

The Influence of Parenting Style Types on the Empathy Skills of Children Aged 5–6 Years in Surabaya City

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ABSTRACT

Empathy skills in children aged 5–6 years constitute a fundamental foundation for social-emotional development and are substantially influenced by the quality of parenting within the family environment. However, empirical evidence regarding the comprehensive influence of Baumrind's three parenting styles on children's empathy remains limited. This study aimed to analyze the effects of authoritative (democratic), authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles on the empathy skills of children aged 5–6 years in Surabaya City using a quantitative causal-comparative (*ex post facto*) approach, as parenting variables cannot be manipulated experimentally. A total of 380 parents were selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire–Short Form (PSDQ-SF) and the Empathy Questionnaire (EmQue) Parents Report, and subsequently analyzed using multiple linear regression

preceded by classical assumption tests, the F-test, and the t-test. The findings revealed that the three parenting styles simultaneously exerted a significant influence on children's empathy ($F = 19.234$; $p < 0.001$). Partially, authoritative parenting demonstrated a significant positive effect ($B = 0.400$; $p < 0.001$), authoritarian parenting showed a significant negative effect ($B = -0.250$; $p < 0.001$), whereas permissive parenting did not exhibit a statistically significant effect ($p = 0.304$). The regression model explained 13.3% of the variance in children's empathy ($R^2 = 0.133$), indicating that the model's explanatory power remains relatively limited, with most of the variance attributable to other factors beyond parenting styles. These findings confirm that authoritative parenting is the strongest positive predictor in fostering empathy development among early childhood children.

Introduction

Empathy is one of the most fundamental social-emotional competencies in early childhood development (Aisah & Widiyaningrum, 2026; Leluni et al., 2026). At the global level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), through the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) 2023, classifies empathy as a component of *collaboration skills* that should be prioritized from the preschool years onward. Likewise, UNICEF emphasizes that empathy promotes prosocial behavior, enhances the quality of peer relationships, and prevents aggressive behavior and bullying (Cunsolo,

2021). According to Hoffman's theory, children's empathy encompasses three interrelated components: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Children not only experience the emotions of others but also learn to adopt others' perspectives and translate them into prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and comforting (Assyifa & Fauziah, 2026; Berardi et al., 2024). A cross-national study conducted by Kozloff et al. (2021), involving 792 children aged 6–10 years from seven countries, demonstrated that empathy develops progressively with age and is influenced by family environmental characteristics. During the age of 5–6 years, children enter the Empathy for Another's Feelings stage in Hoffman's theory, a critical developmental period in which they begin to recognize differences in others' emotions and respond to them more appropriately (Berardi et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence from Indonesia indicates that empathy among children aged 5–6 years remains relatively low and has not yet developed optimally, as reported in studies conducted in Bandar Lampung and Karawang (Fadlillah & Fauziah, 2022). Similar findings emerged from preliminary observations at TK Islam Al-Fatah, where approximately 50% of children demonstrated empathy levels below the expected average. Most children displayed egocentric behaviors, such as taking their peers' toys without considering others' feelings, showing little response when classmates cried, and inconsistently sharing food or play roles during group activities. Reza et al. (2022) further emphasized that developmental stimulation during early childhood

constitutes a crucial foundation for Indonesia's future advancement.

The study of empathy in early childhood cannot be separated from its ecological developmental context. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains that child development is shaped by reciprocal interactions between the child and multiple layers of the environment, ranging from the family as the microsystem to broader sociocultural values (Navarro & Tudge, 2023). Within this framework, the family occupies the most central role because it represents the child's first and primary environment for learning how to recognize, respond to, and express emotions (Saroinsong et al., 2021). Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, particularly the empathy dimension, reinforces this perspective by asserting that the ability to understand others' moods, motivations, and emotions develops through meaningful social interactions within a responsive caregiving environment (Goleman, 1995).

The most influential factor shaping children's empathy within the family environment is parenting style. According to Baumrind's parenting theory, parenting is characterized by two principal dimensions—demandingness and responsiveness (warmth)—whose combinations produce three major parenting styles: authoritative (democratic), authoritarian, and permissive (Carbone et al., 2025). These dimensions determine the extent to which children receive emotional guidance, opportunities to understand others' perspectives, and support for expressing and regulating emotions appropriately

(Fadlillah & Fauziah, 2022). Authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth and adaptive control, has consistently been associated with higher emotional intelligence and stronger social competence in early childhood, whereas authoritarian parenting is linked to children's limited ability to express and regulate emotions (Arta & Prahesti, 2024).

Erikson's psychosocial development theory complements this perspective by explaining that children aged 5–6 years are in the initiative versus guilt stage, a critical period during which parents' responses to children's initiatives determine the development of self-confidence, responsibility, and the courage to engage socially (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). Collectively, the grand theories proposed by Bronfenbrenner, Hoffman, and Erikson provide a comprehensive theoretical explanation for why parenting styles may substantially influence the development of empathy among children aged 5–6 years.

Data from Indonesia indicate considerable variation in parenting practices. A study conducted at TK Ar-Rasyid Payakumbuh found that 61.43% of parents adopted an authoritative (democratic) parenting style, whereas 29.05% practiced authoritarian parenting (Suryana & Sakti, 2022). Such diversity in parenting approaches results in different social-emotional experiences for children, thereby contributing to variations in empathy development.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between parenting and early childhood social-emotional development. Syafiqoh et al. (2026) investigated the effect of tiger parenting on empathy among

children aged 5–6 years in Batang Regency (n = 119) and found that parents' educational level moderated this relationship. Kurniawati et al. (2022) analyzed the influence of authoritative parenting on empathy among children aged 4–5 years in Lamongan using an *ex post facto* correlational design. Sa'diyah et al. (2025) examined the effect of parental empathy on children's empathy among 170 children aged 5–6 years in Purbalingga Regency, with parental education serving as a moderating variable. Meanwhile, Lapanda et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior among children aged 5–6 years using a correlational approach involving 25 participants.

Despite these studies, significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Most previous research has not positioned empathy as the primary dependent variable, has involved varying age groups (4–5 years or early childhood in general), and has not comprehensively examined the influence of all three parenting styles on the three dimensions of children's empathy—*affective*, *cognitive*, and *behavioral*—within a single integrated research framework. Furthermore, the metropolitan context of Surabaya City, characterized by highly diverse family backgrounds, has rarely been investigated specifically in relation to this topic. A bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer of literature published between 2020 and 2026 further confirmed that parenting styles and empathy remain positioned in separate research clusters. This gap highlights the urgency of the present study as an original contribution to strengthening the empirical

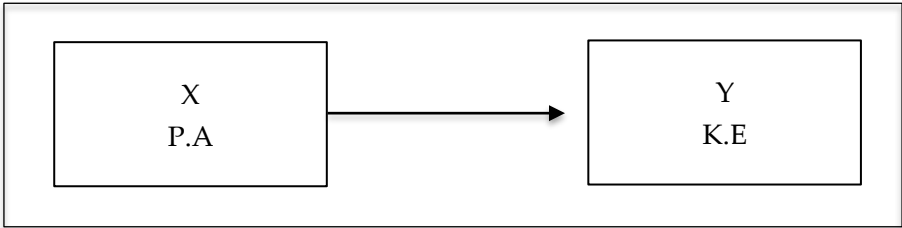
foundation for evidence-based parenting programs in Indonesia.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach using a causal-comparative (*ex post facto*) research design, analyzed through a multiple linear regression model. The study aimed to examine the simultaneous influence of parenting styles on the empathy skills of children aged 5–6 years and to analyze the partial effects of each parenting style—authoritative (democratic), authoritarian, and permissive—on children's empathy without administering any treatment or manipulation to the research variables (Sugiyono, 2022).

The independent variable (X) was parenting style, consisting of three parenting types based on Baumrind's theory: authoritarian (X1.1), permissive (X1.2), and authoritative/democratic (X1.3). The dependent variable (Y) was children's empathy skills.

Figure 1. Simultaneous Conceptual Model



The study was conducted in kindergartens throughout Surabaya City, East Java Province. Surabaya was selected as the research site because it is Indonesia's second-largest metropolitan city, characterized by considerable diversity in terms of socioeconomic status, cultural background, and parents' educational attainment. Such heterogeneity

provides a comprehensive representation of variations in parenting practices.

The study population comprised 61,892 kindergarten children enrolled in Surabaya City, according to data from the Education Portal as of April 27, 2026. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a required sample of 397 respondents (Fadel et al., 2024). The sampling technique employed was random sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of parents who had children aged 5–6 years and whose children were raised primarily by their parents. The exclusion criteria included parents who did not have children aged 5–6 years or whose children were not primarily cared for by their parents.

Data were collected using two standardized instruments, distributed to parents through an online questionnaire (Google Forms). Parenting style was measured using the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire–Short Form (PSDQ-SF) developed by Rahmawati et al. (2022) and adapted from Diana Baumrind's parenting theory. The instrument consisted of 22 items measured on a four-point frequency-based Likert scale: Always (4), Often (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1). It assessed Baumrind's three parenting dimensions: authoritative (11 items), authoritarian (7 items), and permissive (4 items). The instrument has demonstrated satisfactory construct validity and reliability within the Indonesian population, with an acceptable model fit ($p > 0.05$).

Children's empathy was measured using the Empathy Questionnaire (EmQue) Parents Report, developed by Silva et al. (2022) based on Hoffman's theory of empathy and adapted into 13 items. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument measured three dimensions of empathy: Emotion Contagion (4 items), Attention to Others' Emotions (4 items), and Prosocial Responses (5 items). The construct validity of the EmQue was confirmed through significant positive correlations among its dimensions: Emotion Contagion and Attention to Others' Emotions ($r = 0.38$; $p < 0.01$), Emotion Contagion and Prosocial Responses ($r = 0.42$; $p < 0.01$), and Attention to Others' Emotions and Prosocial Responses ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$). Because both instruments relied on the same source of information (parents), the study acknowledged the potential for common method bias, which should be considered when interpreting the findings (Kock et al., 2021).

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25 through four sequential stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize the initial distribution of the data. Second, validity testing was performed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, where an item was considered valid if the calculated correlation coefficient (r) exceeded the critical value, with interpretation referring to Aiken's guidelines (Diniarti & Sulianto, 2023). Third, reliability testing employed Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient greater than 0.70

considered acceptable (Guilford, as cited in Trianingsih, 2023). Fourth, the classical assumption tests included the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test ($p > 0.05$ indicating normal distribution), the linearity test, Levene's homogeneity test ($p > 0.05$ indicating homogeneous variance), the multicollinearity test (Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10), and the Glejser heteroscedasticity test ($p > 0.05$ indicating the absence of heteroscedasticity) (Priyatno, 2020). After all assumptions had been satisfied, hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple linear regression analysis, accompanied by the simultaneous F-test and the partial t-test.

Result and Discussions

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the distribution of the research data, including the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation for each study variable. The descriptive statistics for all research variables are presented below.

This study involved 380 parents from kindergartens in Surabaya City. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to summarize the distribution of each variable. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistical results.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
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Authoritative Parenting Style	380	16	44	36.44	4.333
Authoritarian Parenting Style	380	7	28	18.50	5.308
Permissive Parenting Style	380	3	12	7.81	2.458
Children's Empathy (Y)	380	15	40	31.34	4.419

Based on Table 1, the authoritative parenting style demonstrated the highest mean score ($M = 36.44$; $SD = 4.333$), indicating that this parenting style was relatively prevalent among the respondents. The authoritarian parenting style yielded a mean score of 18.50 ($SD = 5.308$), representing a moderate level. Meanwhile, the permissive parenting style showed the lowest mean score ($M = 7.81$; $SD = 2.458$). Regarding the dependent variable, children's empathy obtained a mean score of 31.34 ($SD = 4.419$), indicating a relatively high level of empathy among the participating children.

Instrument Validity Test

Before testing the hypotheses, the research instruments were evaluated to ensure the appropriateness of each questionnaire item. Validity testing was conducted using the Pearson Product–Moment

correlation coefficient, with an item considered valid if its calculated correlation coefficient (r-value) exceeded the critical value (r-table = 0.101) at the 5% significance level (df = 378).

Table 2. Validity Test Results for the Authoritative Parenting Style Scale

Item	r-value	r-table	Sig.	Interpretation
X1	0.455	0.101	0.000	Valid
X3	0.421	0.101	0.000	Valid
X4	0.601	0.101	0.000	Valid
X5	0.573	0.101	0.000	Valid
X8	0.454	0.101	0.000	Valid
X10	0.549	0.101	0.000	Valid
X11	0.568	0.101	0.000	Valid
X14	0.578	0.101	0.000	Valid
X16	0.529	0.101	0.000	Valid
X19	0.533	0.101	0.000	Valid
X20	0.538	0.101	0.000	Valid

As shown in Table 2, all 11 items measuring the authoritative parenting style obtained r-values ranging from 0.421 to 0.601, all of which exceeded the critical value (0.101) and were statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Therefore, all items were considered valid.

Table 3. Validity Test Results for the Authoritarian Parenting Style Scale

Item	r-value	r-table	Sig.	Interpretation
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X2R	0.813	0.101	0.000	Valid
X6R	0.768	0.101	0.000	Valid
X9R	0.790	0.101	0.000	Valid
X13R	0.777	0.101	0.000	Valid
X15R	0.703	0.101	0.000	Valid
X18R	0.798	0.101	0.000	Valid
X21R	0.448	0.101	0.000	Valid

Table 3 indicates that all seven items measuring the authoritarian parenting style demonstrated r-values ranging from 0.448 to 0.813, all exceeding the critical value and therefore meeting the criterion for validity.

Table 4. Validity Test Results for the Permissive Parenting Style Scale

Item	r-value	r-table	Sig.	Interpretation
X7R	0.779	0.101	0.000	Valid
X12R	0.770	0.101	0.000	Valid
X17R	0.850	0.101	0.000	Valid

As presented in Table 4, all three items assessing the permissive parenting style achieved r-values ranging from 0.770 to 0.850, indicating that every item satisfied the validity criterion.

Table 5. Validity Test Results for the Children's Empathy Scale

Item	r-value	r-table	Sig.	Interpretation
Y1	0.663	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y2	0.632	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y3	0.662	0.101	0.000	Valid

Y4	0.445	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y5	0.597	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y6	0.580	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y7	0.422	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y8	0.359	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y9	0.280	0.101	0.000	Valid
Y10	0.353	0.101	0.000	Valid

According to Table 5, all 10 items measuring children's empathy produced r-values ranging from 0.280 to 0.663, all exceeding the required threshold and therefore considered valid. The results of the instrument reliability test are presented in the following section.

Table 6. Reliability Test Results of the Research Instruments

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Interpretation
Authoritative Parenting Style	0.740	11	Reliable
Authoritarian Parenting Style	0.854	7	Reliable
Permissive Parenting Style	0.718	3	Reliable
Children's Empathy (Y)	0.686	10	Reliable

As presented in Table 6, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all research variables exceeded 0.60, namely 0.740 for the authoritative

parenting style, 0.854 for the authoritarian parenting style, 0.718 for the permissive parenting style, and 0.686 for children's empathy. Therefore, all research instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and were considered reliable for data collection.

Classical Assumption Tests

Prior to conducting multiple linear regression analysis, the data were subjected to several classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, autocorrelation, and heteroscedasticity tests. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the Classical Assumption Tests (Normality, Multicollinearity, and Autocorrelation)

Test	Variable	Test Statistic	Criterion	Interpretation
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	Unstandardized Residual	Statistic = 0.166; Sig. = 0.000; n = 380	Central Limit Theorem	Normally distributed
Multicollinearity	Authoritative Parenting	Tolerance = 0.804; VIF =	Tolerance > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity

		1.244		
	Authoritarian Parenting	Tolerance = 0.381; VIF = 2.624	Tolerance > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity
	Permissive Parenting	Tolerance = 0.408; VIF = 2.451	Tolerance > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity
Autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson)	Multiple Regression Model	DW = 1.078	Approximates $dU < DW < 4 - dU$	No substantial autocorrelation

Table 7 demonstrates that the research data satisfied all classical assumptions required for multiple linear regression analysis. Although the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.000, which is below the conventional threshold of 0.05, the relatively large sample size (n = 380) allows the Central Limit Theorem to justify the assumption of approximate normality. This conclusion was further supported by visual inspection of the residual histogram, which displayed an approximately bell-shaped distribution.

Furthermore, all independent variables exhibited Tolerance values

greater than 0.10 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below 10, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among the predictors. The Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.078 was considered acceptable for cross-sectional social science research, suggesting that no substantial autocorrelation was present. Additionally, the scatterplot of standardized residuals (ZRESID) against standardized predicted values (ZPRED) showed a random distribution of points without any discernible pattern, indicating that heteroscedasticity was not evident. Consequently, all classical assumptions were fulfilled, allowing the multiple linear regression analysis to proceed.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 8. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (Coefficient of Determination, F-test, and Partial t-test) Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.365
R Square	0.133
Adjusted R Square	0.126
Standard Error of the Estimate	4.131

Simultaneous F-test

Model	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Regression Model	19.234	0.000	Significant

Partial t-test and Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	t	Sig.	Interpretation
Constant	20.306	11.286	0.000	—

Authoritative Parenting (X ₁)	0.400	7.322	0.000	Significant (+)
Authoritarian Parenting (X ₂)	-0.250	-3.864	0.000	Significant (-)
Permissive Parenting (X ₃)	0.139	1.030	0.304	Not Significant

Table 8 summarizes the results of the multiple linear regression analysis. The R Square value of 0.133 indicates that the three parenting styles jointly explained 13.3% of the variance in children's empathy, while the remaining 86.7% was attributable to other factors outside the regression model, such as the social environment, peer interactions, and children's psychological characteristics.

The F-test yielded an F-value of 19.234 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles simultaneously exerted a statistically significant influence on the empathy skills of children aged 5–6 years in Surabaya City.

The resulting regression equation was:

$$Y = 20.306 + 0.400X_1 - 0.250X_2 + 0.139X_3$$

Partially, the authoritative parenting style (X₁) had a positive and statistically significant effect on children's empathy ($B = 0.400$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that every one-unit increase in authoritative parenting was associated with a 0.400-unit increase in children's empathy scores.

Conversely, the authoritarian parenting style (X₂) demonstrated a negative and statistically significant effect ($B = -0.250$; $p = 0.000$),

suggesting that an increase of one unit in authoritarian parenting was associated with a 0.250-unit decrease in children's empathy. In contrast, the permissive parenting style (X_3) did not have a statistically significant influence on children's empathy ($B = 0.139$; $p = 0.304 > 0.05$).

The findings of this study demonstrate that the authoritative parenting style exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the empathy skills of children aged 5–6 years. These findings support Baumrind's parenting theory, which posits that a balanced combination of parental warmth and appropriate behavioral control facilitates the optimal development of children's social-emotional competencies. Parents who are responsive, encourage open discussion, and explain the rationale behind family rules provide children with valuable opportunities to understand others' perspectives and emotions. These findings are also consistent with the study by Kurniawati et al. (2022), which reported a positive association between authoritative parenting and empathy among young children. From Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective, the family functions as the child's primary microsystem, where warm and responsive interactions shape children's earliest social experiences. Such an environment is consistent with Hoffman's theory, which explains that children aged 5–6 years are in the Empathy for Another's Feelings stage, during which the ability to understand others' emotions develops through positive and meaningful social interactions.

In contrast, the authoritarian parenting style was found to have a

negative and statistically significant effect on children's empathy. This finding reinforces the results reported by Arta and Prahesti (2024), who concluded that parenting characterized by absolute obedience and one-way communication constrains children's social-emotional development. According to Baumrind's theory, high parental control that is not accompanied by warmth encourages children to prioritize obedience rather than understanding the moral reasoning underlying appropriate behavior. From the perspective of Erikson's psychosocial development theory, children aged 5–6 years are in the initiative versus guilt stage; therefore, excessively controlling parental responses may inhibit children's social initiative and reduce their confidence in expressing concern for others (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). Similarly, Hoffman's theory suggests that authoritarian parenting provides fewer opportunities for children to practice perspective-taking and understand the emotions of others, thereby limiting the development of empathy.

The results further revealed that the permissive parenting style did not significantly influence children's empathy. This finding suggests that emotional warmth alone is insufficient to foster empathy unless it is accompanied by appropriate guidance, consistent boundaries, and parental supervision. The findings are consistent with previous research indicating that empathy develops through continuous modeling, guidance, and reinforcement of prosocial behaviors. This result also aligns with Baumrind's parenting theory, which explains that the

relatively low level of behavioral control characteristic of permissive parenting limits children's opportunities to develop social responsibility and self-regulation, thereby reducing their chances to cultivate empathic behavior optimally.

These findings have important practical implications for early childhood education. Educational institutions should strengthen parenting education programs to assist parents in adopting more authoritative and responsive parenting practices as a strategy for promoting children's empathy development. This recommendation is consistent with the objectives of early childhood education described by Adhe et al. (2025), namely establishing children's foundational knowledge, attitudes, and skills to prepare them for future life. Therefore, improving the quality of parenting within the family environment should be regarded as an essential component of achieving comprehensive early childhood educational goals.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that authoritative parenting, characterized by a balanced combination of parental warmth and adaptive behavioral control, represents a key factor in promoting the development of empathy among young children. Conversely, parenting practices that emphasize obedience without emotional warmth, as reflected in the authoritarian parenting style, should be minimized because they negatively affect children's empathy development. These findings imply that early childhood education institutions should

strengthen parenting education programs that encourage parents to adopt more authoritative and responsive parenting practices as part of a collaborative partnership between families and schools in supporting children's social-emotional development.

This study also has several limitations. First, both parenting style and children's empathy were measured using parental self-report, which may have introduced common method bias. Second, the contribution of parenting styles to children's empathy was relatively modest, indicating that the research model did not capture all relevant determinants of empathy development. Therefore, future studies are recommended to incorporate more diverse data sources, such as direct classroom observations or teacher reports, and to consider additional variables, including emotion regulation and peer interactions, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing empathy development in early childhood.

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