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The Effect Of Giving Character Sticker Rewards On The Learning Independence Of 4–5-Year-Old Children At Mutiara Rinjani Paud

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the low learning independence and high dependence of children on teachers at PAUD Mutiara Rinjani. The study aims to examine the effect of giving rewards in the form of character stickers on the learning independence of children aged 4-5 years. The research method uses a quantitative approach with a causal survey design (ex post facto). The research subjects were all group A children totaling 15 children, selected through total sampling. Data collection techniques used observation sheets and questionnaires covering three aspects of independence: initiative, self-confidence, and responsibility. Data analysis used descriptive and inferential statistics with simple linear regression tests using SPSS 26. The results showed that: (1) there is a significant influence between giving rewards on children's learning independence with a Sig. value of 0.000 < 0.05 and t count 9.926 > t table 2.160; (2) the level of children's learning independence is in the high category with an average score of 28.20 and a percentage of 86.6% of children achieving the Very Good Developing (BSB) and Developing as Expected (BSH) categories; (3) the research instrument was declared valid and reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.822; and (4) the responsibility aspect has the highest average (9.80), followed by initiative (9.73), while self-confidence is the lowest (8.67). The conclusion of the study is that giving character sticker rewards has a positive and significant effect on improving the learning independence of children aged 4-5 years at PAUD Mutiara Rinjani. The research recommends that teachers maintain this reward system and focus more stimulation on children's self-confidence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a central and strategic role in shaping the foundation of a child's personality, intelligence, and social-emotional skills, which will significantly influence their future development. During this golden age, children begin to explore their surroundings, interact socially, and learn to develop autonomy and independence. Learning independence in early childhood education is not merely the ability to perform physical tasks, but rather a mental foundation where children can undertake learning activities on their own initiative, have a sense of responsibility for assigned tasks, and have strong motivation without having to always rely entirely on adult assistance (Fitriani, R., 2025; Rahim & Hasanah, 2025). This learning independence encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that are crucial for children's readiness to enter primary education (Arifin & Tihin, 2024).

Learning is a fundamental process designed to holistically develop a child's abilities, knowledge, and personality. In the dynamics of modern education, independent learning is a vital

indicator of educational success. Children who are independent in learning tend to have high self-efficacy, persist in facing challenges, and achieve optimal academic and non-academic outcomes later in life (Rahma, 2023). This aligns with Deci & Ryan's (2023) perspective within the framework of Self-Determination theory, which asserts that individuals with autonomy will be intrinsically motivated, resulting in a more meaningful and sustainable learning process.

However, the reality on the ground often shows contradictory conditions. Based on preliminary observations conducted on February 2, 2026, at Mutiara Rinjani Early Childhood Education (PAUD Mutiara Rinjani), a crucial phenomenon related to children's low learning independence was identified. The majority of children aged 4-5 years (Group A) still exhibited passive behavior and a very high level of dependency on teachers. Of the 15 children, approximately 67% (10 children) were only willing to begin working on assignments after being personally and repeatedly instructed by the teacher. The children appeared hesitant, anxious, and lacked the confidence to explore learning activities independently. This passive behavior indicates that independent action has not yet become a permanent response in the children. If this pattern of dependency is not immediately reconstructed, children will experience difficulty in developing their optimal potential and are at risk of experiencing adaptation barriers in elementary school (Elok et al., 2023; Ningsih, 2024).

To address the urgency of these problems, measurable pedagogical and psychological interventions are urgently needed. One relevant and empirically proven approach to modifying children's behavior is through the application of Behaviorist learning theory developed by B.F. Skinner, particularly through positive reinforcement techniques. From a behaviorist perspective, independence is viewed as an operant behavior that can be shaped through the regulation of environmental consequences (Firdausi, 2025). When children exhibit positive behavior, providing a pleasant stimulus (reward) will strengthen the stimulus-response bond, so that independent behavior is more likely to be repeated and ultimately become an internalized habit (Fahmi & Lestari, 2022).

In this research, the chosen intervention was to provide rewards in the form of character stickers. Conceptually, rewards are forms of appreciation, gifts, or incentives aimed at increasing children's motivation and activity (Fitriana, 2024). The use of character stickers (e.g., flora, fauna, or animated figures) is highly appropriate for the cognitive developmental characteristics of preschool-aged children, who are still in the pre-operational stage and prefer concrete, engaging, and collectible visual objects (Putri & Wahyuni, 2021). Character stickers are given in a planned and spontaneous manner (immediate reinforcement) each time a child successfully demonstrates initiative, courage to try, or completes a task independently. This approach not only fosters external motivation but is also expected to gradually build internal motivation through a sense of pride in one's achievements (Ramadhani & Fitri, 2023).

Several previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of rewards in the context of early childhood education. Research by Hidayati & Nurjanah (2022) and Nurfaidah & Watini (2023) showed that providing symbolic rewards significantly boosts children's discipline and independence. Similarly, findings by Hidayat & Saputra (2022) confirm that a consistent reinforcement schedule is key to shaping behavior. However, these studies generally treated rewards as a generic symbolic stimulus and evaluated independence as a single composite construct, without isolating which specific dimension of independence responds most strongly to reward-based intervention. This is the specific gap this study addresses: while numerous studies on rewards have been conducted, this study offers novelty by focusing on the specificity of rewards in the form of character stickers aligned with weekly learning themes. It also comprehensively measures the three pillars of independence: initiative, self-confidence, and responsibility, using a quantitative linear regression approach at Mutiara Rinjani Early Childhood Education Center.

Based on the theoretical basis and empirical justification above, the problem formulation in this study is focused on: "Does the provision of character sticker rewards have a significant effect on increasing the learning independence of children aged 4-5 years at Mutiara Rinjani PAUD in the 2025/2026 academic year?". The main objective of this study is to test and

statistically analyze the magnitude of the effect of the reward intervention. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in enriching the literature on behavior modification in PAUD, as well as providing tactical guidance for educators in dealing with the crisis of children's independence in the classroom.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with an associative causal (ex post facto) design. This approach was chosen because it rests on the philosophy of positivism, which aims to measure the influence between variables objectively, systematically, and in a structured manner using numbers and statistical analysis (Aisyah, 2024). More specifically, the design of this study was a causal cross-sectional survey, where data collection for the independent variable (character sticker rewards) and the dependent variable (learning independence) was conducted simultaneously over a period of time to determine the extent to which the treatment, which has become part of the learning routine, impacts children's levels of independence.

This research was conducted at Mutiara Rinjani Early Childhood Education (PAUD) located in Batu Ringgit Hamlet, Selelos Village, Gangga District, North Lombok Regency. The research took place during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The population in this study was all children aged 4-5 years registered in group A. Given the relatively small population, the researchers used a total sampling or census technique, where the entire population of 15 children served as research subjects (sample). The use of total sampling is considered very effective in PAUD classes to avoid selection bias and provide a complete picture of the class dynamics (Melinda & Suwardi, 2021).

Primary data collection techniques were conducted through structured observation and distribution of questionnaire instruments filled out based on in-depth observations by researchers and class teachers. The variable X (Character Sticker Rewards) instrument was measured through 5 main indicators: frequency of giving, variety of types, timeliness (spontaneity), criteria for giving (process orientation), and affective impact on children. Meanwhile, the variable Y (Learning Independence) instrument was developed based on three essential dimensions of early childhood independence: (1) Initiative to start tasks, (2) Confidence in executing activities, and (3) Responsibility in completing and tidying up learning tools (Sari & Nasution, 2022). The measurement scale used was the Likert Scale with a modified score range of 1 to 4 for each statement item.

Before the data were analyzed for hypothesis testing, the instrument was first tested for validity and reliability using SPSS version 26. The validity test used the Pearson Product Moment correlation, while the reliability test used the Cronbach's Alpha formula with an acceptable reliability threshold of > 0.60 (Eliyana et al., 2022). The data analysis techniques applied included descriptive statistical analysis (finding the mean, standard deviation, and percentage of categories) and inferential statistical analysis. The prerequisite tests for inferential analysis included the Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov & Shapiro-Wilk) and the Linearity Test. After the prerequisite assumptions were met, the hypothesis testing was conducted using the Simple Linear Regression test. The decision-making criteria were based on the significance value (Sig. < 0.05) and the comparison of the calculated t value with the t table.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Results

The initial stage of analysis focused on testing the quality of the instrument. Based on the results of the validity test using Pearson Correlation on 15 respondents, correlation values were obtained for the initiative aspect (r = 0.845), self-confidence (r = 0.766), and responsibility (r = 0.757). The overall calculated r value is greater than the table r (0.514) with significance (p < 0.05). This proves that all instrument items are valid. Furthermore, the reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.822, which means the research instrument has a high level of internal consistency (very reliable). In the prerequisite test stage,

the normality test using Shapiro-Wilk produced significant values for the number of initiatives (0.053), self-confidence (0.402), and responsibility (0.083). Because all p-values> 0.05, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed and suitable for analysis using parametric statistics.

Descriptive analysis for variable X (Reward Provision) shows that this practice has been implemented well. The average total reward score was 27.20 from 15 children. A total of 8 children (53.3%) received reward intervention in the very optimal category (score 28-35), 4 children (26.7%) in the fairly optimal category, and 3 children (20%) were still in the less optimal category. Meanwhile, for variable Y (Learning Independence), the results of descriptive statistics are presented in the table below:

Aspect of Independence	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean (Rate-rate)**	**Standard Deviation**
Initiative	15	6	12	9.73	1.75
Self-Confidence	15	6	12	8.67	1.80
Responsibility	15	7	12	9.80	1.70
Total Independence	15	21	34	28.20	4.14

Table 1. Statistical Description of Aspects of Children's Learning Independence

Based on Table 1, the average classical independence score for children is 28.20, which falls into the Developing According to Expectations (BSH) category. Interestingly, when viewed from the dimensions of its formation, the Responsibility aspect leads with the highest average achievement (9.80), followed by Initiative (9.73), while the Self-Confidence aspect recorded the lowest average (8.67). In terms of achievement categorization, as many as 5 children (33.3%) are at the Very Well Developed (BSB) level and 8 children (53.3%) are at the BSH level. Cumulatively, 86.6% of children have achieved an optimal level of independence, and none of the children are at the Not Yet Developed (BB) level.

To prove the causality hypothesis between the two variables, a Simple Linear Regression test was conducted. The test results show that the correlation coefficient (R) reflects the relationship between the two variables, and the coefficient of determination (R Square) indicates the magnitude of the influence. The resulting regression equation is Y = 9.885 + 0.673X. The visualization of the data distribution and the regression line can be seen in the following graph:

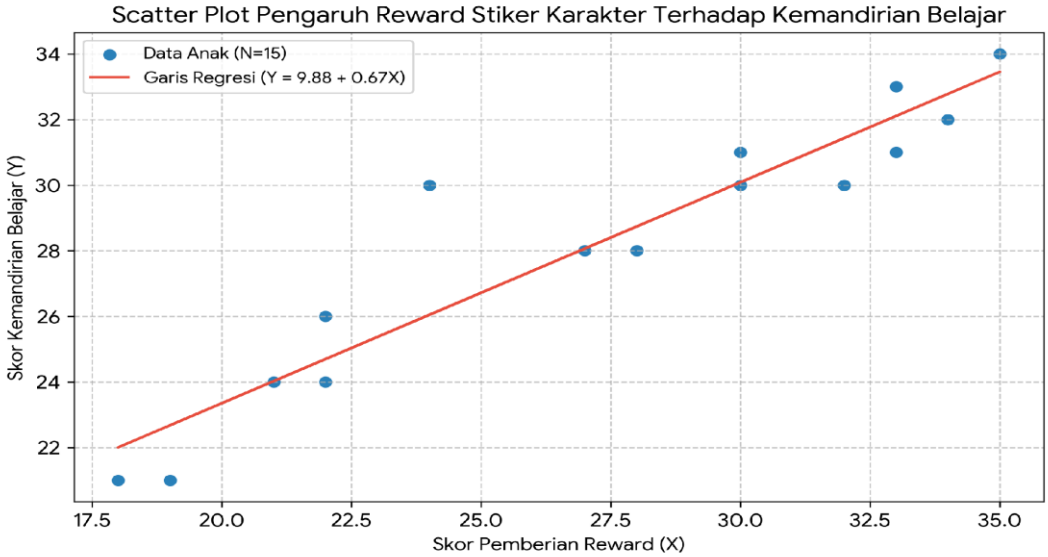

Figure 1. Scatter Plot and Regression Line of the Effect of Rewards on Independence

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	t count	Say.
(Constant)	9.885	1.884	5.247	0.000
Reward (X)	0.673	0.068	9.926	0.000

Table 2. Summary of Linear Regression Coefficient Test

Based on Table 2, partial testing (t-test) on the Reward variable produces a calculated t value of 9.926. This value is much greater than the t table at df = 13 (alpha 5%) which is 2.160. In addition, the significance level (Sig.) is recorded at 0.000, which is much smaller than the probability criterion of 0.05 (0.000 < 0.05). Thus, the statistical decision is that H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted, which definitively proves that there is a positive and very significant influence of giving character sticker rewards on the learning independence of children aged 4-5 years at Mutiara Rinjani PAUD.

To determine the magnitude of this effect, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated from the obtained t value (t = 9.926, df = 13), yielding $R^2 = 0.883$. This means that 88.3% of the variance in children's learning independence can be explained by the provision of character sticker rewards, while the remaining 11.7% is attributable to other factors not examined in this study, such as parenting style at home, individual temperament, or peer interaction. An R^2 value this high indicates a very strong practical effect, not merely a statistically significant one, reinforcing that the reward intervention accounts for the large majority of the variation observed in children's independence scores.

3.2 Discussion

The results of the hypothesis testing clearly confirmed the success of the pedagogical intervention based on behaviorist theory at Mutiara Rinjani Preschool. These findings confirm B.F. Skinner's basic postulate of operant conditioning, which states that conscious behavior followed by reinforcement (pleasant consequences) will have a high probability of being repeated and strengthened (Aeni & Wulandari, 2023). In this research context, children's initiative to start a task, their courage to try it themselves without teacher assistance, and their dedication to tidying up their learning tools are forms of operant responses. Character stickers act as a reinforcing stimulus (positive reinforcer). When teachers apply the principle of immediate reinforcement—giving stickers immediately after a child demonstrates independence—the child's brain quickly associates this independent action with feelings of happiness and recognition (Firdausi, 2025; Sari & Pratama, 2022).

Viewed critically, however, this finding does not merely replicate prior reward studies but extends them in a specific direction. Hidayati & Nurjanah (2022) and Nurfaidah & Watini (2023) reported that symbolic rewards improve discipline and independence as a composite outcome, but neither study disaggregated independence into distinct sub-dimensions, leaving open the question of which behavioral component actually drives the improvement. The present findings suggest a more nuanced picture: the very high R^2 value of 0.883 indicates a stronger effect size than typically reported in comparable reward-based intervention studies in PAUD settings, yet the disproportionately lower score for self-confidence relative to initiative and responsibility indicates that reinforcement is not uniformly effective across all facets of independence. This pattern departs from Hidayat & Saputra (2022), who framed consistent reinforcement scheduling as sufficient on its own to shape behavior; the present data instead suggest that reinforcement schedules primarily strengthen observable task-completion behaviors (initiative, responsibility) while leaving the more internally mediated construct of self-confidence comparatively under-addressed. This distinction matters because it implies that operant conditioning, as commonly applied through token or sticker systems, may be more effective at shaping externally visible compliance than at cultivating the underlying psychological security that sustains independence once external reinforcement is withdrawn.

The effectiveness of the character stickers in this study is inseparable from their implementation design, which aligns with the token economy concept. Stickers with various images tailored to the teaching theme (such as flora and fauna) serve as visual instruments capable of reducing the effect of satiation. This supports the findings of Ramadhani & Fitri (2023) and Hidayat & Saputra (2022), which state that reward variation and adaptive scheduling are vital for maintaining the attention and determination of early childhood. The teacher's ability to apply the principle of shaping—namely, appreciating every little progress a child makes, rather than simply demanding instant perfect results—was the main catalyst for the high classical achievement (86.6%) in the independent category (BSB and BSH). This aligns with research by Nurfaidah & Watini (2023) and Fitriani & Sari (2021), which also demonstrated a significant leap in children's independence when rewards are realized as a form of appreciation for the process and effort.

Although the overall level of independence was high, dimensional analysis revealed critical dynamics. Responsibility (mean = 9.80) and Initiative (mean = 9.73) dominated the children's independence profile. This high sense of responsibility indicates that children responded obediently to classroom rules and regulations (such as tidying up coloring materials after finishing) due to the predictability that their obedience would be rewarded with stickers (Rohani & Zaharah, 2021; Nafisah & Kirana, 2021). Children became highly skilled at autonomously executing sequences of physical tasks.

However, the Self-Confidence aspect (mean = 8.67) was at its lowest point. Although children appear "independent" in their operational behavior (working and tidying), their mental resilience and courage to present their work or try new things they haven't mastered are still vulnerable. This phenomenon validates the cognitive and humanistic school's critique of the extreme behaviorist paradigm (Fahmi & Lestari, 2022). While providing material rewards (extrinsic motivation) is effective in shaping overt behavior, it doesn't necessarily alleviate children's anxiety and emotional insecurity (Arifin & Tihin, 2024; Deci & Ryan, 2023). If children are motivated solely by the promise of stickers, the fear of failure (which results in not receiving a sticker) can suppress authentic self-confidence. Therefore, this external reinforcement must be synergistically collaborated with empathetic verbal reinforcement (such as praise that strengthens intrinsic motivation) so that the independence formed is not merely mechanical, but is born from solid self-confidence (Kurniawati & Fitriani, 2022; Rahim & Hasanah, 2025).

Comparatively, the quantitative findings of this study align with and enrich the existing literature. These results validate previous research by Kusumawati (2018) on playgroup children (aged 2-3 years), which also found a positive correlation between rewards and independence, proving the universality of reward effectiveness across preschool ages. Furthermore, these findings expand the perspective of Sofia & Basri's (2023) qualitative research on star savings, providing conclusive evidence in the form of regression magnitudes and coefficients of determination. With a t-value of 9.926, this research provides a solid scientific foundation that character stickers are not merely pedagogical accessories, but rather highly precise behavior modification instruments when executed within an appropriate behavioristic framework at the early childhood education level.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the presentation of the results of the statistical analysis and synthesis of the discussion, it was concluded that there was a very significant positive effect of providing character sticker rewards on increasing the learning independence of children aged 4-5 years at Mutiara Rinjani PAUD in the 2025/2026 academic year. This success was confirmed by a significance value of 0.000 <0.05 and a calculated t of 9.926 which exceeded the t table. Descriptively, 86.6% of children have succeeded in achieving the level of independence in the category of Developing According to Expectations (BSH) to Developing Very Well (BSB). This positive reinforcement-based intervention has proven very effective in boosting the dimensions of initiative and

responsibility in children practically. However, the self-confidence dimension occupies the lowest achievement, which indicates that the formation of true psychological independence has not been fully achieved due to the high dependence on extrinsic motivation.

In light of these findings, educators at Mutiara Rinjani Early Childhood Education Center (PAUD) and related institutions are advised to maintain a sticker reward system integrated with the learning theme to maintain children's attention. However, teachers should begin to calibrate their approach by more intensively injecting verbal rewards (affirmative praise) and emotional scaffolding techniques to foster a foundation of children's self-confidence (intrinsic motivation). For school-level policymakers, the provision of varied reward media needs to be institutionalized in learning operational standards. For future research, it is highly recommended to conduct a double-design experimental test (control & experimental group) or a longitudinal study to track the persistence of children's independence after the sticker reward fades, so that a more comprehensive understanding of the transition from external to internal motivation in early childhood can be mapped.

In concrete practical terms, these findings translate into several immediately actionable steps for classroom practice. Teachers can adopt a two-tier reinforcement routine in which a character sticker is given for task completion (targeting initiative and responsibility), followed within the same interaction by a specific verbal affirmation naming the effort involved (e.g., praising the attempt itself rather than only the result) to directly target the weaker self-confidence dimension. School leaders at Mutiara Rinjani PAUD and similar institutions can use the 88.3% explained variance as a concrete justification for allocating a modest recurring budget to reward materials, while simultaneously mandating brief teacher training on verbal scaffolding techniques so the reward system does not become the sole driver of children's motivation. For curriculum planners, weekly theme-aligned sticker sets can be formally incorporated into lesson-planning templates as a standard behavioral-support tool rather than an ad hoc classroom practice, ensuring consistency in how reinforcement is delivered across teachers and classrooms.

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