



The Meaning of Teacher-Child Interaction in the Formation of Prosocial and Moral-Religious Character in Early Childhood: A Phenomenological Study at the Lab School Kindergarten Faculty of Education UMJ

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the meaning and practice of teacher-child interactions in shaping prosocial and moral-religious character in early childhood education. The study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand the subjective experiences of teachers in building children's character through daily interactions. The research subjects consisted of four teachers at the Lab School FIP UMJ kindergarten. Data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, then analyzed using data reduction techniques, open coding, thematic categorization, and essential meaning extraction. The results showed that teacher-child interactions were interpreted as a dialogical, reflective, and exemplary relational process. The practice of interaction in shaping prosocial character was manifested through conflict mediation, sharing habits, positive reinforcement, and empathy development. Meanwhile, moral-religious character building is carried out through the habit of worship, the use of polite language, behavioral reflection, and the internalization of values through the real example of teachers. The challenges faced include differences in family backgrounds, consistency in habits, and the dynamics of children's emotional regulation. This study confirms that the quality of teacher-child interaction is a strategic foundation in ensuring the quality of character education in early childhood education.

Keywords: *Teacher-Child Interaction; Prosocial Character; Moral-Religious Character; ECE.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) is the main foundation in shaping human quality in the next stage of development. Early childhood is a period when the human brain is highly receptive to various experiences. During this extended childhood period, they develop a large brain and have the experiences needed to become competent adults in a complex society (Santrock, 2017). Childhood is a period when the human brain is highly sensitive to experiences. As individuals, children have personalities or characteristics that cannot be compared to other children. Individual strategies or approaches are important because each child has different characteristics and uniqueness (Siyami, 2023). During early childhood, children undergo a period of rapid development, so that their learning experiences will have a long-term impact on the formation of their personality, values, and social attitudes. Therefore, education at this stage should emphasize not only cognitive aspects, but also character building as the basis for holistic development.

Children are both individuals and social beings. Friedrich Froebel's educational theory emphasizes the importance of holistic child development through education that involves real experiences, play, and social interaction (Fathoni, 2024). In the context of early childhood education, children's social environment, including family, peers, and teachers, plays an important role in how they perceive and learn. Piaget and Vygotsky have different approaches to socialization in early childhood:

Tabel 1. *Piaget and Vygotsky Approach*
(Trundle & Saçkes, 2015)

Piaget's Approach	Vygotsky's Approach
<p>Piaget emphasizes that children acquire knowledge through direct experiences and their own explorations.</p> <p>For Piaget, play facilitates assimilation (fitting new information into existing schemas) and accommodation (adapting schemas), which together help balance and expand understanding. This process allows children to build knowledge independently without relying on adults for direction</p>	<p>Vygotsky views play as essential for advancing cognitive development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children can perform tasks with guidance that they cannot do alone.</p> <p>Vygotsky emphasizes the social aspect of learning, seeing play as structured with rules, where children create imaginary scenarios, adopt roles, and follow role-specific rules. This structured play supports self-regulation and cognitive growth through social interactions</p>

Both Piaget and Vygotsky approaches place children as active subjects in learning, with Piaget emphasizing the construction of knowledge through independent exploration, while Vygotsky highlights the importance of social interaction and guidance in developing children's abilities. These two views show that children's cognitive and social development occurs through direct experience and collaboration with their surroundings. In line with this, Constructivist Philosophy asserts that children's knowledge and social skills are actively built through interaction, cooperation, and meaningful experiences in their social context.

Constructivism encourages reflection in the learning process, encouraging children to rethink their learning experiences. Teachers can use reflective journals or end-of-lesson discussion sessions where children review what they have learned and how they understand the concepts. The implementation of constructivist learning theory involves teachers providing

encouragement and motivation in learning (Shidiq et al., 2024). The role of children's participation in their communities as a function of their developing knowledge (Edwards, 2005). Constructivism changes the role of the teacher in an effort to help him/her encourage learners to construct new knowledge rather than reproduce already gained knowledge (Triantafyllou, 2024). One of key concepts of constructivism in education is that knowledge should not be passively received but contributed by cognizing subject activity by learners (Ameen, 2023). At this age, children are very open to new stimuli and experiences that can enrich the way they understand the world. The learning process in early childhood is greatly influenced by the social and emotional environment they experience. Children learn a lot from their interactions with parents, teachers, and peers. Positive social experiences will shape their ability to manage emotions, work together, and build healthy relationships. One aspect related to social skills is prosocial behavior.

In the sociocultural perspective proposed by Lev Vygotsky, child development occurs through social mediation, namely interaction with more competent individuals. Through the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), Vygotsky shows that a person can learn better with the help of others who are more skilled (Tohari & Rahman, 2024). Teachers, as significant figures, play a central role in facilitating the internalization of values through daily interactions. The existence of interpersonal relationships among children in the classroom, such as teacher-child, child-teacher, and child-child interactions, will become an interesting social learning process for children (Kusumawati & Zuchdi, 2019). Thus, the quality of teacher-child interaction becomes the primary medium in the character-building process.

Prosocial traits such as empathy, cooperation, caring, and sharing are important indicators of a child's social readiness to interact with their environment. However, this contradicts the findings of a study by Syamsudin et al., which found that not all schools have adequate resources to implement character education comprehensively, resulting in less than optimal outcomes (Syamsudin & Hadi, 2025). In fact, according to Putri, resources in the learning process can lead to the educational goals themselves (D. K. Putri et al., 2020). Where the goal of education is not only about academic values, students today are dominated by the alpha generation, and research by Mau'idah et al. shows that the morals of the alpha generation have been declining or degrading from year to year (JS et al., 2022). Based on this, character education should be implemented at the smallest level and started as early as possible in order to produce a future generation with good character (Hamidah, 2017). On the other hand, moral-religious characteristics such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and awareness of worship form the foundation of children's ethics and spirituality from an early age. Both dimensions develop through concrete experiences and interactions that children encounter in the educational environment.

In the context of Islamic-based early childhood education, character building, in the author's view, is not only oriented towards social behavior, but also towards the internalization of moral and spiritual values. Putri et al. explained the results of their research, which showed that out of 10 children, 10% were still in the beginning stages of development (MB), 60% were developing as expected (BSH), and 30% were developing very well (BSB) (P. N. Putri & Loka, 2025). Firiani explained the results of her research, which showed that instilling spiritual values in children can be done by listening to stories with spiritual or religious content (Fitriani, 2018). However, in reality, the process of internalizing values that has been implemented in schools

and formal and non-formal institutions has not been successful in changing the character of each student. This is because many educational institutions in Indonesia only provide education in the form of theoretical knowledge transfer, without accompanying it with the transfer of values (Nurfadilah, 2025). The cultivation of spiritual values for every student in every educational institution is considered very important in order to shape a soul with good character as a provision for the personal life of a student (Nuryadi et al., 2024). Character education is integrated into the learning routine through habituation, exemplary behavior, and reinforcement of values in various classroom activities. This process requires consistency and reflective awareness from teachers as the main implementers of learning.

Although character education has become a major concern in early childhood education practices, studies exploring how teachers interpret pedagogical interactions in shaping children's character are still relatively limited. Most previous research, both at the national and international levels, has focused primarily on programs, strategies, or curricula in character education, while the dimension of teachers' subjective experiences in pedagogical interactions remains relatively under-explored. Some studies have begun to explore teachers' experiences, such as how teachers interpret teaching practices in the context of equity, which results in different perceptual profiles among teachers within their respective contexts (Rubin & van Es, 2025), as well as how dominant narratives such as labeling children as "fast" and "slow" can influence the way teachers respond to children's learning processes (Rubin & van Es, 2023). In fact, understanding teachers' experiences is important for revealing the relational dynamics that occur in character building. Pedagogical interactions are not merely instructional activities, but rather dialogical processes that involve emotions, values, and reflection. Therefore, a research approach that is capable of exploring the deeper meaning of these experiences is needed.

Nevertheless, research on teacher–student interactions in character education has thus far tended to be dominated by quantitative approaches that focus on measuring behavior, program effectiveness, or children's developmental achievements. While these approaches provide measurable insights, they have not yet fully captured the deeper meaning of the interactive experiences teachers encounter in their daily teaching practices. In fact, the process of character formation does not only take place at the level of observable behavior but also through relational dynamics, reflection, and subjective interpretation. In this context, the perspective of the teacher as the primary agent of interaction is a key factor that remains relatively under-explored. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of teachers' lived experiences in shaping the character of young children.

Based on this background, this study aims to reveal the essence of teachers' experiences in shaping the prosocial and moral-religious character of early childhood through pedagogical interactions. The phenomenological approach was chosen to understand the meaning of experience in depth so as to obtain a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of character formation in early childhood education practices.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design rooted in Edmund Husserl's thinking. The procedure of phenomenology is well suited to handle one set of problems, in phenomenology, where it properly means restriction to the objects and contents of the experiences themselves (Farber, 2017). The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study focuses on exploring the meaning of teachers' subjective experiences

in shaping children's character through pedagogical interactions. In phenomenological studies, experience is defined as an experience consciously experienced by a person, a group of people, or a group of living animals (conscious experience) (Nasir et al., 2023). Phenomenology enables researchers to explore participants' awareness, reflections, and interpretations of the experiences they undergo in their daily learning practices. In line with the principle of prolonged engagement in qualitative research, this study was conducted over a two-month period, from November to December 2025. This timeframe allowed the researcher to engage intensively through repeated observations and in-depth interviews, enabling a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the participants' experiences.

Tabel 1. *Piaget and Vygotsky Approach*
(Trundle & Saçkes, 2015)

No	Sub-research	Interview Questions	Observation Instruments	Documentation Instruments
1	The Meaning of Teacher-Child Interaction from the Teacher's Perspective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you interpret teacher-child interactions in everyday learning? What is the significance of these interactions in shaping children's character? Can you share your most memorable experience related to character building? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher responsiveness Communication patterns 	School vision & mission Educational orientation
2	Interaction Practices in the Formation of Prosocial Character	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you guide your child when conflicts arise? How do you instill a sense of sharing and empathy? What forms of reinforcement do you typically provide? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict mediation Strengthening sharing Group work 	RPPH Integration of values in learning
3	Interaction Practices in the Formation of Moral-Religious Character	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How are values of honesty taught in class? How are prayer and worship habits instilled? What are the challenges in instilling religious values? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Prayer habits Role models Values connection 	Religious habit program Consistency in religious values
4	Challenges and Dynamics in Character Formation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is the biggest challenge in shaping a child's character? How does family background influence this? How do you feel when dealing with a child who is difficult to guide? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Response to negative behavior Consistency of rules 	Parent communication book Home-school synchronization

Source: Processed by Researchers

The subjects of this study consisted of four teachers selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria. These criteria included: (1) having at least three years of teaching experience in early childhood education, (2) having an educational background relevant to early childhood education, (3) being actively involved in daily classroom learning processes, and (4) possessing the ability to reflectively describe their interactions with children. These criteria were selected to ensure that participants possess sufficient and in-depth experience, enabling them to provide essential meaning regarding teacher-child interactions in character development.

This approach is relevant to the research objective, which is not merely to describe learning practices, but to understand the essence of teachers' experiences in the process of internalizing character values. Thus, phenomenology provides a systematic framework for identifying the underlying meaning structure of these experiences. The research was conducted at the FIP UMJ Lab School Kindergarten, South Tangerang City, Banten, as an early childhood education unit based on Islamic values that places character education as an integral part of the learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study provide a broad overview of how teacher-child interaction contributes to the formation of prosocial and moral-religious character in early childhood. These results discuss the meaning of teacher-child interaction from the teacher's perspective, interaction practices in the formation of prosocial character, interaction practices in the formation of moral-religious character, and challenges and dynamics in character formation.

The Meaning of Teacher-Child Interaction from the Teacher's Perspective

The analysis shows that teachers interpret teacher-child interactions as a relational foundation that builds emotional attachment and a sense of security as prerequisites for learning. These interactions are not merely instructional communication, but a process of building closeness that allows children to feel valued and accepted. This can be seen from the interview results:

“Jika interaksinya hangat dan positif, anak lebih terbuka dan nyaman” (CWG4., Sub1., Bag1., jwb2)”.

The data shows that the meaning of interaction lies in a strong affective dimension. Teachers view presence, attention, and patience as the core of the learning process. This can be seen from the interview results:

“Guru bukan hanya mengajar, tetapi hadir dalam setiap proses anak” (CWG1., Sub1., Bag1., jwb5)”.

The meaning of interaction is also understood as a form of tangible role modeling. Teachers realize that every behavior, word, and expression becomes a model for children.

“Cara kita berbicara, merespon konflik, bahkan ekspresi wajah menjadi contoh” (CWG2., Sub1., Bag1., jwb3).

These findings reinforce each other, showing that interaction is interpreted as a continuous process of character modeling in everyday life. In addition to attachment and role modeling, interaction is also interpreted as two-way communication that provides space for children's voices. Teachers do not position children as passive recipients of instruction.

“Anak harus diberi ruang untuk menyampaikan pendapatnya” (CWG2., Sub1., Bag1., jwb5).

This understanding is consistent with the view that interaction is a means of indirectly instilling values through relational experiences:

“Nilai tidak cukup disampaikan lewat cerita, tetapi melalui pengalaman dalam hubungan dengan guru” (CWG3., Sub1., Bag1., jwb2).

Furthermore, teachers interpret interaction as a repetitive process of habituation that gradually shapes character:

“Pembentukan karakter tidak bisa instan. Ia tumbuh dari proses interaksi yang berkelanjutan” (CWG4., Sub1., Bag2., jwb3).

Interestingly, teachers also see interaction as a space for reflection, not only for children but also for themselves:

“Interaksi adalah ruang refleksi, baik untuk anak maupun guru” (CWG4., Sub1., Bag1., jwb4),

Overall, these findings indicate that teacher-child interactions are multidimensional: they are affective spaces, moral examples, dialogic communication, media for internalizing values, and ongoing habituation processes. Interactions are not merely pedagogical strategies, but relational foundations that enable children's characters to be formed through consistent and meaningful experiences. This is consistent with the following documentation:



Figure 1. Teacher and Child Instructions

Interaction Practices in the Formation of Prosocial Character

The analysis shows that teachers interpret the practice of interaction in the formation of prosocial character as a dialogical process that treats conflict as a space for social learning, rather than simply a violation that must be stopped. This is evident in the way teachers do not immediately blame children when conflict arises, but instead open up space for communication. This is evident in the following interview excerpt:

“Saya mencoba menenangkan situasi terlebih dahulu. Anak yang sedang marah sulit diajak berpikir” (CWG4., Sub2., Bag1., jwb1).

The data shows that interactions in conflicts are not only about problem solving, but also about learning social perspectives and regulating emotions. Furthermore, the formation of sharing and empathy is achieved through direct role modeling and consistent habituation. Teachers realize that young children learn mainly through imitation of behavior.

“Kalau kamu di posisi itu, bagaimana rasanya?” (CWG3., Sub2., Bag2., jwb1).

The combination of modeling, concrete experiences, and emotional reflection shows that empathy is constructed through relational experiences, not just verbal instructions. In reinforcing prosocial behavior, teachers prioritize positive reinforcement over punishment. This can be seen in the variety of forms of appreciation given:

“Kadang saya memberi stiker sebagai bentuk apresiasi” (CWG1., Sub2., Bag3., jwb2),

This consistent strengthening is in line with the statement that empowerment is associated with moral values:

“Saya mengaitkan dengan nilai moral, seperti mengatakan bahwa berbagi adalah perbuatan baik yang disukai Allah” (CWG4., Sub2., Bag3., jwb2).

These findings complement each other and show that practices of interaction in the formation of prosocial character have a consistent pattern: dialogical, reflective, based on role modeling, and reinforced through positive appreciation. Interaction is not understood as behavioral control, but as a relational process that enables children to build empathy, cooperation, and the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully. This is in line with the following documentatio:



Figure 2. A Child Socializing with His Friend

Interaction Practices in Moral-Religious Character Building

The results of the study show that the practice of interaction in the formation of moral-religious character is carried out through the integration of religious values into daily life, exemplary behavior, ritual habits, and a contextual reflective approach. Moral values are not taught as separate subjects, but are brought to life in teacher-child relationships. Teachers view interaction as the main medium for the internalization of religious values because young children learn through direct experience. As shown in the interview results:

“Saya mengaitkan setiap perilaku baik dengan nilai agama, misalnya mengatakan bahwa berbagi adalah perbuatan yang disukai Allah” (CWG4., Sub2., Bag3., jwb2).

This data shows that morality is not separated from the spiritual context, but is embedded in daily interactions. The practice of rituals is an important part of shaping moral and religious character. Teachers not only instruct, but also directly accompany children.

“Kami membiasakan doa sebelum dan sesudah kegiatan” (CWG1., Sub3., Bag1., jwb1),

This guidance is not rigid, but is carried out with a warm approach so that children understand the meaning behind these religious activities. In addition to rituals, moral values are instilled through teachers' responses to children's behavior. When inappropriate behavior occurs, teachers choose a reflective approach rather than harsh punishment.

“Jika ada perilaku yang kurang baik, saya mengajak anak berdiskusi tentang konsekuensinya” (CWG4., Sub2., Bag3., jwb1),

yang melengkapi praktik empatik sebelumnya dalam konflik sosial (CWG1., Sub2., Bag1., jwb2). This means that moral and prosocial dimensions are integrated in interactions. Role modeling is central to the formation of moral-religious character. Teachers realize that children imitate the real behaviors they see.

“Apa yang guru lakukan setiap hari akan ditiru oleh anak” (CWG2., Sub1., Bag1., jwb2),

so that the consistency of teachers' attitudes in speaking politely, being patient, and demonstrating religious behavior becomes an important foundation. One teacher said:

“Saya berusaha menjaga ucapan dan sikap karena anak sangat peka terhadap contoh” (CWG3., Sub3., Bag2., jwb1).

Morality is not taught as a doctrine, but is brought to life through warm, consistent, and meaningful relationships. This is in accordance with the following documentation:



Figure 3. Efforts to synchronize activities with the surrounding environment

These findings indicate that moral-religious values are formed through a process of repeated and consistent modeling. Furthermore, teachers interpret the formation of moral-religious character as a gradual process that requires repetition and patience.

“Pembentukan karakter tidak bisa instan. Ia tumbuh dari proses interaksi yang berkelanjutan” (CWG4., Sub1., Bag2., jwb3),

This also applies in the context of religious values. Values are not immediately understood, but are internalized through continuous relational experiences. Overall, the practice of interaction in the formation of moral-religious character in the classroom shows a consistent pattern: integration of values into daily life, ritual habits, moral exemplarity, and reflective dialogue when behavioral deviations occur.

Challenges and Dynamics in Character Building

The results of the study show that the formation of prosocial and moral-religious character does not take place in ideal situations, but is marked by various complex dynamics and challenges. Teachers realize that children's character is not only shaped by interactions at school, but is also influenced by the family environment and external exposures. One teacher explained in an interview as follows:

“Tantangan terbesar adalah perbedaan pola asuh di rumah dan di sekolah” (CWG1., Sub4., Bag1., jwb1),

This data shows that there is a discrepancy in values that affects the consistency of character internalization in children. In addition to family factors, emotional regulation in early childhood is also a dynamic factor. Teachers realize that children's emotional development is still fluctuating.

“Kami harus mengingatkan berulang-ulang karena anak mudah lupa” (CWG4., Sub4., Bag1., jwb2).

Another challenge arises from the differences in children's individual characters. Not all children respond effectively to the same approach.

“Setiap anak memiliki latar belakang dan karakter yang berbeda, jadi pendekatannya tidak bisa disamaratakan” (CWG2., Sub4., Bag2., jwb1),

This means that character building is contextual and personal. Teachers also reflect their own internal dynamics. Character building in children requires consistency and exemplary behavior, which is not always easy to maintain.

“Kami sebagai guru juga harus terus belajar mengendalikan emosi” (CWG3., Sub4., Bag2., jwb2),

These findings indicate that the challenge of character building lies not only with children, but also with teachers' readiness and quality of self-reflection. In addition, time dynamics and curriculum demands also affect the intensity of interaction. However, teachers continue to view these challenges as an integral part of their professional duties.

“Pembentukan karakter memang tidak instan, tetapi harus terus diupayakan dalam setiap kesempatan interaksi” (CWG4., Sub1., Bag2., jwb3).

Overall, the challenges in character building include inconsistencies in parenting styles, fluctuating emotional development in children, differences in individual character, time constraints, and the demand for consistency in teacher role modeling. These dynamics show that character building is a complex, contextual, relational process that requires continuous reflection.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teacher–child interactions serve not only as a means of communication in learning but also as a primary mechanism in shaping the character of young children through emotional, dialogic, and reflective relationships. This process occurs gradually through interactive practices such as modeling, reinforcement, and conflict mediation, which enable children to experience, imitate, and interpret values in real-life contexts. To provide a more systematic overview, please refer to the attached flowchart:

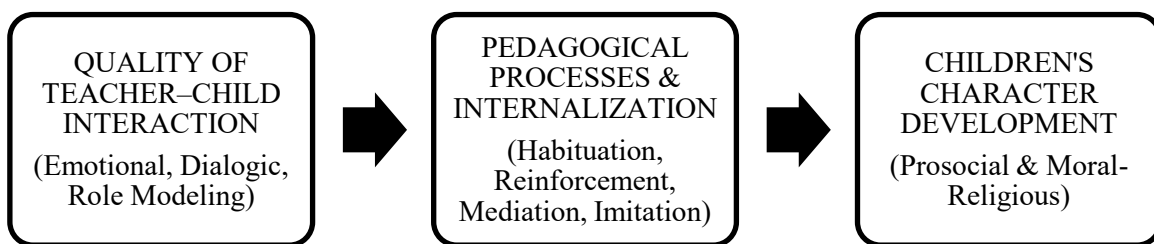


Figure 4. Conceptual Flowchart

Based on this conceptual framework, it can be understood that children’s character development is the result of meaningful and sustained interactions in daily learning practices, which are influenced not only by the quality of teacher–child relationships but also by the surrounding contextual factors. Interaction serves as the foundation that drives the gradual process of internalizing values, ultimately shaping children’s prosocial and moral-religious character. To deepen our understanding of these dynamics, the following discussion will elaborate more specifically on the meaning of teacher–child interaction, practices for fostering prosocial character, practices for fostering moral-religious character, as well as the challenges and dynamics encountered in the process of character development in early childhood.

The Meaning of Teacher–Child Interaction from the Teacher's Perspective

Research findings show that teachers interpret interaction as a dialogical process that enables children to build understanding through everyday social experiences. Interaction is not understood merely as instructional communication, but as a space for the exchange of meaning that shapes the way children understand themselves, others, and the values that exist in their environment. This view is in line with Jean Piaget's thinking, which explains that Evidently Piaget's own position states that social elements are indeed essential to the formation of knowledge, whether pre-scientific or scientific and, as such, are constitutive or defining elements of the growth of knowledge (Genesis, 1996). Social elements are essential in the

formation of knowledge, both at the pre-scientific and scientific stages. Since Piaget's theory of equilibrium, since one of the key requisites of this process was social relationship, so this construct or process has been extended to take into account the social cultural context (Bormanaki & Khoshhal, 2017). Piaget's statement is reinforced by the results of White's research, which explains that The sociocultural understanding that learning precedes development provides a sound footing for the pedagogy of an ICE program designed to encourage the character adaptations that support prosocial development (White & Shin, 2017). In the context of early childhood education, attachment to teachers acts as a secure base that allows children to explore and learn optimally. From this perspective, the process of assimilation and accommodation experienced by children takes place through relational experiences, including dialogue, negotiation, and meaningful social conflict.

On the other hand, interpreting interaction as role modeling reinforces its relevance to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which asserts that children learn through observation and imitation of significant models around them. Social learning theory describes the idea that people learn not only by directly performing a task but also by means of three main social processes: observation, modeling, and imitation (Allan, 2017). Teachers who realize that their attitudes, expressions, and responses will be imitated demonstrate a high level of reflective awareness of the role of modeling in character formation. Previous studies in early childhood character education also confirm that the quality of teacher-child relationships is positively correlated with the development of self-regulation and prosocial behavior. Bandura's theory is reinforced by the results of Elksnin's research, namely Learning social skills early in life is predictive of children's ability to adjust to society and be productive members of their culture (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2000). Therefore, these findings show that the meaning of interaction from the teacher's perspective is not merely practical, but has a strong theoretical basis in developmental and educational psychology.

Interaction Practices in the Formation of Prosocial Character

The practice of dialogic and reflective interaction in conflict resolution is consistent with the social constructivist approach, which views conflict as an opportunity for social learning. When teachers engage children in discussions about their friends' feelings and seek solutions together. This condition is similar to Lev Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which he described as the "difference between the level of solved tasks that can be performed with adult guidance and help, and the level of independently solved tasks" (Dolya, 2010). Children are not only guided to stop negative behavior, but also guided to understand other people's perspectives, which is the core of empathy development. In these social interactions, children learn to master specific cultural tools that enable them to solve intellectual problems and master their own behavior (Der Veer, 2007). Reinforced by Henrich's research findings, developmental pathways and the expression of prosocial actions are moderated by learning and culture (Henrich, 2015). This view emphasizes that through social interaction, children learn cultural tools that shape their thinking and self-control abilities, so that their development and expression of prosocial behavior are significantly influenced by the learning process and cultural context in which they grow up. In addition, a non-punitive and reflective approach is in line with the positive discipline paradigm, which emphasizes the formation of internal moral awareness rather than mere external obedience.

Furthermore, consistent modeling and positive reinforcement reinforce Albert Bandura's observational learning theory. The children's social behavior was assessed on the basis of teacher ratings assuming that the children's actual social behavior in the school setting was mediated by their corresponding efficacy and outcome expectations, which in turn are determined by specific patterns of parent-child interactions (Bandura, 2017). This concept can also be linked to Skinner's concept of reinforcement. For Skinner, the key aspect of development is behavior, not thoughts and feelings. He emphasized that development consists of the pattern of behavioral changes that are brought about by rewards and punishments (Santrock, 2017). This theory is consistent with the findings of Berkowitz's research, which explains that, for example, social skills training has been paired with contingency management in order to teach children how to interact more positively with their peers, and this combination has been found to be more effective in increasing prosocial behavior than contingency programs alone (Berkowitz, 2000). This view shows that children's social behavior at school is shaped by self-expectations influenced by patterns of parent-child interaction and reinforced through mechanisms such as rewards and consequences. In Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, early childhood educators hold a complex and influential role, affecting and being affected by multiple levels of a child's environment (Mustafa, 2025). Therefore, social skills training combined with behavioral reinforcement has been proven to be more effective in increasing prosocial behavior. Research in character education also shows that sharing and empathy develop more optimally in a supportive and emotionally responsive classroom environment. Thus, the interaction practices found in this study reflect the integration of dialogic, modeling, and reinforcement approaches as comprehensive strategies in shaping the prosocial character of early childhood.

Interaction Practices in Moral-Religious Character Building

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' exemplary behavior in religious practices, use of polite language, and reflective habits are more effective in shaping moral-religious character than merely conveying values symbolically or narratively. This is in line with the findings of Russell et al. that This finding supports the hypothesis that human characters are more effective than fantasy characters in facilitating prosocial behavior, such as sharing, in young children (Russell & Cain, 2022). Real human characters are more effective than fantasy characters in facilitating prosocial behavior in early childhood. The integration of religious values in daily interactions shows that the formation of moral-religious character takes place through a process of habituation and internalization of contextual values. The concept of school moral atmosphere (MA) as the set of values, norms and rules, regulating communication and interaction of associates, was proposed by researchers that develop L.Kohlberg's ideas (Karabanova & Sadovnikova, 2014). The practice of habitual prayer, linking behavior to spiritual values, and the moral example set by teachers is in line with the concept of virtue-based education, which emphasizes the importance of repeating good behavior until it becomes an internal disposition. Thus, teachers, as concrete models, play a central role in the process of internalizing values.

In addition, the practice of integrating religious values into interactions supports the view that spirituality in early childhood develops through concrete relational experiences. When teachers associate sharing behavior with shared values, the process not only shapes external

behavior but also builds an internal meaning of goodness. Reinforcing moral-religious values from an early age has long-term implications for children's social development. Bakken explains the results of his research that the growing evidence from the data for social skills lends strength to the notion that early education has long-term benefits for children (Bakken et al., 2017). In this context, consistent, reflective, and exemplary interaction practices in early childhood education not only shape momentary behavior but also have the potential to build a foundation for lasting character. Therefore, the results of this study reinforce the argument that moral-religious character grows from living and consistent relationships, not merely the transfer of religious knowledge.

Challenges and Dynamics in Character Building

The challenge of inconsistency between parenting styles at home and at school shows that character building is an ecological process involving various environmental systems. This finding is consistent with Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, which emphasizes the interaction between microsystems such as family and school in influencing child development. The individual, embedded within these interrelating circles, is affected by environmental forces, as is recognized within Ecological Systems Theory (Hertler et al., 2018). When the values instilled at school are not reinforced at home, the internalization process becomes less consistent. Therefore, character building requires synergistic collaboration between teachers and parents as part of quality-oriented educational governance.

On the other hand, the dynamics of children's emotional regulation and the demands for consistency in teacher role modeling show that character building also depends on the reflective competence of educators. Teachers who do not have the appropriate educational qualifications will be a source of problems. Shofiah explains that this condition occurs because the majority of teachers do not have an educational background in early childhood education or relevant related fields (Shofiah & Munandar, 2023). This situation raises concerns about the quality of early childhood education, as teachers who lack early childhood pedagogy tend to teach in a way that is not contextual and not in line with children's developmental stages.

Teachers not only serve as facilitators, but also as moral role models who must maintain the integrity of their behavior. Mockler explains the results of his research that teacher professional learning through the preferred version of teacher professionalism they uphold and the associated learning they promote in the advancement of that vision of professionalism (Mockler, 2022). Graham explains that better support and professional learning are necessary to improve the quality of teaching for all teachers (Graham et al., 2020). This statement can be summarized as follows: better support and professional learning are necessary to improve the quality of teaching for all teachers. This is in line with the literature on early childhood teacher professionalism, which emphasizes the importance of personal and social competencies in supporting the effectiveness of character education.

Thus, the challenges that arise cannot be viewed merely as obstacles, but rather as part of the complexity of the character-building process, which requires reflective awareness, systemic support, and continuous quality management. The implications of these findings suggest that early childhood education institutions need to integrate the quality of teacher-child interactions as a key indicator in their quality assurance systems, rather than focusing solely on administrative aspects. Additionally, teacher professional development programs should be directed toward strengthening reflective competencies, empathetic communication, and moral

exemplarity through ongoing training and academic supervision. At the policy level, synergy between schools and families is needed to ensure consistency in values during children's character development. Theoretically, these findings underscore the importance of a relational approach in character education, which places interaction at the core of the value-forming process in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the quality of teacher-child interaction is an essential foundation in shaping the prosocial and moral-religious character of early childhood. Warm, dialogical, reflective, and consistent interactions serve as a space for internalizing values that enable character to grow gradually through meaningful relational experiences. Character formation does not occur instantly or separately from context, but rather develops in the dynamics of daily relationships between teachers and children. Therefore, strengthening the quality of interaction is a strategic aspect in efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education, particularly in the development of sustainable and contextual character.

The researchers suggest that early childhood education institutions need to make the quality of teacher-child interactions a key indicator in their quality assurance systems, rather than focusing solely on administrative and curricular aspects. Strengthening teachers' capacity for empathetic communication, self-reflection, and moral exemplarity needs to be done through continuous training and constructive academic supervision. In addition, collaboration between schools and parents needs to be strengthened so that the prosocial and moral-religious values instilled in schools are consistently reinforced in the home environment. Further research can develop quality interaction evaluation instruments as part of a more systematic and measurable PAUD quality management model.

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