SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The development of social-emotional skills in early childhood has been recognized as a fundamental foundation for school readiness and long-term developmental success. This study conducts a systematic literature review to identify effective strategies for developing social-emotional skills in early childhood while analyzing the role of educators and supporting environmental factors. The research method follows the PRISMA protocol by analyzing 25 selected empirical articles from various indexed databases during the 2014-2024 period. The results reveal that the most effective development strategies fall into two main categories: integrated approaches through daily activities such as play and interactive story reading, and structured interventions such as Social-Emotional Learning programs and mindfulness practices. Key findings indicate that the effectiveness of these strategies depends heavily on teachers' multidimensional roles encompassing functions as facilitators, behavior models, and scaffolding providers, supported by synergistic collaboration between school and family environments. The study concludes that social-emotional skills development requires an ecological approach integrating structured strategies with optimization of educators' roles and active parental involvement, thus serving as a guide for educational practitioners in designing comprehensive and sustainable development programs.

Keywords : *Social-Emotional Skills, Early Childhood, Systematic Review, Learning Strategies, Teacher Role*

INTRODUCTION

The Role of the School Environment, particularly teachers, serves as the primary catalyst in developing this social-emotional foundation. Teachers not only act as instructors but also as models that children emulate in managing emotions and social interactions (Abuzar et al., 2024; Curby et al., 2022; Heilporn et al., 2021). As revealed by Wang, (2023) a teacher's creativity in teaching, grounded in their emotional intelligence, is crucial for creating a harmonious classroom climate. This aligns with Nyuhuan, (2024) who asserts that an emotionally supportive environment can enhance children's intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Longobardi et al., (2021) research strengthens this perspective by demonstrating that the quality of positive social interactions at school significantly contributes to the improvement of children's prosocial behavior.

Reality in the field often shows a gap between expectations and practice, where the learning process is still frequently characterized by ineffective communication dynamics (Khanyile et al., 2025). The failure of two-way communication between teachers and students, as mentioned previously, often stems from underdeveloped emotional regulation and empathy skills. Grignoli et al., (2022) note that low empathy can inhibit the emergence of prosocial behavior, Broderick, (2021) warns that the inability to manage negative emotions can disrupt learning concentration. This challenge, as observed by 9Morgan et al., 2022) requires solutions that go beyond the academic curriculum alone and touch upon the teachers' own social-emotional pedagogy.

The implementation of integrated and systematic strategies to optimize social-emotional skills from an early age is no longer an option but a necessity in education. These strategies must include creating a psychologically safe classroom climate, direct teaching about recognizing emotions, and providing opportunities to practice social skills (Garcia-Peinado, 2023; Harjunmaa et al., 2023; Martinez & Gomez, 2024). González Moreno & Molero Jurado, (2024) proves that structured interventions on emotional intelligence can promote better prosocial behavior. Support for this also comes from findings by Garcia-Peinado, (2023) emphasizing the importance of empathy training, suggesting the integration of emotional literacy into daily learning activities.

Ultimately, investing in the development of social-emotional skills in early childhood is a long-term investment in forming individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess strong character. The ability to collaborate, empathize, and overcome challenges constitutes valuable assets in facing life's future complexities (Susanto, 2024). As elaborated by Halimi et al., (2021) a person's success in society is largely determined by their emotional intelligence. This foundation is strengthened who observes that emotionally intelligent teachers will create resilient generations, and is empirically who positively links emotional intelligence with the ability to build healthy relationships and provide social contributions (Kamboj & Garg, 2021).

Although evidence regarding the importance of social-emotional skills has been emerging, systematic reviews that specifically map and analyze the effectiveness of various development strategies applied directly in early childhood education (ECE) settings remain limited. Most existing research, such as that conducted by Fujiantari & Rachmatan (2016), tends to focus on older populations like university students, exploring the relationship between organizational participation and emotional intelligence (Drigas et al., 2023). Similarly, the study by Hatuwe et al., (2023), although conducted in a school environment, focused on high school students rather than early childhood. The novelty of this systematic literature review lies in its effort to comprehensively synthesize empirical evidence to identify the most effective and feasible social-

emotional development strategies for early childhood, while simultaneously formulating a contextual and integrated strategic framework for educators and parents.

This study aims to conduct a systematic literature review to identify, evaluate, and synthesize recent empirical evidence regarding various strategies for developing social-emotional skills in early childhood. By investigating various tested and implemented approaches, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive and systematic review that can serve as a foundation for educational policy making, curriculum development, and improving the competence of ECE practitioners. Therefore, based on the above description, the research questions are formulated as follows: What intervention strategies have proven effective in improving social-emotional skills of early childhood in formal and informal educational settings? And How do educators (teachers) and learning environments support the successful implementation of social-emotional skills development strategies in early childhood?

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review design adopting the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to ensure transparency and replicability in the process of identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant studies (Lame, 2019). This review protocol has been registered in the Open Science Framework (OSF) to minimize reporting bias.

Samples and Sampling Technique

The population in this systematic review comprises all empirical research articles discussing strategies, interventions, or programs for developing social-emotional skills in early childhood (ages 3-6). The sampling technique employed systematic purposive sampling, where only studies meeting specific inclusion criteria were analyzed. Primary data sources were obtained from reputable international journal databases such as PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Scopus. Inclusion criteria included: (1) quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods empirical research articles; (2) research participants being preschool-aged children (3-6 years) or educators/parents involved in their education; (3) published in English or Indonesian within the last 10 years (2014-2024); and (4) explicitly measuring social-emotional skills outcomes or strategy implementation. Exclusion criteria encompassed studies focusing on children with specific developmental disorder diagnoses (such as ASD) and review articles or books.

Research Instrument

The main research instrument used was a systematic data extraction form developed in a coding sheet format. This instrument serves to extract consistent and structured information from each included study. The coding sheet was designed to capture data directly related to the research questions (RQs).

Table 1. Grid Instrument for Systematic Data Extraction (Coding Sheet)

Data Extraction Category	Description	Relationship to RQ
Study Identity	Author, Publication Year, Title, Journal Source	-
Study Methodology	Research Design (quantitative/qualitative), Participants (number, age, setting), Study Duration	Context for all RQs

Strategy/Intervention (RQ1)	Name and detailed description of strategy/intervention, Active components, Implementer (teacher/parent)	To answer RQ 1
Educator Role & Environment (RQ2)	Description of teacher involvement, training provided, learning environment characteristics (physical and social)	To answer RQ 2
Results & Effectiveness (RQ1)	SES outcome measures, main findings regarding effectiveness, effect size (if available)	To answer RQ 1
Supporting & Inhibiting Factors (RQ2)	Contextual factors influencing implementation success or failure	To answer RQ 2

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process began with electronic database searches using keyword strings combined with Boolean operators, for example: ("social-emotional skills" OR "SEL") AND ("early childhood" OR preschool) AND (strategy OR intervention). All search results were then imported into reference management software (Mendeley) to remove duplicates. The selection stage was conducted in tiers based on title and abstract, followed by full-text eligibility assessment, with the entire process documented in a PRISMA flow diagram. Data analysis was performed using thematic narrative analysis. Data extracted into the coding sheet were grouped and synthesized based on emerging themes aligned with the RQs. For RQ 1, analysis focused on categorizing types of strategies and integrating findings regarding their effectiveness. For RQ 2, analysis identified patterns describing educator roles and learning environment elements that were consistent across various studies, thus answering "how" these roles occur

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Globalization has a significant impact on marketing and entrepreneurship, especially for UIN Jakarta students. In the face of globalization, students have a great opportunity to utilize various digital platforms such as social media and e-commerce. Globalization also encourages. From 1,250 studies identified through database searches, 25 studies met the inclusion criteria for further analysis. The selection process is shown in the following PRISMA Diagram:

- Identification: Records identified from databases (n=250) + through other sources (n=5) = Total (n=255)
- Screening: After duplicates removed (n=100), records screened (n=155)
- Eligibility: Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n=85)
- Included: Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n=25)

Analysis of the 25 selected studies revealed various strategies and key findings. Data extraction results of intervention strategies and educator roles are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Synthesis of Intervention Strategies and Educator Roles

Code	Intervention Strategies (Addressing RQ 1)	Educator Role & Learning Environment (Addressing RQ 2)	Context & Effectiveness
P1	Structured Play-Based SEL Program	Teacher as play facilitator observing and scaffolding social interactions	Significantly improved sharing and cooperation skills ($p < 0.01$) in private preschool setting
P2	Story reading followed by character feeling discussions (dialogic reading)	Teacher using open-ended questions to provoke empathy; socio-emotional storybook-rich environment	Children showed improved ability to name emotions and their causes
P3	Mindfulness and simple breathing exercises	Teacher modeling emotion regulation techniques; creating "calm corner" in classroom	Helped children manage anger and frustration, especially previously impulsive children
P4	Collaborative project-based learning	Teacher as designer of social problem scenarios; environment designed to trigger cooperation	Improved social problem-solving skills and assertive communication
P5	Explicit training for parents in responsive parenting	Teacher acting as consultant for parents; intensive school-family communication	This combined intervention produced more sustainable SES progress compared to school-only intervention

Based on the synthesis of findings, the effectiveness of various intervention strategies (RQ1) can be interpreted. The most effective strategies were those naturally integrated into children's daily activities, such as play and story reading, while being explicit in teaching socio-emotional concepts, for example by naming emotions. Structured programs, as implemented in studies P1 and P4, showed significant results because they consistently provided repeated opportunities for children to practice these new skills. This phenomenon aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that the most meaningful learning occurs through direct experience and observation of models in authentic contexts.

Furthermore, regarding the role of educators and environment (RQ2), the interpretation reveals complex and crucial roles. Teachers' roles proved to be multidimensional, shifting from mere instructors to facilitators, behavior models, and timely support providers (scaffolders). The success of a strategy heavily depends on the teacher's capacity to create a psychologically safe learning environment rich in socio-emotional stimulation, as seen in the creation of "calm corners" in study P3 and classroom designs encouraging collaboration in study P4. Moreover, findings from study P5, which integrated training for parents, strengthens the principle in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. These findings confirm that optimal child development is influenced by synergistic interaction and support between various microsystems, in this case school and family.

This synthesis of findings provides confirmation and simultaneously deepens several fundamental theoretical principles. The effectiveness of integrated strategies such as play-based

learning and dialogic reading strengthens Vygotsky's social constructivism perspective, which asserts that children construct social-emotional knowledge through meaningful and guided interactions in social contexts (Ahmed, 2024). In play activities, teachers provide scaffolding a typical Vygotskian concept to bring children from actual to potential understanding levels, for example by modeling how to take turns with toys.

Furthermore, the finding that the teacher's role as model and facilitator is key to success directly corresponds with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Children learn not only from direct instruction but more strongly through observation of the behavior, attitudes, and emotional reactions of significant adults around them (Curby et al., 2022). When a teacher intentionally names their own emotions ("I feel so happy seeing you share"), they are modeling emotional intelligence that children will subsequently imitate.

Moreover, the strength of school-family collaboration revealed in study P5 provides solid empirical support for Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. More sustainable results emerge when the child's main microsystems, namely school and home, create consistent and mutually reinforcing messages (Hatuwe et al., 2023). Interventions focusing on only one environment are less able to generalize the skills learned by children.

Although these findings are consistent, critical analysis reveals several limitations and gaps for future research:

- Cultural Context Variability: Most analyzed studies originated from individualistic Western cultural contexts. The effectiveness of strategies such as verbal emotional expression might not be the same in collectivistic cultures emphasizing social harmony. Future research is essential to test and adapt these strategies in non-Western cultural settings, such as Indonesia.
- Need for Continuous Teacher Training: The shift in teacher roles from instructor to facilitator, model, and scaffolder requires complex competencies. Many studies describe "what" teachers should do, but few investigate "how" to effectively and sustainably train these skills in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.
- External Validity: As an applied research, the main challenge is external validity, meaning the extent to which a strategy proven effective in one setting (e.g., urban private preschool) can be implemented with similar results in other settings (e.g., rural ECE with limited resources). This requires more replication research in various contexts.

Overall, this discussion emphasizes that effective social-emotional skills development is multidimensional. The most promising approach integrates direct classroom strategies utilizing constructivist and observational learning theories, while building strong partnerships with families, aligned with ecological systems perspective (Santoso et al., 2022). Future research needs to shift from merely proving "what works" to exploring "how it works in different contexts" and "how to empower teachers and parents" to consistently and authentically implement these practices. This study successfully addresses previously identified gaps. First, by analyzing 25 empirical studies on early childhood, this review provides more consolidated and specific evidence for this age group, unlike previous systematic maps highlighting limited evidence for children under 7 years (Berg et al., 2021). Second, by identifying specific teacher roles (as play facilitator, model, and parent consultant), this research transcends variable-oriented approaches by providing context for "how" strategies work, aligning with calls for more person-oriented approaches. The novelty of this research lies in the integrated synthesis connecting strategy types with required teacher roles and environmental elements to support them, as seen in the correlation between play-based

strategies and teacher's facilitator role. This integrated framework provides more contextual and actionable guidance for practitioners compared to merely listing effective strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the comprehensive analysis conducted, it can be concluded that this systematic literature review has successfully mapped effective strategies for developing social-emotional skills in early childhood, while simultaneously identifying the critical roles of educators and learning environments, thus directly addressing the research objectives. The main findings confirm that integrated and explicit strategies—such as play-based learning, dialogic reading, and mindfulness training—when implemented in a structured and repetitive manner, represent the most effective approaches for enhancing children's social-emotional competencies. The significance of this research lies in its synthesis demonstrating that the effectiveness of these strategies substantially depends on teachers' multidimensional roles as facilitators, models, and scaffolding providers, along with the establishment of safe environments and synergistic collaboration between schools and families, thereby forming a comprehensive ecological framework for educators and policymakers in designing contextual and sustainable interventions

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