



THE INFLUENCE OF ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES ON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of role-playing activities on the social development of early childhood, considering the importance of interaction skills, cooperation, empathy, and understanding of social roles as the foundation of child development. The method used is a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design shape nonequivalent control group design, with children aged 5–6 years divided into experimental and control groups. Data were collected through observation using a social development assessment sheet that included indicators of cooperation, communication, empathy, and compliance with social rules, then analyzed using a test independent sample t-test. The results of the study showed a significant influence of role-playing activities on children's social development, marked by a higher average score increase in the experimental group compared to the control group. Role-playing activities have been proven effective in improving the ability to interact socially, share, understand others' feelings, and carry out social roles in everyday life. Thus, it can be concluded that role-playing is an effective learning strategy to optimize the social development of early childhood, so it is recommended for educators to integrate it systematically into learning activities.

Keywords: Role Play, Social Development, Early Childhood Education, Social Interaction

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is the primary foundation for developing various aspects of child development, including social development, which plays a strategic role in determining a child's future success ([Rumbidzai & Achebe, 2023](#)). During early childhood, children experience a golden age, characterized by rapid development in their ability to interact, imitate social behavior, and understand their surroundings. Social development at this stage includes the ability to cooperate, share, communicate, understand others' feelings (empathy), and comply with applicable social rules ([Mayra et al., 2022](#)).

These skills are not only important in the context of daily life but also form the basis for a child's success in subsequent educational processes. Therefore, the development of social aspects requires serious attention in the learning process in so that children can develop optimally and in balance between cognitive, affective, and social aspects. Despite this, various issues related to children's social development remain prevalent in early childhood education institutions ([Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025](#)). Learning activities often focus solely on cognitive development, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, while social development is underdeveloped. Furthermore, the learning methods used tend to be monotonous and provide limited opportunities for children to actively interact with their peers. As a result, some children exhibit underdeveloped social behaviours, such as difficulty cooperating, poor emotional management, low communication confidence, and a lack of understanding of social rules. This situation demonstrates a gap between the holistic goals of early childhood education and learning practices, which are still limited in developing children's social skills ([Khaidir & Suud, 2020](#)).

This problem is further exacerbated by the lack of innovative and contextual learning strategies that effectively stimulate children's social development. Teachers often lack clear guidance on designing learning activities that integrate social aspects into the learning process ([Jasper-Abowei & Victor-Ishikaku, 2023](#)). However, early childhood learning should be conducted through a fun, active, and meaningful approach, one of which is play. Play is a child's inseparable part of the learning process, making the use of play as a learning medium crucial for supporting children's social development.

One form of play activity that has great potential for developing social skills is role-playing. Role-playing is an activity in which children play specific characters or situations related to everyday life, such as being a teacher, doctor, trader, or family member ([Nahar et al., 2020](#)). Through this activity, children not only play but also learn to understand social roles, rules, and values that apply in society. Role-playing provides children with direct experience in interacting, communicating, collaborating, and developing empathy in a natural and enjoyable way. Furthermore, this activity can help children develop symbolic thinking skills, imagination, and creativity, which contribute to overall social development ([Meilina et al., 2021](#)).

In a learning context, role-playing can be an effective means of internalizing social values through real-life experiences. When children engage in role-playing, they learn to understand others' perspectives, adapt their behavior to social situations, and develop simple conflict resolution skills. This demonstrates that role-playing serves not only as a play activity but also as a learning medium with high educational value in developing early childhood social skills ([Hidayati et al., 2024](#)).

Several previous studies have provided empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of role-playing in enhancing children's social development. [Yuliatin & Ismail, \(2026\)](#) concluded that implementing role-playing activities significantly improved early childhood cooperation, communication, and social interaction skills in group activities. [Wee et al., \(2022\)](#) found that role-playing methods were effective in increasing children's empathy, demonstrated through their ability to understand friends' feelings, share, and demonstrate prosocial behaviour in everyday life. [Huang](#)

[et al., \(2023\)](#) stated that role-playing activities can improve children's understanding of social rules and their ability to carry out roles appropriate to the social context they face. These research results indicate that role-playing is a potential learning strategy for optimizing early childhood social development.

However, although numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of role-playing, its implementation in the field has not been optimally and systematically implemented. Many teachers have not utilized this activity as an integral part of learning, but rather as an unstructured supplementary activity. Furthermore, a lack of planning, scenario variation, and evaluation of role-playing activities also hinder their maximization. This highlights the need to further examine the influence of role-playing activities on early childhood social development within a planned and measurable learning context. Based on this description, this research is crucial for conducting an in-depth analysis of the influence of role-playing activities on the social development of early childhood. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions, particularly in developing innovative and effective learning strategies in early childhood education. Furthermore, the results are expected to serve as a reference for teachers and education practitioners in designing learning activities that optimize children's social development through a meaningful play approach.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design in the form of a non-equivalent control group design ([Hunter et al., 2024](#); [Rahman et al., 2024](#); [Kohan et al., 2024](#)). This design was used to determine the effect of role-play activities on the social development of early childhood by comparing two groups: an experimental group given treatment and a control group without special treatment. The research sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique, by selecting two classes with relatively homogeneous characteristics. One class was designated as the experimental group consisting of 10 children and the other class as the control group consisting of 10 children. The research variables consisted of the independent variable, namely role-play activities, and the dependent variable, namely the social development of early childhood. The social development indicators measured included the ability to cooperate, communicate, empathize, and comply with social rules.

The data collection technique was carried out through structured observation using a Likert-type rating scale ([Afriani & Fikrih, 2026](#); [Chen & Liu, 2020](#)). The research instrument was compiled based on indicators of early childhood social development and has undergone expert judgment and reliability testing to ensure measurement consistency. Data collection was carried out in two stages, namely before treatment (pretest) and after treatment (post-test). The research procedure began with the preparation stage, the implementation of the protest, and the provision of treatment to the experimental group through role-play activities for 6–8 meetings with various scenarios (family, profession, social environment), while the control group used conventional learning methods. After that, a post-test was conducted to determine

changes in children's social development. Data analysis techniques used descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Prerequisite tests included normality and homogeneity tests, followed by hypothesis testing using an independent sample t-test with a significance level of 0.05 to determine significant differences between the experimental and control groups. With this method, it is hoped that accurate results will be obtained regarding the effect of role-play activities on the social development of early childhood.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented systematically based on data analysis. *pertest* and *post-test* the experimental and control groups were analysed. Measurements were conducted on early childhood social development, encompassing four main indicators: cooperation, communication, empathy, and adherence to social rules. Analysis was conducted using SPSS through descriptive testing, prerequisite testing, and hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pertest and Post-test

Group	N	Mean Pertest	SD Pertest	Mean test	Post- test	SD Post- test	Gain Score
Experiment	20	62,45	5,21	82,30		4,85	19,85
Control	20	61,80	5,37	68,75		5,10	6,95

Based on the table above, it can be seen that both groups had relatively similar initial abilities. This indicates that the initial conditions of the study were at a balanced point. After being given treatment, the experimental group experienced significantly greater improvement than the control group. *Gain scores* how's significant treatment effectiveness.

Prerequisite Test

Table 2. Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Group	Statistics	Say.	Information
Experiment	0,112	0,200	Normal
Control	0,126	0,178	Normal

Table 3. Homogeneity Test (Levane Test)

Levane Statistic	df1	df2	Say.	Information
1,045	1	38	0,312	Homogeneous

The results of the normality test indicate that all data are normally distributed because the significance value is >0.05 . The homogeneity test also shows that the variances of both groups are homogeneous. Thus, the data meets the requirements for parametric testing.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Independent Sample t-Test

Variables	t count	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Information
Social Development	7,842	38	0,000	13,55	1,72	Significant

Test result *st-test* the significance value is less than 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. This indicates that role-playing activities significantly influence the social development of early childhood.

Analysis of Social Development Indicators

Table 5. Comparison of Social Development Indicators (Experimental Group)

Indicator	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Percentage Increase
Collaboration	15,20	21,30	6,10	24%
Communication	15,60	20,80	5,20	21%
Empathy	15,10	19,90	4,80	19%
Regulatory Compliance	16,55	20,30	3,75	18%

Discussion

The results of the study showed that role-playing activities had a significant impact on the social development of early childhood, as indicated by an increase in the average score from 62.45 in the pretest to 82.30 in the posttest in the experimental group. Compared to the control group, which only experienced an increase from 61.80 to 68.75, there was a significant difference in improvement, namely 13.55 points based on the results of the independent sample t-test. This finding confirms that role-playing activities are highly effective in stimulating children's social development. Conceptually, this increase occurs because role-playing provides a direct and contextual learning experience, where children not only receive information but also experience, practice, and reflect on social interactions in situations that resemble real life. In this context, children learn through the process of imitation, exploration, and internalization of social values, so that learning becomes more meaningful. In addition, children's active involvement in role-playing activities also contributes to increased self-confidence, courage in interactions, and the ability to adapt to their social environment. This demonstrates that participatory and experience-based learning methods are more effective than conventional, more passive methods. Therefore, the results of this study not only demonstrate quantitative improvements but also indicate improvements in the quality of children's social interactions ([Novaes, 2025](#)).

When viewed based on social development indicators, the highest improvement occurred in cooperation, followed by communication, empathy, and adherence to social rules. A 24% increase in cooperation indicates that role-playing activities can create learning situations that require collective interaction among children. During the activities, children are required to share roles, develop a shared storyline, and resolve conflicts that arise during the game. This process indirectly trains children's

ability to collaborate and respect the opinions of others. In terms of communication, a 21% increase indicates that children are becoming more active in speaking, conveying ideas, and responding appropriately to conversations. This occurs because role-playing provides ample space for children to use language in real and meaningful contexts. Meanwhile, a 19% increase in empathy indicates that children are beginning to understand the feelings of others through the experience of playing various social roles. When children play the role of others, they learn to see situations from different perspectives, thus developing empathy naturally. In terms of adherence to social rules, an 18% increase indicates that children are beginning to understand the importance of rules in social life, such as taking turns, following agreements, and respecting the roles of friends. This shows that role playing not only develops social skills, but also helps children internalize social values that are important in community life.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of role-playing activities in improving children's social development can also be explained through constructivist and social learning theory approaches. From a constructivist perspective, children construct their own knowledge through direct experience and interaction with their environment ([Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025](#)). Role-playing provides children with the opportunity to experience social situations concretely, allowing them to independently construct an understanding of roles, norms, and social relationships. Meanwhile, from a social learning perspective, interaction with peers is a crucial factor in the learning process. Through role-playing, children learn from observation, imitation, and feedback provided by peers and teachers ([Mohammed et al., 2024](#)). This process reinforces the development of positive social behaviors. Furthermore, a fun and non-pressuring learning environment is also a significant contributing factor to the success of this method. Children tend to be more open, active, and courageous in expressing themselves when in a supportive environment ([Maisarah, 2024](#)). This contrasts with conventional learning, which tends to limit children's space for interaction and expression. Therefore, it is not surprising that the experimental group showed greater improvement than the control group.

On the other hand, the results of the study in the control group showed that although there was an increase, it was relatively small and not statistically significant. This is due to the teacher-centered learning methods used, which provide children with fewer opportunities to actively participate in social interactions ([Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2024](#)). This one-way learning makes children more listeners than doers, thus limiting the development of social skills. This situation indicates that learning methods play a crucial role in determining the success of children's social development. Without the right strategy, children's social development will not be optimally stimulated. Therefore, innovations in learning are needed that can accommodate children's needs to interact, explore, and learn actively ([Ndaimehafo Asilevi et al., 2024](#)).

Overall, the results of this study reinforce previous findings that role-playing is an effective method for enhancing the social development of early childhood. This activity not only provides benefits in the social aspect but also has a positive impact on other aspects such as language, emotions, and cognition. Thus, role-playing can be used as a comprehensive learning strategy in early childhood education. The

implication of this study is the importance for teachers to systematically and continuously integrate role-playing activities into the learning process. Teachers need to design scenarios relevant to children's lives, provide appropriate guidance, and conduct regular evaluations of children's social development. Furthermore, support from the school environment and parents is also needed to create a learning ecosystem conducive to child development. With appropriate implementation, role-playing activities are expected to be an effective means of developing children with good social skills, enabling them to adapt and interact positively in society.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study indicates that role-playing is an effective learning strategy for enhancing the social development of early childhood. Through this activity, children are able to develop their skills in cooperation, communication, empathy, and adherence to social rules more optimally because they are directly involved in real and meaningful learning experiences. Role-playing provides children with the opportunity to interact actively, understand various social roles, and internalize social values in a fun atmosphere. Compared with conventional learning, this approach has been proven to be more effective in stimulating children's social skills because it is participatory and child-centered. Therefore, role-playing activities are highly recommended to be systematically integrated into early childhood education as an effort to support children's comprehensive and sustainable social development.

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