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Strengthening Early Childhood Teachers' Capacity through the Implementation of Conflict Resolution Learning to Enhance Children's Social Skills

Dian Tri Utami[1]✉, Raihana[1], Amiruddin[1], Ak Muhd Aliman Alim[2]
[1]Universitas Islam Riau, Indonesia
[2]Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), Brunei Darussalam
✉Email: diantriutami@fis.uir.ac.id
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Abstract

Background: Social skills are a fundamental aspect of early childhood development, encompassing communication, empathy, self-control, responsibility, and cooperation. However, many early childhood education practices still tend to be teacher-centered and have not optimally utilized children's conflicts as opportunities for social learning. In addition, teachers often lack the knowledge and skills to manage peer conflicts constructively in classroom settings.

Aims: This community service program aims to strengthen early childhood teachers' capacity in implementing conflict resolution techniques to enhance children's social skills.

Methods: The program employed an action research approach consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. The implementation included socialization, training, simulation, and mentoring activities for early childhood teachers. Supporting learning tools such as training modules, daily lesson plans, storybooks, and emotion cards were provided to facilitate the application of conflict resolution strategies in classroom practices. Data were collected through pre-test, post-test, observation, and documentation, and analyzed descriptively.

Results: The results indicate a significant improvement in teachers' understanding and skills in managing children's conflicts constructively. The average score increased from 46.2% in the pre-test to 86.0% in the post-test. Teachers demonstrated better ability to design and implement conflict resolution-based learning activities. In addition, children showed improved social skills, including communication, empathy, emotional regulation, cooperation, and problem-solving abilities. The use of learning media such as storybooks and emotion cards also supported children's understanding of emotions and conflict situations.

Conclusion: The program effectively strengthens teachers' capacity in implementing conflict resolution learning and contributes to the improvement of children's social skills. The integration of training, practical application, and mentoring provides a meaningful and applicable model for enhancing social-emotional learning in early childhood education.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a critical period in human development, during which children experience rapid growth in cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Social development, in particular, plays a fundamental role in shaping children's ability to interact, communicate, and build relationships within their environment. These early social experiences form the foundation for later academic success and overall well-being (Black et al., 2021; Britto et al., 2022; Jeong et al., 2021). Children who develop strong social skills tend to demonstrate better adaptability in school settings and more positive peer interactions. Conversely, limited social competence can lead to difficulties in communication, emotional regulation, and collaboration. Such conditions may affect children's readiness to participate in structured learning environments. Therefore, fostering social skills during early childhood is essential for supporting holistic development.

Social skills in early childhood encompass a range of competencies, including communication, empathy, cooperation, self-control, and problem-solving abilities. These competencies are developed through continuous interaction with peers, teachers, and the surrounding environment (Denham et al., 2020; Rose-Krasnor, 2021; Rubin et al., 2022). Through social interaction, children learn to negotiate, express their emotions, and understand the perspectives of others. However, the development of these skills does not occur automatically and requires intentional stimulation within structured learning environments. Educational settings, particularly early childhood education institutions, play a vital role in facilitating this process. Teachers are expected to design learning experiences that encourage active social engagement. Without appropriate guidance, children may struggle to develop these essential competencies effectively.

Despite the importance of social skills, many studies indicate that children's social development is still not optimal. Some children exhibit passive behavior, low confidence, difficulty in interacting with peers, and limited ability to cooperate (Aurelia et al., 2024; Denham, 2020; Spinrad et al., 2021). These challenges are further influenced by external factors such as increased exposure to digital technology, which may reduce opportunities for direct social interaction (Hendayani, 2019; Kardefelt-Winther, 2020; Livingstone et al., 2021). As a result, children may have fewer opportunities to practice real-life social interactions. This condition can impact their ability to manage emotions and build relationships effectively. The situation highlights the need for more structured and meaningful interventions in early childhood education. Strengthening social skills development requires deliberate and context-based strategies.

One of the natural contexts in which children develop social skills is through conflict. In early childhood settings, conflicts frequently arise during play, such as disputes over toys, misunderstandings, refusal to share, and emotional reactions. These situations provide valuable opportunities for children to learn how to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and resolve problems (Chen et al., 2020;

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Laursen & Hafen, 2021; Yang, 2024). However, in practice, conflicts are often perceived as disruptions rather than learning opportunities. Teachers tend to intervene directly by separating children or resolving conflicts without involving them in the process. This approach reduces children's chances to develop independent problem-solving skills. It also limits their ability to understand social consequences of their actions. Consequently, the educational potential of conflict situations remains underutilized.

Conflict resolution is a key component of social competence that enables children to handle interpersonal problems constructively. It involves recognizing emotions, understanding different perspectives, and generating appropriate solutions (Geckler et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2021; Shonkoff et al., 2021). Through guided conflict resolution, children can develop empathy, self-regulation, and communication skills. Research suggests that children who are trained in conflict resolution strategies demonstrate better social adjustment and reduced aggressive behavior (Domitrovich et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Bierman et al., 2021). These abilities are essential for building positive peer relationships. In addition, they support children's readiness for future social challenges. Therefore, integrating conflict resolution into early childhood learning is highly beneficial.

However, the successful implementation of conflict resolution in early childhood education largely depends on teachers' competence. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators who guide children through the process of understanding and resolving conflicts. Studies indicate that many teachers still lack sufficient knowledge and skills in managing peer conflicts constructively (Egert et al., 2020; Slot et al., 2022; Urban et al., 2021). As a result, conflicts are often handled in a directive manner without providing meaningful learning experiences for children. This condition limits opportunities for children to actively participate in problem-solving processes. Teachers may also feel unprepared to design learning activities that incorporate conflict resolution. Strengthening teacher competence becomes essential in addressing this issue.

Professional development programs for teachers have been widely recognized as an effective means of improving teaching quality and student outcomes. Training programs that combine theoretical knowledge with practical application tend to produce more meaningful and sustainable impacts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Desimone & Garet, 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2020). Practical experiences enable teachers to apply concepts directly in real classroom situations. However, many programs still emphasize theoretical understanding without sufficient opportunities for implementation. This condition may limit the effectiveness of training outcomes in practice. Teachers require structured support to translate knowledge into action. Therefore, more practice-oriented and participatory approaches are needed.

Community service programs provide a strategic platform for implementing such approaches. These programs allow direct interaction between facilitators and

participants in real educational settings, enabling the application of knowledge in authentic contexts (Furco, 2021; Jacoby, 2021; Bringle et al., 2020). Through activities such as training, simulation, and mentoring, teachers can develop both conceptual understanding and practical skills. The integration of instructional tools also supports sustained implementation in classroom practices. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and improve their strategies. This approach promotes meaningful and continuous professional learning. As a result, teachers become more confident in applying new methods.

Field observations indicate that many early childhood teachers still face difficulties in managing children's conflicts effectively. Teachers often resolve conflicts unilaterally without involving children in the problem-solving process. In addition, structured learning activities that support conflict resolution are still limited. Instructional media that facilitate social learning are also not widely used. Teachers report limited access to training related to this topic. These conditions affect the quality of social learning experiences in the classroom. There is a need for practical and applicable support for teachers. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and contextual approach.

An integrated approach that combines training, practical application, and instructional support offers a more effective alternative. The use of structured learning tools such as modules, lesson plans, and visual media can assist teachers in implementing conflict resolution strategies. Continuous mentoring further strengthens teachers' ability to apply these strategies consistently. Such an approach ensures that learning does not stop at the conceptual level. Instead, it becomes part of daily classroom practices. Teachers are supported in developing both competence and confidence. This creates a more meaningful learning environment for children.

This community service program aims to strengthen early childhood teachers' capacity in implementing conflict resolution learning to enhance children's social skills. The program integrates training, practice, and mentoring to provide comprehensive support for teachers. It is expected to improve teachers' ability to manage classroom conflicts in an educational manner. In addition, the program supports the development of children's social competencies through structured learning experiences. The implementation of this program contributes to improving the quality of early childhood education. It also promotes more positive and constructive social interactions among children.

METHODS

Community Service Design

This community service program employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which emphasizes collaborative engagement between facilitators and participants in identifying problems, implementing actions, and reflecting on outcomes. PAR was selected because it aligns with the goal of empowering early childhood teachers to actively participate in improving their own teaching practices,

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particularly in managing children's conflicts constructively. This approach enables teachers to become co-researchers who contribute to problem identification, decision-making, and evaluation processes. Through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, the program facilitates continuous improvement and contextual adaptation. The PAR framework also supports experiential learning by integrating real classroom challenges into the learning process. As a result, the intervention is not only theoretical but also grounded in practical application. This design ensures that the outcomes of the program are relevant, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of early childhood education settings.

Location, Time, and Collaboration

The program was conducted in Bangkinang City, Kampar Regency, Indonesia, involving early childhood education institutions that are members of the local kindergarten teachers' association. The implementation took place through a series of structured activities, including training sessions, simulations, and mentoring processes conducted over a designated period. The program was implemented through collaboration between higher education institutions and early childhood education practitioners, ensuring a balance between academic knowledge and field-based experience. This collaboration also involved coordination with school leaders and teacher groups to facilitate smooth implementation. The participatory nature of the program allowed stakeholders to contribute actively to each stage of the process. In addition, the involvement of institutional networks supported the dissemination and sustainability of the program outcomes. The setting provided an authentic environment for implementing and testing conflict resolution strategies in real classroom contexts. This contextual implementation strengthens the relevance and applicability of the program.

Participants

The participants consisted of early childhood teachers from 11 kindergarten institutions, who were actively engaged in teaching and classroom management. Participants were selected based on their involvement in daily learning activities and their need to improve competence in managing peer conflicts among children. Most participants reported limited prior experience in applying structured conflict resolution techniques in early childhood learning. Within the PAR framework, teachers were positioned as active participants who contributed to discussions, shared experiences, and engaged in collaborative problem-solving. Their involvement extended beyond participation in training to include reflection on their own practices and adaptation of new strategies. The diversity of participants' teaching experiences enriched the learning process through peer interaction and knowledge exchange. This collaborative participation also fostered a sense of

ownership toward the program. As a result, teachers became more motivated to apply the learned strategies in their classrooms.

Procedure of Implementation

The implementation of the program followed a cyclical PAR process consisting of four main stages:

Planning Stage

This stage involved conducting initial field surveys and needs assessments to identify challenges faced by teachers in managing children's conflicts. Data were gathered through informal discussions, observations, and consultations with partner institutions. The findings revealed that teachers had limited knowledge of conflict resolution strategies and lacked structured approaches in facilitating children's social learning. Based on these findings, the program design was developed collaboratively with participants. This included determining training objectives, preparing instructional materials, and designing intervention strategies. The planning process emphasized participant involvement to ensure relevance and contextual alignment. It also established a shared understanding of the goals and expected outcomes of the program.

Action Stage

The action stage consisted of implementing training, simulation, and mentoring activities. Teachers received theoretical input on conflict resolution concepts and their application in early childhood education. This was followed by hands-on practice, where participants designed learning scenarios integrating conflict resolution techniques. Simulation activities allowed teachers to practice guiding children through conflict situations in a controlled environment. Facilitators provided feedback and guidance to improve participants' understanding and skills. The mentoring process supported teachers in applying these strategies in real classroom settings. This stage emphasized active participation and experiential learning to ensure meaningful knowledge transfer.

Observation Stage

Observation was conducted during both training sessions and classroom implementation to monitor participants' progress and engagement. This stage focused on identifying how teachers applied conflict resolution strategies in practice. Observations included teachers' interaction with children, their ability to facilitate dialogue, and their use of instructional media. Data were collected through field notes, documentation, and participant feedback. The observation process also captured challenges and areas for improvement encountered during implementation. This stage provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the intervention. It also served as a basis for further refinement of strategies.

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Reflection and Evaluation Stage

Reflection and evaluation were conducted collaboratively through group discussions and feedback sessions. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in applying conflict resolution techniques. Evaluation was carried out using pre-test and post-test instruments to measure changes in teachers' knowledge and skills. In addition, qualitative reflections were analyzed to understand changes in attitudes and teaching practices. This stage aimed to reinforce learning and support continuous improvement. It also provided an opportunity to identify strategies for sustaining the program beyond its initial implementation. The reflective process strengthened teachers' awareness and professional growth.

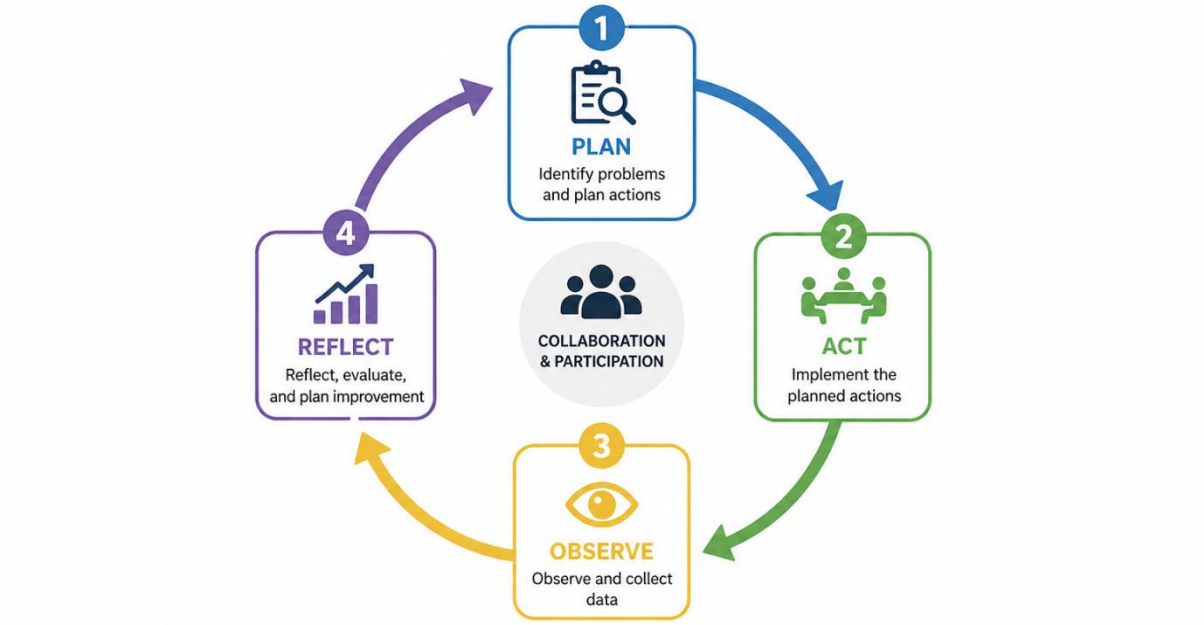


Figure 1. PAR Cycle

Instructional Tools and Materials

The program utilized a set of instructional tools designed to support practical implementation, including training modules, daily lesson plans (RPPH), storybooks, and emotion cards. The training module contained theoretical foundations, practical guidelines, and assessment formats related to conflict resolution. The lesson plans were structured to integrate conflict resolution into daily learning activities in a systematic manner. Storybooks were used to present relatable conflict situations that children could understand and discuss. Emotion cards provided visual support to help children recognize and express their feelings. These tools were designed to be user-friendly, contextually relevant, and easily adaptable to different classroom settings. The integration of these materials enhanced both teaching effectiveness and student engagement. Overall, the instructional tools played a crucial role in supporting the success of the program.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple techniques to ensure validity and depth of analysis. These included pre-test and post-test, observation, interviews, and documentation. The pre-test and post-test were used to measure changes in teachers' knowledge and understanding of conflict resolution concepts. Observations were conducted to assess teachers' practical application and classroom interactions. Interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges during the program. Documentation included lesson plans, photos, and instructional materials produced during the activities. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, which increased the credibility of the findings. This comprehensive data collection approach ensured that both quantitative and qualitative aspects were captured effectively.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a descriptive mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data from pre-test and post-test results were analyzed to determine the level of improvement in teachers' understanding. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and reflections were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in teachers' skills, attitudes, and practices. The integration of both types of data provided a holistic understanding of the program's impact. This approach allowed the researchers to interpret not only measurable changes but also contextual and behavioral transformations. The analysis also supported the identification of factors influencing the success of the program. Overall, the data analysis process ensured that the findings were comprehensive and meaningful.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Planning Stage (Problem Identification and Program Design)

At the planning stage, a needs analysis was conducted through initial surveys, interviews, and discussions with early childhood teachers. The findings revealed that most teachers had not received prior training related to conflict resolution and lacked structured strategies to manage peer conflicts among children. Teachers tended to resolve conflicts directly by separating children or making unilateral decisions without involving them in the problem-solving process. In addition, teachers reported difficulties in designing learning activities that support the development of social skills through play. These findings indicate that teachers' understanding of conflict as a learning opportunity was still limited. Based on these conditions, the program design was developed collaboratively, including the preparation of training modules, lesson plans (RPPH), and instructional media such as storybooks and emotion cards. This stage ensured that the intervention was grounded in actual classroom needs and aligned with participants' contexts.

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Action Stage (Implementation of Training and Mentoring)

The action stage involved the implementation of training, simulation, and mentoring activities for early childhood teachers. Teachers participated in theoretical sessions followed by guided practice in designing and applying conflict resolution-based learning. During simulations, teachers practiced facilitating children to express emotions, negotiate, and find solutions collaboratively. The mentoring process enabled teachers to apply these strategies directly in classroom settings with continuous feedback. A shift in teaching approach was observed, where teachers moved from directive intervention toward facilitative guidance. Instructional tools such as modules, RPPH, storybooks, and emotion cards played a significant role in supporting implementation. These tools helped teachers structure learning activities and made abstract concepts more concrete for children. As a result, teachers demonstrated improved readiness and confidence in integrating conflict resolution into daily learning.



Figure 1. Training on Conflict Resolution Techniques

Interpretation: Figure 1 illustrates the delivery of training sessions where teachers actively engaged in discussions and collaborative learning. The visual evidence shows high participation, indicating that the training approach successfully created an interactive learning environment. This supports the effectiveness of participatory methods in enhancing teacher engagement during professional development.



Figure 2. Simulation of Conflict Resolution in Classroom Practice

Figure 2 demonstrates teachers' involvement in simulation activities, where they practiced applying conflict resolution strategies. The figure reflects a transition

from theoretical understanding to practical application, indicating that teachers were able to internalize and operationalize the concepts introduced during training.

Observation Stage (Monitoring and Data Collection)

During the observation stage, quantitative and qualitative data were collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The pre-test and post-test results showed a significant improvement in teachers' understanding, with the average score increasing from 46.2% to 86.0%**,** reflecting a gain of 39.8%**.** This improvement indicates that the training and mentoring effectively enhanced teachers' conceptual and practical knowledge. Observational data further confirmed that teachers were able to apply conflict resolution strategies in classroom settings, particularly in guiding children to recognize emotions and communicate effectively. The use of instructional media also supported children's understanding of conflict situations. These findings demonstrate that the program produced measurable and observable improvements in teaching practices.

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Results of Teachers' Understanding

No	Assessment Indicators	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Improvement (%)
1	Understanding of conflict concepts	52	88	36
2	Steps of conflict resolution	48	86	38
3	Teacher's role in managing conflict	45	84	39
4	Conflict resolution learning strategies	50	90	40
5	Integration into learning activities	42	85	43
6	Use of instructional media	40	83	43
	Average	**46.2**	**86.0**	**39.8**

Table 1 shows a consistent increase across all assessed indicators, indicating that the intervention had a comprehensive impact on teachers' competence. The highest improvements were observed in the integration of conflict resolution into learning activities and the use of instructional media (both 43%), suggesting that teachers gained strong practical skills in applying the concepts. The improvement in understanding conflict concepts (36%) and resolution steps (38%) indicates that the theoretical foundation was also strengthened. The increase in teachers' roles in managing conflict (39%) reflects a shift in teaching approach from directive to facilitative practices. Overall, the balanced improvement across all indicators

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demonstrates that the program successfully integrated conceptual understanding with practical application.

Reflection and Evaluation Stage (Impact and Improvement)

The reflection stage revealed meaningful changes in both teachers' practices and children's social behavior. Teachers reported increased confidence and awareness in managing classroom conflicts as part of the learning process. They began to involve children more actively in identifying problems and finding solutions, which contributed to more meaningful learning experiences. From the children's perspective, observable improvements were found in social skills, including recognizing emotions, expressing needs, cooperating, and resolving conflicts constructively. Children gradually shifted from reactive behaviors such as crying or aggression toward more adaptive strategies such as communication and negotiation. This indicates that the intervention not only impacted teachers but also produced direct benefits for children's social development. The PAR cycle supported continuous reflection and improvement, ensuring that the changes were not temporary but embedded in teaching practices.



Figure 3. Conflict Resolution Storybook as Learning Media

Figure 3 illustrates the use of storybooks as instructional media to support children's understanding of conflict situations. The visual representation indicates that children were able to relate to the scenarios presented, which facilitated emotional recognition and problem-solving skills. This confirms that visual and contextual learning media play an important role in enhancing social-emotional learning in early childhood.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Participatory Action Research approach provides an effective framework for strengthening teachers' capacity in implementing conflict resolution within early childhood learning. The significant improvement in teachers' understanding, reflected in the increase from 46.2% to 86.0%, indicates that participatory and practice-oriented training can successfully bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom application. When teachers are actively involved in identifying problems, designing solutions, and reflecting on their practices, learning becomes more meaningful and sustainable.

This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that professional development is most effective when it integrates active participation and contextual relevance (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In addition, the structured use of instructional tools such as modules and lesson plans contributes to a clearer translation of abstract concepts into practical teaching strategies. These findings reinforce the importance of combining conceptual understanding with hands-on experience in teacher development programs.

The collaborative nature of the program also played a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes. Interaction among teachers during training and mentoring sessions created opportunities for knowledge exchange and peer support, which strengthened their confidence in applying new strategies. Teachers were not only recipients of knowledge but also contributors who shared experiences and reflected on their practices. Such collaborative learning environments have been shown to improve teacher effectiveness by fostering shared understanding and continuous professional growth (Vescio et al., 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). Furthermore, the role of facilitators in guiding reflection and providing contextual feedback supported teachers in adapting conflict resolution strategies to their classroom realities. The combination of collaboration and facilitation created a supportive learning ecosystem that enabled teachers to move beyond traditional directive approaches toward more facilitative practices.

The integration of conflict resolution into daily learning activities also had a direct impact on children's social development. Observations revealed that children became more capable of recognizing emotions, expressing their needs, and resolving conflicts through communication rather than reactive behaviors. This transformation suggests that structured exposure to conflict resolution strategies supports the development of social-emotional competencies. Previous research highlights that guided conflict resolution can enhance children's empathy, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for positive peer interactions (Geckler et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2021). The use of visual and contextual media such as storybooks and emotion cards further supported children's understanding by making abstract social concepts more concrete. These findings indicate that when conflict is positioned as a learning opportunity, it becomes a powerful tool for fostering social competence in early childhood education.

Community Service Contribution

This community service program contributes to strengthening early childhood teachers' professional capacity in implementing conflict resolution as a structured learning approach to enhance children's social skills. The program demonstrates that integrating training, simulation, and mentoring within a Participatory Action Research framework can effectively bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and classroom practice. Teachers not only improved their knowledge but also developed practical competencies in facilitating children's emotional expression, communication,

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and collaborative problem-solving. The use of instructional tools such as lesson plans, storybooks, and emotion cards further supports the implementation of conflict resolution in daily learning activities. From a practical perspective, the program provides a structured and applicable model that can be adopted by early childhood institutions. From an academic perspective, it offers an approach that integrates social-emotional learning with participatory teacher development. Overall, the program presents a replicable model for improving both teacher competence and children's social development.

Limitations and Suggestions

Several limitations were identified during the implementation of this program. The relatively short duration of the intervention limited the observation of long-term changes in both teachers' practices and children's social behavior. The program was conducted within a specific context involving a limited number of participants, which may influence the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the evaluation focused primarily on descriptive and short-term indicators, without extended longitudinal measurement. Future programs are recommended to extend the duration of mentoring to ensure sustained impact and deeper behavioral change. Expanding the implementation to different regions and institutional contexts may also strengthen the applicability of the model. The use of more comprehensive evaluation methods, including longitudinal observation and performance-based assessment, is also suggested. Strengthening collaboration with educational stakeholders can further support sustainability and wider dissemination.

CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that the Participatory Action Research approach is effective in strengthening early childhood teachers' capacity to implement conflict resolution learning. The program successfully improved teachers' understanding and skills, as evidenced by the increase in scores from 46.2% to 86.0%, as well as observable changes in classroom practices. Teachers became more capable of facilitating children in recognizing emotions, communicating needs, and resolving conflicts constructively. The integration of training, practical application, and mentoring created meaningful learning experiences that supported both teacher development and children's social skills. In addition, the use of instructional media enhanced the effectiveness of the learning process by making abstract concepts more accessible to children. Overall, the program provides a practical and sustainable approach to improving social-emotional learning in early childhood education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

DTU contributed to the conceptualization, coordination of the community service program, and manuscript writing. R and A were responsible for designing and implementing the program activities. AMA contributed to supervision, validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors participated in the evaluation, analysis, and revision of the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used ChatGPT during the preparation of this work to improve academic language quality, structure, and clarity. After using the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTERES

The authors declare that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of this study, the analysis of data, the preparation of the manuscript, or its publication.

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