

Harmonising Psychological and Legal Perspectives on Teacher-Child Interactions: A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Purpose	: Teacher-child interactions in early childhood education are often shaped by pedagogical practices that lack integration with child development psychology and legal frameworks for child protection. This study aims to develop a conceptual framework that integrates developmental psychology principles with legal regulations to guide quality teacher-child interactions in early childhood settings.
Methodology	: This qualitative study employs a library research approach, analysing secondary sources including academic literature on child development, early childhood pedagogy, and relevant legal frameworks governing child protection and early childhood education.
Results	: The analysis resulted in a conceptual framework comprising three core components: input (teacher knowledge of child development and legal standards), process (integration of developmentally appropriate pedagogy with child protection principles), and output (safe, rights-based, and quality interactions). The framework proposes implementation strategies through structured observation, reflective practice, professional supervision, and capacity-building training.
Conclusions	: The proposed conceptual framework offers a systematic approach to strengthening teacher-child interactions by bridging developmental psychology and legal regulations. While developed through library research, the framework requires empirical validation in early childhood education contexts. It provides a foundation for policy development and professional training programmes aimed at improving interaction quality while ensuring compliance with child protection standards.

Keywords: psychology harmonization; child development; legal regulation; early childhood education

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1. Introduction

Teacher-child interactions in early childhood education (PAUD) are fundamental to achieving developmental competencies outlined in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). High-quality teacher-child interactions have been consistently linked to positive developmental outcomes across cognitive, social, and emotional domains (Hu et al., 2020; Pakarinen et al., 2022; Tuominen et al., 2024). However, research by Oktaviana (2024) reveals that interaction patterns at Al-Furqon Kindergarten in Tasikmalaya Regency remain suboptimal in fostering children's independent character. Teachers' limited understanding of child developmental psychology results in pedagogical approaches that fail to respond appropriately to children's developmental needs, leading to interactions that are either overly directive or insufficiently supportive (Woldegiorges & Teklu, 2024). Despite established national standards emphasising developmental appropriateness, a significant gap persists between policy expectations and classroom practice, indicating that current teacher preparation and professional development frameworks do not adequately equip educators with the psychological and pedagogical competencies necessary for quality interactions (Cadima et al., 2025; Egert et al., 2020).

Teacher-child interactions in PAUD settings are not merely pedagogical acts but also carry legal obligations under Indonesia's child protection framework. Every interaction—whether responding to a child's question, managing behaviour, or providing feedback—simultaneously

constitutes a psychological intervention and an enactment of legal responsibility to uphold children's rights (UNESCO, 2022). Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection mandates that children be protected from violence, discrimination, and unfair treatment in educational settings, yet teachers often lack the training to recognise how everyday interaction practices may inadvertently violate these provisions. Research by Astriani et al. (2021) demonstrates that early childhood educators in certain regions remain inadequately equipped to detect psychological and developmental issues in children, potentially compromising both developmental outcomes and legal protections. International frameworks increasingly emphasise the integration of child rights and educational quality standards (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). This gap reveals that the enforcement of child protection law depends fundamentally on teachers' capacity to integrate psychological understanding with rights-based practice in their daily interactions (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2020).

Despite growing attention to teacher-child interactions in early childhood education, existing research has examined psychological and legal dimensions in isolation rather than integration. Studies on psychological aspects have focused on interaction patterns for character building (Oktaviana, 2024), the relationship between interaction quality and child outcomes (Gordon & Peng, 2020; Slot et al., 2020), bullying prevention through teacher psychoeducation (Wahyuni & Pransiska, 2019), teacher psychological well-being and child engagement in classroom settings (Coelho et al., 2019). Concurrently, research addressing legal dimensions has identified teachers' inadequate capacity to detect developmental problems that may constitute violations of child protection rights (Astriani et al., 2021). However, none of these studies has developed an integrative framework that positions teacher-child interactions as simultaneously psychological and legal acts requiring coherent guidance. This fragmentation leaves teachers without systematic support to navigate the dual demands of developmental appropriateness and legal compliance, creating the conceptual gap this study addresses.

The absence of such integration creates practical challenges for PAUD practitioners who must make daily decisions about interaction approaches without clear guidance on reconciling developmental psychology principles with child protection requirements. Research demonstrates that professional development programmes addressing teacher-child interaction quality can improve educational outcomes when properly designed and implemented (Egert et al., 2018, 2020), yet these programmes rarely integrate legal compliance with pedagogical training. High teacher turnover rates in early childhood settings, often linked to inadequate professional support and development opportunities, further complicate quality improvement efforts (Hur et al., 2023). Current teacher preparation programmes typically address these domains separately, leaving educators uncertain how to apply psychological knowledge while ensuring legal compliance. Emerging approaches, including technology-mediated professional learning communities, show promise for supporting teacher development (Zhou et al., 2022), but remain disconnected from legal frameworks. This study therefore develops a conceptual framework that synthesises child developmental psychology with legal regulations to provide systematic guidance for quality teacher-child interactions in early childhood settings.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative library research design to develop a conceptual framework integrating child developmental psychology with legal regulations in early childhood education. Library research was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this study as it allows for systematic synthesis of theoretical foundations and empirical evidence across multiple domains (developmental psychology, legal studies, and educational policy) that have traditionally been examined separately. The research does not involve empirical data collection from participants; rather, it synthesises existing knowledge from published literature and policy documents to propose a novel integrative framework. This

approach is consistent with framework development studies that seek to establish theoretical foundations for future empirical investigation (Egert et al., 2018).

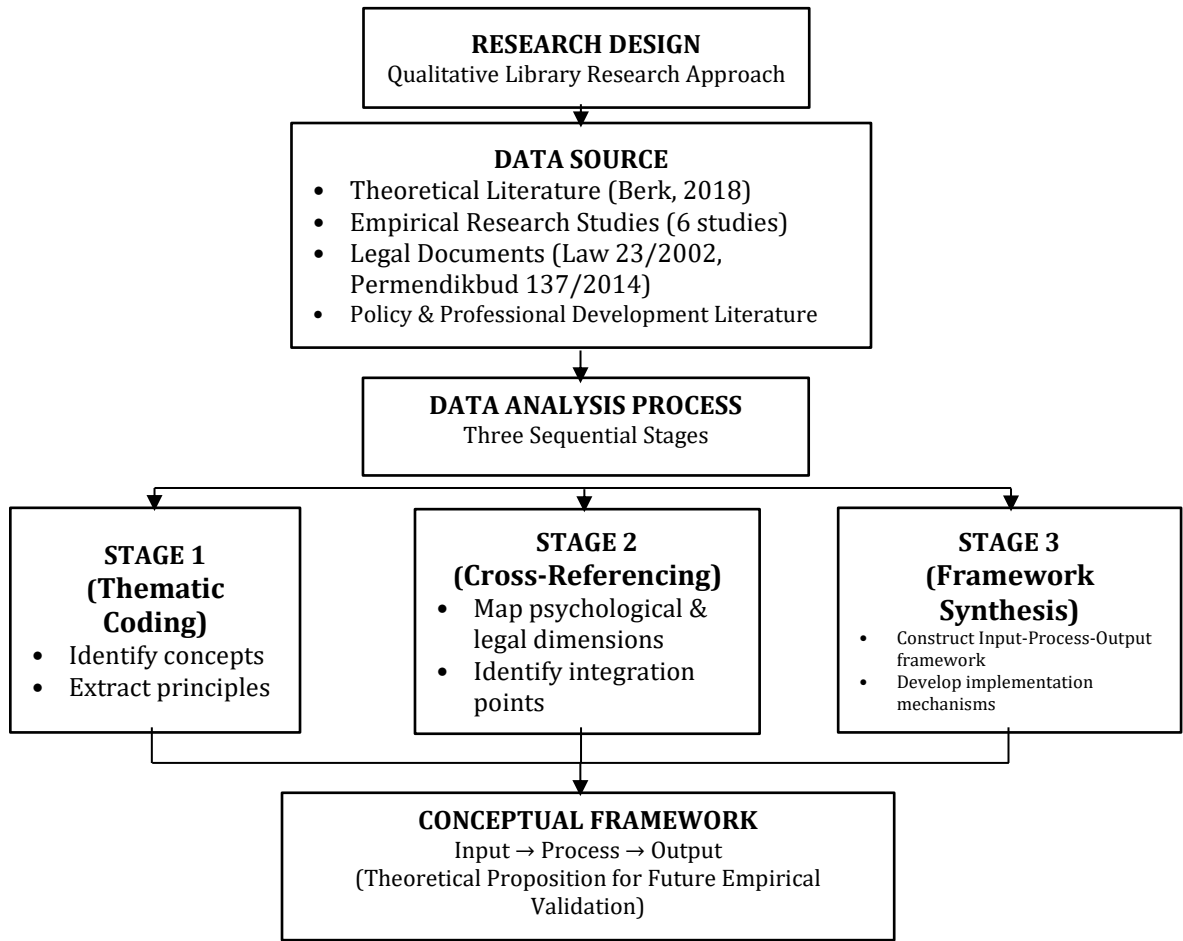


Figure 1. Three-Stage Analytical Process for Developing the Conceptual Framework Integrating Child Developmental Psychology with Legal Regulations in Early Childhood Education

2.2. Data Sources

Data sources were selected using purposive sampling based on relevance to the study's dual focus on developmental psychology and legal regulations in early childhood education. The sources comprised four categories:

Theoretical literature on child development: Foundational texts on developmental psychology, including Berk's (2018) *Child Development*, which provides comprehensive coverage of cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development theories relevant to early childhood. Additional sources included peer-reviewed journal articles on developmental milestones, stage theories, and age-appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Empirical research on teacher-child interactions: Studies examining interaction quality and practices in early childhood settings, with particular emphasis on Indonesian contexts. Key sources included Oktaviana (2024) on teacher interaction patterns in building independent character, Astriani et al. (2021) on early detection of psychological and developmental problems, and Wahyuni and Pransiska (2019) on bullying prevention in kindergarten. International empirical studies providing evidence on interaction quality and child outcomes were also consulted (Hu et al., 2020; Pakarinen et al., 2022; Tuominen et al., 2024).

Legal and regulatory documents: Primary legal sources including Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection and Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 137 of 2014 concerning National PAUD Standards. These documents establish the legal framework for children's rights to protection, education, and safe learning environments. International

frameworks including UNESCO reports on early childhood care and education rights (UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024) were examined to situate Indonesian regulations within global child rights discourse.

Policy and professional development literature: Documents addressing PAUD policy implementation, teacher training standards, curriculum development guidelines, and professional development frameworks. Sources included meta-analyses of professional development effectiveness (Egert et al., 2020) and studies on factors influencing teacher-child interaction quality (Woldegiorges & Teklu, 2024).

2.3. Data Analysis Procedure

Analysis proceeded systematically through three sequential stages, each building upon findings from the previous stage:

2.3.1. Thematic Coding and Concept Identification

All source materials were reviewed systematically to identify key concepts, principles, and requirements related to the study's dual foci. For developmental psychology sources, coding focused on identifying: (a) developmental milestones and characteristics across cognitive, social, emotional, and moral domains; (b) principles of developmentally appropriate practice; (c) interaction strategies that support optimal development. For legal sources, coding focused on identifying: (a) children's rights as articulated in protection laws and education regulations; (b) legal requirements for educational practice and teacher conduct; (c) standards for safe and supportive learning environments. Empirical studies were coded for: (a) current practices in teacher-child interactions; (b) identified gaps between practice and standards; (c) outcomes associated with interaction quality. This stage generated an initial inventory of concepts requiring integration.

2.3.2. Cross-Referencing and Integration Analysis

The second stage systematically examined relationships between psychological principles and legal provisions to identify points of intersection, alignment, and potential integration. This involved mapping developmental needs identified in psychological literature against rights and protections specified in legal documents. For example, children's developmental need for emotional security and responsive relationships (psychological dimension) was cross-referenced with legal requirements for protection from psychological harm and provision of supportive environments (legal dimension). This analysis revealed that many legal protections are grounded in developmental needs, while many developmentally appropriate practices inherently fulfil legal requirements. The cross-referencing process identified areas where current practice fails to integrate these complementary dimensions, highlighting the conceptual gap the framework addresses.

2.3.3. Framework Synthesis

The final stage synthesised findings from the previous stages to construct the conceptual framework. Based on identified intersections between psychological and legal dimensions, the framework was structured around three core components: (a) Input component, specifying the knowledge base teachers require in both developmental psychology and legal regulations; (b) Process component, describing how teachers integrate this dual knowledge in daily interactions through specific practices; (c) Output component, defining quality interactions as those simultaneously supporting developmental outcomes and upholding legal standards. Implementation mechanisms were developed by examining professional development literature and identifying strategies for building teacher capacity in integrated practice. The framework structure was refined iteratively to ensure internal coherence and practical applicability.

2.4. Methodological Considerations

Several considerations shaped the research approach. First, the framework represents a theoretical proposition developed through synthesis of existing knowledge rather than an empirically tested intervention. Future research will be required to validate the framework's

applicability and effectiveness in actual PAUD settings. Second, while the framework draws on international literature, its development prioritises Indonesian legal and policy contexts, potentially limiting direct transferability to other national settings without appropriate adaptation. Third, the library research approach provides breadth of coverage across disciplines but lacks the depth of understanding that direct observation or practitioner input might provide. These limitations are acknowledged as inherent to the chosen methodology and define the scope of claims made regarding the framework's utility.

3. Results

3.1. Foundations of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework draws on various relevant sources, including books, scientific journals, laws, and policy documents addressing early childhood education (PAUD), child development psychology, and child protection legal regulations. From the perspective of child developmental psychology, literature such as Berk's (2018) book *Child Development* and research journals on early childhood cognitive, social, and emotional development serve as the basis for teachers' understanding of child developmental stages and appropriate interaction strategies. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates the significant impact of teacher-child interaction quality on children's developmental outcomes across multiple domains (Egert et al., 2018; Pianta et al., 2020). From the perspective of legal regulations, Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection and Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 137 of 2014 concerning National PAUD Standards provide a legal framework that emphasises children's rights to protection, education, and a safe learning environment. International frameworks increasingly recognise early childhood care and education as a fundamental right requiring legal protection (UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). Previous empirical research, such as Oktaviana (2024) on teacher interaction patterns in PAUD, Astriani et al. (2021) on detecting psychological problems in children, Gordon and Peng (2020) on CLASS domains in Head Start classrooms, and Wahyuni & Pransiska (2019) on bullying prevention, indicate a gap between teacher interaction practices and the implementation of legal regulations, thus necessitating the integration of both aspects. Policy documents related to PAUD, teacher training modules, and curriculum development guidelines further support the concept that teacher-child interactions must address both pedagogical-psychological aspects and legal protection standards. Together, these sources form the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the proposed framework.

3.2. Framework Structure and Components

The conceptual framework integrates two main dimensions in early childhood education: child developmental psychology and child protection legal regulations. In the developmental psychology dimension, the framework emphasises teachers' understanding of children's cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development stages, directing teachers to implement responsive, empathetic, and supportive interaction strategies according to child development characteristics. The legal regulation dimension emphasises teachers' understanding of children's rights according to the Child Protection Law, the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation on PAUD, and related regulations, ensuring that every educational interaction and practice complies with legal protection principles and children's rights.

The framework structure includes three main components: input, process, and output (Table 1). Input includes teachers' knowledge of child developmental psychology, PAUD legal regulations, and pedagogical practices. The process involves teacher-child interactions designed based on developmental psychology principles (cognitive stimulation, emotional reinforcement, and social development) while adhering to legal regulations (child rights protection, violence prevention, and ethical supervision). The output consists of quality interactions that support children's optimal development while fostering a safe, child-friendly, and legally compliant PAUD environment. Implementation mechanisms include observation and psychological assessment of children, review of legal frameworks and PAUD regulations,

and ongoing feedback through supervision, training, and teacher reflection on interaction quality and legal compliance.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework for Integrating Child Development Psychology and Legal Regulations in Teacher-Child Interactions

Component	Description	Implementation in PAUD	Expected Outcomes
Child Development Psychology	Teachers' understanding of cognitive, social, emotional and moral development stages of early childhood	Teachers use cognitive stimulation strategies, educational games, and empathetic approaches in daily interactions	Children receive appropriate stimulation; cognitive, social and emotional development improves
Legal Regulation & Child Protection	Teachers' understanding of children's rights according to Child Protection Law, Minister of Education and Culture Regulation on PAUD, and related regulations	Teachers ensure every activity and interaction complies with children's rights, preventing violence, discrimination and unfair practices	PAUD environment is safe, child-friendly, and complies with legal regulations
Teacher-Child Interaction Process	Integration of developmental psychology and legal regulation in everyday interaction practices	Teachers adapt pedagogical approach to child's character while applying principles of regular observation and reflection	Quality interactions; children feel safe and supported; children's rights are protected
Feedback & Supervision	Continuous evaluation mechanisms to improve interaction quality	Routine supervision, teacher training, and reflection on daily PAUD practices	Improved teacher competence, more effective interactions, and maintained psychological-legal balance
Output/Target	Quality of teacher-child interactions is optimal, supports child's overall development and complies with legal regulations	Overall evaluation of daily interactions, fulfilment of children's rights, and compliance with PAUD regulations	Safe, child-friendly PAUD environment supporting rights and optimal development of early childhood

3.3. Implementation Framework

Preparation Stage (Input): Teachers develop foundational understanding through professional development addressing child developmental psychology (literature, training, workshops) and legal regulations (Child Protection Law, Minister of Education and Culture Regulation on PAUD, international conventions on children's rights). This knowledge serves as the foundation for every interaction.

Implementation Stage (Process): Teacher-child interactions are designed based on psychology and law integration. Strategies of cognitive stimulation, emotional reinforcement, and social development are implemented while ensuring protection of children's rights,

prevention of violence, and ethical oversight. Continuous observation and psychological assessment of children serve as primary instruments for adapting the pedagogical approach.

Evaluation Stage (Output): Teacher-child interactions are assessed based on quality of child development, compliance with legal regulations, and level of safety and comfort of the learning environment. Evaluation results inform continuous improvement and pedagogical refinement.

3.4. Practical Considerations

Several principles guide implementation. Teachers must balance psychological stimulation with legal compliance, viewing every pedagogical action as strengthening children's cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development while fulfilling children's rights. Research demonstrates that high-quality interactions moderate risks associated with problem behaviours in preschool contexts (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2020) and foster critical developmental competencies including working memory and social-emotional regulation (Pakarinen et al., 2022). Teachers need holistic awareness of children as unique entities with different potentials, needs, and rights, ensuring every interaction is personalised. Quality interactions in early childhood settings have been shown to predict children's playfulness and engagement (Tuominen et al., 2024), while structural quality features including adequate professional development support contribute to interaction quality (Slot et al., 2020). Continuous reflection and feedback accompany every interaction through critical teacher reflection, ethical supervision, and strategy adjustment based on observations and child development.

Support mechanisms include ongoing teacher supervision and mentoring by child development psychology and educational law experts to improve teacher capacity. Evidence from multiple countries demonstrates that institutional support for professional development significantly influences teacher engagement and retention (Cadima et al., 2025). Systematic meta-analyses confirm that well-designed in-service professional development programmes can effectively improve teacher-child interaction quality (Egert et al., 2020), with effect sizes varying based on programme intensity, duration, and focus. Teacher-related factors including self-efficacy, beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices, and teaching experience influence interaction quality (Woldegiorges & Teklu, 2024). Collaborative reflection forums involving teachers, parents and stakeholders review interaction practices and ensure compliance with children's rights and legal standards. Emerging digital platforms for professional learning communities offer promising avenues for sustained teacher support (Zhou et al., 2022). Framework-based training modules ensure pedagogical practices and legal compliance become integral parts of PAUD curriculum and teacher professional development.

3.5. Limitations and Future Directions

As a conceptually derived framework developed through library research, this model requires empirical validation before claims of effectiveness can be made. Future research should test the framework's applicability across diverse PAUD contexts, examine its impact on teacher practice and child outcomes, and refine components based on implementation evidence. Cultural adaptations may be necessary for application beyond Indonesian contexts, though the underlying principle that teacher-child interactions carry both developmental and legal significance has broader relevance.

4. Discussion

The conceptual framework developed in this study represents a significant contribution to early childhood education literature by addressing a persistent gap between psychological understanding and legal compliance in teacher-child interactions. The central finding is that teacher-child interactions in early childhood settings function simultaneously as psychological interventions and legal enactments, necessitating an integrated rather than compartmentalized approach. This finding extends the work of Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2020), who demonstrated that teacher-child interaction quality moderates social risks associated with problem behavior in preschool contexts. While their study focused primarily on the psychological dimension of

interaction quality, the present framework positions such quality interactions as inherently fulfilling legal obligations under Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection. The dual nature of teacher-child interactions identified in this study aligns with the UNESCO (2022) emphasis on building legal frameworks that protect early childhood care and education rights. However, the present framework advances this discourse by proposing concrete mechanisms through which teachers can operationalize this integration in daily practice, moving beyond policy-level recommendations to classroom-level guidance.

The framework's input component, which emphasizes teachers' dual knowledge of developmental psychology and legal regulations, finds strong empirical support in existing literature. Woldegiorges and Teklu (2024) identified teacher-related factors, including knowledge, self-efficacy, and beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices, as significantly associated with teacher-child interaction quality. The present framework extends these findings by arguing that knowledge of legal regulations must be considered an equally critical teacher-related factor. Furthermore, Cadima et al. (2025) demonstrated across four countries that institutional support for professional development significantly influences teacher engagement and retention, supporting the framework's emphasis on structured knowledge-building as a prerequisite for quality interactions while also highlighting the institutional conditions necessary for successful implementation. The gap between teacher knowledge and practice identified by Oktaviana (2024), who found suboptimal interaction patterns at Al-Furqon Kindergarten despite established national standards, reinforces the framework's proposition that knowledge alone is insufficient. The input component therefore includes not only theoretical understanding but also practical awareness of how psychological principles and legal requirements manifest in everyday interactions, addressing the disconnect between policy expectations and classroom reality that Oktaviana's research revealed.

The framework's process component, which describes the integration of developmentally appropriate pedagogy with child protection principles, is substantiated by converging evidence from multiple empirical studies. Pakarinen et al. (2022) found that teacher-child interaction quality fosters working memory and social-emotional behavior in children aged two to three years, demonstrating the developmental significance of interaction processes. Simultaneously, Astriani et al. (2021) revealed that early childhood educators remain inadequately equipped to detect psychological and developmental problems in children, highlighting the legal and ethical implications of interaction quality. The process component directly addresses this convergence by proposing that developmental monitoring and rights-based practice should be embedded within the same interaction processes. The meta-analytic evidence provided by Egert et al. (2020) confirms that in-service professional development programs can effectively improve teacher-child interaction quality, with effect sizes varying based on program intensity and focus, validating the framework's emphasis on continuous professional development as a process mechanism. The present framework advances beyond Egert et al.'s (2020) findings by specifying that such professional development must address both psychological and legal dimensions simultaneously rather than treating them as separate training modules. This integrated approach is further supported by Egert et al. (2018), whose earlier meta-analysis demonstrated that professional development programs with clearly defined quality targets produce more consistent improvements in both teacher practice and child outcomes.

The framework's output component redefines quality teacher-child interactions as those that simultaneously support developmental outcomes and uphold legal standards. This redefinition is empirically grounded in research demonstrating the multidimensional impact of interaction quality. Hu et al. (2020) provided evidence that teacher-child interaction quality significantly influences children's academic and cognitive development, while Tuominen et al. (2024) demonstrated that interaction quality predicts children's playfulness and engagement. Gordon and Peng (2020) further confirmed the validity of multidimensional interaction assessment through their examination of CLASS domains in Head Start classrooms. Slot et al. (2020) contributed additional evidence by demonstrating that both structural and process quality features of preschool environments are associated with children's growth in language and preliteracy skills, with their finding that structural quality indirectly influences child

outcomes through process quality aligning with the framework's logic model connecting input to process to output.

The practical viability of the framework must be considered in light of systemic challenges facing early childhood education. Hur et al. (2023) identified that inadequate professional support and development opportunities contribute to high teacher turnover rates in early childhood settings, underscoring both the urgency and the difficulty of implementing comprehensive frameworks such as the one proposed. Without stable, well-supported teaching staff, the sustained knowledge-building and reflective practice central to the framework cannot be maintained. Coelho et al. (2019) found that child engagement in inclusive preschool settings is influenced by both classroom quality and activity settings, suggesting that the framework's implementation must account for contextual variables beyond individual teacher competence. The potential role of technology in supporting framework implementation is suggested by Zhou et al. (2022), who found that digital professional learning communities can effectively support early childhood teachers' ongoing development, offering scalable mechanisms for the continuous reflection, supervision, and collaborative learning that the framework requires.

The conceptual framework aligns with and extends international policy directions articulated by UNESCO and UNICEF (2024), which position early childhood care and education as a fundamental right requiring both quality pedagogical practice and legal protection. While the present framework is grounded in Indonesian legal and policy contexts, the underlying principle that teacher-child interactions carry dual psychological and legal significance has broader relevance. The framework thus contributes to an emerging global discourse that recognizes the inseparability of educational quality and child rights protection, offering a structured model that other national contexts may adapt according to their specific legal and cultural conditions.

5. Conclusion

This study proposes a conceptual framework integrating child developmental psychology with legal regulations to guide teacher-child interactions in early childhood education. The framework addresses a gap in existing research by positioning teacher-child interactions as simultaneously psychological and legal acts requiring coherent guidance. Its three components input (integrated knowledge), process (unified practice), and output (quality interactions) provide systematic structure for preparing teachers to meet dual demands of developmental appropriateness and legal compliance. While developed through library research and requiring empirical validation, the framework offers a foundation for teacher education programme development, professional development design, and policy formulation aimed at improving interaction quality in early childhood settings. Future research should test the framework's effectiveness and refine its components based on implementation evidence across diverse contexts.

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