



# An Analysis of Independence in Children and Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities at MILB YKTM Budi Asih

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## Abstract

Independence refers to an individual's ability to carry out daily activities without relying on others, such as self-care, interacting with the surrounding environment, and completing tasks autonomously. It also encompasses emotional, behavioral, moral, and intellectual aspects that enable a person to navigate daily life without dependence on others. This study aims to analyze the level of independence among children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities at MILB YKTM Budi Asih. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method, collecting data through observations and interviews with students with intellectual disabilities, their parents, and teachers. The findings indicate that the level of independence among children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities at MILB YKTM Budi Asih varies across emotional, behavioral, moral, and intellectual aspects. Although there remains some dependence on parents for certain daily activities, the specialized education provided by the school has made efforts to support the development of independence among these children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** Independence; Intellectual Disability; Special Needs.

## Introduction

Not all children are born with typical abilities; some are born with disabilities, whether physical or mental. Among the various types of special needs, intellectual disability (ID) is a condition where individuals experience limitations in intelligence, which can significantly impact their cognitive development and adaptive behavior. Children with ID typically have an IQ below 70, which makes it difficult for them to achieve independence and comprehend abstract concepts. These limitations often result in various challenges, making it hard for them to live independently, even in the simplest terms. Despite these challenges, individuals with such limitations generally aspire not to be a burden to others. Children with ID require special care to reach their maximum potential. In this context, it is crucial to provide training and support to help them achieve independence in various environments, including at home, school, and within the broader social context. Independence is a vital trait for individuals to avoid dependence on others. Many strategies can be implemented to cultivate independence in these individuals. Independence is essential for all individuals, including children with special needs, such as those with intellectual disabilities. While family plays a crucial role in fostering independence, various other methods can also be employed to encourage these individuals to become self-sufficient.

However, the reality in the field indicates that many children with ID still lack independence. According to Alimin (as cited in Tarsidi, 2013), independence in children with ID should encompass adaptive behavioral skills, such as self-care and adapting to their environment. Achieving this level of independence is not easy for children with ID. Their



intellectual limitations result in delayed activities, as evidenced by the statement: "Mental retardation or intellectual disability is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning below the average level. As a result, children with such conditions require special education due to their mental health challenges." These limitations are evident in various adaptive skills, such as communication, self-care, social skills, health and safety, academics, and tasks related to leisure and work. For children with ID, independence means achieving their potential within their limitations. As such, these children require special services and guidance to fully develop their abilities and potential. Therefore, it is essential to teach independence to children with ID to ensure they do not constantly depend on others, particularly those around them who must support them in becoming independent. If these children are not taught to be independent, they will struggle with daily activities and remain reliant on those around them. The ability of children with ID to assist themselves does not come naturally by imitating their parents or others, as it does with typically developing children. Instead, it must be cultivated through structured self-care lessons provided in school. According to Mumpuniarti (as cited in Nur Amaliyah and Dr. Idris Ahmad, 2015), self-care programs are specially designed curricula to enable students with intellectual disabilities to assist themselves in areas related to their needs.

Research on the independence of children with ID has been extensively conducted (Alfita Sari & Heris Santy, 2018; Astuti, 2018; Zahro, 2018; Anisa et al., 2022; Mubarok et al., 2022; Awalin et al., 2023). However, most of these studies focus solely on the children without incorporating the perspectives of those closest to them, such as parents and teachers. This study involves broader participation, including input from parents and teachers of children with ID, providing a more in-depth understanding of the independence of these children from the perspectives of those closest to them. Additionally, it allows for a comparison of the independence of children and adolescents with ID. In general education settings, self-care skills are not typically taught as a separate subject but are integrated into other subjects such as religion or social studies. While typically developing children can learn self-care skills at home directly from their parents without formal training, children with ID face challenges even in basic tasks like dressing themselves, requiring significant time and specialized guidance from both teachers and parents. Training children with ID to perform tasks such as dressing themselves often requires repetitive instruction and supervision before they can complete the task independently.

## Literature Review

### Intellectual Disability

The term *intellectual disability* (ID) derives from the word *tuna*, meaning loss or impairment, and *grahita*, meaning intellect (Pujiastuti, 2021). According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, ID is defined as a mental disability characterized by poor cognitive abilities, idiocy, or mental retardation. Intellectual disability, or mental retardation, refers to a condition where cognitive development is arrested or incomplete, accompanied by physical and mental impairments that affect intellectual functioning as a whole (Maslim, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as cited in Heward and Alber-Morgan (2017), defines intellectual disability as significantly below-average general intellectual functioning, accompanied by deficits in adaptive behavior that emerge during the developmental period, adversely affecting a child's educational performance. IDEA outlines three criteria for diagnosing intellectual disability: first, significantly below-average intellectual functioning, typically indicated by an IQ score of approximately 70 or below on standardized intelligence tests; second, significant difficulties in performing daily life tasks (adaptive behavior); and third, the onset of intellectual and adaptive behavior deficits during the developmental period to distinguish intellectual disability from other conditions, such as intellectual impairments resulting from traumatic brain injury. A child demonstrating substantial limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior automatically meets IDEA's criteria for an intellectual disability that negatively impacts educational performance. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), as referenced by Heward and Alber-Morgan (2017), defines intellectual disability as significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, with the condition manifesting before the age of 18. Intellectual disabilities are classified into four groups based on traditional IQ scoring: mild (IQ 70-55), moderate (IQ 55-40), severe (IQ 40-25), and profound (IQ below 25) (Heward & Alber-Morgan, 2017).



### **Characteristics of Children with Intellectual Disabilities**

Children with intellectual disabilities generally exhibit several characteristics (Heward & Alber-Morgan, 2017). First, they have a slower learning rate compared to children without disabilities, requiring more time to acquire new knowledge and skills. Second, memory problems are a frequent challenge, with more severe cognitive impairments leading to greater memory issues. Third, these children tend to be slower in focusing on relevant features of learning tasks and often struggle to maintain attention during these tasks. Fourth, students with intellectual disabilities often have difficulty generalizing newly learned knowledge and skills to different settings or situations. Lastly, their motivation to learn is often low, particularly when faced with difficult tasks or problems, leading some to quickly give up and rely on others for help. Cognitive functioning and learning characteristics in individuals with intellectual disabilities include a slow learning rate, poor memory, attention difficulties, challenges in maintaining and generalizing learning, and low motivation.

### **Independence**

The concept of *independence* derives from the Javanese word *mandiri*, meaning self-reliant. Psychologically and spiritually, independence refers to the state of being able to make decisions or perform tasks in life without relying on others. This capability only becomes possible when individuals can carefully consider the outcomes of their decisions and actions, weighing both the benefits and potential drawbacks (Basri, 1996). A person is considered independent if they can make their own decisions and are not continuously controlled by others (Benson & Grove, 2000). Independence is based on the paradigm that each individual or group is responsible for their own life. According to Stein and Book (2000), independence is the ability to direct and control one's thoughts and actions without feeling emotionally dependent on others. Based on the definitions provided by various experts, independence can be summarized as an individual's ability to perform self-care tasks independently, such as eating, dressing, bathing, and managing personal hygiene without assistance. It also encompasses the ability to make emotional decisions and engage in social interactions independently. In early childhood, independence is part of the developmental process that prepares a child for adulthood. Essentially, a child's independence is the ability to think, feel, and act on their own without external assistance, consistent with the daily responsibilities of life.

Independence can be successfully developed when children are given the opportunity to practice it through continuous training and habituation. For instance, parents can offer their children the chance to help with household chores, which in turn fosters independent behavior and allows the child to develop self-reliance within the family. This independent attitude should be instilled in children as early as possible, as it has a positive impact on their overall development. However, not all communities recognize the importance of independence as a vital life skill, and some may underestimate, neglect, or fail to teach it to their children. While pampering children is acceptable to some extent, parents must also adapt to changing circumstances. As children enter adolescence, it becomes time to gradually release them to act independently, though still under parental guidance. Each individual possesses a certain level of independence, which can vary based on their developmental process and learning experiences (Kustiah, 2020). Cultivating and developing independence requires effort, as every child has the right to grow and develop optimally (Ferawati, 2021). Independence can be understood as the ability to make decisions regarding daily activities or needs, based on rational thinking, self-confidence, and assertiveness. According to Yolanda and Ahmad (2019), indicators of learning independence include personal freedom in learning, self-management in learning, and self-direction in organizing material. A child's independence results from a complex interaction between internal and external factors. One significant factor is parental upbringing.

Children tend to mimic the behaviors they observe in their parents. If parents demonstrate independence in their daily lives, such as time management, decision-making, and task completion, children are likely to learn and replicate these attitudes. Emotional support provided by parents also plays a crucial role in boosting a child's self-confidence, which in turn encourages them to take initiative and responsibility for their actions. In addition to upbringing, assigning responsibilities to children is another influential factor in developing independence. When children are given household responsibilities, they learn to manage their time and tasks and understand the consequences of their actions. This process helps them build positive character traits, such as responsibility, discipline, and hard work. Furthermore, giving children responsibilities reduces their dependence on adults, strengthens family bonds through their positive



contributions, and creates a balanced relationship between trust and appropriate guidance. The environment also plays a role in shaping a child's independence. Interactions with peers help children learn to communicate, resolve conflicts, and collaborate independently. A supportive school environment can also facilitate the development of independent skills. Additionally, a child's individual characteristics influence their level of independence. The ability to understand and manage one's emotions, as well as the emotions of others, is crucial in adapting to various situations and responding effectively to challenges. Finally, family support plays a critical role in fostering a child's independence. A family environment that provides emotional support and allows children the freedom to try and learn from their mistakes can help them grow into independent individuals. The family not only offers children a sense of security and confidence but also prepares them to contribute positively to society. In this context, family involvement and support are essential in nurturing a child's independence. According to Werni and Zulmiyetri (2023), family support is vital for the independence of children with intellectual disabilities, helping them manage daily activities effectively.

### **Characteristics of Independent Children**

Independent children are characterized by their tendency and ability to solve problems rather than worry when faced with challenges. They are not afraid to take risks because they consider the consequences before acting. Independent children trust their judgment, so they do not frequently ask for help or seek advice. They have greater control over their lives. Self-development theory provides deep insights into the stages of psychosocial development from infancy to adulthood. One key stage in this theory is the stage of independence versus shame and doubt, which occurs during early childhood, typically between the ages of 3 and 6 years (Erikson, as cited in Julieta, 2023). During this period, children begin to develop their independence and autonomy in completing daily tasks, such as personal hygiene and choosing clothes. Erikson emphasizes the importance of positive experiences in building independence during early childhood. When children are given opportunities to explore and master their environment with the support of parents and surrounding adults, they become more confident and capable of overcoming challenges. However, if their experiences are overly restricted or criticized, children may develop identity confusion and deep feelings of shame. In adolescence, the stage of independence versus shame and doubt evolves into the stage of initiative versus guilt. During this time, adolescents face pressure to discover their identity and formulate clear life goals. They strive to become independent and explore various social roles. If they receive adequate support and can overcome self-doubt, adolescents will develop a strong sense of independence and confidence in facing the challenges of adulthood. According to Havighurst, as cited in Sa'diyah (2017), there are four aspects of independence in children: physical independence, social independence, emotional independence, and intellectual independence.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the level of independence among children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities at MILB YKTM Budi Asih. A qualitative approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon of independence from the perspective of the study participants, including children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities, as well as those directly involved with them, such as parents and teachers. The participants in this study consist of four students with intellectual disabilities from MILB YKTM Budi Asih, selected based on criteria of age and educational level. Additionally, the study involves parents and teachers of these students as informants to gain deeper insights into the independence of children with intellectual disabilities. Data were collected through observation and interviews. Observations were conducted directly in the school environment, particularly in the classroom and during learning activities. The purpose of these observations was to identify the level of independence among students with intellectual disabilities in various aspects, such as emotional, behavioral, and intellectual independence. Interviews were conducted with parents and teachers of the students to gather information about their experiences and perspectives on the development of the children's independence. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to explore relevant topics with greater flexibility. The data obtained from the observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages: coding, where key themes emerging from the data were identified and coded; categorization, where these codes were grouped into categories relevant to the research topic, such as emotional independence, behavioral independence, and intellectual independence; and interpretation, where the data were analyzed and



interpreted within the context of theories on independence and intellectual disabilities, assessing how the data support or contradict the existing literature. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the study employed source triangulation by comparing the data obtained from observations, teacher interviews, and parent interviews. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checks by verifying the interview results with the participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected their views.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The researcher began by conducting preliminary research, collecting data, and conducting interviews with the school staff. The informants from the foundation included teachers of students with intellectual disabilities who served as class guardians for these students at MILB YKTM Budi Asih. MILB YKTM Budi Asih is an educational institution equivalent to an Islamic elementary school (madrasah ibtidaiyah) located in Sukorejo, Gunung Pati District, Semarang City, Central Java. MILB YKTM Budi Asih operates under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. According to the school's administrative staff, MILB YKTM Budi Asih follows the same curriculum as other madrasah ibtidaiyah schools, from grade 1 to grade 6. However, in practice, grades 1 and 2 are combined into one class, and grades 3 to 6 are grouped together in a hall with two teachers—one supervising and the other providing instruction. Due to a shortage of teaching staff at MILB YKTM Budi Asih, this arrangement is unavoidable. Students with visual impairments are placed in separate classes from those with other disabilities. The school provides valuable information regarding the students with intellectual disabilities attending MILB, as well as monitoring their independence during school hours. After collecting preliminary data, the researcher began the study by observing the classrooms where students with intellectual disabilities were engaged in the learning process. The researcher observed four students with intellectual disabilities, consisting of two children and two adolescents.

Subject 1: A/Female/14 years old/Grade 6. A is one of four siblings. She is brought to school by her parents but is not accompanied by them during class. When we arrived in the classroom, A was sitting next to another student at the back of the class. Unlike many other students who were still playing when we arrived, A had already placed her stationery and books on her desk and was attentive during the lesson. A could interact politely with older individuals, using appropriate honorifics like "mas" or "mbak." She confidently socialized with others, asking our names and where we were from, and mentioned the university where her older sibling was studying. A could apologize when she accidentally hurt someone and properly disposed of trash. During our conversation, A asked about Nyepi Day, knew that Monday was a public holiday due to Nyepi, and understood that people were not allowed to leave their homes on that day. She also knew the timing and duration of breaks. A explained that she prepared her schoolbooks by herself the previous day. She could answer questions from the teacher, such as identifying Kalimantan Island on the map. Throughout the lesson, A followed along attentively, sitting properly and paying attention to the teacher, although she was occasionally distracted by our presence.

Subject 2: I/Female/8 years old/Grade 3. Subject I is one of two siblings. She is brought to school by her parents, who wait for her until school ends. During lessons, Subject I listened to the teacher's explanations but did not actively ask or answer questions. However, she brought the correct textbooks according to the schedule and wore the appropriate uniform. She knew when the break time was and went directly to her mother, who was waiting outside the classroom. However, she still needed help from her mother to complete her homework because she struggled with reading and writing. Interviews with her parents indicated that, despite her limitations, Subject I was already relatively independent for her age. Nevertheless, she still depended on her parents for daily tasks like eating and needed guidance for household chores and homework. The parents actively participated in teaching their children independence by providing instructions, examples, and ongoing support. Their strategies included giving routine directions and direct examples for daily tasks. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of motivation, consistently reminding and encouraging the children. The main challenge in helping the children become more independent was patience, especially in situations where the children were unresponsive or difficult to cooperate with. Therefore, patience and maintaining positive communication with the children were crucial in overcoming these challenges.



Subject 3: A/Female/10 years old/Grade 3. Subject A is one of two siblings. She is brought to school by her mother, who stays with her throughout the school day. In class, Subject A tended to be quiet and shy. However, when asked a question by the teacher, she could answer, even if the answer was incorrect. She was also willing to come to the front of the class when called by the teacher. During lessons, Subject A mostly played and talked with her seatmate. Emotionally, Subject A did not display anger or a bad mood; she was cheerful, although she remained quiet. She rarely interacted with other students due to her shyness. Similarly, when asked questions by us, Subject A was hesitant to respond. When we interviewed her parents, Subject A seemed shy and chose to play with her seatmate. It was evident that at home, Subject A had been trained to be independent in basic tasks such as eating and bathing, although still under her parents' supervision. She could get food on her own when hungry and informed her parents when she had homework, often inviting them to help her complete it, although her parents sometimes had to ask her first. At home, Subject A occasionally swept the floor without being told by her parents. She never left the house because her peers did not want to play with her, so she stayed home and played with her mother. Subject A rarely used a mobile phone, as her parents discouraged this habit.

Subject 4: K/Male/14 years old. Subject K is brought to school by his parents, who then leave him at school. K could remove his shoes and place them in the designated area on his own. In class, K was quite active and calm during the lessons. Despite being calm compared to his peers, K was able to socialize and joke with his friends. When the teacher was explaining the lesson, he paid attention. When the teacher showed a map of Indonesian islands, K could identify the locations of Sumatra and Sulawesi Islands, as well as the locations of the Sunda, Javanese, and Asmat ethnic groups on the map. He could also name the presidents of Indonesia when asked by the teacher. K was willing to come to the front of the class when called by the teacher and could answer the questions posed to him. During the Dhuha prayer time, K followed the teacher's instructions for ablution and even led the prayer as the imam, as he was familiar with the recitations and procedures. The results of this study indicate that the children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities at MILB YKTM Budi Asih can be considered independent to some extent, as evidenced by the interviews conducted with the teachers at MILB. This conclusion is further supported by the interviews with the parents of these children

## Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that the level of independence among children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities (ID) at MILB YKTM Budi Asih varies significantly across different dimensions such as emotional, behavioral, and intellectual independence. This variation can be attributed to several factors, including age, the severity of the intellectual disability, and the level of support provided by the family and school environment. One of the key observations from the study is that older students tend to exhibit a higher degree of independence compared to younger students. This is consistent with developmental theories that suggest as children grow older, they gain more experience and skills that contribute to their ability to function independently (Erikson, as cited in Julieta, 2023). For example, Subject K, a 14-year-old male student, demonstrated the ability to manage his own needs during school, such as removing his shoes and participating actively in class discussions. His ability to follow instructions during the Dhuha prayer and even lead the prayer as an imam indicates a significant level of self-reliance, which is crucial for his overall development. In contrast, younger students like Subject I, an 8-year-old female student, showed lower levels of independence, particularly in tasks such as completing homework or managing daily routines without parental assistance. This finding aligns with the literature that younger children with ID often require more direct support and supervision due to their limited cognitive and adaptive skills (Heward & Alber-Morgan, 2017). However, it is important to note that, despite these limitations, Subject I still exhibited some independent behaviors, such as bringing the correct textbooks and wearing the appropriate school uniform, indicating that independence can be fostered even in younger children through consistent guidance and support from parents and teachers. The role of parents and teachers in fostering independence is crucial. The study highlights the importance of a supportive family environment in promoting independence among children with ID. Parents of the participants in this study actively engaged in teaching their children to be independent by providing clear instructions, setting examples, and offering continuous encouragement. This approach is supported by research indicating that parental involvement is a critical factor in developing adaptive skills in children with ID (Yolanda & Ahmad, 2019). Moreover, the emotional support provided by



parents helps build the child's self-confidence, which is essential for them to take initiative and make decisions independently (Stein & Book, 2000). The findings also suggest that the school environment plays a significant role in the development of independence among students with ID. Teachers at MILB YKTM Budi Asih adapted their teaching methods to cater to the specific needs of these students, ensuring that they receive the necessary guidance while gradually encouraging them to perform tasks independently. For instance, Subject A, a 14-year-old female student, was observed to independently prepare her schoolbooks the day before and actively participate in class by answering questions and following the teacher's instructions. This indicates that the structured support provided by the school can effectively enhance the students' ability to function independently, even within the limitations imposed by their disabilities. However, the study also reveals that there are still challenges in fostering full independence among these students. Despite the efforts of parents and teachers, some students, particularly the younger ones, continue to depend heavily on adult support for daily activities. This dependency highlights the need for ongoing, tailored interventions that focus on gradually increasing the independence of children with ID as they age and develop (Heward & Alber-Morgan, 2017). The study underscores the importance of a collaborative approach involving both parents and teachers in fostering independence among children and adolescents with ID. While progress has been observed, particularly among older students, continuous support and targeted interventions are essential to further enhance the independence of these students. Future research could explore the long-term impact of such interventions and the specific strategies that are most effective in promoting independence in this population

## Conclusion

Children with intellectual disabilities (ID) have below-average cognitive abilities, which often result in academic challenges and necessitate specialized educational services. Independence is a critical aspect of both social and individual life. To achieve independence, several key areas must be developed, including emotional, physical, intellectual, and social independence. The findings from this study indicate that the level of independence among students with ID at MILB YKTM Budi Asih varies. Some students have achieved a degree of independence, while others still require assistance from those around them. The study found that older students, particularly adolescents, tend to exhibit higher levels of independence, whereas younger children generally remain more dependent. This suggests that independence can also be assessed based on age, as older students have had more opportunities to practice and model independent behavior. Therefore, fostering independence requires repeated examples and consistent practice. Additionally, creating routines and habits that encourage independence is crucial for these students' development.

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