

Parents' Self Image in Choosing Education to Support Early Childhood Independence at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to explore and validate the self-image of parents at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan, specifically examining how parental self-image influences their perceptions and decisions to enroll their children early in order to support early childhood independence. **Method:** The methodology employed is a qualitative research approach, utilizing a case study design to obtain in-depth and descriptive data. Data collection was conducted through interviews and observations with parents whose children attend SPS Sri Lestari, allowing for a comprehensive narrative analysis of their experiences and perspectives. **Results:** The results indicate that parents at SPS Sri Lestari possess a positive self-image, both personally and toward the institution, which significantly influences their educational choices. This positive self-image shapes their perception of the importance of early education and motivates them to support their children's independence from a young age. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its focus on parental self-image as a critical yet underexplored factor in educational decision-making for early childhood. Unlike previous research that primarily addresses parenting styles, parental involvement, or social support, this study highlights the direct impact of parents' self-perceptions on their choices to foster their children's independence through early education. These findings contribute new theoretical insights into the psychological dimensions that underpin parental decisions in early childhood education settings.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is important. Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as a critical period for fostering children's holistic development, encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022). In Indonesia, ECE is delivered through formal, non-formal, and informal channels, as mandated by Law Number 20 of 2003 and Law Number 23 of 2002, which emphasize every child's right to quality early education and protection. However, the implementation and quality of ECE services vary across regions and are shaped by cultural values, socio-economic conditions, and local community awareness. According to (Greve & Okamoto-Omi, 2023) which states that it is not possible to measure educational outcomes in a decontextualized manner, since early childhood education is based on cultural values that differ from one country to another. In each country, early childhood education services and quality have different quality standards. One of them is Australia, according to (Henderson et al., 2024) the National Quality Framework (NQF) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2023), introduced in Australia in 2012, saw new quality standards introduced to improve early childhood education and care services, and the NQF brought, what was a complex and multi-jurisdiction regulation and quality assurance system of ECEC, into a national approach and includes four key components: (1) the National Law and National Regulations (NSW Government, 2011); (2) the National Quality Standard (NQS); (3) an Assessment and Rating process (A&R); (4) Belonging, being and becoming: The Early

Years Learning Framework for Australia (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). So, that's why, while national frameworks such as Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) provide standardized guidelines, Indonesian communities often rely on locally driven initiatives, such as SPS Sri Lestari in Lamongan, to meet the unique needs of their children.

Within this context, parents play a significant – though contextually variable – role in supporting early childhood development. Play is an arena in which social constellations change and a variety of social and emotional expressions occur (Donner et al., 2022). Research highlights that parental involvement, whether as facilitators, motivators, or partners in education, is influenced by cultural norms, family structures, and available resources. Family-centred approaches in early child care programs and interventions recognise the importance of collaborating with and directly involving parents in supporting their children's development (Hamilton et al., 2003) in (Koshyk et al., 2021). Parents are someone in the composition of members families who have a role as the main organizers of education who have responsibility in the early education level of children aged (Dewi & Widayarsi, 2022). Parents have a strong influence on developing children's character (Hatami et al, 2024). In rural and suburban Indonesian settings, decisions regarding children's early education are further complicated by economic constraints, limited access to formal institutions, and varying levels of parental awareness regarding the importance of ECE.

A growing body of literature has examined parental involvement and its impact on child outcomes, yet relatively little attention has been paid to the psychological factors – specifically, parents' self-image – that may shape educational choices. Parental self-image, defined as parents' beliefs about their own abilities, roles, and aspirations in relation to their children's education (Nurhayat & Noorrizki, 2022), is thought to influence not only their confidence and engagement but also the types of educational environments they select. While some studies have linked positive parental self-image to greater involvement in children's learning (Selviana, S., & Yulinar, 2022), there remains a lack of research exploring how self-image directly informs parents' decisions to choose early childhood education settings that foster independence, particularly in non-urban, resource-constrained communities.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the self-image of parents at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan, a non-formal ECE institution serving families in Jotosanur Village. By focusing on how parents perceive themselves and how these perceptions influence their decision to enroll their children in an environment that supports early independence, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the psychological and contextual factors underlying parental choice in ECE. In doing so, the study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on parental self-image in educational decision-making, offering insights relevant to both scholars and practitioners seeking to enhance early childhood outcomes in similar socio-cultural contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is an approach to obtain in-depth data, data that contains meaning, definite data that is a value

behind the data that appears (Sugiono, 2016). Qualitative research is research that uses a natural setting, with the intention of interpreting something that happens and is carried out by involving various existing methods and in-depth data (Moleong, 2016). Qualitative case study research forces researchers to conduct detailed data mining and to analyze the interactions between factors involved in a study intensively (Riyanto, Y., & Trenda, 2016). The reason the author uses qualitative research is because the data that the author will explore produces descriptive data so that the author considers it very suitable to use qualitative methods.

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the self-image of parents in choosing early childhood education to support children's independence at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan. The case study method was selected to allow for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, bounded by specific time (January–April 2024), place (SPS Sri Lestari, Jotosanur Village, Lamongan), and activity (parental decision-making and involvement in early childhood education). The research design aligns with established frameworks for qualitative case studies, as outlined by Yin and Stake, emphasizing the importance of context, temporality, and the uniqueness of the case under investigation.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives. The primary participants consisted of five parents (guardians) of current SPS Sri Lestari students, two teachers from the institution, five parents whose children had graduated from SPS Sri Lestari, and five parents who chose not to enroll their children at SPS Sri Lestari. Selection criteria included willingness to participate, active involvement in the child's education, and diversity in socio-economic background, educational attainment, and age. This approach enabled the researcher to capture a range of perspectives and experiences related to parental self-image and educational decision-making.

Data were collected through multiple sources to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings: 1.) Participant Observation: The researcher engaged in participatory observation, attending school activities and daily routines to gain firsthand insights into parental involvement and interactions within the school environment; 2.) In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with all participant groups. The interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) to ensure accuracy and allow for detailed analysis. Unstructured interview techniques were also employed to encourage open, flexible responses and to adapt to the informants' communication styles; 3.) Documentation: Supporting documents, such as photographs, field notes, and institutional records, were collected to triangulate and validate the data obtained from observations and interviews.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification: 1.) Data Reduction: raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation were systematically coded, categorized, and condensed to focus on key themes related to parental self-image and child independence; 2.) Data Display: the reduced data were organized into matrices, narrative summaries, and visual representations to facilitate pattern recognition and thematic analysis; 3.) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: preliminary conclusions were continually tested and refined through comparison with additional data and through triangulation across sources.

To ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, several strategies were implemented: Triangulation, member checking, audit trail, and reflexivity. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by using pseudonyms and by securely storing all data. The study received approval from the relevant institutional review board.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study reveals that parents' perceptions and self-images of their role in children's education greatly influence their decisions in choosing educational approaches that can shape children's character and independence. In addition, the results of the study indicate that parents who have a positive self-image tend to be more active in supporting educational activities that are oriented towards developing independence, such as the habit of being independent in daily activities and developing social skills. This study focuses on the analysis of parents' self-image in choosing education that supports children's independence at an early age at SPS Sri Lestari. The context of this study is based on the importance of the role of parents in the decision-making process related to children's education, especially during early childhood, which is a key development period in shaping children's character and independence. At SPS Sri Lestari, early childhood education is designed to foster an independent attitude through various learning approaches that involve the active participation of parents. However, how parents' self-perceptions or self-images influence the educational choices they make for their children is still rarely studied. This study aims to explore the psychological factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing the right education, and how this can support the development of independence in early childhood.

How Does Parents' Self-Image Influence Their Decision to Choose Education Supporting Early Childhood Independence?

The findings reveal that parents' self-image plays a significant role in their educational choices for their children at SPS Sri Lestari. Parents, particularly mothers, reported increased self-confidence and empowerment after enrolling their children in early childhood education, even though the school operates only twice a week. This confidence was reflected in their belief that they could actively contribute to their children's growth and development:

"I feel more confident as a parent. I feel I can give the best for my child." (Respondent 1)

This aligns with (Jones, 2021), who found that parental involvement in early childhood education strengthens parental self-efficacy and identity. Similarly, (Ristianti & Kisworo, 2021), emphasize that positive experiences in educational settings can enhance parental confidence. The transformation of parental identity from passive caregivers to active education partners was also evident. Parents described feeling "more modern" and open to new parenting methods, facilitated by improved communication with teachers and school staff:

"I feel like a more updated parent. I learned a lot from the teachers at SPS Sri Lestari." (Respondent 5)

This shift supports (Kim & Sheridan, 2022) findings on the benefits of collaborative family-school partnerships in enhancing parental competence. The development of a supportive social network among parents further reinforced these positive self-perceptions, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a collective parenting identity (Ramirez, L., & González, 2020).

What Are Parents' Perceptions of SPS Sri Lestari as an Educational Institution?

Parents viewed SPS Sri Lestari as a welcoming, play-based, and affordable institution that aligns with their values and aspirations for their children's independence. The play-based approach was particularly appreciated for motivating children's engagement and learning, consistent with international research highlighting the effectiveness of play in early childhood education (Greve & Okamoto-Omi, 2023). The school's low-cost, accessible location, and integration with local community organizations were decisive factors in parental choice, reflecting findings by (Mukuna & Indoshi, 2020) on the importance of accessibility and socio-cultural fit in educational decisions. The status of the institution owner also has an impact on the community's interest in SPS Sri Lestari. Communities with a majority of certain mass organizations tend to choose institutions that carry the icon of the mass organization they adhere to. This shows that social identity and community affiliation influence the choice of early childhood education institutions (Levickis et al., 2023). The presence of SPS Sri Lestari which is flexible and based on local needs is also an important factor in building a sense of ownership and parental involvement.

Moreover, the school's inclusive environment, which actively involves parents in classroom activities, fostered a sense of ownership and partnership:

"I feel more appreciated as a parent because the school also involves us in children's activities." (Respondent 8)

This participatory approach corresponds with (Nurhayati, 2021) emphasis on parental involvement as a means of family empowerment in early childhood education. Despite challenges such as irregular attendance due to family circumstances, parents maintained positive perceptions of the school's role in supporting children's independence.

How Does SPS Sri Lestari Support the Development of Early Childhood Independence?

Interviews with educators and observations revealed that children at SPS Sri Lestari demonstrated varying but generally positive levels of independence across socio-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor domains. Many children showed active social interaction skills and the ability to follow instructions, while some required additional support, reflecting typical developmental variability. According to (Kim, 2023) these findings indicate a shift from traditional individualistic parenting patterns to collective, community-based parenting supported by schools.

Children's willingness to enter the classroom independently and engage in self-care activities such as tidying up and sharing toys was notable. This readiness is closely linked

to emotional support from parents and teachers, echoing (Yusuf, 2022) the courage to be independent in entering the learning environment is correlated with the emotional support provided by the family. It findings on the role of family emotional backing in fostering independence. According to (López, 2020) social skills and self-confidence are very important in supporting children's active participation in the classroom. Social skills are an important indicator of a child's readiness to enter elementary education (Wang, 2022). It means the development of social skills and self-confidence, essential for school readiness, was also evident.

Programs based on physical play and social interaction have been shown to support cognitive and language development in early childhood (Burkart, 2021). Gross and fine motor skills are very important in supporting children's school readiness (Jarraya, M., 2022). It means that 2 opinions before emphasize the importance of play-based and physical activities in early learning. The presence of mild emotional regulation challenges in some children further highlights the critical role of parenting patterns and early stimulation (Hidayanti, 2023).

Based on the discussion above regarding the self-image of parents at SPS Sri Lestari, it shows a positive tendency where they view themselves as individuals who are more confident, modern, and feel they are not alone in educating their children. Meanwhile, the researcher draws conclusions from the interviews that have been conducted, that the image shown by parents at SPS Sri Lestari is responsible, cares about children's education, and has an awareness of the importance of independence from an early age. This answers the first research question by showing how the self-image of parents at SPS Sri Lestari, which indirectly forms internal motivation in choosing an educational institution that is in line with their values.

Discussion

The discussion section, conducted by the researcher, will provide a more in-depth and comprehensive description of the research results obtained, based on the research conducted. Based on the data obtained, a pattern was identified that parents' self-image which includes their perception of themselves as primary educators, role models, and wise decision makers has a role in their decisions in choosing educational institutions that are considered capable of instilling values of independence from an early age. This pattern shows that the more positive the parents' self-image, the greater their tendency to choose education that emphasizes the formation of children's character and independence. This study shows that some parents at SPS Sri Lestari choose educational institutions based on social image and economic status. Parents at SPS Sri Lestari choose to go to SPS Sri Lestari because the school provides free school services. SPS Sri Lestari is seen as capable of meeting the needs of character formation for children's independence from an early age. In addition, by sending their children to school from an early age, parents will be seen as wise parents who care about their children's education. As found in a case study at PAUD Ar Ridho, Malang City, where parents chose expensive schools that were considered to have good quality and reflected their social status (Izzani et al., 2020). This is contrary to the theory that parents should focus on their role as primary educators and role models for children, and support the development of children's independence through an authoritative parenting style (Windayani & Putra, 2021). This difference shows that social and economic status factors can influence parents' decisions

in choosing educational institutions, although they are not always in line with child development theories that emphasize the importance of independence from an early age.

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This study found that parents' self-image plays an important role in choosing education that supports early childhood independence at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan. This finding is in line with the results of research showing that parental support influences early childhood independence (Wahyuni & Al Rasyid, 2022). In addition, other studies also support this finding, by showing that parenting patterns have a very high relationship with early childhood independence (Tsani et al, 2020). in line with research conducted by (Mahmudatunnisa et al., 2024), parenting patterns have a relationship with the formation of children's independence. The habit of independent behavior carried out from an early age, accompanied by guidance from parents and teachers, can support the character of children's independence. Children who are trusted to learn independently from an early age tend to be independent more quickly (Wahyuni & Al Rasyid, 2022). It is important for parents to create a good educational environment and provide appropriate care to realize children's abilities, especially children's independence. Parents have an important role as motivators and facilitators so as to provide resources and support to increase children's independence and learning (Dewi & Widyasari, 2022).

As facilitators and motivators, parents at SPS Sri Lestari provide facilities for their children in the form of school as early as possible to motivate the spirit of learning in children, and support the formation of children's independent character. Although there are people around the institution who are not interested in the school, parents at SPS Sri Lestari do not waver in the decision they have chosen. Parents at SPS Sri Lestari are convinced and believe that sending children to school at an early age has good benefits for children's growth and development. In line with research conducted in South Jakarta, parental perceptions have an influence on support for registering children for school anak (Zahrawanny & Fitria, 2021). At SPS Sri Lestari, children are accustomed to reading short

letters and Asmaul Husana. In addition, children are also invited to read prayers such as Solawat Nariyah, Burdah and Thibbil qulub. Children are also invited to read daily prayers. by teaching basic Islamic education, parents at SPS Sri Lestari feel happy. Because early Islamic education is an important factor that parents are interested in choosing a school such as research conducted in Ponorogo (Umah, 2021). Parents' self-image plays an active role in their decision to choose their children's education at SPS Sri Lestari. Parents at SPS Sri Lestari have a wise self-image. They take advantage of the free school services offered by SPS Sri Lestari. Although the facilities provided by SPS Sri Lestari are minimal, they are enough to make children feel happy and happy while at school. Learning prepared by educators can be well received by students, and supports character formation, especially children's independence.

However, in a study conducted in Samarinda, there was a difference that emphasized that in addition to self-image, the role of parents also influences the decision to choose a study program. In their study, it was found that self-concept and the role of parents contributed 51.3% to the decision to choose a student's study program (Fahriannur et al., 2022). This difference may be due to differences in the context and focus of the study; the study by Fahriannur et al. focused on the selection of study programs at the higher education level, while this study focused on the selection of early childhood education institutions. In addition, other factors such as the socio-economic status of parents and the social environment can also influence parents' decisions in choosing education for their children (Fatimah, 2020).

The findings of this study indicate that parental self-image plays an important role in the process of selecting early childhood education institutions, especially at SPS Sri Lestari. Parents who have a positive self-image and want to be seen as individuals who care about their children's future tend to be more selective in choosing educational institutions that they consider capable of optimally supporting the development of children's independence. In this context, parents choose educational institutions as a form of representation of the personal and social values they adhere to. In addition, this finding is also in line with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, especially at the autonomy vs shame and doubt stage experienced by early childhood (18 months–3 years). At this stage, children need an environment that can stimulate their courage to be independent, explore, and make simple decisions (Erikson, 2021). The choice of parents for SPS Sri Lestari, which is known to have an approach that supports children's independence, shows that these considerations are not only based on the child's needs, but also a reflection of the parents' beliefs and expectations regarding their role in shaping the child's future. As individuals, by reflecting their beliefs and hopes as parents who play a role in making decisions for their children, parents at SPS Sri Lestari have indirectly actualized themselves so as to form a self-image for themselves and for SPS Sri Lestari. In line with the self-concept theory put forward by Carl Rogers. Self-actualization occurs when individuals feel harmony between their ideal self (what they want) and their self-concept (what they feel). Rogers also argues that individuals view the world as they experience reality, thus influencing behavior. According to Rogers, experience can influence a person's personality (Witono & Widodo, 2023). By seeing graduates from SPS Sri Lestari become children who are more prepared when they reach Playgroup age, parents at SPS Sri Lestari decided to send their children to school at that institution. Another theory that is in line with Rogers is Abraham Maslow's five-hierarchy of needs

theory, one of which is the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization is the highest need of the other four needs (Sumarwan, 2011). The need for self-actualization is a need based on an individual's desire to make themselves the best person according to their potential and abilities. An individual needs to express themselves in an activity to prove to themselves that they are capable of doing so (Milla, 2022). Parents at SPS Sri Lestari carry out self-actualization through decision making. Amidst the onslaught of a society that cares little about children's education from an early age, parents at SPS Sri Lestari make decisions that are contrary to the lifestyle of the community around the school with confidence and hope to support children's independence.

The results demonstrate a clear link between parents' positive self-image and their proactive engagement in choosing an educational environment conducive to fostering independence in early childhood. This confirms the theoretical framework that parental self-concept influences educational decision-making and child developmental outcomes. The findings also resonate with international literature emphasizing parental empowerment and collaborative educational ecosystems (Jones, 2021). By situating this study within the broader scholarly conversation, it becomes evident that SPS Sri Lestari functions not only as a learning space for children but also as a psychosocial support hub for parents, particularly in a suburban Indonesian context where awareness of early childhood education is still developing. The study contributes to filling a gap in the literature regarding how parental self-image shapes educational choices in non-urban, resource-limited settings. The theoretical implication of this finding is the need to expand the understanding of self-image not only as an internal factor of the individual, but also as a basis for making social decisions that have an impact on other parties, in this case children. This study enriches the literature that connects parents' self-concept and children's educational choices, while also underlining the importance of the psychosocial aspects of parents in the process of caring for and educating early childhood.

Data analysis shows that parents' self-image at SPS Sri Lestari plays an active role in the process of choosing education that supports early childhood independence. Parents with a positive self-image tend to be brave in making decisions, namely by choosing an educational approach that supports children's independence. Temporary conclusions show that parents' self-image influences their attitudes and decisions in choosing education that supports children's independence. Parents with a positive self-image are braver in making decisions in choosing education to support children's independence. This emphasizes the importance of improving parents' self-image to support the development of early childhood independence. The following are some key aspects that emerge from the analysis of the results, including: 1.) The Role of Parents' Self-image: Parents' self-image influences their attitudes and decisions in educating children, including in choosing an educational approach that supports children's independence; 2.) The Importance of Early Childhood Independence: Independence is an important aspect in the development of early childhood, which prepares them to face the challenges of life in the future (Pradana, 2023); 3.) Influence of Educational Environment: The educational environment, including the role of teachers and parents, contributes significantly to shaping the independence of early childhood (Hatami et al, 2024); 4.) Parental Involvement: Active involvement of parents in children's education, such as providing emotional support and motivation, can increase children's independence (Darmayanti et al., 2023).

It is important to note that improving parents' self-image can be done through various interventions, such as positive parenting training, counseling, and family empowerment programs. By improving parents' self-image, it is hoped that they can better support the development of early childhood independence, which in turn will have a positive impact on children's readiness to face life's challenges in the future.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study fundamentally finds that parents' self-image plays a pivotal role in their decision-making process when choosing early childhood education that supports the development of independence. Parents at SPS Sri Lestari Lamongan who possess a positive self-image demonstrate increased confidence, a transformed identity as active education partners, and a strong sense of social support and belonging. These psychological and social factors empower them to select educational environments aligned with their values, particularly those fostering early childhood independence. The findings also reveal that parents' perceptions of SPS Sri Lestari as a nurturing, accessible, and value-driven institution reinforce their decisions, reflecting a congruence between parental self-concept and the school's educational approach. Moreover, children enrolled at SPS Sri Lestari exhibit promising levels of independence across socio-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor skills, which aligns with parental expectations and the school's educational philosophy. **Implication:** Theoretically, this study enriches the understanding of parental self-image beyond an internal psychological construct, positioning it as a significant social determinant in educational choices impacting children's development. Practically, the findings suggest that early childhood education institutions should actively engage and empower parents, fostering positive self-perceptions that translate into supportive parenting behaviors and educational decisions. Schools like SPS Sri Lestari serve not only as learning spaces for children but also as psychosocial transformation hubs for parents, particularly in communities with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Enhancing parental self-image through targeted interventions such as parenting programs, counseling, and community-building initiatives can further strengthen early childhood independence outcomes. **Limitation:** This study is limited by its qualitative case study design and relatively small sample size, focusing on a single institution in a specific cultural and socio-economic context. The findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions or educational settings with different characteristics. Additionally, the study relies primarily on self-reported data from parents and educators, which may be subject to social desirability bias. The irregular attendance of children, influenced by family circumstances, also posed challenges in consistently observing educational impacts. **Future Research:** Future studies should consider employing mixed-methods approaches with larger, more diverse samples to validate and expand upon these findings. Longitudinal research tracking children's developmental outcomes in relation to parental self-image and educational choices would provide deeper insights into causality and long-term effects. Moreover, exploring the role of fathers and other caregivers in shaping educational decisions and self-image could offer a more holistic understanding. Investigating the effectiveness of specific parental empowerment interventions on both parental self-image and child

independence development is also recommended to inform policy and practice in early childhood education.

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