JDIMAS
Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat
https://ejournal.unikama.ac.id/index.php/jdimas
ISSN: 3048-183X | Vol. 4, No. 1, 2026 |
pp. 1– 6

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Technical Assistance in Enhancing Developmental Psychology Understanding for Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kepanjen District

Mochammad Ramli Akbar[1]*, Siti Munthomimah[2]

[1,2]Department of Early Childhood Education, Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang, Malang, Indonesia
[1]ramli_akbar@unikama.ac.id | [2]sitimunthomimah@unikama.ac.id
*Corresponding Author

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
February 16, 2026

Revised:
April 20, 2026

Published:
June 30, 2026

Keywords:
Character; Personality; Reward; Punishment; Early childhood education teacher

ABSTRACT

Early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Kepanjen District faced significant limitations in understanding and applying developmental psychology principles, particularly regarding character formation and non-physical reinforcement techniques. This community service program aimed to enhance teachers' operational capacity through structured technical assistance involving 30 educators from KB Al Fithrah Kepanjen and TK ABA 10 Sumberpucung. The initiative was conducted using a two-cycle action outreach approach comprising diagnostic assessments, interactive psychoeducation workshops, field mentoring during school routines, and clinical peer teaching. Evaluation results demonstrated a substantial increase in teachers' practical comprehension, successfully shifting classroom management from rigid physical discipline concepts to constructive behavioral modification strategies. Teachers also mastered individualized reinforcer assessments, enabling non-material motivation tailored to child temperaments. This program provided measurable improvements in teacher competence, establishing a foundation for sustained early childhood psychological assessment practices in partner institutions.

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M. R. Akbar and S. Munthomimah, "Technical assistance in enhancing developmental psychology understanding for early childhood education teachers in Kepanjen District," *JDIMAS: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1–6, 2026, doi: 10.21067/jdimas.v4i1.9713.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers serve as vital facilitators in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of young learners during their critical formative years [1], [2]. In Kepanjen District, Malang Regency, early childhood educators face complex classroom management challenges that require a firm grasp of developmental psychology [3]. However, preliminary diagnostic assessments conducted across local PAUD teacher working groups revealed significant practical gaps. Educators frequently struggled to translate theoretical psychological concepts into daily teaching practices, often leading to uniform instructional expectations that overlooked individual child temperaments [4].

Two primary priority problems were identified among partner schools. First, teachers exhibited overlapping and conflicting interpretations regarding child character and personality [5]. Character was predominantly viewed as rigid, identical behavior across all students, while the internal psychological foundation of personality was largely ignored. Second, misconceptions surrounding behavioral reinforcement were widespread [6], [7]. Teachers generally associated punishment exclusively with taboo physical measures, creating hesitation and anxiety when managing disruptive student behaviors. Concurrently, reward systems were heavily reliant on tangible items or plastic toys, which created unhealthy material dependency among children [8].

To resolve these operational challenges, a targeted community service program was conducted to provide direct, contextual, and interactive technical assistance in developmental psychology. The specific objectives of this program were: (1) to enhance teachers' capacity to differentiate and integrate child character and personality in instructional design, (2) to equip teachers with practical skills in implementing non-physical behavioral management and reinforcer assessments, and (3) to establish collaborative reflective practices between teachers and school leaders to sustain developmental psychology application in early childhood education [9].

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

The community service program was carried out over a 20-day engagement period located at two partner institutions in Kepanjen District: KB Al Fithrah Kepanjen and TK Aisyiah Bustanul Athfal (ABA) 10 Sumberpucung. The participants comprised 30 PAUD educators and school principals. The program utilized a participatory action approach structured into two sequential activity cycles, incorporating diagnostic assessment, workshop facilitation, direct classroom mentoring, and collaborative reflection [10].

2.1 Implementation Stages

The outreach activities were organized into three main implementation phases:

1. Diagnostic Phase and Module Development: The service team performed baseline observations, document analysis, and diagnostic interviews across partner schools to map specific teacher knowledge gaps. Based on these findings, contextual training materials focusing on child personality, non-physical behavioral management, and individual reinforcer assessments were prepared [11].
2. Cycle 1 - Interactive Psychoeducation and Field Mentoring: The team conducted interactive workshops at partner locations, delivering psychoanalytic and behavioral perspectives using real classroom case studies. Following the workshops, facilitators accompanied teachers during daily school routines, such as morning prayer habituations (wadifah amaliyah), observing how educators interacted with children showing disruptive behaviors [12]. Each session concluded with a joint Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with school heads to evaluate immediate behavioral adjustments.
3. Cycle 2 - Clinical Peer Teaching and Reinforcer Assessment: In the second cycle, the team facilitated practical peer-teaching simulations. Teachers practiced non-physical discipline strategies (such as verbal redirection, cooling-off spaces, and non-verbal cues) and learned to execute reinforcer assessments to identify unique non-material motivators for each child [13]. The cycle concluded with a comprehensive reflection session to evaluate skill adoption and establish sustainability plans.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The technical assistance program achieved significant positive outcomes across all target indicators, effectively resolving the partner institutions' primary operational challenges [14].

3.1 Implementation Results and Evaluation

Prior to the outreach program, educators relied on rigid, one-size-fits-all habituation routines without conducting psychological assessments. The initial observations at the two partner institutions revealed differences in how teachers understood and implemented character education. At KB Al Fithrah Kepanjen, character formation emphasized Islamic values through daily religious habituation, including prayers, worship activities, and respectful behavior toward teachers and parents. These activities were conducted regularly, but individual psychological assessments were not systematically incorporated into the learning process. At TK ABA 10 Sumberpucung, character education similarly emphasized moral development, positive behavior, and religious habituation. Although both institutions recognized individual differences among children, their instructional practices primarily focused on observable behavior and predetermined learning expectations.

The diagnostic findings also identified limitations in teachers' understanding of reward and punishment. Teachers commonly associated rewards with praise, gifts, toys, or preferred activities. Meanwhile, punishment was understood through practices such as verbal reprimands, temporary separation, or withdrawing preferred objects. Teachers expressed concerns about the potential negative effects of punishment, particularly when associated with physical discipline. These findings indicated the need for a broader understanding of behavioral reinforcement and developmentally appropriate classroom management.

Table 1 outlines the comparative outcomes observed before and after the implementation of the community service program.

Table 1. Example of Community Service Outcomes

Indicator	Baseline	After Program
Character & Personality Concept	Confounded character with uniform external behavior; neglected individual psychological traits [5].	Distinctly separated personality from trainable character; tailored classroom routines to individual temperaments [9].
Application of Punishment	Associated punishment solely with physical harm, resulting in paralysis in curbing disruptive behaviors [7].	Mastered non-physical behavioral elimination techniques (e.g., redirection, temporary reflection space) [11].
Application of Rewards	Restricted rewards to tangible gifts and toys, causing student material dependency [8].	Implemented social and activity-based rewards customized via individual reinforcer assessments [13].

Following the two-cycle technical assistance program, qualitative observations and teacher reflections indicated improvements in participants' understanding of developmental psychology concepts. Teachers became more aware that character and personality are closely related but represent different aspects of child development. They also recognized

that character formation requires continuous learning experiences and cooperation between schools and families rather than relying solely on repetitive classroom activities.

Regarding behavioral reinforcement, teachers developed a broader understanding that rewards are not limited to material objects and that responses to children's behavior should consider individual characteristics and developmental needs. The mentoring activities also introduced the importance of reinforcer assessments in identifying meaningful forms of reinforcement for individual children. These outcomes were identified through interviews, observations, documentation, and collaborative reflections. However, the available evaluation data were qualitative and did not provide numerical measurements of changes in teacher competence.

3.2 Discussion

The technical assistance successfully demystified developmental psychology for PAUD teachers [14]. At KB Al Fithrah, teachers successfully integrated Islamic value habituation (salafunasholeh) with respect for child individuality. Similarly, educators at TK ABA 10 created emotionally supportive learning spaces. Teachers expressed that mastering non-physical behavioral redirection removed their anxiety regarding classroom discipline [11], [15]. A key enabling factor was the active participation of school principals in FGDs, while time constraints during peak school hours represented a minor limiting factor. Participants requested future technical assistance focusing specifically on early childhood psychological assessment tools [10].

The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between character formation and personality development in early childhood education. Before the program, teachers generally understood character through observable behavior and routine habituation, while personality was associated with individual traits influenced by family and environmental conditions. However, these understandings were not consistently integrated into instructional practices. The technical assistance encouraged teachers to recognize that children may demonstrate different behavioral responses despite participating in similar learning activities. Therefore, character education should not require identical behavioral expressions from all children but should consider their individual developmental characteristics.

The findings also demonstrate that daily habituation remains an important component of character education in both partner institutions. At KB Al Fithrah, religious routines provided opportunities to develop discipline, respect, and positive behavior. Similarly, TK ABA 10 emphasized moral values and positive social interactions. Nevertheless, the initial observations showed that these activities were primarily evaluated through visible behavioral outcomes. Integrating developmental psychology into such routines can help teachers consider children's emotional responses, individual differences, and learning needs when planning and evaluating classroom activities.

Another important finding concerns teachers' understanding of reward and punishment. The initial tendency to associate rewards with material objects and punishment with physical or restrictive actions limited teachers' available classroom management strategies. Through the technical assistance, teachers began to recognize that behavioral reinforcement should be understood in relation to children's individual responses and preferences. This understanding supports the use of more flexible and contextually appropriate reinforcement strategies rather than relying on uniform responses to children's behavior. Importantly, behavioral management practices should remain non-violent, respectful, and appropriate to children's developmental needs.

The program also emphasized the relationship between school-based learning and family environments. Teachers acknowledged that character and personality development cannot be achieved through classroom instruction alone. Children's experiences at home, parental involvement, and everyday social interactions contribute to their developmental processes. Consequently, effective character education requires communication and cooperation between teachers and parents to support consistent and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Although the program produced positive qualitative outcomes, its evaluation primarily reflected teachers' understanding and perceptions during the mentoring activities. The available findings did not establish the long-term effectiveness of the strategies or demonstrate measurable changes in children's developmental outcomes. Therefore, further assistance should focus on strengthening teachers' practical assessment skills, particularly in identifying individual developmental characteristics and appropriate behavioral reinforcers. Such follow-up activities would support the more systematic application of developmental psychology in early childhood education.

4. CONCLUSION

The community service initiative successfully elevated the professional competence of PAUD teachers in Kepanjen District in developmental psychology and classroom management. Educators transitioned from rigid discipline concepts to constructive behavioral management and individualized reinforcement strategies. To maintain these gains, partner schools are recommended to institutionalize regular peer reflections and pursue follow-up programs on psychological assessment frameworks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their gratitude to the leadership and teaching staff of KB Al Fithrah Kepanjen and TK Aisyiah Bustanul Athfal 10 Sumberpucung for their active collaboration. Gratitude is also extended to Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang for institutional support under Grant No. 042/LPPM/UNIKAMA/2026.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

M. R. Akbar: Program conceptualization, workshop facilitation, field mentoring, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. S. Munthomimah: Field coordination, focus group facilitation, documentation analysis, and manuscript review.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no financial or non-financial conflict of interest regarding the execution or publication of this community service program.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors used OpenAI ChatGPT solely for language translation, proofreading, and aligning the manuscript structure with the journal template. The authors retain full responsibility for the data, factual accuracy, and integrity of the content.

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