

Enhancing the Social-Emotional Skills of Early Childhood Children Aged 5–6 Years through Sociodramatic Role-Playing Activities

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ABSTRACT

Social-emotional competence is a fundamental component of early childhood development, yet some children experience difficulties in cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and responding to peers. This study aimed to examine the use of sociodramatic role-playing activities to enhance the social-emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Permata Barko. The study employed a classroom action research design involving 17 children and was conducted through a pre-action assessment and two intervention cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected using a social-emotional observation checklist, teacher interviews, activity documentation, and researcher–teacher reflective notes. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by comparing observation scores across assessment stages, while qualitative data were analyzed to identify patterns in children's social-emotional behaviors. The findings showed progressive improvement in children's social-emotional skills, with the mean score increasing from 2.1 at the pre-action stage to 2.8 in Cycle I and 3.5 in Cycle II on a four-point scale. Improvements were observed in cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy toward peers. The findings indicate that structured sociodramatic role playing can provide meaningful opportunities for children to practice social interaction, manage emotions, communicate feelings, and respond appropriately to peers. The study concludes that sociodramatic role playing, supported by teacher facilitation and reflective instructional improvement, can serve as a practical strategy for strengthening social-emotional development in early childhood education.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a foundational stage of education because it supports children's development across physical, cognitive, language, artistic, and social-emotional domains (Siti Aulia Zannah, 2025). Among these domains, social-emotional development is particularly important because it provides the basis for children's ability to interact with peers, recognize and regulate their own emotions, understand the feelings of others, and adjust their behavior to social expectations (Puspita & Fauziyah, 2025; Robingatin, 2021). Social-emotional competence is also associated with children's confidence, ability to cooperate, creativity in addressing social problems, and readiness to participate in learning activities (Mayar, 2022; Soyan, 2023). Therefore, social-emotional development should not be treated as an additional component

of early childhood learning but as an integral part of children's overall development and educational readiness.

The importance of social-emotional development becomes particularly evident among children aged 5–6 years, a developmental period in which children increasingly learn to express feelings, regulate emotional responses, cooperate with peers, and understand other people's perspectives (Ade Lasma Harianja). Appropriate social stimulation through peer interaction and structured learning activities can contribute substantially to the development of these competencies (Nur, 2024; Wirahandayani et al., 2023). However, social-emotional development does not occur automatically. It requires meaningful social experiences in which children can repeatedly practice communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, turn-taking, problem solving, and perspective taking. Consequently, the learning environment and the pedagogical strategies used by teachers are important in creating opportunities for children to transform social-emotional concepts into observable behaviors.

This issue is also evident in the context of PAUD Permata Barko. Preliminary observations indicated that several children aged 5–6 years experienced difficulties in cooperating with peers, controlling emotions during simple conflicts, waiting for their turns, following play rules, expressing feelings appropriately, and recognizing the feelings of their peers. These conditions are consistent with previous findings indicating that inadequate social stimulation may be associated with lower prosocial skills, difficulties in managing frustration, and lower confidence in social interaction (Azizah & Sudirdjo, 2024; Suprayogi & Soeriaatmadja, 2024). The development of children's social-emotional competence may also be influenced by limited structured play experiences, suboptimal social interaction, and variations in teachers' understanding of strategies for developing social-emotional skills (Armelia, 2024; Hasbi, 2024). In the observed learning context, activities emphasizing social-emotional development were relatively limited, while learning tended to emphasize cognitive development and unstructured free play. As a result, opportunities for children to systematically practice cooperation, self-control, and appropriate emotional expression remained insufficient.

One pedagogical response to this issue is the use of play-based learning, particularly role-playing activities. Sociodramatic role play provides children with opportunities to enact social situations, assume different roles, make decisions, cooperate with others, and manage emotions within a safe and enjoyable learning environment (Daulay et al., 2023). Through such activities, children do not merely receive verbal explanations about appropriate social behavior; rather, they experience and practice these behaviors directly. Role play can also facilitate perspective taking and the internalization of social values through meaningful interaction (Syalaifah & Irmayanti, 2020; Soyan, 2023). Thus, sociodramatic role play offers a pedagogically relevant context for connecting social-emotional learning with children's active participation and everyday social experiences.

Recent empirical research provides support for this approach, although the findings also reveal important limitations. Richard et al. (2021), for example, examined a pretend play-based training program involving children aged 5–6 years and found improvements in emotion comprehension following the intervention. The study is particularly relevant because it addressed emotion comprehension, emotion regulation, and prosocial behavior within a play-based intervention. Similarly, Rao and Gibson (2021) found that dyadic pretend play with emotional themes was associated with children's expression of positive emotions, suggesting that pretend play can provide a social context for experiencing and responding to emotions. Chen and Kacerek (2022) further demonstrated that sociodramatic play creates opportunities for preschool children to engage in peer interaction, role negotiation, perspective taking, and social competence. These

studies indicate that pretend and sociodramatic play can function as meaningful contexts for children's social learning.

Nevertheless, the existing evidence is not entirely consistent. Adam et al. (2022), in a study involving children aged 4–6 years, found that pretend play-based training improved self-regulation within the training context, but the improvement did not significantly transfer to everyday activities outside the intervention. This finding suggests that the developmental effects of pretend play may depend on how activities are structured and how opportunities for transferring learned skills into everyday social situations are provided. In an Indonesian preschool context, Wirahandayani et al. (2023) directly examined role-playing methods and social-emotional development, supporting the use of role play as a learning activity for children's social-emotional development. However, the broader literature still provides limited understanding of how structured sociodramatic role-playing can simultaneously facilitate several practical social-emotional behaviors among children aged 5–6 years in an actual ECE classroom.

Further evidence is provided by Richard et al. (2023), who investigated pretend play-based training among children aged 5–6 years on a larger scale. Their findings showed improvements in emotion comprehension and reductions in aggressive behavioral responses among children participating in the intervention. These results strengthen the argument that pretend play can support selected dimensions of socio-emotional competence. At the same time, a recent meta-analysis by Smits-van der Nat et al. (2024), which synthesized 34 empirical studies involving children aged 3–8 years, found an overall positive association between pretend play and social competence. Importantly, the relationship was stronger when the quality of play was considered rather than merely its frequency. The meta-analysis also indicated that causal evidence remains insufficient, meaning that pretend play should not automatically be assumed to produce improvements in social competence without considering the design and quality of the activity. Although previous studies have examined pretend play, sociodramatic play, role playing, emotion comprehension, self-regulation, and social competence, they have largely addressed these dimensions either separately or within specific intervention conditions, leaving the practical integration of multiple social-emotional skills through structured sociodramatic role-playing insufficiently understood. In particular, the literature provides limited empirical evidence concerning how children aged 5–6 years can use repeated sociodramatic situations to practice cooperation, emotional control, turn-taking, rule-following, emotional expression, and recognition of peers' feelings within an actual ECE learning environment. This limitation is important because improvements demonstrated under controlled or training-specific conditions may not necessarily transfer to children's everyday interactions, as indicated by Adam et al. (2022). Moreover, the meta-analysis of Smits-van der Nat et al. (2024) indicates that the quality and characteristics of play matter, highlighting the need to examine structured and purposeful play rather than treating pretend play as a uniform activity.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on sociodramatic role-playing activities as a structured, experiential, and socially interactive learning strategy for children aged 5–6 years. Its novelty lies primarily in its integrative and contextual contribution: rather than examining a single emotional or social outcome, the study examines the development of several interconnected social-emotional behaviors through children's participation in socially meaningful role situations. The approach is theoretically consistent with the view that children develop social competence through active social interaction, emotional experience, perspective taking, and repeated practice. It also responds to evidence that the quality and structure of play are important for its developmental value (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). In this sense, the study contributes

empirical evidence from an authentic PAUD setting and examines how structured sociodramatic experiences can become a practical mechanism for translating social-emotional learning into children's observable interactions.

Accordingly, this study focuses on enhancing the social-emotional skills of early childhood children aged 5–6 years through sociodramatic role-playing activities at PAUD Permata Barko. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding the use of sociodramatic role play to strengthen children's cooperation, emotional regulation, turn-taking, adherence to play rules, emotional expression, and recognition of peers' feelings. By examining these dimensions within an authentic learning context, the study is expected to contribute to the literature on play-based social-emotional learning and provide practical guidance for ECE teachers in designing structured, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Ismaiyah et al., 2022).

METHODS

1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a classroom action research (CAR) approach to enhance the social-emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years through sociodramatic role-playing activities at PAUD Permata Barko. CAR was selected because it enabled the researcher and classroom teacher to identify learning difficulties, implement instructional improvements, observe behavioral changes, and reflect on the effectiveness of the intervention. Mills (2021) explained that action research allows educators to systematically investigate their teaching practices and use the findings to improve classroom learning. Similarly, Arikunto et al. (2021) described classroom action research as a systematic effort to improve the quality of classroom practices through planned and reflective actions.

The study was conducted over four weeks and consisted of two action cycles. Each cycle included four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The first cycle focused on implementing sociodramatic role-playing activities designed to encourage cooperation, emotional regulation, appropriate emotional expression, and understanding of peers' feelings. The second cycle was planned based on the findings and reflections from the first cycle. This cyclical structure enabled the researcher and teacher to evaluate the initial intervention and make instructional adjustments to address the children's observed needs.

2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at PAUD Permata Barko and involved 17 children aged 5–6 years. The participants were selected using total sampling because all children who met the age criteria and actively participated in the classroom activities were included. The classroom teacher also participated as an instructional facilitator and research collaborator throughout the intervention.

Creswell and Creswell (2023) emphasized that research participants should be selected according to the purpose of the study and the characteristics of the population relevant to the research questions. In line with this principle, Sukardi (2021) explained that sampling decisions in educational research should correspond to the research objectives and the characteristics of the intended participants. Accordingly, total sampling was appropriate for involving the entire group of eligible children in the selected classroom. The classroom teacher's involvement also supported collaboration in implementing the activities, observing children's behavior, and reflecting on instructional improvements.

3. Research Instruments

Four instruments were used to collect the data: a social-emotional observation checklist, teacher interviews, activity documentation, and researcher–teacher reflective notes. The observation checklist served as the primary instrument for assessing changes in children's social-

emotional skills. It covered four indicators: cooperation with peers, emotional regulation, appropriate emotional expression, and understanding of peers' feelings. Each indicator was assessed using a four-point scale, allowing behavioral changes to be recorded systematically across the pre-action assessment and the two intervention cycles.

Cohen et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of selecting research instruments that correspond to the research questions and the nature of the evidence being collected. Similarly, Hardani et al. (2020) explained that research instruments should be aligned with the objectives of the study and the characteristics of the data required. Following these principles, the observation checklist was used to obtain structured behavioral data, while interviews and reflective notes provided additional explanations of children's responses and the implementation of the intervention. Documentation was used to record relevant classroom activities and support the interpretation of the observational findings.

4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over four weeks through a pre-action assessment and two intervention cycles. Before the intervention, the researcher observed the children's existing social-emotional behaviors to establish a baseline. The classroom teacher and researcher then planned sociodramatic role-playing activities based on the difficulties identified during the initial observation. The scenarios were designed to provide age-appropriate opportunities for children to cooperate, manage emotions, express feelings, and respond to the emotions of their peers.

During each cycle, the teacher facilitated the role-playing activities while the researcher observed and recorded children's behaviors using the observation checklist. Teacher interviews, activity documentation, and reflective notes were also used to capture relevant experiences and identify difficulties encountered during implementation. At the end of the first cycle, the researcher and teacher reviewed the observation results and discussed necessary improvements. These reflections informed the planning and implementation of the second cycle.

Mertler (2020) explained that classroom action research involves systematically implementing an intervention, examining its effects, and using the findings to improve subsequent instructional practices. Consistent with this approach, Sugiyono (2022) emphasized the importance of collecting data systematically and selecting procedures appropriate to the research objectives. The combination of repeated observations, interviews, documentation, and reflection therefore supported the examination of changes in children's social-emotional behaviors throughout the intervention.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative analysis was conducted by examining the observation scores obtained during the pre-action assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Scores for each social-emotional indicator were compared across the three assessment points to identify changes in children's observed behaviors. The four-point ratings were summarized descriptively to show patterns of improvement at the individual and classroom levels. Where percentage scores were calculated, the total observed score was divided by the maximum possible score and multiplied by 100.

Qualitative analysis was conducted on teacher interview responses, classroom documentation, and researcher–teacher reflective notes. The information was organized, reviewed, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns concerning children's cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and responses to peers' feelings. The qualitative findings were then compared with the observation scores to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the intervention.

Braun and Clarke (2022) explained that qualitative analysis involves systematically examining data, developing meaningful patterns, and interpreting themes in relation to the research purpose. Complementarily, Riyanto and Hatmawan (2020) discussed the use of descriptive statistical procedures to summarize quantitative data and identify patterns in observed results. By integrating descriptive quantitative comparisons with qualitative interpretation, the analysis examined both the extent of behavioral changes and the classroom experiences associated with those changes.

RESULTS

This study was conducted with 17 children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Permata Barko, with the aim of enhancing their social-emotional skills through sociodramatic role-playing activities. Assessment was conducted during the pre-action stage, Cycle I, and Cycle II using a social-emotional observation checklist covering four main indicators: cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy toward peers.

Pre-Action Observation Results

At the pre-action stage, most children demonstrated low to moderate levels of social-emotional skills. The mean pre-action score across the four indicators was 2.1 on a 1–4 scale, indicating that the children's social-emotional skills had not yet developed optimally.

More specifically, the cooperation indicator showed that the children experienced difficulties in sharing tasks and frequently displayed individualistic behavior during play. Only a few children were willing to cooperate voluntarily. Regarding emotional regulation, many children became easily frustrated and cried when facing minor conflicts, such as having to take turns using play materials or losing during role-playing activities. Children's emotional expression was also limited; they tended to keep their feelings to themselves and experienced difficulties verbally expressing what they were feeling. Finally, regarding empathy toward peers, most children demonstrated limited responses when their peers experienced difficulties, such as failing to help or comfort a peer who was sad.

These pre-action findings indicated a clear need for a structured learning intervention aimed at developing children's social-emotional skills, particularly through age-appropriate role-playing activities.

Results of Cycle I

Following the implementation of Cycle I of the sociodramatic role-playing activities, the children's social-emotional skills improved. The mean social-emotional score increased to 2.8, indicating an improvement from the low to the moderate category.

For the cooperation indicator, the children began to cooperate in groups, share roles, and complete the role-playing scenarios together with their peers. The teacher provided direct guidance to help the children negotiate and distribute tasks during the activities.

Regarding emotional regulation, the children began to demonstrate an ability to calm themselves when conflicts occurred, although they still required teacher guidance. For example, children who initially cried when they lost began to learn to accept their turn or wait for another opportunity to participate in the activity. Emotional expression also improved. The children became more willing to verbally express feelings such as happiness, sadness, or annoyance, enabling teachers and peers to better understand their emotional states.

Meanwhile, the empathy toward peers indicator showed that the children began responding to peers who experienced difficulties or sadness, although these responses were not yet consistent. Some children began helping peers who fell or comforting peers who were sad, indicating the emergence of basic social-emotional competencies.

Results of Cycle II

Following the implementation of Cycle II, which was designed based on the reflections from Cycle I, a more substantial improvement was observed. The mean social-emotional score increased to 3.5, indicating a high level of development. The children demonstrated more stable and consistent social-emotional skills.

For the cooperation indicator, the children were able to work together with minimal teacher guidance. They spontaneously distributed roles, communicated with their peers, and completed the sociodramatic scenarios effectively. The children also began to demonstrate initiative in helping peers who experienced difficulties during the role-playing activities.

Regarding emotional regulation, the children were able to calm themselves more quickly when conflicts occurred, wait for their turns, and accept the outcomes of the activities with more positive attitudes. They also began to express disappointment verbally without crying or displaying angry behavior.

The children's emotional expression became increasingly fluent and clear. They were able to communicate feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, or admiration according to the context of the sociodramatic activities, and their peers were able to respond appropriately.

Meanwhile, the empathy toward peers indicator demonstrated substantial development. The children began spontaneously helping peers who experienced difficulties, sharing play materials, and providing emotional support when their peers felt sad or afraid. These interactions indicated that the children's social-emotional skills improved not only at the individual level but also within the context of group interaction.

Table 1. Development of Children's Social-Emotional Skills

Social-Emotional Indicator	Pre-Action	Cycle I	Cycle II
Cooperation	2.2	2.9	3.6
Emotional regulation	2.0	2.7	3.4
Emotional expression	2.1	2.8	3.5
Empathy toward peers	2.1	2.8	3.5
Mean	2.1	2.8	3.5

The results demonstrate a consistent increase across all social-emotional indicators following the implementation of sociodramatic role-playing activities. The structured activities implemented through the classroom action research cycles enabled the children to develop their social-emotional skills gradually and continuously.

The findings indicate that sociodramatic role-playing activities contributed to the improvement of social-emotional skills among early childhood children. The increase in the mean score from 2.1 at the pre-action stage to 3.5 in Cycle II indicates that the planned and consistently implemented intervention was associated with observable improvements in cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy.

Furthermore, sociodramatic role-playing activities provided children with opportunities to learn through direct experience, enabling them to better understand their own feelings and those of others, manage social conflicts, and interact positively with peers. These findings are consistent with the social-emotional development perspective, which emphasizes that purposeful social interaction can support the development of children's emotional understanding and social skills (Denham, 2021).

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

This study examined whether structured sociodramatic role-playing activities could enhance the social-emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Permata Barko. The findings

indicate a progressive improvement across the classroom action research cycles, with the mean social-emotional score increasing from 2.1 at the pre-action stage to 2.8 in Cycle I and 3.5 in Cycle II. More importantly, the improvement was evident across all four assessed dimensions—cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy toward peers. These findings suggest that the intervention was not limited to strengthening a single social behavior but supported a connected set of competencies that children use when participating in social situations.

The first important finding concerns cooperation. At the pre-action stage, children tended to engage in individualistic play and experienced difficulty sharing tasks. Following the intervention, they increasingly distributed roles, negotiated with peers, shared play materials, and completed scenarios collectively. This development can be interpreted in relation to the social structure of sociodramatic play. Unlike solitary or loosely structured play, sociodramatic activities require children to coordinate actions around a shared scenario. A child cannot successfully perform a role without responding to the roles and actions of other children. Consequently, cooperation becomes an inherent requirement of the activity rather than merely an instruction given by the teacher. The increase in cooperation therefore suggests that repeated participation in shared dramatic situations created opportunities for children to practice social coordination in meaningful contexts. This interpretation is consistent with Harianja et al. (2023), whose classroom action research demonstrated the relevance of role play for supporting social-emotional development among children aged 5–6 years.

The second finding concerns emotional regulation. Children initially tended to cry or become frustrated when they lost, had to wait for materials, or encountered disagreement with peers. By Cycle II, they were increasingly able to wait for their turns, accept outcomes, calm themselves, and communicate disappointment verbally. This change indicates that the value of sociodramatic play extends beyond emotional expression to the practical management of emotional responses. The role-playing situation provides children with repeated, relatively safe opportunities to encounter minor social frustrations while remaining within a structured learning environment. Teacher guidance during these moments appears to have provided external support that children could gradually use to regulate their own responses. In this sense, emotional regulation developed through repeated enactment and guided practice rather than through verbal explanation alone. This interpretation is compatible with the developmental perspective presented by Denham (2021), in which children's emotional competence develops through opportunities to recognize, express, and regulate emotions within social experiences.

The third finding involves emotional expression. Before the intervention, several children had difficulty verbalizing their feelings. During Cycle I, children began to identify and communicate basic emotional states, while by Cycle II they were more capable of expressing happiness, sadness, anger, and admiration according to the situation being enacted. This progression indicates that sociodramatic play can function as an experiential language for emotions. Children were not simply asked to name emotions; they were placed in situations in which emotions had a recognizable social meaning. For example, acting as a particular character required children to communicate how that character felt and to respond to the emotional signals of others. Such contextualized expression may have reduced the abstraction of emotional learning and made emotional vocabulary more meaningful to children. The finding is therefore consistent with Soyan (2023), who identified role play as a useful context for strengthening children's ability to express feelings.

The fourth finding concerns empathy toward peers. The initial observation indicated limited spontaneous responses when peers experienced sadness or difficulties. By Cycle II, children

increasingly helped, comforted, shared with, and supported their peers without waiting for direct teacher instruction. This development is particularly important because empathy requires more than recognizing one's own emotions; it involves attending to another person's emotional or social condition and responding appropriately. Sociodramatic role play provides repeated opportunities for children to occupy roles involving care, assistance, conflict, or emotional difficulty. Through such role enactment, children can encounter situations from perspectives different from their own. The finding is also consistent with Kurniati et al. (2025), who reported that teachers viewed role play as a relevant strategy for developing empathy because it allows children to express emotions, understand social situations, and practice peaceful conflict resolution.

Taken together, these four findings answer the central objective of the study by showing that structured sociodramatic role playing was associated with improvement in multiple dimensions of social-emotional competence. The relationship among the indicators is particularly important. Cooperation creates the social context for interaction; emotional regulation enables children to remain engaged in that interaction; emotional expression enables them to communicate internal states; and empathy enables them to respond appropriately to others. Thus, the four dimensions should not be interpreted as isolated outcomes. They function as mutually reinforcing components of children's participation in social situations.

The progression from Cycle I to Cycle II also provides an important analytical insight. The increase from 2.8 to 3.5 suggests that improvement was not simply a consequence of children's initial exposure to role playing. The second cycle allowed the intervention to be refined in response to observed difficulties. Teacher guidance, scenario adjustment, and reflective evaluation apparently created a more supportive learning process in which children could repeat and consolidate social behaviors. The classroom action research design therefore functioned not merely as a measurement framework but as a mechanism for instructional adaptation. Similar cyclical improvement has been reported in early childhood classroom action research, in which reflection on the first cycle is used to modify subsequent learning activities and address children's continuing social-emotional needs (Herlina et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the view that social-emotional competence develops through active social interaction, emotional experience, and repeated practice, rather than through instruction that is exclusively verbal or conceptual. The introduction of this study positioned role play as a meaningful context for perspective taking, social interaction, emotional experience, and behavioral practice. The present findings provide empirical support for this position because the strongest behavioral changes emerged in situations where children had to interact, respond, negotiate, and act within shared scenarios. The results therefore support the broader proposition that play-based learning can transform social-emotional concepts into observable social behaviors (Denham, 2021; Soyan, 2023).

A critical synthesis of the findings suggests a progressive mechanism of change: structured social situations → role enactment and interaction → guided emotional experience → repeated social practice → increasingly autonomous social-emotional behavior. This mechanism provides a more specific interpretation of why sociodramatic role play may be useful. The intervention did not appear to work merely because children were “playing”; rather, its potential value lay in the combination of shared roles, meaningful social situations, teacher scaffolding, repetition, and opportunities to respond to peers. This distinction is important because the developmental value of play depends on how learning experiences are organized. Thus, the findings contribute a contextual explanation of how structured role-playing activities may support the simultaneous

development of cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy in an authentic early childhood classroom.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with previous research indicating that role-playing and pretend-play activities can support the development of children's social-emotional competence. However, the present findings provide a more integrated account of this relationship by demonstrating improvements across four interconnected dimensions: cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy toward peers. This broader pattern is important because social-emotional competence in early childhood involves the coordination of behavioral, emotional, and interpersonal capacities rather than the development of a single isolated skill.

The improvement in cooperation is consistent with Harianja et al. (2023), who reported that role-playing activities could strengthen social-emotional development among children aged 5–6 years. Their findings support the use of role play as a pedagogical context in which children interact, share responsibilities, and participate in common activities. The present study extends this evidence by showing how cooperation developed progressively across action cycles. Children initially demonstrated individualistic play behavior but gradually became more capable of distributing roles, negotiating with peers, sharing materials, and completing common scenarios. Thus, the present findings suggest that the contribution of role play may lie not only in providing opportunities for interaction but also in repeatedly structuring interaction around shared social goals.

The findings concerning emotional regulation are also consistent with the broader theoretical perspective presented by Denham (2021), which emphasizes the development of children's emotional competence through experiences that require children to recognize, express, and regulate emotions within social contexts. In the present study, children gradually moved from crying or displaying frustration during minor conflicts toward waiting for turns, accepting outcomes, calming themselves, and communicating disappointment verbally. This pattern is noteworthy because it indicates a shift from externally visible emotional reactions toward increasingly controlled and socially appropriate responses. The finding therefore supports the view that emotional regulation can be strengthened when children repeatedly encounter manageable emotional challenges within supportive social environments.

The improvement in emotional expression corresponds with Soyan (2023), who identified role play as a useful learning context for encouraging children to express their feelings. The present study provides further evidence by demonstrating that emotional expression became more differentiated and context-sensitive following repeated role-playing experiences. Children increasingly communicated happiness, sadness, anger, and admiration according to the situations represented in the scenarios. This finding suggests that role play may provide a bridge between children's internal emotional experiences and their ability to communicate those experiences through socially understandable language and behavior.

The development of empathy toward peers is consistent with Kurniati and Wulandari (2025), who highlighted the potential of role-playing activities to stimulate children's empathic abilities. In the present study, empathy was reflected not merely in children's verbal recognition of emotions but in observable behaviors such as helping, comforting, sharing, and providing support to peers. This distinction is important because empathy in early childhood becomes educationally meaningful when emotional understanding is translated into appropriate interpersonal action. The present findings therefore extend previous evidence by indicating that repeated enactment of

socially meaningful situations may create opportunities for children to move from recognizing another person's emotional condition toward responding to it behaviorally.

At the same time, the present findings should be interpreted in relation to evidence suggesting that the effects of pretend play are not uniform across contexts. Previous research has indicated that improvements observed within structured play or intervention settings may not necessarily transfer automatically to children's everyday behavior outside the intervention. Similarly, evidence synthesized in recent literature suggests that the developmental value of pretend play is influenced by the quality, structure, and characteristics of the play experience rather than simply by the frequency with which children engage in pretend play. These considerations help explain why the present study employed structured sociodramatic activities rather than relying on unstructured pretend play. The intervention incorporated defined social situations, shared roles, teacher guidance, repeated practice, and reflection across action cycles, thereby creating conditions in which social-emotional behaviors could be intentionally practiced.

The classroom action research design also distinguishes the present study from studies that examine role play as a fixed intervention. The improvement from a mean score of 2.1 at pre-action to 2.8 in Cycle I and 3.5 in Cycle II suggests that the intervention developed through an iterative process rather than being implemented identically throughout the study. Reflection following Cycle I allowed the teacher and researcher to identify children's continuing difficulties and adjust the subsequent learning activities. This feature is consistent with Herlina (2024), who demonstrated the usefulness of classroom action research for improving children's social-emotional abilities through repeated cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The present findings consequently suggest that the effectiveness of sociodramatic role play may be understood not only as a property of the activity itself but also as a product of how systematically the activity is implemented, monitored, and refined.

A further point of comparison concerns the scope of social-emotional outcomes examined. Several previous studies have concentrated on particular dimensions, such as cooperation, emotion comprehension, emotional regulation, or empathy. In contrast, the present study examined four related dimensions within the same classroom intervention. This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive picture of social-emotional development because children's social functioning requires these competencies to operate together. Cooperation requires emotional regulation; emotional expression supports interpersonal communication; and empathy enables children to respond appropriately to peers. The simultaneous improvement across these dimensions therefore suggests that structured sociodramatic play may provide a common experiential context through which multiple social-emotional competencies can develop.

Nevertheless, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence that sociodramatic role play alone caused all observed improvements. Unlike controlled experimental research, classroom action research does not isolate the intervention from other influences such as teacher attention, maturation, repeated classroom interaction, or increased familiarity with learning routines. The findings are therefore most appropriately interpreted as contextual evidence of improvement associated with the implementation and refinement of structured sociodramatic role-playing activities. This interpretation is particularly important given previous evidence that the transfer and durability of play-based developmental gains may depend on intervention design and contextual conditions.

Overall, comparison with previous studies indicates both continuity and extension. The present findings reinforce existing evidence that role play can provide meaningful opportunities for children's social-emotional development, while extending that evidence by demonstrating a

progressive improvement across cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy within an authentic PAUD classroom. The critical synthesis suggests that the developmental contribution of sociodramatic role play is most plausibly understood not as a consequence of play in isolation, but as the result of structured social interaction, repeated role enactment, emotional experience, teacher scaffolding, and reflective instructional adjustment working together. This integrated interpretation provides a basis for understanding why carefully designed sociodramatic activities may become a practical mechanism for strengthening multiple dimensions of social-emotional competence in early childhood education.

3. Implications of the Findings

The findings contribute to early childhood education by showing that structured sociodramatic role-playing can support the development of multiple, interconnected dimensions of social-emotional competence, including cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy. Theoretically, the study extends the understanding of play-based social-emotional learning by suggesting that its developmental value is associated not simply with participation in pretend play, but with the combination of structured social interaction, role enactment, emotional experience, repeated practice, and teacher scaffolding. The progressive improvement across the action cycles further indicates that reflective instructional adjustment can strengthen the developmental value of play-based activities.

Practically, the findings suggest that PAUD teachers can integrate sociodramatic role playing into regular learning activities through age-appropriate scenarios involving cooperation, turn-taking, emotional expression, conflict management, and helping behaviors. Teachers can function as facilitators by modeling appropriate responses, guiding peer interaction, and gradually reducing assistance as children's competence increases. Systematic observation can also be used to monitor individual progress and inform subsequent instructional adjustments. Thus, the study provides a practical framework for implementing social-emotional learning through structured and developmentally appropriate play.

4. Research Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved only 17 children in a single PAUD classroom, limiting the transferability of the findings to other populations and educational contexts. Second, the intervention was conducted over a relatively short period and consisted of only two action cycles, preventing conclusions about the long-term sustainability of the observed improvements. Third, the classroom action research design did not include a control or comparison group; therefore, changes in children's social-emotional behaviors cannot be attributed exclusively to sociodramatic role playing because maturation, repeated classroom exposure, teacher attention, and other learning experiences may also have contributed. Finally, the use of teacher- and researcher-based observations may have introduced observer or implementation bias. Future research could address these limitations through larger and more diverse samples, longer follow-up periods, comparison groups, and multiple independent assessors to examine the durability and generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that structured sociodramatic role-playing activities were associated with progressive improvements in the social-emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Permata Barko. The mean score increased from 2.1 at the pre-action stage to 2.8 in Cycle I and 3.5 in Cycle II, with improvements observed across cooperation, emotional regulation, emotional expression, and empathy toward peers. The findings indicate that the value of sociodramatic play lies not merely in providing opportunities for children to play, but in creating structured social

situations in which children repeatedly practice cooperation, manage emotional responses, communicate feelings, and respond to peers. The iterative CAR process further enabled the teacher and researcher to refine the activities through observation and reflection. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding of play-based social-emotional learning by highlighting the combined role of structured role enactment, peer interaction, repeated practice, and teacher scaffolding in supporting children's social-emotional development. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that role play can provide meaningful opportunities for interaction, emotional expression, cooperation, and empathy in early childhood settings.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the contextual boundaries of the study. The research involved only 17 children in one PAUD classroom, was conducted over a relatively short intervention period, and employed a classroom action research design without a comparison group. Consequently, the findings demonstrate classroom-level improvement associated with the intervention but do not establish that sociodramatic role play alone caused the observed changes or that the effects would necessarily generalize to other settings. Future research should examine larger and more diverse samples, include comparison or control conditions where appropriate, employ longer follow-up periods, and use multiple or independent assessors to reduce potential observational bias. Further studies could also investigate whether the social-emotional gains observed during structured role play are maintained and transferred to children's everyday interactions beyond the intervention context. Such research would strengthen understanding of the conditions under which sociodramatic play can contribute to sustained and transferable social-emotional development.

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