

An Overview Of Self-Reliance and Self-Development In Children With Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract. Children with intellectual disabilities have limitations in performing self-care activities independently, such as bathing, dressing, and using the toilet. Although training has been implemented at SLB Negeri Pati, most children still show a high level of dependence on others. To describe the level of self-care independence among children with intellectual disabilities at SDLB Negeri Pati. This study used a descriptive quantitative method with a cross-sectional design. A total of 61 respondents were selected from 72 students using simple random sampling. The instrument consisted of a 15-item questionnaire on a 4-point Likert scale (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.924). Data were analyzed using univariate analysis. The findings showed that 34.4% of the children were independent, 52.5% were less independent, and 13.1% were not independent. Higher independence was observed in children with mild intellectual disabilities, aged ≥ 10 years, in upper grades, and with parents aged ≥ 40 years. Most children with intellectual disabilities at SDLB Negeri Pati were still less independent and require continuous self-care training both at school and at home.

Keywords: Independence, Self-Care, Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Children are individuals who are in the process of growth and development—physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. In this process, one important aspect that needs to be developed from an early age is self-care—that is, a child's ability to perform daily activities independently, such as bathing, brushing teeth, getting dressed, eating, using the toilet, maintaining hygiene, and practicing personal and social safety skills. Self-care is particularly important for children with special needs, who tend to have limited independence and rely heavily on others (Ginting, 2023).

A child is a young person. In the field of education, children are divided into two main categories: typical children and children with special needs. Children with special needs are those who experience developmental challenges in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, or sensory aspects, and therefore require educational services and guidance that differ from those provided to typical children. One category of children with special needs that requires intensive attention is children with intellectual disabilities, who are characterized by low IQs and limitations in social skills, communication, and independence. This condition often causes children with intellectual disabilities to struggle with learning activities and daily routines, leading to a high degree of dependence on others. Children with intellectual disabilities have difficulty with basic activities such as bathing, eating, dressing, and using the toilet. Without proper care, this dependence can hinder their social and emotional development as well as their ability to adapt (Rahmawati, 2024).

A number of previous studies have shown that children with intellectual disabilities do indeed face significant challenges in developing independence. A study by Rika Widya et al. (2024) revealed that children with intellectual disabilities experience difficulties in performing daily activities independently; however, that study focused only on basic skills such as eating and bathing, without evaluating the equally important social and emotional aspects. Research by Sriwardani (2024) indicates that children with mild intellectual disabilities remain highly dependent on teachers and parents to meet their basic needs, while Lailatul Husna (2024) examined only specific skills such as brushing teeth. This suggests

that there is still a lack of research examining self-directed independence comprehensively, thus necessitating more comprehensive studies.

Quantitatively speaking, the data on children with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia is quite significant. According to data from Hasibuan (2022), the number of children with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia reached 5.2 million in 2022. In the United States, the percentage of children with intellectual

disabilities ranges from 1.65% to 2.20% among those aged 3–17 (2021), while in Sweden, that figure rose from 0.64% in 2011 to 1.00% in 2021. In Indonesia, the provinces with the highest number of children with intellectual disabilities are West Java (48 million people), East Java (40 million people), and North Sumatra (14 million people). Meanwhile, in Central Java, the districts with the largest number of children with intellectual disabilities are Semarang Regency (9,270 children), Pekalongan (7,386 children), Brebes (7,462 children), and Pati (946 children).

In Pati Regency itself, there are four special education schools (SLB): SLB Bina Citra with 76 students, SLB Negeri Pati with 349 students, SLB Futuhiyah with 27 students, and SLB Sunan Prawoto with 54 students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2025). SLB Negeri Pati is the school with the largest number of students, 72 of whom have intellectual disabilities—71 with mild intellectual disabilities and 1 with moderate intellectual disabilities. This number highlights the high demand for special education services at the school and underscores the need for effective support programs to enhance the students' independence.

Interviews with 10 parents at the Pati State Special Education School revealed that the children's self-care skills remain low. Although a self-care program has been implemented at the school, observations show that most children with intellectual disabilities still rely on others' assistance to perform basic activities. This indicates that although training is underway, the expected outcomes have not yet been fully achieved. The contributing factors can vary, ranging from inappropriate teaching methods and minimal parental involvement to limited supporting facilities and infrastructure. Given these conditions, this study is important to assess the extent of self-care independence among children with intellectual disabilities.

METHODS

This study is a quantitative descriptive study using a cross-sectional approach. The population consisted of 72 children with intellectual disabilities at the Pati State Special Education Elementary School (SDLB Negeri Pati), with a sample of 61 children selected using simple random sampling. The instrument consisted of a 15-item questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, with high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha 0.924). Data analysis was performed using univariate methods and presented as frequency distributions and percentages. The study was conducted in May 2025 with permission from the school,

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

1. Age of Parent and Children

Table 1. Ages of Parents and Children

	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Modus
Parents' age	42.52	42.00	26	60	50
Child's age	11	11	7	12	12

2. Child's Gender, Parents' Occupation, Independence of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Table 2.
Child's Gender, Parents' Occupation, Independence of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

	f	%
Child's Gender		

Male	37	60.7
Female	24	39.3
Total	61	100.0
Parents' Occupations		
Laborer	2	3.3
Farmer	14	23.0
Civil Servant	1	1.6
Unemployed	8	13.1
Self-Employed	32	52.5
Entrepreneur	4	6.6
Total	61	100.0
Levels of independence among children with intellectual disabilities		
Independent	21	34.4
Less Independent	32	52.5
Not Independent	8	13.1
Total	61	100.0

DISCUSSION

Based on a study conducted with 61 respondents, the results showed that, in terms of the level of independence among children with intellectual disabilities, 21 respondents (34.4%) fell into the “independent” category, 32 respondents (52.5%) into the “partially independent” category, and 8 respondents (13.1%) into the “not independent” category. The independent category included 21 children (34.4%) of the total respondents. This indicates that some children with intellectual disabilities at the Pati State Special Education Elementary School have acquired basic self-care skills, although these are not yet fully developed. Most students in this category are distributed across 6th grade (7 students), 5th grade (6 students), 4th and 3rd grades (3 students each), and 2nd grade (2 students). This distribution shows that independence is more commonly found in higher grade levels. This suggests that as students advance to higher grades, they gain more experience and training at school. A longer learning process allows students to become more accustomed to and skilled at carrying out daily activities independently. This explains why most students in the independent category are from 5th and 6th grades (Satriani, 2023).

When viewed in terms of the degree of intellectual disability, all students in the independent category are classified as having mild intellectual disabilities. This is consistent with the theory (Sari, 2024), which states that children with mild intellectual disabilities still have the capacity to be educated, including in daily living skills and personal hygiene. Independence in this group can be achieved through intensive training and consistent practice from both the school and the family. This finding aligns with the results of a study (Kusnawan, 2022), which indicates that children with mild intellectual disabilities have greater potential to achieve independence compared to those with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. This achievement reflects the success of the approach taken by teachers and parents in gradually fostering the children’s independence. The majority of these independent children 14 children (66.67%) are over 10 years old, 4 children (19.05%) are exactly 10 years old, and 3 children (14.29%) are under 10 years old. This indicates that the majority of independent children fall within an age group that is more cognitively and socially mature, making them better prepared to carry out daily activities independently.

Developmental theory (Putri, 2021) asserts that at ages 10–12, children begin to think logically and follow rules, making them better prepared to perform activities independently. In the data from this study, children aged 10–12 did indeed dominate the “independent” category, indicating they have the ability to perform daily activities

In terms of parental age, 13 parents (61.9%) of children in the independent category were over 40 years old. Parents of a more mature age tend to guide their children with greater patience, stability, and consistency. This has a positive influence on the development of children's independence. This suggests that parents aged around 40–50 years tend to have more independent children. Most likely, this is due to the parents' maturity in fostering their children's independence through structured parental guidance. For example, Respondent No. 1 (child aged 10, parent aged 50) and Respondent No. 29 (child aged 11, parent aged 42) demonstrated high levels of independence. This supports the finding (Wulandari, 2020) that middle-aged parents (40–50 years old) tend to be more patient, organized, and consistent in guiding their children, thereby playing a major role in fostering independence.

A total of 14 children (66.67%) in the independent category were boys. This is thought to be due to faster gross motor development, which supports skills such as putting on shoes (P4), putting away belongings (P5), and bathing (P1). This is consistent with (Kustianing, 2021), who states that boys exhibit more optimal gross motor development compared to girls, which is positively correlated with the ability to perform independent activities such as bathing and dressing. Boys are generally more physically active, which accelerates the development of basic motor skills that are essential for daily self-care tasks. This phenomenon appears to contradict common assumptions and some research findings suggesting that girls tend to become independent sooner, particularly in terms of communication and self-control. In the context of this study, these differences are most likely influenced by variations in age, family background, and a social environment that is more supportive of boys. According to a study (Ramadhani, 2020), it is also emphasized that a child's level of independence is not solely determined by gender but is more influenced by learning opportunities, experiences, and the early assignment of responsibilities by parents.

In general, all children in the less-independent category were able to perform basic activities such as bathing on their own (P1), eating (P2), getting dressed (P3), putting on shoes (P4), putting away personal items (P5), and washing their hands (P6). Most are also able to use the restroom on their own (P7) and clean themselves after using the restroom (P8). This is supported by findings (Septiyana, 2023), which state that family support has a significant impact on the ability of children with intellectual disabilities to perform self-care, especially when accompanied by consistent practice and regular guidance from parents.

In social and cognitive aspects, most children also demonstrated playing at neighbors' homes (P9), interacting with friends (P10), doing homework (P11), actively asking questions (P13), and distinguishing between behaviors (P15). This progress indicates increased independence not only in physical aspects but also in social-emotional development. According to a study (Melia, 2023), family support contributes significantly to enhancing the daily activities of children with intellectual disabilities, particularly in terms of social interaction.

Even so, some children in the independent category are still not fully independent in certain areas; for example, some are still picked up by their parents after school (P12), and not all children actively engage in asking questions (P13). This indicates that independence outside the home particularly in the school environment is not yet optimal. Based on research (Rathmawati, 2024), the study emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role in guiding children with intellectual disabilities to learn social and communication skills so they can be more independent in the school environment. Limitations are also evident in the aspect of verbal communication (P14), where most children still require assistance to express their opinions. According to Rirqia (2023), her research indicates that open and empathetic interactions between teachers and students with intellectual disabilities are crucial for fostering independence, particularly in the area of communication.

The "less independent" category included 32 children (52.5%); of this number, 13 children (40.63%) were over 10 years old, 8 children (25.00%) were exactly 10 years old, and 11 children (34.38%) were under 10 years old. Although the age group over 10 years old was the largest, these findings indicate that chronological maturity does not always align with independence, meaning that children with

intellectual disabilities still require guidance in their daily activities. This is supported by Kusnawan (2022), who states that structured training is crucial because age alone does not guarantee full independence for children with intellectual disabilities.

Meanwhile, children aged 7–9 years in this category are in an early stage of development that requires intensive guidance. They are not yet consistent in completing tasks independently, but still have the potential to develop if they receive the right stimulation and support from an early age. This finding is consistent with the results of a study (Tuasikal, 2024) showing that educational and sustainable strategies can facilitate the improvement of independent living skills in children with intellectual disabilities, even though they are in the transitional period of ages 7–9, which requires intensive stimulation and guidance.

The age distribution of parents with 16 (50.0%) in each group under 40 and over 40 shows a relatively balanced distribution between younger and older age groups. This suggests that parental age is not a factor in children's development of independence. Rather, inconsistent parenting and low parental involvement in children's activities are suspected to be the causes of the low level of independence observed. This finding aligns with research conducted by Wardani (2023), which confirms that parental involvement in child-rearing has a positive influence on children's level of independence. Thus, the factor of age needs to be viewed more holistically alongside the quality of parental involvement in daily care.

In terms of daily living skills, most children in this category face difficulties in performing basic activities comprehensively. These children tend to be unable to perform activities such as bathing on their own (P1), eating and drinking independently (P2), and putting on and taking off clothes (P3) and shoes (P4). In addition, they also demonstrate limitations in putting things away after playing (P5) and maintaining personal hygiene, such as washing their hands (P6), using the restroom when they need to go (P7), and cleaning themselves after using the restroom (P8). These challenges are important indicators in assessing daily living independence. These findings are consistent with a study (Khalil, 2024), which showed that basic motor skills training significantly improves fundamental abilities such as bathing, dressing, and washing activities that remain challenging for some children in this study.

Many children in this group are not yet able to play in their surroundings (P9), interact with peers (P10), or complete homework independently (P11). In addition, the children remain highly dependent on their parents' presence at school (P12), have not yet shown the initiative to ask questions (P13), often require assistance with verbal communication (P14), and are not yet able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior (P15). Indicators (P14) and (P15) are the most prominent areas of weakness. This is supported by the findings of Nurul (2024), who states that children with intellectual disabilities not only experience language impairments but also have limitations in social interaction. Barriers in verbal communication and moral understanding are crucial factors that hinder their independence.

A total of 8 children (13.1%) of the total respondents fell into the “non-independent” category. Children in this category demonstrated complete dependence in performing daily activities. They were unable to carry out daily activities such as bathing, dressing, eating, and using the toilet (indicators P1–P8) without assistance from parents, teachers, or caregivers. These children have not yet shown initiative nor do they possess adequate basic skills to independently meet their personal needs. This is supported by a study (Sabila, 2024) which found that children with intellectual disabilities experience difficulty performing activities independently and tend to be highly dependent on adult assistance to meet basic daily needs, such as dressing and maintaining personal hygiene.

The “non-independent” category generally comprises children from a specific age group. The analysis revealed that of the 8 children in this category, 5 (62.5%) were over 10 years old, and 3 (37.5%) were under 10 years old. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Tresnawan (2024), which confirms that the success of children with intellectual disabilities in achieving independence in daily activities is determined more by practical, activity-based training than by biological age alone.

The primary factors contributing to a lack of independence are more likely to stem from limitations in intellectual and adaptive functioning. A total of 7 children fall into the category of mild intellectual disability, while 1 child has moderate intellectual disability. Children with moderate intellectual disabilities have very low intelligence levels and require intensive assistance in carrying out daily activities. This is consistent with the findings of Kurniawan (2024), who noted that children with moderate intellectual disabilities require intensive training and a longer period of time to become independent compared to those with mild intellectual disabilities.

In addition to the child's internal factors, the family environment also plays a significant role in shaping the level of independence among children with intellectual disabilities. Based on the analysis, the majority of children classified as non-independent have parents over the age of 40, 7 children (87.5%) while only 1 parent (12.5%) is under 40 years old. In terms of occupation, most parents were self-employed (5), farmers (2), and 1 was unemployed. These findings suggest that parents' age and occupation can influence their level of involvement in guiding their children. Research by (Sutrisno, 2024) supports these findings, stating that parents' emotional and instrumental involvement significantly influences the development of children's independence.

CONCLUSION

The level of independence among children with intellectual disabilities is largely classified as "less independent" (52.5%). A total of 34.4% of the children are classified as "independent," while 13.1% are still classified as "not independent." Factors such as age, gender, grade level, and parental involvement play a role in influencing these levels of independence.

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