



## **Character Education Analysis of Empathy, Creativity, and Independence in The Film *Totto-Chan* : A Semiotic Study**

**Siti Difa Dulfayanti Azzahra, Khusniyati Masykuroh\***

Early Childhood Teacher Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Indonesia.

\*Corresponding Author. Email: [khusniyati.masykuroh@uhamka.ac.id](mailto:khusniyati.masykuroh@uhamka.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the character formation process conducted by educators and parents in developing empathy, creativity, and independence values in *Totto-chan* through semiotic analysis of signs in the film. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis to examine signs and their meanings in the film. Data collection was conducted through comprehensive documentation of the film, focusing on dialogue, scenes, character expressions, and visual contexts. The findings of this research indicate that character formation occurs through a holistic educational approach implemented by educators and parents. Empathy character is developed through an atmosphere of acceptance and appreciation of differences, creativity is stimulated through an inspiring environment, and independence is fostered through providing trust and responsibility. The research concludes that character formation is most effective when values are not only taught explicitly but also modeled and integrated into daily practices through meaningful experiences provided to children. The contribution to character education in schools is providing a holistic education model that can be adapted into curricula, offering practical guidance for educators in creating learning atmospheres that support character formation through behavioral modeling and meaningful experiences.

### **Article History**

Received: 02-04-2025

Revised: 14-05-2025

Accepted: 21-06-2025

Published: 25-07-2025

### **Key Words:**

Character Education;  
Empathy; Creativity;  
Independence; *Totto-Chan*.

**How to Cite:** Azzahra, S., & Masykuroh, K. (2025). Character Education Analysis of Empathy, Creativity, and Independence in The Film *Totto-Chan* : A Semiotic Study. *Jurnal Paedagogy*, 12(3), 744-753. doi:<https://doi.org/10.33394/jp.v12i3.15504>



<https://doi.org/10.33394/jp.v12i3.15504>

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



## **Introduction**

Education is a transformative process that encompasses behavioral change, the broadening of insights, and the enrichment of life experiences, all aimed at fostering student maturity in both thought and attitude (Khoirroni et al., 2023). An effective educational process results in significant transformations in students, from how they perceive and respond to various issues to their ability to make more mature and wise decisions. A child's character formation is influenced by multiple interconnected environmental elements, including the family as the primary educator, peer relationships, societal interactions, and formal education at school (Desmila & Suryana, 2023). The harmony among these four factors is crucial for the successful and sustainable development of a child's positive character. Childhood is a critical period for instilling character values, as children at this stage are highly receptive to learning and habituation (Fitrianingtyas et al., 2023). Childhood is a critical period for instilling character values, as children at this stage are highly receptive to learning and habituation.

Educators must provide guidance tailored to the individual needs of students, as each child possesses unique characteristics and differences. A uniform approach to teaching cannot be applied effectively (Rochah & Karmila, 2023). Differentiated instruction is not a form of



discrimination, but rather a strategy to optimize each student's potential based on their specific traits and needs, ensuring that learning objectives are met effectively.

The film *Totto-chan* is a literary work rich in educational values, offering valuable perspectives on children's character development. The story of a seven-year-old girl who is often perceived as "different" by those around her presents a compelling case for deeper examination—especially in today's context where many children face similar stigmas due to their uniqueness. Totto-chan's behaviors, such as repeatedly opening and closing her desk, calling street musicians, or talking to swallows during class, reflect the complexity of child character development that is often misunderstood.

This study refers to previous research by (Maleja et al., 2022), which analyzed the psychological development of the character Totto-chan using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory through three aspects: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. Their study revealed that Totto-chan experienced positive psychological development after transferring to a school that better understood her needs. While that research successfully highlighted the mental development of the main character, it did not explore character education values in depth.

The primary distinction between the previous research and the current study lies in the analytical focus: this study emphasizes the roles and strategies of adult characters in shaping children's character. Whereas the earlier study focused more on general social relationships, the current research aims to explore how educators and parents develop empathy, creativity, and independence in Totto-chan through semiotic analysis of signs portrayed in the film.

Instilling empathy in children is essential for fostering healthy interpersonal relationships, both in friendships and future social interactions (Kumari et al., 2023). Creativity reflects an individual's unique approach to engaging with their environment and holds the potential to generate new ideas and innovative breakthroughs (Rahayu, 2022). The development of independence in children can be fostered through several approaches, one of the most effective being the application of daily habit-forming strategies (Aini et al., 2023). A semiotic analysis of the film *Totto-chan* reveals how these three character values are formed through meaningful visual and narrative signs.

## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using semiotic analysis. Semiotics is a field that views all aspects of social life and culture as interconnected systems of signs (Safika, 2020). It explores the science of signs, which consist of two inseparable components: the *signifier* (the form or expression) and the *signified* (the concept or meaning). The data collection technique used in this research is comprehensive documentation, focusing on an in-depth analysis of the film *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*. Qualitative research demands systematic and thorough data collection; therefore, the researcher will conduct detailed observations of the film's content, including dialogue, scenes, character expressions, and visual contexts that represent the character values under study.

The data analysis technique follows the semiotic framework of Ferdinand de Saussure, which centers on the system of signs and the relationships between them in constructing meaning. Saussure's semiotics interprets representation through linguistic signs that possess two psychological dimensions: the signifier (the form) and the signified (the meaning). The signifier encompasses elements such as prior experience, word choice, expression, and speech sounds. Meanwhile, the signified consists of experiential impact, physical objects, substance, and the responses they evoke (Hamama Madhona, 2019).

## Results and Discussion

Based on the data collection and analysis, several key factors were identified that influence the findings of this study. The discussion is organized according to specific indicators within each character value to ensure a systematic and in-depth understanding. Each indicator is described in detail, supported by relevant data and interpretative insights drawn from the analysis. The following are the indicators for the character values of Empathy, Creativity, and Independence:

### 1) Empathy as a Character Value

#### a) The Ability to Understand the Feelings of Others



Figure 1. The Headmaster speaks to Yasuaki (30.30)

**Signifier:** The headmaster understands Yasuaki's tendency to stay inside and read while his classmates play outside, recognizing that it stems from his difficulty walking.

**Signified:** The headmaster demonstrates empathy by acknowledging the reason behind Yasuaki's behavior without passing judgment. He realizes that Yasuaki reads not because he avoids socializing, but because his physical limitations make it uncomfortable for him to participate in outdoor play with his peers.

#### b) Tolerance Toward Differences



Figure 2. Totto-Chan invites Yasuaki to play (35.56)

**Signifier:** Totto-Chan invites Yasuaki, a child with special needs, to play during recess.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan treats Yasuaki no differently from other children and takes the initiative to include him in play, demonstrating acceptance and inclusiveness toward someone with physical limitations.

#### c) Willingness to Help Others



Figure 3. Totto-Chan helping her mother

**Signifier:** Totto-Chan helps her mother prepare a lunchbox for school.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan displays a helpful and empathetic attitude toward her mother's workload, illustrating prosocial behavior and cooperation within the family context, as well as an awareness of each family member's role.

**d) Ability to Manage Anger**



Figure 4. Classmates trying to calm an upset friend (1.15.16)

**Signifier:** Totto-Chan and her friends refrain from retaliating when children from another school mock their own.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan and her peers demonstrate self-control and emotional maturity by not responding to insults with hostility. Their calm reaction reflects an ability to manage negative emotions and maintain self-respect without resorting to aggressive behavior

**e) High Sensitivity Toward the Surrounding Environment**



Figure 5. School community gathers at Yasuaki's final resting place (1.34.26)

**Signifier:** The headmaster, teachers, and Yasuaki's classmates gather at his final resting place to pay their respects.

**Signified:** The entire school community displays collective empathy and reverence for their late student. This action reflects a recognition of enduring social bonds even after death, as well as care and respect for the mourning process and Yasuaki's final wishes.

Empathy is a fundamental aspect of human development, clearly illustrated through the interactions between characters in the film (Mardiyah et al., 2020). The headmaster demonstrates deep empathy by understanding Yasuaki's choice to read

instead of playing with his peers, without judging his physical limitations. This reflects a highly empathetic trait—tolerance and sensitivity toward the needs of others (Sumarni et al., 2020). Totto-Chan embodies the concept of prosocial behavior through acts of collective care, as seen when her classmates help her after she falls into a ditch, and when the entire school community gathers to honor Yasuaki at his final resting place. These actions demonstrate the core components of prosocial behavior: emotional responsiveness through empathy, moral reasoning, and prioritization of others' well-being (Widiarti, 2013). The ability of Totto-Chan and her friends to manage their anger when mocked by students from another school reflects emotional maturity—an essential part of empathy, which is further translated into concrete, constructive behavior (Rochmani, 2022).

## 2) Creativity as a Character Value

### a) Ability to Create Something New and Different



Figure 6. Classroom made from a train carriage (06.41)

**Signifier:** Headmaster Kobayashi repurposes an old train carriage into a unique and engaging classroom.

**Signified:** The headmaster demonstrates innovative thinking by transforming the function of a disused train carriage into a learning space. This action reflects the ability to recognize new potential in old objects, offering a creative solution to educational needs, and creating a non-traditional learning environment that captures children's interest and stimulates their imagination.



Figure 7. Diverse children's interests in learning (23.45)

**Signifier:** Headmaster Kobayashi designs a flexible curriculum that allows students to choose the order in which they study subjects.

**Signified:** This educational approach highlights pedagogical innovation centered on student needs and interests. The flexible curriculum reflects a deep understanding of intrinsic motivation, diverse learning styles, and the importance of autonomy in education. It also challenges rigid conventional teaching methods by empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey.



## b) Expression of Original Ideas and Thoughts

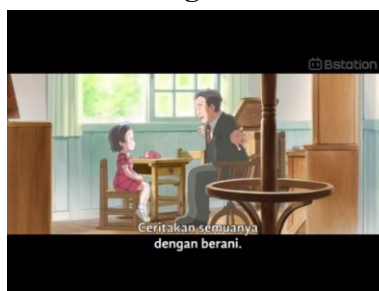


Figure 8. First meeting between the Headmaster and Totto-Chan (09.56)

**Signifier:** The headmaster gives Totto-Chan the opportunity to share all her experiences on her first day at school.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan exhibits the courage to express herself freely, unconstrained by social norms or adult expectations. The headmaster creates a psychologically safe space for open expression, and Totto-Chan responds with imaginative storytelling from a child's unique perspective—uninhibited by the pressure to provide “correct” answers typical in formal educational settings.

## c) Fluency in Thinking and Adaptability

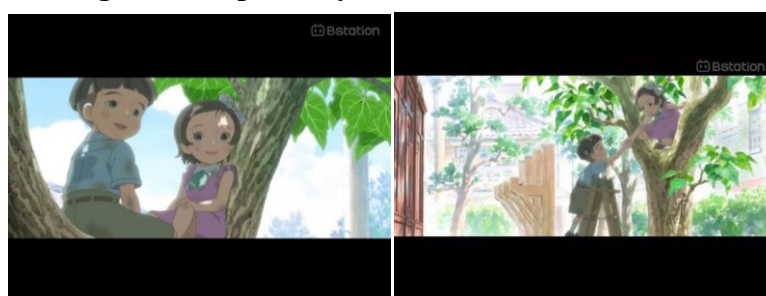


Image 9. Totto-Chan and Yasuaki successfully climb a tree (47.27)

**Signifier:** Totto-Chan comes up with the idea to climb a tree with Yasuaki and persistently finds ways to help him join her, despite his physical limitations.

**Signified:** This illustrates Totto-Chan's creative initiative and problem-solving ability, unhindered by her friend's physical challenges. It reflects a solution-oriented mindset, persistence in the face of obstacles, and empathetically driven creativity aimed at inclusion and collaboration.

Creativity, as the potential to generate new and different ideas (Palupi et al., 2022), is vividly portrayed through Headmaster Kobayashi's innovation in transforming an old train carriage into a classroom and library. This act represents more than physical novelty; it reveals out-of-the-box thinking in creating a meaningful and engaging learning environment for children. Tomoe School's flexible curriculum also illustrates how creativity emerges from unique individual characteristics interacting with their surroundings (Huda et al., 2022). Headmaster Kobayashi designed an educational system that honors each child's unique interests and learning styles, giving them the freedom to choose the order of subjects based on their curiosity. This approach exemplifies the educator's role in supporting the development of students' creative potential as emphasized in educational theory. Creativity does not arise spontaneously, but rather develops through lived experiences, acquired knowledge, and interactions with others and the environment

(Hairiyah & Mukhlis, 2019). This is evident in Totto-Chan's initiative to climb the tree with Yasuaki—despite his physical limitations—demonstrating how she draws from her experiences and social awareness to craft creative solutions in real-life situations.

### 3) Independence as a Character Value

#### a) Ability to Express Feelings Appropriately



b) Figure 10. Totto-Chan speaking to the Headmaster (12.26)

**Signifier:** Upon meeting the headmaster for the first time, Totto-Chan says, “I don’t understand why people say I cause trouble for others. I’m just little Totto, sir.” The headmaster responds, “I see... you’re a very good little girl,” while gently stroking her head.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan’s honest expression of confusion about how others perceive her reflects emotional self-awareness and a need for validation. Her ability to articulate her feelings openly shows a developing emotional independence, supported by a safe, accepting adult response.

#### c) Completing Tasks Without Parental Supervision

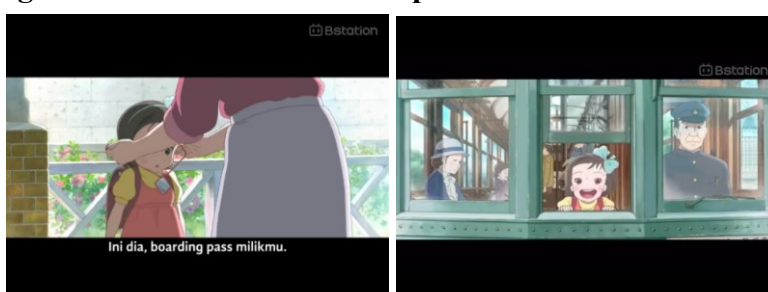


Figure 11. Totto-Chan receives a ticket from her mother to go to school alone (17.28)

**Signifier:** Totto-Chan wears a red backpack as her mother fastens a boarding pass for her to travel to school by train on her own.

**Signified:** This illustrates Totto-Chan’s confidence and bravery in navigating public transportation independently. It represents a cultural norm in Japan that fosters early independence, where children are encouraged to carry out daily tasks—such as commuting to school—without adult accompaniment.

#### d) Performing Daily Activities Independently



Figure 12. Children carry their desks and chairs for lunch (25.55)

**Signifier:** At Tomoe Gakuen, children bring and set up their own meals and seating for lunch.

**Signified:** This activity instills personal responsibility for nutrition and self-management from an early age. It also reflects Japanese educational values that build independence through structured routines like communal mealtime.

e) **Taking Responsibility for One's Actions**



Figure 13. Totto-Chan cleaning up after dropping her wallet in the toilet (32.05)

**Signifier:** After dropping her wallet into a toilet pit, Totto-Chan attempts to retrieve it by removing the contents of the pit. Though she doesn't find it, she puts everything back in place afterward.

**Signified:** Totto-Chan's willingness to clean up the mess demonstrates accountability for her actions. It shows her understanding that every action has consequences and that restoring order—even when the goal isn't achieved—is part of personal responsibility. This also reflects honesty and integrity in behaving responsibly without external supervision.

Totto-Chan exhibits the ability to express emotions appropriately (Norma Gita et al., 2022), as seen in her candidness when questioning others' views about her behavior. This situation demonstrates growing emotional independence, nurtured through open dialogue and active participation in social life. Her behavioral independence is strongly reflected when she travels to school alone by train, aligning with Japanese educational principles that promote self-reliance from a young age. Parental support and sibling interaction are crucial in developing this autonomy (Rujiah et al., 2023). The value of responsibility—an essential component of independence—is embodied in the scene where Totto-Chan cleans up after her unsuccessful attempt to retrieve her wallet. This act reflects the capacity to complete tasks independently (Nursyifani & Atmaji, 2020), and reinforces the idea that independence also includes social competence and emotional regulation (Yuliastutie & Supriyadi, 2022).

## Conclusion

Based on a semiotic analysis of the film *Totto-Chan*, it was found that the development of empathy, creativity, and independence in children emerges through a holistic educational approach implemented by both educators and parents. Headmaster Kobayashi played a pivotal role by creating a non-conventional learning environment and a flexible curriculum that respects each child's individuality. Meanwhile, parents complemented this by providing practical opportunities for independence within a supportive family setting. Peer interaction also played a significant role, emphasizing that character formation is a reciprocal process in which children are active participants. The findings indicate that character development is most effective when values are not only taught explicitly but also modeled and integrated into





meaningful daily experiences. Educational approaches that respect autonomy, appreciate individuality, and provide safe spaces for exploration have proven effective in instilling empathy, creativity, and independence—manifested through concrete behavior rather than merely conceptual understanding.

### Recommendation

Future research is encouraged to examine the application of character education values from *Totto-Chan* in the Indonesian education context, particularly in developing early childhood (PAUD) curricula that integrate similar holistic approaches. For teachers, it is recommended to adopt instructional strategies that value students' uniqueness, model empathetic behavior, and provide opportunities for creative expression through experiential learning. For parents, it is advised to implement parenting styles that nurture empathy through open dialogue, create opportunities for safe exploration, and maintain consistency between the values taught and the behaviors modeled—thereby cultivating children's independence effectively.

### References

- Aini, N. Q., Faturhman, N., & Darmawan, D. (2023). Penerapan Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Melalui Metode Pembiasaan Guna Pembentukan Kemandirian Anak Usia Dini di KB Azzahroh Serang. *JECIE (Journal of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education)*, 6(2), 98–113. <https://doi.org/10.31537/jecie.v6i2.1051>
- Astuti, H. P., Nugroho, A. A. E., & Dewi, N. A. R. (2020). Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Picture and Picture Berbasis Keanekaragaman Hayati Dalam Pembentukan Empati Anak Usia Dini. *Intuisi: Jurnal Psikologi Ilmiah*, 12(1), 66–74. <https://doi.org/10.15294/intuisi.v12i1.23573>
- Desmila, D., & Suryana, D. (2023). Upaya Guru dalam Menanamkan Karakter Anak Usia Dini melalui Pendidikan Multikultural. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(2), 2474–2484. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i2.2001>
- Fitrianingtyas, A., Rasmani, U. E. E., Wahyuningsih, S., Jumiatmoko, J., Zuhro, N. S., Winarji, B., & Nurjanah, N. E. (2023). Mengembangkan Pendidikan Karakter melalui Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek di PAUD. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(5), 5675–5686. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i5.4970>
- Hairiyah, S., & Mukhlis. (2019). Pengembangan Kreativitas Anak Usia Dini Melalui Permainan Edukatif. *Jurnal Kariman*, 7(2), 265–282. <https://doi.org/10.52185/kariman.v7i2.118>
- Hamama Madhona, R. (2019). *Soetomo Communication and Humanities Representasi Emosional Joker Sebagai Korban kekerasan Dalam Film Joker 2019 (Analisis Semiotika Ferdinand De Saussure)*. 3, 6.
- Huda, N., Fatimah, S., & Amrulloh, A. Y. (2022). Strategi 4P (Person, Press, Process, Product) Dalam Mengembangkan Kreativitas Pembelajaran Kaligrafi Peserta Didik Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Sultan Agung Depok Sleman. *Jurnal Tifani*, 2(1), 9–16. <https://tifani.org/index.php/tifani/article/view/14>
- Khoirroni, I. A., Patinasarani, R., Hermayanti, N. I., & Santoso, G. (2023). Pendidikan Karakter: Tingkat Anak Sekolah Dasar di Era Digital Inayah. *Jupetra*, 02(02), 269.
- Kumari, R., Nurhayati, S., Harmiasih, S., & Endang Yunitasari, S. (2023). Menumbuhkan Sikap Empati Pada Anak Usia Dini Melalui Pembiasaan Sedekah Jumat Berkah di PAUD Insan Mandiri Kota Bogor Rini. *AKSARA: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Nonformal*, 09(2), May, 1067–1074.



- Lalely, T. A. (2017). Pengembangan Karakter Kreatif pada Anak Usia Dini Melalui Pembelajaran Tematik. In *INSANIA : Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* (Vol. 22, Issue 2, pp. 341–353). <https://doi.org/10.24090/insania.v22i2.1223>
- Maleja, W., Karmin Baruadi, M., & Bagtayan, Z. A. (2022). Proses Perkembangan Kejiwaan Tokoh Utama Dalam Novel Totto-Chan: Gadis Cilik Di Jendela Karya Tetsuko Kuroyanagi (Kajian Psikoanalisis Jacques Lacan) Development Process of the Main Character in the Novel Totto-Chan Gadis Cilik di Jendela By Tetsuko Kuroy. *Jambura Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 3(2), 1–12. <https://ejurnal.ung.ac.id/index.php/jjll>
- Mardiyah, S., Yulianingsih, W., & Putri, L. S. R. (2020). Sekolah Keluarga: Menciptakan Lingkungan Sosial untuk Membangun Empati dan Kreativitas Anak Usia Dini. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5(1), 576. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v5i1.665>
- Norma Gita, T., Dhieni, N., & Wulan, S. (2022). Kemandirian Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun dengan Ibunya yang Bekerja Paruh Waktu. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(4), 2735–2744. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i4.1032>
- Nursyifani, C. U. C., & Atmaji, L. T. (2020). Boardgame Sebagai Media Untuk Membangun Karakter Kemandirian Anak Usia 4-6 Tahun. *Journal of Art, Design, Education And Culture Studies (JADECS)*, 5(2), 67–74.
- Palupi, D. I., Rahmani, E., Yusnita, E., Gustina, H., Pertiwi, H., & Chalid, N. (2022). Pengembangan Kreativitas Sebagai Pembentukan Karakter Anak Usia Dini. *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 4(1), 7–12. <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v4i1.88>
- Rahayu, F. (2022). Pengembangan Kreativitas Anak Melalui Startegi 4P (Person, Press, Process, Product). *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education*, 8(3), 2406–2414. <https://doi.org/10.58258/jime.v8i3.3779>
- Rochah, C., & Karmila, M. (2023). Literature Review: Pendekatan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Pada Satuan PAUD. *Seminar Nasional" Transisi PAUD ....* <https://conference2.upgris.ac.id/index.php/snpuad/article/view>
- Rochmani, A. (2022). Pembiasaan Sedekah Untuk Pembentukan Karakter Empati Pada Anak Usia Dini Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an. *Andragogi: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 4(1), 89–103.
- Rujiah, R., Rahman, I. K., & Sa'diyah, M. (2023). Pembelajaran Kemandirian untuk Anak Usia Dini. *Ideguru: Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Guru*, 8(2), 238–246. <https://doi.org/10.51169/ideguru.v8i2.491>
- Safika, N. D. (2020). Analisis Semiotika dalam Puisi “Sajak Balsem untuk Gus Mus” Karya Joko Pinurbo. *Pertemuan Ilmiah Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 281, 281–292.
- Shalihat, I. S., LN, S. Y., & AS, U. S. (2021). Creative Character Training (CCT): Dampaknya terhadap Karakter Kreatif Guru Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(2), 565–578.
- Sumarni, A., Sofia, A., & Irzalinda, V. (2020). Empati Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun. *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak*, 6(2), 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.23960/jpa.v6n2.22260>
- Widiarti, P. W. (2013). Pendidikan Karakter Berbasis Empati Pada Anak-Anak Usia Sd. *Informasi*, 39(2), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v0i2.4446>
- Yuliastutie, K. L., & Supriyadi. (2022). Pengaruh Pendekatan Metode Montessori dalam Membentuk Karakter Kemandirian pada Anak Usia Dini. *Arus Jurnal Pendidikan*, 2(2), 185–195. <https://doi.org/10.57250/ajup.v2i2.97>