

THE ROLE OF SELF-REGULATION AN INDEPENDENCE IN INCREASING LEARNING MOTIVATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD WITHOUT FATHER'S ROLE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Self-regulation (SR) and independence can affect children on early childhood to develop their learning motivation. The self-regulation can support early child development in the area of learning. The independence can also allow them to become individuals who are able to complete the independent way of the early child's own motivation on learning. Learning motivation can also be impacted by father's role as distinct obstacles for children's psychological growth and academic development. This literature review aims to analyze the role of self-regulation and independence as a mediator of the effectiveness to increase learning motivation in early childhood without father's role. Articles published between 2012 and 2025 were analyzed in this study and obtained from several reputable databases which focused on self-regulation, independence and motivation to learn on early child without father's role. The findings suggest that self-regulation helps children manage their emotions, attention, and behavior, skills that are essential for staying engaged in learning activities. Meanwhile, independence, which is often strengthened through maternal or caregiver support, plays a key role in fostering intrinsic motivation and resilience. Even in the absence of a father, the combination of self-regulation and independence can work together as a compensatory mechanism that boosts children's motivation to learn.

Keywords: Early childhood, Father absence, Independence, Learning motivation, Self-regulation

INTRODUCTION

The preschool period is a very important phase in a child's development. At this stage, the foundations of personality, the formation of willpower, and voluntary behaviour are established, which will influence the child's future development (Turdimurodo, 2021). Preschool teachers must have a thorough awareness of early childhood developmental traits in order to maximize the growth and development of their students. Children at this age typically exhibit intense curiosity, developing inventiveness, and a desire to explore; as a result, they need to be guided by organized and successful educational programs. The use of engaging learning media plays a role in creating meaningful learning experiences while simultaneously facilitating the development of independence in children (Kuset et al., 2021). Most factor that can enhance children's learning motivation is self-regulation. Self-regulation enables children to control their emotions and behaviours (Hautakangas et al., 2022). Children who are able and active in utilizing their self-regulation skills tend to have good academic motivation (Basaria & Margaretha, 2024). According to Zimmerman, self-regulation in learning involves three main aspects: metacognition, motivation, and behaviour. Metacognition refers to an individual's ability to plan, organize, self-guide, monitor, and evaluate the learning process. Motivation acts as an internal driver that includes perceptions of self-efficacy, competence, and autonomy, all of which relate to the basic need for self-control and a sense of competence. Meanwhile, behaviour reflects an individual's effort to manage themselves, select and utilize their environment, or create conditions that support learning activities (Qistia et al., 2019).

In addition, early childhood independence is one of a fundamental concept in developmental research, denoting a young child's growing capacity to act, make decisions, and attend to their own needs with diminishing dependence on adults. The development of independence is crucial for later academic achievement, social competence, and psychological well-being, making it a central focus in early childhood education, parenting, and policy frameworks worldwide (Stevenson, 2017). The development of early childhood independence is influenced

by a complex interplay of psychological factors within the context of close parent-child relationships, as well as the ecologies in which children and parents are situated (Wong et al., 2020), environmental factors influenced by genetics and individual experience in shaping cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional competencies (Heckman, 2018), and social factors are associated with early parent-child relationship, genetics, and prenatal influences (Ramos et al., 2022). Parent-child relationship which absence of a father figure can have profound effects on a child's emotional and behavioural development. Children without involved fathers often experience emotional pain, self-isolation, and aggressive behaviours as coping mechanisms (Flouri et al., 2015). Fathers who are not involved in their children's learning process fail to understand and follow their learning progress, which should consider each developmental characteristic. Essentially, these tasks are directed toward enabling children to become independent and determine their own future according to their hopes and aspirations (Qistia et al., 2019).

This perspective is further reinforced by Erikson's psychosocial theory, which emphasizes that child development is influenced not only by biological and cognitive factors but also by social and cultural factors. Thus, social and cultural factors and the role of the family, especially the father figure, are closely related to the development of children's learning motivation. Fathers play an essential role in instilling moral values while strengthening children's independence and self-regulation, so the absence of a father figure can significantly impact their education and development (Taufik & Amir, 2023). The urgency of this study lies in the fact that there are many studies about the role of self-regulation and independence with school achievement, but few focus on motivation learning on the early child in Indonesia. In addition, there is a lack of research that links the three simultaneously in a study. Therefore, based on the explanation above, this study will focus on analyzing the role of and self-regulation and independence with the learning motivation of early childhood without a father figure in Indonesia. This study is important to understand and analyze the role of fathers in shaping children's independence and self-regulation and how these affect their learning motivation. Through this study, it is expected that both fathers and mothers will become more aware and pay closer attention to their children's growth and development, particularly regarding independence and self-regulation.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation, according to Bandura (Athallah, 2023, p. 25), is the ability to manage and direct behaviour as an effort to achieve personal goals. Zimmerman (Athallah, 2023, p. 25) defines it as thoughts, feelings, and actions that are deliberately planned and sustained in line with intended objectives. Similarly, Miller and Brown (Athallah, 2023, p. 25) describe self-regulation as the capacity to plan, guide, and monitor behaviour flexibly in response to changing conditions. Thus, self-regulation can be understood as an individual's ability to adjust behaviour to align with personal goals. Ebbes et al. (2024) put forward three main indicators of self-regulation, namely: (1) emotional control, which is demonstrated through a child's ability to control their anger or not cry easily when faced with situations that do not go their way, thereby helping them adapt to their social environment and build positive relationships; (2) attention control, which is reflected in the child's ability to stay focused and not be easily distracted, thereby supporting success in completing tasks and participating in learning activities; and (3) behavioural control, which is evident in the habit of following rules, such as waiting in line, tidying up toys, or stopping when reminded by teachers or parents, thereby fostering discipline and awareness of applicable social norms.

Zimmerman (Athallah, 2023, p. 27) identifies three key aspects of self-regulation: metacognition, which refers to awareness and monitoring of cognitive processes, including planning, organizing, and self-instruction (Pons in Athallah, 2023, p. 27); motivation, which emphasizes intrinsic drive, confidence, and the need for control; and behaviour, which refers to individuals' ability to regulate themselves and optimize their environment. Furthermore, Zimmerman (Athallah, 2023, p. 27) highlights three factors influencing self-regulation: individual factors such as knowledge, goals, and metacognition; behavioural factors such as effort and skills; and environmental factors such as social conditions and prior experiences. Collectively, these aspects and factors illustrate that self-regulation is a multidimensional process integrating cognition, motivation, and behaviour to achieve personal objectives.

Children who are able to regulate themselves possess high intrinsic motivation to learn and explore, and they can face extrinsic tasks by setting challenges and standards for themselves, working hard because they value the activity. The internalization process makes behaviour regulation, initially introduced by adults, part of the child's identity, with self-regulation evolving from external control to full autonomy. Independent self-regulation helps children manage challenges, make choices, and strengthen relationships with significant others, while autonomy support and social involvement facilitate this development, whereas excessive control can hinder it (Grolnick et al., 1999).

A good level of self-regulation in children is closely related to learning motivation, which represents the psychological drive to engage in learning activities consistently and meaningfully (Aminingtyas & Wardhani, 2023).

The family's role is inseparable from parents as the ones responsible for guiding and instilling values within the family. The role of parents in shaping children's character is no longer the responsibility of the mother alone. The father's role in character building, nurturing, caring for, and educating children is highly significant (Andhika, 2021). Problems in self-regulation arise when children's ability to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours is still weak. Children with low self-regulation often have low self-confidence and tend to show maladaptive behaviours. They usually face difficulties in achieving goals, demonstrate inconsistent behaviour, and struggle to stay focused in various activities (Wardiana et al., 2025). Therefore, developing strong self-regulation is very important to help children enhance self-control, build confidence, and support their success in daily activities.

Independence

Early childhood independence refers to the ability of young children to perform tasks and make decisions without constant adult intervention. This includes being comfortable when separated from parents, completing tasks independently, and engaging in daily routines without assistance (Fadlillah et al., 2020). Independence is the ability to exert choice over occupational performance, which may occur independently or interdependently, with dependence arising from inability to choose or environmental mismatches (Collins, 2017). Fadlillah et al. (2020) further highlights characteristics of independence, including daring to be left by parents, being able to do the task independently; and being able to carry out daily habits. In this sense, independence can generally be understood as the ability and skills to take care of oneself both physically and psychologically.

Cerino (2023, pp. 2–4) identifies five key indicators of children's independence: (1) self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation; (2) the ability to make choices and take responsibility; (3) self-discipline in structured environments; (4) competence developed through repeated routines; and (5) self-expression, communication, and behavioural regulation. Mikhaylova et al. (2023) identified three main indicators of child independence, namely (1) self-care, such as eating, dressing, and tidying up toys; (2) simple decision-making, such as choosing activities or clothes; and (3) responsibility, which is reflected in completing tasks and taking care of one's belongings. The indicators used in this study are indicators of child independence based on Mikhaylova et al. (2023). These indicators show the increasing autonomy of children in managing their daily routines, recognizing personal preferences, and developing a sense of responsibility for their actions and possessions.

Introduction

Learning motivation, derived from the word "motive," refers to a drive or stimulus that generates behaviour. Hamzah (in Sari, 2016, p. 50) defines it as an impulse or energy that triggers specific actions, while Sartain (in Sari, 2016, p. 50) views it as a complex expression that directs behaviour toward goals. Similarly, Chung and Megginson (in Sari, 2016, p. 50) interpret motivation as goal-directed behaviour associated with the effort exerted to achieve objectives. Slavin (in Sari, 2016, p. 50) adds that motivation is an internal process that guides and sustains behaviour over time. Research by Veraksa et al. (2022) clarifies this by identifying three main indicators of children's learning motivation, namely: intrinsic motivation, which is reflected in children's enjoyment of learning new things and asking questions; extrinsic motivation, which is evident in children's responses to praise and rewards; and persistence or tenacity, which is demonstrated by not giving up easily and trying again when they fail. Thus, learning motivation can be understood as a dynamic psychological construct, encompassing internal and external factors that encourage children to actively engage in learning activities, while fostering habits of curiosity, responsibility, and resilience as the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning. According to Septiana (2021, p. 49), learning motivation can be influenced by two main factors: intrinsic motivation, which arises from within the individual such as interest, positive attitudes, and natural curiosity; and extrinsic motivation, which comes from external influences such as encouragement, instructions, or environmental conditions including teaching methods and learning tools. Learning motivation also has several characteristics (Septiana, 2021, p. 51): the desire to succeed, the presence of learning needs, future aspirations, recognition and rewards for achievement, and engaging activities that encourage participation. These elements demonstrate that learning motivation is both a psychological drive and a practical condition that sustains students' efforts to achieve academic goals.

Father's Role

Fathers are now generally expected to take an active role in sharing parenting responsibilities with mothers (O'Brien, 2005; Henz, 2019). Generally, fathers tend to engage in more playful activities with their children, whereas mothers usually concentrate more on nurturing (Wilson et al.; Chu & Lee, 2019). Another aspect of childcare that

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reflects “taking responsibility” involves engaging in the daily, routine tasks of caring for children—activities that are often seen as less enjoyable and just for fun activity with father (Raley et al., 2012).

Studies from Raley, Bianchi and Wang (2012) found that research on how parents spend their time reveals that fathers are much more likely to care for their children alongside mothers rather than alone (Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Budig and Folbre 2004; Craig 2006). These findings highlight an important aspect of childcare related to the amount of time a parent spends with their child—specifically, who assumes responsibility for fulfilling the child's needs. When both parents are present, the responsibility is often shared or passed between them. However, when fathers care for their children alone, they tend to take on greater responsibility for anticipating and meeting their children's needs compared to when these duties are shared with another adult. Fathers with working wives may spend more time parenting solo than those who are the sole earners. Additionally, when mothers work irregular hours, fathers tend to take on more childcare duties (Presser 2003; Wight, Raley, and Bianchi 2008; Raley et al., 2012).

The preschool stage is marked by increasingly active interactions between parents and children, as children rapidly develop language and cognitive skills and show greater initiative (Park, 2014; Chu & Lee, 2019). During this time, fathers' participation in childcare helps support the child's ability to regulate emotions and develop coping mechanisms, while also encouraging emotional expression and empathy (Sarkadi et al.; Chu & Lee, 2019). Additionally, a child's understanding of gender roles and self-identity may be shaped by their relationship with their father (Halpern, 2016; Chu & Lee, 2019).

METHOD

This study were indetified and searched from online database, such as the Google Scholar databases for articles. The 49 articles were founded by using search term like “ self-regulation” OR “independence” OR “early childhood” OR “ father's involement” AND “fathers Role” and cross-referencing. Out of 49 results, the articles lacking parenting and gender were excluded. The final research was completed at 2025-09-12. Additional relevant references from these articles were also reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that self-regulation has a role in increasing learning motivation. This shows that children who are able to manage their emotions, attention, and behaviour are more motivated to learn. Self-regulation helps children stay focused on their goals, control their impulses, and persevere even when faced with difficulties—all of which are important components of learning engagement. Increased self-regulation is associated with an increase in motivation. Children with good self-regulation are able to maintain enthusiasm and avoid boredom when faced with challenging learning tasks. Thus, self-regulation functions as an internal mechanism that supports learning motivation.

Zimmerman's theory of self-regulated learning provides a strong theoretical basis for interpreting these findings. According to Zimmerman, self-regulation encompasses metacognition, motivation, and behaviour, which together guide students to achieve learning goals. The results of this study support Zimmerman's perspective by showing that children with better self-regulation exhibit higher learning motivation. In the context of absent fathers, self-regulation becomes a very important skill, as it equips children with strategies to deal with emotional challenges and remain engaged in the learning process. Therefore, teaching self-regulation skills from an early age can be a protective factor for children growing up in single-parent families.

These findings are in line with research by Basaria and Margaretha (2024), which shows that self-regulation has a significant relationship with academic motivation in adolescents. Although the age groups are different, the consistency of findings across various stages of development confirms that self-regulation is very important for maintaining motivation. In the context of early childhood, this study shows that self-regulation already plays an important role, so educators and caregivers need to make a conscious effort to develop this capacity. Training children to manage their emotions and focus their attention can significantly increase their motivation to learn, especially in situations where their fathers are not involved.

The results of the study also show that independence has a role in increasing learning motivation in early childhood children who do not have a father figure. These findings show that the higher the child's independence, the greater their motivation to engage in learning activities. Independence allows children to complete tasks on their own, make simple decisions, and take initiative, which in turn fosters self-confidence and responsibility. These psychological attributes contribute to enthusiasm and perseverance in the learning process. These results confirm that children who are supported to develop independence from an early age are more likely to become motivated learners who willingly explore and face new challenges.

These findings are consistent with Erikson's psychosocial theory, particularly the initiative versus guilt stage, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy and initiative in childhood. When children are given the opportunity to act independently, they develop a sense of competence that has a positive impact on their intrinsic motivation to learn. Conversely, when children are overly restricted and not given the space to practice independence, they may experience doubt and decreased motivation in the context of learning. Thus, independence is not only a behavioural achievement but also a psychological driver of motivation.

These findings are also consistent with previous studies, as reported by Setiawati and Panduwina (2024), that independence is a significant predictor of learning motivation in higher education. Although the populations are different, the similarity of results across age groups shows that independence is a stable factor related to motivation throughout all levels of education. In the context of early childhood without a father figure, independence becomes even more crucial, as children often have to rely more on themselves in carrying out daily activities and learning activities. This emphasizes the importance of the role of mothers and teachers in creating an environment that encourages independence, so that children have the confidence and drive to achieve academic success.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study that has been conducted, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, self-regulation has a role in increasing relationship with the learning motivation of early childhood. Children who are able to control their emotions, regulate their attention, and restrain impulsive behaviour will be more focused and consistent in their learning. They do not give up easily when faced with difficulties, but are able to persevere and complete tasks better. Self-regulation in this case functions as an internal mechanism that supports children to remain engaged in the learning process, especially in situations where the father is not present. Second, independence was also found to have a significant relationship with learning motivation. Children who demonstrate the ability to do tasks on their own, take initiative, and dare to make simple decisions tend to have higher learning enthusiasm. This can be seen from how their self-confidence and sense of responsibility develop.

Third, this study shows that these two aspects complement each other. Independence provides a foundation of initiative and courage to try, while self-regulation helps maintain consistency, focus, and emotional control so that children stay on the right track. Thus, these two factors can be viewed as twin pillars that support early childhood learning motivation. From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study have important implications for parents and teachers. A supportive environment, both at home and at school, is essential for fostering independence and training children in self-regulation from an early age. Mothers, as the primary figure in families without a father, play a major role in providing children with opportunities to practice independence while guiding them in regulating their emotions and behaviour. Teachers can also contribute through structured, enjoyable learning activities that give children space to develop initiative and self-control.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces Erikson's psychosocial theory, which emphasizes the importance of initiative and autonomy in childhood, while also supporting Zimmerman's self-regulated learning theory, which places self-regulation as an important factor in achieving learning goals. The consistency of the findings with previous studies on different age groups shows that independence and self-regulation are universal factors that influence learning motivation throughout all stages of education. Thus, it can be concluded that efforts to increase learning motivation in early childhood, especially in the context of absent fathers, need to focus on developing independence and self-regulation simultaneously. These two aspects complement each other and form an important foundation for children to grow into confident, independent, disciplined individuals with a continuous spirit of learning.

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