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Managing self-help skill development activities in early childhood institutions

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***Abstract*---**This study investigates the management of self-help skill development activities in two early childhood institutions in Hanoi, focusing on how planning, organizing, guiding, and evaluation practices support young children's independence. The research was conducted over an eight-week period with the participation of 128 children, 18 teachers, 4 school leaders, and 42 parents. Data were collected through teacher surveys, classroom observations, semi structured interviews, parent questionnaires, and document analysis. The findings show that consistent routines, accessible learning environments, and effective teacher facilitation significantly enhance children's ability to carry out daily tasks such as handwashing, independent dressing, organizing materials, caring for plants, and managing personal belongings. Children in both schools demonstrated clear progress, with higher independence levels observed in classrooms that were intentionally arranged to promote autonomy. The results also identify limitations including the lack of formal evaluation tools, limited child-sized materials, and uneven reinforcement from families. Overall, the study highlights the importance of coordinated management practices that involve teachers, administrators, and parents. It provides practical implications for improving self-help skill education in early childhood settings and suggests directions for future research.

***Keywords*---**Self-help skills, Early childhood education, Activity management, Learning environment, Teacher facilitation, Child independence.

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1. Introduction

Self-help skills are fundamental components of early childhood development, enabling young children to perform daily routines independently and confidently. These skills include basic activities such as eating, dressing, toileting, cleaning, organizing materials, and caring for personal belongings. They form the basis for adaptive functioning and prepare children for successful participation in social and learning environments. Noor, Gul, and Majid (1995) emphasize that self-help abilities contribute not only to functional independence but also to children's broader developmental outcomes, including motor coordination, self-regulation, and social responsibility.

Developing self-help skills requires more than simply teaching children how to perform tasks. It involves creating sustained opportunities for practice, forming habits through daily routines, and cultivating a sense of autonomy. Research shows that environments that allow children to make choices, manipulate materials, and practice tasks repeatedly lead to notable improvements in their independence (Nurani & Pratiwi, 2020). Similarly, Thomas et al. (2020) highlight that systematic instruction and consistent reinforcement of daily living skills support long-term maintenance of independent behaviors, demonstrating the importance of carefully planned instructional strategies.

Within early childhood institutions, the management of self-help skill development activities plays a pivotal role in ensuring that children receive consistent and meaningful opportunities to practice these skills. Management includes planning appropriate routines, organizing the learning environment, guiding teaching practices, and evaluating children's progress. Teacher competence is central to this process. Umam, Cahyono, and Ridha (2019) argue that professional training in constructivist instructional methods significantly enhances teachers' abilities to facilitate self-help learning effectively. In addition, family involvement reinforces continuity between school and home settings, increasing the likelihood that children internalize and maintain self-help habits.

Despite the importance of self-help skill development, many early childhood institutions face challenges in managing these activities systematically. Issues may include limited learning materials, inconsistent teacher implementation, insufficient training, or inadequate collaboration with families. Kissel, Whitman, and Reid (1983) demonstrated that without structured management and teacher support, children's acquisition of self-care skills may be slow or inconsistent, especially in institutional settings. This highlights the need for coordinated management strategies that integrate environment, routine, teacher guidance, and family cooperation.

In Vietnam, recent reforms in early childhood education emphasize the development of independence, self-regulation, and practical life competencies as core outcomes for young children. However, the effectiveness of self-help skill development largely depends on how schools organize and manage corresponding activities. While some institutions have begun integrating daily routines and practical life tasks into their programs, systematic management practices remain uneven across schools. There is a lack of empirical research examining how early

childhood institutions in Vietnam plan, implement, and evaluate self-help skill development activities.

Given this gap, the present study focuses on understanding the management of self-help skill development activities in early childhood institutions. It explores current practices, identifies strengths and limitations, and examines factors that influence the effectiveness of these activities. Findings from the study aim to contribute both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for improving the management of self-help skill education in early childhood settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Help Skills in Early Childhood Education

Self-help skills refer to children's ability to independently perform basic daily activities such as eating, dressing, maintaining personal hygiene, organizing materials, and caring for personal belongings. These skills are crucial foundations for early autonomy and functional independence. Noor, Gul, and Majid (1995) emphasize that self-help competencies form the basis of adaptive functioning, enabling children to participate confidently in social and learning environments. Common groups of self-help skills include eating and drinking, dressing and undressing, toileting and hygiene, cleaning and organizing, and managing personal items.

The role of self-help skills extends beyond practical ability. They contribute to children's holistic development by strengthening cognitive flexibility, fine motor coordination, emotional regulation, and social responsibility. Research by Thomas et al. (2020) indicates that consistent practice of daily living skills supports long-term behavioral stability and helps children develop routines that promote independence. Furthermore, self-help skills are closely related to key competencies such as self-regulation, confidence, decision-making, and behavioral control. When children practice self-help tasks repeatedly, they learn to plan, initiate actions, solve problems, and reflect on outcomes, all of which contribute to their emerging sense of agency.

Studies in early childhood contexts also demonstrate that the acquisition of self-help skills is influenced by meaningful learning experiences. Nurani and Pratiwi (2020) found that interactive environments and supportive instructional media enhance children's motivation to perform tasks independently. Similarly, Seesurrun (2015) indicated that targeted programmes tailored to children's developmental needs significantly improve self-help behaviors, especially among children with special needs.

2.2. Management in Early Childhood Educational Settings

Management in early childhood education involves a systematic process that includes planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating educational activities. These functions ensure that children's developmental needs are supported through structured and well-coordinated learning experiences. Effective management is essential in organizing self-help skill development because such skills require consistency, appropriate environments, and collaborative support.

The role of administrators, teachers, and parents is central to this process. Administrators create policy frameworks, allocate resources, and guide the overall direction of educational programs. Teachers act as facilitators who design daily routines, provide guidance, and model desired behaviors for children. Umam, Cahyono, and Ridha (2019) emphasize that teacher training and pedagogical capacity significantly influence the effectiveness of self-help instruction, particularly when using constructivist or child-centered approaches. Parents also play a vital role by reinforcing self-help practices at home, creating continuity between school and family environments.

Child-centered management models highlight the importance of environments that support autonomy, freedom of choice, and hands-on practice. These models prioritize individual readiness, flexible pacing, and opportunities for children to act independently. Abatena (1995) argues that community-supported and participatory approaches enhance children's sense of competence and belonging, which in turn encourages them to take greater responsibility for their own behaviors.

2.3. Organizing Self-Help Skill Development Activities

Organizing self-help skill development activities in early childhood institutions requires structured routines and intentional practice embedded within daily life. Common types of activities include practical life tasks such as cleaning, pouring water, buttoning clothes, arranging materials, and caring for plants. These activities may be incorporated into learning centers, transitions, outdoor play, or daily classroom routines.

A supportive environment is a key factor influencing the success of self-help skill development. Allman (2014) highlights the importance of accessible learning materials, child-sized tools, and organized spaces that allow children to practice independently. The role of teachers is equally important. Kissel, Whitman, and Reid (1983) demonstrated that systematic staff training and consistent teacher support significantly improve children's abilities to perform self-care skills, especially in institutional settings.

Continuity and repetition are essential in this process. Self-help skills require sustained practice over time, typically in real-life contexts rather than isolated lessons. Songprakun and McCann (2012) note that structured self-directed interventions can enhance resilience, suggesting that regular and supportive practice helps children feel capable and confident. Activities that are meaningful, culturally relevant, and age-appropriate tend to produce the strongest developmental benefits.

Environmental, institutional, and social factors also influence self-help skill development. According to Verma et al. (2024), interventions integrated with community-based or behavioral change programs lead to more consistent improvements, especially when family and community members participate in reinforcing desired behaviors.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted over an eight-week period at two kindergartens in Hanoi: Hoang Van Thu Kindergarten and Dai Thanh Kindergarten.

A total of 128 children aged four to five years participated in classroom observations, including 66 children from Hoang Van Thu Kindergarten and 62 children from Dai Thanh Kindergarten. The study also involved 18 teachers, 4 school leaders, and 42 parents. Twelve teachers completed a management practice survey, while six participated in semi-structured interviews to describe their experiences in planning, organizing, and guiding self-help activities. Four administrators were interviewed to provide institutional perspectives on policies, environmental conditions, and school-level management practices. Additionally, forty-two parents completed questionnaires to assess home–school collaboration in supporting children's self-help routines.

A structured teacher survey consisting of 25 items was used to evaluate planning, organizing, guiding, and evaluating activities related to self-help skills. Classroom observations were conducted 24 times in total, with 12 observations per school, focusing on routines such as handwashing, independent dressing, cleaning learning materials, watering plants, and arranging personal belongings. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, along with document analysis that included weekly lesson plans, classroom arrangement records, and photo documentation of implemented activities. Parent questionnaires provided additional insights into how self-help routines were reinforced at home.

During the eight-week implementation, both schools carried out regular and experiential activities designed to support the development of self-help skills. The activities included daily handwashing before meals and after outdoor play, independent dressing and shoe-wearing practice twice a week, organizing toys and learning materials after each activity block, watering classroom plants three times a week, and arranging personal belongings during arrival and nap time.

Data analysis was conducted through both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Quantitative data from teacher surveys were analyzed using means and percentage distributions to identify general trends in management practices. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were coded thematically, resulting in key themes related to management structure, learning environment, teacher facilitation, and home–school collaboration.

4. Findings

4.1. Current Situation of Activity Management

Teacher survey results indicate that both schools demonstrated a generally consistent and structured approach to managing self-help skill development activities. The analysis focused on four core management components: planning, organizing, guiding, and evaluating. Table 1 shows the mean scores provided by the 12 participating teachers.

Table 1. Teacher Ratings of Management Components (n = 12)

Management Component	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Planning	3.92	0.41	Good
Organizing	4.08	0.36	Good
Guiding	4.15	0.39	Good
Evaluation	3.67	0.44	Moderate

Teachers rated guiding highest, indicating strong confidence in modeling behaviors and using verbal prompts. Evaluation, however, received the lowest score, revealing that systematic assessment of self-help skills remains inconsistent.

Classroom observations support these findings. Of the 24 observed sessions, 19 sessions (79.1 percent) showed well-established routines, while 5 sessions (20.9 percent) displayed irregularities, particularly during transition periods such as cleaning up or organizing learning materials.

4.2. Strengths and Limitations in Management Practices

Strengths
Several strengths were identified through observation and document review:
Well-organized learning environments with child-accessible sinks, shelves, and labeled storage spaces.
Consistent teacher facilitation, including modeling, encouraging repetition, and providing minimal assistance.
High levels of child engagement during routine-based activities, reflecting positive attitudes toward independent tasks.
The progress in children's independence over eight weeks is evident in Table 2.

Table 2. Children's Independent Completion Rates (n = 128)

Activity	Hoang Van Thu (n=66)	Dai Thanh (n=62)	Combined
Handwashing	53/66 (80.3%)	48/62 (77.4%)	101/128 (78.9%)
Independent dressing	49/66 (74.2%)	44/62 (71.0%)	93/128 (72.7%)
Cleaning materials	54/66 (81.8%)	49/62 (79.0%)	103/128 (80.5%)
Watering plants	46/66 (69.7%)	42/62 (67.7%)	88/128 (68.7%)
Arranging personal items	52/66 (78.8%)	46/62 (74.2%)	98/128 (76.5%)

Children in Hoang Van Thu Kindergarten consistently showed slightly higher independence levels, which teachers attributed to greater environmental readiness and more structured daily routines.

Limitations

Despite the strengths, several limitations were identified:

Lack of formal evaluation tools: Teachers relied mainly on informal observations without using developmental checklists or rubrics.

Limited availability of child-sized materials: In some classrooms, materials for practical life activities (such as tongs, pitchers, or small watering cans) were insufficient.

Time constraints: Teachers reported difficulty allocating adequate time for self-help routines due to tight schedules.

Uneven parent cooperation: Interview data revealed that some parents continued to complete tasks for their children, resulting in inconsistent reinforcement between home and school.

A teacher shared: "When parents do everything for their children at home, we have to start again every morning."

4.3. Factors Influencing Management Outcomes

The effectiveness of self-help skill development practices was influenced by four key factors emerging from thematic analysis:

Teacher competence and attitudes: Teachers with stronger confidence in child-centered approaches provided more independent practice opportunities.

Quality of the learning environment: Classrooms with accessible tools and clear visual cues saw higher child independence rates.

Administrative support and school policies: Schools that integrated self-help routines explicitly into weekly lesson plans achieved better consistency.

Family reinforcement: Parent questionnaires revealed differences in the level of reinforcement at home. Table 3 summarizes the responses from 42 parents.

Table 3. Parent Reinforcement of Self-Help Routines (n = 42)

Level of Home Reinforcement	Number	Percentage
Always reinforce	11	26.2%
Often reinforce	18	42.8%
Sometimes reinforce	9	21.4%
Rarely reinforce	4	9.5%

Children with strong home reinforcement (always or often) were consistently more confident and quicker in performing self-help tasks during classroom observations.

4.4. Evidence from Observations and Interviews

Field observations provided clear evidence of children's improved independence and routine awareness over time. During early observations, many children required repeated reminders when washing hands or organizing materials. By Week 8, more than 80 percent of children followed the posted handwashing sequence without teacher assistance.

Teachers reported noticeable behavioral changes: "They remind each other about cleaning up and even help friends zip jackets"; "Children became more persistent and showed pride in completing tasks alone."

Administrators highlighted the significance of consistent routines: “Daily repetition builds habits. The more predictable the routine, the more independent the children become.”
Document analysis confirmed that classrooms with better-structured activity schedules and visible instructional cues showed greater improvements in children’s independence.
Overall, the findings demonstrate that well-managed environments, consistent teacher facilitation, and strong home–school collaboration collectively enhance children’s self-help skill development.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the important role of systematic management in supporting the development of self-help skills in early childhood settings. Across both kindergartens, children demonstrated noticeable improvements in handwashing, independent dressing, organizing materials, watering plants, and managing personal belongings. These results suggest that when self-help routines are integrated consistently into daily schedules, young children are capable of developing independence and responsibility at a rapid pace. The increase in independence over the eight-week period aligns with previous research showing that repeated opportunities for practice strengthen children’s confidence and ability to carry out daily living tasks.

The data indicate that the most effective practices were found in classrooms where teachers demonstrated strong facilitation skills and where the physical environment was organized to promote autonomy. This is consistent with earlier studies emphasizing that accessible materials and a well-prepared environment significantly enhance young children’s ability to perform self-help activities independently. Classrooms with child-height sinks, open shelves, and clear visual cues saw higher independence percentages across both schools. These findings reinforce the view that environmental readiness is a foundational element in developing practical life skills.

Teacher competence also emerged as a central factor. Interviews revealed that teachers who embraced child-centered approaches were more likely to provide children with opportunities to attempt tasks independently before intervening. This resonates with previous research that highlights the importance of teacher attitudes and pedagogical skills in facilitating children’s self-help learning. In contrast, teachers who expressed concerns about time constraints or classroom management tended to provide more direct assistance, limiting children’s opportunities for self-directed practice.

The findings also highlight challenges that have been noted in other early childhood studies. One of the most prominent limitations identified was the lack of structured evaluation tools. While teachers showed strong skills in planning and guiding activities, they relied largely on informal observations to monitor progress. This parallels earlier research pointing out that evaluation of life skills in early childhood contexts is often undocumented or inconsistently applied. The absence of systematic assessment may affect teachers’ ability to track development over time or identify children needing additional support.

Another significant factor was parent reinforcement. Children whose parents frequently reinforced self-help routines at home showed higher independence levels in classroom observations. This finding is consistent with studies demonstrating that home routines and parental expectations strongly influence children's practical life skills. The variability in parent involvement observed in this study reflects a broader pattern found in the literature, where cultural expectations, parental beliefs, and household routines shape children's independence. The 42 parent responses revealed that although many parents actively supported self-help practices, a notable proportion still completed tasks for their children, reducing consistency between school and home.

The role of administrators also requires discussion. Interviews with school leaders demonstrated that administrative support, clear policies, and structured weekly plans contributed significantly to the consistency of routines across classrooms. Schools that explicitly integrated self-help activities into lesson plans achieved more predictable implementation. This confirms existing research that leadership and policy alignment are crucial for ensuring that life skills are not treated as optional but embedded as core components of early childhood education.

Overall, the results of this study support the view that self-help skill development is most successful when teachers, administrators, and families work collaboratively. The combination of well-managed classroom environments, consistent teacher facilitation, supportive policies, and strong home–school reinforcement creates a comprehensive system that enables children to develop independence effectively. These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by illustrating how management practices directly influence children's practical skill development in early childhood settings. They also underline the need for clearer evaluation tools, improved teacher training, and stronger parent engagement to ensure consistent reinforcement of self-help routines.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the management of self help skill development activities in two early childhood institutions in Hanoi and examined how these practices contributed to young children's independence. Over an eight week period, both Hoang Van Thu Kindergarten and Dai Thanh Kindergarten demonstrated that consistent routines, carefully prepared environments, and effective teacher facilitation played a significant role in improving children's ability to carry out daily self help tasks. Observational data showed clear progress in multiple areas including handwashing, independent dressing, cleaning and organizing materials, watering plants, and managing personal belongings. These results confirm that when children are given regular opportunities to practice practical tasks, they quickly build confidence and competence.

The findings highlight the importance of management practices in supporting the development of self help skills. Classrooms that were intentionally arranged with accessible materials and visual cues enabled children to act independently with minimal assistance. Teachers who encouraged children to take initiative, modeled steps calmly, and maintained consistent expectations contributed greatly to children's success. Administrative support also influenced implementation,

especially when self help routines were included in weekly planning and monitored as part of classroom practice.

Despite these strengths, several limitations were identified. Teachers lacked structured assessment tools to track children's progress and relied mainly on informal observation. Limited child sized materials and time pressures within the daily schedule also affected consistency. Variation in parent involvement created differences between home and school expectations which influenced children's independence. These challenges indicate the need for improved evaluation tools, additional resources, and strengthened communication with families.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the development of self help skills in early childhood education depends on a coordinated approach involving teachers, school leaders, and parents. When routines are well managed and reinforced across settings, children develop independence more effectively. The findings provide useful implications for educators and administrators who aim to promote children's self reliance through structured routines and experiential learning activities. Future studies may explore long term outcomes, design standardized assessment instruments, or identify strategies to enhance family engagement in supporting practical life skills.

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