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Implementing Role-Playing to Develop Social Morality and Cooperation in Early Childhood: A Case Study of an Islamic Kindergarten

Penerapan Permainan Peran dalam Mengembangkan Akhlak Sosial dan Kerja Sama Anak Usia Dini: Studi Kasus di Taman Kanak-Kanak Islam

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Abstract

Early childhood education requires learning experiences that support not only cognitive development but also the formation of social morality and cooperation. This study examines how role-playing was implemented at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu Tanjung Payang, South Lahat, and how it contributed to children's social morality and cooperation. A qualitative case study design was used. Data were collected through passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents, and documentation, and were analyzed using an interactive model. The findings show that role-playing was implemented contextually through themes close to children's experiences, learning stimuli, simple play attributes, role distribution, and teacher facilitation. The activity gave children opportunities to practice respect, sharing, helping, empathy, responsibility, discipline, and care for others, and it supported cooperation through communication, task distribution, turn-taking, mutual assistance, respect for peers' opinions, and joint completion of activities. Observations, teacher interviews, and parent interviews yielded consistent information. The study concludes that contextually designed, participatory role-playing can serve as a learning strategy to support children's social morality and cooperation, particularly when it is reinforced by character habituation at school and at home. As a single-site qualitative case study, the findings are context-bound and do not establish causal relationships.

Keywords: cooperation; early childhood education; role-playing; social morality; social skills

Abstrak

Pendidikan anak usia dini memerlukan pengalaman belajar yang tidak hanya mendukung perkembangan kognitif, tetapi juga pembentukan akhlak sosial dan kerja sama. Penelitian ini mengkaji penerapan permainan peran di TK Islam Tunas Ilmu Tanjung Payang, Lahat Selatan, serta kontribusinya terhadap perkembangan akhlak sosial dan kerja sama anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif pasif, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan kepala sekolah, guru, dan orang tua, serta dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa permainan peran diterapkan secara kontekstual melalui tema yang dekat dengan pengalaman anak, stimulus pembelajaran, atribut permainan sederhana, pembagian peran, dan fasilitasi guru. Kegiatan tersebut memberi anak kesempatan untuk mempraktikkan sikap menghormati, berbagi, menolong, berempati, bertanggung jawab, disiplin, dan peduli terhadap orang lain, serta mendukung kerja sama melalui komunikasi, pembagian tugas,

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bergiliran, saling membantu, menghargai pendapat teman, dan penyelesaian kegiatan secara bersama-sama. Informasi dari observasi, wawancara guru, dan wawancara orang tua menunjukkan kesesuaian. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa permainan peran yang dirancang secara kontekstual dan partisipatif dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai strategi pembelajaran untuk mendukung akhlak sosial dan kerja sama anak, terutama apabila diperkuat melalui pembiasaan karakter di sekolah dan di rumah. Sebagai studi kasus kualitatif pada satu lembaga, temuan penelitian ini bersifat kontekstual dan tidak menunjukkan hubungan sebab-akibat.

Kata kunci: akhlak sosial; kerja sama; keterampilan sosial; pendidikan anak usia dini; permainan peran

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Introduction

Early childhood education is an important stage of child development because social, emotional, moral, and character aspects develop intensively during this period. Learning for young children therefore needs to be designed not only to support cognitive development but also to provide experiences that help children build social behavior and the ability to interact with their environment (Hikmawati & Winnuly, 2025; Sujiono, 2013). Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 137 of 2014 on the National Standards for Early Childhood Education also identifies social-emotional development as an important part of the standards for early childhood development, which should be stimulated through learning processes suited to children's characteristics (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014).

In the context of Islamic education, forming *akhlak* (morality) from an early age is important because children need to be habituated to behaving well toward others. In this study, social morality (*akhlak sosial*) is understood through behaviors that can be observed in children's interactions, such as respect, sharing, helping, empathy, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. These aspects are related to early childhood social skills, which include the ability to build relationships, interact, share, cooperate, and solve social problems constructively (Istianti, 2015). Research on preschool children has also linked emotional competence with social competence (Denham et al., 2003), and consistently implemented character education is an important part of supporting children's social-emotional development (S. Rahayu et al., 2024).

One learning strategy that can give children direct social experience is role-playing. Through role-playing, children have the opportunity to portray characters or situations, communicate with peers, understand social roles, and respond to situations through play. Play in general is recognized as an important context for healthy child

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development (Ginsburg, 2007; Yogman et al., 2018), and from a sociocultural perspective, play creates a context in which children act beyond their everyday behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). Pretend play has also been reviewed in relation to children's development (Lillard et al., 2013). Previous studies indicate that role-playing can be used to support children's social and emotional development, including interaction, communication, and involvement in shared activities (Hafiyah & Zaini, 2022; Harianja et al., 2023; Paggama et al., 2023; Rachmi et al., 2023).

Several studies show that role-playing has been used in various early childhood learning contexts. It has been reported to support social interaction, social-emotional development, the courage to communicate, and children's involvement in shared activities (Sulistiyani et al., 2023; Wildani et al., 2024). Yunifia and Wardhani (2023) showed that role-playing is also related to the development of young children's self-confidence. In the context of online learning, Suprayogi and Soeriaatmadja (2024) found a positive relationship between role-playing and the level of young children's social-emotional development. More recent studies also show that role-playing activities can be a means of developing children's communication, empathy, and cooperation (Ariyanti et al., 2026; Musthofiyyah et al., 2025). Role-playing is therefore relevant to the development of social abilities, which are an important part of early childhood education.

In addition to social-emotional aspects, role-playing is also related to children's moral development. Research on role-playing indicates that such activities can give children experience in understanding and practicing moral behavior in the situations they enact, including politeness and helping (Landewang et al., 2025). Role-play based on a folktale has also been used to instill character values in primary school children (A. Rahayu, 2024), and more recent findings show that role-playing based on character values can support the formation of moral attitudes in young children (Khairi & Daulay, 2026).

Cooperation is an important part of children's social development because it involves the ability to interact and work with others to achieve the goals of an activity. In young children, cooperation can be seen in the ability to share tasks, follow group rules, help friends, appreciate others' contributions, and complete activities together (Pratama et al., 2024). In the classic study by Parten (1932) of preschool children, cooperative play was described as activity organized around a shared purpose and involving a division of roles. Playing together can also give children opportunities to

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develop these abilities through direct interaction with peers (Darmawanti & Oktaviana, 2024; Shofiah & Fauzi, 2023).

Although research on role-playing in early childhood has been extensive, the studies vary in focus, including social interaction, social-emotional development, sociability, moral values, and social skills. Research on cooperation has also been conducted through various play activities. However, studies are still needed that describe in more depth how role-playing is applied in everyday learning and how the play experience relates to the emergence of socially moral behavior and children's cooperation.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated and practice-based focus. This study examines social morality and cooperation together within a single Islamic kindergarten, describes the components through which role-playing was implemented in daily learning (theme, stimulus, attributes, role distribution, and teacher facilitation), and relates these components to children's socially moral and cooperative behavior through triangulation of observations, teacher interviews, and parent interviews. In this way, the study addresses the need for contextual, in-depth accounts of role-playing practice and offers a case-based contribution for early childhood educators. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the implementation of role-playing and its contribution to the development of social morality and cooperation among children at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu Tanjung Payang, South Lahat, using a qualitative case study approach.

Method

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of role-playing in developing the social morality and cooperation of young children, without applying any treatment or manipulation to the situation under study. The research was conducted at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu in Tanjung Payang Village, South Lahat District, Lahat Regency, South Sumatra Province. The research lasted approximately three months and covered proposal preparation, preliminary observation, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The research schedule ran from April to July, with data collection and analysis carried out from May to June.

The data sources consisted of pupils and informants involved in the learning process. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in, and knowledge of, the learning process and the development of

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children's social morality and cooperation. They comprised one principal, six classroom teachers, and ten parents (guardians), while 17 pupils in Group B were the research subjects. The number of informants could be expanded following the snowball sampling principle if additional information was needed to deepen the findings.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation was passive participant observation: the researcher was present at the research site to observe the learning process without taking part in the activities carried out by the teachers or pupils. Observations focused on the implementation of role-playing, interactions among pupils, socially moral behavior, and cooperation during group activities. The observation guide covered the implementation of role-playing, social morality, cooperation, and pupils' responses and interactions.

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted with the principal, teachers, and parents. They were used to obtain information about learning planning, the implementation of role-playing, changes in children's behavior, and supporting and inhibiting factors in learning. Documentation was used as supporting data and included the school profile, organizational structure, curriculum, teaching modules, photographs of learning activities, and documents assessing children's development.

In this qualitative study, the researcher acted as the main instrument. Supporting instruments were an observation guide, an interview guide, and research documents. The observation guide was used to record the role-playing process, socially moral behavior, cooperation, and pupils' responses, whereas the interview guide was used to explore information from the principal, teachers, and parents.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model (Miles et al., 2014), which proceeds cyclically through three components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Reduction was carried out by selecting and grouping data according to research themes. The data were then presented as descriptive narratives, tables, analytical matrices, interview excerpts, and documentation of learning activities. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified on the basis of the patterns, relationships, and meanings that emerged from the data.

Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), by comparing information obtained from observations, teacher interviews, parent interviews, and documentation. Verification was carried out by checking the consistency of information across sources, so that the findings were not based on a single data source.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discusses them in relation to previous studies. It is organized around five themes: the contextual implementation of role-playing, its role in developing social morality, its role in developing cooperation, the facilitating role of the teacher, and the link between school experiences and behavior at home. Each theme reports the findings, interprets them, relates them to earlier research, and considers their meaning for practice.

Contextual and Child-Centered Implementation of Role-Playing

The findings show that role-playing at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu was carried out contextually, using a theme close to children's experiences. The teacher provided a stimulus through a video, used simple attributes, assigned roles or let children choose them, and then accompanied the children while they played. Table 1 summarizes these components and the social experiences that each offered. This pattern shows that role-playing was positioned not merely as a play activity but as a learning experience that allowed children to take an active part in social situations.

Table 1. Forms of Role-Playing Implementation and Children's Social Experiences

Implementation Component	Research Findings	Children's Social Experience
Contextual theme	The theme "Firefighter" was used as the context of the play.	Children understood and enacted roles in a social situation close to their own experience.
Learning stimulus	The teacher showed a video, followed by a discussion.	Children gained an initial understanding of the situation and the roles to be played.
Media and attributes	Children used simple attributes made during the activity.	Children were actively involved in the play by using simple attributes.
Role distribution	The teacher assigned roles and gave children the opportunity to choose their roles.	Children learned to understand the responsibilities and functions of each member of the group.
Group interaction	Children communicated, helped one another, took turns, and completed the activity together.	Children gained direct experience in interacting and cooperating.

Implementation Component	Research Findings	Children's Social Experience
Teacher facilitation	The teacher gave direction and accompanied the activity without taking over the whole activity.	Children received support as well as space to take initiative and interact.

Source: Compiled from the research findings and literature review.

The sequence shown in Table 1 suggests that the learning value of the activity came from the design of the whole experience rather than from role enactment alone. A familiar theme gave children a shared point of reference, the video and discussion gave them an initial understanding of the situation and the roles involved, and the simple attributes made participation concrete. This interpretation is consistent with the sociocultural view that play creates a context in which children act beyond their everyday behavior (Vygotsky, 1978), and with the idea of guided play, in which adults prepare the setting while children keep the initiative (Weisberg et al., 2013).

These findings are in line with Rachmi et al. (2023), who positioned role-playing as an activity that gives children direct experience. The results of Sulistyani et al. (2023) also show that the use of scenarios, learning media, and teacher assistance can give children room to communicate and interact. Fikri et al. (2024) showed that role-playing through the market day technique can be used to stimulate children's social-emotional development through contextual activities that involve social interaction. More recent findings indicate that role-play designed contextually can support children's involvement in social-emotional learning (Ariyanti et al., 2026; Suwandi & Riady, 2026). For practice, these studies and the present findings suggest that teachers can plan role-playing deliberately, by selecting a familiar theme, preparing a stimulus, providing simple attributes, and organizing roles, instead of treating it as unstructured free play.

Role-Playing as Direct Experience in Developing Social Morality

In this study, social morality was not limited to children's verbal understanding of good behavior but also appeared through practice during play. Children shared tools, helped friends, waited for their turn, followed rules, took responsibility for their roles, showed empathy, stayed honest, and showed care for their friends. Role-playing therefore gave children space to experience and practice social behavior in situations that resemble real-life experience. Because these behaviors were enacted within a shared activity, teachers could observe and reinforce them as they occurred, which may be less feasible when values are only explained verbally.

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This finding is consistent with Istianti (2015), who regards the ability to interact, share, cooperate, and solve social problems as an important part of young children's social skills. Landewang et al. (2025) also showed the relevance of role-playing to children's moral development, and Khairi and Daulay (2026) indicated that role-playing based on character values can be used to shape moral attitudes. A study of primary school children likewise reported the use of role-play to instill character values (A. Rahayu, 2024), although its participants were older than those in the present study. In addition, because emotional competence in preschool children has been linked with social competence (Denham et al., 2003), the empathy and care observed here may be understood as part of a broader social-emotional foundation for prosocial behavior.

In an Islamic kindergarten, these results suggest that the cultivation of social morality can be connected to everyday play activities, so that values such as respect, sharing, and helping are practiced and not only taught.

Role-Playing in Developing Children's Cooperation

The cooperation found in this study appeared through several behaviors, namely communication, task distribution, mutual assistance, turn-taking, respect for others' opinions, and joint completion of activities. This shows that, for young children, cooperation does not simply mean doing an activity at the same time. It also involves the ability to adjust one's actions to the roles and needs of group members. These behaviors resemble what Parten (1932) described as cooperative play, in which activity is organized around a shared purpose with a division of roles.

The finding is in line with Pratama et al. (2024), who identified children's cooperation through the ability to share tasks, follow group rules, help friends, and complete activities together. Shofiah and Fauzi (2023) also showed that playing together can be a context for developing cooperation, and Darmawanti and Oktaviana (2024) reported a similar relationship for a traditional group game. Nurhusnaina et al. (2024) found that role-playing can be used to develop sociability, including cooperating, sharing, respecting friends, and helping others. More broadly, play is regarded as contributing to children's social-emotional development (Yogman et al., 2018). Thus, the present findings indicate that the structure of role-playing, which involves role distribution and a shared goal, can become a space for children to practice cooperation.

The meaning of these findings lies in how group structure shapes children's opportunities. When roles are distributed, each child holds a responsibility on which the

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group depends, which gives turn-taking, task sharing, and mutual assistance a functional purpose within the play. Respecting peers' opinions and completing the activity together then become part of what the play requires, and not merely behaviors requested by the teacher.

The Teacher as Facilitator in Role-Playing

One important finding of this study is the position of the teacher as a facilitator. The teacher provided the stimulus, explained the rules, helped prepare the attributes, organized the role distribution, gave direction, and offered reinforcement, but did not dominate the course of the play. The observation data specifically show that the teacher gave direction and reinforcement without taking over the play.

This pattern is in line with Sulistyani et al. (2023), who showed the importance of teacher assistance in giving children opportunities to interact during role-playing. The finding is also consistent with Rachmi et al. (2023) and Suwandi and Riady (2026), who emphasized the importance of the teacher's role in providing directed play experiences while leaving room for children to take initiative and interact. This balance between structure and autonomy is also what the guided play literature describes (Weisberg et al., 2013). The practical meaning is that facilitation is a deliberate pedagogical skill: too little guidance may leave children without direction, whereas too much may remove the child-centered character of the activity.

Linking Role-Playing Experiences at School with Children's Behavior at Home

Interviews with parents indicated that role-playing experiences at school were also reflected in children's behavior at home. Children were reported to retell the activities, act out the characters they had played, help with simple chores, play together more easily, and show sharing and caring behavior. This suggests that learning experiences may continue from the school to the home environment. However, because this study used a qualitative case study and did not conduct longitudinal measurement, these findings cannot be used to claim a causal relationship.

This is in line with the view that children's social skills develop through interaction and experiences in their social environment (Istianti, 2015). In the context of character education, consistent habituation across environments is also important in supporting children's social-emotional behavior (S. Rahayu et al., 2024). The caution about causality is also in keeping with the review by Lillard et al. (2013), who concluded that evidence for a causal role of pretend play in development remains limited. In

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practice, parents' reports may serve as a channel of communication between school and family, through which teachers and parents can reinforce the same values.

Synthesis of the Discussion

Overall, this study shows that role-playing at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu functioned as a learning experience that connected play activities with the practice of social behavior. Children did not merely perform a role; they also communicated, shared tasks, helped friends, followed rules, showed empathy, and completed activities together. This finding is consistent with earlier research showing that role-playing can support children's social, emotional, and moral development and their ability to interact (Aliyah et al., 2026; Ariyanti et al., 2026; Landewang et al., 2025; Musthofiyyah et al., 2025; Suwandi & Riady, 2026).

Table 2. Synthesis of Findings, Interpretation, and Literature Support

Main Findings	Interpretation	Previous Studies
Role-playing was implemented contextually through the theme, stimulus, attributes, role distribution, and teacher facilitation.	The quality of implementation relates to the quality of the play experience design, not merely to the act of playing roles.	Musthofiyyah et al. (2025); Rachmi et al. (2023); Sulistyani et al. (2023).
Children practiced respect, sharing, helping, empathy, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and care. Children communicated, shared tasks, helped one another, took turns, respected others' opinions, and completed activities together.	Social morality appeared through experience and practice of behavior in real social situations. Cooperation was multidimensional and developed through interaction and direct experience.	Aliyah et al. (2026); Istianti (2015); Musthofiyyah et al. (2025); Paggama et al. (2023); Pratama et al. (2024); Sujiono (2013).
The teacher acted as a facilitator who provided structure and support during play.	Teacher assistance helped maintain the direction of the activity while preserving space for children's initiative.	Aliyah et al. (2026); Musthofiyyah et al. (2025); Rachmi et al. (2023).
Parents reported more visible sharing, helping, and caring behavior at home.	The findings indicate a possible link between school experiences and behavior at home but do not prove a causal relationship.	Istianti (2015); S. Rahayu et al. (2024).

Source: Compiled from the research findings and literature review.

Table 2 shows that the findings across the four themes support one another. The consistency among observations, teacher interviews, and parent interviews strengthens the credibility of the pattern through source triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), although

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all sources come from one institution. The synthesis also clarifies the contribution of the study: the value of role-playing in this context did not lie in the activity alone but in the combination of contextual design, role distribution that creates shared responsibility, and teacher facilitation that preserves children's initiative. For early childhood teachers, this implies planning role-playing as a structured yet child-centered activity and linking it with character habituation at school and at home. For research, the findings point to the need for studies in other settings and with designs able to test the relationships suggested here.

Conclusion

Role-playing at TK Islam Tunas Ilmu Tanjung Payang, South Lahat, was implemented contextually through a theme close to children's lives, a learning stimulus, simple media and attributes, role distribution, and teacher facilitation. Within this pattern, children gained direct social experience that supported social morality, shown in respect, sharing, helping, empathy, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and care for peers, and cooperation, shown in communication, task sharing according to roles, respect for others' opinions, mutual assistance, turn-taking, and joint completion of activities. The consistency among observations, teacher interviews, and parent interviews strengthens this picture within the research context. Theoretically, the findings suggest that the value of role-playing depends on how the whole experience is designed rather than on role enactment alone.

Practically, role-playing can be used as a learning strategy in early childhood education to support social morality and cooperation, particularly when it is applied contextually and participatively and is supported by the habituation of character values at school and at home. Teachers are encouraged to design role-playing that offers real social experience while preserving space for children to take initiative and interact with peers. This study is limited to one institution and a qualitative case study approach, so its findings mainly describe the context of TK Islam Tunas Ilmu and are not intended for broad generalization. Future research may examine role-playing in different early childhood institutions using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to obtain a broader picture.

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