

EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN YOUNG CHILDREN AT PEMBINA STATE KINDERGARTEN: THE KEY TO MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The capacity to manage emotions is a critical skill that should be cultivated from an early age, as it has a direct impact on both the mental and physical well-being of children. This research investigates the developmental process of emotional regulation in early childhood and its association with children's health status. Conducted at TK Negeri Pembina, the study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with data gathered through observations and interviews involving teachers and parents. The subjects in this research were 15 children in group B aged 5-6 years old with specifically 7 boys and 8 girls. To obtain comprehensive insights, the principal was interviewed to explore the school's policies and instructional strategies aimed at fostering emotional regulation. Data collection employed three complementary methods, which are non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis. Data analyzed by thematic analysis. The results indicate that a supportive environment, active teacher engagement, and effective parenting practices significantly enhance children's emotional regulation abilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood marks a decisive period in human development, when the foundations of personality are laid and core competencies begin to take shape. Among these, the capacity to regulate emotions is particularly significant. Emotional regulation refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, and adjust emotional responses in ways that are appropriate to the social context (Papalia & Martorell, 2021; Shaffer, 2020). Such competence enables children to adapt to their surroundings, maintain positive relationships, and resolve conflicts constructively (Drupadi, 2020).

Despite its importance, observations in various early childhood education settings suggest that emotional regulation is not yet a central focus of teaching practice. Many children still exhibit limited self-regulatory abilities, reflected in behaviors such as aggression or social withdrawal, which signal that their emotional regulation skills are not yet fully developed (Ummah et al., 2024; Yulianto et al., 2020). These findings point to a gap in current educational approaches, where the systematic development of emotional competencies has yet to be fully integrated into daily learning experiences.

A growing body of research demonstrates that approaches integrating emotional and social learning are effective in strengthening children's capacity for emotional regulation (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Marilou Hyson, 2003). Activities such as role-play and storytelling create space for children to identify, express, and manage their emotions in developmentally appropriate ways (Aryanti et al., 2024; Purnama et al., 2018). Similarly, strategies that emphasize positive reinforcement and collaborative learning have been found to support the emergence of healthy socio-emotional behaviors (Salsabila & Wahyudi, 2024).

Theoretically, Gross's model provides a valuable lens for examining emotional regulation by distinguishing between reappraisal and suppression strategies (Puspitasari & Hidayat, 2023). Carolyn Saarni, (1999) further underscores the role of a supportive social environment in fostering emotional competence. Within this perspective, early childhood educators hold a dual responsibility: they guide learning processes while also serving as living examples of effective emotional regulation (Leo & Hendriati, 2022; Santrock, 2011). The way teachers handle emotional situations in the classroom offers children direct, observable models, helping them internalize and apply adaptive strategies in their own social interactions (Yusuf, 2014).

Building on this conceptual foundation, the present study examines key constructs and their interrelationships, positioning emotional regulation as the dependent variable, with teacher roles, instructional strategies, and classroom climate serving as independent variables, and family involvement acting as a moderating factor (Hadi, 2011; Sukmadinata, 2013). Beyond identifying these variables, the research seeks to contribute to the field by proposing a culturally grounded learning model for emotional regulation that reflects Indonesian values and educational contexts.

By weaving together teacher strategies, pedagogical methods, and emotional

support into an integrated framework, the study aspires to offer an innovative approach for advancing the holistic development of emotional regulation in early childhood (Delzi Nurhafifah et al., 2024; Drupadi, 2020). The proposed model is envisioned not only to enrich early childhood education practices but also to strengthen character formation from the earliest years, ensuring that the cultivation of emotional competence is both developmentally responsive and culturally aligned. This research investigates the developmental process of emotional regulation in early childhood and its association with children's health status.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to provide an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of emotional regulation in early childhood at TK Negeri Pembina. The chosen approach allows for a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon within its natural setting, without altering or controlling the variables under observation. The research was carried out during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, during March-April 2025, at TK Negeri Pembina, located at Jalan Dadaha No. 34B, Kelurahan Nagrawangi, Kecamatan Cihideung, Kota Tasikmalaya, Provinsi Jawa Barat. The subjects in this research were 15 children in group B aged 5-6 years old with specifically 7 boys and 8 girls. Parents consented to have study staff contact their child's teachers at kindergarten, first, and second grade.

The primary participants in this study consisted of the school principal and children from Group B, who were actively engaged in daily learning activities. Participant selection was conducted purposively, based on criteria such as basic communication abilities and consistent participation in classroom activities. To obtain comprehensive insights, the principal was interviewed to explore the school's policies and instructional strategies aimed at fostering emotional regulation.

Data collection employed three complementary methods. First, non-participant observation was used to record children's emotional behaviors during learning sessions. Second, semi-structured interviews with the principal provided a deeper understanding of approaches to emotional regulation within the learning process. Third, document analysis involved reviewing teachers' daily records and children's creative works that reflected emotional expression. Semi structured

interviews with the principal to examine approaches to emotion management in the learning process, and document analysis, which involved reviewing teachers' daily records and children's creative work that convey emotional expression.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The process began with transcribing and conducting a preliminary review of data from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Subsequently, key themes were identified to capture the essential findings on emotional regulation. In the final stage, reflection and interpretation connected these themes to the study's theoretical framework, producing a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional regulation develops in early childhood within an educational setting.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Non-participant observations revealed that most children in Group B of TK Negeri Pembina were able to both recognize and express fundamental emotions such as happiness, anger, fear, and sadness. For example, during role-play activities, moments of joy were evident through laughter, bright smiles, and lively body language. Conversely, in situations of conflict such as disagreements over toys children displayed a variety of emotional responses, ranging from crying and pouting to seeking comfort or assistance from the teacher.

As the principal described during an interview on March 17, 2025: "The children are generally able to express their feelings. For instance, when they feel upset, they might say 'I don't like it' or remain silent. When they are happy, they often jump around or burst into laughter." This observation underscores the children's emerging ability to articulate their emotional states, whether verbally or through non-verbal cues, and reflects the natural variability of emotional expression in early childhood.

At TK Negeri Pembina, teachers play a central role in helping children recognize and manage their emotions. Through interactive activities such as storytelling sessions and small group discussions, they guide children to explore the emotions experienced by story characters and relate them to their own lives. This approach not only enhances children's emotional awareness but also creates opportunities for them to reflect on personal experiences in a safe and supportive setting.

As the Principal explained during an interview on March 17, 2025, the process is often facilitated through simple yet purposeful questions. "I often encourage children by asking questions such as 'What made you angry?' or 'What

makes you happy?’ to help them practice expressing their emotions,” she noted. Such practices, embedded in everyday classroom interactions, allow children to articulate their feelings with increasing confidence while also learning to understand the emotions of others.

The school actively cultivates children’s emotional regulation skills through a variety of structured and creative activities, including circle time discussions, role-play scenarios, and expressive outlets such as drawing and singing. Beyond the classroom, the institution extends its efforts to the home environment by offering parenting classes designed to equip parents with practical knowledge about the significance of managing children’s emotions. As the principal explained, “We consistently provide training for parents to help them understand how to support children when they are upset or experiencing a tantrum” (Principal Interview, March 17, 2025). This integrated approach ensures that emotional guidance is reinforced both at school and at home, creating a consistent and supportive environment for children’s socio-emotional growth.

The findings of this study indicate that children’s ability to identify and articulate their emotions is greatly influenced by the active engagement of teachers and the presence of a classroom environment that feels both safe and supportive. Such conditions not only encourage open emotional expression but also create opportunities for children to practice these skills within a nurturing social context. This observation resonates with (Saarni, 1999) assertion that the development of emotional regulation is deeply rooted in social interactions with responsive and attuned adults, whose presence provides both guidance and emotional security.

The findings are consistent with Hyson (2003) assertion that teachers’ emotional engagement plays a decisive role in nurturing children’s emotional competence. This perspective is echoed by Setiawati and Damayanti (2019), who emphasize the importance of teacher guidance in enabling children to express their emotions in ways that are both constructive and adaptive. In practice, approaches such as storytelling and group discussions have proven particularly effective, as they provide children with opportunities to reflect on their feelings, share experiences, and develop a deeper awareness of their emotional world.

5. CONCLUSION

The ability of young children to regulate their emotions plays a central role in

supporting both their psychological stability and physical well-being. This capacity does not develop in isolation; it is shaped by the combined influence of educators, the learning environment, and parental involvement. The experience at TK Negeri Pembina illustrates how intentional integration of emotional regulation into daily classroom practices can nurture not only children's emotional competence but also their overall growth and development. Such an approach reinforces the idea that fostering emotional skills is not an isolated educational goal, but a fundamental component of preparing children for lifelong learning and well-being.

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