

Teachers' Roles in Addressing Aggressive Behavior Through Social-Emotional Learning in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Aggressive behavior in early childhood can hinder children's social-emotional development. Teachers play a crucial role in addressing such behavior through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). This qualitative study employed an intrinsic single-case study design to examine teachers' roles in managing aggressive behavior at RA Al Abror, Gresik. Data were collected through interviews with teachers and observations of children aged 4–6 years. The findings revealed two forms of aggressive behavior: verbal aggression, including arguing and teasing, and non-verbal aggression, such as hitting and damaging objects. The contributing factors included inappropriate parenting styles, limited emotional regulation skills, an uncondusive family environment, and biological factors. Teachers' roles encompassed creating a safe learning environment, identifying aggressive behaviors, implementing behavior management strategies, teaching social-emotional competencies, and collaborating with parents and relevant professionals. The

study concludes that effective implementation of Social-Emotional Learning requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of aggression, the application of appropriate intervention strategies, and collaboration among multiple stakeholders to establish a supportive learning environment.

Introduction

Early childhood represents a highly significant and critical stage of development that serves as the primary foundation for shaping an individual's personality, emotional development, and social competence (Batubara et al., 2023). During this golden age, children begin to develop fundamental abilities to recognize their own emotions, understand the feelings of others, and establish healthy social relationships with both peers and adults around them. This developmental process determines the quality of children's adaptation and psychological well-being in later stages of life (Al Etivali, 2019).

However, throughout this developmental process, various disruptive behaviors frequently emerge, one of which is aggressive behavior. Manifestations such as hitting, biting, screaming, and damaging objects are commonly observed and may become serious obstacles to children's learning processes and social interactions. Such behaviors not only disrupt the classroom environment but also impede children's ability to develop the social-emotional competencies required for their future lives (Hambali, 2024).

Aggressive behavior in early childhood, as defined by Steward and Coach (cited in Rahmi, 2021), refers to maladaptive behavior that is essentially intended to hurt, injure, or harm others. A similar definition was proposed by Antasari (cited in Nafiyah & Handayani, 2014), who described aggression as any intentional behavior directed toward another person or object with the purpose of causing harm, disturbance, or injury, whether physically or psychologically. If left unaddressed, such behavior has the potential to become a persistent behavioral pattern with long-term adverse effects on children's emotional and social development into adulthood (Hikmawati et al., 2023).

The etiology of aggressive behavior is multifactorial and complex. Contributing factors may originate from within the child, such as limited emotional regulation and impulse control, as well as from external environments, including inconsistent parenting practices and uncondusive family conditions (Muttaqin, 2021). Underdeveloped social skills also constitute a significant contributing factor, as children may not yet possess an adequate repertoire of behaviors to express their needs or resolve conflicts constructively (Ismaniar & Landa, 2023).

Within formal educational settings, particularly Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions, teachers play a strategic and indispensable role in addressing this challenge. Teachers function not only as educators responsible for transmitting knowledge but also as caregivers, mentors, and role models who assist children in managing their emotions and developing positive interpersonal relationships.

Teachers' professional competence, as emphasized by Reza and Eliza, largely determines their effectiveness in fulfilling these multidimensional roles (Sapitri & Sahwal, 2023).

One scientifically recognized and practically effective approach to addressing aggressive behavior is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is systematically designed to equip children with essential competencies, including recognizing and managing emotions, demonstrating empathy, establishing healthy relationships, and making responsible decisions. By integrating SEL into classroom practices, teachers can create a safe, supportive, and conducive learning environment that promotes children's social-emotional development while reducing aggressive tendencies (Lapanda et al., 2022).

Further evidence from previous studies indicates that aggressive behavior in early childhood has been widely investigated from various perspectives. A study conducted by Marini, Sholihah, and Nusir (2024) employed a case study approach to identify the forms and underlying causes of aggressive behavior among young children. The findings revealed that aggressive behavior manifested in the forms of grabbing peers' belongings, using offensive language, pinching, and fighting. The primary contributing factor was permissive parenting, which failed to provide children with clear behavioral boundaries. Although the study successfully identified the manifestations and causes of aggressive behavior, it did not examine the educational strategies implemented by teachers to address such behaviors.

Similarly, Musslifah, Cahyani, Rifayani, and Hastuti (2021) investigated the relationship between parenting styles and children's aggressive behavior through in-depth interviews. Their findings demonstrated that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have considerable potential to trigger aggressive behavior in children. These findings further emphasize the significant influence of the family environment on children's behavioral development. Nevertheless, the study primarily focused on family-related factors and did not examine the role of educational institutions or teachers in intervening when aggressive behavior occurs within the school environment.

Another study conducted by Masalwa and Kusayang (2025) examined teachers' strategies for managing aggressive behavior among young children in the digital era using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings showed that teachers implemented emotional regulation strategies through play-based activities and storytelling, modeled positive behavior, limited children's use of digital devices, and actively involved parents in the intervention process. The study highlighted the importance of teachers' roles in fostering children's emotional regulation. However, it did not specifically employ the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) framework as the conceptual foundation for addressing aggressive behavior.

Furthermore, Hadi, Ermiana, and Darmiany (2025) investigated teachers' strategies for managing aggressive behavior through role-playing activities. Their findings demonstrated that role-playing

effectively reduced aggressive behavior while simultaneously enhancing prosocial behaviors, including empathy, cooperation, self-control, and appropriate emotional expression. Although this study confirmed the effectiveness of role-playing as a method for promoting children's social-emotional development, its focus remained limited to a single instructional strategy and did not comprehensively examine the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in everyday classroom practice.

Meanwhile, Desvianti (2023) employed a quasi-experimental approach to examine the effectiveness of prosocial role-playing activities in reducing aggressive behavior among kindergarten children. The findings confirmed that prosocial role-playing significantly decreased aggressive behavior compared with the control group. The study emphasized the importance of strengthening prosocial behavior as a preventive strategy against childhood aggression. Nevertheless, it primarily focused on evaluating the effectiveness of a specific intervention program and did not explore in depth the role of teachers during the implementation process or the factors that facilitated and constrained its success.

Based on the review of previous studies, it can be concluded that most research has concentrated on the factors contributing to aggressive behavior, particularly parenting styles (Marini et al., 2024; Muslifah et al., 2021), as well as intervention strategies employing specific instructional methods, such as role-playing and prosocial activities

(Desvianti, 2023; Hadi et al., 2025). Other studies have also highlighted teachers' strategies for promoting children's emotional regulation in the digital era (Masalwa & Kusayang, 2025). However, these studies have not specifically examined teachers' roles as the primary agents in implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to address aggressive behavior in early childhood.

Moreover, previous studies have generally examined aggressive behavior either from the perspective of its underlying causes or the effectiveness of specific instructional methods. Limited research has comprehensively explored how teachers identify aggressive behavior, design intervention strategies, integrate social-emotional competencies into classroom instruction, and establish collaborative partnerships with parents within a comprehensive Social-Emotional Learning framework.

Another research gap lies in the study context. Most previous studies were conducted in different early childhood education institutions and geographical settings, whereas research investigating the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning to address aggressive behavior among young children in Gresik Regency remains relatively limited. Therefore, further research is needed to provide a contextual understanding of how aggressive behavior is addressed through the Social-Emotional Learning approach in accordance with the social and cultural characteristics of the local community.

This need is also reflected in the realities observed in the field.

Preliminary observations conducted at RA Al Abror Mundu Pedagangan, Wringinanom District, Gresik Regency, demonstrated the urgency of implementing this approach. Initial interviews with Group B teachers revealed that several children frequently disturbed their classmates, hit others, shouted, used inappropriate language, and ran uncontrollably during classroom activities. This situation was further exacerbated by teachers' limited capacity to manage aggressive behavior effectively, indicating a gap between the ideal role of teachers and their actual capacity to address behavioral problems.

Therefore, an in-depth and contextual investigation into teachers' roles in addressing aggressive behavior through the lens of Social-Emotional Learning has become essential. This study is expected to bridge the gap between theory and practice while contributing to the development of an intervention model that is aligned with the characteristics and specific needs of early childhood education settings, particularly at RA Al Abror.

Based on the identified research problems, this study specifically aims to examine: (1) the forms of aggressive behavior exhibited by children at RA Al Abror; (2) the actual roles performed by teachers in addressing such behavior; (3) the implementation of the Social-Emotional Learning approach as a mitigation strategy; and (4) the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of this approach.

Accordingly, this study is expected not only to provide a

comprehensive academic understanding of teachers' roles in addressing aggressive behavior through Social-Emotional Learning but also to offer practical recommendations that can strengthen the capacity of early childhood educators to guide children in overcoming aggressive behavior, thereby supporting their optimal emotional and social development in accordance with the goals of national education.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using an intrinsic single-case study design to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of teachers' roles in addressing aggressive behavior through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) within a specific educational setting (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2025). An intrinsic case study was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore a phenomenon holistically within its natural setting. The study was conducted at RA Al Abror Mundu Pedagangan, located in Wringinanom District, Gresik Regency, Indonesia. The research participants consisted of two Group B teachers, who were purposively selected because they interacted directly with children aged 5–6 years on a daily basis (Mardhiyah et al., 2025; Sumilih et al., 2025), as well as approximately five to seven children from the same group who had been identified during the preliminary observation as frequently displaying aggressive behavior.

Data were collected using three primary techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to explore

their strategies, challenges, and reflections regarding the implementation of the Social-Emotional Learning approach in addressing aggressive behavior. Second, passive participant observation was carried out during classroom instruction, play activities, and transitional periods to directly observe manifestations of aggressive behavior and teachers' responses to such behaviors. All observations were systematically documented in detailed field notes. Third, document analysis was undertaken by examining supporting documents, including teachers' anecdotal records, daily lesson plans, and children's developmental profiles. These documents served as triangulation data to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024; Zahroh et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Rusli et al., 2025).

The collected data were analyzed interactively using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data reduction stage, the interview transcripts and observation records were coded and simplified to identify relevant information. The reduced data were subsequently presented in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and emerging themes. This analytical process was conducted cyclically throughout the research.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation

(teachers and children) and method triangulation (interviews, observations, and document analysis) were employed. In addition, peer debriefing through limited academic discussions was conducted to validate the consistency of the data interpretation. Throughout the study, all research procedures were carried out in accordance with established research ethics principles.

Result and Discussions

Based on the analysis of data collected through interviews and classroom observations, this study identified two major forms of aggressive behavior exhibited by children aged 4–6 years at RA Al Abror. The first category was verbal aggression, which manifested in behaviors such as using inappropriate language to attract attention, arguing against teachers' instructions, teasing peers, speaking impolitely, and deliberately provoking classmates during learning activities. The teachers reported that children displaying these behaviors frequently disrupted classroom concentration by shouting or using offensive language, particularly during transition periods such as lining up or moving between activities. These findings are consistent with previous literature, which defines verbal aggression as an attempt to harm others through spoken language, often driven by a desire to dominate or gain immediate attention.

One of the Group B teachers explained:

"Children who frequently display aggressive behavior usually tease their classmates, argue when given instructions, and sometimes use inappropriate

language when their wishes are not fulfilled. These behaviors most often occur during group play activities.”

The second category was non-verbal or physical aggression, which included direct behaviors such as hitting and kicking peers, damaging other children's belongings, and impulsive actions such as running aimlessly around the classroom, thereby disrupting classroom order. Classroom observations indicated that these behaviors often occurred without any apparent provocation. For example, some children suddenly hit classmates who were quietly engaged in play. Such behaviors not only posed a risk of physical injury but also created an unsafe classroom atmosphere and disrupted the overall teaching and learning process. The coexistence of verbal and physical aggression among children at RA Al Abror suggests that they experience complex difficulties in emotional regulation and social interaction.

The emergence of aggressive behavior cannot be separated from several interrelated contributing factors. Internally, the primary factor was children's limited ability to regulate their emotions, which is understandable considering that the development of the prefrontal cortex—the brain region responsible for impulse regulation—is still ongoing during early childhood. Many children had not yet developed sufficient emotional vocabulary to express feelings of frustration, anger, or disappointment appropriately, leading them to communicate these emotions through physical aggression or harsh verbal expressions. In addition, biological factors, such as naturally reactive temperaments,

also contributed, as some children were inherently more sensitive to negative stimuli.

From an external perspective, parenting practices within the family emerged as a significant contributing factor. Inappropriate parenting styles, whether excessively authoritarian, which limits children's opportunities to express their opinions, or overly permissive, which prevents children from learning to tolerate frustration, may increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Furthermore, uncondusive family environments characterized by parental conflict, limited emotional warmth, or children's exposure to violence provide behavioral models that children tend to imitate through observational learning, as explained by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Djollong et al., 2023).

Emotional distress experienced at home is often carried into the school environment, where children express their unresolved emotions through disruptive behaviors directed toward classmates and teachers. In addressing this complex situation, teachers at RA Al Abror perform several crucial and multidimensional roles. Their primary and most fundamental responsibility is to create a classroom environment that is safe, comfortable, and free from intimidation, ensuring that every child, including those who exhibit aggressive behavior, feels accepted and respected. Within such a supportive environment, teachers identify and develop a thorough understanding of the underlying causes of each child's aggressive behavior through careful observation and a dialogic approach. Rather than responding with immediate punishment,

teachers actively engage children in respectful conversations to explore the reasons behind their actions. This approach not only enables teachers to gather meaningful information but also encourages children to reflect on and recognize their own emotions.

A Group B teacher stated:

"When a child hits or teases a classmate, we do not immediately scold them. Instead, we first invite the child to talk so that we can understand what they are feeling and why they behaved that way."

Beyond identifying the causes of aggressive behavior, teachers proactively implement various behavior management strategies grounded in the principles of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). These strategies include providing positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards when children demonstrate prosocial behavior; establishing fair and consistent consequences for aggressive actions; and explicitly teaching alternative ways to express emotions. For instance, children are encouraged to use expressions such as *"I am angry"* or *"I don't like that"* instead of resorting to physical aggression. The essence of these interventions lies in the explicit teaching of social-emotional competencies through developmentally appropriate methods, including role-playing, storytelling, and group discussions, all of which aim to foster self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy.



Figure 1. Interview with a Group B Teacher

The findings indicate that aggressive behavior among children at RA Al Abror consists of both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal aggression was expressed through behaviors such as arguing, teasing peers, using inappropriate language, and shouting during classroom activities. Non-verbal aggression, on the other hand, manifested in actions including hitting, kicking, damaging property, and impulsive behaviors that disrupted classroom order. These findings are consistent with those reported by Marini et al. (2024), who found that aggressive behavior among young children commonly includes the use of offensive language, pinching, fighting, and taking peers' belongings. The similarity between these findings suggests that aggressive behavior in early childhood generally manifests as both verbal and physical aggression, reflecting children's limited capacity to regulate emotions

and engage in positive social interactions. However, the present study further revealed that disruptive behaviors, such as aimlessly running around the classroom and interfering with learning activities, also constitute a prominent manifestation of aggression. This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that aggression is not limited to behaviors that directly harm others but may also appear in forms that disrupt the learning process and undermine the overall classroom environment.

The factors contributing to aggressive behavior identified in this study include internal factors, particularly children's limited emotional regulation abilities, and external factors, namely inappropriate parenting practices and unconducive family environments. These findings support the study conducted by Musslifah et al. (2021), which reported that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles contribute to the emergence of aggressive behavior in children. The present findings are also consistent with those of Marini et al. (2024), who concluded that permissive parenting prevents children from understanding acceptable behavioral boundaries within social interactions. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that aggressive behavior cannot be attributed solely to parenting practices. Rather, it is closely associated with children's ability to recognize, understand, and regulate their own emotions. Accordingly, the present findings offer a broader perspective by suggesting that childhood aggression results from the interaction between individual developmental characteristics

and family environmental factors.

In addressing aggressive behavior, teachers at RA Al Abror play a pivotal role, serving not only as instructors but also as mentors and facilitators of children's social-emotional development. Teachers strive to establish a safe learning environment, identify the underlying causes of aggressive behavior, provide emotional support, and teach children more constructive ways of resolving conflicts. These findings are consistent with those reported by Masalwa and Kusayang (2025), who emphasized the importance of teachers' roles in fostering children's emotional regulation through various learning activities. However, the present study reveals that teachers' responsibilities extend beyond implementing specific intervention strategies. Instead, teachers continuously provide guidance through everyday classroom interactions, positioning themselves as the primary agents who connect children's emotional needs with the broader objectives of Social-Emotional Learning. This finding highlights that the effectiveness of teachers' interventions lies not merely in isolated instructional techniques but in their sustained educational engagement throughout children's daily learning experiences.

The implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in this study was integrated into various classroom activities, including positive reinforcement, the habituation of prosocial behavior, storytelling, role-playing, and simple discussions about emotions. These findings are closely aligned with those of Hadi et al. (2025) and

Desvianti (2023), both of whom demonstrated that role-playing effectively reduces aggressive behavior while simultaneously promoting empathy and children's social competence. This similarity suggests that strengthening social-emotional competencies constitutes an effective approach to addressing aggressive behavior in early childhood. Nevertheless, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that successful intervention does not depend solely on the use of role-playing as an instructional method. Rather, it relies on the comprehensive and continuous implementation of Social-Emotional Learning throughout the entire educational process. In other words, this study illustrates that SEL functions as a broader educational framework that encompasses various learning experiences rather than merely representing a single instructional technique.

Furthermore, this study found that the successful implementation of Social-Emotional Learning was supported by teachers' commitment and the establishment of a positive school climate. However, several obstacles were also identified, including teachers' limited understanding of the systematic implementation of SEL and insufficient parental support in reinforcing children's social-emotional development at home. These findings overlap with those reported by Masalwa and Kusayang (2025), who likewise emphasized the importance of parental involvement in addressing children's aggressive behavior. The present study, however, provides additional insight by demonstrating that inconsistencies between school-based interventions

and parenting practices at home substantially reduce the effectiveness of aggressive behavior management. Therefore, successful implementation of Social-Emotional Learning requires not only competent teachers but also strong and sustainable collaboration between schools and families to ensure consistency in children's social-emotional development across learning environments.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce previous evidence regarding the importance of developing children's social-emotional competencies as an effective means of reducing aggressive behavior in early childhood. At the same time, this study offers a distinctive contribution by demonstrating that aggressive behavior can be addressed more effectively through the integrated, continuous, and collaborative implementation of Social-Emotional Learning, involving teachers, parents, and the broader school community. Consequently, this study not only explains the forms and underlying causes of aggressive behavior but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers implement Social-Emotional Learning as the primary educational strategy for addressing aggressive behavior among young children.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study conducted at RA Al Abror, it can be concluded that teachers play a central role in addressing aggressive behavior among young children through the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). Aggressive behavior, manifested in both

verbal forms (such as teasing and arguing) and non-verbal forms (such as hitting and damaging property), results from the interaction of multiple factors, including inappropriate parenting practices, children's limited emotional regulation abilities, and uncondusive family environments. In responding to these challenges, teachers assume multifaceted roles by creating a safe and supportive learning environment, identifying the underlying causes of aggressive behavior, implementing appropriate behavior management strategies, teaching social-emotional competencies, and collaborating with parents to support children's development.

The implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is carried out through preventive measures, direct interventions, and the systematic development of core social-emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and positive interpersonal relationships. The findings further indicate that the effectiveness of this approach is supported by teachers' commitment and a positive school climate. However, its implementation is constrained by several challenges, including teachers' limited competence in systematically applying SEL, insufficient parental involvement in reinforcing social-emotional learning at home, and limited educational resources. Therefore, the successful implementation of Social-Emotional Learning requires continuous professional development for teachers, active collaboration between schools and families, and adequate institutional support.

Thus, this study demonstrates that the consistent, comprehensive, and collaborative implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) constitutes an effective strategy for mitigating aggressive behavior while fostering healthy social-emotional development among young children. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on early childhood education by emphasizing that teachers' roles extend beyond classroom instruction to encompass emotional guidance, behavioral intervention, and collaborative partnerships that promote children's holistic development.

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