

Analysis of Early Childhood Social-Emotional Development Using the EMC2 Approach in Early Childhood Education Institutions

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Abstract

Children's inability to manage their social and emotional well-being requires strategic intervention through adult support. This study aims to analyze the social and emotional development of early childhood through the implementation of the EMC2 approach in the PAUD environment. This study employed a field research design with a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted narratively to describe the opinions, actions, and phenomena observed during the study. Theoretically, this study confirms that the EMC2 approach is effective in mapping and stimulating children's emotional intelligence in formal settings. Practically, the high percentage of students in the "Developing" category (74% cumulative BSH and BSB) indicates that integrating teachers' understanding of children's developmental stages and structured adult support can minimize social-emotional barriers. These results imply the importance of standardizing teacher competencies in emotional literacy to ensure that the remaining percentage of "Undeveloped" children can be accommodated through more personalized interventions.

Kata Kunci: *Social Emotional, Early Childhood, EMC2 Pillar*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a golden age or golden period where a child's brain experiences extraordinary plasticity, making it the most appropriate time to instill social and emotional intelligence (Al Umairi, 2025). However, amidst the dynamics of the modern world full of rapid changes and complex challenges, the focus of education is often trapped on cognitive achievements alone, while affective aspects such as empathy and emotional management are often neglected.

Many early childhood educators still use conventional approaches that focus solely on child compliance rather than a deeper understanding of emotions. However, without a structured approach like EMC2 (Empathy, Compassion, Mindfulness, Critical Inquiry), children will struggle to recognize self-regulation. As Hidayat (2023)

emphasized, teachers' failure to integrate empathy and mindfulness into their learning makes children vulnerable to social anxiety in the school environment (Risma Anita Puriani³, 2025).

Children's social development currently faces significant challenges due to increased exposure to devices, which reduces the duration of face-to-face interactions. This results in children having low empathy scores. Not many early childhood education institutions (PAUD) have implemented the EMC2 framework as a behavioral analysis tool. Most focus solely on the end result, without understanding the cognitive processes children undergo when empathizing. This research is urgent because the EMC2 approach offers a solution to the saturation of traditional, often subjective observation methods. UNESCO's report emphasizes that emotional literacy through Critical Inquiry is key to enabling children to not only follow rules but also critically assess their own and others' feelings (Noraffandy Yahaya & Nur Fazila i Salleh, 2020).

There's a misconception that social development is solely the responsibility of schools. The narrative that adult support is essential often remains theoretical without any concrete implementation (Sari et al., 2025). Without a shared understanding of the developmental process between teachers and parents, interventions carried out at school will be "neutralized" when the child returns home, resulting in the child's development becoming stagnant.

A child's inability to manage emotions and interact healthily with their environment can have long-term impacts, ranging from low self-confidence to difficulty in building interpersonal relationships in adulthood. (Mushab Al Umairi, 2023a). Therefore, a comprehensive framework is needed to optimize this development. A child really needs social-emotional skills, motivational and intellectual qualities to be able to successfully navigate the preschool years (Syahreni Yenti, 2021). Therefore, the issue of children's social emotional development is very important and needs to be understood clearly in the current social era. Socioemotional development comes from two different words "social" and "emotional" which are so closely related that they are often referred to as socioemotional.

Research on social-emotional development in early childhood is a crucial step in understanding the foundations of character and future psychological well-being. The following is a systematic draft of a preliminary narrative, emphasizing the urgency of the EMC2 (Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry) approach (Brahmi et al., 2026). The EMC2 approach initiated by UNESCO MGIEP offers a new paradigm in social emotional education. (Brahmi et al., 2025). This approach not only trains children to be socially "smart" but also emotionally "wise" through four main pillars: Empathy: Children's ability to understand and feel the perspective of others, which is key to building tolerance. Mindfulness: Trains children to be fully present in the present moment, helping them regulate stress and anxiety from an early age. Compassion: Encourages children to take concrete actions to help others, transforming empathy into positive action. Critical Inquiry: Encourages children to ask questions and analyze logically, so they are able to make responsible decisions based on human values (Wulandari & Rahayu, 2025).

This research stems from the urgent need to integrate EMC2 values into the daily activities of early childhood. By analyzing how these pillars interact with children's social behavior, we can formulate more holistic learning strategies. Through this approach, children are expected to grow not only into academically intelligent individuals but also possess strong mental resilience and social awareness.. Based on the background description of this study, there is a Research GAP, described as an analysis of the social-emotional development of early childhood using the EMC2 approach in PAUD institutions. Several previous studies related to this study are discussed, and these gaps constitute a novelty of this study. The following describes several studies related to the analysis of social-emotional development of early childhood using the EMC2 approach in PAUD institutions.

"Cultivating EMC2's Social-Emotional Attitudes Towards Psychological Well-Being in Elementary School Students" (Faizah & Liliana, 2025). The results of this study, it can be concluded that students generally show significant progress in various social emotional dimensions, the ability to communicate and cooperate with others shows good and very good results, with percentages of 79% and 86% respectively. This journal analyzes the social emotional development of early childhood which is very relevant to the research I am reviewing. This study took samples from elementary school students.

Implementation of Educational Short Films in Improving EMC2 (Empathy, Compassion, Mindfulness, and Critical Inquiry) at SDN 105327 (Barus et al., 2025). This study shows that the systematic implementation of educational short films through three cycles of action successfully

improved the EMC2 skills of fifth-grade students at SDN 105327 Pedamean. Each cycle showed significant improvements, both in terms of emotional engagement and critical reflection. This journal is relevant because it has similar studies, namely regarding the EMC2 approach to Social Emotional. This study analyzes the EMC2 approach through the application of educational short films.

Improving Learning Outcomes with the Discovery Learning-EMC2 Model in Grade 7 Science” (Tamansiswa et al., 2024). This study shows that the results of student completion in studying science material continue to increase from pre-cycle by 65.625%, cycle I by 81.25%, and cycle II by 90.625%. In addition, the average student learning outcomes experienced an increasing graph from pre-cycle by 78.125%, cycle I by 83.4375%, and cycle II by 92.65625%. The results of this study's completion are included in the very high category and the average learning outcomes are included in the high category. This journal is relevant because it has similar studies, namely regarding the EMC2 approach to Social Emotional. This study took samples from learning outcomes using the EMC2 discovery learning model for 7th grade students.

Although extensive research on early childhood social-emotional development has been conducted, most still focuses on basic self-regulation of emotions. There is a gap in the integration of Critical Inquiry as a driver of Compassion. This research aims to address this gap by using the EMC2 approach as a holistic framework that has not been widely explored in the context of Early Childhood Education (ECED) in Indonesia. Through an in-depth analysis of EMC2-based social emotional development, this study aims to provide a real contribution to educators and parents in shaping a future generation that is more civilized, empathetic, and critical in facing the challenges of the times.

2. METHODS

The research steps used in this study are field research. Observation, interviews, and documentation methods were used to obtain data. The analysis of this study was descriptive qualitative (in the form of written opinions from the people and actions observed). The analysis of early childhood social-emotional development using the EMC2 approach in PAUD institutions used data reduction analysis, data presentation, and verification. According to Miles, Huberman & Saldana (1992), there are three qualitative data analysis techniques, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Spradley & Huberman, 2024). The research steps on the dyadic relationship to early childhood social-emotional development in PAUD environments are visually illustrated. These research steps can be seen in full in the Figure 1.

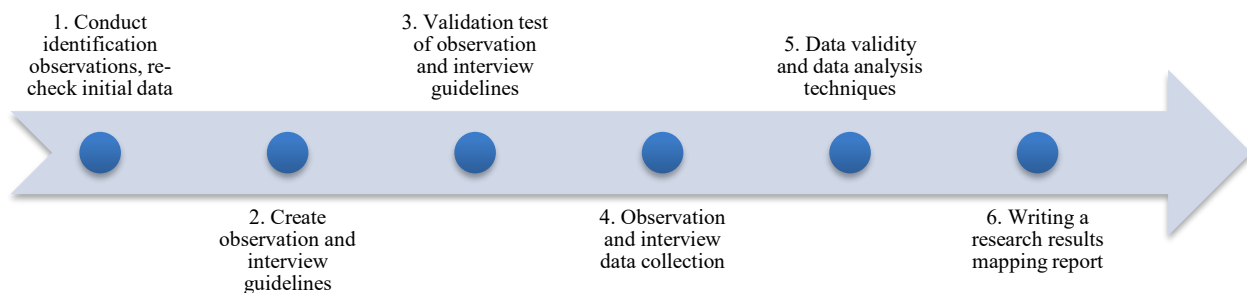


Figure 1. Research Steps Design

If the test results yield different data, the process should be repeated until a consensus is reached. Time often influences data credibility. Data collected using morning interviews, when the interviewee is fresh and has fewer problems, will yield more valid and credible data. In the data analysis stage, researchers analyze the collected data by understanding the entire research data. Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and compiling data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation. This involves organizing the data into categories, breaking it down into units, synthesizing it, arranging it into patterns, selecting what is important and what will be studied, and drawing conclusions that are easily understood by both the researcher and others (Rijali, 2019). The data analysis technique used by researchers refers to the interactive analysis data model

according to Miles and Huberman (1992). The activities carried out during the data collection period to reporting include three parts, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Nurkhasyanah, 2024).

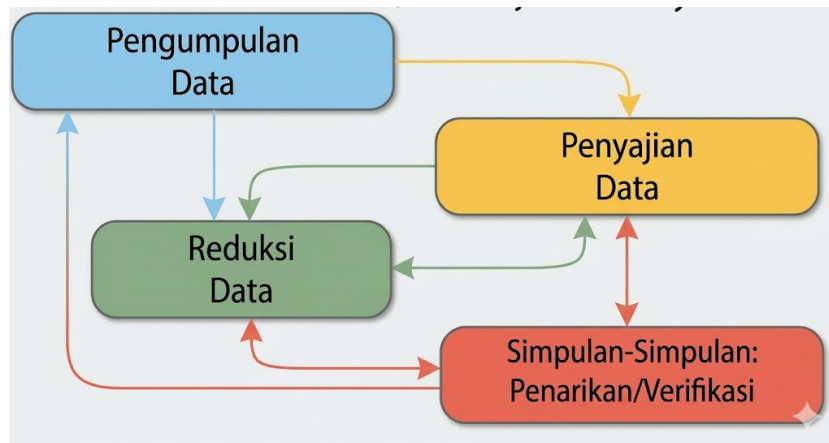


Figure 2. Analysis Data (Nabawi, 2025)

Based on the qualitative data analysis that the researcher identified, there are several comprehensive discussion competencies that are generally related to the EMC2 approach to children's social emotions, namely: Empathy: Children's ability to understand and feel the perspectives of others, which is key in building tolerance. Mindfulness: Training children to be fully present in the present moment, helping them regulate stress and anxiety from an early age. Compassion: Encouraging children to take concrete actions in helping others, turning empathy into positive actions. Critical Inquiry: Encouraging children to ask questions and analyze logically, so that they are able to make responsible decisions based on human values. Table 1 is a table of EMC2 Early Childhood instruments:

Tabel 1. EMC2 Early Childhood Instrument

EMC2 Pillar	Indikator	Validation	Notes
Empathy	Children are able to express their friends' feelings.	The teacher confirmed that the child often entertained his friends.	The child is embracing a friend.
Mindfulness	Children are able to do deep breathing techniques when they feel upset.	The teacher said that the child was starting to be able to control his emotions.	Games that require children to patiently wait their turn
Compassion	Children offer help without being asked when friends are in trouble.	Teachers noted increased toy sharing behavior.	Hug or ask how a friend is doing when they are crying or have fallen.
Critical Inquiry	Children ask "why" when there is conflict in class.	The teacher saw that the children were starting to dare to negotiate.	Why do we need to queue when washing our hands? What happens if we don't queue?

The implementation of this research is located in Kebomas District, Gresik Regency, and the sample of this research was taken at the ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten Educational Institution. The research implementation period started from January to April 2025. The subjects of this research consisted of kindergarten principals, teachers, and students. This research activity began with interviews with several kindergarten principals and teachers at the ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten PAUD institution. Then, collaboration and agreement were made regarding conducting research activities related to dyadic relationships with early childhood social emotions in PAUD institutions. Then the research team formulated and compiled materials related to dyadic relationships with early childhood social emotions in PAUD institutions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the relationship between Early Childhood Social-Emotional Development Analysis and the EMC2 Approach in Early Childhood Education Institutions. In this section, findings from practitioners, teachers, and students are presented. Based on the qualitative data analysis, the researcher identified several comprehensive discussion competencies that are generally related to the EMC2 approach to children's social emotions, namely: Empathy: Children's ability to understand and feel the perspectives of others, which is key in building tolerance. Mindfulness: Training children to be fully present in the present moment, helping them regulate stress and anxiety from an early age. Compassion: Encouraging children to take concrete actions in helping others, transforming empathy into positive actions. Critical Inquiry: Encouraging children to ask questions and analyze logically, so that they are able to make responsible decisions based on human values (Faizah & Liliana, 2025). The researcher developed this analysis as Figure 3.

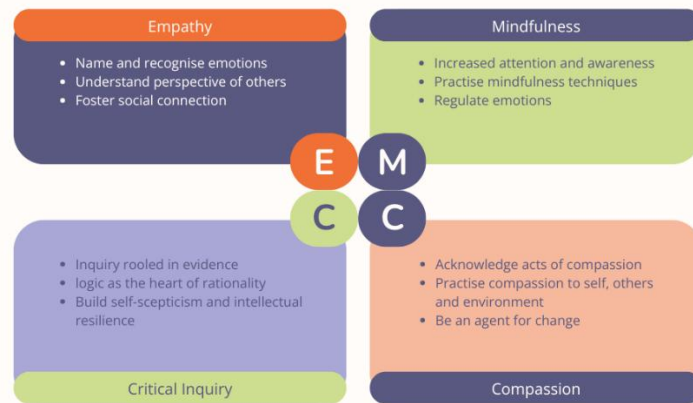


Figure 3. EMC2 (Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, Critical Inquiry)

Empathy: Children's Ability To Understand Other People's Perspectives



Figure 4. Student Visit Sick Friends

Empathy is an emotion in children that is able to see the hardships of others, even though empathy already exists in children, it must be cultivated so that it develops because it is one way to instill good behavior and help each other so that children can be accepted in the school environment and society (Ernst et al., 2022). According to Goleman the ability to empathize is the root of caring and compassion in every emotional relationship of a child in his efforts to adjust his emotions to the emotions of others (Mulyawati et al., 2022). Empathy is the key to understanding other people's feelings so that children are able to show tolerance and can give affection, understand their friends' needs, and want to help friends who are experiencing difficulties (Febrianti & Setiawati, 2023). Children who learn empathy will develop compassion and be able to control their emotions by giving

and accepting forgiveness, and will be willing to play together and share with their friends. In this regard, researchers conducted interviews with several teachers at ABA 48 Kindergarten, ABR Gresik, regarding students' empathy, as follows.

"Often they immediately approach, rub their friend's back, or even put on a sad face and ask, 'What's wrong with you?'. But there are also those who run to their teacher, shouting, 'Teacher, Mawar fell!'" (Teacher)

A child's ability to recognize the situation and condition of a friend who is ill. Sometimes empathy doesn't require many words; simply sitting together and being physically present makes others feel less alone. This demonstrates that when someone feels understood, their emotional burden and pain feel lighter, making them more prepared to bounce back.

Mindfulness: Train Children To Be Fully Present



Mindfulness is a form of meditation, a person generally meditates by systematically managing attention and energy, this can improve the quality of experience and also can realize humanity fully, as well as creating awareness of other people's relationships with the world (Wicaksono et al., 2022). Mindfulness is a state of awareness. If we pay close attention, we'll find that we don't always go about our daily activities in full awareness (Sofyan I, 2019). More specifically, mindfulness is an awareness created by paying conscious attention in the present moment, without judgment, in a unique way, and on an ongoing basis. In this regard, researchers interviewed several teachers at ABA 48 Kindergarten, ABR Gresik, regarding student mindfulness, as follows.

"When they see their teacher carrying things, some students hold the door so she can open and close it. Also, when they see their friends having trouble opening their packed snacks, they help them open them without any instructions." (Teacher)

Mindfulness for children is the skill of becoming a friend to one's own mind. It's the ability to be aware of one's feelings without feeling overwhelmed, allowing them to face challenges with a calmer heart and sharper focus. The child not only feels compassion, but is fully present, both physically and mentally. He doesn't try to "fix" his friend, but rather accompanies them until they feel strong enough to get back on their feet.

Compassion: Encourage Children To Take Real Action To Help Others.



Figure 6. Students Play together and Help Each Other

Compassion is an openness to the suffering of others followed by a desire to alleviate the suffering of others (Ayulanningsih & Karjuniwati, 2020). The concept of self-compassion, which is being kind to oneself when facing problems, has been linked to positive outcomes and is considered one of the most effective coping strategies for caregivers, particularly in reducing caregiver burden (Aditya & Farisandy, 2025). In this case, the researcher conducted interviews with several teachers at ABA 48 Kindergarten, ABR Gresik regarding student mindfulness as follows.

"When they saw their friend's drinking water spilled, some of them immediately offered to help by finding tissues or a mop. Also, when their friend didn't bring any provisions, they were happy to share with their friend so they could eat together." (Teacher).

When compassion meets a helpful spirit, a lasting and sincere relationship is created. It's no longer about "who gives what," but about how both parties care for each other so that no one feels alone in their struggle. Compassion from a friend is the highest form of recognition. It shows that the helper's kindness is not seen as an obligation or something to be taken for granted, but rather is valued as a valuable character quality.

Critical Inquiry: Invite Children To Ask Questions And Analyze Logically.



Figure 7. Students Try to Explain Their Ppinions

Critical thinking skills are a component of cognitive development. The development of preschool children's thinking skills is correlated with their cognitive development. Children need critical thinking skills to solve and explain problems. Therefore, critical thinking is a cognitive component that must be optimized from an early age. Critical thinking skills are essential skills that

must be developed to improve a person's quality. Children's critical thinking skills can be taught by getting them used to asking and responding to problems. This allows children to pay attention, categorize, recognize, analogize, classify, generalize, analyze, reflect, and so on. In this case, researchers conducted interviews with several teachers at ABA 48 Kindergarten ABR Gresik regarding students' critical inquiry as follows.

“When the teacher explains a topic/theme. For example, when learning about rain, a child asks, “If the rainwater from the sky runs out, what will happen, teacher?” “Student, if the water falls from the sky, the fish will come with it too?” (Teacher)

Based on the results of interviews with several kindergarten principals and teachers at ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten. The results obtained were that when children identified various comprehensive discussion competencies that were generally related to children's social emotional EMC2 approach, it became clear that they valued feelings and experiences significantly improved when they were given valuable opportunities to carry out 4 competencies related to children's social emotional in the TK/RA institutional environment. Then parents also felt helped because in addition to support and guidance, there was also an introduction or understanding regarding how to improve children's social emotional skills properly using the EMC2 approach.

When preschool children are oriented to the social environment of educational institutions, they learn to explore and interact socially. This significantly helps them become more independent and develop greater self-control, particularly in their social-emotional aspects. By understanding EMC2, children's social-emotional competencies, several learning opportunities are created, fostering the concept of 5S learning (Smile, Greet, Say Hello, Be Polite, and Courteous) (A. M. Sidiq & Rohma, 2024).

The big advantage of understanding the 4 social emotional competencies of children in an educational institution environment is that it will provide many opportunities to combine social activities in the TK/RA educational environment with social activities in the community environment, especially those that can develop children's social emotional development. Results of observations and interviews at the ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten educational institution. The researcher presents several lists of understandings of early childhood social-emotional development competencies using the EMC2 approach at ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten, as Table 2.

Table 2. Indicators Of Competencies, Participants, And Competency Achievement

Indicators of Competencies	Participants	Competency Achievement			
		BB	MB	B	BSB
Empathy	26 Childrens	3	7	8	8
Mindfulness		2	6	10	8
Compassion		2	4	14	6
Critical Inquiry		2	4	12	8
Total number of CK		9	21	44	30

*Note: BB (Not Yet Developed), MB (Starting to Develop), B (Developing) and BSB (Very Well Developed)

Based on the number of students at the ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten institution, 26 children, with qualifications that have competency achievements that have not yet developed (BB) as much as 9%, those that have competency achievements that have begun to develop (MB) as much as 21%, those that have competency achievements that have developed (B) as much as 44%, and those that have competency achievements that have developed very well (BSB) 30%. From the results of the data above, it can be concluded that the achievement of early childhood social emotional development competencies with the EMC2 approach at ABA 48 ABR Gresik Kindergarten is still quite good.

Theoretically, social emotional development is a process in which children learn to adapt to understand others, manage their own emotions, and establish meaningful relationships with their environment. (Al Umairi, 2025). According to Hurlock (2011), social development is the acquisition of the ability to behave in accordance with social demands (Al Umairi, 2023). Meanwhile, emotional development is related to children's ability to recognize, express, and manage their feelings.

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory: In the PAUD age range (3-6 years), children are in the Initiative vs. Guilt phase (Mushab Al Umairi, 2023a). Children begin to show initiative in social interactions and exploring their environment. Failure or rejection by their environment during this phase can lead to feelings of guilt that hinder emotional development.

Daniel Goleman's Theory of Emotional Intelligence: Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence (EQ), which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, is a stronger predictor of success than IQ (A. Miranti. M. A. U. Sidiq, 2022). PAUD is a critical period for laying the foundation of EQ. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational framework developed to help individuals understand emotions, feel empathy, and build positive relationships (Mushab Al Umairi, 2023b). CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) states that SEL focuses on five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Umairi et al., 2025). The EMC2 approach exists as a cutting-edge form of SEL that integrates neuroscience and pedagogy.

The EMC2 (Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, Critical Inquiry) approach was developed by UNESCO MGIEP (Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development). This framework builds on neuroscientific findings that the brain is plastic (neuroplasticity), allowing brain circuits that regulate emotion and cognition to be trained from an early age. Empathy is the psychological ability to understand and share the feelings of others (Sera Lapanda et al., 2022). Neurobiologically, empathy is related to mirror neurons in the human brain, which activate when observing another person's actions or emotions. Empathy is divided into cognitive empathy (the ability to understand another person's perspective/perspective taking) and affective empathy (the ability to sense another person's emotions) (Mulyawati et al., 2022). At an early age, empathy is cultivated by facilitating children's recognition of various emotions (emotion recognition). Mindfulness is defined as the awareness that arises from intentionally and non-judgmentally directing attention to the present moment (Bukhori et al., 2023). Practicing mindfulness in children theoretically helps regulate the amygdala (the brain's fear/impulsivity center) and strengthens the prefrontal cortex (the reasoning/emotional regulation center). This is crucial for preventing tantrums in children. Compassion is a cognitive and behavioral step that goes beyond empathy. If empathy is "I feel your pain," then compassion is characterized by the intrinsic motivation of "I want to alleviate your suffering." (Ayulanningsih & Karjuniwati, 2020). In social development theory, compassion encourages the emergence of prosocial behavior such as sharing, helping, and comforting, which are the main indicators of social maturity in PAUD institutions. (Aditya & Farisandy, 2025). Inquiry Criticism is a child's ability to question assumptions, see the consequences of an action, and make logical decisions. (Maylia et al., 2024). Even though the cognitive abilities of early childhood children are still pre-operational (symbolic and egocentric), critical inquiry trains children's cognitive flexibility to find solutions (problem-solving) when conflicts occur between friends (Zizan & Tahun, 2024).

Based on the theoretical review above, it can be synthesized that the social-emotional development of early childhood requires pedagogical interventions that not only accustom children to good behavior but also train their brain architecture. The EMC2 approach provides a theoretical neuro-psycho-pedagogical foundation in which children gradually learn to recognize themselves (Mindfulness), feel for others (Empathy), act prosocially (Compassion), and reason logically socially (Critical Inquiry). The implementation of EMC2 in early childhood education institutions is a preventive and formative strategy that is crucial in shaping children's long-term psychological well-being.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion regarding the implementation of the EMC2 (Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry) approach in PAUD institutions, several main points can be concluded as follows: Effectiveness of Social-Emotional Stimulation. The EMC2 approach has been proven to significantly improve the social-emotional intelligence of early childhood. The four pillars, applied in an integrated manner, provide a clear framework for children to recognize, manage, and express emotions in a healthy manner. The most prominent change is seen in children's self-regulation skills, which have become more stable. Internalizing Values through Habituation. The success of this approach lies not in theoretical instruction, but in habituation.

Mindfulness helps children focus and calm down. Empathy and compassion build social sensitivity. Critical Inquiry fosters independent thinking in making ethical decisions. The Role of Teachers as Emotional Architects. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and role models. Technical and administrative challenges can be overcome if teachers are committed to practicing the EMC2 values themselves before teaching them to their children. The quality of interactions between teachers and children is key to successful character transformation in the classroom. School-Family Synergy. Research shows that children's social-emotional development achieves optimal results (BSB scale - Very Well Developed) when there is continuity between EMC2 practices at school and parenting patterns at home. Parental support in validating children's emotions accelerates this emotional maturation process.

For Early Childhood Education Institutions: It is recommended to integrate the EMC2 pillars into the Operational Curriculum of Educational Units (KOSP), not merely as an additional activity, but as part of the school culture. For Teachers: Continuous training on mindfulness techniques and empathetic communication is needed to better prepare teachers to deal with the diverse emotional dynamics of children. For Future Researchers: Experimental research with a control group is needed to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of EMC2 compared to conventional methods in the long term.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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