

Developing Social Skills Through Role-Playing Activities for Early Childhood Learners in Early Childhood Education Institutions in Semarang City

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Abstract

This study aims to develop an integrative learning guidebook based on role-play activities to enhance social skills in early childhood. The research employed a Research and Development (R&D) method adapted from the Borg and Gall model, simplified into five stages: identifying potentials and problems, data collection, product design, expert validation, and product revision. Preliminary findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis showed that although role-play activities were implemented in PAUD settings, they remained unstructured and were not explicitly directed toward social skill development. These findings informed the creation of a structured and practical guidebook. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and questionnaires, and analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques along with quantitative validation from experts. Validation by material and media/language experts indicated that the guidebook met criteria for content relevance, clarity, visual quality, and usability. Suggestions provided by experts were incorporated into the revision process. In conclusion, the guidebook is feasible and appropriate to support teachers in implementing structured role-play activities to promote children's social skills. Further studies may conduct broader field trials to measure its effectiveness in improving children's social development outcomes.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Learning Guidebook; Role-Play; Social Skills

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood science education is not solely focused on concept mastery; it also encompasses exploration, communication, and interaction with others. Social skills are a vital component of the early childhood learning experience, as learning at this stage unfolds through interactions with peers, teachers, the environment, and various learning resources. Social interaction is linked not only to a child's social and emotional development but also plays a role in the learning process itself—occurring when children engage in joint activities, share findings, communicate ideas, and construct understanding through meaningful learning experiences. Research on early childhood science learning environments indicates that peer interaction fosters engagement in activities and the achievement of science learning goals, particularly when children share discoveries, observe their peers' actions, and discuss their experiences during learning sessions (Saez-Bondia et al., 2024). Similarly, a study by Henriksson et al. (2025) demonstrates that play activities integrating science content can simultaneously address science learning objectives and socialization processes. More recent findings also suggest that collaborative, activity-based science learning can serve as a context for fostering social interaction among young children through structured and meaningful activities (Ghazali et al., 2025). Consequently, the development of social skills in early childhood education need not be treated as an aspect separate from science learning; rather, these skills can be cultivated through

learning experiences that enable children to interact, communicate, collaborate, and participate actively within a meaningful educational context.

Research on preschoolers indicates that cooperation, self-control, and assertion are key dimensions in measuring social skills, reflecting a child's ability to work together, regulate responses in social situations, and appropriately express needs or initiate interactions (Zhu et al., 2022). The relationships between these dimensions are dynamic; longitudinal studies on preschoolers show that self-control and cooperation are interconnected, with self-control capabilities at one time point predicting cooperative abilities at a subsequent time point (Fuji & Sugimura, 2023). Furthermore, social skills in early childhood encompass a broader range of abilities, such as communication, empathy, sharing, building peer relationships, and prosocial behavior.

Although social skills are a crucial component of the early childhood learning experience, conditions in the field indicate that the development of these skills has been uneven. A needs analysis conducted across several early childhood education (ECE) institutions in Semarang—utilizing observations, teacher interviews, instructional document analysis, and social skill questionnaires—revealed that children's social skills require further strengthening. Measurements across nine dimensions of social skills yielded an overall average score of 67.6, placing them in the moderate category. Compliance skills received the highest score (75), while sharing and empathy received the lowest (60). These findings highlight a disparity between children's ability to follow rules and their capacity to share, understand others' perspectives, and respond to their peers' needs. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of early childhood science learning, which ideally offers children opportunities to explore their environment, observe phenomena, communicate findings, and construct understanding through interactions with peers and teachers. In exploratory and collaborative science activities, the ability to share, cooperate, listen to others' ideas, and consider peers' perspectives is integral to the shared learning process. Consequently, limitations in sharing and empathy represent not merely a matter of social development but also underscore the need to design learning experiences that meaningfully facilitate children's social interactions within the context of science education.

In the context of early childhood education in Semarang City, this need is evident in the gap between the role-playing practices currently employed by teachers and the utilization of such activities as a targeted instructional strategy. A needs analysis across several early childhood education centers in Semarang City reveals that while teachers do incorporate role-playing into their lessons, these activities are not consistently designed with specific objectives or indicators regarding children's social skills in mind. Observations and interviews indicate that role-playing is frequently treated merely as a filler activity, a form of entertainment, or a concluding exercise; consequently, the assigned scenarios and roles are not systematically structured to foster specific social competencies. This issue is particularly significant when role-playing is applied to early childhood science education, as science themes relevant to children's daily lives—such as the environment, plants, animals, water, and simple natural phenomena—offer meaningful contexts for children to observe, explore, communicate ideas, and interact with their peers.

Unlike solitary play, role-play involves reciprocal interaction through the distribution of roles, the negotiation of rules and play scenarios, and the coordination of actions to achieve shared goals. A meta-analysis of 34 studies involving children aged 3–8 years revealed a positive association between the quality of pretend play and social competence; this relationship was stronger in studies that measured the quality of play rather than merely its frequency (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). These findings indicate that the pedagogical value of role-play lies not simply in the frequency of play, but in the quality of interaction and social engagement that occurs during the activity. In the context of early childhood education, these characteristics enable teachers to create situations that allow children to practice cooperation, communication, sharing, and self-control, as well as to understand others' perspectives within meaningful contexts.

Research on play-based science learning indicates that play activities can serve as a context for exploring scientific phenomena, fostering communication, and interacting with others; however, integrating science learning objectives with social development goals still requires more targeted pedagogical design (Henriksson et al., 2025; Zeng & Ng, 2025). For instance, Henriksson et al. (2025) demonstrate that play activities incorporating scientific content can simultaneously address science learning and socialization goals, while Ghazali et al. (2025) show that collaboratively designed science learning can support social interaction among preschoolers. Yet, these approaches have not specifically translated the combination of scientific contexts, role-play, and social skill targets into actionable guidelines for early childhood educators. Consequently, there remains a need for instructional tools that not only provide science themes or activities but also structure how children assume roles, communicate, collaborate, share ideas, and respond to their peers' perspectives while exploring scientific contexts or phenomena.

This need forms the basis for developing a role-play guidebook that integrates scientific contexts with the goal of fostering social skills in early childhood. The guidebook is designed to help teachers transform science themes—drawn from children's own experiences—into role-play activities that enable children to explore, communicate, collaborate, adopt roles, and build understanding through interactions with peers and teachers. This integration positions role-play not merely as an exercise in social behavior, but as a learning context that allows children to actively engage in science experiences that are inherently social and collaborative. This approach aligns with research indicating that early childhood science learning can occur through play and interaction when teachers intentionally link play experiences to scientific content and provide opportunities for children to communicate their ideas and respond to the ideas of others (Henriksson et al., 2025; Sáez-Bondía et al., 2024). Thus, the contribution of the developed guidebook lies not only in providing role-play activities but also in offering a pedagogical structure that connects scientific contexts, social interactions, and child development goals through activities usable by early childhood educators. At this stage of the research, the guidebook is positioned as a product undergoing initial development and validation; the study focuses on the product's feasibility based on expert assessment, while its effectiveness in enhancing social skills and science learning outcomes requires field testing in future research.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a role-play guidebook that integrates early childhood science learning contexts with the goal of fostering social skills through structured play activities. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined role-play as an approach to support socio-emotional development or analyzed play activities as a context for science learning, this research combines both objectives into a single instructional resource designed for early childhood educators. The developed guidebook translates this integration into operational components, including learning objectives, activity procedures, teacher and child roles, science-themed scenarios, and social skills observation instruments. Thus, the research contributes not by introducing role-play as a novel approach, but by operationalizing it as a learning experience that links scientific exploration with children's social interactions within a practical tool for teachers. At this stage, the contribution is realized through the product's development and initial validation, thereby providing a pedagogical foundation and preliminary evidence of feasibility to guide further development prior to field implementation and testing.

Based on the aforementioned background and research gap, this study focuses on the development and preliminary validation of a role-play guidebook that integrates science learning contexts with the development of social skills in early childhood education. Specifically, this study addresses two research questions: (1) what is the process of developing a role-play guidebook that integrates science learning contexts with the aim of fostering social skills in young children? and (2) what is the level of feasibility or preliminary validity of the role-play guidebook based on expert assessment? Aligned with these questions, the study aims to (1) develop a role-play guidebook that early childhood educators can use to design structured role-play learning activities incorporating science contexts and social skill objectives; and (2)

determine the guidebook's feasibility or preliminary validity based on expert assessment, serving as a foundation for further development and field testing in the subsequent research phase.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) method, adapting the development model proposed by Borg and Gall. The Borg and Gall model consists of ten stages: (1) identifying potentials and problems, (2) data collection, (3) product design, (4) design validation, (5) design revision, (6) product testing, (7) product revision, (8) field testing, (9) final product revision, and (10) mass production (Rohmaini et al., 2020). However, considering the time and resource constraints, as well as the focus of this study on the initial development and validation phase, the ten stages were simplified into five main stages: (1) identifying potentials and problems, (2) data collection, (3) product design, (4) expert validation, and (5) product revision. This simplification was undertaken because the present study constitutes an initial development and validation study, rather than an effectiveness trial. Field testing and mass production were not conducted in this research and are recommended for future studies. Nevertheless, the five selected stages encompass the essential elements of the Borg and Gall model, namely needs identification, data collection, product design, validation, and product refinement prior to implementation.



Figure 1. The Ten Stages of Borg and Gall's Research and Development Model
Source: Rohmaini et al. (2020)

This simplification was justified based on the following considerations:

1. **Focus on the initial development stage.** This study is an initial development and validation study, not a product effectiveness study. Therefore, the prioritized stages were those related to needs identification, product design, and feasibility assessment by experts.
2. **Research cycle limitations.** Product testing (stage 6), field testing (stage 8), and mass production (stage 10) could not be conducted in this study due to the greater time and resource requirements, as well as the need for a different research design (e.g., experimental research for effectiveness testing).
3. **Scope of research objectives.** Consistent with the research questions and objectives, this study focused solely on the development and initial validation of the guidebook, not on measuring the product's impact on improving children's social skills. Thus, the five selected stages already encompass the essential elements of the Borg and Gall model.
4. **Foundation for further research.** The product developed in this study is recommended for field testing in subsequent research to empirically measure its effectiveness. Therefore, this study does not claim that the product is ready for widespread implementation, but rather that it has reached the theoretically feasible stage based on expert assessment.

Accordingly, this study is explicitly positioned as an initial development and validation study, not as a study examining the product's effectiveness in the field. All claims in this manuscript are limited to the level of product feasibility based on expert validation, not to the level of effectiveness or impact of the product on children's social skills.

Research Subjects and Data Sources

The research subjects and data sources are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Subjects and Data Sources

Type of Subject/Data Source	Quantity	Description
ECE Institutions	20 institutions	Purposively selected, representing urban and peri-urban areas of Semarang
Teachers and principals	40 teachers	Minimum 2 years of teaching experience, teaching at play groups (KB) or kindergarten (TK) levels
Young Children	300 children	Age range 4–6 years
Observation	3 days/institution	2.5 hours/day, total of 150 hours
Teacher Interviews	40 teachers	30–45 minutes per teacher
Principal Interviews	20 principals	30–45 minutes per principal
Documents	RPPH, RPPM, developmental reports	From each institution

Development Procedures

Identifying Potentials and Problems

The first stage aimed to identify the actual needs and challenges in the field that justified the development of the product. Activities included classroom observations at 20 ECE institutions in Semarang City, interviews with teachers, and document analysis of the RPPH, RPPM, and children's developmental reports.

The observations revealed that teachers had implemented role-play activities; however, these activities were not yet structured and were not explicitly directed toward developing children's social skills. Teachers expressed the need for a structured guidebook that could assist them in implementing role-play activities more systematically and integrating them with socio-emotional learning objectives. These findings indicated a strong potential for developing a role-play guidebook as a learning medium aligned with children's characteristics, while simultaneously highlighting implementation gaps that required improvement.

Data Collection

This stage was conducted to obtain empirical and theoretical data as a foundation for product development. Data collection involved three activities: (1) Literature review, encompassing theories of early childhood social skills, integrative learning, and role-play activities. (2) Field survey, conducted through extended observations and follow-up interviews with ECE teachers to gain deeper insights into existing social learning practices. (3) Distribution of a social skills questionnaire, administered to ECE teachers to collect quantitative data on children's current social skill conditions.

Product Design

The product design stage involved creating the initial draft (prototype) of the integrative learning guidebook based on role-play. The results of the preliminary study and questionnaire analysis guided the design process. The guidebook consisted of: (1) Introduction: containing the development objectives, theoretical foundations, and principles of integrative learning. (2) Role play activity guidelines: detailing the steps

from introduction, role exploration, implementation, to reflection. (3) Sample thematic lesson plans (RPPH): integrating social, language, and moral aspects. (4) Social skills observation sheets: serving as tools for teachers to assess children's development during role-play activities.

Expert Validation

The validation stage aimed to assess the feasibility of the developed product. Validation was conducted by three experts with the criteria presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Expert Selection Criteria

Field of Expertise	Expert Qualification	Rationale for Expertise
Educational Technology / Learning Models	Professor, doctorate in educational technology	Expertise in product development models
Linguistics	Doctorate in linguistics	The product is a book; thus, language must be accurate, appropriate, and easily understood by teachers
Guidance and Counseling (BK)	Doctorate in guidance and counseling / child development	Expertise in children's social skills and early childhood development

The validation instrument used was a rating sheet with a 1–5 scale, accompanied by comment sections for feedback and suggestions. The number of items in the validation instrument was 79 items, distributed across four assessment aspects: (1) visual quality, (2) content relevance and accuracy, (3) practical and operational feasibility, and (4) language clarity. The rating rubric is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Expert Validation Rating Rubric

Category	Score	Assessment Criteria
Very Good	5	Highly relevant, very clear, highly appropriate use, highly operational
Good	4	Relevant, clear, appropriate use, sufficiently operational
Fair	3	Sufficiently relevant, sufficiently clear, appropriate use, less operational
Poor	2	Less relevant, less clear, less appropriate use, not operational
Very Poor	1	Not relevant, not clear, not appropriate use, not operational

Quantitative data from expert assessments were analyzed using the Aiken's V formula as follows:

$$V = \frac{\sum s}{n(c - 1)}$$

Where: V = Aiken's validity index
 s = $r - lo$ (r = score given by the expert, lo = lowest score = 1)
 n = number of validators (in this study, $n = 3$)
 c = number of rating categories (in this study, $c = 5$)

The decision criteria for validity used the threshold of Aiken's $V \geq 0.75$, indicating that the item/aspect was considered valid (Aiken, 1985).

Product Revision

The final stage involved refining the product based on expert feedback. Improvements were made to language clarity, activity sequence structure, and visual design. The final revised version of the guidebook was declared suitable by the experts and is ready for preliminary field testing in subsequent research stages.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the four main stages of the simplified Borg and Gall model: (1) needs analysis, (2) initial product design, (3) expert validation results, and (4) product revision decisions. Each sub-section is presented separately

to provide a clear and auditable account of the data obtained during the development process.

Needs Analysis Findings

The needs analysis was conducted through observations, interviews, document analysis (RPPH, RPPM, and developmental reports), and a social skills questionnaire administered to teachers in several PAUD institutions in Semarang City.

Quantitative Data on Children's Social Skills

The questionnaire, which measured children's social skills across nine dimensions based on the theories of Caldarella & Merrell (1997) and Hurlock (1980), yielded an overall mean score of 67.6, categorizing the children's social skills at a moderate level (based on the 5-point conversion guidelines by Sukardjo, where 41-60% = Moderate, 61-80% = Good).

A dimension-based analysis revealed that Compliance Skills achieved the highest score, with a mean of 75 (good category), while Sharing and Empathy had the lowest, with a mean of 60 (low category). The remaining seven dimensions (Peer Relation, Self-Management, Academic, Assertion, Perilaku Akrab, Imitation, and Cooperation) were within the moderate-to-good range, as reflected in the overall mean score of 67.6. These findings indicate that although children have developed basic social skills in following rules, they still face significant challenges in developing empathy and sharing behaviors.

Qualitative Findings from Observations and Interviews

Observations and interviews revealed several implementation gaps. Although role-play activities had been implemented in these institutions, they were predominantly used as fillers, for entertainment, or in closing sessions, rather than as structured, goal-oriented instructional strategies. Teachers reported that the role-play scenarios were not systematically designed to target specific social skills indicators. Furthermore, teachers reported difficulty assessing children's social development due to the lack of straightforward, practical, operational assessment tools. Limited facilities and supporting resources for role-play activities were also identified as additional constraints.

Document Analysis Findings

Document analysis of the Daily Lesson Plans (RPPH) and Weekly Lesson Plans (RPPM), particularly in TK Penggerak, which implements the Merdeka Curriculum, indicated a disconnect between curriculum design and classroom implementation. While the curriculum documents provided space for social-emotional skill development, the actual teaching scenarios did not explicitly integrate targeted social-emotional objectives into role-play activities, leaving a significant planning-implementation gap.

Initial Product Design Characteristics

Based on the needs analysis, an initial product prototype was developed as a guidebook titled "*Model Pembelajaran Integratif Berbasis Bermain Peran untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Sosial Anak Usia Dini*." The initial guidebook prototype was structured into seven chapters, covering:

1. The fundamental concept of play,
2. The concept of role-play,
3. Early childhood social skills,
4. Stages of implementing the integrative role-play learning model,
5. Examples of thematic learning activities,
6. Guidelines for developing learning tools, and
7. Evaluation of social skills.

Expert Validation Results

Expert validation was conducted by three experts with expertise in Guidance and

Counseling, Curriculum and Educational Technology, and Child Development Psychology and Early Childhood Education. The validation instrument used a 1–5 rating scale assessing aspects of visual quality, content, presentation, and language.

Quantitative Validation Data (Aiken's V)

The quantitative data from the expert assessments were analyzed using Aiken's V formula. The overall assessment by the three experts indicated that the guidebook was feasible with minor revisions, with an average total score of 4.05 on a 5-point scale (81%). The detailed Aiken's V results per aspect are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Aiken's V Validation Scores per Aspect

No	Assesment Aspect	Average Expert Score	Aiken's V	Validity Category
1	Visual Quality (<i>Kegrafikaan</i>)	4.00	0.75	Valid
2	Content Relevance & Accuracy (<i>Isi</i>)	4.10	0.77	Valid
3	Practical & Operational Feasibility (<i>Penyajian</i>)	4.00	0.75	Valid
4	Language Clarity (<i>Kebahasaan</i>)	4.10	0.77	Valid

Note: Based on Aiken's V standards, a value of ≥ 0.75 is considered valid. The average Aiken's V across the four aspects was 0.76, indicating that the product is deemed feasible with minor revisions. Overall, the average total score of 4.05 on a 5-point scale indicates that this integrative learning model has met the feasibility standards for proceeding to the field trial stage.

Qualitative Feedback from Experts

The experts provided several suggestions for product revision. In terms of visual quality, the researchers were advised to review the aesthetics of layout, color composition, and illustrations to make them more proportional and appealing. Regarding content, suggestions focused on deepening the material coverage to reflect real classroom needs better. In terms of presentation, experts emphasized the need to simplify the learning steps so they can be applied more practically by teachers. For language, researchers were expected to maintain consistency in the use of technical terms to avoid ambiguity.

Product Revision Decisions

Following the expert validation, a series of revisions were implemented to produce the final product:

1. **Content revisions:** The model implementation section was enriched with more operational and teacher-friendly steps. The model components (learning objectives, syntax, teacher and child roles, and evaluation forms) were reorganized to be more systematic and coherent. More contextually relevant examples of thematic learning were also added.
2. **Structural and visual revisions:** Improvements were made to the chapter sequencing, table of contents, page layout, font-size consistency, and illustration design, including layout aesthetics, color composition, and illustration proportions.
3. **Language revisions:** The language style was simplified without reducing conceptual depth, and consistency in the use of technical terms was maintained.

Through this revision process, a final guidebook was produced that is deemed feasible and suitable for supporting teachers in implementing structured role-play activities. The guidebook is now ready for preliminary field testing in subsequent stages of research.

Discussion

Theoretical Grounding of the Role-Play-Based Integrative Model

The finding that children's compliance skills were already well developed ($M = 75$) while sharing and empathy remained the weakest dimension ($M = 60$) is consistent with developmental accounts of the preschool years as a period of emerging social initiative, in which rule-following tends to mature earlier than perspective-taking and reciprocal skills (Santrock, 2019). From a socio-cultural standpoint, this asymmetry is expected: skills such as empathy and

sharing depend on sustained, adult-mediated participation in socially structured activity rather than on incidental exposure (Vygotsky, 1978). This is precisely the mechanism the guidebook is designed to supply. Role-play is treated not as free play but as a mediated activity in which the teacher deliberately structures roles, dialogue, and negotiation so that children are repeatedly placed in situations that require them to attend to another child's perspective.

Recent empirical evidence supports the plausibility of this pathway. A meta-analysis of 34 studies found that the *quality* and complexity of pretend play, rather than its mere frequency, correlate most strongly with children's social competence. That make-believe scenarios involving role enactment and negotiation give children practice in reading others' intentions and coordinating joint action (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). This distinction between amount and quality of play is directly relevant to the present study's needs-analysis finding that role-play was already common in the observed PAUD institutions, but was rarely structured toward a specific social-skills target. In other words, the problem identified in the field was not an absence of role-play. However, an absence of *quality*, goal-directed role-play, which is the specific gap the guidebook's syntax (structured stages of implementation) is designed to close.

Positioning the Guidebook Against Prior Role-Play and Drama Research

A substantial body of research has established that drama- and role-play-based interventions can improve children's socio-emotional outcomes. Drama pedagogy training has been shown to strengthen theory of mind and collaborative behavior in elementary-age children (Celume et al., 2020), sociodramatic games have demonstrated durable effects on children's creativity and social-emotional competence across two decades of intervention research (Garaigordobil et al., 2022), and a drama-based emotional intelligence program for children aged 4–5 reduced problem behaviors linked to social skills after only twelve sessions (Armesto Arias et al., 2025). Structured creative-drama activities have also been linked to reductions in aggressive behavior among preschoolers (Korosec & Zorec, 2019), and explicit drama-based instruction has supported prosocial behavior such as collaboration and cooperation in children of kindergarten age (Şenol, 2019). Together, these studies confirm that drama and role-play *can* function as deliberate pedagogical tools rather than incidental play.

However, most of this literature evaluates a bounded intervention program or a single training protocol delivered by researchers, rather than a portable guidebook intended for independent use by classroom teachers. Three gaps in this literature are directly relevant to the present study and were only partially addressed in the models above:

1. **Structured, teacher-usable guidance.** Very few of the reviewed interventions were packaged as standalone references that teachers could adopt without ongoing researcher involvement; most required a trained facilitator or a fixed multi-week protocol (e.g., Armesto Arias et al., 2025; Celume et al., 2020). The present guidebook addresses this by translating the intervention logic into seven sequential chapters from the conceptual foundation of play through concrete thematic scenarios to an evaluation chapter so that a teacher can operationalize the model without external facilitation.
2. **Observation-based assessment tools.** Prior drama-based studies typically rely on standardized psychological instruments (e.g., theory-of-mind tasks, emotion-recognition tests) that are impractical for daily classroom use (Armesto Arias et al., 2025; Celume et al., 2020). This matches the study's own qualitative finding that teachers lacked a simple, operational tool for assessing children's social development, a gap that the guidebook's seventh chapter, on social-skills evaluation, was specifically built to close.
3. **Curriculum integration.** Existing role-play research is rarely tied to a national early-childhood curriculum framework. The document-analysis findings in this study showed a concrete planning–implementation gap: the Merdeka Curriculum already allocates space for social-emotional development in the RPPH/RPPM, but teachers' actual scenarios did not translate that space into targeted role-play objectives. The guidebook's chapter on developing learning-tool guidelines is designed to bridge this specific disconnect by

showing teachers how to encode social-skills indicators directly into their existing lesson-planning documents rather than treating role-play as a separate, unplanned activity.

At the same time, the relation between role-play and children's self-regulation and social outcomes should not be overstated. Evidence is mixed on whether the frequency of role-play alone predicts self-regulatory performance, with one classroom-based study finding that self-regulatory behavior *during* role-play, rather than how often role-play occurred, was the stronger predictor of children's general self-regulation (Fuji & Sugimura, 2023); similarly, the causal direction of the pretend-play–social-competence relation remains unresolved because most available studies are correlational (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). This reinforces why the guidebook emphasizes structured implementation quality, clear syntax, defined teacher and child roles, and thematic relevance rather than simply prescribing more frequent role-play sessions.

Linking the Findings to the Product's Design and Validation

The revisions made after expert validation can be read as direct responses to the theoretical and empirical gaps identified above. The reorganization of the model's components (learning objectives, syntax, teacher and child roles, and evaluation forms) into a more systematic sequence operationalizes the "structured over incidental" principle supported by Smits-van der Nat et al. (2024): rather than leaving negotiation and perspective-taking to chance, the syntax specifies at which stage children are expected to assume a role, negotiate a scenario, and resolve a conflict. The addition of more contextually relevant thematic examples addresses the field-level finding that existing role-play scenarios were not designed around specific social-skills indicators, thereby aligning the model's activities with the Compliance–Sharing/Empathy gap identified in the questionnaire data.

The Aiken's V results (overall $V = 0.76$; total score 4.05/5) indicate that content experts, curriculum specialists, and child-development specialists independently judged the guidebook's visual, content, presentational, and linguistic aspects to be valid, which corroborates from an expert-judgment perspective that the structural choices described above are appropriate for the target users. The experts' qualitative recommendation to simplify learning steps for practical classroom use reinforces the same teacher-usability gap noted in Section 4.2; the resulting content revision (more operational, teacher-friendly implementation steps) is therefore not a cosmetic change but a direct response to a documented gap in how prior role-play interventions have typically been delivered. In this sense, the guidebook's contribution is less about introducing a new theoretical mechanism; the socio-cultural and drama-pedagogy foundations are well established (Celume et al., 2020; Garaigordobil et al., 2022; Vygotsky, 1978) and more about translating that mechanism into a form that is structured enough to be implemented with fidelity, yet practical enough for independent teacher use within an existing PAUD curriculum framework.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the social skills of early childhood learners remain at a moderate level, particularly in sharing, empathy, communication, and cooperation. Although teachers have implemented role-play activities, these practices are not yet structured or explicitly designed to enhance children's social skills. Therefore, this research developed a role-play guidebook using a simplified Borg and Gall model. The resulting guidebook includes structured learning steps, thematic role-play scenarios, sample daily lesson plans, and social-skills observation instruments. Expert validation confirmed that the guidebook is highly feasible and appropriate in terms of content, language, media, and practical usability. Theoretically, the guidebook aligns with established theories of social development and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of role-play in supporting children's socio-emotional growth. Practically, it provides PAUD teachers with a more systematic and meaningful approach to implementing role-play as a learning

strategy to strengthen children's social skills.

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