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COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLES OF LEAD AND ASSISTANT TEACHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY AT RA YAA BUNAYYA, PAPUA

A Ubaidillah¹

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Fattahul Muluk Papua, Indonesia (aubaidillahmadurio5@gmail.com)

Sulis Maryati

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Fattahul Muluk Papua, Indonesia (sulismaryati.papua@gmail.com)

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ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Manajemen kelas yang efektif berperan penting dalam Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD) untuk mendukung perkembangan kognitif, sosial-emosional, dan perilaku anak. Penelitian ini menelaah manajemen kelas kolaboratif melalui praktik *co-teaching* antara guru utama dan guru pendamping di RA Yaa Bunayya, Papua. **Tujuan:** Tujuan penelitian adalah memahami interaksi, pembagian tanggung jawab, dan kontribusi kedua peran dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan suportif. **Metode:** Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus digunakan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen terhadap dua guru utama, dua guru pendamping, dan kepala RA. **Hasil:** Hasil analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa guru utama berfokus pada kegiatan inti pembelajaran, sedangkan guru pendamping mendukung kebutuhan individual anak, menjaga keteraturan, dan membantu pengawasan. Kolaborasi terjadi pada tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan, dan evaluasi, didukung oleh komunikasi terbuka serta pembagian peran yang jelas. Tantangan seperti ketidakjelasan peran dan keterbatasan waktu dapat diminimalkan melalui pelatihan profesional dan dukungan administratif. **Kesimpulan:** Temuan menegaskan bahwa *co-teaching* meningkatkan iklim kelas, keterlibatan anak, dan efektivitas pembelajaran. **Implikasi:** Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi empiris bagi pengembangan model kolaboratif guru di PAUD serta membuka arah bagi penelitian lanjutan mengenai implementasi *co-teaching* di berbagai konteks pendidikan di Indonesia.

¹ Correspondence author

Keywords:	ABSTRACT
Collaborative Classroom Management; Co-teaching in Early Childhood Education; Lead and Assistant Teachers; Teacher Collaboration.	<p>Background: Effective classroom management plays a vital role in Early Childhood Education (ECE) to support children's cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral development. This study explores collaborative classroom management through <i>co-teaching</i> practices between lead and assistant teachers at RA Yaa Bunayya, Papua. Purpose: It aims to examine the interaction, division of responsibilities, and contributions of both roles in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Method: A qualitative case study was conducted using participatory observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving two lead teachers, two assistant teachers, and the school principal. Result: Thematic analysis revealed that lead teachers focused on core learning activities, while assistant teachers provided individual support, maintained classroom order, and supervised children. Collaboration occurred during the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages, facilitated by open communication and clearly defined roles. Challenges such as role ambiguity and time constraints were addressed through professional training and administrative support. Conclusion: The findings affirm that <i>co-teaching</i> enhances classroom climate, child engagement, and instructional effectiveness. Implication: This study offers empirical insights for developing collaborative teaching models in ECE and suggests directions for future research on <i>co-teaching</i> implementation across diverse educational contexts in Indonesia.</p>

A. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) forms a critical foundation for children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral development. This period is often described as the *golden age* of brain development, during which appropriate stimulation significantly influences children's thinking skills, language development, social interaction, and emotional regulation. Consequently, the quality of teacher-child interactions and classroom management during early childhood directly affects learning outcomes and children's well-being. Research shows that professional interventions and training focused on classroom management can enhance teaching practices and children's learning outcomes (Obee et al., 2022), underscoring the importance of strengthening teacher competence as a key effort to improve the quality of ECE in Indonesia.

In many educational settings, including Indonesia, ECE classrooms are managed by a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. Collaborative arrangements or *co-teaching* allow them to share responsibilities in planning, instruction, and behavior management, enabling more varied instruction and more responsive support for children. International studies indicate that such collaboration increases teachers' capacity to implement positive management strategies and address diverse learner needs (Bonacina-Pugh & Zhang, 2023; Wakeman et al., 2024). Complementary roles between the lead teacher and assistant teacher support the creation of an adaptive learning environment that promotes children's holistic development.

Indonesian research also highlights the meaningful contribution of assistant teachers to classroom dynamics. Assistant teachers participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning activities, provide support for children who require special attention, and help establish consistent routines (Hidayat et al., 2024). In certain contexts, assistant teachers play an important role in supporting children with special needs, although inconsistencies in task division with lead teachers remain a challenge (Salum et al., 2025). These findings emphasize that assistant teachers are key actors in building inclusive and effective learning environments.

Collaborative practices are further strengthened through partnerships with higher education institutions. At Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang (UNIKAMA), *co-teaching* is integrated into the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, allowing pre-service teachers to collaboratively design and conduct lessons. This model enhances the integration of theory and practice while providing authentic classroom experience (Fipunikama, 2025). Broader literature also stresses that effective ECE management requires a holistic approach involving parents, digital integration, and interinstitutional coordination (Setyowati, 2025), indicating that collaboration must occur not only among teachers but also among stakeholders across the educational ecosystem.

Despite these benefits, collaboration between lead and assistant teachers faces challenges such as unclear role division, limited professional competency, insufficient time for joint planning, and school cultures that do not fully support teamwork. Studies suggest the need for more structured professional development, improved human resource management, and stronger managerial strategies to optimize the role of assistant teachers (Atikah & Aurelia, 2025; Faizin et al., 2024). Systemic support such as clear regulations and continuous training is essential for ensuring consistent implementation of collaborative practices.

Professional development programs have also been shown to strengthen *co-teaching* skills and classroom management, particularly in inclusive settings. Role recognition, organizational support, and involvement in decision-making can enhance work motivation and teacher-child interactions (Alsudairy, 2024). Understanding role dynamics and collaboration processes is therefore crucial for achieving effective classroom management (Schlieber et al., 2023). This suggests that teacher capacity-building must integrate professional, collaborative, and managerial competencies as part of continuous development.

However, empirical studies examining collaboration between lead and assistant teachers in Indonesian ECE settings remain limited. Research linking collaborative practices with children's learning outcomes and organizational factors such as school management, workload, and training has not been widely explored (Faizin et al., 2024; Rahardjo, 2024). A review of studies from 2020–2025 reveals several gaps: (1) a lack of comparative studies between classrooms managed solely by lead teachers and those using collaborative arrangements, (2) limited evidence on how collaborative practices and teaching experience influence classroom management implementation, and (3) insufficient recommendations for tiered training and clearer role distribution to strengthen collaboration.

Further studies show that assistant teachers' roles can be suboptimal due to inadequate training and inconsistent task assignments. In some cases, assistant teachers are required to assume responsibilities beyond their scope, such as temporarily acting as lead teachers (Salum et al., 2025). Although differentiated learning strategies are widely implemented, no comparative analysis has been conducted regarding classroom management in solo lead-teacher settings versus co-teaching environments (Fatimah et al., 2025). These findings highlight the need for deeper investigation into effective collaborative practices and contextual challenges.

Given these gaps, this research aims to fill this gap by analyzing how collaborative practices between lead and assistant teachers are formed, implemented, and contribute to the effectiveness of classroom management in PAUD settings. Conducted at RA Yaa Bunayya, Papua, this study seeks to provide in-depth insights into interaction patterns and cooperative mechanisms between both teachers, offering evidence that may serve as a reference for contextual co-teaching guidelines in Indonesia (Atikah & Aurelia, 2025; Rytivaara et al., 2024). The findings are expected to reveal effective real-world practices, strengthen teacher professionalism, and contribute to the development of sustainable PAUD training programs and policies.

B. METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research approach with a case study design. This design was selected because the focus of the investigation was to understand the meanings, processes, and interaction patterns that shape the collaboration between lead teachers and assistant teachers in their authentic working environment. As explained in the characterization of qualitative research as an interpretive practice that positions the researcher within participants' daily realities through techniques such as observation, interviewing, and document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), the case study model offered an appropriate framework for examining the collaborative teaching practices that naturally occur at RA Yaa Bunayya in Papua.

Participants and Research Setting

The research involved two lead teachers, two assistant teachers, and the school principal. These individuals were selected through purposive sampling because of their direct engagement in classroom collaboration. RA Yaa Bunayya was chosen as the research site based on preliminary observations indicating that the institution consistently applies a co-teaching system across all classes. Consequently, both the setting and participants aligned with the criteria of possessing relevant experience, knowledge, and characteristics essential for obtaining rich and contextually meaningful insights into the phenomenon under study.

Data Collection Procedures

Three primary techniques were employed to gather data: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The researcher conducted repeated participant observations over a period exceeding one semester (approximately seven months), allowing close documentation of real-time interactions between lead and assistant teachers. Angrosino and Rosenberg (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) emphasize that observation in qualitative research requires careful self-reflection and accurate recording to ensure grounded interpretation.

In this study, observational data played an essential role in capturing the natural flow of collaborative practices as they occurred in the classroom. Observations documented how lead and assistant teachers distributed tasks, responded to children's behaviors, and coordinated instructional actions during learning activities. These real-time observations provided concrete evidence of the interaction patterns noted in interviews, such as communication challenges, adjustments made to support children experiencing difficulties, and the situational decision-making that shaped co-teaching practices. Thus, observation not only complemented but also strengthened interview and documentation findings by offering direct insights into classroom dynamics.

In-depth interviews were held with the teachers and the principal to explore their experiences, perceptions, and collaborative strategies. To reinforce and validate the field data, several school documents including lesson plans (RPP), daily activity records, and institutional archives were reviewed as part of the documentation process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique involved coding the data, identifying recurring meanings, and organizing these into broader thematic patterns. The analysis revealed several key themes, such as forms of teacher collaboration, strategies for supporting children who experience difficulties, and the influence of role distribution on classroom climate. These themes were supported with concrete examples from the field to ensure that the interpretations genuinely reflected practice. In line with the characterization of qualitative researchers as interpretive bricoleurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), the researcher synthesized multiple data sources to construct a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied triangulation across sources, methods, and time. Triangulation is widely recognized as a strategy that enhances the credibility of qualitative research by enabling phenomena to be examined from multiple perspectives (Carter et al., 2014). Accordingly, information obtained from lead teachers was compared with accounts from assistant teachers and relevant documents; observational data were cross-checked with interview and documentation data; and data collection was conducted repeatedly to ensure temporal consistency. Additionally, member checking was carried out with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. These procedures strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings and ensured that the documented collaborative practices accurately represented actual conditions within the classroom.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Roles of Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers in Learning

a. Role of Lead Teachers

The findings show that lead teachers carry the primary responsibility for the learning process at RA Yaa Bunayya. Their duties include preparing the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH), organizing instructional materials, documenting children's development, and leading core activities such as circle time, thematic lessons, and educational play. Lead teachers also oversee social interactions in the classroom, ensuring that every child participates while adjusting teaching strategies to individual needs. These findings align with the view that the lead teacher serves as the central driver of instruction in co-teaching arrangements (Qualls et al., 2025). Thus, the role of the lead teacher is not merely administrative but fundamentally shapes the direction, continuity, and overall quality of classroom learning.

b. Role of Assistant Teachers

Assistant teachers perform complementary functions by providing individualized support, assisting children who require extra attention, preparing learning media, and supervising the class when the lead teacher manages administrative tasks. Observations indicate that assistant teachers actively soothe unsettled children, offer additional demonstrations, engage in scaffolding, and maintain safety throughout class activities. This corresponds with the view that assistant teachers act as a support system enabling lead teachers to balance group instruction with individual needs (Malik et al., 2024). Consequently, the presence of assistant teachers strengthens the continuity of learning by offering personalized attention and ensuring that children remain comfortable and engaged.

c. Synergy and Division of Responsibilities

The data reveal a clear division of responsibilities: lead teachers concentrate on core instructional activities, while assistant teachers provide individual guidance and classroom supervision. Both teachers communicate through subtle signals or short cues to keep the flow of learning uninterrupted. This aligns with the argument that the effectiveness of co-teaching lies in synergy rather than a mere technical division of labor (Schlieber et al., 2023). Accordingly, the collaborative rhythm established between lead and assistant teachers contributes to more efficient classroom management and supports a smoother learning experience for young children.

Collaboration Between Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers in Classroom Management

The findings indicate that collaboration between lead and assistant teachers in early childhood classrooms encompasses three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. At the planning stage, both teachers meet daily after school to discuss lesson plans, divide responsibilities, identify children requiring additional support, and prepare instructional materials. In several instances, assistant teachers contribute suggestions to address children's difficulties, which the lead teacher then integrates into the lesson plan. This demonstrates that planning is conducted collaboratively and complementarily, reflecting mutual professional engagement.

During the implementation stage, lead teachers take the primary role in facilitating learning activities, including circle time, thematic lessons, and educational play. Assistant teachers provide individualized support by calming restless children, motivating less active learners, and assisting with small-group activities. Their presence also helps lead teachers maintain classroom routines, ensuring student engagement and smooth instructional flow. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that assistant teachers play a substantive role in supporting both academic and emotional needs of children (Malik et al., 2024; Sanders-Smith et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2025).

The evaluation stage involves joint reflections between lead and assistant teachers regarding the success of activities, challenges encountered, and strategies for improvement. Some evaluations include the school principal and parents, such as in monitoring children's development, maintaining consistent routines, and providing feedback on individual needs or additional support, like supplemental nutrition. Field observations indicate that evaluation is conducted systematically, documented, and used to inform subsequent lesson planning. This approach ensures that collaborative practices are sustained and responsive to children's evolving needs (Liu et al., 2024; Wakeman et al., 2024).

The success of collaboration is further strengthened by clear division of responsibilities: lead teachers focus on core learning and group instruction, while assistant teachers provide individual support, supervision, and resource facilitation. Effective collaboration requires open communication, shared ownership, and mutual respect so that each teacher feels valued and can make meaningful contributions. These findings correspond with Liu et al, who highlight that collaborative practices enhance teacher creativity, reduce emotional burden, and strengthen relationships among educators, children, and parents.

From a theoretical standpoint, Vygotsky's social constructivism supports these results by emphasizing that effective learning occurs through dynamic social interaction. In this context, collaboration between lead and assistant teachers functions as dual scaffolding, with lead teachers providing the overarching learning framework and assistant teachers ensuring that each child remains connected and supported within their zone of proximal development (Wibowo et al., 2025). Similarly, co-teaching fosters social and academic interactions that enhance problem-solving, engagement, and socio-emotional development (Kraatz et al., 2020). Effective co-teaching therefore integrates instructional scaffolding with individualized support.

Moreover, intensive collaboration and joint reflection contribute to improved classroom management and overall child development (Hartigan, 2014). The synergy between lead and assistant teachers mirrors international best practices in early childhood education, where shared responsibility, coordinated action, and reflective practice are central to effective classroom management (Rytivaara, 2012; Schlieber et al., 2023).

In conclusion, collaboration between lead and assistant teachers not only ensures smooth and effective learning processes but also strengthens connections among school, children, and parents. This collaborative approach makes classroom management more inclusive, adaptive, and capable of supporting the holistic developmental needs of young learners.

Challenges in Collaboration

The findings of this study indicate that collaboration between lead and assistant teachers does not always proceed smoothly and encounters several challenges from different perspectives. From the principal's viewpoint, limited time and a lack of structured planning often act as barriers, particularly when differences in perspectives arise between teachers. Lead teachers reported challenges related to unclear role division and suboptimal communication, which occasionally caused inconsistencies in delivering instruction. Meanwhile, assistant teachers faced difficulties linked to children's conditions, such as lack of concentration, reluctance to follow instructions, restlessness, and involvement in peer conflicts. These issues required individualized attention and flexible classroom management strategies. In some cases, assistant teachers had to postpone certain tasks to calm children or facilitate more positive social interactions.

To address these challenges, teachers applied several strategies, including creating a more detailed task distribution before activities began, strengthening communication between colleagues, participating in specialized training on collaboration and classroom management, and using personal approaches to help children refocus on learning activities.

These findings align with prior research highlighting the main challenges in teacher collaboration. Wilkins et al. emphasize that differences in teaching styles, limited time for reflection, and difficulty maintaining consistent classroom management are common obstacles. The study underscores that effective professional communication is essential for successful collaboration (Wilkins et al., 2023). Similarly, Chitiyo notes that in co-teaching models, challenges include limitations in individual teacher skills, insufficient time for joint planning and reflection, and the need for additional resources to implement co-teaching effectively. Despite these obstacles, co-teaching was recognized as beneficial because it allows students with diverse learning needs to remain in general classrooms while receiving collaborative instruction. Principal support and targeted collaborative training are crucial in minimizing these barriers and ensuring sustainable implementation (Chitiyo, 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) helps explain the dynamics observed in this study. Interactions between teachers, schools, and children are influenced by structural factors, such as time constraints, policies, and facilities, as well as personal factors, including communication, teaching styles, and children's conditions. The challenges identified in collaboration reflect

interactions between the microsystem (classroom) and the mesosystem (relationships among teachers and with the principal). Therefore, systemic solutions such as regular communication, professional development, and clear task division are essential for overcoming collaboration barriers and supporting effective classroom management.

In summary, the challenges encountered in collaboration between lead and assistant teachers underscore the complexity of co-teaching in early childhood classrooms. The findings highlight that effective collaboration requires not only clear role division and structured planning but also responsive strategies tailored to children's individual needs. The integration of theoretical perspectives reinforces that classroom dynamics are influenced by both structural and personal factors. Addressing these challenges demands a holistic approach, combining professional development, systematic communication, and adaptive teaching strategies. Recognizing these factors strengthens our understanding of collaborative classroom management and provides practical insights for enhancing teacher cooperation and improving learning outcomes in early childhood education.

Impact of Collaboration

The findings of this study indicate that collaboration between lead and assistant teachers has a positive impact on various aspects of education.

1. Classroom environment: The atmosphere became more conducive, safe, and supportive. Children's routines were maintained, allowing them to feel comfortable and motivated to participate.
2. Children: There was a noticeable increase in self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and cooperation abilities. Individual support from assistant teachers helped children stay focused and feel personally attended to.
3. Teachers: Clear task division enhanced efficiency and opened opportunities for innovation through joint discussion and planning.
4. School: The overall quality of learning improved, with teacher collaboration becoming a key factor in successful classroom management.

These findings are supported by previous studies. The active involvement of assistant teachers in pedagogical and core teaching aspects of early childhood education improves learning quality. As partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating lessons, assistant teachers provide more personalized support to children, fostering social development and self-confidence. Such collaboration also encourages teachers to be more innovative in their instructional approaches (Aurina & Zulkarnaen, 2022).

Furthermore, collaboration between lead and assistant teachers contributes to creating a conducive and supportive classroom climate. The presence of two complementary educators not only motivates children but also helps teachers manage the classroom more effectively (Schlieber et al., 2023). Teacher collaboration also enhances the quality of pedagogical interactions, creativity, and learning innovation in early childhood classrooms (Liu et al., 2024).

Theoretically, principles of constructivist learning theory and social constructivism suggest that effective learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative support (Bada, 2015; Wibowo et al., 2025). In the context of early childhood education, collaboration between lead and assistant teachers creates a rich learning environment: children receive both instructional guidance and individualized attention, teachers gain efficiency and opportunities for innovation, and the school

improves overall educational quality. Therefore, the positive impacts of collaboration are felt not only by children but also by teachers and the institution as a whole.

Analysis of Collaboration Between Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers in Early Childhood Classroom Management

The analysis of the research findings shows that collaboration between lead and assistant teachers is fundamental in creating an effective, responsive, and supportive learning environment. The results indicate that the lead teacher takes full responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process. This central role aligns with findings emphasizing the lead teacher as the primary instructional coordinator in co-teaching settings (Qualls et al., 2025; Wong, 2023).

Meanwhile, the assistant teacher plays a highly significant complementary role by providing individualized support and strengthening children's engagement. This corresponds with studies underscoring the substantive contribution of assistant teachers to academic and emotional support (Malik et al., 2024; Thompson et al., 2025). Research conducted in international school settings also highlights the assistant teacher's role in scaffolding children's social and academic functioning (Sanders-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, the assistant teacher's role should be understood as professionally substantive rather than merely technical.

The synergy between lead and assistant teachers is demonstrated through a clear yet flexible division of responsibilities. This finding aligns with arguments that effective co-teaching is rooted in shared ownership of instructional responsibilities (Rytivaara, 2012; Schlieber et al., 2023). In this sense, the collaborative practices at RA Yaa Bunayya reflect international best practices in early childhood education.

During the planning phase, the teachers' routine discussions help align instructional strategies with children's needs. This reinforces studies emphasizing the importance of collaborative planning for teacher professionalism, creativity, and emotional resilience (Damiani & Drelick, 2024; Liu et al., 2024).

In the implementation phase, the assistant teacher's individualized support reflects Vygotsky's ZPD theory and aligns with findings showing that co-teaching promotes problem-solving and social engagement (Kraatz et al., 2020). The influence of institutional culture on successful collaboration (Rönn-Liljenfeldt et al., 2025) is also consistent with the supportive leadership structure observed at RA Yaa Bunayya.

In the evaluation phase, collaboration among teachers, the principal, and parents illustrates an ecological interaction consistent with Bronfenbrenner's systems theory. This corresponds with research demonstrating that institutional and administrative support is essential for sustaining co-teaching practices (Wakeman et al., 2024).

Overall, the results demonstrate that structured collaboration between lead and assistant teachers significantly enhances classroom climate, children's engagement, and teacher professionalism. These conclusions correspond with both local and global literature (Aurina & Zulkarnaen, 2022; Bonacina-Pugh & Zhang, 2023; Schlieber et al., 2023). Therefore, the collaborative practices identified in this study are not only contextually meaningful but also aligned with international standards for early childhood education.

Study Limitations

This study has several noteworthy limitations. First, the small sample size (one PAUD institution) limits the generalizability of the findings to broader settings. Second, the results are highly contextual, shaped by institutional culture, leadership style, and interpersonal dynamics thus requiring careful interpretation when applied to other schools. Third, the qualitative design captures subjective experiences rather than producing widely generalizable patterns.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that structured collaboration between lead teachers and assistant teachers plays a critical role in shaping an effective, supportive, and engaging early childhood learning environment. Clear division of responsibilities, continuous communication, and joint planning and evaluation contribute significantly to improved classroom management and stronger child engagement. These collaborative practices demonstrate that co-teaching is not only functional in daily classroom routines but also essential for enhancing teacher professionalism and instructional quality in PAUD settings.

From a practical standpoint, these findings imply the need for strengthened teacher training programs in Indonesia, particularly in developing collaborative competencies such as shared planning, reflective practice, and communication skills between lead and assistant teachers. Institutional policies should also provide dedicated time for co-planning, encourage joint professional development, and ensure administrative support to sustain effective collaboration.

For policy development, schools and education authorities are encouraged to formally recognize the professional role of assistant teachers and integrate collaborative teaching models into PAUD institutional standards. Such recognition would better support classroom management and improve the overall quality of early childhood education.

Future research should explore co-teaching practices across diverse regional contexts in Indonesia to understand how cultural, structural, and institutional differences shape collaboration. Comparative studies examining the effects of co-teaching on children's academic outcomes versus their social-emotional development would also provide valuable insights for refining instructional strategies and informing national PAUD policy reforms.

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