

## Analysis of Early Childhood Education Background on Adaptation and Adjustment Skills in the Kindergarten Environment: A Comparative Study Between PAUD and Non-PAUD Graduates

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**ABSTRACT** Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays an important role in preparing children to enter formal education, particularly in terms of their ability to adapt and adjust to the school environment. This article aims to analyze comparatively the adaptation and adjustment abilities of children aged 5–6 years based on their educational background, namely between ECE graduates and non-ECE graduates. This study employed a qualitative approach with a comparative study design. Data were collected through direct observation of children's behavior during learning and play activities in the kindergarten classroom, focusing on aspects of environmental adaptation, social interaction, emotional regulation, and creativity in play. The data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that children who graduated from ECE demonstrated better adaptation skills, as indicated by their readiness to face the school environment, understanding of classroom routines, independence, and compliance with rules. In addition, ECE graduates showed more developed social-emotional adjustment and higher creativity in play compared to non-ECE children. These findings confirm that ECE contributes positively to preparing children for the kindergarten environment and supports children's holistic development.

**KEYWORDS:** *Child Adaptation, Early Childhood Education, Self-Adjustment.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) constitutes a crucial foundation for the development of human resources, as this period is widely recognized as the “golden age,” a phase during which children experience rapid physical and psychological growth. During these early years, significant brain development takes place, with neural connections forming at an extraordinary rate alongside the growth of other bodily organs. At the same time, children experience substantial progress in gross and fine motor skills, language acquisition, and sensory development. Beyond physical growth, early childhood education plays a critical role in fostering children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, thereby establishing a strong basis for intellectual growth and social competence later in life. A well-structured educational environment during early childhood can stimulate curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving abilities while also nurturing positive attitudes toward learning. Consequently, early educational experiences are widely considered

essential for preparing children to succeed in formal schooling and in their future social environments (Nurhayati, 2025).

One of the most important aspects of early childhood development that must be stimulated from an early age is social-emotional development. Social-emotional competence refers to children's ability to understand and manage their emotions, establish positive relationships with others, and respond appropriately to various social situations. Structured Early Childhood Education programs are capable of fostering essential social skills such as cooperation, empathy, communication, and the ability to interact effectively with peers and adults. Through guided play, group activities, and teacher support, children learn how to share, take turns, express their feelings, and resolve simple conflicts. Emotional maturity gained during early childhood helps children respond more effectively to challenges and unfamiliar situations. Furthermore, well-developed social-emotional skills significantly influence children's readiness for subsequent stages of life, including formal education and social participation (Batubara et al., 2023). Previous studies have demonstrated that the development of social-emotional competence has a positive impact on children's social interactions, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being (Meno et al., 2024).

Within the context of social-emotional development, adaptation and self-adjustment abilities are particularly vital. Adaptation refers to a child's capacity to modify behavior and responses in accordance with new environmental demands, while self-adjustment involves the internal processes that enable children to cope with change and maintain emotional balance. These abilities are especially important when children encounter new social and educational settings, such as entering kindergarten for the first time. At the age of 5–6 years, children begin to develop greater self-awareness and self-regulation. They start to recognize appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, follow instructions more consistently, and control their impulses in structured settings. These emerging abilities allow children to explore their surroundings with greater confidence, understand the social norms within their environment, and build increasingly complex knowledge structures. As a result, school readiness which encompasses academic, social, and emotional dimensions is closely linked to children's capacity for adaptation and self-adjustment (Christy et al., 2025).

The transition into formal educational settings such as kindergarten represents a significant developmental milestone during which children's adaptation and self-adjustment skills are put to the test. Kindergarten introduces children to a structured learning environment that differs substantially from the home setting. In school, children must adapt to routines, follow rules, interact with teachers and classmates, and participate in organized activities. The school environment has a major influence on character formation, as interactions with educators, peers, and learning materials contribute to the development of adaptive behaviors. A supportive and stimulating kindergarten environment can promote growth across multiple domains, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Azis et al., 2024). Conversely, children who struggle to adapt may experience difficulties participating in classroom activities, forming friendships, and managing their emotions. Therefore, the educational experiences children receive prior to entering kindergarten particularly whether they have attended an Early Childhood Education program are considered important factors that may influence their ability to adapt and adjust.

Given the central role of Early Childhood Education in preparing children for future learning experiences, participation in ECE programs is widely believed to have a significant impact on children's readiness for formal schooling. High-quality Early Childhood Education programs provide structured opportunities for children to develop language skills, motor coordination, social interaction, and early academic competencies. Through play-based learning and guided instruction, children become familiar with classroom routines, group activities, and basic learning concepts. These experiences help reduce anxiety and uncertainty when children transition into kindergarten, as they are already accustomed to structured environments and social

interactions. Research has shown that participation in Early Childhood Education programs contributes positively to school readiness by enhancing language development, motor skills, and social competence (Haerduin, 2023). Another study conducted by Wu et al. (2025) found that pre-kindergarten programs influence not only children's readiness but also their attendance and engagement in kindergarten. These findings highlight the importance of examining how prior educational experiences shape children's adjustment to new learning environments.

Despite the recognized benefits of Early Childhood Education, not all children have access to or participate in ECE programs before entering kindergarten. As a result, differences may emerge between children who have attended Early Childhood Education programs and those who have not. Children without prior ECE experience may require more time to adapt to classroom routines, social expectations, and learning activities. They may also face challenges in managing their emotions, interacting with peers, and following instructions. In contrast, children with ECE backgrounds are often better prepared to handle the demands of kindergarten, as they have already developed basic adaptation and self-adjustment skills. Understanding these differences is essential for educators and policymakers in order to design effective support systems and transition programs for children entering kindergarten.

Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze in depth the educational backgrounds of young children, particularly the differences between those who have attended Early Childhood Education programs and those who have not, in relation to their adaptation and self-adjustment abilities in the kindergarten environment. Through a comparative study approach, this research seeks to identify the extent to which preschool educational experiences influence children's social-emotional maturity and readiness to face the demands of a new learning environment. The study focuses on several key aspects, including environmental adaptation, social interaction, emotional regulation, and participation in classroom activities.

The findings of this study are expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of Early Childhood Education curricula, transition programs from ECE to kindergarten, and more effective educational strategies for young children. By identifying the factors that support successful adaptation and adjustment, educators can design learning environments that better meet children's developmental needs. In addition, the results of this research may serve as a valuable reference for parents and teachers in preparing children to enter formal education. By ensuring that children receive appropriate stimulation and support during their early years, parents and educators can help create optimal conditions for growth and development.

Ultimately, Early Childhood Education plays a vital role in ensuring that children are well-prepared to face the challenges of formal schooling. By fostering adaptation skills, self-adjustment abilities, and social-emotional competence, ECE programs help children build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. Therefore, providing access to quality Early Childhood Education should be considered a priority in efforts to support children's success in school and beyond.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a comparative study design aimed at describing and comparing children's adaptation and adjustment abilities in the kindergarten environment based on their educational background, namely children who graduated from early childhood education (ECE/PAUD) and those who did not attend PAUD. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand children's behavioral phenomena naturally within the context of daily learning activities. The subjects of this study were kindergarten children aged 5–6 years with different preschool educational backgrounds, consisting of children who had previously attended PAUD and those who had not. The research was conducted in the kindergarten classroom where the researcher served as an educator, allowing direct access to children's behavior and interactions during the learning process.

Data were collected through direct observation of children's behavior during learning and play activities. Observations were conducted repeatedly and systematically by focusing on indicators of children's adaptation and adjustment abilities, such as responses to new environments, independence, social interaction, emotional regulation, and creativity in play. The data were obtained from the researcher's field notes recorded during the learning process. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the qualitative data analysis model. The researcher compared the behavioral patterns of PAUD and non-PAUD graduates to identify differences in adaptation and adjustment abilities within the kindergarten environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Children's Adaptation Ability to the School Environment

To obtain a more systematic description of children's adaptation abilities in the kindergarten environment, the observation results described earlier were organized into several indicators of adaptive behavior. The presentation of these indicators aims to clarify the differences in adaptation characteristics between PAUD graduates and non-PAUD children so that the emerging adaptation patterns can be understood more easily and in a structured manner. The comparison of children's adaptation abilities based on preschool educational background is presented in the following table.

**Table 1. Comparison of Adaptation Abilities of PAUD and Non-PAUD Children**

Adaptation Aspect	PAUD Graduates	Non-PAUD Children
Initial response to the kindergarten environment	Show readiness and good acceptance of the new environment	Tend to hesitate and need time to adjust
Understanding of classroom routines	Quickly understand the daily activity flow (learning, playing, resting)	Often confused and require repeated guidance
Independence in activities	Able to perform activities independently with minimal guidance	Still dependent on teacher assistance
Courage to try new activities	Active and willing to try new games or activities	Tend to observe first before participating
Adaptation to classroom rules	Easier to follow simple rules	Require more time to understand and follow rules

Based on observations conducted during learning and play activities in the kindergarten classroom, clear differences were found between PAUD graduates and non-PAUD children in terms of their ability to adapt to the school environment. Adaptation in this study refers to children's ability to recognize learning situations, adjust to classroom routines, understand simple rules, and respond both emotionally and behaviorally to new environments. These aspects are important indicators of school readiness, as they reflect how well children can function in a structured learning setting and interact with their surroundings.

PAUD graduates tended to show better readiness from the beginning of their entry into kindergarten. During the first weeks of learning, most children were able to follow the daily sequence of activities, including opening activities, core learning sessions, and closing activities, without showing significant resistance or anxiety. They appeared to understand classroom patterns more quickly, such as the transitions between learning time, playtime, and rest time. This suggests that prior experience in PAUD helped children become familiar with structured learning environments that are similar to those found in kindergarten. As a result, they were better prepared to adjust to classroom expectations and routines.

In addition, PAUD graduates demonstrated higher levels of independence in daily

classroom activities. They were able to take educational play materials independently, use them appropriately, and return them after use without constant reminders from the teacher. In several situations, children were also able to adapt to changes in activities with minimal guidance. This ability indicates that adaptive readiness had been developed through previous learning experiences in PAUD, where children were often encouraged to be independent and responsible.

In contrast, non-PAUD children generally required a longer period of adaptation. During the initial stages, some children showed hesitation, passivity, and a stronger need for teacher assistance. They often preferred to observe their peers before attempting activities or using play materials. In some cases, non-PAUD children also showed greater emotional dependence on teachers, particularly when encountering unfamiliar classroom situations. These findings suggest that limited prior exposure to structured learning environments may influence children's ability to adapt effectively to kindergarten settings.

### **Children's Adjustment in Social and Emotional Interactions**

Children's adjustment in the school environment is reflected not only in their ability to follow rules but also in how they interact with peers and respond to their social surroundings. Therefore, to clarify the observational findings related to children's social and emotional aspects, the results were summarized into several adjustment indicators. The presentation in table form helps readers see the differences between PAUD graduates and non-PAUD children more concisely and comparatively, as shown below.

**Table 2. Comparison of Social and Emotional Adjustment of PAUD and Non-PAUD Children**

<b>Adjustment Indicator</b>	<b>PAUD Graduates</b>	<b>Non-PAUD Children</b>
Interaction with peers	Actively interact and play together	Tend to play alone or remain passive
Sharing ability	Able to share toys and cooperate	Still need teacher guidance and reinforcement
Response to teachers	Confident, communicative, and responsive	Show hesitation or dependence
Emotional regulation	Relatively able to control emotions while playing	Easily anxious, cry, or withdraw
Participation in group activities	Actively involved and cooperative	Participation is still limited

In terms of adjustment, observation results showed that PAUD graduates had more developed social-emotional abilities compared to non-PAUD children. Adjustment in this study was assessed based on children's ability to interact with peers, communicate with teachers, and manage emotions during learning and play activities. PAUD graduates appeared to establish social interactions with classmates more easily. They initiated play, shared toys, and participated in group activities without significant conflict.

When minor conflicts occurred during play, children tended to control their emotions and resolve problems with minimal teacher assistance. This indicates relatively good emotional regulation skills. In addition, PAUD graduates showed more positive relationships with teachers. They were not hesitant to greet teachers, ask questions, or express simple ideas during activities. They also responded well to instructions and followed directions effectively. This suggests that children had prior experience interacting with educators and were therefore more prepared for social relationships in a formal school environment.

Conversely, non-PAUD children showed limitations in social and emotional adjustment. Some children preferred to play alone and had difficulty forming intensive interactions with peers. In certain situations, non-PAUD children showed emotional reactions such as crying easily, withdrawing, or showing discomfort when facing activity changes. They also needed more time to build confidence in interacting with teachers and peers.

**Children’s Creativity and Imagination in Play Activities**

Play activities are one of the most important indicators in assessing early childhood development, particularly in creativity and imagination. Based on observations during play activities, differences were found in play patterns between PAUD graduates and non-PAUD children. To facilitate understanding, the findings were organized into several aspects of play creativity. The comparison is presented in the following table.

**Table 3. Children’s Creativity and Imagination in Play Activities**

<b>Creativity Indicator</b>	<b>PAUD Graduates</b>	<b>Non-PAUD Children</b>
Variety in using play materials	Use play materials in varied and creative ways	Use materials according to basic functions
Role-playing ability	Able to create roles and simple storylines	Limited and require examples
Initiative in play	Show independent play ideas	Wait for teacher direction or imitate peers
Exploration of play environment	Actively explore and try new things	Hesitant and less explorative
Imagination in play	Well-developed and expressive imagination	Imagination still limited

Differences between PAUD graduates and non-PAUD children were also evident in creativity and imagination during play activities. Play is the main activity in kindergarten and serves as a medium for cognitive, social, and emotional development. Therefore, observing play activities is an important indicator of children’s readiness and adjustment.

PAUD graduates showed more varied and imaginative play abilities. They developed play ideas independently, such as role-playing with simple storylines, imitating adult roles, or combining several play materials into new forms of play. They were also more active in exploring the play environment and showed high curiosity.

In contrast, non-PAUD children tended to use play materials in limited ways according to their basic functions. They still required examples from teachers or peers before developing play independently. In some cases, children appeared hesitant to try new variations of play and preferred to follow modeled activities. This indicates that limited structured play experience before entering kindergarten may affect children’s creativity and imagination development.

**Discussion**

**Children’s Adaptation Ability**

The results of this study consistently show significant differences in children’s adaptation abilities to the kindergarten environment between those who attended Early Childhood Education (PAUD) and those who did not. These findings highlight the crucial role of PAUD in preparing children for the transition to a formal school environment, particularly in terms of initial response, understanding classroom routines, independence, willingness to try new activities, and adaptation to rules. Early childhood education has a significant impact on children’s later development by forming a strong foundation in knowledge, skills, and learning motivation. Positive early childhood education experiences can substantially influence children’s development, improve school success, and reduce the need for special education services (Damayanti et al., 2022).

In terms of initial responses to the kindergarten environment, PAUD graduates showed higher readiness and were less hesitant in facing new environments compared to non-PAUD children. This readiness can be explained by children’s experiences in PAUD, which allow them to interact with peers and adults outside the family environment and adapt to different settings (Asmarita et al., 2020). Research confirms that high-quality early childhood education has long-

term positive effects on children's development, especially in behavior, social interaction, and emotional maturity. Children who participate in formal early childhood programs at the age of three tend to demonstrate stronger academic skills and more optimal social behavior compared to peers without prior educational experience. PAUD institutions provide stimulation that supports children's growth and development, thereby enhancing school readiness for further education.

Understanding classroom routines also emerged as a clear differentiating factor. PAUD graduates tended to understand and follow established routines more quickly, while non-PAUD children often showed confusion. This is consistent with the objectives of PAUD, which include instilling rules and discipline as well as improving communication and social skills. According to Rusmiati et al. (2022), learning experiences in PAUD contribute to children's social responsibility, including increased obedience and compliance. A supportive and motivating learning environment in PAUD can help children exceed perceived limitations and achieve rapid development in various aspects of life, including the ability to follow routines (Hudain et al., 2023). Discipline instilled from an early age becomes an important quality that influences students' lives and guides their development (Ramadhanti et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in terms of independence, willingness to try new activities, and adaptation to classroom rules, PAUD graduates demonstrated higher levels of competence. PAUD serves as a setting to develop children's independence in preparation for future life stages, as independence needs to be nurtured from an early age as an initial provision for entering the next level of education (Mahmudah et al., 2023). Children who develop independence tend to show greater self-confidence and are better able to adjust to new environments, peers, and unfamiliar individuals (Suatin & Purwanti, 2023). While effective academic learning is important, teaching social skills is equally essential, as children's school performance is closely related to their ability to interact with peers and adults and to follow rules within the school environment.

### **Children's Adjustment Ability**

The findings of this study further reveal striking differences in children's social and emotional adjustment between those who attended PAUD and those who did not. Various aspects, including peer interaction, sharing ability, responses to teachers, emotional regulation, and participation in group activities, consistently showed advantages among PAUD graduates. This indicates that experiences in PAUD significantly shape children's social and emotional capacities, preparing them for more structured school environments (Nurhayati, 2025). Healthy social-emotional development in early childhood is essential as a foundation for interacting with broader social environments such as schools (Amalia et al., 2023).

In terms of peer interaction and sharing ability, PAUD graduates demonstrated more advanced skills. Exposure to diverse social environments in PAUD allows children to learn interaction, negotiation, and sharing of toys or resources, contributing to the development of essential social skills (Poerwati & Cahaya, 2018). Through these experiences, children learn how to cooperate, resolve minor conflicts, and understand others' perspectives, which are fundamental for healthy interpersonal relationships. In contrast, non-PAUD children may require more time to develop these skills due to limited social interaction outside the family environment. Social involvement with peers in early childhood plays an important role in shaping children's character, including their ability to share and cooperate.

Children's responses to teachers and emotional regulation showed similar patterns. Children who attended PAUD tended to show more positive and cooperative responses toward authority figures such as teachers. They learned to follow instructions, respect rules, and understand behavioral expectations within the classroom. PAUD also helps children develop the ability to identify, understand, and manage their emotions more effectively. Through teacher guidance and peer interaction, children learn strategies to cope with frustration, anger, and sadness, which are essential for adaptation in the school environment. Positive emotional development in early childhood helps children regulate their emotions during social interactions

(Al Umairi, 2025).

Furthermore, participation in group activities emerged as another strong indicator of the advantages of PAUD graduates. Structured group activities in PAUD provide opportunities for children to practice cooperation, take roles, listen, and contribute within a team. These experiences enhance social skills while also fostering a sense of belonging and confidence to participate actively. Non-PAUD children may show hesitation or difficulty in joining and contributing to group activities due to limited prior experience with group dynamics. Studies indicate that early childhood education plays an important role in improving children's socio-emotional abilities (Albariq et al., 2023).

### **Creativity and Imagination**

The findings of this study also highlight significant differences in creativity and imagination during play activities between children who attended PAUD and those who did not. Observations showed that PAUD graduates demonstrated greater variation in the use of play materials, stronger role-playing abilities, greater initiative in play, more active exploration of the play environment, and richer imagination compared to non-PAUD children. This indicates that PAUD environments provide rich stimulation that supports the development of children's creative and imaginative potential, which is essential for holistic development (Zahrawanny & Fitria, 2021).

In terms of variation in the use of play materials and role-playing abilities, PAUD graduates appeared more advanced. Children who attended PAUD tended to use play materials in more varied and creative ways, extending beyond their basic functions. The use of learning media such as loose parts in STEAM-based learning, for example, can enhance children's creativity by encouraging them to generate ideas and imagine new possibilities. These abilities often align with children's capacity to create roles and simple storylines in role-playing activities, reflecting cognitive and imaginative flexibility. Through role play, children can express themselves creatively while also developing social skills (Saputri & Katoningsih, 2023).

Initiative in play was also a clear differentiating factor. PAUD graduates more frequently demonstrated independent play ideas, whereas non-PAUD children tended to wait for teacher instructions. Learning environments in PAUD that allow children freedom to play and choose activities according to their interests encourage initiative, creativity, and exploration (Latif et al., 2022). This independence results from opportunities to explore and experiment, which foster initiative, autonomy, and creativity.

Finally, exploration of the play environment and imagination in play also showed clear advantages among PAUD graduates. Play during the preschool years allows children to explore and understand their surroundings while developing imagination and creativity (Ramadhani & Fauziah, 2020). PAUD facilitates exploration through stimulating environments and diverse activities that directly support imaginative development. Through imagination and play, children learn to understand their world, and imagination supports both cognitive and social development (Wiyani, 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings and discussion presented above, it can be concluded that early childhood education background has a significant influence on children's adaptation and adjustment abilities in the kindergarten environment. Children who attended PAUD demonstrated better adaptation skills than those who did not, particularly in responding to the school environment, understanding classroom routines, showing independence, having the confidence to try new activities, and complying with classroom rules. Structured learning experiences in PAUD help children become better prepared for the transition into a formal educational setting. In addition, adjustment abilities in the social and emotional domains were more developed among PAUD graduates. These children tended to interact more actively with peers, were able to share, showed positive responses toward teachers, and demonstrated more

stable emotional regulation during learning and play activities. In contrast, children without PAUD experience required a longer adaptation period and more intensive guidance to achieve similar levels of adjustment. Overall, this study confirms that participation in early childhood education contributes positively to children's readiness for kindergarten, particularly in terms of adaptation, social-emotional adjustment, and creativity.

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