# Caregivers Role in Fostering Independence of Children with Special Needs at Bhakti Luhur Dormitory

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the role of caregivers in fostering independence among children with special needs at Bhakti Luhur Putra Dormitory. The study focuses on parenting strategies that enhance self-care abilities, which are crucial for improving these children's quality of life and social integration. Despite existing studies on caregiving for children with disabilities, limited attention has been given to institutional settings where personalized care and empowerment-based approaches are applied. This study uses a qualitative research methodology, utilizing interviews, observations, and document analysis to collect data from eleven Bhakti Luhur Putra Dormitory caregivers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis involving eleven caregivers with significant experience. The findings highlight that emotional support, structured training, and personalized care are vital strategies for promoting independence. These approaches foster children's confidence, encourage self-reliance, and help them integrate into broader social environments. This research provides practical insights for improving caregiving practices in institutional contexts. It contributes to the literature by offering a focused understanding of how specific caregiving strategies impact the autonomy of children with special needs. Recommendations include integrating emotional intelligence and structured independence training into caregiver development programs for better developmental outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of adapting care strategies to meet the unique needs of each child, ensuring long-term benefits for their personal growth and social participation.

Keywords: Caregiver; Independence; Children with Special Needs; Emotional Support; Structured Training

## INTRODUCTION

Human development spans all life stages, but individuals with disabilities often face significant social and functional barriers. In Indonesia, around 22.97 million people, or around 8.5% of the total population, have the majority of disabilities in the elderly group (Supanji, 2023). Children with special needs experience physical, mental, or other social behaviour characteristics or abnormalities (Darmawati & Indriawati, 2021). Children with special needs (ABK) are a group that needs special attention and support in developing their independence and social skills (Herman & Ramdhani, 2022). The level of intellectual disability varies from mild to severe, reflecting the limitations in intellectual and adaptive functioning and the level of support required (Westrop et al., 2024). In Indonesia, data shows that the population of children with special needs continues to increase, with various challenges faced by both families and institutions that provide care for them. One institution that has an essential role in supporting the development of ABK is Bhakti Luhur, which focuses on empowering children who need special attention. This social condition shows that empowering parenting is necessary to help ABK develop independence and adapt to society.

Children with intellectual disabilities often face barriers to achieving independence due to cognitive limitations and social obstacles, which usually hinder the development of their autonomy. Meanwhile, according to (Vaucher et al., 2020), for individuals with intellectual disabilities, the ability to exercise self-determination is influenced by personal traits and social-environmental factors. Research shows that these children need a specific parenting approach and ongoing support to help them develop optimally (Savari et al., 2023). Caregivers play an essential role in improving the independence and autonomy of children with special needs, primarily through personalized care. A study by Vanderkerken et al. (2019) emphasizes the importance of formal and informal support from the family and environment in supporting the quality of life of children with special needs. In Indonesia, institutions such as the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory have long been the primary environment where children with special needs receive personalized care. Caregivers also have the duty and responsibility to care for children lovingly, nurturing, guiding, and training children both in daily activities and spiritual life(Goa, 2020). Studies on such services are limited, but it is important to note that these institutions provide significant support in developing children with special needs through a community approach (Vaucher et al., 2020). More research on the direct impact of parenting practices in nursing institutions in Indonesia indicates the need for further study. Empirical research can explore how these parenting practices affect a child's personal development and contribute to long-term independence (Gardiner et al., 2019).

Although the study recognizes the importance of caregivers in the social development of children with disabilities, there is still uncertainty about how particular parenting strategies in institutional settings such as Bhakti Luhur directly contribute to fostering independence. This study intends to investigate the following questions: (1) What unique parenting practices contribute the most to the autonomy of children with moderate Grahita Deficiency? (2) How is the approach to caregiver empowerment aligned with child development milestones? By answering these questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of parenting in Bhakti Luhur and offer insights that can inform better parenting models.

The complexity of this problem lies in the multifaceted nature of the development of independence among children with intellectual disabilities. The interaction between cognitive limitations, emotional resilience, and the parenting environment creates unique challenges for caregivers and children. Successful parenting strategies require individualized care, emotional support, and structured independence training (Nankervis et al., 2020). Furthermore, these children often face additional social stigmatization, making the role of caregivers not only crucial in daily activities but essential in helping children integrate into the broader social context (Holmes & Mortenson, 2024). Understanding how caregivers balance these roles is vital to identifying best practices in empowering children with special needs.

This study aims to determine the role of caregivers in fostering the independence of children with special needs in the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory. Specifically, this study aims to (1) Identify effective parenting strategies to increase the autonomy of children with special needs in the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory. Light; (2) Analyze the impact of empowerment-based parenting on children's ability to perform daily tasks independently; and (3) Provide recommendations to improve parenting practices to improve child development outcomes. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on parenting for children with intellectual disabilities and offer practical insights to enhance parenting approaches in institutions.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design, which is appropriate to understand the complex role of caregivers in fostering the independence of children with special needs. The qualitative research was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of parenting and the individual experiences of caregivers and children in the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory. This approach is beneficial for identifying and describing parenting strategies that encourage the independence of children with special needs. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study aims to capture the life experiences of caregivers and their impact on children.

The target population of this study is caregivers and children with special needs (medium disabilities) at the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory in Malang, Indonesia. The purposive sampling technique is used to select caregivers who have at least two years of experience working with children with intellectual disabilities, ensuring they have adequate exposure to parenting practices. The sample consisted of 12 caregivers. Respondents' profiles include demographic information such as age, gender, educational background, and years of experience.

Data were collected using three main methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with caregivers to gather detailed information about the strategies they use to foster independence in children. In addition, participant observation was carried out to observe the interaction between caregivers and children in their daily routines. This method is crucial in uncovering parenting behaviours directly and understanding how these practices contribute to children's autonomy. Finally, document analysis is used to review available institutional records, such as progress reports or training manuals, which can provide insights into parenting approaches.

The main focus of this study includes parenting strategies (measured through interviews and observations) and children's level of independence (measured through observation and document analysis). Parenting strategies are coded into categories such as "emotional support," "independence training," and "personalized parenting." In contrast, children's independence is assessed based on their ability to complete tasks such as dressing, eating, and engaging in unassisted social activities.

Data from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, suitable for qualitative research focusing on identifying recurring patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019)The thematic analysis involves several stages, including data introduction, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, and determination of the final theme. This method allows for a detailed understanding of how parenting practices align with children's development of independence. In addition, the triangulation method is applied to ensure the credibility of the findings by cross-verifying data from various sources (interviews, observations, and documents).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis resulted in several key themes that highlight effective parenting strategies and their impact on children's independence. The following sections will detail the results according to the identified themes and discuss the implications.

| Aspects | Interview Results | Implementation Examples |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Task-Based Learning** | Learning is tailored to each child's ability level for everyday skills, such as folding clothes, sweeping, washing dishes, and maintaining personal hygiene. | The caregivers provided simple training, such as folding clothes for Jonathan, self-care for Emanuel, and taking out the garbage for Adi. Tasks are trained regularly, with strict supervision and gradual progression. |
| **Positive Reinforcement** | Praise, small rewards, and verbal recognition motivate and recognize the child's achievement in completing tasks. | The caregiver offers a snack or small gift on a birthday, plays music, or provides additional playtime as a gift. |
| **Environmental and Social Support** | A structured and clean environment is created, involving children in daily tasks to help them feel responsible for maintaining order. | Equipment such as brooms and clothes are placed in an easily accessible place. Children are involved in daily routines such as sweeping and mopping, emphasizing cleanliness and independence. |

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| **Effective Communication** | Communication is tailored with clear, straightforward, step-by-step instructions to help children understand their tasks more efficiently. | The caregiver gives step-by-step instructions, such as "Sweep first, then take out the garbage." Demonstrations are often used for children who need additional guidance, such as Adi, who respond better to simplified instructions. |
| **Consistency and Patience** | Patience and consistency are essential, especially when children are reluctant or slow to respond to assignments. | When children do not complete tasks, caregivers guide and provide repetitive exercises. Caregivers will maintain patience by motivating themselves and reminding themselves of their responsibilities and the needs of the children. |
| **Use of Simple Aids.** | Simple utensils, such as brooms, clothes, and cooking utensils, help children practice independence and minimal use of technology. | Tools such as brooms and teach children how to sweep and clean tables. For children who need visual aids, caregivers use pictures atau animasi sederhana untuk memperjelas instruksi. |

Unique findings from interviews on the role of caregivers in increasing independence in children with special needs at Wisma Putra Bhakti Luhur.

| **Unique Findings** | **Information** | **Implementation Examples** |
|---|---|---|
| **Personalized Rewards** | Caregivers provide gifts matching the child's preferences to encourage enthusiasm, such as coffee or favourite snacks. This approach reflects the caregiver's understanding of the child's emotional needs. | Offer coffee to a child who likes it or provide a specific snack to which the child responds positively. |
| **Social Interaction and Togetherness** | Caregivers create a family atmosphere through activities such as watching TV or listening to music, helping children learn about togetherness and positive social bonds. | Inviting children to relax together, such as watching TV or listening to music, fosters emotional closeness. |

| Mood-Based Communication | Caregivers adjust their interaction style based on the child's mood. If the child seems reluctant or unwell, communication is delayed or changed so that the child feels supported, not depressed. | If the child is in a bad mood, the caregiver uses humour or delays tasks to avoid conflict, ensuring the child is positively involved later in life. |
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| **Balanced Positive Reinforcement** | Praise and rewards are given in moderation, such as occasional snacks or small gifts, while verbal praise is more often shown. It helps the child stay motivated without expecting excessive physical rewards. | Give verbal praise such as "good job" or "smart" every time the child completes a task while offering physical rewards such as occasional treats. |
| **Emotional Management by Caregivers** | Caregivers face emotional challenges when dealing with children who are difficult to engage with or follow instructions. To maintain long-term patience, they engage in self-reflection, rest, or recreation to keep their motivation and emotional balance. | Caregivers take breaks or engage in recreational activities to relieve stress and realize the importance of patience in dealing with children with special needs. |
| **Children's Initiatives from Repetitive Practice** | Children who are regularly trained show initiative in completing tasks without being commanded. Consistent exercise shows long-term results, as children begin to assume responsibility independently. | Children clean their rooms, set the table, or do simple tasks without needing a reminder from the caregiver. |

## Task-Based Learning

Task-based learning at Wisma Putra Bhakti Luhur allows children to practice specific daily life skills, such as folding clothes, washing dishes, and maintaining personal hygiene. This strategy aligns with the theory of behavioural learning (Goddard, 2017), which states that knowledge can be improved through task repetition and proper reinforcement (Luhur, 2024). Wahyuningsih & Umaeroh (2021) support these findings, which suggest that consistent task-based learning helps

children with special needs improve their fine and gross motor skills, essential for daily life. By providing simple, repetitive tasks, children with special needs can develop routines that help them master basic skills and form regular behaviour patterns.

## Positive Reinforcement as a Motivational Factor

Positive reinforcement is essential in building motivation and confidence among children with special needs at Wisma Putra Bhakti Luhur. Bandura supports this approach (1977), who shows that positive behaviours can be reinforced through appropriate praise and rewards. In addition, (Brooks et al., 2020) found that positive reinforcement, such as verbal praise or small gifts, increased emotional engagement between children and caregivers, fostering a supportive environment. The study showed that children who received positive reinforcement were more likely to show better initiative and task-solving skills. It is consistent with recent findings by Kinnunen and Holopainen (2023), which show that positive individual reinforcement fosters intrinsic motivation, leading to greater independence in overcoming everyday challenges.

## Supportive Physical Environment

The well-structured environment at Wisma Putra Bhakti Luhur significantly contributes to the independence of children with special needs. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Salsabila, 2018) emphasizes that the physical and social environment dramatically affects a child's development, mainly when this environment provides structure and stability. Vaucer et al. (2020) noted that an environment that supports independence in which children can interact freely with tools and objects helps them understand their responsibilities and roles in daily activities. The study shows that organizing the physical environment, such as easy access to cleaning tools or cutlery, can increase children's confidence in completing daily tasks. Lubis et al. (2023) also support these findings, suggesting that a well-organized environment improves social interaction and practical skills among children with special needs. Rahmi (2021) indicates that perceived social support, particularly emotional and informational support from family and friends, significantly influences the social skills of students with special needs. The author highlights the importance of a supportive environment for enhancing interpersonal abilities in this demographic.

## Adaptive and Structured Communication

Effective communication between caregivers and children with special needs is essential to improve children's understanding of the tasks given. Caregivers at Wisma Putra Bhakti Luhur use a communication approach tailored to each child's conditions and abilities. It aligns with Rogers' theory of therapeutic communication (Nik Ahmad, 2015), which states that clear, simple, and gradual communication increases understanding and engagement. Izquierdo and Anguera (2021) found that adaptive and personalized communication can improve children's ability to follow instructions and develop independence. The caregiver's use of short, clear communication,

accompanied by demonstrations or visual aids, supports the idea that effective communication significantly assists the child in understanding and responding to tasks.

### Consistency and Emotional Management by Caregivers

Caregivers' patience and consistency in facing daily challenges are vital to the success of the facility's self-reliance program. Caregivers are expected to be patient and consistent, especially when the child shows reluctance or difficulty completing tasks. Cristiani et al. support these findings. (2021), who state that good emotional management and patience can foster a sense of security and trust in children. Research by Putri et al. (2023) shows that caregivers who manage their emotions effectively are more successful in maintaining a stable parenting environment supporting children's emotional development. In the context of Wisma Bhakti Luhur, caregivers who reflect on their emotional stability show greater effectiveness in supporting children's independence. Perceptions of the processes of care were correlated with caregiver stress levels. Low satisfaction with the receipt of general and specific information suggests that care coordination should be prioritized (Lai et al., 2021).

### Challenges in the Implementation of Independence Programs and Flexibility in Approach

One of the main challenges that caregivers face is the child's frequent mood swings, which can affect their ability to complete tasks. It aligns with research by Nankervis et al. (2020), which found that mood factors in children with special needs affect their involvement in learning activities. However, with a flexible and adaptive approach, caregivers can adjust the method to suit the situation better, such as postponing or changing tasks until the child's mood improves. A study published in 2022 emphasizes that attention to contextual factors is crucial for adapting caregiver interventions for families with children who have developmental disabilities. It highlights that caregivers often need to adjust their approaches, such as postponing tasks until a child's mood improves, to ensure better engagement and outcomes (Szlamka et al., 2022).

### Key findings

### Emotional Support and Relationship Building

The findings suggest that emotional support is an essential component of effective parenting. Caregivers reported using positive reinforcement and active listening strategies to build trusting relationships with children. The interviews revealed that caregivers who created a warm and supportive environment observed higher confidence and willingness in children to engage in independent tasks. For example, one caregiver noted, "When children feel safe and supported, they tend to try to do things on their own" (Caregiver 3, Interview, 2024). Caregivers are essential for emotional support and building self-esteem and confidence in children with special needs. Research indicates that emotional support is vital for enhancing children's psychological well-being and promoting independence (Asa et al., 2021).

## Structured Independence Training

Observational data show that structured training sessions, in which caregivers guide children through daily activities (such as dressing and eating), contribute significantly to children's ability to perform these tasks independently. The analysis revealed that children who participated in these sessions showed an increased success rate in self-care tasks. For example, documentation showed a 40% improvement in self-dressing skills over six months for children who engaged in structured training compared to those who did not receive such support. Implementing structured training programs by caregivers is crucial for developing self-care skills. Studies show that consistent practice in daily living skills significantly contributes to the autonomy of children with disabilities (Nawang Palupi et al., 2017).

## Personal Care Approach

Caregivers use personalized strategies tailored to each child's needs and abilities. The interview highlighted that understanding each child's unique challenges is essential for fostering independence. For example, caregivers adapt their approach based on each child's learning pace, which results in increased engagement and task completion rates. Further analysis of the documents supports these findings, which suggest that personalized care resulted in a noticeable increase in children's participation in group activities, with a 50% increase in engagement rates recorded over the study period. Tailoring care to meet the unique needs of each child is a fundamental role of caregivers. This personalized approach has been shown to foster better developmental outcomes, allowing children to progress at their own pace (Asa et al., 2021).

The study identifies several unique parenting practices that caregivers employ, instrumental in promoting the autonomy of children with moderate intellectual disabilities. These practices include personalized care strategies, emotional support, and structured training programs tailored to each child's needs. The findings indicate that caregivers implementing these strategies enhance the children's self-care skills and foster a sense of independence and self-efficacy. It aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of adaptive parenting practices in supporting the development of children with special needs (Meral et al., 2023). Thus, the research findings provide empirical evidence that directly addresses the first research question, demonstrating the effectiveness of specific caregiving practices in promoting child autonomy. When caregivers are empowered, it leads to better outcomes for children, including improved social skills, increased self-esteem, and greater independence in daily activities. This positive reinforcement encourages caregivers and children to engage actively in the developmental process (Miller, 2016).

This study also highlights the critical role of caregiver empowerment in achieving developmental milestones for children. The findings suggest that when caregivers are equipped with the necessary training and resources, they are better positioned to support their children's growth and development (Thalen et al., 2023). This empowerment is closely linked to the caregivers' ability to implement effective strategies that align with the developmental needs of the children. The discussion elaborates on how structured training programs enhance caregivers' skills and positively impact the children's ability to reach key developmental milestones. This relationship underscores

the importance of a holistic approach to caregiver training, essential for fostering an environment conducive to the children's independence and overall development. Empowering caregivers also involves teaching them how to advocate for their child's needs within educational and healthcare systems. This advocacy aligns with developmental milestones by ensuring that children receive appropriate services that promote their independence and self-determination as they grow (Honan et al., 2023).

**Research Implications.**

This study shows that an adaptive, consistent, and empathetic parenting approach significantly impacts the independence of children with special needs. This approach aligns with recent research showing that environmental factors, positive reinforcement, and tailored communication strategies play an essential role in the education of children with special needs. Applying these findings can be a model for other care institutions trying to improve the quality of their services. By focusing on the positive reinforcement role, consistency, and patience in dealing with children with special needs, this research contributes to developing more holistic and needs-based practices to support children's independence and social development. These findings underscore the importance of emotional support, structured training, and personalized care in fostering independence among children with special needs. Caregivers are crucial in providing care and empowering children to develop the skills necessary for independent living. It aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes the diverse nature of parenting for children with special needs (Vicente et al., 2020)The implications of this study suggest that caregiver training programs should incorporate strategies that enhance emotional support, offer structured training, and encourage personalized care approaches.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study shows that caregivers in the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory play an essential role in fostering the independence of children with mild disabilities. Implementing emotional support, structured training, and personalized strategies improves children's self-care skills. These findings could serve as a basis for developing training programs for caregivers to improve parenting practices and ultimately empower children with special needs.

This research provides valuable insights into the role of caregivers in fostering the independence of children with special needs (Medium Disabilities) in the Bhakti Luhur Dormitory. The study's findings show that effective parenting is characterized by emotional support, structured training, and a personalized approach. These strategies improve children's self-care abilities and contribute significantly to their development and confidence. Empirically, this study complements the existing literature on parenting practices for children with disabilities by highlighting specific methods that can be applied in similar contexts to increase independence.

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that caregiver training programs prioritize emotional intelligence, individualized strategies, and structured learning experiences. Such an

approach can improve the quality of care for children with special needs, leading to better developmental outcomes. From an economic point of view, investing in caregiver training and support can reduce the long-term costs associated with reliance on external care services, which encourages a more sustainable model for families and institutions.

However, this research has limitations. The small sample size, i.e., 12 caregivers, limited the generalization of the findings, making it difficult to draw broader conclusions that apply to all parenting contexts. In addition, the study relied on self-reported data by caregivers and observational assessments, which could introduce bias or subjectivity in the results. Future research may address these limitations by using more significant and diverse samples and combining quantitative measures alongside qualitative insights to strengthen the validity of the findings.

In addition, although the study identified the key strategies used by caregivers, it did not explore children's perspectives regarding their experiences in practicing independence. Involving children's opinions in future research will provide a more holistic understanding of the parenting process and its impact. Overall, this study opens the door to further exploration of effective parenting practices, which prompted researchers to investigate additional dimensions that affect the independence of children with special needs.

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