The Key to Child Independence Starting at Home: A Case Study on The Role of Parenting Styles and Practical Life Skills

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ABSTRAK

This study aims to examine how parental parenting affects the development of *practical life skills* in early childhood. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with parents and educators of children aged 4-6 years. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification, accompanied by triangulation techniques to increase the validity of findings. The results showed that authoritative parenting styles were most effective in fostering children's independence, while permissive and authoritarian parenting tended to inhibit such development. Parents' challenges are generally related to time constraints, social pressures, and cultural norms that do not support children's exploration. Socio-cultural and environmental factors have been shown to mediate the effectiveness of parenting significantly. The implications of this study confirm the importance of building a consistent, responsive, and contextual parenting ecosystem in supporting children's life skills. These findings are expected to be an important contribution to the development of early childhood education policies that are more adaptive to social and cultural dynamics of society.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is widely acknowledged as a critical period for developing practical life skills daily routines and self help abilities that form the foundation for autonomy, emotional regulation, and social integration (Putra et al., 2025). Educational theorists such as Maria Montessori emphasize the importance of early independence, structured routines, and hands on learning experiences in fostering children's holistic development. However, a significant gap persists between this theoretical consensus and the realities observed in many households (Brunson et al., 2023) . In practice, numerous parents either due to lack of knowledge, cultural tendencies, or socioeconomic constraints underestimate or delay the introduction of practical life tasks to young children. In some contexts, overprotective parenting styles limit children's opportunities to perform basic life tasks independently, inadvertently fostering dependency rather than capability (Ankrah et al., 2020) . The discrepancy between what children *should* be doing according to developmental theory and what they *actually* experience in their home environments is particularly pronounced in urban, dual income, or high-stress families. This gap raises important questions about how parenting styles influence the development or suppression of these essential early competencies. How do real world parenting behaviors align with, or diverge from, the developmental principles advocated in educational and psychological theories.

Previous research has addressed various aspects of parenting and its influence on children's socio-emotional development, academic readiness, and behavioral outcomes. Baumrind's typology of parenting styles authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful has been particularly influential in linking parenting approaches with child developmental outcomes (Ahmed, 2025). Studies have shown that authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structure, tends to yield the most favorable developmental results. Additionally, several studies by Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel (2020) have explored the cultivation of practical life skills

through preschool curricula, especially in Montessori environments. However, few studies have directly examined how specific parenting styles influence the *acquisition* of practical life skills in children during early childhood especially within the everyday home context, outside of structured educational settings. Even fewer studies have employed a qualitative approach to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of parents in this domain. Therefore, this research occupies a unique position by bridging educational theory with parenting psychology through qualitative investigation, aiming to fill the void left by predominantly quantitative and school-based studies (Sabnis & Wolgemuth, 2024). It adds depth to existing knowledge by focusing specifically on home-based routines and parental influence on early life skill formation.

This study offers a novel contribution by focusing on the intersection between parenting styles and the development of practical life skills in children aged 4-6 years, viewed through the lens of real life family practices. While existing studies typically prioritize academic or emotional outcomes of parenting, this research investigates a more functional and foundational domain: everyday skills such as dressing, cleaning, feeding, and organizing personal belongings (Wiyono et al., 2020). The uniqueness lies not only in the subject matter but also in the methodological choice: a qualitative case study design that explores in-depth parental narratives and contextual influences. This approach enables a richer understanding of *how* parenting behaviors manifest in home environments and *why* some children develop strong life skills while others lag behind despite similar educational backgrounds (Wiyono et al., 2023). Furthermore, this study emphasizes the cultural and socioeconomic nuances that shape parental attitudes and behaviors toward children's independence (Pramono et al., 2023). By capturing diverse parental voices, this study contributes to both early childhood education and parenting literature, offering practical insights for educators, counselors, and policy makers who seek to support skill development in early years through family centered strategies.

This study aims to explore the relationship between parenting styles and the development of practical life skills in early childhood, with a particular focus on home based experiences rather than school-based interventions. The core questions to be investigated can be articulated as to how different parenting styles influence the development of practical life skills in children aged 4-6 years, the challenges and motivations parents perceive in fostering or inhibiting practical life skills at home and the ways in which socio-cultural and environmental factors mediate the relationship between parenting practices and children's functional independence. This reflects a multidimensional interest in both patterns of parental behavior and the contextual conditions that frame those behaviors. By asking these questions, this study seeks to uncover not only the outcomes of parenting decisions but also the underlying beliefs, routines and constraints that shape those decisions. This study is designed to generate insights into the processes by which practical life skills are fostered or inhibited in the home environment.

The preliminary argument underlying this study is that authoritative parenting characterized by consistent routines, emotional warmth, and encouragement of autonomy plays a pivotal role in nurturing practical life skills in early childhood. Conversely, authoritarian or permissive parenting may hinder the development of these competencies due to either excessive control or lack of structure (Yanxue et al., 2024). This argument is informed by developmental theories that emphasize the importance of responsive and structured environments in fostering self-regulation and initiative. Furthermore, the study assumes that cultural expectations and socioeconomic factors may either reinforce or counteract the effects of parenting style (Ali et al., 2023). For example, in some cultural settings, children may be discouraged from engaging in self-care tasks due to perceptions of age-inappropriateness or parental anxieties around mess and safety. Therefore, parenting style alone may not fully predict life skill outcomes without

considering broader contextual variables (Salavera et al., 2022). Through qualitative inquiry, this study seeks to test and refine this argument by capturing the nuances of parenting decisions, thereby advancing a more holistic understanding of how early life competencies are formed within the family unit.

The purpose of this study is to explore how different parenting styles influence the development of practical life skills in children aged 4-6 years, with a specific focus on home based experiences rather than formal educational settings. By examining parental behaviors, motivations, and challenges within their real life socio cultural and environmental contexts, this research seeks to uncover the ways in which authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting approaches either support or hinder the cultivation of everyday competencies such as dressing, feeding, cleaning, and organizing. The study aims to bridge the gap between educational theory and family practice by employing a qualitative case study design that captures parental narratives, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the contextual factors such as culture, socioeconomic status, and household structure that shape functional independence in early childhood. Ultimately, this research contributes to early childhood education and parenting literature by generating insights that can inform family-centered strategies and policy development to better support children's holistic growth and autonomy at home.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Priya, 2021). This approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to explore in depth and holistically the dynamics of the relationship between parenting styles and the development of practical life skills in early childhood. Case studies are chosen to understand the complex and specific social contexts in which behaviors and meanings develop naturally (Cleland et al., 2021). This study does not aim to generalize statistics, but to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in one particular location by taking into account the social, cultural, and environmental contexts that accompany it. The research was carried out at BA Restu 1 Malang, a kindergarten based on Islamic values and strong cultural locality. This location was chosen because it has a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds for students' families, as well as the implementation of children's independence activities that are part of the school's daily program. In addition, this kindergarten is located in an environment that still upholds local cultural norms, making it a relevant place to explore how social norms and structures affect parenting patterns and child development.

The sources of information in this study consist of main and supporting informants. The main informarman is the parents of children aged 4-6 years who are registered at BA Restu 1 Malang. They were selected based on the variety of parenting backgrounds and involvement in the child's daily life (Bornstein et al., 2022). Supporting informants include classroom teachers involved in parenting (such as grandmothers or home caregivers). They provide additional perspectives on child development and parenting practices applied in home and school settings (Lehrl et al., 2020).

Data was collected through two main techniques, namely participatory observation, carried out during the teaching-learning process and daily activities of children at school to directly observe children's independent practices, children's interactions with teachers and peers, and children's responses to practical tasks. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with parents and teachers to gain an understanding of the parenting styles applied, challenges and motivations in shaping children's life skills, as well as perceptions of social and environmental factors that affect the development of children's independence. Interviews were conducted personally, recorded with respondents' permission, and transcribed for analysis purposes. Data analysis is carried out in stages based on the model (Miles et al., 2014) with the following procedure.
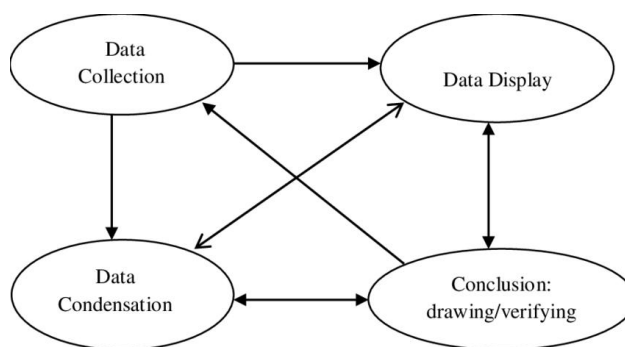
Figure 1. Data Analysis

To improve the validity of the data, triangulation techniques are used, which is to compare the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure the consistency of information. In addition, confirmation was carried out to the informant (member check) to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with the respondent's original experience (Zairul, 2021).

RESULT and DISCUSSION
Result

In this study, practical life skills are defined as basic skills that support the independence of children aged 4-6 years in daily activities, such as dressing themselves, cleaning up toys, eating without assistance, and participating in light household activities such as sweeping or making the bed. "Parenting style" refers to the parenting pattern used by parents in guiding, regulating, and responding to children's needs classified into four types according to Baumrind: authoritative (warm and firm), authoritarian (hard and rigid), permissive (loose without rules), and neglectful (minimal involvement). Meanwhile, "sociocultural" factors include local values, norms, and beliefs that influence how parents educate children, and "environmental factors" include the physical and social conditions of the household such as the number of family members, time availability, and economic background. These three elements are the basis for analyzing how children's life skills are formed through complex interactions between parenting patterns, social values, and family conditions.

Interview with informant Mrs. SA, a housewife with two children, showed that she adheres to an authoritative parenting style. She stated :

> "Since the age of 3, I have made it a habit for my children to eat on their own. At first, it was very messy, rice everywhere, sometimes more spilled than what went into the mouth. But I still let him try it on his own. I am sure that if he is not accustomed to it from a young age, he will continue to depend on others. Usually I give an example first, then I ask him to try to repeat. I also give praise even though the results are not perfect, so that he is enthusiastic. Now when he eats, he doesn't wait to be fed. Even if it spills, he takes his own wipes and cleans them up. (W_SA_2025)"

On the other hand, informant Mrs. MP, a doctor with a busy work schedule, admitted to implementing a parenting style that tends to be permissive. She said :

> "If in the morning, I would rather help him put on clothes than wait for him for a long time. Sometimes I can't bear to see him in distress. I think as long as the child is not fussy and everything is done, yes, already. But now I'm starting to

realize, maybe I should also be more patient and give her space to study on her own. (W_MP_2025)"

From these two narratives, it can be seen that parents' motivations and challenges in encouraging children's life skills are greatly influenced by the time available, their level of patience, and their perception of children's independence. While Mrs. S emphasized the importance of the learning process even though it is not immediately perfect, Mrs. M focuses more on daily efficiency, which risks hindering children's opportunities to learn independently. In addition, Mrs. RI's class teacher also argued that ;

"The parenting style that is applied while at home will also have an impact on activities in the classroom. For example, children who are raised with an authoritarian parenting tend to be afraid to try new things. They wait for orders, do not take initiative, and even look hesitant when they have to complete independent tasks such as tidying up stationery or opening their own provisions. It was as if they were afraid of being wrong. Some children who at home say "this is not allowed, it is not allowed," all are arranged. In class, they become passive. When we give them exploratory tasks such as choosing materials for crafts or role-playing, they get confused, keep quiet, or constantly ask, "Mom, is it okay?" Even though other friends can immediately make a decision (W_RI_2025)".

The results of three weeks of observation at BA Restu 1 Malang showed significant differences in the independence of children who were raised with different approaches. Children from parents with authoritative parenting styles generally appeared more confident and alert in activities such as tidying up bags, washing hands before eating, or arranging sandals. In contrast, some children who were raised in a permissive or authoritarian manner appeared more passive, often waiting for help from teachers for simple tasks, or showing excessive dependence. In the practice sessions of washing hands and tidying up stationery, it was seen that children from families with open communication patterns and habituation of activities at home were able to complete tasks without repeated directions. Interactions with teachers were also more positive: they tended to ask or request help politely when they really needed it. These data strengthen the assumption that independence is not only influenced by children's cognitive abilities, but also by the involvement and behavioral patterns of parents at home.

Based on the results of interviews and observations, it can be understood that early childhood life skills are closely related to parenting patterns, which indirectly shape children's self-confidence and initiative in daily activities. Parents who consistently involve children in domestic tasks tend to have children who are more functionally and socially prepared. On the other hand, time constraints, negative perceptions of the "hassle" of teaching children, or ignorance of the importance of life skills cause some parents to not provide space for children to learn independently. The sociocultural context of Malang, which still highly values obedience and order, also influences the disciplinary approach used by parents. Therefore, it is important to see the process of forming children's life skills not only as a result of individual behavior, but as a product of the dynamic interaction between parenting patterns, cultural values, and environmental conditions.

Discussion
Parenting Styles and the Development of Practical Life Skills: Convergence with Theory

The results of this study show that authoritative parenting styles make the most significant contribution to the formation of practical life skills of children aged 4-6 years. This is in line with the findings of (Tiwari, 2022; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2023), who stated that authoritative

parenting characterized by a balance between warmth and boundaries encourages children to become independent and responsible. Children of parents who use this approach show initiative, confidence, and the ability to complete daily tasks independently (Volman & 't Gilde, 2021). On the other hand, permissive and authoritarian parenting tends to produce children who are less functionally skilled, both due to a lack of structure and direction (permissive) and due to a lack of space for exploration and autonomy (authoritarian). These findings confirm the importance of warm and responsive interaction in the formation of independent living habits, which are not only driven by instruction, but also by learning opportunities and perseverance in the process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Interestingly, the research also found that some parents who consciously attempted to apply authoritative strategies faced resistance from their environment. Cultural norms that emphasize obedience and parental authority sometimes clashed with the ideals of child autonomy and exploration (Sikorska, 2023). As a result, even well-intentioned authoritative parents reported feeling pressured to revert to more authoritarian practices, especially when under social scrutiny or time constraints. These nuances highlight the dynamic nature of parenting practices in real life, where style is not merely a fixed category but a fluid adaptation to context and constraints. Therefore, while theory emphasizes the superiority of the authoritative style, this research suggests that practical application requires support not only from the family but also from the broader sociocultural environment (Carton et al., 2021). It underscores the need for public awareness and education programs that reinforce the benefits of autonomy-supportive parenting in fostering children's daily life competencies (Wiyono et al., 2019).

Parental Challenges and Motivations: Structural Barriers and Cultural Norms

This study also reveals various challenges faced by parents in getting their children used to independent activities. Most of the challenges arise from structural factors such as time constraints due to work, fatigue, and pressure to complete household tasks quickly. These findings are in line with a study by (Ferreira et al., 2023; Kalil & Ryan, 2020), which showed that limited time in the family has a direct impact on the quality of parenting interactions. On the other hand, parents' motivation in shaping children's independence is driven by the long-term desire for children to be better prepared to face the social world. However, local cultural values also play a significant role. In an environment like Malang, social norms that emphasize neatness, obedience, and "good children" can suppress children's exploratory efforts, as children's untidy or slow activities are often considered to disrupt the order. This creates a tension between social values and children's developmental needs, which has a direct impact on the consistency of the application of life skills at home (Li et al., 2023).

In addition to structural and cultural factors, emotional dynamics within the family also influence how consistently parents promote practical life skills (Putra et al., 2024). Many parents reported feelings of guilt when seeing their children struggle, especially during activities that require patience and repetition, such as dressing, cleaning, or eating independently. This emotional response often leads to parental intervention doing the task for the child rather than allowing the child to persist through difficulty. This aligns with the findings of (Li et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022), who emphasized that parental autonomy support is often compromised by parents' discomfort with their child's momentary distress or failure. Moreover, gender expectations influence how independence is encouraged. Some parents admitted that they were more tolerant of boys being less self reliant, assuming that independence would come "naturally with age," while girls were expected to help more with household chores early on. This gender bias creates uneven developmental opportunities between boys and girls, as also highlighted in the work of on gender socialization (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020).

Despite these barriers, parental motivation remains strong. Many participants expressed a clear awareness that early independence is crucial for long-term resilience and adaptability (Mentges et al., 2023). They believe that children who can manage their own needs are better equipped to navigate formal education settings and social expectations. However, they also acknowledged that without broader support such as school reinforcement, community understanding, and flexible work arrangements efforts at home often face setbacks. These findings suggest that promoting practical life skills is not solely an individual parenting responsibility but a collective developmental agenda. A supportive socio-educational framework that aligns parental motivation with institutional expectations could enhance consistency and success in early independence training (Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, structural interventions must go hand-in-hand with parental awareness in fostering long-lasting life skills in young children.

Socio-Cultural and Environmental Mediation: The Role of Context

Another important finding is how socio cultural and environmental factors play a mediating role in the relationship between parenting style and child independence. Families with large extended family structures, limited economic conditions, or dependence on external caregivers (such as grandmothers or neighbors), often exhibit inconsistent parenting (Matovu et al., 2024). This results in the strengthening of children's dependency and the inhibition of the development of life skills. Social context is the main medium of children's cognitive and functional development. When the context is not supportive, even a good parenting style can be ineffective. For example, parents who intend to encourage children to tidy up toys are often "corrected" by other family members who think the task is not appropriate for early childhood (Packer & Dulcey, 2022). As such, it is important for early childhood education interventions to not only target children and parents, but also the surrounding support systems.

This research further illustrates that children's autonomy cannot be developed in isolation from the socio cultural ecosystem in which they live. When parenting goals conflict with prevailing social norms or environmental constraints, the child receives mixed signals, which can hinder their functional independence (Ozturk, 2022). For instance, in several cases observed during the study, parents who had initially applied authoritative parenting practices felt compelled to "give in" when living with older relatives who held more traditional views on child rearing such as the belief that young children should be served rather than taught to serve themselves. This tension confirms Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Iruka et al., 2020; Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2023). which posits that child development is shaped by multiple layers of influence, including microsystems like the immediate family and mesosystems such as interactions between home and school. In families where schools reinforce autonomy and exploration, children tend to show better development in life skills even when home environments are not fully supportive. Conversely, when both school and family environments emphasize obedience over initiative, children's independent behaviors become stunted (Ningzi, 2024). Environmental limitations such as cramped living spaces, lack of child-friendly tools, or safety concerns also affect whether children are given the opportunity to practice functional tasks like preparing food or organizing belongings (Jansson et al., 2022). In economically constrained households, these tasks may be viewed as risks or burdens rather than learning opportunities. Therefore, encouraging independence is not merely a matter of will but of access, awareness, and shared community values.

Implications: Functional Dispositions and Structural Interventions

The main implication of the results of this study is that the success of the formation of practical life skills in children does not solely depend on the intentions or efforts of parents, but also on the support structures around them. If an effective parenting pattern is not balanced by a

supportive social environment, then the educational function of the home will be disrupted. In terms of function and dysfunction, families that are able to create stable routines and expectations will optimally support the child's independence, while families with inconsistencies in patterns and cultural pressures will increase the risk of developmental dysfunction (Rolland, 2025). Therefore, early childhood education interventions need to be holistic involving parenting training, local value based counseling, and facilitation of a home environment that supports children's exploration. Because if not, then non adaptive social and cultural structures will continue to be hidden obstacles in the formation of children's independence functions that should develop from an early age.

Another implication relates to policy level support. The role of social welfare, economic assistance, and family-friendly work arrangements cannot be ignored in shaping how parents parent (Heikkinen et al., 2024). Time poverty, job insecurity, and lack of access to quality childcare all reduce parents' emotional and physical bandwidth to consistently implement autonomy-supportive parenting. Therefore, structural interventions such as providing flexible working hours, offering parent education as part of health or social services, or integrating life skills training in early childhood curricula are not merely supportive but foundational to equitable child development (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Finally, the data highlights that interventions must respect and integrate local cultural values rather than impose external models. Local wisdom can serve as an entry point for behavioral change if reframed in ways that support developmental goals. For example, the cultural value of "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation) can be transformed into a shared parenting ethos where communities collectively take responsibility for building children's independence, rather than leaving it solely to nuclear families.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant influence of parenting style on the development of practical life skills in children aged 4–6 years, with authoritative parenting emerging as the most effective due to its balanced combination of assertiveness and warmth. It also reveals that parents' motivations and challenges in nurturing children's independence are closely tied to time constraints, social expectations, and local cultural values, emphasizing that fostering independence is not merely about educational strategies, but also about parents' willingness to step out of their comfort zones and create a supportive environment. Scientifically, this research contributes to the evolving discourse in early childhood education by stressing the integration of parenting approaches, cultural contexts, and social environments in shaping children's functional independence. Using a qualitative case study method, the study offers rich insights often missed in quantitative research, though it is limited by its narrow geographical scope, lack of gender diversity, and exclusive reliance on qualitative methods. Thus, future research employing quantitative or mixed methods with broader demographic and cultural representation is essential to produce a more comprehensive understanding and inform inclusive, context-sensitive educational policy.

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