

Socio-Emotional Behavior of Early Childhood in the Context of Play in the Bulo Neighborhood

Aminasry Muh. Juliman¹, Munir Yusuf², Subhan³

Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini, Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo, Indonesia^{1,2,3}

email: 42064800807@iainpalopo.ac.id¹

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Corresponding author

Abstract

The development of socio-emotional behavior in early childhood is a crucial foundation for future social interaction and psychological well-being. This study aims to describe the forms of socio-emotional behavior in children aged 4–5 within the context of play, identify influencing factors, and analyze the role of parents in supporting this development. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data collected through in-depth interviews and documentation involving 33 parents in the Bulo neighborhood, Walenrang Subdistrict, Luwu Regency. The findings indicate that most children demonstrated positive socio-emotional abilities, such as engaging in healthy interactions, independence, conflict resolution, and appropriate emotional expression. Key supporting factors include family environment, peer presence, quality of social interaction, and parental involvement in play activities. These results highlight the importance of synergy among families, communities, and educational institutions in creating a supportive and meaningful developmental environment for young children.

Keywords: *Socio-Emotional Behavior, Early Childhood, Play Activities, Parental Role, Social Environment.*

Abstrak

Perkembangan perilaku sosial emosional anak usia dini merupakan dasar penting bagi interaksi sosial dan kesehatan psikologis di masa depan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan bentuk perilaku sosial emosional anak usia 4–5 tahun dalam konteks bermain, mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya, serta menganalisis peran orang tua dalam mendukungnya. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam dan dokumentasi terhadap 33 orang tua di Lingkungan Bulo, Kecamatan Walenrang, Kabupaten Luwu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan sebagian besar anak memiliki kemampuan sosial emosional yang baik, seperti berinteraksi positif, mandiri, mampu menyelesaikan konflik, dan mengekspresikan emosi dengan tepat. Faktor pendukung utama meliputi lingkungan keluarga, teman sebaya, kualitas interaksi sosial, dan keterlibatan orang tua dalam bermain. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya sinergi antara keluarga, masyarakat, dan lembaga pendidikan dalam menciptakan lingkungan tumbuh kembang yang sehat dan bermakna bagi anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: Perilaku Sosial Emosional, Anak Usia Dini, Aktivitas Bermain, Peran Orang Tua, Lingkungan Sosial.

PENDAHULUAN

Early childhood education (ECE) is an educational level designed to support children from birth to six years of age before they enter primary school (Khodarash et al., 2025; W. P. Sari et al., 2025; Syaharra et al., 2025; Warmansyah & Marwan, 2025; A. Wulandari et al., 2025). This process aims to provide appropriate stimulation to promote both physical and spiritual growth, ensuring that children are developmentally ready for the next stage of education (Nurdin et al., 2024; S. Y. Utami et al., 2023; T. Wulandari et al., 2024). Education itself is a conscious effort undertaken by the government, society, and families through guidance, teaching, and training activities, both in formal and informal settings, throughout a person's life. According to the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, national education aims to develop learners' potential to become individuals who are faithful, pious, morally upright, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible (Noor, 2018). This principle serves as a foundation for fostering children's socio-emotional development during early childhood.

Early childhood is known as the golden age a highly sensitive and optimal period for overall growth and development (Alifah et al., 2024; Azizah et al., 2024a; I. P. Sari et al., 2023). During this stage, children begin to respond to their surroundings and engage in social interaction. Social development refers to achieving maturity in forming relationships with others, which occurs through interactions within the family, community, and educational institutions (Aqila & Kamariah, 2019; Septiani et al., 2025). Hurlock (1954) stated that social development is the ability to behave in ways that are socially acceptable when interacting with others. Even infants as young as six months old exhibit a growing need to interact and explore their environment.

Behavior is shaped through human interaction with the environment and life experiences (Aini & Fitria, 2021; Qistina & Khadijah, 2025; Satriyawan & Ichsan, 2020). Dewi et al., (2020) explains that behavior encompasses cognition (thinking), affection (feeling), and conation (acting). In early childhood, socio-emotional behavior becomes a vital indicator of a child's ability to adapt, empathize, and regulate emotions in various social settings. Socio-emotional competence includes the ability to identify, manage, and express emotions appropriately, establish secure relationships, and explore the environment confidently within the context of their culture and community (Puspitasari & Rahma, 2023).

Research has shown that plays a critical role in shaping children's socio-emotional behavior (Azizah et al., 2024b; Nurhalisa et al., 2024; R. D. Utami et al., 2024). Through play, children learn to understand social norms, develop empathy, and practice cooperation. According to Nafisah et al., (2023), children's socio-emotional development is formed through listening, observing, and imitating what they see in social interactions. However, the effectiveness of this learning process is greatly influenced by contextual factors such as access to play spaces, parental involvement, and socio-cultural support from the surrounding environment.

The Bulo neighborhood in Walenrang Subdistrict, Luwu Regency, presents its own social and cultural dynamics, making it a meaningful context for observing children's development. Based on initial observations and interviews with local residents, not all children have access to adequate and safe play spaces. Several obstacles including the limited number of peers, inadequate play facilities, and parents' concerns about safety risks when children play outside hinder children's opportunities for healthy socialization. These constraints may affect the quality of social interactions and the overall development of children's socio-emotional skills.

While the importance of play in promoting socio-emotional development has been widely discussed in previous studies, limited attention has been given to how local social dynamics, environmental limitations, and parental roles interact to shape children's socio-emotional behavior, especially in rural areas like the Bulo neighborhood. What sets this study apart is its effort to explore the relationship between play activities, the local socio-cultural setting, and parental involvement in shaping the socio-emotional behavior of children aged 4–5 years in a geographically and socially distinctive environment.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate and characterize the socio-emotional behavior of early childhood within the context of play in the Bulo neighborhood, Kelurahan Bulo, Walenrang Subdistrict, Luwu Regency. Additionally, it seeks to identify the influencing factors and analyze the role of parents in supporting the development of children's socio-emotional competence through play-based activities.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore and describe the socio-emotional behavior of early childhood in the context of play. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural settings, particularly those involving parental perspectives and contextual influences on child development.

Research Participants

The research involved thirty-three (33) parents of children aged four to five years residing in the Bulo neighborhood, located in Walenrang Subdistrict, Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on the criterion that they were the primary caregivers of children within the specified age range and were actively involved in the children's daily routines, including play activities.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to gain insights into children's behavior during natural play activities. In-depth interviews were carried out

with parents to explore their views, experiences, and perceptions regarding their children's socio-emotional development. Documentation included the collection of supporting records, photographs, and field notes to strengthen the validity of the data.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic coding approach. Themes were identified by categorizing recurring patterns in the responses related to social interaction, emotional expression, conflict resolution, and independence. Observational and documented data were triangulated to support the findings, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive and credible understanding of children's socio-emotional behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the findings of this qualitative study on the socio-emotional behavior of early childhood in the context of play in the Bulo neighborhood. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving parents of children aged 4–5 years. The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, allowing patterns and categories to emerge from the participants' narratives. The results are organized into three main themes: (1) forms of socio-emotional behavior observed during play, (2) influencing factors within the home and social environment, and (3) the role of parents in supporting the development of socio-emotional competence. Selected quotations from participants are included to enrich the interpretation and provide contextual depth to each theme.

Children's Ability to Interact Positively with Peers and Adults

Most children aged 4–5 in the Bulo neighborhood demonstrated an encouraging level of social-emotional development, particularly in peer interaction. During daily play activities, children actively engaged in group games such as role-play, hide and seek, and imaginative scenarios. These activities provided opportunities to build cooperation, empathy, and conflict management. As described by one participant (P1),

“She really enjoys playing with friends—running around, playing hide and seek, pretend-selling. Sometimes there are fights over toys, but she can often solve it herself. If not, I help explain.”

This highlights the child's growing independence in social negotiation. Another parent (P2) explained,

“He is friendly, often plays with others, and although sometimes there are disputes especially over toy cars—he calms down quickly and makes peace.”

Children were observed to possess a basic awareness of turn-taking and emotion regulation. Some (P3, P4) demonstrated the ability to apologize spontaneously, suggesting the emergence of prosocial behaviors and early moral understanding.

In terms of interaction with adults, children generally displayed respectful behavior, such as greeting elders, saying thank you, and showing politeness. One parent (P5) reported,

“When she meets adults, she greets them and kisses their hand.”

Another (P6) noted,

“He is polite and knows how to greet and speak properly, but sometimes gets too involved in adult conversations.”

These narratives indicate that the children are internalizing social norms and developing appropriate communication patterns. However, some still require guidance in setting boundaries within adult interactions.

Independence in Play and Daily Activities

Children in the study showed varying levels of independence. Some required prompting to complete basic responsibilities such as tidying up after play, while others displayed initiative and creativity. For example, one respondent (P7) noted:

“He cleans up only when I ask and stay with him. If he’s tired, he leaves everything.”

In contrast, others demonstrated autonomous exploration and imaginative behavior. A parent (P8) described how her child liked

“playing with robot toys, making soap bubbles, and inventing things.”

Another (P9) mentioned,

“He enjoys making little houses out of cardboard when he finds unused boxes.”

These findings reveal that children are not only developing physical coordination but also cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills through play. The emerging independence suggests a progression toward emotional maturity and self-regulation, although consistent adult scaffolding remains essential.

Constructive Conflict Resolution

Children were frequently involved in conflict during play, particularly over toys or disagreements about rules. Despite this, many showed a tendency to resolve disputes constructively. One parent (P10) noted:

“If there’s a problem, he usually apologizes first.”

Another (P11) shared,

“She often tells stories about what happened during play, especially funny things or moments when she felt happy or upset.”

These statements suggest that children are beginning to understand interpersonal boundaries and to verbalize emotions as a way of resolving social tension. While most children were able to restore relationships quickly, adult mediation was still occasionally needed, especially in more emotionally charged situations.

Expressing Emotions Appropriately

Findings showed a range of emotional expression strategies among children. Some preferred to withdraw when frustrated, while others openly expressed disappointment or joy. A parent (P12) shared:

"If she disagrees during play, she goes quiet and plays alone. If others keep bothering her, she starts crying."

Another (P13) mentioned:

"When her toy breaks, she gets really upset and cries. She's very attached to her toys."

In contrast, a more expressive child (P14)

"loves telling long stories and sometimes imitates her friends' speaking styles."

These examples reflect differences in emotional sensitivity, regulation, and expressive abilities. Some children demonstrated resilience and a capacity for self-soothing, while others still relied on adult support to manage strong emotions. The presence of narrative expression (storytelling) also emerged as a valuable medium for emotional processing and social imitation.

Factors Influencing Children's Socio-Emotional Behavior During Play

Family Environment

The family environment plays a crucial role in shaping socio-emotional competencies. Children with responsive caregivers were more likely to exhibit empathy, assertiveness, and appropriate behavior during play. One parent (P15) explained:

"There are no children her age nearby, so she plays with her older sibling and sometimes ends up crying. But when playing at church with peers, she gets along well."

This highlights how peer compatibility and emotional safety influence behavioral outcomes. Children benefit from structured environments where parents provide guidance, model empathy, and offer consistent emotional support.

Peer Interaction

Interaction with peers was found to be both a source of social learning and emotional challenge. Many parents (P16–P18) reported that their children were excited

to play with peers and often initiated group play. However, disputes over toys and competitiveness were common. One noted:

"He is very active and gets upset if he loses or doesn't get his way. But he usually makes up quickly and invites his friends to play again."

Another stated:

"She shares toys but sometimes argues over rules. But it's normal—they fight and then make peace."

These findings underscore that children are in the process of developing social tolerance, negotiation skills, and emotional resilience through peer interaction.

Access to Play Spaces and Community Support

Environmental safety and adult presence also influenced children's play behavior. Some parents restricted outdoor play due to proximity to rivers or roads. For example (P19):

"Our house is near the river, so I tell her to stay in the yard and not follow friends near the water."

(P20) added:

"It's crowded here, and kids often fight over toys. I supervise and explain how to take turns."

Another (P21) said:

"He plays with older kids who sometimes tease him. So I encourage him to play with those his age."

These responses highlight how environmental risks and age disparities can limit social opportunities, but also how adult supervision and intervention can mediate those effects.

Parental Role in Supporting Socio-Emotional Development

Parents played an active role as facilitators of emotional and social learning. This included teaching appropriate behavior, modeling kindness, and providing emotional support. A parent (P22) explained:

"I teach him to share, say sorry, and praise him when he helps or behaves well. We also talk at night about his friends."

Another (P23) shared:

"I hug her daily, talk about feelings, and show how to treat others kindly."

Yet another (P24) added:

"I accompany her during play and encourage her to be confident. I tell her it's okay to make mistakes."

These parenting strategies fostered self-confidence, empathy, and emotional regulation in children, reinforcing the importance of warm, consistent guidance in early socio-emotional development.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that young children in the Bulo neighborhood of Walenrang Subdistrict, Luwu Regency, generally exhibit positive socio-emotional development through play. Based on interviews with 33 parents of children aged 4–5, it was observed that children engage actively in various play forms including role-play, traditional physical games, and imaginative activities that foster skills such as sharing, turn-taking, and independent problem-solving (Suarez et al., 2024). Most children demonstrated emerging autonomy by making decisions during play, tidying up their toys, and verbally expressing their preferences. Some also showed high levels of creativity, such as designing games or building play structures from household materials.

Social interaction during play further revealed that children are beginning to internalize cooperation, empathy, and communication (Thümmeler et al., 2022). Many were able to resolve conflicts constructively by apologizing, proposing joint solutions, or taking turns with peers (Ardhi & Warmansyah, 2023). Emotional expressions, ranging from joy to disappointment, were generally appropriate and manageable, suggesting progress in emotional regulation. Parents played a vital role in supporting this development by modeling positive behavior, engaging in joint play, and offering emotional reinforcement through praise, physical affection, and open dialogue at home for instance, discussing daily experiences before bedtime.

Environmental factors also influenced children's behavior. Access to peers, availability of safe play areas, and proximity to communal spaces contributed to the quality of their social interactions (Hackman et al., 2010; M. Sari et al., 2022). In some cases, children without nearby peers played independently or with older siblings; yet with sufficient support from parents and the surrounding community, such limitations did not hinder development. Overall, these findings reinforce the notion that play is fundamental to nurturing socio-emotional growth. When provided with a supportive environment and healthy social interactions, children in Bulo demonstrate the potential to become emotionally resilient and socially competent individuals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the socio-emotional behavior of early childhood in the context of play in the Bulo neighborhood is shaped by peer interaction, adult involvement, and environmental conditions. Children generally exhibit positive socio-emotional traits, including the ability to interact constructively, show independence,

resolve conflicts, and express emotions appropriately. Key influencing factors include family environment, peer relationships, access to safe play spaces, and the role of the broader community. While parental involvement in play remains limited, their emotional support, guidance, and positive modeling are crucial in fostering empathy, emotional regulation, and social competence in young children. A collaborative effort among families and communities is essential to ensure optimal socio-emotional development through meaningful and safe play experiences.

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