

Fostering Social-Emotional Growth through Cooperative Learning in Early Childhood Education

Yuli Siswantini¹, Dedi Kuswandi², Ahmad Samawi³

Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java, Indonesia

yuli.siswantini.2401548@students.um.ac.id; dedi.kuswandi.fip@um.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the enhancement of children's social-emotional development through the application of cooperative learning strategies in early childhood education. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were analyzed systematically using techniques of data display, reduction, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that social-emotional growth in early childhood can be significantly improved through structured cooperative learning activities that include clear role division within groups, the use of positive feedback and rewards, and strategies aimed at fostering self-confidence and independence. The implementation of these practices not only enhances children's social interaction skills but also supports emotional regulation and resilience. The study highlights the critical role of collaborative learning in shaping key aspects of social-emotional development, offering practical implications for educators in early childhood settings. Structured group activities, meaningful participation, and positive reinforcement are shown to be effective tools for nurturing interpersonal competence and autonomy in young learners, laying a strong foundation for future developmental outcomes.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Improvement; Cooperative Learning; Collaborative Learning; Early Childhood Development; Positive Reinforcement

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood social-emotional development is fundamental in shaping their character and readiness to face life's challenges (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022; Mundiri & Hamimah, 2022; Norman et al., 2023). However, although child development theory emphasizes the importance of this aspect, in reality, many children are not yet optimal in their social and emotional skills. This is a crucial issue in education, especially at the Kindergarten (TK) level. According to the theory of social-emotional development, early childhood must recognize and manage emotions, build positive social relationships, and have empathy (P Ashevich, 2022; Thümmler et al., 2022; Váradi, 2022). However, in practice, many children experience difficulties in these aspects, which can affect their academic and social development in the future. This gap between theory and reality indicates the need for a practical approach to improving children's social-emotional development.

In Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten, although various learning methods have been implemented, the challenge in improving children's social-emotional skills is still a concern. Observations show that children often struggle with social interaction, managing emotions, and showing empathy towards their peers. This indicates the need for a more effective learning approach to meet children's developmental needs. In this context, applying learning methods that can support children's social-emotional development is very important.

Previous studies have shown that cooperative learning methods can improve children's social-emotional skills (Llorent et al., 2022; Low & Van Ryzin, 2023; Polat et al., 2022). For example, research by Palupi et al. (2023), Sa'diyah et al. (2023) and Umam (2023) showed that applying the Cooperative Learning Type Number Head Together method can improve children's social-emotional development. In addition, research by Chinedu & Akobi (2022) and Wulandari & Suhma (2024) also found that the cooperative learning model affects children's social-emotional and language development. These studies show that the cooperative approach can be an effective alternative in supporting the social-emotional development of early childhood.

Furthermore, Mänty et al., (2022) revealed that cooperative learning methods in kindergarten can improve children's ability to work together, resolve conflicts, and manage emotions in social interactions. In addition, research by Llorent et al. (2022) and Turan & Alemdar (2022) also shows that cooperative learning can increase children's self-confidence

and empathy, which are important parts of social-emotional development. These findings further strengthen the argument that cooperative learning can be a practical approach in supporting children's social-emotional development, and its relevance is very high in the context of Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten.

Although previous studies have shown that cooperative learning methods can improve children's social-emotional skills, there is still a gap between existing theories and their application in the field, especially in early childhood education. Most of these studies focus more on the theory of cooperative learning in general without examining how its specific implementation in kindergarten can directly impact children's social-emotional development in different local and cultural contexts. Therefore, although cooperative theory has been proven effective, its more detailed and contextual application in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten must be explored further to fill this gap and provide more precise guidance for educators. The novelty of this study lies in the application of cooperative learning methods in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten, which has not been widely explored before. In addition, this study will also examine in depth the impact of implementing this method on children's social-emotional development and the factors that influence its success. Thus, this study is expected to provide new contributions to developing effective learning methods to improve early childhood social-emotional skills. This paper aims to answer the following question: How can the application of cooperative learning methods improve children's social-emotional development in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten?

The temporary argument that can be put forward is that applying cooperative learning methods in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten can improve children's social-emotional development. This is based on the basic principles of cooperative methods that encourage children to work together, communicate, and respect each other in groups. Thus, this method can help children develop social skills such as empathy, cooperation, and emotional management, which are important aspects in their social-emotional development. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for educators and education practitioners in designing and implementing more effective learning methods to support the social-emotional development of early childhood.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Santa Soriano & Torres Valdés, 2021; Cole, 2024). The selection of this design is based on the need to explore in depth the application of cooperative learning methods in improving children's social-emotional development in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten. Case studies allow researchers to gain a more detailed and contextual picture of how cooperative learning is implemented and directly impacts children's social-emotional development. This approach also allows one to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges educators and children face in learning.

The research location was chosen at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten because it is an educational institution with characteristics and needs relevant to this research topic. This kindergarten has also implemented several learning methods that focus on child development, but has not fully implemented cooperative learning for the social-emotional aspect. The selection of this location aims to explore in more depth how cooperative learning can be applied and contribute to improving children's social-emotional skills in a more specific context.

Data collection techniques used in this study include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Khoa et al., 2023; Opara et al., 2023). Observations will be carried out to directly see the implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom and the social-emotional interactions between children. After implementing this method, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, parents, and children to obtain their views on changes in children's social-emotional skills. Documentation in the form of field notes and recordings of learning activities will be used to support observation findings. Data analysis was carried out using data reduction, data presentation, and data verification techniques, which involved organizing and mapping findings to better understand the impact of cooperative learning on children's social-emotional development. To ensure the validity of the data, checking was carried out through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as discussions with colleagues to ensure

RESULTS

Structured Collaborative Learning

Structured collaborative learning is a learning approach in which children work in small groups to achieve common goals with clear roles. In the context of Klumutan 1 Kindergarten, Saradan Madiun, structured collaborative learning requires each child to have individual responsibilities in the group, such as being a recorder, reader, or discussion organizer. This method aims to improve social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and empathy, through directed interactions and guidance from educators. Learning is carried out using activities that encourage children to share ideas, work together, and complete tasks together positively.

According to Karina Devid Mirawati, one of the teachers at Klumutan 1 Kindergarten, the structured collaborative learning method has positively impacted cooperation between children. She explained that children become more active in contributing to the group through a clear division of roles. He stated, "Every child feels valued because they have an important role in the group. This makes them more confident and more open in interacting with friends." This shows that structured learning not only helps children complete tasks but also provides an opportunity to increase self-confidence and mutual respect.

On the other hand, one of the parents stated that he saw positive changes in how his child interacted with his friends after implementing this method. "My child used to prefer playing alone, but now he plays more often with his friends and is more patient when sharing tasks in a group," he said. This shows that structured collaborative learning affects children's social interactions in the classroom and their attitudes outside the classroom, such as playing at home. Based on this interview, it can be understood that this method effectively improves children's social skills in a broader context.

In the results of field observations, researchers noted that during cooperative learning activities, children appeared to be more active in participating in group discussions and listening to each other's opinions. Children who previously tended to be quiet and preferred to play alone began to interact more openly. In one activity, children were divided into small groups to create a joint project, and they were seen sharing ideas, helping friends, and discussing constructively. Researchers observed that a clear structure in each group, such

as the division of roles and responsibilities, made it easier for children to collaborate and increased their self-confidence.

Based on the data collected from interviews and observations, it can be understood that structured collaborative learning in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten effectively improves children's social and emotional skills. Children involved in this activity showed significant development in cooperation, communication, and empathy. They learned to appreciate the roles of their friends and felt more confident when interacting in groups.

Structured collaborative learning contributes to children's social-emotional development. Children become more active in participating in group activities, they learn to cooperate with their friends, and begin to show empathy in social situations. Clear division of roles in the group is key to building a sense of responsibility and self-confidence, facilitating their social development.

Implementation of Roles in Groups

Implementing roles in groups in the context of cooperative learning in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten refers to assigning specific responsibilities to each child to ensure active involvement and contribution to the learning process. These roles include note-taker, reader, discussion leader, or timer, all designed to encourage effective collaboration and individual accountability. Each child can lead or support a peer in completing a group task to develop social-emotional skills, such as communication, empathy, and emotion management. Implementing these group roles improves social skills and increases self-confidence and ownership of the learning process.

Table 1. Implementation of Roles in Groups

Interview Excerpts	Indicators	Informant
"Children feel more confident when they are given roles, because they know what to do."	Self-confidence	Teacher
"They learn to respect each other when each has different responsibilities."	Cooperation	Teacher
"Children who are group leaders show more initiative in completing tasks."	Leadership	Principal
"The division of roles makes children more organized and focused in completing tasks together."	Time management and organization	Teacher

Based on interviews with informants, the implementation of roles in groups positively affects various social-emotional aspects of children. All informants confirmed that children feel more confident and can work together more effectively when given clear roles in groups. This shows that role allocation helps children manage tasks and increases their involvement in the learning process. In addition, leadership indicators also emerged as important factors in increasing children's initiative, although not all children showed the same development in this aspect. Although some children who play the role of leader can direct their friends well, some are not confident enough to carry out this role optimally.

Furthermore, the cooperation indicator also showed strong agreement from all informants. The division of roles in groups allows children to learn to respect each other and understand the importance of individual contributions in achieving group goals. This shows that implementing structured roles can improve essential social skills, such as empathy and tolerance.

In observations conducted in the field, researchers noted that children given specific roles in groups tended to be more active and organized in learning activities. For example, children who were given the role of leader showed greater initiative in leading discussions and guiding their peers. In addition, children who played the role of recorder or timer appeared more focused and structured in carrying out their tasks. These observations support the findings from the interviews, which showed that transparent role allocation plays a role in increasing children's sense of responsibility and social skills.

The data collected through interviews and observations shows that implementing roles in groups significantly improves children's social and emotional skills. Children who were given group roles improved self-confidence, cooperation, and leadership. They became more organized, more confident in interacting, and better able to complete tasks together. This role allocation allows children to understand the importance of collaboration, as well as develop empathy and the ability to listen to others.

The pattern seen in the data above shows that role allocation in groups consistently positively impacts children's social-emotional development. Structured cooperative learning with clear roles helps children to work together, increase self-confidence, and develop leadership skills. Children given the role of leader or timekeeper tend to be more active and organized. In contrast, those who hold other roles, such as recorder or reader, also improve

communication and cooperation. Proper role allocation can improve children's engagement and social-emotional learning outcomes, which are critical for their future development.

Providing Positive Feedback and Rewards

Providing positive feedback and rewards in cooperative learning at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten refers to praising or recognizing children's efforts, progress, or achievements in group tasks. This feedback aims to reinforce positive behavior, motivate children to participate actively, and develop self-confidence. Rewards can be verbal praise, stickers, or special recognition in front of their peers. Providing appropriate feedback increases children's motivation and improves their ability to collaborate, manage emotions, and develop overall social skills.

According to Sabrina Ulul Qomariyah, one of the teachers at Klumutan 1 Kindergarten, "When children receive praise after completing group assignments well, they feel appreciated and more confident to collaborate again. The praise makes them feel more enthusiastic about participating in learning." From this interview, it can be understood that positive feedback, such as verbal praise, can increase children's self-confidence and desire to continue participating in groups. Feedback given after children have completed their assignments provides appreciation and reinforces children's positive behavior in interacting with their friends. Nadira, one of the parents, stated, "After my child was given an award for his hard work in the group, he became more open and active in communicating with his friends. My child appreciates the process of cooperation in the group more." This statement shows that giving awards after completing group assignments increases children's involvement in group activities and supports their social development, especially in interacting and building relationships with their peers. From this interview, awards function as a tool to reinforce positive behavior in a social context.

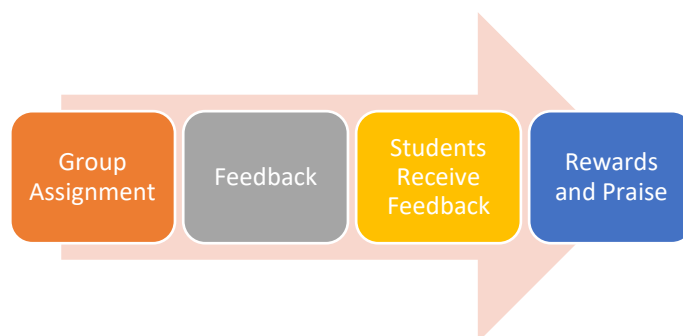


Figure 1. Flow of Giving Positive Feedback and Rewards

The flow related to this sub-theme can be described as follows: first, children are given tasks in groups that require collaboration. Second, they are given positive feedback whenever they complete a task or demonstrate good social behavior, such as working with friends or completing tasks well. Third, children who receive positive feedback feel appreciated and encouraged to participate more actively in group activities. Fourth, rewards such as praise or recognition from teachers or friends increase children's self-confidence and reinforce their positive behavior. This flow shows how giving positive feedback directly increases children's involvement and social-emotional development. In field observations, researchers noted that children who often receive positive feedback tend to participate more actively in group activities and interact more easily with their friends. For example, when a child successfully leads a discussion in a group, the teacher praises him or her, and the child becomes more confident to continue leading other discussions. This observation shows that rewards given appropriately can strengthen children's self-confidence, encourage them to take a more active role in the group, and improve their ability to collaborate. Children who receive positive rewards also appear more open and confident when interacting with their friends.

Based on data from interviews and observations, it can be understood that providing positive feedback and rewards plays an important role in improving children's social-emotional development at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten. Positive feedback, whether through praise or other rewards, increases children's self-confidence and motivates them to actively participate in cooperative learning. Children's rewards after successfully completing tasks or behaving well in groups strengthen their involvement in group activities and build better social relationships with their friends.

The pattern seen from the data above shows that providing positive feedback and rewards increases children's motivation, engagement, and social skills. Children who receive positive feedback are more confident and active in group activities. Rewards significantly impact children's behavior, making them feel appreciated and encouraged to interact better with their friends. This pattern shows that the positive feedback and reward approach in cooperative learning can accelerate children's social-emotional development in a fun and constructive way.

Building Self-Confidence and Independence

Building self-confidence and independence in cooperative learning at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten provides opportunities for children to take active roles in groups, make decisions, and complete tasks with little or no adult assistance. Through clear roles and individual responsibilities, children are encouraged to take initiative, manage their tasks, and interact with their peers in ways that build their self-confidence. Independence is also built through activities that require decision-making and problem-solving, which helps children feel more capable and confident in facing social and academic challenges. Cooperative learning provides natural space for children to develop these skills in a supportive environment.

Table 2. Building Self-Confidence and Independence

Interview Excerpts	Indicators	Informant
"Children appear more confident when given the opportunity to lead their own groups."	Self-confidence	Principal
"When they are given responsibility, they learn to manage their time and work more independently."	Independence	Teacher
"Children who are given more opportunities to make decisions in groups feel more valued."	Initiative	Teacher
"A clear division of roles helps children feel they have control over the tasks they do."	Responsibility	Teacher

Based on Table 2 above, giving roles in groups can strengthen children's self-confidence and independence. All informants agreed that children who were allowed to lead or make group decisions felt more confident. This shows that structured cooperative learning, where children are given specific responsibilities, can help them develop greater self-confidence. Children who can lead or make decisions feel more valued and have more control over their tasks. This aligns with developmental theory, which shows that independence can be fostered by allowing children to be responsible for their work.

In addition, indicators of independence also showed consistent results among informants. Children who were given responsibility in groups learned to manage their own time and work, showing that cooperative learning allows children to develop self-management skills. This indicates that through clear role division, children learn to work together and hone their ability to stand alone and take responsibility for their actions.

In field observations, researchers noted that children given group roles significantly improved self-confidence and independence. For example, children who played the role of

leader or timekeeper were seen to be more active in directing their friends and making decisions related to group assignments. In addition, children tasked with completing certain parts of their work were more focused and did not depend on the teacher or other friends. These observations indicate that providing structured roles makes children feel more involved in the learning process and more confident in their ability to complete tasks. Based on data obtained from interviews and observations, it can be understood that implementing cooperative learning that provides clear roles to children directly increases their self-confidence and independence. Children who are allowed to lead or make decisions in groups feel more valued and more confident in their ability to complete tasks. In addition, they also show independence in managing their own time and work. This supports the view that cooperative learning can help children develop important social-emotional skills, including self-confidence and independence.

The pattern seen from the data above shows that cooperative learning that provides structured roles significantly supports the development of children's self-confidence and independence. Children who are given responsibility in groups feel more valued and are more involved in the learning process. They show significant improvements in task management and decision making, leading to increased independence. This pattern suggests that role-playing in groups can effectively improve children's social and emotional skills, facilitating their personal growth in a supportive social context.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that structured collaborative learning, role implementation in groups, positive feedback, and rewards play an important role in improving children's social-emotional development in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten. This finding aligns with existing theories regarding cooperative learning and children's social-emotional development. Positive feedback can improve students' motivation and performance, which is also supported by the results of this study (Hooda et al., 2022; Malecka & Boud, 2023; Martinez et al., 2024). Structured collaborative learning allows children to work together, communicate, and develop social skills, which aligns with Bandura's social learning theory (Hooda et al., 2022; Rehing, 2022; Sumianto et al., 2024). However, the difference lies in the direct application in early childhood, where positive

reinforcement is given in a group context, not just individually, thus further strengthening social relationships among children.

The application of roles in groups shows that giving responsibility can increase children's self-confidence and independence (Hidayanti et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2022). Role sharing helps children feel valued and gives them a sense of responsibility for the group. In this study, children who were given active roles in groups showed increased independence, which aligns with the theory of giving responsibility and independence in early childhood education. However, the difference found in this study is the focus on the application of roles that support social development, where children learn to do their tasks and collaborate and interact more effectively in a group context.

The theoretical implication of this finding is the importance of integrating social learning and reinforcement theories in early childhood education. Structured cooperative learning, focusing on positive feedback, can strengthen theories supporting social-emotional development. These findings confirm that, in addition to improving academic skills, children can also develop social and emotional skills through directed interactions and group-based learning. Therefore, this study expands our understanding of how cooperative learning methods can be applied more effectively to support early childhood social-emotional development, especially in more specific contexts such as kindergarten.

Practically, these findings provide important insights for educators at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten and elsewhere. Structured collaborative learning with clear role assignments can be used as an effective method to enhance children's engagement and social development. Providing positive feedback and rewards can also be used to encourage children to continue participating in learning, increase their self-confidence, and strengthen social relationships with their classmates. Educators can utilize these findings by designing activities that facilitate collaboration between children, provide age-appropriate responsibilities, and provide constructive feedback after each achievement regarding tasks and social interactions.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that a structured cooperative learning approach with the implementation of group roles, providing positive feedback, and rewards can be a very effective method in supporting children's social-emotional development at Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten. Through this learning, children learn academic skills and essential social skills, such as cooperation, empathy, and emotional management.

These findings significantly contribute to the development of more comprehensive learning methods in early childhood education, focusing on academic achievement and children's social-emotional development as a foundation for future success.

CONCLUSION

The most important findings of this study are that structured cooperative learning, the application of roles in groups, and positive feedback and rewards can significantly improve children's social-emotional development in Klumutan 1 Saradan Madiun Kindergarten. Children allowed to work together in groups are given clear roles and receive positive feedback, which shows improvements in self-confidence, independence, and social skills such as cooperation and emotional management. The wisdom of this study shows that social reinforcement through this method is significant in shaping the character of early childhood children who are not only academically intelligent, but also emotionally and socially.

The main strength of this paper lies in its contribution to developing learning methods that integrate social learning theories with positive reinforcement in early childhood education. This study provides practical and theoretical insights for educators in creating a learning environment supporting children's social-emotional development. However, the limitation of this study lies in the sample being limited to one kindergarten in a particular area, which limits the generalizability of the findings. For future research, it is recommended to expand the research sample to various early childhood education institutions with different backgrounds and further explore the long-term impact of this method on children's social-emotional development.

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