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## Implementation of independent character in children with special needs in basic education units

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the crucial issue of instilling independent character in children with special needs, recognizing their unique circumstances that necessitate tailored attention, particularly in the realm of education. The primary objective of the study is to delineate the process of fostering independent character in these children and to identify factors that either hinder or facilitate its implementation at SD Negeri Karanganyar Yogyakarta. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research relies on observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection methods, with school principals and special accompanying teachers as the subjects. The focal point is the examination of independent character implementation in children with special needs at SD Negeri Karanganyar. The study reveals a three-stage approach to instill independent character, encompassing collaborative preparation involving teachers and parents, an implementation phase featuring habituation and internalization in learning and daily activities, and an evaluation stage conducted every three months in the middle of the semester. Supporting factors include parental involvement, school collaboration, and adequate facilities while inhibiting factors comprise insufficient parental awareness and inadequate infrastructure. The findings contribute valuable insights to the enhancement of independent character development in children with special needs, emphasizing the pivotal role of collaborative efforts and addressing existing challenges in education and parental involvement.



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## Introduction

The whole countries in the world, both developed and developing countries indeed need education for the citizens. As well as the Indonesian citizens who deserve the education as written in Indonesian law regulation, it guarantees the law protection of the education. It is written in UUD 1945 Clause 31 Verse 1 that every citizen has the right to get an education. The development of education in Indonesia should be carefully monitored by the government, so that every citizen will be able to get the right to education, including Children with Special Needs. Children with Special Needs are also part of the Indonesian children who need to be educated and embraced by the parents and also the country. Right of the Children with Special Needs is written in Undang Undang No. 39 Clause 54 Year 1999 of Human Rights: "Every child with physical and or mental disabilities has the right to get the treatment, education, training, and special help from the country to ensure their life by the humanity, to increase their self-confidence, and to develop the ability to participate in society, nation and

state" (Rumia & Halomoan, 2021). This regulation becomes the power of Children with Special Needs parents to get the same rights as other children in any field. Even though Children with Special Needs have limits due to their disability, they still carry potential that could be developed which should be noticed. Right of the Children with Special Needs also written in Undang-Undang No. 20 Year 2003 related to the National Education System Bab IV Clause 5 Verse 2 that the citizens with emotional, mental, intellectual, and social disability have the right to get special education.

At this very moment, Indonesia still doesn't have accurate and specific data related to the amount of Children with Special Needs. Based on the data of "Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional (Susenas) 2018", the population of people with disabilities reached 30 million people, while based on the data of "Survey Penduduk Antar Sensus (Supas)", it only reached 21 million people. Based on the data of Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) in 2017, the number of Children with Special Needs in Indonesia reached 1.6 million. According to the website of kemdikbud.go.id, with a total of 1.6 million children, there still only 18 percent of them which able to get inclusive education. Of those 18 percent of children, 115.000 children get an education in special school special schools and 299.000 get an education in regular schools with inclusive implementation. Based on the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Children patronage, the amount of Children with Special Needs is 1.5 million children. Generally, the United Nations predicted that there are at least 10% of school-age children are Children with Special Needs. In Indonesia, the number of school-age children (5-14 years) is about 42.8 million, referred to that statement, there should be more than 4.2 million children in Indonesia who are children with special needs (Pendidikan dan Sains et al., 2022). The data record on children with special needs in Indonesia in 2011 is the number 356.192, but there were only 86.645 children who got the treatment, while until this year, there are only 105.185 children. In 2012, the government targeted to be able to accommodate 50% of children (Desiningrum, 2016). Based on the data from UNICEF in 2016, 2,5 million children with special needs in Indonesia do not get the secondary school, 600 thousand elementary school children, and 1,9 million elementary school children (in Kompasiana.com). Referring to that data, the government should be able to find a solution to improve education in Indonesia so that all children could get the same chance to get an education, especially for children with special needs in Indonesia. From that case, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) made a serious effort to support inclusive schools in Indonesia.

An inclusive school is a school where regular students and students with special needs can blend in without any discrimination. Children with special needs have different characteristics from regular children, they have disabilities in physical, mental, and psychological. That is why they need special treatment. There also should be a special approach and assessment from the teacher before the children join the learning process to figure out the disability so that they can get the right treatment in class. Because in sociality, children with special needs are commonly treated as ex-community children. To prevent that problem, children with special needs deserve to have a proper education like other children. The proper education for children with special needs has criteria to achieve the appropriate learning. The characteristic of children with special needs is that they tend to have unstable emotions. They might not be able to control their anger and emotions. In this case, to help the children learn to manage their emotions, parents should give the best support and make the right decision to help the children (Pratiwi, 2015). The support itself include creating a stable and safe atmosphere for children and choosing the right parenting method to build the children's good characteristic. The support given by the parents and teachers could help the children be more stable in doing their daily activities, while there are still many children with special needs who have not been able to control their emotions.

The government introduced a program called Reinforcement of Character Education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter) as an effort to improve education. There are 5 main values as the priority, which are: religion, nationality, cooperation, integrity, and independence (Novitasari et al., 2019). Character education is an urgency for every educational institution to maximize the implementation of character education. This program was created due to the increase in cases where parents and teachers perceive that children with special needs are being less independent. One of the reasons is because of the parent who spoil their children too much. Quoted from Kompas on June 7, 2012, children who live in adequate families and are full of affection but less disciplined will become spoiled children. This is where character education is important to build students to be more ethical and have high moral standards from the early years of education, especially on independent character. Independence is the ability to do something and to take full responsibility for it (Nugroho & Mareza, 2016). Independent character is the main character that should be developed in children with special needs. It should be taught from the early years to shape their character for the future. With independent character, children with special needs will be able to take responsibility for what they do and become more independent, and more confident. This could be applied in school by daily habituation.

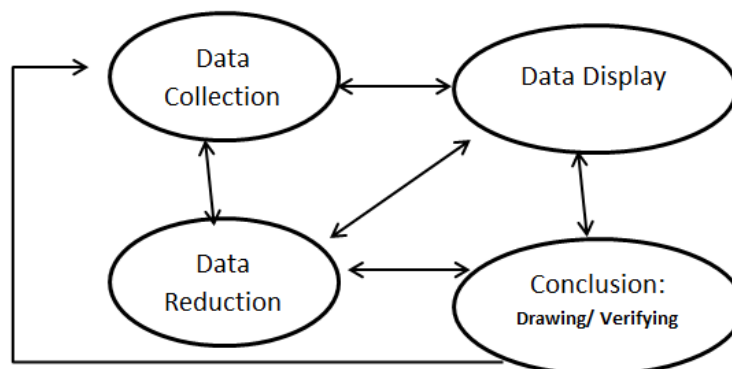
Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of developing independent character in children with special needs in primary education units (Sari Dewi et al., n.d.) However, a more in-depth analysis is

needed to detail the factors that may influence the implementation process. Several studies emphasize that effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and educational institutions is key to ensuring the success of this initiative (Dalyono et al., 2017). In contrast, other studies have highlighted significant barriers, such as a lack of parental awareness of the importance of independent character development and a shortage of adequate facilities and infrastructure in primary education settings (Febri et al., 2015). While there have been efforts to identify these factors, there is still a gap in the understanding of how learning strategies can be optimised more effectively to achieve the goal of self-reliant character development, especially at the primary education level. The implementation of independent character implementation for children with special needs is important, it is compatible with the research held by (Halimah et al., 2021) that stated that independent character for children with special needs is the final goal to shape them to be independent and more responsible in doing every daily activities. The method to teach children with special needs is with habituation, especially daily habituation which includes the children. As confirmed by (Asdaningsih & Erviana, 2022) independent character can be formed by daily learning, motivation, direct supervision, habituation, and exemplary.

Therefore, this research is expected to broaden the scope to better understand the dynamics of interactions between various stakeholders, including teachers, parents and school authorities, as well as the environmental factors that influence the implementation of independent character in children with special needs. With a more comprehensive approach, this research is expected to provide a more holistic view and more detailed solutions to improve the effectiveness of efforts to develop independent character in children with special needs at the basic education level. With a background as an inclusive school that has implemented independent character in Yogyakarta, SD Negeri Karanganyar stands out as an educational institution that understands the diversity of children with special needs, including those with learning difficulties, ADHD, and tunagrahita. Through observation, it is seen that the implementation of independent character in this school occurs through habituation in daily activities and learning, such as reading prayers before and after learning, tidying up school equipment, dressing politely, going to school on time, and keeping the environment clean by throwing garbage in its place. This method proves the suitability and success of the implementation of independent character in children with special needs at SD Negeri Karanganyar. Therefore, it is important to describe how the Implementation of Independent Character in Children with Special Needs at SD Negeri Karanganyar Yogyakarta and its supporting and inhibiting factors.

## Method

This research adopted a descriptive research approach with a qualitative orientation, using a case study design as outlined by Moleong (2007). Conducted at Sekolah Dasar Negeri Karanganyar in Yogyakarta, the school's vision and mission which explicitly focus on fostering student character emphasises the significance of its role as an inclusive education institution. The main subjects of the study involved the principal, class teachers and students. The research explored the steps in implementing independent character development for children with special needs in a primary education unit, while exploring factors that both hinder and support the implementation of independent character principles. Data collection involved various methods, including group discussion forums, questionnaires and documentation. The researcher acted as the main instrument, using an interview matrix, observation matrix and documentation matrix to facilitate data collection. The validity of the collected data was ensured through triangulation techniques. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman framework, encompassing sequential steps from data collection, data reduction, data presentation, to conclusion. The next stage of the research aims to provide valuable insights into the practical aspects of implementing independent character development for children with special needs, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and supporting factors in the process.



**Figure 1.** Qualitative Data Analysis Huberman, A.M. & M.B. Miles (1984)

## Results and Discussions

The development of independent character in children with special needs in primary education units is an urgent matter in improving the quality of inclusive education. This article explores the results of research on the implementation of character independence in children with special needs in primary schools, while highlighting the supporting and inhibiting factors in this process. Through an in-depth understanding of the realities on the ground, the article provides insights into the effectiveness of the measures taken, while illustrating the complex dynamics that influence these efforts. With a focus on primary schools as the main stage, this research aims to open a window for readers to understand the real challenges and opportunities that arise in realising independent character in children with special needs in the context of inclusive education. With the findings revealed, this article is expected to make a positive contribution to designing and improving education programmes that are more inclusive and focused on the character development of children with special needs.

### Shaping independent character in students with special needs

The research on the implementation of independent character development for Children with Special Needs at Karanganyar State Elementary School spanned from June 2023 to November 2023, encompassing various stages including planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning stage, the school initiated a parent meeting to deliberate on the application of independent character, as stated by a teacher in an interview: "Initial preparations for the application of independent character were undertaken through collaborative efforts with parents." Strategies employed to enhance the parental role as primary stakeholders in basic education at SD N Karangayar, Yogyakarta, involved fostering networks and communication. These efforts aimed to instill character values in students through diverse daily activities and create a school environment that is not only comfortable and safe but also imbued with religious nuances. Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, the significance of parents' roles has grown exponentially. Their responsibilities encompass being educators, facilitators, supervisors, companions, motivators, and exemplary figures, highlighting the crucial impact of parental involvement in the successful implementation of independent character development, (Prabowo, Fakhruddin and Rohman, 2020).



**Figure 2.** Parents Meeting

Based on the interview with the supporting teacher, it is stated that before the implementation of independent character implementation, the school would hold a parent's meeting to achieve the goal as the parents have an important role in the implementation itself. The next stage, which is the implementation stage has 3 parts such as habituation, learning, and daily activities. The implementation stage unfolds through habituation, internalization in the learning process, and integration into daily activities. The habituation process involves integrating self-development into daily activities and fostering habits that enhance the independence of children with special needs. The habituation process involves integrating self-development into daily activities and fostering habits that enhance the independence of children with special needs. The habituation focuses on independence aspects such as being independent in loudly reading activity in front of friends. This independence can be seen from their self-confidence, their lack of dependence on others, as well as their discipline (Rachmandhani et al., 2023). Activities carried out to form independent character in children with special needs are through flag ceremonies. As stated by the accompanying teacher, children with special needs were also included in the ceremony to increase their self-confidence. While they may not do as well as regular students, it can help boost their confidence while the teacher is still looking over their shoulder. The initiation of implementing independent character begins with fostering commitment and cooperation between schools, families, and communities to instill independent character in children with special needs. In addition, the school formulates a comprehensive work plan for its implementation. A crucial aspect of preparation is the



establishment of rules that regulate the implementation of independent character in these children. The implementation of independent character involves commitment and cooperation between the school, family, and community, and formulating a comprehensive work plan, including the establishment of rules governing the implementation of independent character in children with special needs.



**Figure 2.** Flag ceremony activities

Based on the interview with the supporting teacher, the ceremony is one of the ways to increase the children with special needs confidence which is part of the independent character implementation. The implementation of independent character in children with special needs is also internalized in the learning process. It is also written in the mission of SD Negeri Karanganyar which states “Habituation to independent living and socialization to the surrounding”, in line with (Tambunan, 2021) who stated that the implementation of character education at school should be based on basic character values that are by the needs, conditions, and environment of the school itself. The data shows that teachers taught the students to be disciplined, responsible, confident, and honest. It is strengthened by the interview result with the supporting teacher. Everyone plays a pivotal role in demonstrating values such as honesty and confidence through real-life examples, promoting responsible behavior, and instilling discipline. Internalization in the learning process involves teaching discipline, responsibility, and confidence values. The mission of SD Negeri Karanganyar emphasizes habituation to independent living and socialization, aligning with the principles of character education. Teachers guide students to be actively involved in the learning process, allowing them to showcase their potential (Yaqin & Sholeh, 2022).



**Figure 3.** Children with special needs prepare their stationery

Based on those interviews and observations, it could be concluded that teachers always give advice and direct examples to the students so that they can be disciplined in working on the task and responsible for their homework. Students also get used to telling the truth, when they have not done their homework, when they have wrong answers, they are told to be brave enough to tell the truth. Teachers, as role models, play a crucial

role in teaching and learning activities, exuding values of humility, positive actions, and personalities that reflect basic principles, so when teachers forget their role as role models, this can reduce learners' seriousness and effectiveness in the learning process (Candra et al., 2023.). Students also get used not to cheating by arranging the seats and warning the students to do it by themselves. The students indeed need the implementation of character values in daily activities and the examples shown to the students are the ones that happen daily at home or school. To get further information related to the daily independent character implementation, some interviews were held with teachers. The supporting teachers stated "We gave all students real examples so that they will understand the instruction easier. Those real examples are like coming to school on time, not littering, dressing politely, and telling good and bad behavior". As inheritors of values and moral agents, the role of teachers is not only to understand the importance of instilling moral values but also responsibility to create rules that shape student discipline to comply with environmental values, with an understanding of appropriate strategies and approaches, both through transmission and construction, according to the situation and conditions of the values that the teacher or school wants to develop (Faiz, n.d.).



**Figure 4.** Children with special needs throwing trash into the dustbin

A child with special needs who throws rubbish into the trash can is a real illustration of independent character development. These actions demonstrate not only awareness of cleanliness and the environment but also the child's ability to carry out daily tasks independently. In this moment, children with special needs show independence by recognizing their responsibility to maintain cleanliness. With careful steps, they carried their rubbish and placed it neatly in the designated bins. This reflects children's active involvement in forming positive habits from an early age. This action not only creates a clean environment but also fosters character values such as responsibility, independence, and awareness of cleanliness. Children with special needs, through this simple act, show that they can be a meaningful part of maintaining cleanliness together with other members of society. Thus, proper waste disposal not only reflects concern for the environment but is also an important step in forming children's independent character. The application of the concept of self-reliant character in elementary schools through a theoretical study of littering behavior involves the integration of aspects of autonomy, personal responsibility, and self-discipline, with an approach that utilizes Planned Behaviour Theory, Character Development Theory, and Environmental Psychology to form positive intentions and sustainable practices in maintaining environmental cleanliness (Farah Suangga et al., 2023). Daily activities serve as a platform for instilling character values. Teachers promote non-discrimination, encouraging children to play and interact with their special friends during breaks. Social Learning Theory is used in efforts to promote non-discrimination by teachers by emphasizing the role of observing, identifying, and learning from inclusive behavior, changing attitudes, and reducing discriminatory behavior in educational settings (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Real-life examples are employed to teach discipline, care for the environment, and religious practices. Students are actively involved in maintaining school hygiene and participating in religious activities

This action not only creates a clean environment but also fosters character values such as responsibility, independence, and awareness of cleanliness. Children with special needs, through this simple act, show that they can be a meaningful part of maintaining cleanliness together with other members of society. Children with disabilities who maintain hygiene involve an in-depth understanding of how independent skill development theory, social learning theory, and inclusive approaches can be applied to guide children with disabilities in understanding, internalizing, and practicing hygiene habits as an integral part of their daily lives, according to their abilities and needs (Warini et al., 2023). Thus, proper waste disposal not only reflects concern for the environment but is also an important step in forming children's independent character. Based on the interviews, it could be concluded that the independent character implementation in children with special needs is performed

during daily activities such as being disciplined and caring for the surroundings. The real examples from the teachers also play a great role in helping the children to be more independent. Teacher role modeling in character education involves an in-depth investigation into how teachers' behavioral models, values, and principles can influence students' character formation, using the frameworks of social learning theory and character development psychology, and considering the important role of interpersonal interactions, moral coaching and conveying positive values that can inspire learners in their character formation process (Jadid & Timur, 2020).



**Figure 4.** Evaluation between teacher and parents of children with special needs

Finally, the final stage in implementing independent character for children with special needs is evaluation. Based on interviews with accompanying teachers at Karanganyar State Elementary School, evaluations are carried out every 3 months. This evaluation is a medium for improving and developing the implementation of independent character in children with special needs, this was also conveyed by the accompanying teacher "We are holding this evaluation as an effort to improve character education in schools, we are holding this evaluation every semester or every three months". The evaluation stage is an integral part of assessing the success of implementation. Is the process of determining achievements and functions as a standard for assessing compliance with planned standards. Evaluations carried out every 3/6 semesters aim to identify areas that need improvement and ensure implementation is by established standards. Evaluation carried out between the school and the student's parents. Overall, the evaluation shows the success of implementing independent character development. The role of parents in character education evaluation is crucial because as the first teacher of children, positive behaviors and actions shown by parents will be the main role models in shaping children's morals and values (C et al., 2021).

#### **Supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of independent character in children with special needs in primary education units**

In looking at the results of the implementation of independent character in children with special needs in primary education units, there are several significant findings. Concrete steps that have been taken by SD Negeri Karanganyar Yogyakarta are revealed to realize an independent character. The analysis of the research results also includes the development of children with special needs in adopting independent values through habituation in daily activities and learning at school. Factors that support the implementation of independent character include the role of teachers, collaboration with parents, and support from the school. Parents who provide positive support, teachers who teach by example, and a creative learning environment help children become independent, and creative and understand lessons well. Collaboration and commitment between teachers, parents, and the community create a strong foundation for success, while a clear vision and mission of the institution provide focused direction (Fatah Natsir et al., n.d.). This finding provides an overview of how close cooperation between various parties can create an environment that supports the formation of independent character in children with special needs (Dewi et al., 2023). The application of responsive learning methods and the active participation of parents are key elements in creating a solid foundation for the character development of these children. The application of responsive learning methods and the active participation of parents are central to creating a solid foundation for the character development of children with special needs. (Rachmandhani et al., 2023). Responsive learning methods tailored to children's individual needs enable more effective adoption of independent character values. Responsive inclusive education adapts learning strategies to children's learning styles, creating an environment that supports the development of their independence.

Concrete examples integrated into teaching, inclusive education practices, and structured planning make a significant contribution to the systematic development of independent character in schools. Active engagement and communication with parents increase the impact of character development initiatives, fostering a supportive environment for children (Arnum & Hidayat, 2023). Open communication between teachers and parents is an important bridge to understanding children's needs and development, while parental support at home can be translated into daily practices that support children's independent character development in the school environment.

Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors encountered were parents' limited acceptance of their children's special needs. Lack of parental involvement and lack of facilities and infrastructure can hinder the effectiveness of character development activities. This analysis illustrates the challenges that need to be overcome to deliver an effective inclusive approach, including concrete steps that can be taken to overcome these obstacles. The challenges that arise add to the complexity, requiring adaptive strategies to maintain the sustainability of the programme. (Retnasari, Lisa et al., 2018). Resistensi terhadap perubahan di kalangan pendidik atau pemangku kepentingan dan kurangnya kehadiran orang tua secara keseluruhan untuk anak-anak berkebutuhan khusus semakin menambah potensi hambatan. Mengatasi faktor-faktor ini sangat penting untuk menciptakan kerangka kerja yang holistik dan efektif untuk menerapkan pengembangan karakter mandiri pada anak berkebutuhan khusus. Hal ini melibatkan pengembangan lingkungan yang kolaboratif dan inklusif, menyediakan sumber daya yang diperlukan, dan mengadaptasi strategi untuk mengakomodasi keadaan yang berubah, yang pada akhirnya memastikan keberhasilan penanaman karakter mandiri pada siswa.

Pembahasan mendalam mengenai temuan-temuan tersebut melibatkan sintesis data dengan kerangka teoretis, menghubungkan antara hasil penelitian dengan konsep-konsep pendidikan inklusif dan teori pengembangan karakter. Artikel ini juga membahas implikasi praktis dari temuan penelitian, menggali potensi perbaikan dalam implementasi karakter mandiri untuk anak berkebutuhan khusus di unit pendidikan dasar. Dengan demikian, pembahasan ini menjadi landasan bagi rekomendasi dan perbaikan lebih lanjut dalam rangka meningkatkan efektivitas pendekatan inklusif dalam pengembangan karakter pada anak-anak berkebutuhan khusus.

## Conclusions

Based on the research findings and discussions related to the implementation of independent character development for children with special needs at SD Negeri Karanganyar, several key conclusions can be drawn: The implementation of independent character development at SD Negeri Karanganyar follows a structured approach consisting of distinct stages. The initial stage, the preparation stage, involves collaborative efforts between teachers and parents to lay the foundation for a successful implementation of independent character development for children with special needs. The second stage, the implementation stage, incorporates various key concepts. The first concept is habituation, achieved through role-playing during ceremonial activities to enhance the children's confidence. The next concept is internalization during the learning process, where children are taught essential values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and confidence. These principles are applied in daily activities, including timely homework completion, reading aloud in front of peers, and punctuality. The implementation in daily activities extends to real-life examples provided by teachers, emphasizing behaviors such as punctuality, polite dressing, and respectful conduct.

A religious concept is also introduced, with children instructed to independently perform tasks like ablution, folding their prayer rugs, and responsibly managing water resources. Habituation to care for the surroundings is fostered through actions like proper disposal of trash in designated bins and the maintenance of school facilities. The final stage is the evaluation, conducted every three months to assess school development and identify areas for improvement. This systematic evaluation ensures ongoing refinement and enhancement of the independent character development program. In summary, the independent character implementation at SD Negeri Karanganyar is a well-structured process involving collaborative efforts, practical concepts, and real-life examples. The systematic evaluation further emphasizes the commitment to continuous improvement and the overall success of the independent character development initiative for children with special needs.

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