

# Current Status and Educational Measures for Developing Self-Care Skills among Children Aged 5–6 at Preschools in Hac Thanh Ward, Thanh Hoa Province

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**Abstract:** Self-care skills constitute a foundational component of children's independence, playing a decisive role in their adaptability, autonomy, and self-confidence during the crucial transition from preschool to primary education. This study aims to objectively and comprehensively assess the current status of self-care skills among children aged 5–6 and to propose an appropriate, feasible system of educational measures for preschools in Hac Thanh Ward, Thanh Hoa Province. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combined direct observation of 46 children (using a pre-designed checklist) with a quantitative survey of 88 preschool teachers and 46 parents (utilising a Likert scale) to gather multidimensional data. The findings reveal that while self-care skills among 5–6-year-olds in the surveyed area have been initially developed, they remain unstable and exhibit an imbalance across skill domains (eating and drinking skills ranked highest, whereas personal safety skills ranked lowest). Grounded in theoretical frameworks and empirical data, the study develops and proposes four systematic educational measures to enhance the quality of self-care skill education, thereby equipping children with essential readiness for primary school.

**Keywords:** self-care skills; children aged 5–6; preschool education; educational measures.

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## 1. Introduction

Early childhood education is not only the first level in the national education system but also plays a fundamental role in shaping children's initial abilities, qualities, and living habits. In Vietnam, the 2019 Education Law and the Early Childhood Education Program (issued under Circular 17/2009/TT-BGDĐT) affirm that one of the mandatory and core requirements is the formation of scientific living habits, self-care skills, and self-protection skills for children from the preschool stage onward. Especially at the age of 5-6, a crucial psychological turning point, children are preparing to transition to primary school. The general education environment demands a high level of independence, self-management, personal discipline, and flexible adaptability. Mastering self-care skills (from eating and personal hygiene to ensuring safety) is the “key” to helping children confidently integrate and minimise psychological pressure in their new learning environment.

However, in rapidly developing, urbanising areas like Hac Thanh ward, Thanh Hoa city, the teaching of self-care skills faces significant paradoxes and challenges. The fast-paced modern industrial lifestyle and improved family economic conditions have led many parents to overindulge, do things for their children, or overprotect them, inadvertently depriving them of opportunities to experience and practice independence. At the same time, in some preschools, the implementation of the program still heavily emphasises a “caring for and supervising children” mindset rather than fostering a constructive environment where children can engage in self-care and take responsibility for their own actions.

Stemming from the profound theoretical implications and practical shortcomings of the aforementioned educational issues, conducting an objective, multi-dimensional measurement of the current state of self-care skills among 5-6 year old children in Hac Thanh ward, Thanh Hoa province, and subsequently proposing a system of scientifically sound and feasible educational measures, is an urgent requirement. This research not only provides a realistic picture of the current situation but also contributes solutions to guide the innovation of skills education methods for preschool children in the current context.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Theoretical basis for teaching self-care skills to 5-6-year-old children

#### 2.1.1. The concept of self-service skills

From the perspective of early childhood psychology and education, self-care skills in preschool children are defined as their ability to perform, independently and proactively, or with minimal adult assistance, actions and behaviours to meet their essential daily needs. These needs include eating, dressing, personal hygiene, and recognising and avoiding dangers to ensure their own safety.

According to Nguyen Anh Tuyet (2015), self-care skills are not simply a series of isolated mechanical movements, but a complex psychological process integrating the unity of three components: cognition

(understanding why something must be done), attitude (self-awareness, sense of responsibility), and behaviour (acting) in the process of children self-regulating their personal activities. Maria Montessori (1967) strongly argued that children's independence is not innate but formed through children's active participation in self-care activities within a "prepared environment" appropriate to their size and cognitive abilities. From a socio-psychological perspective, Albert Bandura (1986), through his theory of social cognition, emphasised that children's behavioural skills are formed and strengthened through observing models (adults, friends), imitating them, and receiving reinforcement (praise, encouragement) in a continuous, interactive environment. Therefore, self-care skills are the most vivid and concrete manifestation of independent capacity, nurtured in the communication space between children and their educational environment (family, school).

### **2.1.2. The concept of self-care skills education**

Teaching self-care skills to 5-6-year-old children is a purposeful, planned pedagogical process designed and implemented by the school, with close cooperation between teachers and families. This process aims to foster, train, automate, and reinforce children's independent behaviours through structured activities, play, and practical experiences.

Based on LS Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the "Zone of Proximal Development," the development of self-care skills is optimal when children receive appropriate "scaffolding" from adults. Teachers or parents provide just enough guidance for children to overcome initial difficulties, then gradually withdraw to allow them to transition from guided to independent execution and mastery of their behaviour. Similarly, Jean Piaget (1952) asserted that children in the pre-operational stage are primarily visual and action-oriented; they learn most effectively through direct interaction with objects and concrete experiences in the real world.

Based on these theoretical foundations, it can be asserted that self-care skills education in preschool cannot be implemented through dogmatic lecturing or abstract theories. Instead, it requires teachers to design the environment, create problem-solving situations, and organise repetitive activities so that children can directly immerse themselves in practice, thereby self-training and adjusting their behaviour.

### **2.1.3. The role of self-care skills for 5-6-year-old children**

Self-care skills play a crucial role in the holistic development of children aged 5-6:

*In terms of personal development and character, it helps children develop independence, self-esteem, a sense of personal responsibility, and the ability to manage and recover from minor difficulties.*

*In terms of cognitive and motor skills, performing skills (such as buttoning a shirt, holding chopsticks) train fine motor dexterity, develop hand-eye coordination, and stimulate logical and sequential thinking (about the steps involved) and problem-solving abilities.*

*From a sociological perspective, Self-care skills are fundamental to helping children adapt to a group environment. A child who is self-reliant in daily life will easily integrate, confidently interact, cooperate, and establish positive relationships with their peers.*

*In terms of school readiness, this is a prerequisite for children to meet the stringent requirements for self-management, personal discipline, and daily routines when entering the primary school environment (Grade One).*

In particular, during the transition to primary school, self-care skills are essential for children to meet the requirements of self-management and personal discipline in the new learning environment (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Teaching self-care skills to 5-6-year-old children is crucial for their sustainable development.

### **2.1.4. Self-care skills groups for 5-6 year old children**

Based on the objectives of the National Preschool Education Program (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009) and the psychophysiological characteristics of this age group, this study structures children's self-care skills into four basic groups, forming a framework for assessing the current situation:

- (1) Self-service skills in eating, including the ability to neatly scoop/pick up food; use eating utensils correctly and flexibly (spoons, forks, bowls, cups); awareness of maintaining general hygiene, cleaning up the seat after eating.
- (2) Self-care skills in dressing, demonstrated through the ability to undress and put on clothes and shoes; the ability to distinguish and choose clothing suitable for weather changes (hot/cold) and social situations.
- (3) Personal hygiene and health care skills group, including basic hygiene practices such as washing hands with soap correctly, wiping face, brushing teeth, combing hair, going to the toilet in the designated place and knowing how to cover mouth when coughing/yawning.

- (4) The group of personal safety skills, the highest level of self-care, includes the ability to identify dangerous objects/places/situations (electricity, boiling water, strangers); comply with basic safety rules and know how to seek help, handle simple risk situations in life.

These four skill sets reflect essential requirements in children's lives and form the basis for assessing the current situation and proposing educational measures (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009; Bandura, 1986).

## 2.2. Research Organisation and Methods

This study applies a triangulation method to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the results, and is conducted on three groups of subjects:

**Direct Observation Sample (Children):** 46 children aged 5-6 years old were deliberately selected from preschools in Hac Thanh ward. Each child was directly observed by the researcher three times in different natural daily settings (mealtime, playtime, naptime). The tool used was a detailed behavioural checklist with four skill groups (eating, dressing, hygiene, safety), assessed on a 4-point Likert scale (1 - Unable to 4 - Proficient, self-motivated). The final score was the average of the three observations.

**Quantitative survey sample (Adults):** To compare and verify children's behaviour from multiple perspectives, the study surveyed 46 parents (corresponding to 46 observed children) to assess children's behaviour in the family environment, and simultaneously surveyed 88 preschool teachers directly teaching children aged 5-6 in the area. The measurement tool was a 4-level Likert-scale questionnaire that was validated and demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82).

**Location and Data Processing:** The study was conducted at 7 representative kindergartens in Hac Thanh ward and surrounding areas (Quang Phu Kindergarten, Quang Tam Kindergarten, Quang Cat Kindergarten, Tan Son Kindergarten, Truong Thi B Kindergarten, Dong Son Kindergarten, Ba Dinh Kindergarten). Quantitative data collected were cleaned and statistically processed using specialised software, employing the following parameters: mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and rank.

## 2.3. Current status of self-care skills of 5-6 year old children in preschools in Hac Thanh ward, Thanh Hoa province

### 2.3.1. Analysis of results from direct observation of children

Observing 46 children using a behavioural checklist enabled quantification of self-care skills via average indicator scores within each skill group.

Table 1: Levels of self-care skills in children (n = 46, observed data)

TT	skill group	M	SD	Rank
2	Eat and drink	2.85	0.36	1
2	Clothing	2.63	0.40	2
3	Personal hygiene	2.51	0.42	3
4	Personal safety	2.33	0.47	4
<b>TBC Shared</b>		<b>2.58</b>		<b>0.39</b>

(Source: Analysis of survey results, 2026)

The results in Table 1 accurately reflect the self-reliance abilities of 5-6-year-old children in the surveyed area:

**Overall level:** Children's self-care skills are at an average to above-average level (M = 2.58/4.0). This indicates that their independence is beginning to develop; however, their behaviour is not yet stable or proficient enough to become a lasting habit.

**Uneven development:** There is a clear disparity between skill groups. *Eating skills* ranked highest (M = 2.85) due to their frequent repetition in daily routines (breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack). Conversely, *personal safety skills* ranked lowest (M = 2.33). This weakness stems from limitations in children's ability to perceive and predict risks and handle situations, consistent with their pre-operational psychological characteristics: children often act on emotions, and their situational thinking is heavily reliant on constant reminders and warnings from adults.

**Level of dispersion:** The standard deviations of all skills are low (SD < 0.5), indicating that the skill development level among children in the observed sample is relatively uniform and not excessively differentiated, but overall has not yet reached the highest expected level.

### 2.3.2. Analysing the results from the perspective of teachers and parents.

Data from 88 teachers and 46 parents were collected using a 4-level Likert-scale questionnaire, reflecting perceptions and assessments of children's development of self-care skills.

Table 2: Levels of self-care skills in children (n = 134, survey data)

TT	skill group	Teachers (n = 88)			Parents (n = 46)		
		M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank
1	Eat and drink	2.95	0.45	1	2.88	0.52	1
2	Clothing	2.70	0.48	2	2.64	0.55	2
3	Personal hygiene	2.58	0.50	3	2.52	0.53	3
4	Personal safety	2.45	0.52	4	2.36	0.57	4
<b>Average</b>		<b>2.67</b>	0.49		<b>2.60</b>	0.54	

(Source: Analysis of survey results, 2026)

According to Table 2, there are several noteworthy points: Table 2 highlights some noteworthy points:

*Consensus on hierarchical structure:* Both teachers and parents share the same understanding of the uneven development of skill groups, with the order from highest to lowest being completely consistent with direct observation results: (1) Eating => (2) Dressing => (3) Personal hygiene => (4) Personal safety. This consistency once again confirms: the daily living environment dictates skill development; the actions that children perform most often will become the most proficient.

*Discrepancies in assessment:* In general, teachers tend to rate children's skills higher than parents across all indicator groups (average score difference of 0.06 to 0.09). This psychological difference is entirely explainable: Teachers assess children in a disciplined, organised classroom environment where behaviours are guided and supervised by rules; whereas parents observe children in a free, less controlled family environment, coupled with a protective, do-it-for-the-child mentality that makes children dependent and less likely to express their independence at home fully.

### 2.3.3. Comprehensive Comparison and Assessment of the Current Situation

Table 3: Comparison of self-care skills levels across three data sources.

TT	skill group	Observations (n=46)	Survey (Teachers n=88)	Survey (Parents n=46)	The biggest difference
1	Eat and drink	2.85	2.95	2.88	+0.10
2	Clothing	2.63	2.70	2.64	+0.07
3	Personal hygiene	2.51	2.58	2.52	+0.07
4	Personal safety	2.33	2.45	2.36	+0.12
<b>Average</b>		<b>2.58</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.60</b>	

(Source: Analysis of survey results, 2026)

The comparative results show that “eating skills “were consistently the highest across all three research sources, while “personal safety skills “were consistently the lowest, reflecting the general developmental characteristics of 5-6-year-old children.

The convergence of data from three perspectives (empirical observation, teacher professional evaluation, and family opinions) paints a consistent picture of the current situation:

The self-reliance abilities of 5-6-year-old children in preschools in Hac Thanh ward have been fostered, but they are not yet mature enough to become a sustainable skill.

The alarming weakness in the “Personal Safety” and “Personal Hygiene” skills groups exposes a gap in current educational methods. Educational activities at school and at home still seem to focus on equipping children with theoretical knowledge (teaching them what is dangerous and what is clean) rather than creating enough space and hypothetical situations for children to experience, stumble, and practice problem-solving skills.

The approach to early childhood education in the study area requires a paradigm shift: from a “caring and protective” mindset to one that “creates space for children to act independently and take responsibility.” This is a practical imperative to create the following educational measures.

### 2.3.4. Measures to educate self-care skills for 5-6-year-old children in preschools in Hac Thanh ward, Thanh Hoa province

**Measure 1: Organise an educational environment that develops self-care skills for children aged 5-6 years old.**

Organising an educational environment to create favourable conditions for children aged 5-6. Self-care skills are formed and developed through direct experience in daily life situations. Under the principal's guidance, the educational environment is designed to support the goal of developing self-care skills. Teachers are the direct subjects in designing and organising the classroom space in an open, convenient way for children to use independently.

The content of organising the learning environment focuses on arranging clearly defined functional areas, keeping supplies and equipment within easy reach, ensuring safety, and creating opportunities for children to perform self-care activities such as eating, personal hygiene, dressing, and handling simple situations. The implementation process requires teachers to minimise direct intervention, increase task assignment, and encourage children to perform tasks independently, while observing and providing targeted support to correct behaviour promptly.

This approach is suitable for the developmental characteristics of 5-6-year-old children, when the need for independence and the ability to control behaviour are clearly formed, and is also suitable for the facilities of preschools in Hac Thanh ward, creating a foundation for the stable development of self-care skills.

#### **Measure 2: Design a self-care skills education plan according to the competency-building process.**

Designing a self-care skills education plan ensures a transition from recognition to practice and achieving proficiency, thereby fostering sustainable independent behaviour in children. Teachers play a central role in organising this, based on the goals of the preschool education program and the individual developmental characteristics of each child, by determining specific requirements for each skill group and integrating these into daily routines.

The implementation process involves integrating self-care skills into learning, play, and daily activities, and organising children to practice repeatedly in familiar situations under supervised guidance to reinforce behaviour and form habits. Differentiating the level of requirements according to each child's ability ensures that all children have the opportunity to participate and progress, in line with the cognitive characteristics of the 5-6 age group, in which learning is most effective through direct action and experience.

#### **Measure 3: Establish a family-school coordination mechanism in self-care skills education.**

Establishing a coordination mechanism between families and schools ensures continuity and consistency in the development of self-care skills for 5- to 6-year-old children. The school plays a guiding and organising role; teachers directly connect and guide, while parents participate as coordinating agents, maintaining and reinforcing children's behaviour within the family environment. The coordination focuses on unifying educational goals, organisational methods, and skill-training approaches appropriate to each content group, while also providing specific guidance for parents to help children practice these skills in their daily lives.

The implementation process is carried out through regular exchanges between teachers and parents via appropriate communication channels, combined with organising family-involvement activities to strengthen consensus and improve educational effectiveness. This measure is particularly necessary in the context of Hac Thanh ward, where parents have the means to care for their children yet still tend to do things for them; therefore, reorienting the role of support rather than replacement is crucial for developing sustainable self-care skills.

#### **Measure 4: Organise a range of experiential activities to develop self-care skills**

The diverse experiential activities are designed to provide opportunities for 5-6-year-olds to develop self-care skills through practical situations, thereby transforming knowledge into behaviour. Teachers are the direct organisers of these activities, selecting forms appropriate to the children's developmental characteristics and the school's organisational conditions. The content focuses on a flexible combination of individual, group, and collective activities, integrating self-care tasks into games, simulated situations, and daily routines. The implementation process emphasises increased practical experience, allowing children to independently perform tasks such as preparing meals, maintaining personal hygiene, organising belongings, and handling simple safety situations; simultaneously, teachers play a guiding, supportive, and behavioural-adjustment role as needed. This approach is suitable for the learning characteristics of preschool children, in which knowledge acquisition and skill development occur effectively through activities and experiences, while also meeting the requirements for innovation in educational organisation in the practical context of preschools in Hac Thanh ward.

### **3. Conclusion**

Through empirical surveys using highly reliable measurement tools, this study provides a vivid picture of the self-care skills of 5-6-year-old children in preschools in Hac Thanh ward, Thanh Hoa province. Although children have formed a basic foundation of independence (reaching an average level,  $M=2.58$ ), the skill

structure still shows a worrying imbalance in development. The fact that essential life skills such as personal safety and hygiene have not been firmly established is a warning sign that the educational model should shift from one heavily focused on “awareness and care” to one heavily focused on “practice and experience.”

To address these practical gaps, the study proposed a system of four synchronised and logically coherent educational measures: redesigning the physical space (Open Environment), integrating into the educational cycle (Cognition - Experience - Habit), promoting situational learning methods, and connecting the educational ecosystem (Family - School). These measures do not exist in isolation but interact closely with each other, promising to create a complete micro-educational environment that helps 5-6-year-olds not only perfect self-care skills but also build strong inner self-reliance, ready to face the challenges of the transition to primary school.

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