



Strengthening children's social attitudes through social education practices: A case study in a religious care institution

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening children's social attitudes is an important goal of social education in residential care institutions, particularly amid increasing individualism and changing patterns of social interaction among young people. This study examines how social education practices strengthen the social attitudes of foster children in a religious-based care institution. A qualitative case study was conducted at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage in Malang Regency, Indonesia. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving foster children, caregivers, administrators, and a social studies teacher and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. The findings reveal that children's social attitudes are strengthened through three interconnected processes: relational guidance and emotional support from caregivers, experiential social education practices—including etiquette, muhadhoroh, student organizational activities, and Ramadan Safari—and institutional collaboration that supports children's participation and reflection. Through these processes, children develop empathy, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, and social awareness through repeated social interactions and lived experiences. The study proposes a Relational Pedagogical Process model, demonstrating that social education in residential care institutions operates as a relational and experiential pedagogical process in which caregiver–child relationships, participatory social experiences, and reflection collectively contribute to the development of children's social attitudes.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of social attitudes among adolescents has become an important concern in studies of child education and alternative care. Adolescents growing up in alternative care settings, including residential and foster care, may face particular challenges in developing social competence, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior when responsive caregiving and meaningful social learning opportunities are limited (Soriano-Díaz et al., 2022). These challenges may be intensified by children's previous family and social experiences, as many enter care from disrupted family environments or contexts that provide limited support for the development of positive social attitudes (Amalia & Nursaidah, 2025). This issue is particularly relevant during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by identity exploration in which insufficient social support may increase vulnerability to identity-related difficulties (Nurani & Sanjaya, 2025). Consequently, strengthening social attitudes in alternative care requires more than behavioral regulation; it requires an educational environment that enables children to experience, interpret, and practice constructive social relationships.

International perspectives increasingly conceptualize social education not merely as the transmission of norms or behavioral compliance, but as a process of developing empathy, collaboration, social responsibility, and active participation through authentic experiences and sustained social interaction. Studies involving adolescents in foster care demonstrate that participatory and experience-based activities can provide meaningful opportunities for social development (Känkänen et al., 2022). Similarly, continuous activities grounded in real-life experiences have been identified as effective contexts for strengthening the social attitudes of foster children (Nathanael et al., 2023). These perspectives suggest that social attitudes are not simply taught as abstract values but are developed through participation in social relationships and everyday practices. Thus, strengthening the social attitudes of adolescents in institutional care represents not only a behavioral concern but also a broader pedagogical challenge.

In Indonesia, this challenge is particularly significant because children living in orphanages come from diverse family and socioeconomic circumstances, including loss of parental care, dysfunctional family environments, and socioeconomic vulnerability. The absence of parental figures may affect children's social, emotional, and cognitive development and increase difficulties in developing positive social attitudes (Sudirman et al., 2026). Differences in children's backgrounds and previous experiences may likewise influence their social and emotional development and their ability to establish healthy interpersonal relationships (Nafira & Djuwita, 2025). Therefore, orphanages are expected to function not only as institutions that provide children's basic needs but also as educational and social environments that facilitate character development, communal living, social responsibility, and prosocial behavior. This broader function is consistent with Indonesian social welfare policy, which emphasizes that residential child-care institutions should support children's character formation and social capacities in addition to meeting their basic needs (Permensos, 2011).

The importance of this educational function has increased amid contemporary social changes associated with digitalization, intensive social media use, and changing patterns of interaction among adolescents. Digital technologies increasingly shape how adolescents communicate and participate socially, potentially altering opportunities to practice empathy, cooperation, interpersonal communication, and direct conflict resolution (Feraco et al., 2025). At the same time, technological development and globalization create additional challenges for caregivers seeking to support children's character development (Damayanti & Syawaluddin, 2025). For adolescents living in alternative care settings, these conditions may become particularly consequential when caregiving practices remain predominantly instructional and provide limited opportunities for meaningful social participation. Strengthening social attitudes therefore requires educational practices that allow children not only to understand social values but also to encounter differences, negotiate relationships, assume responsibilities, and reflect on their experiences in everyday life.

Previous studies have identified several mechanisms associated with children's social development in alternative care settings. International research has highlighted the importance of child-caregiver relationships, resilience, social competence, and collaborative activity-based learning (Soriano-Díaz et al., 2022). Supportive relationships with caregivers, structured routines, and collaboration among institutional actors have also been identified as important elements in strengthening children's social development (Pinheiro et al., 2026). Within the Indonesian context, studies have emphasized modeling, habituation, guidance, and advice as strategies for developing children's social behavior. Afriani and Afrinaldi (2023), for example, highlights the contribution of caregiver role modeling and guidance, whereas Handayani and Sunarti (2024) indicate that modeling and guidance alone may be insufficient when children have limited opportunities to engage in direct social practices. Consistent with this argument, Amalia and Nursaidah (2025) show that structured programs involving children directly in social activities can contribute meaningfully to the formation of social attitudes.

Despite these contributions, an important gap remains in understanding how these elements operate together as an integrated social education process within children's everyday lives. Previous studies have generally examined caregiver relationships, modeling, habituation, structured activities, or social competence as relatively separate dimensions. Consequently, less attention has been given to the process through which relational support, habituation, direct social experiences, children's

participation, and reflection interact continuously to connect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of social attitudes. This limitation is particularly relevant in religious-based residential care institutions, where institutional values, caregiver–child relationships, communal routines, and social activities coexist within the same educational environment. Thus, the issue is not merely which practices are used to strengthen children's social attitudes, but how those practices function pedagogically as an interconnected process through which children experience, interpret, and internalize social values.

Initial observations at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage in Malang Regency indicate such an interconnected pattern of social education. Social learning is embedded in children's everyday lives through communal living, collective activities, community service, group learning, and engagement with the wider community. Exploratory interviews with caregivers further suggest that strengthening social attitudes is not limited to advice or compliance with institutional rules. Rather, it involves caregiver role modeling, habituation, emotional support, gradual assignment of responsibility, and children's direct participation in social experiences. As a Muhammadiyah religious-based care institution, these practices are also embedded within the internalization of Islamic values that guide interpersonal relationships and communal responsibilities. This setting therefore provides a relevant context for examining social education not as a collection of isolated character-building activities but as a relational and experiential pedagogical process embedded in everyday institutional life.

Against this background, the novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing social education practices as an integrated pedagogical process for strengthening children's social attitudes in a religious-based residential care institution. Rather than examining role modeling, habituation, guidance, or social activities separately, the study investigates how caregiver–child relationships, institutional practices, lived social experiences, and supporting systems interact in the development of children's social attitudes. In doing so, the study seeks to move beyond identifying individual strategies toward explaining the underlying process through which social attitudes are developed within the everyday ecology of residential care. This perspective is also relevant because the role of caregivers in shaping foster children's social attitudes remains relatively underexplored (Wiguna et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how social education practices strengthen the social attitudes of foster children at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage. Specifically, it investigates (1) the role of caregivers as relational and pedagogical agents in strengthening children's social attitudes, (2) the implementation of social education practices through which children experience and internalize social values, and (3) the institutional factors that support or constrain this process. Theoretically, this study seeks to extend the understanding of social education by explaining how relational interactions, experiential practices, and institutional support operate together in shaping children's social attitudes within a religious-based care setting. Practically, the findings are expected to provide an evidence-based reference for residential care institutions in designing more relational, participatory, and experience-based educational practices and to inform the development of child-care programs that address not only children's basic needs but also their social development.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in depth how social education practices contribute to strengthening the social attitudes of foster children within their natural institutional setting. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, meanings, behaviors, and social interactions rather than to quantify predetermined variables. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand phenomena as experienced and interpreted by participants through descriptive inquiry conducted in natural settings (Moleong, 2018). More specifically, the case study design allows for an in-depth investigation of a bounded case, program, activity, or social phenomenon within its contextual setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Yin (2018) further emphasizes the value of case studies for developing contextual and in-depth understandings of complex phenomena, particularly when research questions concern how processes occur within real-life settings. Accordingly, this design enabled the study to examine not only the forms of social education practiced at the institution but also how foster children

experienced, interpreted, and responded to these practices in their everyday lives. This approach was also relevant given that children's social experiences in residential care may be shaped by caregiving patterns, interpersonal communication, and the internalization of social values through collective interactions (Agustina et al., 2025). The bounded case examined in this study was therefore the implementation of social education practices within an institution-based residential care setting.

The researcher served as the primary instrument throughout the qualitative research process and was directly involved in designing the study, establishing relationships with participants, collecting and interpreting data, and preparing the research report (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This role is consistent with Moleong (2018), who describes the qualitative researcher as the planner, implementer, data collector, analyst, interpreter, and reporter of the research process. The study was conducted at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage, located in Kepanjen District, Malang Regency, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively because social education and habituation practices are integrated into the institution's everyday activities, including religious activities, shared responsibilities, cooperation among foster children, character-building activities, and participation in community-based social activities. These characteristics provided a context in which social education could be examined as an ongoing process embedded in children's daily lives. The selection of this institutional context is also supported by previous research indicating that the residential care environment can play an important role in developing social values, discipline, and self-confidence among foster children (Haning & Maksum, 2026).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in, experience with, or knowledge of social education practices at the institution. The informants consisted of one caregiver, one orphanage administrator, five junior-high-school-level foster children, two foster children involved in the OSWAH organization, two foster children who served as leaders in Ramadan Safari activities, and one social studies teacher who interacted with the children in educational activities. Participant recruitment continued until the information obtained was considered sufficiently rich and relevant to address the research focus. This selection strategy enabled the study to incorporate perspectives from foster children as the primary participants in social education practices as well as from adults involved in their caregiving, institutional management, and educational experiences.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, which are commonly used to obtain comprehensive qualitative data from multiple sources (Sugiyono, 2022). Participant observation was conducted to examine social education practices as they occurred in the children's everyday environment, including congregational worship, community service, group learning, organizational activities, and other religious, educational, and social activities. In-depth interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations concerning the role of caregivers, the implementation of social education practices, children's social experiences, and the process through which social attitudes were strengthened. Documentation was used as an additional source of evidence and included institutional development programs, activity schedules, photographs, institutional reports, and other relevant records. The use of these three sources enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and supported triangulation across the collected evidence.

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2013), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These processes were conducted iteratively throughout data collection and analysis rather than as strictly sequential stages. During data condensation, relevant information from interview transcripts, observational records, and documentation was selected, organized, and focused according to the research questions. The condensed data were then organized into descriptive and thematic displays to identify recurring patterns concerning caregiver-child relationships, social education practices, children's social experiences, and institutional factors supporting or constraining the strengthening of social attitudes. Emerging interpretations were continuously compared across data sources, and conclusions were progressively developed and verified against the available evidence. This analytical procedure is consistent with Sugiyono (2022), who emphasizes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification as interconnected processes in qualitative data analysis.

The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and the maintenance of an audit trail. Following Sugiyono (2022), source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from foster children, caregivers, administrators, and the social studies teacher, whereas method triangulation involved comparing evidence generated through observation, interviews, and documentation. Initial interpretations were also discussed with selected informants through member checking to examine whether the researchers' interpretations were consistent with participants' experiences and intended meanings. In addition, the procedures of data collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation were systematically documented as an audit trail to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the study.

Ethical principles were applied throughout the research process, particularly because most of the participating foster children were under 18 years of age. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage. For child participants, informed consent was obtained from the administrator or caregiver acting as the responsible guardian, accompanied by assent from each participating child to ensure voluntary participation. Adult participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and intended use of the study before agreeing to participate. Data collection was scheduled in consultation with participants and caregivers to avoid disrupting children's routine activities and institutional schedules. Participants were informed of their right to provide or withhold information and to participate voluntarily. To protect confidentiality and privacy, participants' identities were anonymized using initials in the presentation of the findings, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes and handled in accordance with the ethical principles of social research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of the Research Findings

Based on the thematic analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data, the strengthening of foster children's social attitudes at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage was embedded in everyday social interactions and institutional practices rather than occurring solely through formal learning. Three interrelated themes emerged from the data: (1) the role of caregivers as role models, guides, and mediators in strengthening children's social attitudes; (2) the implementation of social education practices through children's direct participation in everyday social experiences; and (3) institutional support and challenges affecting the continuity of social attitude development.

As summarized in Table 1, these themes encompass relational guidance from caregivers, structured and experiential social activities, collaboration among institutional actors, and challenges arising from children's diverse characteristics and adaptation processes. Together, the findings show that the strengthening of social attitudes occurs through an interconnected process involving caregiver–child relationships, participation in social practices, institutional support, and ongoing reflection on children's social experiences.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes of the Research Findings

Main Theme	Subtheme
The role of caregivers in strengthening children's social attitudes	Exemplary behavior; emotional support; conflict mediation; reflective coaching
Implementation of social education practices	Etiquette program; muhadhoroh; organization (OSWAH); Ramadan Safari
Supporting and inhibiting factors	Collaboration between actors; tiered evaluation system; character diversity; communication and adaptation barriers

Caregivers as Guiding Figures, Mediators, and Mirrors of Social Attitudes

In the lives of children in orphanages, caregivers are present not only as enforcers of the rules, but also as figures to be observed, emulated, and even emotionally turned to when the children experience social confusion. Many children describe caregivers as reminders but also as companions. In the daily spaces where children eat together, complete chores, deal with minor conflicts with friends, or even when they feel upset with others, caregivers act as social mediators. One foster child described how social values are taught not only through advice, but through spontaneously tested practice:

"I was once asked out by a female teacher, then suddenly asked, 'Did anyone take out the trash? Did she help me pick up something?' It turns out we haven't been that responsive." (Foster Child, Interview D, 2026)

Experiences like this show that social education does not stop at knowledge of manners, but touches the reflective awareness of children who are invited to review their own social responses. For some children, the presence of a caregiver also provides a sense of security. One foster child revealed that:

"I am comfortable with the rules from the caregiver because when we face obstacles or conflicts in our activities, there is someone to mediate, namely the caregiver." (Foster Child, Interview S, 2026)

This statement demonstrates that strengthening social attitudes requires not only rules but also relational presence. Children seem to need more than just behavioral correction, but also emotional presence in their daily lives. Furthermore, caregivers also help children manage their emotions. As a foster child who once led an organization recounted:

"I'm the type of person who has to be quick, sometimes members who take a long time to complete tasks make me emotional, and here the caregiver reminds me to be able to manage my emotions and help my members and is reminded that when organizing, it's not literary work but teamwork." (Foster Child, Interview D, 2026)

In moments like these, the caregiver's role is not as a punisher, but as a facilitator of social maturity. As discovered by Yanuardianto (2022) The process of caregivers emphasizing character values through activity planning, methods, and evaluation. Thus, caregivers are not merely supervisors but also substitute parents, striving to meet physical, mental, and social needs and ensuring that each activity has a purpose (purposive activity) in shaping the child's social attitudes.

Social Education Practices as a Space for Learning to Live Together

The findings indicate that children's social attitudes were strengthened through a series of interconnected social education practices embedded in everyday institutional life. These practices included etiquette education, muhadhoroh, OSWAH organizational activities, extracurricular activities, and Ramadan Safari. Documentation showed that these activities were implemented systematically throughout the year, while the Ramadan Safari extended children's social experiences beyond the institution to several areas, including Sengguruh, Kebonagung, Blitar, Tumpang, and Poncokusumo. Rather than functioning as isolated programs, these activities provided different but complementary opportunities for children to practice communication, cooperation, responsibility, leadership, social adaptation, and respectful interaction with others.

Etiquette education provided a foundation for children's everyday interpersonal behavior by introducing and reinforcing appropriate ways of communicating and interacting with others. Children learned how to speak politely, ask for help, express gratitude, apologize, and demonstrate respect in daily interactions. One foster child explained,

"Etiquette teaches good ethics and politeness, communication etiquette, saying sorry, thank you, and asking for help" (Foster Child A, interview, 2026).

The social studies teacher similarly observed that the activity prepared children to interact appropriately beyond the institutional environment:

"From this etiquette activity, they can learn manners and ethics in dealing with other people, as well as providing them with provisions before they go out into the community to practice" (Social Studies Teacher, interview, 2026).

Observations further indicated that these values were reinforced through everyday interactions, allowing children to practice responsiveness and respectful behavior rather than encountering etiquette solely as prescribed institutional norms. More participatory social experiences were provided through muhadhoroh and OSWAH activities. Muhadhoroh, which involved regular public-speaking activities conducted in groups, created opportunities for children of different ages and backgrounds to communicate, cooperate, negotiate responsibilities, and develop confidence. A caregiver described the relationship between these activities and children's social development:

"The OSWAH and muhadhoroh activities are a real practice of strengthening social attitudes because they experience the process of training leadership, cooperation and communication, such as determining the theme to be presented and being guided by OSWAH members" (Caregiver N, interview, 2026).

The children's accounts reflected similar experiences. One participant stated, *"In the process of Muhadhoroh, we learn a lot about mutual respect because we are in a group with various generations, so we have to understand the diverse characters of children, work together, and train self-confidence and public speaking" (Foster Child D, interview, 2026).*

Another child explained, *"In Muhadhoroh here, we are grouped across levels, so I can adapt to different characters, especially when discussing" (Foster Child T, interview, 2026).*

OSWAH activities further provided opportunities to practice leadership, responsibility, and time management. One foster child explained,

"From the OSWAH practice, we learn leadership and time management because here we not only manage our own time but are responsible for managing the time of other friends and understanding the diverse attitudes of our friends" (Foster Child D, interview, 2026).

The findings also showed that differences of opinion emerged naturally within these collective activities. A foster child who had led a muhadhoroh activity recalled,

"There was a problem when deciding on a theme, there were different opinions, so I tried to vote" (Foster Child S, interview, 2026).

Such experiences provided opportunities for children to encounter different perspectives, negotiate group decisions, and develop strategies for resolving disagreements. Extracurricular activities complemented these experiences by providing additional opportunities for children to develop their individual potential while practicing teamwork and sportsmanship in group settings.

The Ramadan Safari extended these social education practices into community settings. During the program, foster children participated in activities outside the orphanage, including assisting with mosque activities, teaching children at TPQ, organizing community activities and competitions, participating in community service, and interacting with residents in unfamiliar social environments. A caregiver explained,

"We require children to participate in the Ramadan Safari. Through this activity, children can socialize with the community and implement the lessons taught at the orphanage. There are also assessments here to evaluate our foster children" (Caregiver N, interview, 2026).

An administrator similarly stated, *"The Ramadan Safari is also a form of social education. Here, they learn to understand different personalities, adapt, and contribute directly to society" (Administrator M, interview, 2026).*

The social studies teacher further emphasized the experiential dimension of the program:

"I've been greatly helped by the orphanage's Ramadan Safari program, where each child devotes themselves to the community for a week. They have programs there that involve helping with mosque activities, coaching children at the TPQ, organizing competitions, and community service" (Social Studies Teacher, interview, 2026).

The children's reflections showed that participation in the Ramadan Safari was associated with experiences of cooperation, tolerance, communication, confidence, and adaptation. One foster child stated,

"After participating in the safari, I learned a lot about cooperation and tolerance" (Foster Child N, interview, 2026),

while another reflected,

"I used to not have the courage to speak in public, but after participating in activities at the orphanage, I started to have the courage" (Foster Child A, interview, 2026).

The program also provided opportunities for children from different cultural backgrounds to adapt to unfamiliar social environments. A participant from Central Kalimantan explained,

"I'm originally from Central Kalimantan and experienced culture shock in Java, but now I'm starting to understand through this activity because I'm directly exposed to the outside community" (Foster Child N, interview, 2026).

These accounts indicate that community-based activities enabled children to apply social values learned within the institution while encountering different people, social expectations, and cultural contexts.

Table 2. Social Education Practices and the Strengthening of Children's Social Attitudes

Structured Activity	Description of Findings	Social Attitudes Strengthened	Data Sources
Muhadhoroh	Provides opportunities to practice public communication, cooperation, discussion, and social adaptation across age groups	Self-confidence, communication, cooperation, mutual respect, and social adaptation	Interviews with caregivers, administrators, and foster children; activity documentation
Etiquette	Reinforces ethics, manners, respectful communication, and responsiveness in everyday interactions	Politeness, respect, empathy, and interpersonal awareness	Interviews with caregivers, administrators, foster children, and social studies teacher
OSWAH	Provides experience in organizing activities, managing responsibilities, and coordinating with peers	Leadership, responsibility, discipline, time management, and cooperation	Interviews with caregivers, administrators, and foster children
Extracurricular activities	Provides opportunities to develop children's potential through individual and group activities	Teamwork, sportsmanship, cooperation, and self-development	Interviews with caregivers, administrators, and foster children; activity documentation
Ramadan Safari	Provides direct experience of participating, serving, communicating, and adapting within wider community settings	Social awareness, tolerance, responsibility, cooperation, confidence, and social adaptation	Interviews with caregivers, administrators, foster children, and social studies teacher; Ramadan Safari documentation

Taken together, the findings show that social education at the orphanage operated through a continuum of experiences ranging from everyday interpersonal habituation to structured group activities and direct engagement with the wider community. Etiquette education strengthened basic interpersonal conduct; muhadhoroh provided opportunities to develop communication, cooperation, confidence, and adaptation; OSWAH supported leadership and responsibility; extracurricular activities facilitated teamwork and sportsmanship; and the Ramadan Safari extended these competencies into community settings. As summarized in Table 2, each activity provided a distinct context for strengthening particular dimensions of children's social attitudes while collectively

contributing to the broader development of social competence through repeated participation and interaction.

Collaboration, Evaluation, and Challenges in Maintaining the Strengthening of Social Attitudes

The strengthening of children's social attitudes at the orphanage was supported not only by caregivers but also by collaboration among multiple institutional actors, including mudabbiroh, OSWAH members, administrators, social studies teachers, and the institution's director. This collaborative structure provided different levels of guidance, supervision, and evaluation throughout children's daily activities. As one administrator explained,

"Mudabbiroh to the OSWAH, to the administrator, to the caretaker" (Administrator M, interview, 2026).

The social studies teacher further described the regular evaluation process, stating,
"Every week there is an evaluation of the children's development" (Social Studies Teacher A, interview, 2026).

These accounts indicate that the development of children's social attitudes was supported through a tiered institutional structure rather than relying on a single caregiver or educational activity. Collaboration also extended to children's formal learning experiences at school. Social studies learning was connected to social situations encountered by children in their everyday lives at the orphanage, allowing their experiences to become part of the learning process. One foster child explained,

"Mr. Agung always links the problems at the orphanage with social studies learning, so through social studies, we learn about tolerance, responsibility, and responsiveness" (Foster Child D, interview, 2026).

This connection provided opportunities for children to reflect on their everyday social experiences through concepts addressed in social studies learning. Despite this institutional support, the findings also revealed several challenges in strengthening children's social attitudes. Differences in individual characteristics, difficulties in adapting to peers, communication barriers, and limited awareness of others' needs sometimes affected children's interactions. During the Ramadan Safari, for example, one foster child observed,

"They only focus on their own tasks; for example, if their friends haven't finished, they don't help each other enough" (Foster Child S, interview, 2026).

This account indicates that individual responsibility did not always translate into cooperation or responsiveness to the needs of other group members. Thus, children's ability to complete their assigned responsibilities could coexist with limitations in collective awareness and mutual assistance. Differences in children's personalities and communication styles also created challenges that required ongoing adaptation and emotional regulation. As one foster child reflected,

"Not everyone is gentle; some are outspoken, so we learn about differences, respect, and controlling our emotions" (Foster Child D, interview, 2026).

Rather than indicating the absence of social development, these interpersonal difficulties illustrate that strengthening social attitudes involved an ongoing process of encountering differences, managing emotional responses, negotiating relationships, and learning to interact constructively with others. Accordingly, the findings show that institutional collaboration provided an important support system for children's social development, while the diversity and complexity of everyday social interactions simultaneously created challenges through which social attitudes continued to be practiced and developed.

Synthesis of Meaning of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that foster children's social attitudes were strengthened primarily through lived social experiences embedded in their everyday interactions rather than through direct instruction alone. Social attitudes developed as children participated in situations that

required them to interact with others, assume responsibilities, respond to differences, and reflect on their experiences. Caring and cooperation, for example, were practiced when children assisted peers in completing shared responsibilities; tolerance developed through daily interactions with peers from diverse cultural and personal backgrounds; responsibility was strengthened when children were entrusted with leadership and organizational roles; and emotional regulation was practiced when they encountered disagreements, disappointment, or differences in group activities. This pattern is consistent with [Nasution and Basri \(2025\)](#), who found that assigning tasks and responsibilities to foster children can contribute to the development of their social attitudes. Thus, social education at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage operates not merely through the transmission of social values but through opportunities for children to experience and practice those values within everyday social relationships.

The findings further suggest that the development of social attitudes is a gradual and continuous process shaped by repeated participation in social situations. Children's social development does not require interactions to be free from disagreement or difficulty; rather, differences in personality, communication styles, responsibilities, and expectations provide situations in which children learn to cooperate, adapt, regulate their emotions, and understand the perspectives of others. This interpretation is consistent with [Lestari and Listyaningsih \(2024\)](#), who emphasizes that appropriate educational programs, social activities, and opportunities to develop children's interests and talents can create a supportive environment for strengthening self-confidence. Similarly, [Nurjannah and Toni \(2023\)](#) highlight the role of assigning responsibilities in developing children's sense of responsibility and care as part of moral development. These findings indicate that children's social attitudes are strengthened not only through what they are taught but also through what they repeatedly experience and practice in their relationships with others.

This process also reflects the importance of connecting knowledge, practice, and habituation in children's character development. [Putri and Yarni \(2023\)](#) identify knowledge, implementation, and habituation as interconnected aspects of character formation, while [Damayanti and Syawaluddin \(2025\)](#) emphasizes that children's participation in collective activities enables them to contribute, appreciate the roles of others, and recognize the importance of togetherness in achieving shared goals. In the present study, these processes were evident across everyday routines, muhadhoroh, OSWAH activities, extracurricular activities, and the Ramadan Safari, where children encountered progressively broader opportunities to apply social values in interpersonal, organizational, and community contexts. Taken together, the findings position social education as a relational and experiential pedagogical process in which guidance, habituation, shared responsibilities, interpersonal differences, social participation, and reflection interact continuously to strengthen children's social attitudes.

Discussion

This study shows that foster children's social attitudes are strengthened at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage through a relational, gradual, and integrated pedagogical process. The main findings highlight three important points. First, caregivers act as central figures, not only guiding behavior but also shaping children's social awareness through role models and emotional support. Second, social education practices such as etiquette, muhadhoroh, organization, and Ramadan Safaris serve as concrete and transformative social learning spaces. Third, the success of strengthening social attitudes is influenced by institutional collaboration systems, but also faces challenges in the form of character diversity, relationship dynamics, and tensions in children's social adaptation. These findings demonstrate that children's social attitudes do not develop through passive internalization of norms, but through a process of negotiation of meaning, emotional experiences, and repeated social interactions. Thus, strengthening social attitudes in the context of orphanages is more accurately understood as a process of becoming social, namely the process of becoming social individuals through shared life experiences.

The Role of Caregivers as Pedagogical and Relational Agents in the Formation of Social Attitudes

The findings demonstrate that caregivers play a role that extends beyond administrative supervision and behavioral control. They function as pedagogical and relational agents who provide behavioral models, mediate interpersonal conflicts, facilitate reflection, and create a sense of emotional security for foster children. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, this finding suggests that children's social attitudes develop through continuous exposure to the behaviors of significant adults, followed by observation, imitation, reinforcement, and reflection within everyday interactions. Caregivers therefore become important social models through whom children learn how empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and sensitivity toward others are enacted in concrete social situations.

Importantly, the findings indicate that this learning process extends beyond the verbal transmission of values. When caregivers spontaneously encourage children to reflect on whether they have helped others without being instructed to do so, social values are transformed from abstract expectations into objects of reflection on actual behavior. Such interactions encourage children to evaluate the consequences of their actions and become more attentive to the needs of others. This finding is consistent with [Paturohman and Sahrul \(2025\)](#), who emphasize the importance of caregiver interpersonal communication in fostering children's self-confidence and social openness. Similarly, [N. A. Putri \(2025\)](#) highlights the contribution of interactive caregiver–child communication to the development of children's self-confidence. Taken together, these studies support the present finding that supportive communication is not merely a means of delivering guidance but also a relational mechanism through which children develop confidence, openness, and social responsiveness.

However, the present study extends these earlier findings by demonstrating that effective caregiving involves not only communication and behavioral guidance but also relational presence. Foster children appeared to benefit from knowing that caregivers were available to listen, mediate conflicts, provide reassurance, and help them interpret difficult interpersonal experiences. Emotional availability therefore constitutes an important component of the social education process because it creates a secure relational environment in which children can express difficulties, reconsider their responses, and gradually develop more mature ways of interacting with others. In this sense, the caregiver–child relationship should not be understood solely as a hierarchical relationship between an authority figure and a child, but as a pedagogical relationship through which trust, reflection, and social learning are continuously constructed.

This interpretation is consistent with Social Pedagogy Theory, which conceptualizes education as a relational process grounded in presence and shared experience rather than instruction alone ([The international Social Work & Society Academy, 2024](#)). From this perspective, caregivers engage in being with children rather than merely telling them what to do. Their pedagogical influence emerges through everyday interactions in which social values are modeled, practiced, negotiated, and reflected upon. Consequently, seemingly ordinary moments—such as resolving disagreements, reminding children to assist peers, discussing inappropriate responses, or supporting children when they experience interpersonal difficulties—become meaningful pedagogical encounters through which social attitudes are developed.

Conceptually, these findings broaden the understanding of caregiving in institutional settings. Rather than positioning caregivers merely as substitute parental figures or supervisors responsible for maintaining discipline, this study identifies them as architects of a relational learning environment in which children can observe, practice, interpret, and internalize socially meaningful behavior. The formation of social attitudes therefore depends not only on what caregivers teach but also on the quality of the relationships they establish and the opportunities they create for children to reflect on lived social experiences. This relational dimension helps explain how caregiving practices can contribute to the gradual development of children as empathetic, responsible, cooperative, and socially responsive individuals.

Developing a Conceptual Model: Relational Pedagogical Process

The findings of this study indicate that foster children's social attitudes are strengthened not through one-way instruction or isolated character-building activities, but through an ongoing relational pedagogical process embedded in everyday institutional life. This process emerges from the interaction between a nurturing care environment, reciprocal caregiver–child relationships, participation in social education practices, and opportunities for children to reflect on their social experiences. Rather than functioning independently, these elements operate as an interconnected process through which children experience, practice, interpret, and gradually internalize social values. This finding is consistent with [Tang et al. \(2024\)](#), whose systematic review suggests that caregiving practices in residential care settings are more conducive to children's social development and well-being when they are grounded in supportive, participatory, and child-centered relationships.

Building on these empirical findings, this study proposes the Relational Pedagogical Process model as a conceptual explanation of how social education practices contribute to strengthening foster children's social attitudes. As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), the model consists of five interconnected components: (1) nurturing environment, (2) caregiver–child relational interaction, (3) social education practices, (4) reflection and meaning-making, and (5) strengthening of social attitudes. These components should not be understood as rigid or strictly sequential stages; rather, they represent a dynamic and iterative process in which relationships, experiences, and reflection continuously interact in children's everyday social development.

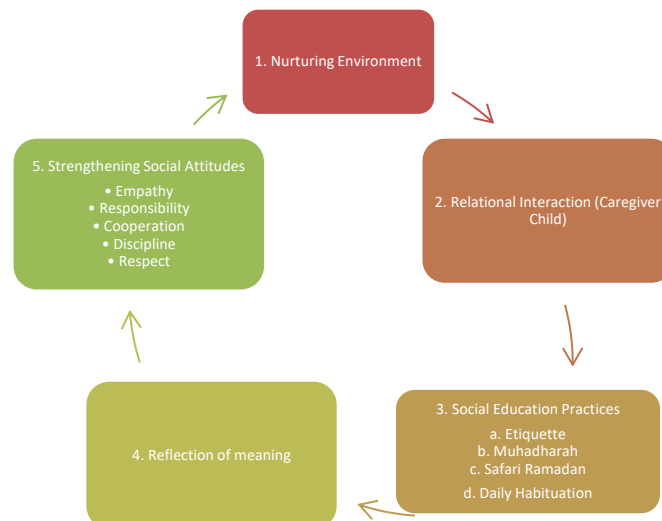


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relational Pedagogical Process in Strengthening Foster Children's Social Attitudes

The process begins with a nurturing environment that provides institutional norms, shared values, routines, expectations, and a sense of social and emotional security. Within this environment, caregiver–child relational interactions provide the interpersonal foundation for social learning. Through supportive communication, behavioral modeling, guidance, conflict mediation, and emotional presence, caregivers create opportunities for children to observe and experience how social values operate in actual relationships. These interactions are subsequently reinforced through social education practices, including etiquette activities, muhadharah, student organizational activities, community service, daily habituation, and the Ramadan Safari. Such activities provide authentic social situations in which children are required to cooperate, assume responsibility, communicate with others, negotiate differences, adapt to unfamiliar circumstances, and respond to the needs of their peers and communities.

However, participation in social activities alone does not automatically produce changes in social attitudes. A central mechanism identified in this study is reflection and meaning-making. Through caregiver guidance, conflict resolution, self-evaluation, interpersonal feedback, and reflection on everyday experiences, children are encouraged to interpret what their social encounters mean and reconsider how they respond to others. Experiences of disagreement, leadership,

cooperation, cultural differences, and even interpersonal tension therefore become pedagogically meaningful when children are given opportunities to reflect on them. Through this process, social values move beyond externally imposed rules and gradually become personally meaningful orientations that guide children's behavior.

This interpretation extends Social Learning Theory by suggesting that social development within residential care settings involves more than observing and reproducing behavioral models. Although modeling remains important, the findings indicate that children also actively construct meaning from their interactions and experiences. Social learning therefore occurs through the interplay of modeling, participation, relational interaction, and reflection. In this respect, the model incorporates a relational dimension into the learning process: caregivers do not merely demonstrate desirable behavior but accompany children as they encounter, interpret, and respond to real social situations. The findings therefore position the child not as a passive recipient of social values but as an active participant in constructing social understanding through lived experience.

Through repeated cycles of interaction, participation, and reflection, these experiences contribute to the strengthening of social attitudes manifested in empathy, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, respect, and social awareness. This interpretation is consistent with [Hirots et al. \(2021\)](#), who emphasize that nurturing environments that provide opportunities for active participation and meaningful social experiences can support children's social skills, emotional regulation, and psychosocial adjustment. In the present study, however, these processes are further situated within the everyday relational and educational practices of a religious-based residential care institution, demonstrating how institutional culture, caregiver relationships, and experiential social education can operate together as an integrated pedagogical system.

The theoretical significance of the proposed model lies in its explanation that the strengthening of social attitudes is neither the outcome of a single intervention nor a simple linear progression from instruction to behavioral change. Instead, it develops through the cumulative and iterative interaction of environment, relationships, lived social experiences, and reflective meaning-making. Children may encounter social difficulties, reconsider their behavior, receive guidance, practice alternative responses, and subsequently face new social situations. Social attitude formation is therefore understood as a continuing process of social becoming rather than a fixed educational outcome. Within this process, the caregiver-child relationship serves as a central relational foundation, while social education practices provide the experiential context in which social values are enacted, negotiated, reflected upon, and progressively internalized.

Social Education Practices as a Living Social Learning Space

The findings demonstrate that children's social attitudes are strengthened not through isolated character-building programs but through social education practices embedded in their everyday lives. Activities such as etiquette education, muhadhoroh, OSWAH organizational activities, extracurricular activities, and the Ramadan Safari provide recurring contexts in which children practice cooperation, responsibility, respect for differences, communication, conflict resolution, and social adaptation. This finding is consistent with [Rismawati et al. \(2025\)](#), who emphasize the important role of structured and sustained programs in residential care institutions in supporting children's spiritual, intellectual, and social development. However, the present findings further indicate that the pedagogical significance of these activities lies not merely in their structured implementation but in the opportunities they provide for children to experience social values through direct participation in everyday relationships and collective activities.

From a social pedagogy perspective, these practices can be understood as forms of learning through communal life, in which educational experiences are embedded in ordinary social interactions rather than confined to formal instruction. For example, learning to express gratitude or apologize through etiquette education involves more than acquiring rules of politeness; it encourages children to recognize and respond appropriately to the presence, feelings, and needs of others. Similarly, muhadhoroh and OSWAH activities require children to organize activities, communicate across age groups, assume leadership responsibilities, negotiate different opinions, and coordinate with peers. The Ramadan Safari extends this experiential process beyond the institutional environment by requiring children to interact with unfamiliar communities, adapt to different social

and cultural contexts, and participate directly in community activities. These findings are consistent with Devra et al. (2025), who identify social education as an important means of internalizing responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and cooperation. They also correspond with Putra (2026), who emphasizes the longer-term importance of psychosocial support and character development for foster children.

The experiential nature of these practices is particularly important because social attitudes require opportunities for enactment rather than conceptual understanding alone. Participatory and experience-based programs can support the development of emotional regulation, empathy, healthy interpersonal relationships, and responsible decision-making (Nurwahyuni et al., 2025). Similarly, activities involving interaction with external parties can broaden children's social experiences and contribute to the development of their social attitudes (Watri, 2025), while engagement with the wider community provides meaningful contexts for children's social and emotional development (Ainnunnisa et al., 2025). In the present study, therefore, activities such as OSWAH and the Ramadan Safari functioned not simply as institutional programs but as experiential learning contexts in which children encountered real responsibilities, interpersonal differences, and consequences of their social behavior.

Importantly, the findings also reveal that meaningful social learning does not always occur under harmonious conditions. Everyday situations such as waiting for others to finish speaking, assisting peers who have not completed shared tasks, negotiating group decisions, and responding to disagreement become opportunities for children to practice social attitudes. This finding is consistent with Romiyatun and Wakhudin (2023), who highlight the contribution of collective habituation within residential care environments to children's social discipline. However, the present study extends this understanding by showing that disagreement, interpersonal tension, and social discomfort can themselves become pedagogically meaningful experiences. During muhadhoroh, for example, differences of opinion regarding activity themes required children to negotiate and reach collective decisions. During the Ramadan Safari, children encountered unfamiliar people, cultural differences, and community expectations that required adaptation. Such experiences suggest that tolerance is developed not merely by learning that differences should be respected, but by repeatedly encountering differences and learning how to respond to them constructively.

From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, these encounters are important because children actively interpret the meanings associated with their social experiences. Being entrusted with leadership, for instance, may be interpreted not simply as receiving an additional task but as recognition of one's capability and responsibility. Likewise, interacting with peers who have different personalities or communication styles can encourage children to reinterpret interpersonal differences as situations requiring emotional regulation, adaptation, and mutual understanding. Social education practices therefore function as spaces for social meaning-making, in which children continuously interpret themselves, others, and their roles within social relationships. Through repeated interactions and interpretations, children gradually construct understandings of what it means to be responsible, cooperative, respectful, caring, and socially responsive.

These processes can also be interpreted through Bandura's Social Learning Theory. As explained by Lesilolo (2019), social learning involves reciprocal relationships among behavior, environmental conditions, and individual processes, with modeling constituting an important mechanism of learning. Within the orphanage, caregivers provide behavioral models, but children's learning extends beyond observation and imitation. Modeled behaviors are practiced through collective activities, tested in actual interpersonal situations, and reinforced through guidance, feedback, and repeated experience. Consequently, social learning occurs through an interaction between modeling, participation, experience, and reflection, rather than through observation alone.

Repeated participation also helps explain how initially externally guided behaviors can gradually become more stable dispositions. Routine activities, institutional expectations, and recurring social responsibilities provide conditions in which behaviors such as discipline, cooperation, respect, and responsibility are repeatedly practiced until they become increasingly familiar in children's everyday conduct. This process resonates with the concept of habituation associated with Bourdieu, in which repeated social practices within a structured environment contribute to the development of durable dispositions. In this sense, the orphanage does not merely

prescribe desirable social behavior; it provides a social environment in which such behavior can be repeatedly enacted, negotiated, and progressively incorporated into children's ways of interacting with others.

Taken together, the findings position social education practices as a living social learning space in which social attitudes are developed through the interaction of modeling, participation, habituation, interpersonal negotiation, and meaning-making. The contribution of this study therefore lies not simply in identifying which programs strengthen children's social attitudes, but in explaining how these programs become pedagogically meaningful through children's lived experiences. Etiquette, muhadhoroh, OSWAH, extracurricular activities, and the Ramadan Safari provide different social contexts, yet they operate through a shared mechanism: children encounter social expectations, participate in relationships, experience challenges and differences, interpret those experiences, and progressively develop more socially responsive ways of acting. Social education in residential care can therefore be understood as an experiential and relational process through which everyday communal life itself becomes a medium for children's social development.

Comparison with International Literature

The findings of this study show important parallels with international literature on community engagement and experiential social learning among children and adolescents. In particular, the Ramadan Safari provides a community-based setting in which foster children interact with people beyond the orphanage, assume social responsibilities, cooperate with others, and adapt to unfamiliar social and cultural environments. These findings are consistent with [Giummarra et al. \(2022\)](#), who indicate that adolescents' direct participation in community service, volunteering, and collaborative activities can contribute to the development of empathy, communication, responsibility, and collaborative skills. Community engagement has also been associated with a stronger sense of belonging, social participation, and the development of an inclusive civic identity ([Lightbody & Escobar, 2021](#)). Viewed in this broader context, the Ramadan Safari shares an important feature with international community-based learning practices: social competence is developed through active participation in authentic social environments rather than through instruction alone.

Nevertheless, the social education practices identified at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage are situated within a distinctive religious and cultural context. Whereas community engagement initiatives in international contexts may draw on approaches such as positive youth development, volunteering, civic engagement, or service learning, the Ramadan Safari integrates community participation with religious practice, character formation, and social service. Children are therefore exposed simultaneously to opportunities for social interaction, community contribution, moral reflection, and the enactment of religious values. In this context, community engagement is not merely a means of developing interpersonal competence but also a setting in which social responsibility, care for others, and religiously grounded values can be practiced in everyday social relationships. This contextual characteristic demonstrates how broadly recognized principles of experiential and community-based learning can take culturally specific forms within faith-based residential care.

A similar pattern can be observed in the etiquette program. At an international level, interventions that combine social skills development with opportunities for real-life interaction have been associated with improvements in interpersonal communication, cooperation, and social participation ([Giummarra et al., 2022](#)). The etiquette practices identified in the present study share this emphasis on developing children's ability to interact appropriately with others. However, their educational orientation extends beyond interpersonal competence alone. Etiquette is embedded in everyday institutional life as a process through which children repeatedly practice politeness, respect, empathy, appropriate communication, and sensitivity toward others while simultaneously engaging with values grounded in the institution's religious orientation. Thus, the program connects social competence with moral and relational dimensions of children's everyday behavior.

Taken together, the comparison with international literature suggests that the mechanisms identified in this study—direct participation, repeated social interaction, shared responsibility, and experiential learning—are broadly consistent with approaches to social development reported across

different contexts. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that these mechanisms are shaped by the cultural, institutional, and religious environment in which they operate. The contribution of the present study therefore lies not in claiming that the Muhammadiyah orphanage represents an entirely distinct form of social education, but in showing how internationally recognizable principles of experiential social learning are contextualized within a faith-based residential care setting. In this setting, social participation, character formation, and religious values become interconnected components of children's everyday social learning.

Dynamics of Support and Barriers: Strengthening Social Attitudes as a Non-Linear Process

The findings further demonstrate that the strengthening of children's social attitudes does not occur through a smooth or uniformly progressive process. Despite the presence of structured social education practices and institutional support, children continued to encounter social and emotional challenges, including differences in personality and communication styles, limited responsiveness to peers' needs, difficulties in cooperation, and adaptation to unfamiliar cultural and social environments. These challenges reveal an important complexity in social attitude development: competence in one dimension of social behavior does not necessarily correspond to competence in another. A child may demonstrate discipline and responsibility in completing individual tasks while remaining less responsive to peers who require assistance. Similarly, children may understand the importance of cooperation while still experiencing frustration when working with group members whose behaviors, communication styles, or working pace differ from their own.

Rather than interpreting these inconsistencies as evidence of unsuccessful social education, the findings suggest that they constitute part of the developmental process itself. Social attitudes do not appear to develop through a simple progression from inadequate to desirable behavior. Instead, children repeatedly encounter social expectations, experience interpersonal difficulties, reconsider their responses, receive guidance, and attempt alternative ways of interacting. Strengthening social attitudes can therefore be understood as an iterative and non-linear process involving experience, tension, reflection, adjustment, and renewed social practice. From this perspective, interpersonal disagreement and social discomfort are not necessarily barriers external to learning; under appropriate guidance, they can become situations through which children practice emotional regulation, perspective-taking, cooperation, and adaptation.

The importance of sustained support within this process is consistent with [Gabrielli et al. \(2023\)](#), who emphasize the relationship between the psychosocial well-being of children in care and the quality of social support available within their caregiving environment. The present study extends this perspective by suggesting that effective support depends not merely on the presence or number of supporting actors, but also on the consistency of guidance and social expectations across those actors. At the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage, caregivers, mudabbiroh, OSWAH members, administrators, social studies teachers, and institutional leaders contributed to interconnected processes of guidance, supervision, and evaluation. The tiered evaluation system enabled children's social development to be observed and supported across different settings rather than being treated as the responsibility of a single caregiver.

The connection between institutional life and formal education further illustrates the significance of this collaborative support. When social studies teachers relate concepts such as tolerance, responsibility, and social responsiveness to situations that children encounter in the orphanage, experiences from everyday communal life become material for educational reflection. Formal learning and lived social experience can therefore reinforce one another, allowing children to interpret social concepts in relation to situations they have personally encountered. This is particularly relevant within residential care, where children continuously negotiate individual needs, shared responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and the expectations associated with communal living. Accordingly, foster children should not be positioned merely as recipients of institutional interventions; the findings portray them as active participants who interpret, negotiate, and respond to their social experiences while developing their social identities and relationships.

Institutional collaboration emerged as an important condition supporting this process. [Susanti et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasize that support across the social system of an orphanage contributes to the creation of a healthy and sustainable developmental environment. Similarly, [Sulistijanti et al.](#)

(2024) highlight collaboration between caregivers and schools as an important strategy for monitoring and supporting children's development. Raihani et al. (2023) also point to the contribution of supportive social environments involving foundations, schools, and orphanages, while Nafira and Djuwita (2025) emphasize the importance of collaboration among relevant actors in supporting foster children's social and emotional development. These studies reinforce the present finding that children's social development is more effectively supported when guidance extends across the different environments and relationships in which they participate.

In the context of the present study, collaboration among the orphanage, educational actors, and other institutional components facilitated greater continuity between the social values introduced, practiced, monitored, and evaluated in children's everyday lives. This continuity is important because inconsistent expectations across settings may make it more difficult for children to interpret and internalize expected social behaviors. When institutional actors communicate and reinforce compatible expectations, children encounter repeated opportunities to practice responsibility, cooperation, discipline, respect, and responsiveness across different social situations. Collaboration therefore functions not merely as administrative coordination but as a pedagogical support system that provides continuity in children's social learning.

Taken together, these findings indicate that both support and barriers are integral to the process of strengthening social attitudes. Institutional collaboration provides continuity, guidance, and opportunities for reflection, whereas interpersonal differences, communication difficulties, and adaptation challenges create situations in which social competencies are tested and further developed. The contribution of this study lies in showing that social attitude development within residential care should not be conceptualized as a linear outcome of structured programs. Rather, it emerges through repeated cycles of social experience, difficulty, guidance, reflection, and readjustment within a network of relationships and institutional support. This dynamic helps explain why the strengthening of social attitudes is best understood as an ongoing relational and developmental process rather than as a fixed behavioral outcome.

Deepening the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Symbolic Interactionism provides a useful perspective for understanding why the strengthening of children's social attitudes does not occur mechanically through compliance with institutional rules. Rather, social attitudes are developed through processes of interaction, interpretation, and meaning-making within children's everyday relationships. When children experience interpersonal conflict, receive guidance or correction from caregivers, or are entrusted with leadership responsibilities, they encounter situations in which they interpret not only the expectations of others but also their own roles within those relationships. Through these repeated interactions, children gradually construct understandings of themselves as responsible, cooperative, trusted, and socially responsive individuals.

The conflict experiences identified in this study illustrate this process particularly well. Interpersonal disagreement did not merely represent a behavioral problem requiring correction; it also created opportunities for children to reconsider their responses, interpret the perspectives of others, and renegotiate how they positioned themselves within the group. When conflict was addressed through dialogue, caregiver mediation, and subsequent reflection, children were encouraged to move beyond immediate defensive responses toward greater awareness of others' feelings and perspectives. From a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, such changes can be understood as processes of social meaning-making in which children's understandings of themselves and others are continuously reconstructed through interaction.

This interpretation is consistent with Hirot et al. (2021), whose findings highlight the importance of supportive and reflective relational environments in children's social and psychosocial development. Safe and dialogic interactions can provide opportunities for children to interpret interpersonal experiences and develop more constructive understandings of their social relationships. The present study further demonstrates that this meaning-making process extends beyond caregiver-child interactions to children's participation in collective and community-based activities. As suggested by Lightbody and Escobar (2021), participation in community settings can strengthen social engagement, belonging, and the development of civic identity. In the present context,

experiences such as the Ramadan Safari provided opportunities for foster children to encounter unfamiliar people and social expectations, assume responsibilities within the community, and interpret themselves as individuals capable of contributing to others.

The findings therefore suggest that behavioral change cannot be explained solely as compliance with institutional expectations or the reproduction of behaviors modeled by caregivers. Children actively interpret the meanings of the situations they encounter, the responses they receive from others, and the responsibilities entrusted to them. A leadership responsibility, for example, may become meaningful as an expression of trust; assistance to a peer may reinforce an understanding of oneself as caring and responsible; and interpersonal disagreement may become an opportunity to reconsider how one's behavior affects others. Through repeated cycles of interaction and interpretation, social experiences contribute not only to behavioral adjustment but also to the ongoing construction of children's social identities.

From this perspective, an important contribution of the present study is its demonstration that residential care institutions can function as relational contexts for social identity construction, where meanings are continuously produced, negotiated, and reconstructed through everyday interactions. Social attitude development therefore involves more than learning what behaviors are socially expected; it also involves children's developing understanding of who they are in relation to others. This perspective complements the study's broader Relational Pedagogical Process by explaining the meaning-making mechanism through which relational experiences, social participation, conflict, guidance, and reflection can gradually contribute to the development of responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and social awareness.

Theoretical Contributions and New Understandings

Conceptually, this study contributes to the understanding of social education in residential care by demonstrating that the strengthening of foster children's social attitudes can be understood as an ongoing relational pedagogical process rather than as the outcome of isolated character-building programs. Social attitudes develop through the interplay of supportive relationships, behavioral modeling, participation in everyday social practices, interpersonal challenges, and reflection on lived experiences. From this perspective, residential care institutions can be understood not only as settings for child protection and the provision of basic care but also as social pedagogical environments in which everyday communal life provides continuous opportunities for children to develop social understanding, relationships, and socially responsible ways of acting.

The integration of Social Pedagogy Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism provides a multidimensional explanation of this process. Social Pedagogy Theory highlights the importance of relational presence and shared experiences in creating meaningful educational encounters between caregivers and children. Social Learning Theory explains how social attitudes are developed through observation, modeling, participation, reinforcement, and repeated practice, particularly within relationships with significant adults and peers. Symbolic Interactionism further explains how children actively interpret these interactions and construct meanings about themselves and others through their everyday social experiences. Considered together, these perspectives suggest that social attitude development involves not only learning appropriate behavior but also experiencing, practicing, interpreting, and gradually giving personal and social meaning to that behavior.

A further contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that interpersonal difficulties are not necessarily external barriers to social learning. Differences in personality, disagreements, communication difficulties, emotional tension, and challenges in adapting to others can become pedagogically meaningful when accompanied by appropriate relational support and opportunities for reflection. Such experiences require children to reconsider their responses, understand different perspectives, regulate their emotions, negotiate relationships, and attempt more constructive forms of interaction. Social development therefore does not proceed uniformly or linearly; rather, it involves repeated cycles of interaction, difficulty, guidance, reflection, adjustment, and renewed participation.

Taken together, these findings provide the conceptual basis for the Relational Pedagogical Process proposed in this study. The model positions social attitude development as emerging from

the dynamic interaction of a nurturing environment, caregiver–child relationships, social education practices, and processes of reflection and meaning-making. The theoretical contribution of the study therefore lies not simply in confirming that role modeling, habituation, or social activities are important, but in explaining how these elements interact within children's everyday relational experiences to strengthen social attitudes. In this sense, foster children are not passive recipients of character education; they are active participants who continually interpret social experiences, negotiate relationships, and construct understandings of themselves in relation to others. Strengthening social attitudes can therefore be understood as an ongoing process of social development through which children gradually learn not only how to live with others, but also how to understand themselves as responsible, empathetic, cooperative, and socially responsive members of a community.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that foster children's social attitudes at the Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Putri Orphanage are strengthened through social education practices embedded in everyday life, supportive caregiver–child relationships, and an institutional culture that encourages active social participation. Empathy, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, and social awareness develop as children observe, practice, and reflect on social values through shared experiences. Based on these findings, this study proposes the Relational Pedagogical Process, which positions interpersonal relationships, participatory experiences, and reflection as interconnected mechanisms in strengthening children's social attitudes. The model contributes to Social Pedagogy Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism by illustrating how social learning, relational experiences, and meaning-making interact within a residential care setting.

The findings should be interpreted within the study's limitations. As a qualitative case study conducted in a single faith-based residential care institution, the findings are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalization. In addition, data collected within a specific period cannot capture longer-term changes in children's social attitudes after leaving residential care. Future research could therefore employ longitudinal and comparative designs across religious and non-religious care institutions and different cultural contexts to examine the sustainability of children's social development and the transferability of the proposed Relational Pedagogical Process.

Practically, the findings suggest that residential care institutions should complement the provision of children's basic needs with relational, participatory, and experience-based social education. Strengthening caregivers' relational and socio-emotional competencies, providing meaningful opportunities for children to participate in collective and community activities, and creating environments that support open communication, reflection, and constructive conflict resolution may contribute to children's social and emotional development. Programs such as etiquette education, muhadhoroh, student organizational activities, and the Ramadan Safari illustrate how everyday institutional and community experiences can serve as meaningful contexts for strengthening children's social attitudes.

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