

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS THROUGH MINI BUILDING PROJECT WITH ICE CREAM STICKS IN CONSTRUCTION CENTER

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Abstract:

This study aims to improve children's social emotional skills through a mini building project using ice cream sticks in the construction center. The research was conducted in Group B at TK Mutiara Insani with 8 children aged 5–6 years. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data collection techniques included observation sheets, field notes, and documentation. The findings of the first cycle showed that children began to cooperate, share, and wait for their turns, although conflicts such as role domination and emotional outbursts still appeared. Improvements were then implemented in the second cycle by giving clearer roles, simple rules, and positive reinforcement through star stickers. The second cycle demonstrated significant progress, with more than 80% of children successfully developing social emotional indicators such as cooperation, patience, sharing, and emotional control. The study concludes that mini building projects using ice cream sticks are effective and meaningful activities to enhance early childhood social-emotional development.

Keywords: *social emotional, project-based learning, ice cream sticks, early childhood*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan sosial emosional anak melalui proyek mini bangunan menggunakan stik es krim di sentra pembangunan. Penelitian dilakukan pada anak kelompok B TK Mutiara Insani yang berjumlah 8 orang dengan rentang usia 5–6 tahun. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) model Kemmis dan McTaggart yang meliputi perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Instrumen penelitian berupa lembar observasi, catatan lapangan, dan dokumentasi. Hasil siklus I menunjukkan bahwa anak mulai belajar bekerja sama, berbagi, dan menunggu giliran, meskipun masih muncul kendala seperti perebutan peran dan emosi yang mudah meledak. Pada siklus II dilakukan perbaikan dengan pembagian peran yang lebih jelas, aturan sederhana, serta pemberian reward berupa stiker bintang. Hasil siklus II menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan, lebih dari 80% anak mampu berbagi, sabar menunggu giliran, bekerja sama, dan mengendalikan emosi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa proyek mini bangunan dengan media stik es krim efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan sosial emosional anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: *sosial emosional, pembelajaran berbasis proyek, stik es krim, anak usia dini*

INTRODUCTION

Social emotional development is a crucial foundation in early childhood education. It encompasses skills such as cooperation, empathy, self-regulation, patience, and respect for others (Hurlock, 2011). These competencies are not innate but must be nurtured through meaningful learning experiences from an early age. Children with strong social emotional skills are more likely to adapt well in school settings, build positive peer relationships, and regulate their behavior in challenging situations (Goleman, 2000).

In reality, many children still face obstacles in expressing appropriate social emotional behavior. For instance, they may struggle to share, show frustration when their desires are not fulfilled, or refuse to collaborate with peers. These conditions can hinder not only social adjustment but also academic readiness. Teachers are therefore responsible for designing activities that allow children to practice and internalize social emotional values in natural contexts (Effendi, 2020).

One effective approach to support this development is project-based learning. According to Tedjasaputra (2005), project activities in early childhood education can stimulate children's logical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative skills. Specifically, construction center activities provide opportunities for children to negotiate roles, cooperate in building projects, and resolve conflicts. Simple media such as ice cream sticks can be highly engaging, safe, and inexpensive, making them ideal for early childhood classrooms (Sudjana, 2010).

Several studies affirm the effectiveness of project-based approaches in enhancing children's social emotional development. Lestari (2018) found that construction projects improved cooperation and communication among preschoolers. Similarly, Rahmawati (2020) demonstrated that using ice cream sticks not only fostered creativity but also promoted social skills such as sharing and turn taking. Despite these findings, there is still limited research on the integration of project-based learning using simple media within multicultural contexts, especially in Indonesian early childhood education.

Based on this gap, this study was conducted with the aim of improving social emotional skills of Group B children at TK Mutiara Insani through a mini building project using ice cream sticks in the construction center.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied Classroom Action Research (CAR) with the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model, consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research subjects were 8 children aged 5–6 years in Group B at TK Mutiara Insani during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Procedures:

1. Cycle I: Children were asked to build mini houses using ice cream sticks in groups. Teacher observed interactions, focusing on indicators of sharing, patience, cooperation, and emotional control.
2. Cycle II: Based on Cycle I reflection, improvements were made by assigning clearer roles (glue applier, stick arranger, decorator), setting simple rules, and providing positive reinforcement with star stickers.

Instruments:

1. Observation sheets for social-emotional indicators.
2. Field notes of children's behaviors.

3. Documentation (photos and videos).

Data Analysis:

1. Qualitative analysis: descriptive observations of children's behavior.
2. Quantitative analysis: percentage of children achieving "developed as expected" in social emotional indicators.
3. Success criteria: minimum 75% of children reached "developed as expected."

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Pre-Action Assessment (Pre-Cycle)

Before the implementation of the mini building project, a preliminary observation (pre-cycle) was conducted to identify the initial level of children's social emotional development in Group B at TK Mutiara Insani. The observation focused on four key indicators:

1. The ability to share materials and tools
2. Patience in waiting for their turn
3. Cooperation in group activities
4. Emotional control when facing challenges

Table 1: Pre-Cycle Assessment of Children's Social Emotional Development

No	Child's Initial	Sharing	Patience	Cooperation	Emotional Control	Category
1	A.K.A.	30%	25%	40%	20%	Not Yet Developed
2	A.R.	45%	35%	50%	30%	Emerging
3	A.I.M.	40%	30%	45%	25%	Emerging
4	B.L.D.S.	35%	25%	40%	20%	Not Yet Developed
5	H.R.B.A.	40%	35%	45%	25%	Emerging
6	M.E.A.	45%	40%	50%	30%	Emerging
7	M.R.P.I.	35%	30%	40%	25%	Not Yet Developed
8	P.S.P.	45%	40%	50%	30%	Emerging

Average percentage per indicator:

1. Sharing materials: 39%
2. Patience in waiting: 32%
3. Cooperation: 45%
4. Emotional control: 26%

Most children were still in the "Not Yet Developed" (NYD) and "Emerging" (E) categories. Children tended to compete for materials, lacked patience, and found it difficult to manage emotions during activities. Some children, such as A.K.A., M.R.P.I., and B.L.D.S., often showed emotional outbursts or frustration when things did not go their way. Meanwhile, A.R. and M.E.A. began to show early cooperative behavior, although inconsistently.

These findings indicated the need for structured learning activities that could encourage children to share, cooperate, and regulate their emotions in a group setting. Therefore, the mini building project using ice cream sticks was applied in Cycle I as an intervention.

B. Cycle I Findings

Cycle I was carried out by engaging children in a mini building project using

ice cream sticks at the construction center. Children were divided into small groups and encouraged to build structures collaboratively with minimal teacher interference.

Table 2: Children's Social Emotional Development in Cycle I

No	Child's Initial	Sharing Materials	Patience (Waiting Turn)	Cooperation	Emotional Control
1	A.K.A.	40% (NYD)	40% (NYD)	55% (E)	35% (NYD)
2	A.R.	60% (D)	55% (E)	70% (D)	50% (E)
3	A.I.M.	50% (E)	50% (E)	55% (E)	35% (NYD)
4	B.L.D.S.	65% (D)	50% (E)	65% (D)	50% (E)
5	H.R.B.A.	50% (E)	45% (E)	55% (E)	35% (NYD)
6	M.E.A.	55% (E)	55% (E)	70% (D)	50% (E)
7	M.R.P.I.	55% (E)	50% (E)	60% (E)	40% (NYD)
8	P.S.P.	65% (D)	55% (E)	65% (D)	50% (E)

Legend:

NYD = Not Yet Developed

E = Emerging

D = Developed as Expected

VD = Very Well Developed

The average improvement from pre-cycle to Cycle I was visible, particularly in sharing and cooperation. However, patience and emotional regulation were still relatively low. Children such as A.K.A. and H.R.B.A. still tended to dominate activities and became frustrated when their wishes were not met. Meanwhile, A.R., B.L.D.S., and P.S.P. began to show progress by helping and sharing with peers, though still required teacher guidance.

C. Cycle II Findings

Based on reflections from Cycle I, the teacher made several improvements for Cycle II:

1. Assigning clearer roles for each child (gluer, builder, decorator),
2. Establishing simple group rules, and
3. Providing positive reinforcement (star stickers) for cooperative behavior.

Table 3: Children's Social-Emotional Development in Cycle II

No	Child's Initial	Sharing Materials	Patience (Waiting Turn)	Cooperation	Emotional Control
1	A.K.A.	80% (D)	75% (D)	85% (VD)	70% (D)
2	A.R.	90% (VD)	85% (VD)	95% (VD)	80% (VD)
3	A.I.M.	80% (D)	75% (D)	85% (VD)	70% (D)
4	B.L.D.S.	85% (VD)	80% (VD)	90% (VD)	75% (D)
5	H.R.B.A.	80% (D)	75% (D)	80% (D)	70% (D)
6	M.E.A.	90%	85%	95%	80%

		(VD)	(VD)	(VD)	(VD)
7	M.R.P.I.	85%	75%	85%	70%
		(VD)	(D)	(VD)	(D)
8	P.S.P.	90%	85%	95%	80%
		(VD)	(VD)	(VD)	(VD)

By Cycle II, significant improvements were recorded across all indicators. Over 80% of children achieved the “Developed” (D) or “Very Well Developed” (VD) levels in sharing, cooperation, patience, and emotional regulation. Children became more cooperative, motivated, and emotionally stable during group play.

The improvement from the pre-cycle to Cycle II demonstrates that the mini building project using ice cream sticks effectively enhanced children’s social emotional competence. Through this activity, children practiced cooperation, patience, and emotional control in a real social setting.

In Cycle I, children such as A.K.A. and B.L.D.S. still struggled with emotional regulation, while A.R. and P.S.P. showed good progress in sharing and teamwork. By Cycle II, the introduction of clearer role assignments, group rules, and reward systems helped all children become more active, engaged, and balanced in their interactions.

Cycle II also introduced a more structured role division and a reward system using star stickers. Children became more enthusiastic, cooperative, and emotionally stable during group activities. By the end of Cycle II, more than 80% of the children had reached the expected developmental level. They appeared more motivated, less competitive, and more capable of working collaboratively with their peers.

The findings of this study revealed a significant improvement in children’s social-emotional skills through the implementation of the mini building project using ice cream sticks in the construction center. The progress was clearly observed from Cycle I to Cycle II. In Cycle I, although some children began to learn to share, cooperate, and wait for their turn, several challenges remained, such as role domination, minor conflicts, and emotional outbursts. This is understandable since early childhood is a developmental stage in which children are still learning to recognize and regulate their emotions.

According to Hurlock (2011), social emotional development in early childhood occurs through interaction with others. Children acquire skills such as sharing, cooperating, and adjusting themselves through real experiences rather than verbal instruction alone. Thus, the findings of Cycle I indicated that children required more structured practice and teacher support to manage their social interactions effectively.

In Cycle II, improvements were made by providing clearer role distribution, applying simple group rules, and giving positive reinforcement through star stickers. These strategies proved effective in enhancing children’s social emotional skills. When each child was assigned a specific role, potential conflicts were reduced because children no longer competed for dominance. This finding aligns with Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding, which highlights the importance of adult guidance to help children achieve certain social competencies within group interactions.

The application of simple rules, such as “those who finish gluing must give their turn to a friend,” also helped children internalize concepts of discipline and fairness within the group. Piaget (1962) suggested that at the preoperational stage,

children begin to understand social rules through shared play experiences with peers. By consistently applying simple rules, children gradually learned to adapt to collective agreements.

Furthermore, the use of star stickers as positive reinforcement effectively motivated children to demonstrate desired behaviors. Skinner's behaviorist theory (1953) emphasizes that behavior reinforced with rewards is more likely to be repeated. In this study, children were motivated to share, wait patiently, and cooperate because of the recognition and appreciation they received from the teacher.

These results are consistent with Lestari (2018), who found that simple construction projects improved cooperation and communication among preschoolers, and Rahmawati (2020), who demonstrated that ice cream stick media fostered creativity as well as social skills such as sharing and turn taking. Both studies support the outcomes of this research, showing that mini building projects can create a conducive environment for children's social emotional development.

The progress from Cycle I to Cycle II also illustrates that social emotional learning is a gradual process. Children cannot instantly demonstrate mature social behaviors but require repeated, structured experiences. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role as facilitators, motivators, and guides in helping children internalize social-emotional values in everyday activities.

The implication of this study is that project-based learning using simple, low cost media is highly relevant in early childhood education. Mini building projects not only enhance fine motor skills and creativity but also serve as effective tools to foster positive social attitudes. In multicultural classroom settings, such projects may further promote empathy, mutual respect, and collaboration across differences.

Therefore, it can be concluded that mini building projects using ice cream sticks provide meaningful, engaging, and effective opportunities for young learners to develop essential social emotional skills, which are foundational for school readiness and future life challenges.

Table 4: Social Emotional Development Progress from Pre-Cycle to Cycle II

Indicator	Pre-Cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
Sharing Materials	39%	55%	85%
Patience (Waiting Turn)	32%	50%	80%
Cooperation	45%	63%	90%
Emotional Control	26%	45%	75%

Interpretation:

1. The data show a steady improvement in all four indicators across the three phases.
2. The highest increase occurred in cooperation, which rose from 45% in the pre-cycle to 90% in Cycle II.
3. Emotional control also improved significantly, showing that children became more capable of managing frustration and following group norms.
4. Overall, by Cycle II, most children had reached the "Developed as Expected"
 a. (D) to "Very Well Developed" (VD) levels in all social emotional aspects.

CONCLUSION

This classroom action research demonstrated that a mini building project using ice cream sticks in the construction center effectively improved the social emotional skills of Group B children at TK Mutiara Insani. In Cycle I, children began to practice sharing, waiting for their turn, cooperating, and controlling their emotions, but challenges remained, such as role domination, conflicts, and emotional outbursts. The percentage of children achieving the expected social emotional indicators ranged from 40–60%, indicating the need for improvements.

In Cycle II, after applying clearer role distribution, simple group rules, and positive reinforcement through star stickers, a significant improvement was observed. More than 80% of children successfully demonstrated progress in sharing, cooperation, patience, and emotional regulation.

Therefore, it can be concluded that mini building projects using ice cream sticks are effective, engaging, and meaningful activities to enhance early childhood social emotional development. This project-based approach can serve as a practical alternative strategy that is easy to implement with simple and low-cost media.

Table 5: Previous and Recent Studies Related to This Research

No	Researcher and Year	Title of the Study	Method /Subject	Main Findings	Relevance to This Research
1	Vygotsky (1978)	Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes	Theoretical study	Explained that children's social emotional development occurs through social interaction and adult scaffolding.	Provides the theoretical foundation that teacher support and group collaboration enhance social emotional growth.
2	Hurlock (2011)	Child Development	Theoretical review	Social emotional development is formed through direct social experiences rather than verbal instruction.	Supports the use of experiential learning to foster emotional and social competence in early childhood.
3	Piaget (1962)	Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood	Developmental psychology study	Found that through play, children learn discipline, fairness, and empathy.	Supports the use of cooperative play projects like mini building activities in social learning.

4	Skinner (1953)	Science and Human Behavior	Behaviorist approach	Positive reinforcement such as praise or rewards strengthens desirable social behavior in children.	Supports the application of a reward system in project-based activities to encourage positive social behavior.
5	Lestari (2018)	Improving Early Childhood Cooperation through Simple Construction Projects	Classroom Action Research, 15 kindergarten children	Construction project activities enhanced children's cooperation and communication skills.	Reinforces that project-based learning can effectively develop children's social-emotional abilities.
6	Rahmawati (2020)	The Use of Ice Cream Stick Media to Improve Creativity and Social Skills of Kindergarten Children	Classroom Action Research, 10 group B children	Ice cream stick media effectively improved creativity, sharing, and teamwork.	Relevant because it uses the same medium (ice cream sticks) to develop social-emotional competence.

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