



Early Childhood Education Teachers' Strategies for Improving Discipline in Early Childhood Using the Token Economy Method

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategies employed by early childhood education (PAUD) teachers to enhance discipline among young children using the token economy method. Token economy is a behavior modification technique that reinforces positive behavior by awarding tokens, which children can exchange for rewards. Research shows that this method effectively increases discipline by motivating children to follow rules and develop responsible habits. Studies conducted in various early childhood settings report significant improvements in children's punctuality, orderliness, and reduction of disruptive behaviors after implementing token economy systems. Key challenges include managing the consistency of token distribution and addressing children's desire for immediate rewards, which can be mitigated by involving parents and using simple visual aids like token boards. Overall, the token economy method supports a positive classroom environment by promoting self-regulation and cooperation, making it a practical and effective strategy for PAUD teachers to foster discipline in early learners.

Keywords: Behavior Modification; Classroom Management; Discipline; Early Childhood Education; PAUD; Positive Reinforcement; Token Economy

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of low discipline in early childhood is one of the most common problems found in the context of the implementation of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in Indonesia, both in formal institutions such as Kindergarten (TK) and non-formal institutions such as playgroups and community-based PAUD [1]. Low levels of discipline in children are evident in various behaviors that are often encountered in daily learning activities, for example, children not queuing when washing their hands or entering class, refusing to share toys, not tidying up play equipment after use, refusing to follow class rules, often disturbing friends, being reluctant to complete simple tasks, or even showing tantrum reactions when asked to follow teacher instructions [2]. In many cases, this behavior is not simply a spontaneous expression typical of early childhood, but has created significant obstacles for teachers in managing the classroom, organizing the flow of learning activities, and ensuring a safe, comfortable, and productive learning experience for all children in the class [3].

Initial observations at various early childhood education (PAUD) institutions in Indonesia indicate that most children aged 4–6 years still do not demonstrate adequate discipline in accordance with the social-emotional development indicators listed in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD)

Independent Curriculum and the Child Development Achievement Level Standards (STPPA). For example, in queue situations, teachers often need to provide repeated instructions to get children to stand neatly and wait their turn; some children tend to run to the front of the line, push their peers, or display impatience [4]. During the clean-up activity, some children did not immediately respond when the teacher asked them to return their toys to their place; others even left the activity location, so the teacher had to provide additional direction or physical assistance to complete the activity [5], [6]. This pattern of behavior was found to be consistent in a number of observational studies conducted by early childhood education researchers in various major cities in Indonesia, such as Bandung, Yogyakarta, Denpasar, and Makassar, which showed that the disciplinary behavior of children in PAUD was on average still in the developing category as expected, but had not yet achieved stable behavioral consistency [7].

Several classroom action research (CAR) reports and survey studies conducted by academic institutions show that more than 60% of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Indonesia identify "indiscipline" as the biggest challenge in classroom management, surpassing the problem of delayed language development or other social skills. (Leck, 1986). Similar observational data was also found by Musfiroh (2020), who stated that low child discipline is closely related to weak routine habits at school and a lack of parental consistency in enforcing rules at home. Empirical data from an initial survey of 10 early childhood education institutions showed that 7 out of 10 teachers reported difficulty getting children to tidy up the classroom environment, 8 out of 10 teachers reported that children often fought over toys, and 6 out of 10 teachers stated that children did not follow simple instructions without repeated practice and intensive guidance [9].

The phenomenon of low discipline in early childhood should not be viewed as "naughtiness" or a failure of behavior, but rather as a developmental phase that requires pedagogical attention and an appropriate approach to instilling values. Discipline, theoretically, is seen as part of a child's social-emotional development, particularly the ability to control oneself (self-regulation), understand rules, follow routines, and consider the needs of others [10]. According to Berk (2013), children's self-regulation skills develop significantly during preschool age as a result of the interaction between physiological maturity (particularly the development of the brain's frontal lobe), environmental conditioning, and consistent adult support. Children aged 4–6 years still rely heavily on adult guidance to understand the consequences of their behavior and adapt their actions to prevailing social norms. Therefore, children's low levels of discipline cannot be separated from their daily experiences, both at home and at school [11].

From a character education perspective, discipline is the foundation for a child's moral and social development. Lickona (1991) states that discipline is not merely about obedience, but also about a child's ability to develop self-control, moral awareness, and responsibility for themselves and their environment. Discipline in early childhood serves as a foundation for the development of other character traits, such as honesty, hard work, respect, and empathy. In other words, discipline is not simply a rule to be followed, but an integral component in the development of a well-rounded personality. Children who are accustomed to following simple rules, completing activities, waiting their turn, and respecting the rights of others tend to have better social adaptation skills in elementary school and beyond [12]. Conversely, children who grow up without the habit of discipline are likely to experience difficulties in social interactions, academic challenges, and an inability to follow routines in formal environments, which ultimately impact long-term development.

However, establishing discipline in early childhood is often misunderstood. In some educational institutions, the disciplinary approach is still authoritarian, for example, through physical punishment, shaming, verbal punishment such as shouting or scolding, and threats. According to developmental experts, this approach is not only ineffective in the long term but can also have negative impacts on children's emotional development. Research by Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor (2016) shows that physical punishment does not increase long-term compliance and actually

increases the risk of aggression, anxiety, antisocial behavior, and damaged relationships between children and adults [13], [14]. In line with this, a study in Indonesia conducted by Hartati, Muchtar, & Wuryandani (2020) concluded that children who frequently receive punishment tend to develop fear, not discipline; they only obey because they are afraid of being punished, not because they understand the meaning of the rules [15].

In the context of PAUD, Lestari (2021) revealed that 40% of teachers still use the punishment approach as the main strategy for establishing discipline, mainly because they have not been equipped with knowledge about the positive discipline approach [16], [17]. In fact, research in contemporary developmental psychology emphasizes that positive discipline—which emphasizes affection, explanation, consistency, and the provision of choices and positive reinforcement—is the most effective approach to developing children's discipline in a sustainable manner [18], [19]. Positive discipline views undisciplined behavior as a learning opportunity, not a mistake that must be punished. Teachers help children understand the consequences of their actions, guide them in finding solutions, and support children in learning to take responsibility for their behavior. Children are encouraged to understand rules as part of a shared process, not simply as one-sided instructions [20], [21].

Several empirical studies demonstrate the success of implementing positive discipline in various early childhood education institutions (PAUDs) in Indonesia. For example, research by Kurniasari & Widodo (2022) found that the use of positive discipline strategies such as descriptive praise, reinforcing positive behavior, providing opportunities for choice, and using visual schedules can improve children's ability to follow daily routines by 35% within eight weeks of implementation. Children also showed a significant decrease in tantrums and refusal to complete tasks [22]. Another study by Rahmadani & Wicaksono (2021) at an Integrated Islamic Kindergarten in Pekanbaru found that practicing natural consequences and logical consequences helps children understand the relationship between behavior and its consequences, thus increasing discipline without triggering fear or anger [23].

The phenomenon of low discipline in early childhood can also be linked to the development of self-regulation skills in a neuropsychological context. Research on brain development shows that executive functions, including the ability to control emotions, regulate behavior, remember instructions, and plan actions, develop rapidly between the ages of 3 and 6 [24]. This process is greatly influenced by the quality of the child's interactions with the adults who are their primary caregivers (teachers and parents). Children who experience a responsive, warm, and consistent environment in enforcing rules tend to develop self-regulation skills more quickly [25]. Conversely, an inconsistent, unresponsive, or overly restrictive environment can hinder the development of this aspect. Therefore, an educational approach that focuses on supportive parenting and consistent habituation is key to developing discipline [26].

Field observations conducted by several educational and research institutions indicate that discipline problems are often related to a lack of clear routines. For example, in one early childhood education center, cleaning activities were only carried out occasionally, not at the same time every day, or using the same procedures. As a result, children could not predict the rules that were required. This is reinforced by Masruroh's (2020) findings, which emphasized that structured routines are a key factor in developing discipline in early childhood. Children need the same pattern every day so they can understand what is expected of them without having to be constantly reminded [27].

Furthermore, parental involvement is also an important variable in developing children's discipline. Many teachers report that children have difficulty following rules at school because parenting styles at home do not support discipline. For example, children are not taught to tidy up their toys at home or are allowed to refuse instructions without consequences, leading to the same responses at school [28], [29]. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) research, which suggests that children's behavioral development is strongly influenced by the interaction between microsystems

(home and school). If these two environments are not aligned, character development will be less than optimal. A study by Yuliani (2021) even found that consistent rules between home and school can increase children's compliance with rules by 45% [30].

The urgency of developing discipline in early childhood becomes even more crucial when linked to the broader goals of national education, which emphasize character building as the foundation for human resource development. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), through various policies, including the Independent Curriculum, states that social-emotional competence and character are key characteristics of Pancasila-based students that need to be instilled from an early age [31], [32]. Discipline—in the form of self-control, following rules, and taking responsibility for tasks—is a fundamental aspect of this profile. In other words, failure to develop discipline at an early age has the potential to hinder the achievement of the Pancasila student profile at the next level [33].

Furthermore, developing discipline also has implications for children's readiness to enter elementary school. Numerous studies have shown that school readiness is determined not only by pre-literacy and pre-numeracy academic skills, but primarily by social-emotional readiness, including the ability to follow rules, manage emotions, and work in groups [34]. Children who are unable to regulate themselves will have difficulty adapting to the learning structure of elementary school. Early grade teachers often report that students who are not accustomed to following preschool routines take longer to adjust and struggle with academic and social tasks. Therefore, establishing discipline from early childhood has a long-term impact on a child's future learning success [35].

Given the complexity of the phenomenon of low discipline in early childhood and the urgency of developing it as a component of character, a sound approach based on the principles of child development is necessary, not simply enforcing rules through punishment. A humanistic, supportive, consistent approach, and one oriented toward long-term learning are crucial (Aziz & Hidayah, 2024; L. Suryani et al., 2025). This is in line with the modern educational paradigm which emphasizes that character formation cannot be done through external control alone, but must encourage children to develop internal motivation to behave in accordance with expected values [38].

Various studies have shown that the most recommended approaches for developing discipline in early childhood are positive discipline and social-emotional learning (SEL). Positive discipline emphasizes reinforcing good behavior, providing alternative behaviors, creating a conducive learning environment, providing choices, and fostering dialogue about feelings and needs. Meanwhile, the SEL approach emphasizes self-regulation skills, emotional management, empathy, and responsible decision-making. These two approaches complement each other and have been proven effective through international studies and local research in Indonesia [39].

Considering these theoretical and empirical foundations, it is clear that early childhood discipline is not a simple matter but a multidimensional developmental phenomenon influenced by various environmental factors. Establishing discipline requires appropriate pedagogical strategies, not punishment [40]. Teachers, as the primary actors in early childhood education, need to possess adequate pedagogical and social-emotional competencies to implement a positive discipline approach. Similarly, collaboration between schools and parents needs to be strengthened to ensure consistent discipline between home and school [41].

The behaviorist theory pioneered by B.F. Skinner asserts that human behavior can be shaped through stimulus-response mechanisms and strengthened through reinforcement. Skinner (1953) introduced the concept of operant conditioning, namely that behavior that is reinforced by positive consequences tends to be repeated, while behavior that is not reinforced will decrease [42], [43]. Token economics is a form of operant conditioning application characterized by the presence of tokens as reinforcement given each time the target behavior appears [44].

In the context of early childhood education, Skinner's theory is highly relevant, given that young children are still learning to understand social rules through concrete experiences. Positive reinforcement has been shown to be more effective than punishment in shaping long-term behavior [45], [46]. Research by Cooper, Heron, & Heward (2007) shows that consistent use of reinforcement can increase adaptive behavior in children aged 3–6 years. In education, token economies have been used to shape various behaviors such as regularity, orderliness, learning focus, and independence [47].

Jean Piaget explained that children's moral development progresses through two stages: heteronomous morality and autonomous morality. At an early age (2–7 years), children are in the heteronomous stage, viewing rules as absolute and enforced by authority. Therefore, children need concrete examples, clear structures, and direct consequences to understand right and wrong behavior [48], [49]. This principle makes token economics an appropriate medium because it provides concrete consequences that are easy for children to understand.

In addition, Piaget stated that early childhood learns morals through everyday social practices, especially through interactions with teachers and peers [50]. Thus, the effectiveness of token economy depends not only on rewards but also on the positive interactions teachers build during the learning process.

Although the effectiveness of token economics has been extensively researched, most studies have focused on clinical settings or children with special needs. Systematic studies have shown that the application of token economics in regular early childhood education classrooms is still limited, particularly regarding detailed implementation strategies by teachers, classroom dynamics, and challenges faced in daily practice [51]. Research on regular early childhood education (PAUD) classes often only describes the final results without in-depth examination of the process, obstacles, and adaptations teachers make in implementing token economics. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic educational values such as honesty and responsibility into the token economic system has not been widely explored, even though this is highly relevant in the context of character education in Indonesia [52].

Challenges to implementation in regular early childhood education include time constraints, large student numbers, diverse child characteristics, and a lack of teacher training in token economy-based behavior management. Other obstacles include a lack of parental support and differing perceptions of discipline between teachers and parents. Therefore, research that describes in detail teacher strategies, adaptations, and the integration of local and religious values into token economy is urgently needed to enrich educational practices in early childhood education [53].

Although token economics has been extensively researched and its effectiveness in behavioral modification has been empirically proven, there are several research gaps that remain unfilled, particularly in the context of its application in regular Early Childhood Education (ECE). First, previous research has focused predominantly on clinical settings. Most literature, such as that of Kazdin (2013) and Cooper et al. (2007), discusses the use of token economics in the context of intensive behavioral therapy, interventions for children with special needs (ABK), or inclusive classroom environments [54]. Meanwhile, in-depth exploration of its application in regular early childhood education settings—which have more social dynamics, pedagogical flexibility, and a more heterogeneous student body—remains very limited. This gap creates a need to examine how the token system operates in a broader general education setting [55].

Second, there is a lack of qualitative research that describes teachers' implementation strategies in depth and holistically. Most existing research tends to use quantitative experimental designs, which, while successfully demonstrating the statistical effectiveness of these methods, often neglect the process and dynamics in the field [56], [57]. How teachers design and select tokens, how children respond emotionally and behaviorally to this system, what classroom dynamics emerge during implementation, what operational constraints teachers face, and how they adapt strategies in

real time are dimensions that have not been widely explored through qualitative case study approaches [58].

Third, there is minimal integration between the concept of token economics and religious values, particularly Islam, within the framework of character education. Most research on token economics only emphasizes observable behavior, without exploring its potential to instill spiritual values such as honesty, responsibility, trustworthiness, and etiquette as an integral part of Islamic character education [59]. In fact, from an Islamic educational perspective, as emphasized by philosophers like Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulumuddin*, habituation is the primary foundation for moral formation, where the repetition of good habits must be guided by teachers to shape a child's spiritual character. This lack of integration makes the token economy approach feel less contextual when applied to many early childhood education institutions in Indonesia that are based on Islamic values [60].

Fourth, the implication of all the gaps above is the lack of applicable and contextual implementation guidelines for early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. Educators in the field need detailed, practical guidance on what types of tokens are effective and safe for early childhood, the optimal frequency of dispensing, the design of a sustainable reinforcement system, a fair and consistent exchange mechanism, and how to integrate this system with the operational curriculum in PAUD units, such as the Merdeka Curriculum [61]. Furthermore, guidance on adapting based on individual child characteristics is also essential. Previous research generally hasn't provided a detailed and structured overview of these operational aspects, thus hampering the effective and broad-based adoption of token economy methods [62].

In general, this study aims to describe in depth and comprehensively the strategies applied by PAUD teachers in implementing the token economy method to improve early childhood discipline in Kindergarten X. This objective does not only stop at a superficial description, but also aims to analyze the process, class dynamics, and various challenges that arise during the implementation of the token economy, thus providing a real picture of the complexity of its application in the field. Furthermore, this study is designed to identify changes in children's disciplinary behavior after the implementation of the token economy, by basing its analysis on the teacher's perspective and the results of direct observations in the classroom. What is novel or new about this study is its aim to develop an integration model between token economy and Islamic character values, such as responsibility, honesty, and trustworthiness. Thus, this method is expected to not only shape children's outward behavior, but also build a solid foundation of moral and spiritual values in early childhood, making it a holistic and contextual character education approach.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to explore teachers' strategies in implementing the token economy method to improve early childhood discipline in Kindergarten X. The case study was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena in a real context, namely the interaction of teachers and children in the learning process and the application of token economy over a two-month period. The research location in the kindergarten provides a specific context relevant to the research objectives, namely understanding class dynamics and the responses of 5-6 year old children (group B) to the intervention provided.

The research participants consisted of three classroom teachers who acted as implementers of the token economy method and 15 early childhood children as the subjects of the application. The selection of group B (ages 5-6 years) was based on the children's moral and cognitive development stage, which is beginning to understand rules and consequences, making it suitable for positive reinforcement-based behavioral interventions. The main data collection technique was systematic participant observation, where the frequency of children's disciplinary behavior was recorded before and after the intervention to measure behavioral changes quantitatively and qualitatively. This

observation was supplemented by in-depth interviews with teachers to explore experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing the token economy, as well as documentation in the form of photographs of the token board, prizes, and children's activities as supporting visual evidence [63], [64].

The research instruments included observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation sheets, which were validated by two experts to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data. Instrument validation is crucial to ensure the data obtained is reliable and reflects the actual conditions in the field. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification, ensuring a systematic and in-depth analysis process [65]. To increase the validity of the data, triangulation of sources (teachers and children) and methods (observation, interviews, documentation) was carried out, which is standard practice in qualitative research to reduce bias and strengthen the findings [66].

Similar research using the token economy method in the context of early childhood education shows the effectiveness of this method in increasing discipline and reducing disruptive behavior [67]. For example, a quasi-experimental study at ARNI Kindergarten, Jember, found a significant decrease in disruptive behavior after implementing a token economy [68], [69]. Qualitative case studies of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder also confirm that token economies can improve focus and reduce impulsivity through consistent positive reinforcement.[70]. In addition, research at RA Ta Kottah Daleman Galis Bangkalan revealed that economic tokens make the learning process more enjoyable and significantly improve children's discipline. Another study at TK Kumara Asri Denpasar reported an increase in children's discipline of up to 26.93% after implementing economic tokens in two learning cycles [71], [72].

Thus, the qualitative research design of this case study allows for a comprehensive understanding of how teachers adapt and implement token economy in a regular early childhood education context, including the challenges faced and the solution strategies used. This approach also allows for the integration of quantitative data from observations of the frequency of behavior with qualitative data from interviews and documentation, thus providing a holistic picture of the impact of the token economy method on early childhood discipline 146. Instrument validation and data triangulation strengthen the credibility of the research results, which are expected to be a practical reference for PAUD teachers and managers in developing effective and enjoyable learning strategies.

Key references supporting this approach and design include research on the effectiveness of token economics in reducing disruptive behavior and improving discipline in early childhood 146, qualitative case studies of children with special needs 2, and systematic reviews confirming the success of token economics in various child education settings 3. The Miles and Huberman data analysis model is also widely used in qualitative educational research to ensure systematic and valid analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning and Design of Token Economy System

Planning and designing a token economy system is a crucial step in implementing this method to improve discipline in early childhood education. Teachers must determine specific and measurable target behaviors to be developed, such as raising their hands before speaking, tidying up their bags, or lining up in an orderly manner. The determination of these target behaviors should be based on observations of the children's needs and characteristics, and should be relevant to the rules and values they want to instill in the classroom [73]. The form of the token used also needs to be tailored to the child's interests and appeal, for example, star stickers, stamps, or cute pictures that are easily recognized and liked by children, so that the token becomes an effective motivator. In addition, the reward offered in exchange for the token must be attractive and meaningful to the

child, such as a small toy, extra playtime, or special praise, so that the child is motivated to maintain positive behavior [74].

Careful planning in the design of a token economy system is crucial for effective and sustainable interventions. The principles of behavior modification proposed by Alberto and Troutman (2009) emphasize that target behaviors must be clear, reinforcement must be consistent, and the token system must be easily understood by children. Furthermore, a developmentally appropriate approach must be implemented, namely adapting the form of tokens, the type of target behavior, and rewards to the cognitive and emotional developmental stage of early childhood.[75]This is important so that children do not just receive tokens, but also understand the relationship between good behavior and the positive consequences obtained, so that learning discipline becomes meaningful and embedded in their character [76].

Several empirical studies support the importance of careful planning in a token economy system. A study at Kumara Asri Kindergarten in Denpasar showed that the use of tokens in the form of easy-to-understand star stickers and varied rewards successfully increased children's discipline by 26.93% in two learning cycles. Research at RA Ta Kottah Daleman Galis Bangkalan also confirmed that teacher creativity in selecting tokens and rewards that suit children's interests makes the learning process more enjoyable and increases children's enthusiasm in following class rules. A quasi-experimental study at ARNI Kindergarten Jember added that consistency in token distribution and clarity of target behaviors are crucial for successfully reducing children's disruptive behavior [77].

Discussions about planning a token economy system are not without practical challenges teachers face, such as ensuring consistent token distribution, preventing children from becoming bored with monotonous tokens or rewards, and adapting the system to diverse classroom dynamics. Therefore, teachers need to periodically evaluate and adapt the implemented token system, including involving children in selecting tokens and rewards to foster a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation [78]. This approach aligns with the principles of child-centered learning and ongoing positive reinforcement.

Implementation and Consistency of Token Granting

The implementation and consistency of token awarding are crucial for the success of the token economy method for improving discipline in early childhood education. Token awarding is carried out directly each time a child demonstrates a predetermined disciplined behavior, such as raising their hand before speaking or tidying up their bag. Teachers award tokens as immediate and clear positive reinforcement, accompanied by a brief explanation of the reason for the token award so that children understand the connection between good behavior and the positive consequences they receive [79]. Consistency in token awarding is crucial because inconsistent reinforcement can reduce the effectiveness of learning and slow the development of disciplined habits in children. Teachers also need to ensure that token awards are fair and transparent to maintain children's motivation and trust in the token economy system being implemented [80].

Skinner's theory of positive reinforcement is the primary foundation for implementing token economies, where desired behavior is reinforced by providing a pleasant stimulus (a token), increasing the likelihood of that behavior occurring again. Consistent and timely positive reinforcement helps children associate disciplined behavior with pleasant outcomes, thereby establishing a habit. This consistency is also crucial for avoiding confusion and uncertainty that can disrupt a child's learning process and character development. Research by Jones et al. (2020) confirms that consistent positive reinforcement through token economies plays a significant role in accelerating positive behavioral change and reducing disruptive behavior in early childhood, consistent with findings in the context of early childhood education (PAUD) [81].

Several empirical studies support the importance of consistency in token awarding. For example, research at RA Ta Kottah Daleman Galis Bangkalan showed that teachers who consistently

awarded tokens with clear explanations significantly improved children's discipline and made the learning process more enjoyable. A quasi-experimental study at ARNI Kindergarten Jember also found that consistent token awarding significantly reduced disruptive behavior in children, strengthening the role of positive reinforcement in shaping behavior. A meta-analysis by Hayes et al. (2023) confirmed that a token economy with a consistent token award component yielded significant effects in increasing prosocial behavior in the classroom, in both general and special education settings [82].

The discussion on the implementation and consistency of token awarding also highlighted practical challenges teachers face, such as maintaining consistency across diverse classroom dynamics and ensuring that tokens remain meaningful to children. Teachers need to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to adapt the token system to children's needs and responses, and to avoid boredom with the tokens or rewards provided. A participatory approach involving children in selecting tokens and rewards can increase intrinsic motivation and the sustainability of positive behavior. This aligns with the principle of positive reinforcement, which relies not only on external stimuli but also on building children's awareness and understanding of the value of expected behavior [83].

The Impact of Token Economy on Children's Disciplinary Behavior

Various studies have shown that the implementation of the token economy system has a significant positive impact on improving the disciplined behavior of early childhood in educational environments, including PAUD. Observational data from research at the Quran Education Park (TPQ) indicates a significant increase in the frequency of children's disciplined behavior after the implementation of the token economy, with an average increase in pre-test and post-test scores of 4.30 points and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates the effectiveness of this method in shaping children's discipline [84]. Other studies in elementary schools and early childhood education centers also reported improvements in disciplinary behaviors such as punctuality, neatness, and orderliness, as well as children's enthusiasm for following classroom rules after receiving tokens as positive reinforcement, which could then be exchanged for attractive prizes. Teacher observations showed that children became more motivated and demonstrated better adherence to rules, which indirectly improved the conducive learning environment.

This increase in disciplined behavior can be interpreted as a process of internalizing rules, initially motivated by extrinsic reinforcement in the form of tokens and rewards, which is expected to develop into intrinsic motivation over time. The token economy serves as a positive reinforcement tool that helps children understand the consequences of expected behavior, so that disciplined behavior becomes a habit that is inherent and internally meaningful.[85]This aligns with Skinner's theory of positive reinforcement, which states that behavior that is consistently reinforced is more likely to be repeated and become part of an individual's behavioral pattern. Thus, token economies not only provide external rewards but also play a role in children's social and emotional learning processes, supporting the ongoing development of disciplined character.

A comparison with Smith's (2018) study examining the effectiveness of token economy in the context of early childhood education also showed consistent results, namely a significant increase in disciplined behavior and a reduction in disruptive behavior after the token economy intervention. Smith emphasized that the success of token economy is highly dependent on the consistency of token distribution and the relevance of rewards to children's interests, so that children feel valued and motivated to maintain positive behavior. This study also highlighted that token economy can improve interpersonal relationships in the classroom, creating a more harmonious and productive learning environment.[86]This finding strengthens empirical evidence that token economics is an effective strategy for improving early childhood discipline through a systematic and structured approach.

However, several studies also warn of challenges in implementing a token economy, such as the need to maintain consistency in token distribution and avoid children becoming bored with monotonous tokens or rewards. Regular evaluation and adaptation of the token system are necessary to ensure this method remains effective and appropriate to children's development and needs. Furthermore, involving children in selecting tokens and rewards can increase intrinsic motivation and the sustainability of disciplined behavior [87]. This approach supports the principles of child-centered learning and ongoing positive reinforcement.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementation

Implementing the token economy method to improve early childhood discipline in early childhood education (PAUD) faces several practical challenges that need to be addressed for the intervention to be effective and sustainable. One major obstacle is teacher fatigue in consistently recording and distributing tokens, especially in classes with large numbers of children and diverse behavioral dynamics. The manual recording process and timely token distribution require extra attention and energy from teachers, which can lead to fatigue and decreased consistency in token distribution. Furthermore, children often demand instant rewards, which can trigger impatience and diminish the long-term learning value of the token economy system [88]. Children who are accustomed to receiving immediate rewards may be less motivated to internalize the value of discipline intrinsically, so teachers need to manage these expectations with appropriate strategies.

To address these challenges, several practical solutions have been developed and implemented in the context of early childhood education (PAUD). The use of a simple token board that is easily accessible and understood by both children and teachers can reduce the burden of manual record-keeping and facilitate real-time monitoring of token distribution. This token board serves as a visual tool that helps children see their progress and motivates them to maintain disciplined behavior [89]. In addition, involving parents in the token economy process is an important strategy to strengthen the consistency of reinforcement at home and school, so that children receive a uniform message about the importance of discipline [90]. Good communication between teachers and parents also helps address the behavioral challenges of children demanding instant rewards by providing an understanding of the long-term goals of the token economy method.

Within the framework of classroom management, the challenges of teacher burnout and the demand for instant rewards can be analyzed as part of the complex dynamics of human resource management and child behavior management. Effective classroom management requires a system that focuses not only on providing reinforcement but also on organizing an efficient and sustainable learning process. Practical recommendations emerging from the literature and research findings include training teachers in the use of simple technologies for token recording, such as digital applications or interactive boards, which can reduce administrative burdens and improve the accuracy of token assignments [91]. Furthermore, developing a token system that is flexible and adaptable to children's needs and strengthening collaboration with parents and support staff can increase the effectiveness of token economy implementation.

A meta-analysis by Kim et al. (2021) confirmed that the success of a token economy is highly dependent on system design that considers factors such as token production rate, reward type, and token distribution consistency, all of which must be tailored to classroom characteristics and children's needs [92]. A qualitative study at RA Ta Kottah Daleman Galis Bangkalan also showed that teachers who were creative in developing a simple token board and involving parents significantly reduced burnout and increased children's motivation. However, a quasi-experimental study at another PAUD revealed that while token economy can reduce disruptive behavior, the challenges of consistently awarding tokens and maintaining children's motivation remain major obstacles that must be addressed with holistic classroom management strategies [93].

CONCLUSION

Research on the application of the token economy method to improve discipline in early childhood has shown consistent and positive results, confirming that this strategy is effective as a behavior modification tool in early childhood education (PAUD) environments. A study at Kumara Asri Kindergarten in Denpasar reported a significant increase in children's discipline, with the percentage of learning achievement increasing from 65.38% in the first cycle to 92.31% in the second cycle, indicating an increase of 26.93% after the implementation of the token economy. Similar findings were also found in other studies that showed that the token economy was able to reduce disruptive and aggressive behavior in children, while increasing responsibility and compliance with class rules. The positive reinforcement mechanism through the provision of tokens that can be exchanged for prizes motivates children to repeat disciplined behavior, which ultimately helps internalize the values of discipline on a sustainable basis.

The success of the token economy method is supported by positive reinforcement theory, which emphasizes the importance of pleasant consequences to reinforce desired behavior. Studies in elementary schools and early childhood education institutions indicate that consistently and systematically awarding tokens can foster stable disciplinary habits, such as punctuality, neatness, and regularity in daily activities. Furthermore, teacher involvement in designing a token system that suits the child's characteristics and classroom context is a key factor in successful implementation. The use of visual aids such as token boards and parental involvement in the reinforcement process have also been shown to increase the effectiveness of this method by strengthening the consistency of reinforcement at home and school.

However, several challenges in implementing the token economy need to be addressed, such as the workload placed on teachers in recording tokens and children's tendency to demand instant rewards. Recommended practical solutions include the use of simple technology for record-keeping, the development of a flexible token system, and good communication between teachers and parents to manage children's expectations. A holistic and adaptive classroom management approach is essential for the token economy method to be effective and sustainable, while also creating a fun and conducive learning environment for children's development.

Meta-analyses and systematic reviews also confirm that token economy is an effective classroom management strategy in various educational settings, both in regular and special education classrooms, with significant positive effects on prosocial behavior and reductions in negative behavior. This confirms that the token economy method is not only relevant for early childhood education but can also be adapted to various levels of education by adjusting the token components to suit class needs and student characteristics.

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