



## Development and Evaluation of the TRIKON-S Model for Strengthening Social Skills in Early Childhood Education

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### ABSTRACT

Social skills in early childhood are an important foundation for the ability to interact, communicate, and adapt in social life. In the process of social interaction, children often experience simple conflicts such as fighting over toys, difficulty taking turns, differences of opinion, and emotional outbursts. However, conflicts in children are often ignored or resolved directly by teachers without giving children the opportunity to learn to resolve them independently. This study aims to develop the TRIKON-S (Transforming Interaction in Conflict-Social) model as a conflict resolution learning approach to strengthen the social skills of early childhood and to test its feasibility and effectiveness. The study used the Research and Development (R&D) method with the Borg & Gall model through ten stages of development. The research subjects consisted of 60 children aged 5–6 years in several PAUDs in Pekanbaru City. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and social skills assessment sheets, then analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results showed that the TRIKON-S model was in the very feasible category based on expert validation. The implementation of the model proved effective in improving children's social skills, with an N-Gain value of 0.71 (high category) and a significant t-test result ( $p < 0.05$ ). Children demonstrated improved communication, cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and self-control skills during the learning process. These findings confirm that social conflict can be transformed into meaningful learning experiences to strengthen the social skills of early childhood.

**Keywords:** Conflict Resolution, Peer Conflict, Social Skills, Collaborative Play, Early Childhood Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a crucial period for the development of children's social skills. During this stage, children begin to develop interactions with peers, teachers, and the family environment, which lay the foundation for future social adaptation. Tuerk et al (2020) stated that social interaction is an inseparable part of children's lives because through this interaction children learn to recognize, understand, and internalize applicable social values and norms. Social skills in early childhood include the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate, manage emotions, show empathy, and resolve conflicts constructively (Kaya & Deniz, 2020). These skills are not only crucial for children's success in interactions today but

also have long-term impacts on academic success, mental health, and quality of life in adulthood. Longitudinal research Jones et al (2015) shows that children who have strong social competence since kindergarten tend to have higher educational attainment, stable employment, and better mental health as adults. Falcão & Bolsoni-Silva (2015) the importance of social skills in children is not only seen from their ability to adapt in the school environment, but also from its role in reducing aggressive behavior, preventing learning difficulties, and helping children develop problem-solving skills more effectively. In addition, Kennedy (2010) emphasized that social behavior and communication skills developed in early childhood form an important foundation for children's future social adaptation. Children with good social skills are generally more confident, more easily accepted by their peers, and more active in collaborative activities.

The importance of early childhood social skills is also reflected in national education policy through Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 5 of 2022, which emphasizes that social and emotional development is one of the main achievements of early childhood education, including the ability to recognize emotions, control desires as a form of respect for others, interact with peers, understand applicable rules and customs, and have the motivation to learn and persevere in learning. However, in practice, various social and emotional problems are still found in early childhood, such as aggressive behavior, difficulty working together, low empathy, lack of self-confidence, and the inability to manage conflict positively. Conversely, poor social skills can lead to various developmental problems.

Supported Margaret Aurelia et al (2024) children who have low social skills tend to show aggressive behavior, withdraw from social environments, are less able to control their emotions, have low empathy, lack of self-confidence in children, and have difficulty working together with peers and tend to need help and support to bring out children's initiative in social interactions. Study Dereli-Iman (2014) also shows that poor social skills in childhood are associated with a lack of discipline, school phobia and truancy, academic failure, an increased risk of behavioral disorders and/or deviant behavior, for example, theft, physical and verbal violence including bullying, harassment, and dependence on certain substances that can lead to addiction. Therefore, the development of social skills needs to be carried out in a planned manner through meaningful educational interventions from an early age.

In the context of early childhood education, children's social interactions are often colored by various conflict situations, such as fighting over toys, differences of opinion while playing, difficulty taking turns, or emotional outbursts when desires are not fulfilled. Chen et al (2010) said that the frequency of conflict in children ranges from 1 in 3 minutes and the average conflict of 200 conflicts is 23 seconds, the problem of conflict is social in nature. According to Ashby & Neilsen-hewett (2012) conflict in early childhood is defined as a situation in which one child tries to influence the actions of another child, and the second child rejects or opposes the attempt, while conflict resolution is understood as the various strategies that children use to resolve these differences socially, either by giving in (yielding), endure (standing firm), or negotiate (negotiation). Damayanit & Maningtyas (2021) suggests that conflict in early childhood often arises because children already have strong desires and ideas about what they want to achieve, but do not yet have an adequate understanding of

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socially acceptable ways to achieve those desires. Conflict in children is generally viewed as negative behavior to be avoided. However, a contemporary educational perspective views conflict as a potentially powerful opportunity for social learning. Huang & Lajoie (2023) stated that conflict situations require conflict resolution skills. Conflict resolution is a method used by individuals to overcome social conflict with the aim of reaching a resolution to the dispute that occurs, generally between two parties (Geckler et al., 2016). Through appropriately facilitated conflict resolution experiences, children can learn to recognize emotions, understand others' perspectives, negotiate, and find peaceful solutions together (Wahyuni, 2014). Thus, conflict does not have to be suppressed, but can be transformed into a constructive learning experience to strengthen children's social skills.

The importance of conflict resolution education for early childhood has been discussed in various studies. A social problem-solving approach shows that children who receive structured conflict resolution education tend to be more assertive, cooperative, have better emotional awareness, and are more responsible in social interactions (Kusuma, 2018). Furthermore, conflict resolution learning also contributes to the development of children's emotional intelligence, communication skills, empathy, and collaborative skills. These competencies are crucial in preparing children for an increasingly complex and diverse social life.

Despite growing awareness of the importance of social-emotional learning, learning practices in many early childhood education (PAUD) institutions still tend to be teacher-centered and academically oriented. Children often have limited opportunities to engage in reflective interactions, collaborative problem-solving, and meaningful social communication. As a result, learning experiences specifically designed to develop children's social skills are suboptimal. Several initial observations in PAUD settings indicate child behaviors such as difficulty expressing feelings appropriately, reluctance to share, irritability when faced with conflict, difficulty cooperating, and low empathy for peers. These conditions highlight the need for an innovative learning model capable of integrating social interaction and conflict resolution into early childhood learning activities.

In the context of early childhood education, learning is child-centered and considers the uniqueness of each child. According to Hayati & Purnama (2019), learning is a mental and psychological activity that occurs in active interactions, resulting in changes in understanding, attitudes, and behavior. Mulyasa (2017) describes the characteristics of children's learning styles, including (a) children acquire knowledge through play activities, (b) children learn by constructing their own knowledge, (c) the learning process takes place naturally, (d) children learn more easily when learning is presented comprehensively, interestingly, meaningfully, and usefully. Children also build their understanding by exploring various objects and events around them, as well as through interactions with others. Therefore, learning in PAUD is designed in a conducive manner to bring children to learn naturally without coercion so that children's potential develops optimally.

This study aims to develop the TRIKON-S (Transforming Interaction in Conflict-Social) learning model as an innovative approach to strengthening early childhood social skills through conflict resolution learning. This model is designed to help children develop communication, cooperation, self-control, social sensitivity, and responsibility through

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meaningful social interaction experiences. Another objective of this study is to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the TRIKON-S model in improving early childhood social skills in early childhood education settings.

This research is important because learning practices in many early childhood education institutions still tend to be academically oriented and teacher-centered, thus limiting children's opportunities to develop social skills through reflective and collaborative social interactions. Children have not yet received learning experiences specifically designed to develop conflict resolution, emotional management, and positive social relationships. This situation highlights the need for innovative learning models that can systematically and meaningfully integrate social interaction and conflict resolution into early childhood learning activities.

Conceptually the TRIKON-S model is based on the theory of social information processing (SIP) (Crick & Dodge, 1994) and (Sandy & Boardman, 2000) conflict resolution program. Dodge's SIP theory explains that children's conflict resolution behavior is the result of a series of stages of social information processing, namely encoding social cues, interpreting situations, clarifying social goals, generating alternative responses, evaluating and selecting responses, and implementing responses or behaviors. Meanwhile, Boardman's conflict resolution program emphasizes the development of self-identity, self-control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional competence, communication, assertiveness, and cooperation. In addition, this study is also supported by Bandura (1986) social cognitive theory, which explains that the development of children's social behavior is influenced by the reciprocal relationship between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (reciprocal determinism).

The quality of conflict resolution is largely determined by the child's accuracy in each stage of the SIP. Distortion at any stage, such as misinterpreting a friend's intentions and/or failure to control impulses, can lead to aggressive responses or withdrawal. In the context of early childhood, the SIP process is still developing and is heavily influenced by the child's emotional maturity, self-concept, and social experiences, thus requiring systematic and continuous learning stimulation. Sandy Boardman's (2020) conflict resolution program provides an operational pedagogical basis that directly internalizes the SIP stages into eight domains of conflict resolution. In line with the framework of social information processing, while emphasizing the importance of cognitive stages in understanding and responding to social situations, children's conflict resolution skills can also be viewed as a process that requires a deeper understanding of social information. According to Campbell & Skarakis-doyle (2011), conflict resolution is viewed as a child's social cognitive ability to understand social situations, determine interaction goals, evaluate various possible strategies, and choose the most appropriate verbal and nonverbal response. Furthermore, Wilton et al (2000) explain that the conflict resolution skills learned by children will be applied in their daily lives. Quiet and dominant children who experience bullying learn to be more open with their peers and no longer become quiet. Quiet children generally show a tendency to be less assertive, even though assertiveness is necessary in establishing social relationships with others because assertive behavior can help improve children's social skills. This means that through the conflict resolution process, children learn to use various strategies such as giving in,

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persisting, and negotiating to reach mutual agreements. This process reflects social cognitive abilities in understanding situations, managing emotions, and choosing appropriate responses.

In an effort to understand how early childhood social skills develop and how learning can support them, it is necessary to first explain what is meant by social skills themselves. According to Sorlie et al (2020), social skills are a multidimensional construct, the ability to integrate cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral aspects to adapt in social interactions. Similarly, Cabe & Altamura (2011) stated that social skills are the ability to integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral states to achieve goals in a social context. Therefore, social skills can be described as how well a child gets along with peers and adults and builds successful relationships. This description explains that social skills are a person's abilities formed through a continuous process of learning to control emotions and social interactions with the help of or influencing factors such as the environment, relationships, or family closeness. Children who receive good stimulation will become more confident, willing to cooperate and participate, and able to accept responsibility. Conversely, children who lack social stimulation will tend to act aggressively.

Another assessment framework that is also widely used to understand children's social skills according to Gresham et al (2010) is Social Skills Improvement System(SSIS), which groups social skills into five main aspects. Measurement of social skills insocial skills improvement system (SSIS) covers five main aspects, including (a) communication, namely the child's ability to convey his feelings and thoughts effectively, including using eye contact and being able to say polite words such as "please" and "thank you" to others; (b) cooperation, namely the child's ability to obey rules and complete tasks collaboratively with others; (c) responsibility, namely the child's behavior in respecting the property rights of others and behaving well even without supervision; (d) social sensitivity, namely the child's ability to feel the feelings of others and try to comfort them, both in happy and sad situations; and (e) self-control, namely the child's ability to remain calm when faced with teasing and can control his emotions when angry. This description shows that the social skills scale not only captures the child's ability to relate to others, but also includes internal aspects that contribute to shaping the child's social behavior. This scale provides a comprehensive picture of the components of social skills that need to be developed in early childhood.

Based on the literature review and empirical evidence, a research gap exists: most early childhood education (PAUD) learning has not integrated conflict resolution as a systematic strategy to strengthen children's social skills. Previous research has focused more on general social-emotional development, while research on structured conflict-based learning models to enhance early childhood social skills is still limited. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the development of the TRIKON-S model, which integrates conflict resolution and social interaction stages as a constructive learning experience in early childhood education.

The hypothesis of this study is that the TRIKON-S model is effective in strengthening the social skills of early childhood. The study used a Research and Development (R&D) method with stages including model development, expert validation, limited trials, and effectiveness testing for early childhood education institutions. In this study, the term TRIKON-S is an abbreviation of Transforming Interaction in Conflict-Social, a learning model that utilizes conflict situations as a means of building meaningful social

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learning experiences for early childhood. Social skills are understood as a child's ability to interact positively with others through communication, cooperation, emotional control, empathy, and social responsibility. Conflict resolution is defined as a child's ability to resolve differences or disputes peacefully through negotiation, cooperation, and self-control.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the TRIKON-S (Transforming Interaction in Conflict–Social) model in strengthening social skills among early childhood learners. Research and Development was selected because it enables the systematic design, validation, revision, and testing of educational products to ensure their feasibility and effectiveness in addressing identified learning needs. The development process focused on producing a social learning model that facilitates children's communication, cooperation, responsibility, social sensitivity, and self-control through structured learning experiences. To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed model, the study adopted a pretest–posttest control group design involving experimental and control groups, allowing comparisons of social skill development before and after the implementation of the intervention.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted during the 2024/2025 academic year in several early childhood education centers (PAUD) located in Pekanbaru City, Indonesia. The participants consisted of children aged 5–6 years who were enrolled in the selected institutions. The sample was determined using a random sampling technique to ensure that all eligible participants had an equal opportunity to be included in the study. The selected participants were subsequently assigned to experimental and control groups. Children in the experimental group participated in learning activities using the TRIKON-S model, whereas children in the control group received conventional learning activities commonly implemented in early childhood classrooms. This design enabled the researchers to examine the contribution of the developed model to the enhancement of children's social skills within authentic educational settings.

### **Model Development Procedure**

The development of the TRIKON-S model followed a systematic sequence of stages consisting of needs analysis, product development, expert validation, limited trials, product revision, and field testing. The needs analysis stage was conducted to identify challenges related to children's social skills and existing instructional practices within early childhood education settings. Information obtained from observations and interviews provided the foundation for designing the conceptual framework and instructional components of the model. Following this stage, the initial prototype of the TRIKON-S model was developed, incorporating learning activities designed to promote social interaction, conflict resolution, cooperation, and positive social behaviors among children.

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The developed model subsequently underwent expert validation involving specialists in learning design, early childhood education, and educational media. Feedback provided by the experts was used to revise and improve the model before implementation. A limited trial was then conducted to evaluate the practicality and feasibility of the model in classroom settings. Findings from the trial informed further revisions, leading to the production of the final version of the TRIKON-S model. The final field testing stage was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the model in improving children's social skills through its implementation in the experimental group.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

Data were collected using multiple techniques, including observations, interviews, documentation, expert validation questionnaires, and pretest–posttest assessments. The primary instrument was a social skills observation sheet designed to assess children's social competencies across five dimensions: communication, cooperation, responsibility, social sensitivity, and self-control. Each dimension was evaluated using a four-level rating scale to capture variations in children's social behavior during learning activities.

Observations were conducted systematically throughout the implementation process to document children's interactions, participation, and behavioral changes. Interviews with teachers and school administrators were carried out to obtain deeper insights into existing social skill challenges, learning practices, and perceptions regarding the developed model. Documentation was used to support and verify observational findings, while expert validation questionnaires were administered to evaluate the quality, relevance, and feasibility of the TRIKON-S model before implementation. Pretest and posttest assessments were administered to both experimental and control groups to measure changes in children's social skills resulting from the intervention.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity of the instruments and the developed model was established through expert judgment involving learning design experts, early childhood education specialists, and media experts. The validation process assessed the relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensiveness of the model components and research instruments. Recommendations from the experts were incorporated into the revision process to improve the quality and feasibility of the final product.

Reliability was strengthened through methodological triangulation and consistency of assessment among observers. Multiple sources of data were compared to enhance the credibility of the findings, while observer agreement procedures were implemented to ensure consistency in the assessment of children's social skills. These procedures contributed to the trustworthiness and accuracy of both qualitative and quantitative findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the TRIKON-S model. Quantitative data obtained from the pretest and posttest assessments were analyzed using SPSS software. Prior to hypothesis

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testing, the data were examined through the Shapiro–Wilk normality test and homogeneity test to ensure compliance with statistical assumptions. Differences between the experimental and control groups were subsequently analyzed using the independent samples t-test. To determine the magnitude of improvement in children's social skills following the intervention, the Normalized Gain Score (N-Gain) was calculated and interpreted according to established criteria.

Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman. This analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing conducted continuously throughout the research process. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the TRIKON-S model in strengthening social skills among early childhood learners. Although the study provides important insights into social skill development within early childhood education settings, the findings are limited to institutions in Pekanbaru City. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other educational contexts with different characteristics and learning environments.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The results of the study indicate that the TRIKON-S (Transforming Interaction in Conflict-Social) model is able to strengthen the social skills of children aged 5–6 years in the aspects of communication, cooperation, responsibility, social sensitivity, and self-control. This finding is seen through changes in children's social behavior during the implementation of the model, both based on the results of classroom observations and statistical testing in the experimental and control groups. Children who participated in the implementation of the model showed an increase in the ability to express opinions verbally, listen to friends, work together in groups, and reduce impulsive behavior when facing social conflict.

The TRIKON-S model was developed as a social learning approach that positions conflict as a constructive social learning experience. The model's implementation flow is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Flow of the TRIKON-S Model

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These findings demonstrate that educationally facilitated conflict experiences can be an effective social learning medium for young children. In the implementation process of the model, simple social conflicts such as fighting over toys, refusing to take turns, or differences of opinion during play are used as learning contexts to help children recognize emotions, understand others' perspectives, and find shared solutions. Children no longer simply receive conflict resolution from the teacher, but are involved in a direct process of social reflection and negotiation. This situation helps children develop social awareness through real-life experiences close to everyday life.

Quantitatively, the implementation of the TRIKON-S model showed a higher increase in social skills scores in the experimental group compared to the control group. A comparison of pretest and posttest scores is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Children's Social Skills Scores Before and After Implementation of the TRIKON-S Model

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	N-Gain
Experimental	30	58.43	84.76	0.71
Control	30	57.91	68.24	0.24

The table shows that the experimental group achieved high levels of social skill improvement, while the control group only experienced low levels of improvement. These findings indicate that engaging children in reflective interaction and collaborative conflict resolution positively impacts their social development.

The improvement in children's social skills in this study also occurred across all dimensions of social skills, particularly in cooperation and social sensitivity. These changes are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Improvement Across Dimensions of Children's Social Skills

Social Skill Dimension	Pretest	Posttest
Communication	2.31	3.54
Cooperation	2.28	3.61
Responsibility	2.44	3.47
Social Sensitivity	2.17	3.58
Self-Control	2.20	3.39

Improvements in cooperation and social sensitivity indicate that the TRIKON-S model helps children learn to understand their peers' feelings, share roles, and build more positive social relationships. Children appear more engaged in group discussions, demonstrate cooperative behavior, and begin to resolve conflicts without aggression.

Statistically, the results of the independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups after the model implementation. The N-Gain Score of the experimental group was in the moderate to high category, indicating that a greater increase in social skills occurred in the group that received the TRIKON-S model implementation. This finding shows that the developed model is not only conceptually

feasible but also empirically effective in supporting the strengthening of social skills in early childhood.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study support the findings of Yang (2024) which explain that social conflict in early childhood not only presents behavioral challenges but also provides important opportunities to develop negotiation skills, emotional regulation, and social problem-solving. Children who gain experience resolving conflict constructively tend to demonstrate better social skill development than children who consistently rely on adult intervention. In this study, children's active involvement in the conflict resolution process helps them understand the relationship between emotions, behavior, and social consequences in everyday interactions.

Changes in children's social behavior are also evident in their improved interpersonal communication skills during the learning process. Children begin to express their desires in more positive language, listen to their peers' opinions, and provide more appropriate social responses in group activities. These findings suggest that structured social interactions provide a space for children to learn to use communication as a tool for conflict resolution. These results align with research Rezende & Shigaeff (2023) that suggests social skills develop through children's involvement in the process of understanding social norms, reading interpersonal situations, and building effective social interactions through direct experience.

Furthermore, the use of social conflict-based picture stories in the TRIKON-S model helps children understand social situations more concretely. Children appear to more easily recognize characters' emotions, understand the causes of conflict, and discuss alternative solutions after listening to stories related to their daily experiences. These results support research Gasser et al (2022) which explains that narrative stories can foster the development of empathy and social reasoning in children through emotional engagement and reflective discussion of the characters' experiences. Narratives provide opportunities for children to understand social behavior from various perspectives without having to experience the situation directly.

This study also found that changes occurred not only in the children, but also in the teachers' pedagogical practices. Teachers began facilitating social dialogue and reflection rather than directly providing solutions to conflicts that arose in the classroom. This approach helped create a more participatory learning environment and supported children's social and emotional development more naturally. Hossain & Younus (2025) explained that teachers' understanding of social learning strategies significantly influences the successful implementation of learning centered on children's social interactions and experiences.

Although the research results demonstrate the effectiveness of the TRIKON-S model in strengthening children's social skills, several other factors need to be considered when interpreting the research findings. Children's social skill development is influenced not only by learning interventions at school, but also by the family environment, interaction patterns at home, and individual characteristics. Furthermore, some children require a longer adaptation period to actively engage in social discussions and negotiation processes with peers. Therefore, the results of this study need to be understood in the context of learning

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implementation, which occurs gradually and is influenced by various social factors around the child.

The implications of this research indicate that social learning in early childhood needs to be directed toward contextual, reflective, and participatory interaction experiences. The TRIKON-S model provides an alternative learning approach that utilizes social conflict as a learning experience to help children develop communication, emotional regulation, and cooperation skills from an early age. This approach is relevant to the needs of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes the importance of social skills, collaboration, and problem-solving in children's future lives.

However, this study is limited to a few early childhood education centers (PAUD) in Pekanbaru City and a relatively limited implementation period. Further research is needed to test the model's consistency of effectiveness across different sociocultural contexts and over longer implementation periods to provide a more in-depth analysis of its long-term impact on children's social and emotional development.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the TRIKON-S (Transforming Interaction in Conflict–Social) model is an effective and developmentally appropriate approach for strengthening social skills in early childhood education by transforming social conflicts into meaningful learning experiences. Through reflective communication, collaborative negotiation, and social reinforcement, the model promotes children's communication, cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and self-control while supporting positive social interactions. The study further highlights the importance of learning experiences that extend beyond academic achievement by providing opportunities for children to understand emotions, resolve conflicts, and build constructive social relationships from an early age. As a result, the TRIKON-S model offers a practical and innovative pedagogical alternative for creating participatory, contextual, and child-centered learning environments that support social-emotional development and enrich educational practices in early childhood settings.

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