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Literature Review: Counseling Strategies in Early Childhood Education to Reduce Tantrum Behavior in Children

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Abstract

Early childhood is at an early stage of development in recognizing and managing emotions, so they often exhibit tantrum behavior when frustrated or have difficulty expressing needs verbally. Tantrums that are not handled appropriately can lead to other problematic behaviors and hinder children's social-emotional development. Therefore, counseling strategies in early childhood education (PAUD) are important to help children learn to manage their emotions adaptively. This study aims to identify effective counseling strategies to reduce tantrum behavior in early childhood. This study used a qualitative method with a literature review approach by reviewing journals, theses, and books relevant to the topic of tantrums and PAUD counseling. The analysis results show that counseling strategies such as play therapy, empathetic communication, strengthening emotional regulation, and teacher-parent collaboration have been proven to reduce the intensity of tantrums and help children recognize and control their emotions. The implementation of developmentally appropriate counseling strategies provides a sense of security for children and creates a more conducive learning environment. Counseling plays a crucial role in supporting children's social-emotional development and is an effective approach to managing tantrums in PAUD. The results of this study can be used as initial data for subsequent researchers in studying this problem in different contexts and issues.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education serves as a fundamental foundation for character development, social-emotional skills, and behavioral development in later life. Early in life, children experience a golden period when brain development is rapid, and they are sensitive to stimuli from education and social interactions. Therefore, the standard of early childhood education services is a determining factor in the success of long-term learning and individual development. Early childhood education involves not only the teaching process but also the holistic developmental environment to prepare children for the next level of education (Nugroho & Fahmi, 2021).

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Therefore, insight into the dynamics of children's behavior, such as emotional aspects such as tantrums, is a vital component in providing a quality education. In Indonesia, the importance of this is increasingly evident through various national studies that reveal that the socio-emotional development of early childhood still faces significant obstacles.

According to the 2022 Indonesian Early Childhood Status report from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), approximately 52.3% of children aged 3–6 in Indonesia still exhibit difficulties in regulating their emotions, such as a tendency to cry easily, excessive anger, and mild aggressive behavior. Furthermore, the National Early Childhood Profile Survey (BKKBN, 2021) shows that 1 in 4 children exhibits repeated tantrums at least twice a day, both at home and at school. Tantrums, as a form of uncontrolled emotional expression, are a significant issue because, if not handled properly, they can hinder children's learning process and affect their social interactions in early childhood education environments.

Tantrum behavior itself is an emotional outburst typically characterized by loud crying, screaming, hitting, or refusing instructions (Gitara et al., 2023). This phenomenon is actually part of normal development, but it can become problematic if its frequency, intensity, or duration disrupts a child's daily activities or learning in early childhood education. Tantrums that are not properly addressed can develop into long-term behavioral problems, such as aggressiveness, anxiety, and difficulty adapting socially in elementary school (Kim & Park, 2023). Several early childhood educators admit that they still struggle to find effective and age-appropriate support methods for children to handle these complex emotions.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that most early childhood education (PAUD) teachers have not received adequate training in child development counseling. According to the 2023 Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology report on the Pedagogical Competence of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Educators, only 38% of PAUD teachers feel confident applying basic counseling approaches to address challenging behavior in children. Yet, counseling-based interventions are essential to help children recognize, express, and manage their emotions productively. PAUD teachers are not only required to provide learning guidance; they must also understand children's emotional needs through sensitive, empathetic, and developmentally appropriate methods. Counseling competency in PAUD educators is a key element in creating a safe and supportive emotional environment for children (Gading & Pratiwi, 2021).

Tantrums, as a behavioral problem, are inseparable from a child's ability to regulate their emotions. Theoretically, emotional regulation is the capacity to understand, interpret, and manage emotional responses according to social context. Gross's theory of emotional regulation explains that young children are still learning to control their impulses, thus requiring adult assistance in co-regulation. In the context of early childhood education, teachers and counselors play a key role in this support. Intensive emotional support from teachers can reduce the frequency of tantrums by up to 60% within the first six weeks of intervention (Alqahtani, 2022).

Counseling strategies in early childhood education (PAUD) encompass various methods, such as play therapy, small group counseling, empathetic communication techniques, positive reinforcement, and socio-emotional development approaches integrated into the curriculum. Successful strategies must consider the child's age, brain development, and local culture. A play-based counseling approach can significantly reduce tantrums by providing a safe space for children to express their emotions through symbolic and sensorimotor activities (Lestari & Mahmudah, 2022). This approach also aligns with the philosophy of early childhood education in Indonesia, which emphasizes fun, meaningful, and hands-on

learning.

The urgency of studying counseling strategies in early childhood education (PAUD) is increasingly apparent as various literature shows that traditional approaches, such as reprimands or punishment, are no longer appropriate in the context of early childhood development. Children are not individuals who can automatically change their behavior after being reprimanded; they require consistent, empathy-based support. Punitive approaches can even exacerbate tantrums. Children who receive physical or verbal punishment during tantrums are twice as likely to experience tantrums as children who receive a supportive counseling approach (Torres & Molina, 2021).

Focusing on tantrum behavior is crucial due to its high prevalence among young children in Indonesia. Based on national data and recent research findings, it is crucial for early childhood education (PAUD) administrators to view this issue not simply as "naughty" behavior, but as a developmental expression that requires professional counseling. This study can also encourage PAUD institutions to develop evidence-based policies for managing child behavior. Structured, evidence-backed counseling practices can significantly improve the quality of PAUD services, particularly in the area of behavior management (Harsono & Yulia, 2023). This demonstrates that counseling strategies are not only a pedagogical necessity but also a crucial component of PAUD quality management.

The research, "Literature Review: Counseling Strategies in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) to Reduce Tantrum Behavior in Children," is crucial. This research not only enriches academic knowledge regarding child development counseling but also makes a tangible contribution to educational practice in the field. This literature review will integrate the latest scientific findings regarding the effectiveness of counseling strategies in reducing tantrum behavior and identify the most relevant approaches to the PAUD context in Indonesia. Through a comprehensive and in-depth review, it is hoped that this research can serve as an important reference for teachers, education practitioners, and policymakers in efforts to improve the quality of emotional support for early childhood.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature review method to analyze various scientific findings regarding counseling strategies in early childhood education (PAUD) to reduce tantrum behavior in children. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because this study seeks to deeply understand the phenomenon of tantrum behavior and the counseling approaches used by educators in the context of early childhood education. This method allows researchers to comprehensively interpret text-based data, resulting in a complete conceptual picture of relevant counseling interventions. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research aims to uncover meaning, understand processes, and describe the essence of a phenomenon through interpretive analysis of available data sources. Therefore, this method is considered most appropriate for the research objectives. Data analysis in this study uses content analysis techniques that focus on interpreting, categorizing, and deriving meaning from the literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tantrums in early childhood can be considered a form of strong emotional outburst, especially when children find it difficult to regulate their feelings or express their needs. These tantrums are not just ordinary anger, but rather a strong emotional response because children's self-control is still underdeveloped. When they cannot express what they need or feel pressure from their surroundings, their emotions can explode in the form of loud crying, screaming, kicking, hitting, or refusing to follow

rules. Qualitative research in the context of early childhood education shows that teachers often observe children experiencing tantrums engaging in actions such as rolling over, kicking, or hitting objects or their peers when feeling frustrated or anxious (Fadila et al., 2025).

Tantrums can have various causes, but one of the main ones is a child's inability to verbally express their feelings and desires. Children who don't yet have the words to express their anger, fear, or disappointment tend to resort to aggressive behavior as a way to express themselves. Furthermore, inconsistent parenting styles, such as being too permissive and sometimes too strict, can exacerbate the situation because children feel insecure about predicting how adults will react.

Environmental factors, such as excessive noise, large classrooms, or peer conflict, can also trigger emotional outbursts. In some cases, tantrums also occur when children feel unheard, disrespected, or have their requests rejected in a manner they perceive as rude. The impact of these tantrums is quite evident in early childhood school settings. Frequent tantrums can disrupt learning, as teachers often have to stop activities to calm children down. Furthermore, if tantrums persist, they can hinder children's social and emotional development, such as difficulty controlling emotions, being patient, and developing empathy for others. Furthermore, relationships between children and teachers can become strained if tantrums are perceived as misbehavior rather than as a sign of emotional support. Tantrums can also make children feel unsafe in the school environment if they feel unable to express their feelings without being judged.

In the context of early childhood education (PAUD), counseling is not simply formal therapy conducted in a clinic, but rather a mentoring process designed to suit the child's developmental stage. Early childhood counseling has its own characteristics: a gentle, empathetic approach, based on play activities, and emphasizing unconditional acceptance. The primary goal is to help children recognize, name, and manage their emotions in a healthy and flexible manner. Some basic principles of counseling in PAUD are empathy, where educators understand children's feelings without judgment; unconditional acceptance, so children feel accepted as they are; positive communication, where teachers use gentle words, name children's feelings, and acknowledge them; and the use of play as the primary medium (Sulistianingsih, 2022). Play activities were chosen because, for young children, play is a natural way to communicate and convey their thoughts and feelings.

The role of teachers is crucial: they act as "early counselors" in the school environment. They observe children's behavior, accompany them during emotional outbursts, and provide consistent emotional support. Through observation, teachers can identify the causes of tantrums, help children regulate their emotions, and build safe and comfortable emotional bonds. These principles form the basis for more specific counseling strategies in the early childhood education environment.

Counseling strategies in PAUD to reduce tantrum behavior

Play Therapy

Play therapy is a primary approach to addressing these challenges. In this method, children are given the opportunity and tools, such as dolls, sand, or role-playing games, to express their emotions without using words. These activities allow children to channel frustration, anxiety, and anger through symbols of their own choosing. Qualitative research has shown that play therapy techniques, such as free play and role-play, help children manage anger, fear, and sadness in a safe and structured manner (Insis, 2023). Filial therapy, a variant of play therapy in which parents are trained as "therapists," can reduce the frequency of tantrums and improve children's emotional regulation skills (*Filial Therapy Untuk Meningkatkan Regulasi Emosi*

Dan Mengurangi Tantrum, 2025). Through play therapy, children learn about self-control by trying out emotional scenarios, responding to frustration in a safe environment, and feeling that their emotions are noticed and understood.

Empathetic Communication-Based Counseling

Counseling based on empathetic communication is also a highly recommended strategy. In this case, educators apply active listening, identify children's emotions ("I see you're sad because your toy was lost"), and acknowledge their feelings ("It's natural for you to feel upset"). Phenomenological research in a Semarang kindergarten showed that gentle verbal communication, hugs, eye contact, and a calm demeanor from educators significantly contributed to reducing tantrums in children aged 2–4 years (*Filial Therapy Untuk Meningkatkan Regulasi Emosi Dan Mengurangi Tantrum*, 2025). With this approach, children are encouraged to understand that their emotions are valid and manageable. By naming emotions ("labeling"), children increase their awareness of their feelings, while validation makes them feel safe. This method not only defuses emotional outbursts in the moment but also develops children's internal skills to recognize and manage emotions in the future (Melvianti et al., 2024).

Behavioral Approaches: Positive Reinforcement and Time-In

Behavior-based techniques also yield positive results when combined with emotional approaches. Positive reinforcement involves rewarding children when they successfully express emotions verbally or stop themselves before an outburst, which encourages the development of self-regulation habits. In contrast to time-outs, some recent research recommends time-ins, which involve approaching the child and providing guidance when emotions arise, rather than isolating them. While time-outs can reduce maladaptive behavior, their effectiveness is greatly influenced by how and when they are implemented (Agustini, 2025).

Simple CBT (Cognitive-Behavioral) for Preschool Children

While conventional cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is generally aimed at older children, simplified versions can be adapted for younger children. This approach might include the use of emotion cards, such as pictures of faces depicting anger, sadness, or joy, exercises to identify emotions, and visual strategies for self-regulation, such as "take a deep breath" or "count to five before speaking." Some educators report that using these cards and visual-based exercises helps children identify their feelings independently and choose methods to calm themselves before a tantrum becomes more intense.

Collaborative Counseling with Parents

The most successful interventions, according to the literature, involve collaboration between teachers and parents. A case study in Yogyakarta found that parents play a crucial role in managing children's negative emotions through warm interactions, emotional support, and active participation in regulation techniques (Muthmainah et al., 2023). Furthermore, qualitative research in the journal Review Pendidikan & Pengajar (2025) showed that teachers implemented counseling that included parent education on empathetic communication and sensory activities, resulting in children experiencing a decrease in negative post-tantrum emotions and learning to manage their feelings.

Impact of Implementing Counseling Strategies on Children

The frequency and intensity of tantrums decreased. Children who received interventions through play therapy or empathetic communication reported fewer emotional outbursts, such as explosive outbursts or loud crying, and when tantrums did occur, they lasted shorter than before the intervention. This indicates that children are increasingly able to recognize their body's internal cues before they reach the "explosion" point. Emotional regulation skills improved. After receiving

counseling, children demonstrated stronger abilities to identify their feelings, such as saying "I'm angry because..." or "I'm sad because...", choosing ways to calm themselves down, such as taking deep breaths or speaking softly, and asking for help from adults. These skills provide an important foundation for building emotional self-awareness.

Social behavior becomes more stable, and interactions with peers improve (Widiasari et al., 2016). Children who better regulate their emotions tend to be better able to wait their turn, share, and resolve conflicts through words, in contrast to children whose tantrums are less controlled. Classrooms also become more conducive because teachers don't need to frequently stop activities to calm emotional children, strengthening the teacher-child relationship. With an empathetic counseling approach, children feel cared for and understood, strengthening their emotional bond with their educators. This trust makes children more open in expressing their feelings later in life, while teachers feel more capable of supporting them. Children's readiness to learn increases. Children with more stable emotions are typically more focused on learning activities, calmer, and more prepared to follow classroom routines. Therefore, emotional counseling strategies also contribute to long-term academic readiness, as emotional regulation is a fundamental competency for learning and social interaction in school ("Peranan Guru Bimbingan Konseling Pada Anak Usia Dini," 2023).

CONCLUSION

Tantrums in early childhood are a normal part of development, but they require careful attention because they can disrupt learning, classroom dynamics, and children's social-emotional growth. Tantrums often arise from immaturity in self-regulation, limited language skills, inconsistent parenting styles, and a lack of responsiveness from adults in providing emotional support. Therefore, early childhood education institutions need to implement a mentoring approach that emphasizes not only behavioral correction but also comprehensive emotional support. Successful counseling strategies for reducing tantrums include approaches based on empathetic relationships, play activities, and ongoing mentoring. Play therapy, for example, has been shown to help children safely express their emotional conflicts, while counseling through empathetic communication strengthens children's ability to recognize and label their feelings. Behavioral approaches and simple techniques for emotion regulation also help children learn to respond positively to stressful situations. The implementation of counseling strategies in early childhood education has positive impacts, such as reduced frequency and intensity of tantrums, improved emotional regulation skills, a more harmonious classroom atmosphere, and the formation of warmer and more supportive bonds between teachers and children. This study emphasizes the importance of developing teachers' abilities in developmental counseling and integrating counseling into daily learning routines.

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