

The Impact of Sibling Rivalry on Children's Social Development in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

The family is the first and primary environment for a child's social development, where interactions between siblings—sibling rivalry—become a common dynamic influencing children's behavior and social growth. This study aims to understand in depth the impact of sibling rivalry on children's social development within Early Childhood Education (PAUD). This research employs a qualitative approach, with subjects consisting of early-age children experiencing sibling rivalry, their parents, and PAUD teachers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct field observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that poorly managed sibling rivalry negatively affects children's social development, indicated by emotional problems such as jealousy and low self-confidence, making it difficult for children to share, empathize, and build positive peer relationships at school. However, the study found that the crucial role of parents in applying fair and responsive parenting, along with teachers' use of emotional validation strategies, is effective in minimizing conflict. It is concluded that constructive and collaborative management

of sibling rivalry between parents and educators can transform this challenge into an opportunity for children to develop healthy and balanced social skills.

Introduction

The family is the first and foremost setting where all aspects of a child's development are shaped, especially their social development (Hanifah & Farida, 2023). Interaction among siblings is one of the earliest and deepest relationships within the family unit. This relationship is often characterized by complex dynamics known as sibling rivalry. This phenomenon, marked by jealousy, competition, and conflict between siblings, is frequently seen as a normal component of the developmental process. It is an essential element in child development, particularly in early childhood settings such as PAUD. At this stage, children begin learning to interact with their environment, build social relationships, and develop communication and emotional expression skills. However, families with more than one child often experience competitive dynamics, also known as sibling rivalry (Mansur, 2019). According to Gaol (2017: 24), the factors that contribute to sibling rivalry include parents dividing their attention among children, showing favoritism toward certain children, and children's lack of self-understanding.

Children growing up together may experience sibling rivalry as they compete for attention, affection, and recognition from parents and other family members. This rivalry can influence children's social

development in various positive and negative ways (Tani, 2007).

In PAUD environments, where children begin learning to socialize with peers, understanding the influence of sibling rivalry becomes crucial. According to Aziza et al. (2025), poorly managed sibling rivalry may result in social difficulties such as problems sharing, low self-confidence, and aggressive behavior. Conversely, well-managed sibling rivalry can provide opportunities for children to learn conflict resolution and enhance their social capabilities (Prasetyo & Naqiyah, 2022).

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of sibling rivalry on social development in PAUD. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on exploring the experiences, perceptions, and social interactions of children, parents, and PAUD teachers in the context of sibling rivalry.

The research location was selected at a PAUD institution where children with siblings participate in learning activities. The subjects included young children experiencing sibling rivalry, their parents, and PAUD teachers who observe children's social development. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with parents and teachers, aimed at obtaining insights into children's social behavior and experiences related to sibling rivalry. Observation was used to allow the researcher to obtain data directly from the field and to observe real-life

conditions. Documentation was used to strengthen field data through photographs and recorded interviews.

Result and Discussions

Based on various studies, the impact of sibling rivalry on children's social development in PAUD shows significant influence. Research by Amalia et al. (2024) reveals that sibling rivalry can trigger emotional difficulties in preschool-aged children, which then negatively affect their interactions with peers and wider social environments. According to Khoiruddin (2018), children with social-emotional developmental problems tend to experience major obstacles in friendships, social adjustment, behavior, and academics. They are at risk of social exclusion, isolation, withdrawal, shyness, and loneliness. A supportive and understanding family environment allows children to grow happily, actively, and enthusiastically. The absence of such an environment hampers the development of crucial early social skills.

Parents play an essential role in addressing the negative impact of sibling rivalry. Research by Aziza et al. (2025) emphasizes that parents who are fair and responsive in interacting with their children can reduce sibling conflict and competition. Balanced attention helps decrease jealousy—often the root of sibling rivalry.

Further discussions reveal that unmanaged sibling rivalry may lead to emotional issues such as insecurity, jealousy, and low self-esteem, all of which negatively affect children's social abilities and hinder the development of positive peer relationships (Kinasih, 2019). In PAUD,

where social skills are developing, this becomes a challenge for children learning to share, empathize, and communicate. Thus, the role of parents and teachers is highly significant in guiding children to manage sibling conflict in healthy and constructive ways (Ayub et al., 2024). This aligns with Syauqi (2025), who explains that a loving, fair, and consistent parenting approach creates a harmonious family environment that supports optimal social development.

PAUD educators must collaborate with parents to identify sibling rivalry and provide effective strategies for managing it. Training and educational programs for parents and teachers on how to handle sibling rivalry can serve as effective preventive measures (Elyta & Mutia, 2022). By doing so, the negative impacts can be minimized, allowing children to grow with strong social skills needed for future social life.

Field Interview and Observation Findings

Interview results with an experienced PAUD teacher (eight years) revealed recurring classroom incidents—small dramas reflective of sibling rivalry at home. A six-year-old boy grabbed a colored pencil from his five-year-old sister, shouting, “This is mine!”

Figure 1. Documentation of classroom activities.



On another day, the younger sibling cried because she wanted a picture her brother had drawn.

Figure 2. Documentation during dismissal time.



For outsiders, these may seem like ordinary child behavior. However, for PAUD teachers, these incidents echo the dynamics occurring at home. “Children don’t come to school as blank slates,” said Teacher A. “They bring their entire world with them—including relationships with siblings. Rivalry at home often carries over into classroom interactions.”

At school, teachers do not act as referees; instead, they focus on emotional foundations.

“The key is validation. When a child is angry because their toy was

taken, I say, ‘I know you’re angry. It’s okay to be angry, but hitting your friend is not okay.’ We name their emotions and guide their behavior.”

Interviews with parents of two children—a five-year-old and a four-year-old—reveal similar dynamics. The one-year age gap creates constant energy and endless competition. According to Mother R:

“Every day feels like being a referee. They fight over the same toys, compare who gets more milk, or who gets hugged first when we arrive home from work. Because they’re so close in age, the idea of ‘older sibling should give in’ doesn’t make sense to them.”

Figure 3. Documentation of play activities at home.



Father B added that exhaustion is the biggest challenge; when parents are tired, patience is reduced.

“At first, we often reflexively said, ‘Look, your little sister can do it—why can’t you?’ We realized that was poisonous. It only sharpened the rivalry.”

Their solution was to remove comparisons entirely. Praise became

individualized and specific. During heated conflicts, they no longer used separating time-outs but instead used time-ins—hugging both children to calm them before discussing the incident.

The most effective strategy was the “special schedule”—every weekend, one parent spends exclusive one-on-one time with each child. Mother R reported significant improvements:

From the two perspectives—teachers at school and parents at home—a powerful conclusion emerges: managing sibling rivalry is not about eliminating competition but guiding it wisely. The key lies in adults seeing each child as unique, validating feelings without judgment, and ensuring each child feels wholly loved. Whether at school or at home, the message must remain the same: love is not divided—it multiplies.

According to Hasanah & Istiqomah (2024), although sibling rivalry is common in families with more than one child, its impact on social development in PAUD cannot be underestimated. Sinambela & Simanjuntak (2025) affirm that with proper management from parents and educators, negative effects can be minimized, allowing children to achieve healthy and balanced social-emotional development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that sibling rivalry affects children’s social development in Early Childhood Education (PAUD). The rivalry occurs not only at home but also influences school interactions, disrupting children’s peer relationships. When poorly managed, sibling rivalry

leads to emotional problems such as jealousy, insecurity, and low self-confidence, resulting in social difficulties including aggression and challenges in forming friendships.

However, the roles of parents and educators are crucial in mitigating negative impacts. Strategies such as avoiding comparisons, giving specific praise, and creating special one-on-one time have been proven effective. At school, emotional validation helps children understand and manage their feelings. In conclusion, sibling rivalry does not need to be eliminated but managed wisely. Collaboration between fair and loving parents and emotionally supportive educators can transform rivalry into valuable learning opportunities, helping children develop empathy and essential social skills for their future.

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