be visible at home (Obukhova et al., 2024; Swit & Breen, 2023). Most existing studies focus on the influence of parental support on children's school readiness and independence (Khotimah & Zulkarnaen, 2023; Rizkyani et al., 2020), but few specifically examine the effects of grandparental caregiving on child autonomy (Putri & Izzati, 2020). Furthermore, perceptions of independence vary across cultures, influencing how caregivers and educators assess and encourage children's self-sufficiency (Bruheim Jensen, 2020; Wade et al., 2022). Therefore, further exploration is needed to understand how grandparental caregiving impacts early childhood independence.

Although much research has been conducted on children's independence, studies specifically addressing the role of grandparents in this aspect remain limited (Souralová et al., 2025). Existing research tends to focus more on parental influence, leaving gaps in understanding the unique contributions and limitations of grandparental caregiving in fostering autonomy (Sari & Rasyidah, 2020; Xia et al., 2021). Moreover, while previous studies acknowledge the emotional and financial stress experienced by grandparent caregivers, fewer studies examine how these challenges translate into specific caregiving practices and their impact on child development (Dudley et al., 2023; Keim et al., 2023). Most research has also been conducted in Western contexts, necessitating further investigation into how cultural factors shape autonomy development in children raised by grandparents in Indonesia (S. Lu, 2023; Pandya, 2020).

Based on the identified research gap, this study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on the independence of children aged 5–6 years who are raised by their grandparents. By examining independence through key indicators such as spontaneity, self-control, autonomy, and self-assertion (Iijima, 1985), this research will provide empirical insights into the

developmental differences between children under grandparental care and those raised by parents. This understanding is expected to provide recommendations for educational practices and caregiving strategies that support child independence within multigenerational households.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design, which is suitable for systematically analyzing and describing the characteristics of a specific population or phenomenon. The research aimed to assess the level of independence in children aged 5-6 years under the care of grandparents, as perceived by teachers at RA Cibinong, Bogor. The population consisted of 119 children who met specific inclusion criteria, as outlined in Table 1: Sampling Determination Criteria. The purposive sampling technique was used, ensuring participants were selected based on predefined conditions relevant to the study objectives (Sugiyono, 2017). Inclusion criteria required that children be under grandparental care for at least 15–40 hours per week or full-time, with grandparents providing emotional, financial, and daily caregiving support. Participants were excluded if they were not within the specified age range, received full parental care without grandparental involvement, or were unwilling to participate in the study. The final sample distribution across 12 educational institutions is detailed in Table 2: Number of Samples Obtained, with participant numbers per school ranging from 6 to 14.

Table 1. Sampling Determination Criteria

No	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion criteria
1	Children aged 5-6 years and cared for by grandparents 15-40 hours/week or full day.	Students are not aged 5-6 years.
2	Grandparents are involved due to factors such as parents getting divorced, being busy working or parents dying.	Full parental care without the involvement of grandparents
3	Grandparents who provide emotional, financial, and other support such as feeding, bathing, dressing, and other responsibilities	Grandparents do not provide emotional, financial, and other support.
4	Domiciled in Cibinong sub-district	Domiciled outside Cibinong sub-district
5	Schools and respondents are willing and pleased to fill out the research questionnaire.	Schools and respondents were unwilling and did not want to fill out the research questionnaire.

The data collection process involved administering a structured questionnaire to grandparents and conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers to evaluate children's independence at home and school. The research utilized an adapted version of an independence diagnostic test, chosen due to its established validity and reliability (Iijima, 1985). The adaptation process followed a six-step framework, including forward translation, content review, back translation, cultural adaptation, pretesting, and final revisions (Lenz et al., 2017). The final instrument consisted of 40 statements covering four indicators: (1) spontaneity, such as washing hands before meals without reminders; (2) self-control, including the ability to refrain from disturbing others; (3) autonomy, such as expressing opinions clearly; and (4) self-assertion, such as active participation in activities outside of school. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very inappropriate) to 5 (very appropriate). To ensure validity and reliability, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. Pearson's correlation was employed to test validity, with an item considered valid if $r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$ and a significance value of < 0.05 . Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha, where values below 0.6 were considered unsatisfactory, those between 0.6–0.79 were acceptable, and values above 0.8 indicated a high level of consistency (Sugiyono, 2017).

Table 2. Number of Samples Obtained

No	School name	Number of children
1	RA Al – Istiqomah	12
2	RA Nurul Abror	9
3	RA Al – Falah	10
4	RA Al Mukarromah	7
5	RA Bahrul 'Ilmi	6
6	RA Bunayya	9
7	RA Bina Insan	11
8	RA Sulamun Najjah	9
9	RA Al - Asiyah	9
10	RA Mutiara Islam	10
11	RA An Nawawi	14
12	RA Al Barokah	13
Total		119

Result

Based on the steps of concept adaptation (Lenz et al., 2017) There are 6 stages. The first stage to the third stage, the researcher conducted translation and back translation at PLBPP UNNES, then in the fourth stage, the researcher conducted a discussion with expert validators in the fields of PAUD and psychology, then in the fifth stage, the researcher conducted pretesting and revision with the child's school teacher where if the results of the pretesting and revision contained statements that were not appropriate, they would be rechecked and corrected, then the last stage was distributing the questionnaire.

In the instrument test with the expert validator, several statements were not appropriate. The validator suggested that statements that were not appropriate should be deleted to save time and money. Then after the validator finished, pretesting and revision with the teacher. The results of the pretesting and revision with the teacher contained several questions that were not appropriate, such as the statement "trying to do any work or task that is within their competence" was changed to "children prefer to do something they like by themselves rather than asking for help from others". After all the statements were appropriate, they were analyzed.

Before further analysis, data from the questionnaire results were used to test the validity and reliability of the instrument, as many as 30 samples were first distributed to teachers then the results of the samples were tested through SPSS version 22, the test value will be proven by comparing the calculated r with the r table, the statement is said to be valid if the calculated $r > r$ table, the set r table is 0.1515 and the significance value < 0.05 .

The results of the instrument validity test obtained stated that all statement items in the calculated $r > r$ table and the significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$, then the validity test was declared valid. Thus, it means that all teacher samples who filled out the questionnaire did not feel confused by the questions asked and the answers given were also appropriate; so that the questionnaire instrument could be continued to be filled in by the entire population. Likewise, in the instrument reliability test, the value based on Cronbach's alpha was obtained as 0.801, meaning that 0.801 is greater than 0.60. then it can be said that the reliability results are high. After conducting validity and reliability tests of the instrument, the data from the questionnaire filled out by the child's school teacher were further analyzed by testing descriptive statistical analysis using the following quantitative methods:

Table 3. Results of descriptive statistical analysis

Independence Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation
Spontaneity	57.76	7.78
Self-Control	18.73	3.17
Autonomy	31.30	4.51
Self-Assertion	15.53	2.68

Based on Table 1, the categorization is determined based on: 1. Very high category is at a number more than 60, 2. The high category at number 31 - 60, 3. The Medium category is at number 18 - 30, 4. The low category is at numbers 8 - 17, 5. The very low category is at a number less than 8. The results of descriptive statistical analysis show that the independence indicator of children aged 5-6 years, especially in Spontaneity is in the high category ($M = 57.76$, $SD = 7.78$). Self-control is in the medium category ($M = 18.73$, $SD = 3.17$). Autonomy is in the high category ($M = 31.30$, $SD = 4.51$). Self-assertion is in the low category ($M = 15.53$, $SD = 2.68$). It can be concluded that in the independence variable of children aged 5-6 years, the spontaneity indicator is in the highest category, self-control is in the moderate category, autonomy is in the good category and the self-assertion indicator is in the low category..

Discussion

The increasing prevalence of grandparental caregiving has significant implications for children's psychosocial development, particularly in fostering independence (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2020; Rahmawati & Diana, 2016; Zakaria, 2019). This study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the independence of children aged 5–6 years under grandparental care, focusing on four key indicators: spontaneity, self-control, autonomy, and self-assertion (Iijima, 1985). Prior research has highlighted both the advantages and challenges of grandparental caregiving, noting that while grandparents provide stability and emotional support, their permissive parenting style may hinder the development of independence (Pagarwati & Rohman, 2020; Sary & Iriyani, 2022). Moreover, the lack of familiarity with modern educational practices among grandparents can influence children's self-regulation abilities, affecting their school readiness (Khotimah & Zulkarnaen, 2023; Simatupang et al., 2021). Given the crucial role of teachers in shaping children's independence in a structured environment, their insights offer valuable perspectives on how grandparental caregiving influences children's autonomy and decision-making skills.

Building on this foundation, the study's findings revealed that spontaneity was the highest-rated indicator of independence among children under grandparental care ($M = 57.76$, $SD = 7.78$). Spontaneity, defined as a child's ability to act without external prompts, was observed in behaviors such as voluntarily tidying up after activities, expressing curiosity, and engaging in problem-solving without adult intervention (Cheon et al., 2019; Fatkhurahman, 2016). These findings align with prior research emphasizing that children raised by grandparents often develop a heightened sense of self-sufficiency in daily tasks, as they are frequently left to navigate their environment with less direct supervision (Altschuler et al., 2018). However, while spontaneity is a positive indicator of independence, it must be balanced with structured guidance to ensure children develop appropriate decision-making skills (Waygood et al., 2020). This suggests that although grandparental care may allow children greater freedom to explore their surroundings, structured yet flexible environments remain crucial in fostering holistic independence (Nakatsubo et al., 2021).

While spontaneity was observed at high levels, self-control was found to be in the medium category ($M = 18.73$, $SD = 3.17$), indicating some inconsistencies in children's ability to regulate emotions and behavior. Teachers noted that although children could refrain from disruptive behaviors and were aware of consequences, they still struggled with emotional regulation in social settings, particularly when influenced by peers (Gagne, 2017; Mukarromah, 2022). This finding suggests that while grandparental care provides a stable and nurturing environment, it may lack the structured discipline necessary for fostering consistent self-regulation skills (Fadlillah et al., 2020). Since self-control in early childhood is shaped by both direct parental guidance and opportunities for social learning, deficiencies in either can lead to challenges in emotional and behavioral regulation (Steed & Shapland, 2020). Therefore, interventions that support emotional regulation in children raised by grandparents are essential, as self-control is a foundational skill for future academic and social success (Pandya, 2020).

Despite the moderate level of self-control, autonomy was rated in the high category ($M = 31.30$, $SD = 4.51$), suggesting that children in grandparental care demonstrated strong decision-making abilities, such as choosing their activities and expressing personal preferences (Rosmaya et al., 2019). However, this autonomy did not necessarily translate into self-assertion, which scored the lowest among the indicators ($M = 15.53$, $SD = 2.68$). While children acted independently, they struggled to express their thoughts and advocate for their needs confidently (Al-masri, 2020). This discrepancy may stem from the tendency of grandparents to either overprotect or overly indulge children, limiting opportunities for assertiveness (Sary & Iriyani, 2022). Research has shown that children raised in permissive caregiving environments often develop autonomy in routine tasks but lack the confidence to voice their opinions or take initiative in social settings (Potorska, 2020). The low self-assertion scores highlight a critical area for intervention, as effective communication and confidence are essential for children's future social and academic success.

These findings align with existing literature on the mixed effects of grandparental caregiving on children's independence. While children under grandparental care develop autonomy in daily routines, they may struggle with assertiveness due to overly protective or indulgent caregiving styles (Fauziah et al., 2018). Studies in China and Chile have reported similar outcomes, where grandparental involvement fosters emotional security but can also result in over-dependence (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022; Sun & Jiang, 2017). Furthermore, research suggests that grandparents often prioritize emotional support over discipline, potentially hindering the development of self-regulation and assertiveness (Latifah et al., 2016; Matovu & Wallhagen, 2020). These findings underscore the need for balanced caregiving approaches that encourage both emotional bonding and structured discipline to support holistic independence development in children (Zakaria, 2019).

The variation in independence indicators among children in grandparental care can be attributed to differences in caregiving styles and environmental factors. Spontaneity and autonomy may be higher due to the freedom and trust given by grandparents, whereas lower self-assertion and self-control may result from a lack of structured discipline (Khotimah & Zulkarnaen, 2023; Miyamoyo, 2019). Additionally, the age and physical limitations of grandparents may contribute to inconsistent discipline, as older caregivers may struggle to enforce rules effectively (Keim et al., 2023; Martínez-Martínez et al., 2021). This aligns with research indicating that permissive caregiving often results in children who are independent in daily tasks but hesitant in social interactions (Dudley et al., 2023; Wang & Bansak, 2024). Addressing these gaps through targeted interventions, such as structured early childhood programs and grandparent education initiatives, could enhance children's overall independence (Guo et al., 2023; Swit & Breen, 2023).

The results of this study have important implications for early childhood education and caregiving policies. Understanding how grandparental caregiving influences children's independence can inform teacher training programs and curriculum development to better support children raised in multigenerational households (Obukhova et al., 2024; Steed & Shapland, 2020). Schools can implement strategies to foster self-assertion and self-control, such as role-playing exercises, peer interactions, and structured decision-making activities (Nisskaya & Tsyganova, 2024). Additionally, community-based initiatives, such as parenting workshops for grandparents, can provide guidance on fostering balanced independence development (Cox & Hayslip, 2024; Koh et al., 2024). Given the complexities of intergenerational caregiving, future research should explore how different grandparental caregiving styles impact children's independence over time, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of caregiving dynamics (Beatty et al., 2023; You & Nesteruk, 2022).

Conclusion

This study examined teachers' perspectives on the independence of children aged 5–6 under grandparental care. Using a survey design and quantitative analysis, it assessed four indicators: spontaneity, self-control, autonomy, and self-assertion. Findings show spontaneity and autonomy were high, self-control moderate, and self-assertion low, suggesting children under grandparental care act independently but struggle with assertiveness. These insights inform early childhood education and caregiving policies. Schools can enhance self-assertion through role-playing and decision-making tasks, while community workshops can support grandparents. Limitations include reliance on teacher perspectives; future research should use behavioral observations and explore caregiving styles. Further studies should investigate interventions for self-assertion and compare caregiving across cultures to refine educational and caregiving strategies for holistic child development.

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