



Navigating Positive Discipline in Early Childhood Classrooms: Teachers' Challenges and Experiences

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Abstract:

This study explored early childhood teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline within a natural classroom setting. Although positive discipline is widely promoted in early childhood education, most existing studies focus on behavioral strategies or program outcomes, with limited attention to how teachers enact positive discipline as an emotionally demanding, relational practice in everyday classroom interactions, especially in Indonesian contexts. Employing a qualitative single-case study design, the research was conducted at TK Aisyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo, Central Java, Indonesia. Data were gathered from four purposively selected teachers through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and institutional document reviews, followed by reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed three interconnected themes: (1) balancing emotional responsiveness with behavioral boundaries through "connection before correction," (2) managing repeated challenging behaviors using redirection and guided situation repair rather than immediate punishment, and (3) maintaining structural rule consistency while flexibly adapting communication strategies to individual child temperaments and developmental readiness. The study demonstrates that positive discipline is experienced not as a rigid set of management techniques, but as a dynamic, relational, and emotionally demanding practice. These insights extend existing literature by conceptualizing positive discipline as an ongoing process of emotional co-regulation and relational negotiation, rather than solely a classroom management toolkit. The findings emphasize the need for professional development that enhances educators' emotional co-regulation capacities and highlight the importance of aligning home, school behavioral expectations within an ecological framework.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Early childhood education provides an important foundation for children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development (Savina, 2021). At this stage, children are still developing their ability to regulate emotions, control impulses, understand social expectations, and interact appropriately with others. Therefore, teachers play an important role in creating classroom environments in which children can learn behavioral expectations while simultaneously developing autonomy, emotional competence, and positive relationships. The quality of teacher-child interactions and classroom management is particularly important because teachers' responses to children's behavior can shape children's opportunities to develop self-regulation and social competence.

Classroom management in early childhood education has traditionally been associated with establishing rules, maintaining order, and responding to inappropriate behavior. However, contemporary approaches increasingly emphasize responsive and developmentally appropriate forms of behavioral guidance (Sumiati & Patilima, 2023). Rather than viewing discipline primarily as a mechanism for controlling children's behavior, these approaches position discipline as part of the learning process through which children gradually develop self-regulation and responsibility. Positive discipline is consistent with this perspective because it combines clear behavioral expectations with respectful relationships, emotional support, guidance, and developmentally appropriate consequences.

The implementation of positive discipline is particularly relevant in early childhood classrooms because young children cannot always be expected to regulate their behavior independently. Their behavioral responses are closely connected to their developing emotional and self-regulatory capacities. Research on self-regulation in preschool and early elementary classrooms emphasizes the importance of classroom practices that support children in developing attention, behavioral control, and adaptive responses to classroom demands. Similarly, research on teacher emotional support indicates that teachers' consistent and responsive interactions can contribute to children's adjustment in preschool settings (Bailey, Ondrusek, Curby, & Denham, 2022a; Wang et al., 2025). These findings suggest that behavioral guidance should be understood as part of children's broader social-emotional development rather than as an isolated classroom-management practice.

Recent literature on emotional co-regulation further underscores the relational nature of early childhood discipline. Emotional co-regulation refers to the process by which adults support children in managing their emotions and behavior through attuned, responsive interactions. In early childhood classrooms, teachers' capacity to co-regulate children's emotions is closely linked to the quality of teacher-child relationships and the emotional climate of the classroom. However, much of the existing research on emotional co-regulation focuses on children's outcomes or on general dimensions of teacher emotional support, rather than on how teachers experience and enact co-regulation in the moment-to-moment demands of implementing positive discipline. This represents an important gap, particularly given that positive discipline requires teachers to simultaneously acknowledge children's emotions, maintain behavioral boundaries, and guide children toward more appropriate responses.

Teachers nevertheless face practical challenges when translating positive discipline principles into everyday classroom interactions. Classroom behavior is dynamic, and teachers may encounter behaviors such as aggression, refusal to follow instructions, emotional outbursts, conflict between peers, or repeated disruption. Responding to such behaviors requires teachers to balance several demands simultaneously: maintaining classroom order, acknowledging children's emotions, communicating behavioral boundaries, and providing opportunities for children to learn more appropriate responses. Research on early childhood teachers' use of behavior-specific praise demonstrates that teachers' behavioral responses are influenced by characteristics of both children and classroom situations, indicating that behavioral guidance is a complex interactional process rather than a uniform set of techniques (Granger et al., 2024).

Classroom management research further indicates that teachers' ability to establish clear expectations and maintain consistent responses is an important element of positive classroom environments. Aydın and Karabay (2020) for example, reported that improvements in teachers' classroom-management skills were associated with more positive classroom climates. However, knowledge of appropriate classroom-management strategies does not necessarily ensure that teachers can implement them consistently in every situation. Teachers must interpret children's behavior, consider developmental characteristics, and select appropriate responses while attending to the needs of the entire class (Durmuşoğlu Saltalı, 2022).

The implementation of positive discipline is also influenced by the relationship between teachers and families. Children's behavioral development occurs across multiple environments, particularly home and school. Parents and teachers may therefore hold different interpretations of children's behavior and different expectations regarding appropriate behavioral responses. Research has shown that parent and teacher perceptions of children's behavior do not always correspond, suggesting that children's behavioral difficulties may be understood differently across home and educational contexts (Morris, Qi, & Elbaum, 2026). Such differences may create challenges when teachers attempt to establish consistent behavioral guidance.

Parent-teacher communication is consequently an important component of implementing behavioral guidance in early childhood settings. Family engagement is not a single or uniform construct; parents and educators may understand their roles and responsibilities differently (Bettencourt et al., 2023). Communication between teachers and families can provide opportunities to exchange information about children's behavior and development, but effective communication also requires teachers and parents to develop a shared understanding of children's needs. Research on early childhood teacher-family communication has identified both the importance of communication and the challenges teachers experience in establishing reciprocal relationships with families (Avari, Hamel, Schachter, & Hatton-Bowers, 2023).

The present study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human dev The present study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which views children's development as being shaped by interactions among interconnected environments. In the context of this study, the classroom represents a microsystem in which teachers and children interact directly, while communication between teachers and families represents a mesosystem linking the school and home environments. This perspective allows positive discipline to be understood not only as a classroom practice but also as a relational and contextual process involving children, teachers, families, and the school environment.

Previous studies have contributed important knowledge about classroom management, teacher-child interactions, children's self-regulation, behavioral guidance, and parent-teacher partnerships. However, much of the existing literature examines these dimensions separately. Research on classroom management has primarily focused on teachers' strategies and classroom

climate, while research on family engagement has focused more broadly on communication and collaboration between parents and educators. In addition, existing research on positive discipline in early childhood education has identified teachers' roles and strategies, including modeling positive behavior, providing encouragement, establishing rules, facilitating problem solving, and collaborating with parents (Sumiati & Patilima, 2023). Although these studies provide valuable evidence, there remains a need to understand how teachers themselves experience the process of navigating positive discipline in everyday early childhood classroom situations (Hermahayu, Rasidi, & Zahra, 2025).

This gap is particularly important because the implementation of positive discipline involves a tension between responsiveness and boundary setting. Teachers are expected to acknowledge children's emotions and developmental needs while also maintaining clear behavioral expectations. If behavioral guidance becomes overly controlling, it may return to punitive practices; conversely, if teachers focus only on children's emotions without maintaining clear boundaries, positive discipline may be misunderstood as permissiveness. Understanding how teachers navigate this tension can provide a more contextualized explanation of how positive discipline is actually implemented in early childhood classrooms.

Moreover, most existing studies on positive discipline and classroom management adopt outcome-oriented or strategy-focused designs, examining which techniques are effective or how often teachers use particular practices. While such research is valuable, it provides limited insight into teachers' lived experiences, interpretations, and emotional work as they implement positive discipline in real time. Examining teachers' perspectives is essential because positive discipline is not simply a set of techniques; it is a relational and emotionally demanding practice that requires continuous judgment, adaptation, and co-regulation in interaction with children and families. A qualitative focus on teachers' experiences can therefore illuminate how positive discipline is understood, negotiated, and sustained in everyday classroom life.

The present study addresses this gap by examining teachers' experiences of implementing positive discipline within a single early childhood education setting. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of positive discipline through children's behavioral outcomes, this study focuses on teachers' perspectives and classroom experiences. A qualitative single-case study allows the researchers to examine how teachers interpret challenging behavior, maintain consistency, establish behavioral boundaries, and communicate with families within the specific context of their school (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The study therefore contributes to the literature by providing an in-depth account of positive discipline as a relational and contextual practice involving teachers, children, and families.

Based on this background, the objective of this study was to explore teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline in an early childhood classroom. Specifically, the study examined: 1) How teachers balance empathy and emotional validation with clear behavioral boundaries; 2) How teachers respond to repeated challenging behaviors through persistent and constructive guidance; and 3) How teachers maintain consistent classroom expectations while flexibly adapting guidance to individual children's developmental needs.



Method (منهج)

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline in an early childhood education setting (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). A qualitative single-case study design was selected, with TK Aisyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo, Central Java, Indonesia, serving as the bounded research context. The study focused on exploring teachers' lived experiences and naturally occurring classroom practices without experimental intervention (Doyle, McCabe, Keogh, Brady, & McCann, 2020). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and relevant institutional documents (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in classroom teaching and behavioral guidance (Campbell et al., 2020). The procedures were designed to provide an in-depth understanding of how positive discipline was implemented in the selected setting and how teachers responded to challenges encountered during everyday classroom interactions.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline in an early childhood education setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative single-case study design was selected, with TK Aisyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo, Central Java, Indonesia, serving as the bounded research context. The study focused on exploring teachers' lived experiences and naturally occurring classroom practices without experimental intervention (Doyle et al., 2020). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and relevant institutional documents (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in classroom teaching and behavioral guidance (Campbell et al., 2020). The procedures were designed to provide an in-depth understanding of how positive discipline was implemented in the selected setting and how teachers responded to challenges encountered during everyday classroom interactions.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants in this study were four teachers at TK Aisyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo, Central Java, Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select educators who were directly responsible for classroom instruction and behavioral management. The sample consisted of three lead classroom teachers and one assistant teacher with varying years of teaching experience, ranging from 4 to 17 years.

The eligibility criteria included teachers who were: (1) actively teaching at TK Aisyah Menuran during the period of investigation, (2) directly engaged in guiding children's behavior in classroom settings, and (3) willing to participate in recorded interviews and observations. Staff members not directly involved in daily classroom teaching were excluded.

To maintain strict participant confidentiality, all individuals were anonymized using codes T1 through T4. The demographic and professional characteristics of the participants are detailed in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Characteristics of the Participants

Participant	Age	Teaching Experience	Position
T1	32 Years	10 Years	Classroom Teacher
T2	29 Years	6 Years	Classroom Teacher
T3	41 Years	17 Years	Classroom Teacher
T4	27 Years	4 Years	Asistant Teacher

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design. The case was bounded by one early childhood education institution, namely TK Aisyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo, Central Java, Indonesia. The design was selected to explore teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline within their natural classroom context.

The participants were not subjected to any experimental manipulation or intervention, and no random assignment was conducted. Instead, teachers were observed naturalistically during their regular classroom activities. The study therefore focused on teachers' experiences and practices within their existing classroom context rather than comparing experimental or control conditions (Xu & Zammit, 2020).

Data were collected through three sources: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and relevant school documents. Each of the four participating teachers took part in one individual semi-structured interview lasting approximately 40–55 minutes. The interviews explored teachers' understanding of positive discipline, experiences in responding to children's challenging behavior, strategies for establishing behavioral boundaries, and challenges in maintaining positive discipline practices (Suryobroto, Setiawan, Nampai, & Marhaendro, 2022).

Four classroom observations were conducted over a four-week period, with each observation lasting approximately 90 minutes. The observations were conducted as non-participant observations during regular learning activities. The observation focused on teachers' responses to children's behavior, behavioral boundaries, emotional support, behavioral redirection, and developmentally appropriate consequences. Field notes were recorded during and immediately after each observation.

Relevant school documents concerning classroom rules and behavioral guidance were also reviewed to provide contextual information about the implementation of positive discipline at the school.

The interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The data were read repeatedly, coded, grouped into categories, and examined for recurring patterns. Related categories were subsequently developed into themes representing teachers' challenges and experiences in implementing positive discipline.

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were triangulated to strengthen the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings (Kyngäs et al., 2020). Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participant identities were protected through the use of codes, and the personal identities of the teachers were not disclosed in the manuscript.

Result (نتائج)

The analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observations, and school documents generated three interconnected themes concerning teachers' experiences in implementing positive discipline at TK Aisyiyah Menuran, Baki, Sukoharjo: (1) balancing empathy with behavioral boundaries, (2) responding to repeated challenging behaviors, and (3) maintaining

consistency while adapting guidance to individual children. The three themes were identified across the four teacher participants and were supported by recurring patterns observed during classroom activities. Rather than treating positive discipline as a fixed set of **classroom management** techniques, the teachers described and demonstrated it as an ongoing **relational** process of guiding children while maintaining respectful **and secure** relationships and clear behavioral expectations.

A summary of the identified themes, daily classroom challenges, and teachers' strategies is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Teachers' Experiences and Strategies in Implementing Positive Discipline

Theme / Dimension	Daily Classroom Challenges	Teacher Navigating Strategies
1. Balancing Empathy with Boundaries	Distinguishing between validating emotional outbursts (crying, anger) and allowing inappropriate behavior.	Using emotional support as an entry point, approaching calmly, validating feelings, and restating limits clearly.
2. Responding to Repeated Behaviors	Managing recurring non-compliance, peer conflicts, and interruptions without reacting impulsively or punitively.	Verbal reminders, physical proximity, behavioral redirection, offering choices, and facilitating situation repair.
3. Consistency vs. Individualization	Applying predictable rules across teachers while accommodating varied child temperaments and regulation capacities.	Maintaining uniform classroom expectations while adapting verbal communication prompts and cooling-down periods.

1. Balancing Empathy with Behavioral Boundaries

The first theme concerned teachers' efforts to balance emotional responsiveness with clear behavioral boundaries. All four teachers described the importance of understanding children's emotional states before responding to inappropriate behavior. Teachers reported that children's crying, anger, refusal, or conflict with peers were not immediately interpreted as deliberate disobedience. Instead, teachers attempted to identify the situation underlying the behavior and provide an appropriate response.

This finding aligns with Hermahayu et al. (2025) and Kamila et al. (2024), who found that positive discipline in Magelang PAUD settings emphasized understanding children's emotional states before behavioral correction. Similarly, Wang et al. (2025) demonstrated that teacher emotional support serves as a foundation for children's social-emotional development. Crucially, this finding operationalizes the core principle of Positive Discipline Theory, often conceptualized as "connection before correction" (Nelsen, 2006). When viewed through the lens of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), this relational sequence acts as a fundamental mechanism of emotional co-regulation rather than a mere instructional technique. Because preschool-aged children possess developing neurobiological self-soothing capacities, the teacher's calm and emotionally attuned presence provides an external regulatory anchor (a "secure base"). This co-regulatory attunement de-escalates the child's acute distress, thereby enabling higher-order cognitive processing and behavioral receptivity.

At the same time, the teachers emphasized that acknowledging children's emotions did not mean accepting inappropriate behavior. They maintained classroom expectations by explaining which behavior was acceptable and which behavior needed to be changed. One teacher explained:

"Children need to understand that certain behaviors are not acceptable, but we also need to understand the reasons behind their behavior." (T1, 10/06/2026)

This pattern was also observed during classroom activities. When children became upset or refused to follow instructions, teachers generally approached them calmly, acknowledged their emotional state, and then restated the expected behavior. Rather than immediately using reprimands, teachers used short explanations, reminders, and behavioral redirection.

For example, during one observation, a child became upset after another child took a classroom object. The teacher first allowed the child to express frustration and then guided the child to explain what had happened. The teacher subsequently reminded both children about taking turns and encouraged them to resolve the disagreement. The interaction ended with the children returning to the activity without the use of punitive consequences.

Across the observations, teachers therefore appeared to distinguish between accepting children's emotions and accepting inappropriate behavior. Emotional support was used as an entry point for behavioral guidance, while classroom rules continued to function as boundaries. This pattern was consistent with the teachers' interview accounts, the behavioral expectations documented by the school, and the framework of democratic guidance outlined by Sumiati and Patilima (2023). Furthermore, by pairing emotional validation with clear behavioral limits, teachers actively nurtured Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies—specifically self-awareness and emotional literacy—helping children distinguish between internal emotional states and external behavioral expressions.

2. Responding to Repeated Challenging Behaviors

The second theme emerged from teachers' experiences in responding to behaviors that continued to occur despite previous reminders. Teachers identified repeated behaviors as particularly demanding because positive discipline required them to remain patient and consistent rather than responding impulsively. This challenge is consistent with Durmuşoğlu Saltalı's (2022) finding that preschool teachers' ability to manage problem behaviors requires high levels of self-efficacy and emotional literacy.

The behaviors described by teachers included difficulty waiting for turns, interrupting classroom activities, refusing instructions, conflicts with peers, and emotional outbursts. Although the specific behaviors varied across children, teachers reported that repeated behavior required repeated guidance. Teacher T2 described the situation as follows:

"Sometimes we have already explained the rule, but the same behavior appears again the next day. It is not resolved after one explanation; we have to repeat the guidance and remind the child again." (T2, 10/06/2026)

Observation data supported this account. During several classroom sessions, teachers responded to repeated inappropriate behavior by using verbal reminders, redirecting children's attention, offering choices, or asking children to repeat the expected behavior. In some situations,

teachers provided children with opportunities to correct their behavior rather than immediately imposing a punishment.

One observed interaction involved a child who repeatedly interrupted a group activity. The teacher initially reminded the child of the agreed classroom rule. When the behavior occurred again, the teacher moved closer to the child, briefly explained the expected behavior, and offered the child an alternative role within the activity. The child subsequently returned to the activity and was able to participate without further interruption during the observed period.

The teachers also described the importance of giving children opportunities to repair situations following inappropriate behavior. Repair could involve returning an object, apologizing to a peer, waiting for a turn, or repeating an action appropriately. These responses indicated that teachers viewed behavioral incidents as opportunities for children to learn alternative ways of responding rather than simply as occasions for punishment. This approach aligns with recent studies emphasizing positive discipline as a framework for fostering self-awareness, responsibility, and emotional coregulation through supportive teacher-child interactions (Avari et al., 2023; Granger et al., 2024).

Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), these non-punitive, restorative responses effectively satisfy children's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Offering structured choices nurtures autonomy, while guiding situational repair builds social competence and preserves relational relatedness without eliciting shame, fear, or external compliance.

An important pattern across the four teachers was that repeated behavior did not necessarily lead to increasingly severe consequences. Instead, teachers tended to repeat expectations, modify the form of guidance, and provide additional opportunities for children to practice the expected behavior. This suggests that persistence and repetition were central features of positive discipline in the observed classroom context, functioning as ongoing pedagogical scaffolding that assists children in internalizing prosocial behaviors over time.

3. Maintaining Consistency While Adapting Guidance to Individual Children

The third theme concerned the relationship between consistency and individualization. All four teachers emphasized that children needed predictable classroom expectations. Teachers reported that rules were more meaningful when children encountered similar expectations across classroom situations. This finding echoes Pangestuti et al.'s (2026) research on Indonesian children's self-regulation, as well as empirical evidence from Indonesian early childhood settings demonstrating that consistent positive discipline routines significantly enhance young children's independence, responsibility, and self-discipline. Teacher T3 stated:

"Once the rules have been established, we try to apply them consistently. Children need to know that the rules remain the same and do not depend on which teacher is present." (T3, 10/06/2026)

Classroom observations showed that teachers repeatedly referred to established classroom expectations and used familiar verbal prompts when responding to similar behaviors. Positive acknowledgment was also used when children demonstrated appropriate behavior. These practices created relatively predictable responses to common classroom situations,

consistent with Bailey et al. (2022) who demonstrated that consistency in emotional support is key to children's preschool adjustment.

However, consistency did not mean that teachers used exactly the same response for every child. Teachers described differences in children's temperament, emotional regulation, communication abilities, and responsiveness to particular forms of guidance. Consequently, the teachers sometimes adjusted the way an expectation was communicated while maintaining the same behavioral boundary.

For instance, a child who responded positively to verbal reminders could be guided through a brief verbal prompt, whereas another child who was highly emotionally activated was given additional time to calm down before discussing the behavior. In both situations, the behavioral expectation remained unchanged, but the teacher adjusted the process through which the child was guided toward that expectation.

This distinction between consistent expectations and flexible implementation appeared repeatedly across the interview and observation data. Teachers did not perceive consistency as treating every child identically. Instead, consistency was understood as maintaining shared classroom rules while adapting communication and support to children's developmental and emotional needs (Raniah & Rakhmawati, 2023; Suli et al., 2025).

This dynamic balance is deeply grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The early childhood classroom operates as a primary microsystem in which face-to-face proximal processes occur between teachers and children. Because a child's capacity to navigate behavioral expectations is continually shaped by reciprocal interactions between individual biopsychological characteristics and the classroom ecology, positive discipline must remain context-sensitive. By keeping classroom rules consistent at the environmental level while tailoring proximal communicative exchanges to individual developmental states, teachers create a supportive ecological fit that optimizes children's behavioral adjustment.

4. Cross-Source Pattern of Findings

Comparison of the three data sources revealed a consistent pattern between teachers' reported experiences and their observed classroom practices. Teachers described positive discipline as requiring calm responses, clear expectations, repeated guidance, and behavioral redirection. These practices were also observed during classroom activities. School documents provided additional contextual evidence that behavioral expectations were established within the classroom setting.

The convergence of interview and observation data was particularly apparent in teachers' responses to children's challenging behavior. Teachers reported that they attempted to avoid immediate punitive responses, and observations showed the use of reminders, emotional support, redirection, and opportunities for behavioral repair. At the same time, the data indicated that implementing positive discipline required continuous teacher effort, particularly when behaviors were repeated or when children responded differently to the same form of guidance.

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of positive discipline in the observed setting involved three closely connected processes: understanding children's emotional states,

maintaining clear behavioral boundaries, and adapting guidance without abandoning consistency. The findings further suggest that teachers experienced positive discipline not as a single classroom management technique but as an ongoing relational practice embedded in everyday teacher-child interactions, anchored across integrated socio-emotional, developmental, and ecological frameworks.



Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings of this study reveal that implementing positive discipline in an early childhood classroom is far from a smooth, textbook execution of behavioral techniques. Instead, it is an emotionally demanding and continuously negotiated relational reality where teachers must navigate both children's developmental vulnerabilities and their own emotional regulation in real time.

First, in the daily reality of a preschool classroom, a child's emotional outburst whether crying, screaming, or throwing toys is rarely an act of willful defiance; rather, it manifests an acute state of neurobiological and emotional dysregulation. When educators react impulsively with punitive reprimands, it triggers a defensive stress response, causing the child to either dissociate or escalate in distress. The teachers at TK Aisyiyah Menuran navigated this challenge by prioritizing emotional attunement before attempting behavioral correction. By crouching to the child's eye level, maintaining physical warmth, and validating distress, teachers effectively de-escalated the child's physiological arousal.

Crucially, this empirical practice embodies the core tenet of Positive Discipline Theory: "connection before correction" (Nelsen, 2006). Viewed through Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), this relational sequence functions not merely as a classroom management tactic, but as a vital mechanism of emotional co-regulation. Because preschool-aged children possess immature neurobiological systems for autonomous self-soothing, a dysregulated child requires an external anchor. The teacher steps in as a secondary attachment figure and a "secure base", actively lending their calm nervous system to stabilize the child. Once physiological equilibrium is restored, higher-order cognitive receptivity returns, creating an authentic "teachable moment". Furthermore, by helping children identify and label their intense feelings, teachers foster core Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies, specifically self-awareness and emotional literacy—enabling children to understand that while all emotions are acceptable, behavioral expressions must remain bounded (Hermahayu et al., 2025; Kamila et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

Second, one of the most exhausting realities for early childhood educators is responding to repeated challenging behaviors. In an authentic classroom setting, explaining an expectation once or even multiple times does not guarantee immediate adherence because young children's executive functioning and inhibitory control are still actively developing. When a child persistently 3.

Third, teachers face an ongoing dilemma between maintaining collective classroom order and accommodating individual child temperaments. A rigid "one-size-fits-all" enforcement model may produce superficial order, but it frequently alienates sensitive, anxious, or highly active children. Conversely, excessive permissiveness generates ambiguity and instability. The solution demonstrated by these teachers was maintaining firm macro-boundaries while differentiating micro-level guidance. For a child with higher baseline self-regulation, a brief verbal cue sufficed; for a child experiencing sensory or emotional overload, the teacher provided a quiet cooling-down space before revisiting the expectation. This confirms that consistency in positive discipline is not about identical treatment, but about equitable scaffolding—ensuring every child reaches shared behavioral benchmarks through pathways tailored to their individual developmental readiness (Bailey et al., 2022; Pangestuti et al., 2026; Raniah & Rakhmawati, 2023).

Finally, the sustainability of positive discipline inside the classroom is inseparable from the broader socio-ecological context. A teacher can invest considerable effort into establishing empathetic boundaries, but if a child encounters harsh punitive measures or total permissiveness at home, the child experiences behavioral dissonance and heightened dysregulation at school. This dynamic illustrates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory in action. The classroom *microsystem* and the home *microsystem* continuously interact across the *mesosystem*. When schools establish proactive, collaborative communication with parents to align disciplinary philosophies, children experience coherent behavioral expectations across settings. Moreover, institutional factors within the *exosystem*—such as administrative leadership, collaborative peer support, and professional training in emotional co-regulation—serve as critical ecological buffers that sustain teachers' capacity to implement positive discipline consistently without experiencing professional burnout (Avari et al., 2023; Morris et al., 2026).



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study demonstrates that positive discipline in early childhood education is fundamentally a dynamic, relational, and emotionally demanding practice rather than a mechanical execution of classroom management routines. By examining teachers' lived experiences at TK Aisyiyah Menuran, the findings illuminate how effective behavioral guidance relies on balancing emotional empathy with firm boundaries, providing iterative scaffolding for repeated challenging behaviors, and maintaining collective consistency while honoring individual developmental readiness. Grounded across attachment, self-determination, social-emotional learning, and bioecological frameworks, positive discipline succeeds when teachers serve as co-regulatory secure bases who foster internalized self-discipline from within rather than securing transient compliance through punitive control.

Practical Implications

To translate these empirical insights into sustainable classroom and institutional realities, several multi-level implications must be addressed:

1. **Teacher Professional Development & Emotional Co-Regulation Training:** Teacher education programs and in-service training must move beyond abstract behavioral theories to provide practical, experiential modules on adult and child emotional co-regulation. Training should equip educators with neurodevelopmentally informed de-escalation techniques, somatic calming strategies, and reflective practices that bolster teacher emotional literacy and prevent professional burnout.
2. **Collaborative Behavior-Support Systems:** Early childhood institutions must establish systemic, school-wide behavioral support infrastructures. Rather than leaving individual teachers to navigate persistent or complex behavioral challenges in isolation, schools should implement peer-coaching networks, collaborative case-reflection forums, and dedicated support staff to create a shared culture of positive guidance.
3. **Proactive Mesosystemic Teacher-Parent Partnerships:** Educational institutions must build reciprocal, bidirectional communication channels with families. Establishing collaborative workshops, regular developmental dialogues, and shared behavioral guidelines helps align

disciplinary philosophies between the home and school microsystems, ensuring that children experience predictable and supportive expectations across all daily environments.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this qualitative single-case study offers nuanced, context-rich insights into teachers' practices within an Islamic early childhood setting, its boundaries highlight important avenues for future inquiry:

1. Cross-Contextual and Comparative Investigations: Future research should conduct comparative studies across diverse early childhood contexts, including public versus private institutions, urban versus rural settings, and culturally varied educational environments to examine how institutional ecologies shape positive discipline practices.
2. Multi-Informant Perspectives: Subsequent studies should incorporate the direct voices and lived experiences of young children and parents through child-friendly participatory methods and family interviews. Capturing multi-informant perspectives will provide a more holistic, comprehensive understanding of how positive discipline is experienced and sustained across the entire socio-ecological system.

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