



Implementing a Deep Learning Approach to Foster Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of deep learning based instruction in developing early childhood social-emotional development in Kindergarten. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research involved children aged 5–6 years from one classroom group who were selected purposively based on their active participation in learning activities. Teachers were included as key informants to provide information regarding the planning and implementation of learning. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and documentation such as children's development records and learning materials. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In addition, a thematic coding process was applied to identify patterns related to experiential, interactive, and reflective learning practices. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of data sources and methods was used by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation. The novelty of this study lies in providing a qualitative account of how deep learning principles experiential, interactive, and reflective learning are integrated into daily classroom practices in early childhood education. The findings indicate that learning activities based on real experiences and active participation encourage the development of cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, and independence among children. Children also showed increased emotional engagement and more positive interactions with peers during learning activities. Overall, the results suggest that experience-oriented learning strategies can support social-emotional development in early childhood classrooms within the context of the studied kindergarten. These findings provide practical insights for educators in designing meaningful and participatory learning environments to support holistic child development.

Keywords: *Deep Learning, Early Childhood, Meaningful Learning, Social-Emotional Development*

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the main foundation in shaping the quality of human development at the next stage (Khadijah et al., 2022). Early childhood is known as the golden period because there is very rapid growth and development, both in cognitive, language, physical, motor, and social-emotional aspects (Fradana & Suwarta, 2025). The social-emotional aspect has an important role in helping children understand themselves, manage emotions, build interpersonal relationships, and adjust to the social environment. Optimal social-emotional development will support children's learning readiness, increase confidence, and form positive character from an early age. Education at the kindergarten level is required

to be able to create a learning process that is not only oriented to academic aspects, but also touches the social and emotional development of children as a whole (Krisnawati & Parmiti, 2023).

The reality in the field shows that there are still children who have difficulty managing emotions, are less able to cooperate, have not shown empathy, and are not independent in completing simple tasks. This condition is influenced by various factors, such as parenting, social environment, and learning strategies that lack space for meaningful learning experiences (Syakuro et al., 2023). Teacher-centered learning that emphasizes one-way activities tends to limit children's opportunities to explore emotions, interact, and build social skills naturally. This situation demands learning innovations that are able to actively involve children, provide real experiences, and encourage emotional involvement in the learning process (Riska et al., 2023).

The deep learning approach is one of the relevant strategies to answer these needs. Deep learning in education is not only interpreted as the use of technology, but rather a learning process that emphasizes deep understanding, active involvement, reflection, and meaningful learning experiences (Widat et al., 2023). This learning encourages children to engage emotionally, socially, and cognitively through exploratory, collaborative, and contextual activities. Children do not only receive information, but experience, feel, and build knowledge through direct interaction with the environment and peers. This process has the potential to foster emotional regulatory skills, empathy, responsibility, and social skills that are important for early childhood development (Karomah et al., 2023).

Directed reflection activities help children recognize their emotions, understand their learning experiences, and develop social awareness. In the context of Aisiyiah Kindergarten, preliminary classroom observations indicated that several children aged 5–6 years still showed difficulties in managing emotions during group activities, such as waiting for turns, cooperating with peers, and responding appropriately to classroom instructions. These conditions highlight the need for learning strategies that not only focus on cognitive outcomes but also support children's social-emotional development. Meaningful and real-experience learning provides opportunities for children to internalize social-emotional values through active participation in classroom interactions (Loulyta Sari, 2025). Therefore, examining how deep learning-based instruction is implemented in daily learning activities at Aisiyiah Kindergarten becomes important to better understand its role in supporting children's social-emotional growth within this specific educational setting.

A number of studies show that learning that emphasizes hands-on experience and active involvement has a significant influence on children's social-emotional development. Children who engage in exploratory and collaborative learning tend to show improved cooperative skills, empathy, and better emotional control (Purwoko et al., 2023). A learning environment that supports social interaction and provides space for emotional expression contributes to the formation of children's confidence and independence. Teachers play the role of facilitators who create a safe, fun, and responsive learning environment to children's emotional needs (Syafiqoh et al., 2023).

Aisiyiah Kindergarten as an early childhood education institution has a commitment to developing learning that is oriented towards holistic child development. Efforts to develop

social-emotional skills are an important part of the learning process, considering that children's character is formed through repeated social experiences. The implementation of deep learning learning is expected to be able to create a more interactive, reflective, and meaningful learning atmosphere so that children can develop social-emotional skills optimally. Learning designed through exploratory activities, group cooperation, and direct experience provides opportunities for children to learn to manage emotions, understand the feelings of others, and build positive social relationships (Wijayanto, 2023b).

Although the concept of deep learning has been widely studied in education, its application to early childhood education, especially in the development of social-emotional skills, still requires more in-depth study. Some learning practices still focus on cognitive achievement and have not fully made room for children's emotional experiences (Rissi & Sinaga, 2025). This gap indicates the need for research that systematically examines how deep learning pedagogy is implemented and how it influences early childhood social-emotional development. Although previous studies have discussed deep learning and meaningful learning in early childhood education, many of them focus on general instructional outcomes and provide limited attention to detailed classroom processes and social-emotional aspects of children. More importantly, there is still a lack of qualitative case-based analysis that specifically explores how deep learning practices support social-emotional outcomes in kindergarten settings. Therefore, this study positions itself to address this gap by conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis of learning practices at Aisiyiah Kindergarten. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the learning process, classroom dynamics, and the contribution of deep learning pedagogy in shaping children's social-emotional abilities within a real early childhood education context.

This study aims to analyze the application of deep learning in developing early childhood social-emotional skills in Aisiyiah Kindergarten. The focus of the research includes the process of implementing learning, forms of child involvement, and the development of social-emotional aspects that arise during learning activities. The results of the research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the concept of meaningful learning in early childhood education and become a practical reference for educators in designing learning that supports the optimal social-emotional development of children. In addition, this research is expected to enrich the study of innovative learning strategies that place learning experiences as the center of children's character and personality development from an early age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive analytical design to explore the implementation of deep learning pedagogy in fostering early childhood social-emotional skills. This design was selected to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of learning processes and children's behavioral development within natural classroom settings.

Research Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at Aisyiyah Kindergarten, Bima, Indonesia, involving children aged 5–6 years. Participants were selected purposively based on their active participation in classroom learning activities. Teachers were also involved as key informants to provide insights into instructional planning and implementation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations focused on children's social-emotional behaviors, including cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, and independence during learning activities. Interviews with teachers were conducted to explore instructional strategies and classroom practices. Documentation included children's developmental records, learning materials, and activity photographs to support data validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted through three systematic stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, all raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were carefully selected, categorized, and simplified to focus on relevant information related to children's social-emotional development and the implementation of deep learning practices. This process involved organizing field notes, transcribing interview data, and coding meaningful units of information. Furthermore, the data display stage was carried out by presenting the organized data in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic groupings, allowing patterns and relationships to be more easily identified and interpreted. The use of data displays enabled the researcher to compare findings across different data sources and to systematically examine emerging themes.

In addition, thematic analysis was applied to deepen the interpretation process by identifying recurring patterns related to experiential, interactive, and reflective learning practices. Through this approach, the researcher was able to construct meaningful interpretations of how deep learning pedagogy was implemented and how it influenced children's social-emotional behaviors. Finally, conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the analysis process and verified to ensure their consistency with the collected data.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, this study employed triangulation of both data sources and data collection methods. Data obtained from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and supporting documentation were systematically compared and cross-checked to confirm the consistency of the findings. This triangulation process helped to minimize potential bias and strengthen the validity of the interpretations.

In addition, prolonged engagement in the field and careful observation allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the learning context and children's behaviors.

The researcher also maintained detailed field notes and documentation to support transparency in the research process. By applying these strategies, the study ensures that the findings are credible, dependable, and grounded in actual classroom practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the study show that the application of deep learning in Aisyiyah Kindergarten provides positive development for early childhood social-emotional skills. The learning process that emphasizes direct experience, active engagement, and social interaction encourages children to show more adaptive behavioral changes during activities. This development can be seen in children's ability to work together, manage emotions, show empathy, and be independent in completing learning activities.



Figure 1. Children's collaborative activities in experiential learning

Figure 1 shows the child's involvement in group activities during the learning process. Children are seen interacting, sharing tools, and working together in completing the activities given. This situation illustrates the development of children's social abilities through learning experiences that emphasize collaboration and active participation. The interactions built during activities provide opportunities for children to learn to appreciate friends, follow simple rules, and build positive social relationships.

The findings indicate a noticeable improvement in children's cooperative behavior during group learning activities. Collaborative tasks encouraged children to share materials, assist peers, and demonstrate tolerance while participating in play-based learning. These interactions suggest that structured group activities within deep learning-oriented instruction create opportunities for children to practice basic social norms and peer respect in authentic situations. Importantly, children who previously preferred solitary play gradually became more engaged in group participation, indicating a shift toward more active social involvement. This pattern shows that experiential and collaborative learning contexts contribute to the

development of cooperative skills by allowing children to learn social behavior through direct interaction rather than instruction alone.

Development is also evident in children's ability to manage emotions during learning activities. Observations indicate that children gradually expressed their feelings in a more controlled manner, such as calming themselves after minor disappointment and responding more positively to the teacher's directions. For instance, during a group activity one child who initially appeared upset after losing a turn later stated, *"I will wait, after my friend,"* while sitting quietly and rejoining the activity. This example suggests that reflective and experience-based learning situations help children practice emotional regulation in real contexts. Reflection activities conducted after the lesson also supported children in recognizing their emotional experiences. When the teacher asked about their feelings, several children were able to mention emotions such as happiness, sadness, or disappointment and relate them to specific classroom situations. These observations indicate that reflection within deep learning activities functions not only as a closing activity but also as a mechanism that helps children interpret and regulate their emotional responses during social interaction.

In the aspect of empathy, children show increased concern for friends. Children begin to show positive responses when they see their friends having difficulties, such as helping to tidy up toys, comforting sad friends, and sharing opportunities in group activities. These prosocial behaviors develop through hands-on interaction experiences built in exploratory and collaboration-based learning. Children not only understand the teacher's instructions, but also show social awareness that arises naturally during the learning process.

Children's independence skills have also undergone significant development. Children look more confident in completing simple tasks, such as tidying up learning tools, following activity rules, and completing activities without excessive dependence on teachers. A learning environment that provides space for exploration encourages children to try, make simple decisions, and take responsibility for the activities carried out. This independence develops as the child's confidence and involvement in meaningful learning experiences increase.



Figure 2. Active involvement and independence of children in the learning process

Figure 2 shows a learning atmosphere that emphasizes the active involvement of children in completing tasks. Children show independence through direct participation, focus on activities, and the ability to follow the teacher's directions during the learning process. This condition reflects the development of children's confidence and responsibility in learning activities designed based on experience and exploration. An interactive learning environment provides space for children to develop social-emotional abilities naturally.

The results of the observation show that deep learning creates a more interactive learning atmosphere and is responsive to the needs of children's development. Children look more enthusiastic, emotionally engaged, and actively interact during activities. Learning that emphasizes hands-on experience and reflection helps children build social-emotional understanding through real-life experiences, not just verbal instruction. Emerging behavioral changes show that experiential learning and social interaction make a positive contribution to the development of early childhood social-emotional abilities.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of deep learning in Aisiyah Kindergarten contributes meaningfully to the development of early childhood social-emotional skills (Madyawati et al., 2023). Learning processes that emphasize experience, active participation, and social interaction create conditions where children are not only involved cognitively but also emotionally and socially (Benson et al., 2025). This finding suggests that deep learning in early childhood contexts operates through meaningful engagement that allows children to construct social understanding through direct experiences rather than abstract instruction alone (Khotimah & Abdan, 2025). In this sense, the study extends the application of deep learning theory by showing its relevance in shaping social-emotional competencies within everyday classroom activities.

Improvement in children's cooperative skills reflects how collaborative learning environments facilitate the internalization of social values. Group-based activities enable children to practice sharing, helping peers, and understanding their roles within a group setting (Jailani, 2023). These interactions indicate that social behavior develops through continuous participation in real social situations. Such findings align with the constructivist perspective that emphasizes social interaction as a key process in the formation of knowledge and behavior (Mubarok et al., 2025).

The development of emotional regulation also becomes evident through children's increasing ability to recognize and express their feelings more appropriately. Reflection activities conducted after learning sessions appear to support children in understanding their emotional experiences during classroom interactions (Mubarok et al., 2025). This process contributes to strengthening children's self-awareness and emotional control, which are essential for building stable social behavior. A supportive and secure learning environment further reinforces this development, as children feel accepted and valued during the learning process (Salam et al., 2022).

Empathy development is reflected in the emergence of children's prosocial behavior in various learning situations. Children begin to show concern for peers experiencing difficulties, assist in organizing learning materials, and share opportunities in collaborative

activities. These behaviors are formed through repeated interaction and meaningful participation rather than instant outcomes (Febriyanti et al., 2022). Opportunities for active interaction allow children to gradually develop social awareness and the ability to understand others' feelings, which are important foundations for healthy social relationships and positive character formation (Widjayatri et al., 2023).

Children's independence also shows noticeable progress through learning activities that emphasize exploration and direct experience. Children demonstrate greater confidence in completing tasks, following activity rules, and taking responsibility for their actions (Suriati, 2025). Experiential learning allows children to make simple decisions and learn from the outcomes of their actions, which strengthens their confidence and readiness to face learning challenges (Astini et al., 2023). This finding suggests that deep learning supports not only social interaction but also the development of self-directed behavior in early childhood learning environments.

The implementation of deep learning further creates a more interactive learning atmosphere that is responsive to children's developmental needs. Increased enthusiasm, participation, and emotional engagement observed during learning activities indicate that meaningful experiences play a crucial role in supporting social-emotional understanding (Ummat & Munir, 2025). Learning processes involving emotional engagement, interaction, and reflection appear to provide stronger developmental impact compared to one-way instructional approaches (Astini et al., 2023). This reinforces the view that deep learning in early childhood education integrates cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions simultaneously.

The role of teachers emerges as a key factor in facilitating this learning process. Teachers act as facilitators who create a safe, supportive, and engaging environment that encourages children to interact and express themselves openly (Wijayanto, 2023a). Through guidance, positive reinforcement, and structured interaction, teachers help children interpret their social and emotional experiences during learning activities (Mesra, 2023). This pedagogical role strengthens the internalization of social-emotional values and supports the effectiveness of deep learning practices in the classroom (Sato et al., 2023).

Overall, the results highlight the relevance of deep learning for early childhood education that prioritizes holistic development. Learning experiences that emphasize participation, reflection, and interaction contribute to the formation of more developed social-emotional skills (Cahyawati, 2025). These developments are reflected not only in children's behavior during learning activities but also in their ability to interact with peers, regulate emotions, and demonstrate concern for the surrounding social environment (Herlina, 2023).

In general, deep learning demonstrates effectiveness in supporting the development of children's social-emotional abilities through interactive and reflective learning experiences. By positioning children as active participants, the learning process facilitates the development of cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, and independence within the classroom context. Experiential and contextually designed learning activities provide opportunities for children to build deeper social-emotional understanding, suggesting that strategies

emphasizing emotional and social engagement are important to continuously develop in early childhood education practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of deep learning in early childhood education contributes positively to the development of children's social-emotional skills. Learning activities that emphasize experiential, interactive, and reflective processes encourage children to exhibit more adaptive behaviors, including improved cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, and independence. Increased emotional engagement and social interaction also make the learning experience more meaningful for children. Furthermore, experiential learning enables children to develop social-emotional understanding through direct interaction with their environment and peers, while a safe and supportive learning environment enhances their confidence and sense of responsibility. These findings confirm that deep learning pedagogy can effectively support holistic development in early childhood education by integrating cognitive and social-emotional dimensions. Theoretically, this study contributes to the advancement of deep learning by highlighting experiential, interactive, and reflective learning as key mechanisms in fostering social-emotional competencies. However, this study is limited to a single research setting and a qualitative design; therefore, the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Future research is recommended to involve more diverse settings and participants, as well as to examine the long-term impact of deep learning on children's developmental outcomes.

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