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Teachers' Strategies and Challenges in Supporting Emotion Regulation in Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Kindergartens

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Abstract. *Supporting emotion regulation in inclusive classrooms requires understanding teachers' strategies, their contexts of use, and the challenges encountered. This study describes a teacher's strategies and challenges in supporting the emotion regulation of a child with special needs in an inclusive kindergarten. A qualitative single-case study used one semi-structured interview with the classroom teacher and observations of classroom interactions. Analysis followed an interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Methodological triangulation compared interview and observation evidence concerning teacher actions, interactional situations, and the child's responses. Four strategy themes were identified: recognizing early signs and approaching promptly; labeling emotions and setting behavioral limits; offering choices and guiding verbal communication; and supporting calming and re-engagement. Reported challenges included sudden responses, variation in the child's responses, a continuing need for guidance, and divided teacher attention. Observations showed the child following guidance, choosing alternatives, beginning to calm with assistance, and returning to activities. These responses were interpreted through co-regulation, while changes over time were based on the teacher's account. The study offers a contextual understanding of relationships among strategies, implementation challenges, and the child's responses to inform reflection on emotional support in inclusive classrooms.*

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Introduction

Early childhood education provides an important setting in which children learn to participate in shared activities, build relationships with peers, and respond to the emotional demands of everyday life. In kindergarten classrooms, these demands arise when children must wait for their turn, share toys, accept instructions, or stop an activity they enjoy. Situations that appear straightforward to adults can cause frustration for children because individual wishes do not always align with classroom rules and group needs. Education therefore takes place through planned learning activities as well as through interactions in which children cry, express anger, reject instructions, or need help

to resume participation (Blewitt et al., 2018 ; Murano et al., 2020). Teachers' responses in these situations form an important part of children's emotional experiences at school. In inclusive classrooms, emotional support needs to accommodate differences in communication, participation, and the assistance children require. Children with special needs cannot be treated as a group with uniform characteristics. Some children can express their wishes verbally, whereas others rely more heavily on movement, facial expressions, or actions to communicate discomfort. These differences influence how teachers interpret situations and select appropriate support. For example, resistance to instructions needs to be understood in relation to the ongoing activity, the child's ability to understand the message, and opportunities to express a preference. Emotional support thus requires attention to the relationship between the child and the classroom environment, alongside attention to individual behavior.

Emotion regulation is an important concept for understanding these processes, but it needs to be distinguished from behavior that simply appears more orderly. A child who stops crying has not necessarily understood their feelings, just as a child who follows instructions may not yet be able to manage emotions independently. Emotional expression concerns how emotions are displayed; emotion recognition involves identifying feelings; and compliance refers to responding to another person's request. These processes can be related to emotion regulation, but they are not interchangeable indicators. This distinction is necessary to ensure that interpretations of observed responses remain consistent with the evidence, particularly when a teacher continues to provide active guidance and support.

Evidence from broader early childhood social and emotional learning research establishes why emotional support deserves attention within educational practice. Synthesized intervention studies reporting benefits across social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes . These findings concern programs evaluated across groups and do not substitute for evidence about the interaction through which a teacher supports an individual child. Further examined targeted interventions in early childhood settings, demonstrating the importance of specifying the outcomes addressed (Blewitt et al., 2021). This distinction connects the educational importance of emotional learning with the need to study support as it occurs during everyday classroom episodes.

Teacher support in this study is understood through co-regulation, an interactive process in which an adult helps a child navigate and manage an emotional situation. Support may involve approaching the child, helping to name feelings, offering alternatives, or remaining alongside the child while they calm down. The analytical focus is the relationship between the teacher's actions and the child's responses, without assuming that independent regulation has already developed. Examined the relationship between teacher co-regulation and children's self-regulation in preschool settings (Silkenbeumer et al., 2018). This perspective provides a basis for understanding adult assistance as part of development that occurs through everyday interactions.

More recent empirical evidence indicates that teachers' emotional support takes varied forms and serves different purposes. Using video observations in early childhood education and care, found relationships among early emotion coaching practices, co-regulation through metacognitive prompts, and children's self-regulation (Silkenbeumer et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate the relevance of teacher assistance while locating supportive practices within particular situations and children's experiences. For a case study, they provide a basis for tracing the assistance offered and the responses that follow. The relationships identified in that research do not, however, directly establish the

effectiveness of a strategy in every other case. Emotional interactions also occur within social environments governed by behavioral expectations.

Showed that teachers' responses to children's negative emotions are connected to communication practices and the norms of preschool classroom life (Cekaite & Ekström, 2019). Teachers' actions therefore concern both helping children calm down and explaining how to interact with others. When a child wants an object being used by a peer, the teacher needs to understand the child's wishes while protecting the peer's rights. This context helps explain how acknowledging feelings can accompany setting limits on actions that could hurt other children. Support also involves decisions made as a situation unfolds. Teachers need to decide when to approach a child, whether to offer choices, how to communicate behavioral limits, and when to invite conversation. Examined teachers' interpretations of actual emotional situations and their explanations of the decisions they made (Kostøl & Mänty, 2024). This focus suggests that strategies need to be understood alongside the situational considerations informing them. A list of strategies alone does not explain why an action is used in one episode but replaced or combined with another action in the next. Attention to these decisions connects observed practices with the reasons teachers give for using them.

Emotional support in special education can also be understood through the quality of teacher–child dialogue. Examined conversations about emotional experiences by considering teacher involvement and sensitivity in guiding dialogue (Spilt et al., 2021). Their approach extends attention from the type of message delivered to the way conversations unfold within a supportive relationship. This perspective is relevant to understanding communication guidance and conversations after calming as parts of an interaction. Analysis needs to distinguish opportunities to speak that teachers provide from responses that children actually produce, so that teacher actions are not automatically treated as evidence of children's abilities.

Understanding teachers' practices requires attention to professional and classroom organizational dimensions. In a systematic review of 103 empirical studies, mapped early childhood teachers' emotions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociocultural levels (Qin et al., 2024). Emotional work takes place within relationships and conditions that extend beyond individual experience. During support, the need to attend to one child may coincide with responsibility for maintaining group activities. This framework positions the availability of teacher attention as a condition of support that needs to be examined through teachers' experiences and documented classroom events. The activity context is another important element in understanding emotional support. Examined variation in emotion-focused teaching across preschool activities (Curby et al., 2024). Their study provides a basis for considering how opportunities for support and its forms relate to the activity underway. Waiting for a turn, wanting a toy being used by a peer, and encountering conflict represent different contexts. Examining these contexts allows strategies to be explained through the relationship among activity demands, supportive actions, and children's responses. The analysis does not assume that all strategies are used uniformly or that every activity creates the same need for assistance.

Attention to context is also evident in study of social and emotional learning in Taiwanese preschools (Wilkinson & Kao's, 2019). They identified variation in teachers' understanding of their responsibilities for social and emotional learning and its place in educational practice. These findings suggest that recognizing the importance of emotions does not always translate into intentional support within classroom activities. Understanding support requires examining both actual practices and teachers'

explanations of their roles. Findings from other settings inform analytical questions here, without assuming that the same conditions apply to the classroom under study.

Within inclusive education, identified diverse conceptualizations of teacher emotional competence, including emotional awareness, empathy, support, and emotion regulation (Calandri et al., 2025). Their review focused on primary and secondary education, which needs to be distinguished from kindergarten. Nevertheless, it highlights the importance of specifying the emotional dimensions under investigation and the forms of participation of interest. The present study examines supportive actions involving one child and does not claim to assess the teacher's overall emotional competence. An inclusive perspective situates assistance within the relationship between the child's needs and opportunities to participate in classroom activities.

Professional preparation provides a related perspective on inclusive support reviewed preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood classrooms, while synthesized qualitative research on preparation experiences of inclusive preschool teachers (Yu & Cho, 2022 ; D'Agostino & Douglas, 2022). Together, these reviews make preparation and confidence relevant to examining teachers' accounts of practice. The present inquiry addresses the decisions and difficulties experienced by a practicing teacher rather than evaluating a preparation program. Through a review of emotion regulation development among autistic pupils, highlighted the need to understand support embedded in everyday school life (Bennett et al., 2024). Their review discusses approaches with varied outcomes and encourages documentation of practices beyond discrete, time-limited interventions. Its relevance here concerns everyday assistance, without equating the child in this case with autistic pupils. The designation of special needs is not used to infer a diagnosis or a particular pattern of responses. Support is examined through the situations and behaviors presented, while the teacher's account provides insight into the experience of offering assistance.

Special education research also requires conceptual care in interpreting emotional responses. Studied emotion regulation among young autistic children, reviewed conceptual and measurement issues in autism research (Berkovits et al., 2017 ; Cai et al., 2018). These diagnosis-specific studies inform attention to communication and the distinction between regulation and behavioral expression. They do not establish the child's diagnosis in this case; the analysis remains grounded in the documented support needs and classroom interactions. Existing literature addresses emotion regulation support, emotional dialogue, and contextual variation in teaching practices. Accordingly, the research gap is not framed as an absence of studies on teachers' roles. The issue developed here concerns how triggering situations, signs interpreted by the teacher, supportive actions, the child's immediate responses, and classroom demands are connected within one case. An explanation linking these elements provides greater detail than grouping strategies separately. The gap is contextual and analytical: the study examines relationships within documented practice, without claiming that these relationships have never been investigated in any educational setting.

A further gap concerns the relationship between narrated experiences and observed practices. Interviews allow teachers to explain their reasons for acting, the difficulties they encounter, and changes they perceive. Observations document actions and responses in particular episodes. The two techniques address different aspects of a case, so similar summaries do not necessarily constitute equivalent evidence. A report of communication guidance needs to be compared with observed guidance and then distinguished from the child's actual use of words. This examination preserves the

relationship between data and interpretation and clarifies how each technique contributes to understanding the case. Triangulating interview and observation evidence is intended to clarify teacher actions, interactional situations, and the child's responses.

Evidence of similar practices can strengthen descriptions of strategies, whereas interview-only information explains experiences outside the observed episodes. Responses such as choosing an alternative or returning to an activity are situated within the assistance provided. Changes over time are treated as the teacher's reported experience. The study's contribution therefore lies in a contextual understanding of strategy use, implementation challenges, and the child's responses. Its added value does not depend on claiming the discovery of entirely new strategies. This study aims to describe teachers' strategies and challenges in supporting the emotion regulation of a child with special needs in an inclusive kindergarten. Three questions guide the investigation: What strategies are used, and how are they implemented? What challenges arise during support? What immediate responses are documented, and what changes does the teacher report? The case study focuses on one support process in one classroom. In practical terms, it offers material for reflection on the relationships among approaching the child, supporting communication, offering choices, setting limits, and assisting calming. This understanding informs context-sensitive practice rather than a uniform procedure for all children.

Methods

Design and Unit of Analysis

A qualitative single-case study design was used to understand the strategies and challenges involved in a teacher's support for the emotion regulation of a child with special needs in an inclusive kindergarten. The unit of analysis was the process through which the teacher supported the child during emotional situations in the classroom. The analysis connected the situation encountered, the strategies used, the child's immediate responses, and the reported challenges. The case study design preserved the relationship between the process and its context, consistent with emphasis on contextual understanding (Yin's, 2018). The case was bounded by one child and one classroom teacher in one inclusive kindergarten. Activities of interest included peer interaction, toy use, turn-taking, and following instructions. The situational focus was on episodes in which the child's wishes were not immediately fulfilled and the teacher provided assistance. The study described everyday practice and did not use an intervention-testing design.

Case Context and Participant

The interview and observations described a child who could participate in activities and interact with peers but needed support in emotional situations. The teacher reported both verbal and nonverbal communication. The child sometimes nodded or named a feeling when asked, while verbal expression of wishes remained inconsistent. These descriptions were attributed to their respective sources; the teacher's reports of abilities were not treated as developmental assessment results. The main participant was the classroom teacher directly involved in supporting the child. Selection was purposive, based on everyday involvement and knowledge of the child's characteristics and responses. The teacher explained strategies, considerations informing actions, and challenges. The child's and school's identities were concealed, and descriptions focused on information relevant to the support process.

Data Sources and Collection

Data came from one semi-structured interview with the classroom teacher and observations of classroom activities. The interview was conducted on 14 September 2026. The guide covered triggering situations, early signs, strategies before and during emotional responses, actions after calming, challenges, and changes perceived by the teacher. The interview provided accounts of experiences and considerations, while observations provided evidence of actions in particular episodes. Documents were not analyzed as an evidence source.

The interview was coded W1.S1.14/09/2026, identifying the main participant, the first session, and the date. Accounts of change were analyzed as retrospective teacher reporting. Interview evidence is presented as attributed paraphrases, with the source code identifying the account from which each thematic description was developed. Observations focused on the child's behavior, the teacher's actions, responses following support, and subsequent participation in activities. The situations presented included rapid movement toward a peer, crying while waiting, pushing a peer, and wanting to use a toy. Episodes served as presentation units linking the initial situation, behavior, action, and response. Labels Obs-1–Obs-4 identify episodes and do not indicate the number of observation sessions. Unrecorded information was not supplied through inference or converted from interview reports into observational facts.

Data organization and analysis

Analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview material and observation notes were examined to organize descriptive codes, categories, and themes concerning the child's situation, teacher actions, immediate responses, and challenges. The thematic structure in Table 1 presents the categories used to connect these aspects of the support process. Findings were organized into four strategy themes and one challenge theme. Changes perceived by the teacher were separated from immediate responses. The strategy themes covered early approach, emotion labeling and behavioral limits, choices and communication, and support during calming. Relationships among strategies were examined without assuming that all were always used sequentially. The presentation combined thematic narratives, episode summaries, and matrices. Narratives explained meaning, episode tables displayed the available sequence, and matrices clarified relationships among evidence.

Conclusions were checked at the level of specific claims. Helping to name feelings was distinguished from the child's understanding; communication guidance was distinguished from the speech produced; and following instructions was distinguished from independent regulation. These distinctions guided interpretation in the findings and discussion. The relationship between categories and supporting evidence was retained in the data displays. Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize transparent links between thematic interpretation and data in trustworthy qualitative analysis. Here, the theme table identifies evidence sources, the episode table links actions with immediate responses, and the triangulation matrix specifies agreement and complementary information. These displays make the interpretive basis of the reported themes visible to readers. Braun and Clarke (2021) argue that quality criteria should be coherent with the analytical approach adopted. Accordingly, the thematic organization is used within the stated interactive model rather than presented as a separate reflexive thematic analysis procedure.

Triangulation and institutional permission

Methodological triangulation compared the interview with observations. Because only one teacher was interviewed, triangulation across informants was not used. The comparison in Table 5 examined the presence of reported actions, complementary information, and aspects supported by only one technique. The absence of a behavior from an observed episode was not interpreted as evidence that it never occurred.

For example, offering choices was compared with the episode in which the teacher offered waiting or using another toy. Agreement supported the presence of this practice, while the child's selection provided information about an immediate response. Accounts of change over time were interpreted as retrospective reporting rather than inferred from individual episodes. The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by an interview guide and observation focus. Interpretations were checked by returning to interview material and field notes and distinguishing observed actions, teacher reporting, and analytical interpretation. Institutional permission for PPG implementation was documented in Letter No. 1827/UIM/B.17/Spy/X/2026 (Surat Izin Pelaksanaan PPG), within the partnership between the school and the LPTK at Universitas Islam Makassar. The letter concerns permission to implement PPG activities at the partner school. The child's and school's names were concealed. Identifying details unnecessary for understanding the support process were excluded. Episodes involving peers were described through actions and classroom context, preserving the analytical relevance of the interactions while protecting identities.

Reporting differentiates the case boundary, participant account, observed interactions, and interpretive claims, consistent with Levitt et al.'s (2018) emphasis on methodological transparency in qualitative journal articles. Source attribution is retained throughout the results so that the reader can follow how the interview and observations contribute to each finding.

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings describe strategies and challenges within one inclusive classroom case. The interview explains the teacher's experiences, whereas observations show actions and responses in particular episodes. Four strategy themes form the main groups. Challenges, reported changes, and integration of evidence explain the context of implementation. Interview paraphrases are drawn from W1.S1.14/09/2026.

Table 1. *Theme structure and supporting evidence*

Theme	Category	Evidence source
Early approach	Recognizing behavioral changes and approaching	Interview; Obs-1
Emotion labeling and behavioral limits	Naming feelings and stopping actions toward peers	Interview; Obs-2 and Obs-3
Choices and communication	Offering alternatives and encouraging words	Interview; Obs-1 and Obs-4
Support during calming	Remaining with the child and resuming activities	Interview; Obs-2 and Obs-3
Challenges	Response variation, guidance, and divided attention	Interview; partly related to observation

The findings presented in Table 1 illustrate the thematic structure of the study and the supporting evidence obtained from interviews and observations. The themes describe

the approaches used to respond to children's emotional and behavioral needs, including the challenges encountered during implementation. The categories were developed to organize the observed practices into several interconnected aspects of support. The first theme, Early Approach, focuses on recognizing behavioral changes and approaching children appropriately. The interview data and Observation 1 (Obs-1) provide evidence of how early recognition and an appropriate initial approach may help adults respond to children's needs before their emotional or behavioral responses escalate. This theme highlights the importance of paying attention to behavioral cues and initiating supportive interactions.

The second theme, Emotion Labeling and Behavioral Limits, emphasizes helping children identify and express their feelings while establishing appropriate behavioral boundaries. The interview data and Observations 2 and 3 (Obs-2 and Obs-3) support this category. The practices include naming emotions and guiding children to stop behaviors that may harm or disturb their peers. These approaches aim to support emotional awareness while maintaining a safe and respectful environment for social interaction.

The third theme, Choices and Communication, highlights the use of alternative choices and encouraging language to guide children's behavior. Evidence from the interviews and Observations 1 and 4 (Obs-1 and Obs-4) indicates the relevance of offering alternatives and using positive communication when supporting children. Rather than relying solely on direct instructions, these practices provide opportunities for children to respond to situations through more appropriate behavioral choices. The fourth theme, Support During Calming, concerns the assistance provided to children while they regulate their emotions and prepare to resume activities. The interview data and Observations 2 and 3 (Obs-2 and Obs-3) support this theme. Remaining with the child during the calming process and facilitating a gradual return to activities reflect the importance of continued support rather than expecting children to manage difficult emotions independently.

The final theme, Challenges, identifies difficulties associated with variations in children's responses, the need for guidance, and the division of adult attention across multiple demands. Interview evidence, partially supported by observational findings, indicates that implementing these approaches may require flexibility and continuous adjustment to individual circumstances. These challenges suggest that supporting children's emotional and behavioral needs is not always a uniform process and may depend on the child's response, the situation, and the availability of adult support. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that the identified themes are interconnected. Recognizing behavioral changes, supporting emotional identification, communicating choices, and remaining present during calming may form a sequence of supportive practices. However, the challenges identified in the data indicate that their implementation requires sensitivity to individual differences and the context in which interactions occur.

Recognizing early signs and approaching promptly

The teacher explained that emotional situations often involved unfulfilled wishes, such as a toy being used by a peer or having to wait. The teacher recognized a louder voice, crying, resistance to instructions, and faster movement as signs of discomfort. These interpretations drew on experience in supporting the child and knowledge of the child's habits. Behavior was therefore read alongside the situation rather than as a sign with a fixed meaning. The reported practice was to approach the child promptly after recognizing these signs. The teacher described approaching as an opportunity to provide guidance before the situation developed further. Obs-1 showed the child moving more

quickly toward a peer, followed by the teacher approaching and encouraging verbal expression of wishes. The child followed the guidance. Agreement concerned the change in movement and the approaching action; its meaning as discomfort came from the teacher's explanation. The episode supports a description of an early approach without establishing that this action prevented emotional escalation. It shows how the teacher opened interaction and provided guidance. This action was linked to communication support, allowing approach and communication categories to occur within the same episode.

Labeling emotions and setting behavioral limits

The teacher reported helping to name feelings and connecting them with unfulfilled wishes. In Obs-2, the child was asked to wait for a turn, then cried and showed anger. The teacher helped name the feeling, explained the waiting situation, and remained alongside the child. The child began to calm during this interaction. The strongest evidence concerns the teacher's provision of emotional language; the child's verbal response was not detailed enough to establish independent understanding. The teacher also explained that anger was acceptable but pushing or hitting peers was not, and avoided negative labels for the child.

Obs-3 showed the teacher stopping a push, helping the child calm, and communicating that pushing was not permitted. Observation supported the behavioral limit, while acceptance of feelings was more clearly documented in the interview. Together, these categories addressed the child's experience and peers' safety. Distinguishing sources matters because stopping an action does not automatically demonstrate acknowledgment of emotion. The narrative retains both actions according to the evidence: the teacher explained acceptance in the interview and demonstrated a limit on pushing in observation. Calming occurred during support, without isolating one action as the sole cause of the response.

Offering choices and guiding communication

The teacher described offering a choice between waiting for a toy and using another toy when a peer was using the desired object. Choices were intended to make guidance more than a prohibition. Obs-4 showed the teacher offering these alternatives and the child selecting an option. This evidence supports the practice of offering choices and the immediate response, rather than effectiveness across all situations. Choices retained the child's wishes as context while providing actions compatible with shared activities. The teacher also reported encouraging words to request toys or assistance. In Obs-1, verbal guidance was observed, but the child's utterance was not detailed. Convergence concerned the teacher's provision of a communication opportunity. Following guidance was not treated as evidence that the child had independently expressed a wish. The two categories were related through the provision of alternative actions and communication. Both opened possibilities for a subsequent response when a wish was not immediately fulfilled. Nevertheless, the choice made and the guidance provided were distinguished so that the child's abilities were not inferred solely from the adult's actions.

Supporting calming and re-engagement

Table 2. *Summary of observed episodes*

Episode and situation	Child's behavior	Teacher's actions	Response
Obs-1; trigger not detailed	Moving more quickly toward a peer	Approaching, guiding, encouraging words	Following guidance; utterance not detailed

Episode and situation	Child's behavior	Teacher's actions	Response
Obs-2; waiting for a turn	Crying and showing anger	Naming feelings, explaining waiting, remaining alongside	Beginning to calm with support
Obs-3; trigger not detailed	Pushing a peer	Stopping the action, setting a limit, helping calm, inviting conversation	Calmer and returning to the activity, as reported in the latest manuscript
Obs-4; toy used by a peer	Wanting the toy	Offering waiting or another toy	Choosing an alternative

The teacher reported remaining with the child during calming and not immediately insisting on participation while the child was still crying. Once the child was calmer, the teacher invited discussion of the event and the expression of wishes, then guided a return to the activity. In Obs-2 and Obs-3, the teacher remained involved while the child began to calm. The latest source manuscript also reported a conversation after calming and a return to the activity in Obs-3. The findings show assistance continuing after an action was stopped. Returning to the activity was treated as the continuation of the episode, while the content of the conversation and the child's conversational responses were not detailed. Active adult assistance provided the context for the response. The relationship can be described as an action followed by a response, without establishing that one strategy caused an emotional change. The four themes represent a repertoire of support rather than a fixed sequence. Labeling occurred while waiting; choices were offered when a toy was unavailable; and a limit was set after pushing. Teacher involvement was common across episodes, while combinations of support varied with context.

Challenges in providing support

The teacher reported responses that could arise suddenly, variation in responses, a continuing need for guidance, and divided attention. Pushing was documented in observation, but its sudden nature came from the interview. The occurrence of a physical action was not treated as evidence that there had been no early signs. Reports that the child was sometimes difficult to calm also covered a broader range of experiences than the observational examples presented.

Table 3. *Challenges and their evidentiary basis*

Challenge	Teacher's account	Relationship to observation
Sudden onset	Physical responses could arise suddenly	Pushing observed; suddenness not detailed
Response variation	Sometimes following guidance, sometimes difficult to calm	Following guidance and calming with assistance observed
Continuing guidance	Still needing guidance	Assistance present in several episodes
Divided attention	Other children also needed the teacher	Simultaneous management not detailed

The need for guidance was described as an ongoing experience. Several episodes showed teacher assistance and thus related to this account, but did not establish the child's needs across every activity. Divided attention was a classroom-level challenge described by the teacher: supporting one child had to occur alongside responsibility for other pupils. Simultaneous management of attention was not detailed in the episodes, so this evidence remained an interview report. These challenges place strategies within changing conditions of use. The teacher did not describe uniform responses across situations. Difficulties and smoother responses form parts of the experience that need to be considered together, without presenting each event solely as a success or failure.

Changes reported by the teacher

Table 4. *Changes as reported by the teacher*

Aspect	Perceived change
Guidance	Sometimes more willing to listen to reminders
Communication	Beginning to use words, not consistently
Emotion recognition	Sometimes nodding or saying angry when asked
Assistance	Beginning to ask for help or express wishes
Activities	Perceived to return sooner after help with calming

The teacher reported gradual changes in listening to reminders, communicating wishes, recognizing anger, requesting help, and returning to activities. The terms sometimes, beginning to, and not yet consistently indicate perceptions of uneven change. These reports represent the teacher's experience rather than results from longitudinal observational comparisons. Observations provided examples of following guidance, choosing alternatives, and returning to an activity. These examples relate to the reports but do not demonstrate differences from an earlier period. This distinction preserves the function of each form of evidence: the interview explains perceived comparisons, while observation documents a particular event.

Integrating interview and observation evidence

Triangulation compared specific claims. Agreement about teacher actions was not extended to confirmation of independent ability. The matrix shows several points of convergence in practice, while reports of divided attention and change have different evidentiary coverage. Integration produced descriptions of strategies accompanied by immediate responses and the context of the teacher's experiences.

Table 5. *Triangulation matrix*

Aspect	Interview	Observation	Interpretation
Approach	Approaching when signs recognized	Approaching in Obs-1	Agreement on action; meaning of signs from teacher
Labeling	Helping name emotions	Labeling in Obs-2	Agreement on teacher practice
Limits	Pushing not permitted	Stopping and setting a limit in Obs-3	Agreement on behavioral limits
Choices	Waiting or another toy	Choices in Obs-4	Agreement; observation adds selection response
Verbal guidance	Encouraging words	Guidance in Obs-1	Agreement on action, not independent speech
Calming	Continuing support	Assistance in Obs-2 and Obs-3	Agreement on active support
Activities	Talking then returning	Sequence reported in Obs-3	Agreement on follow-up
Attention	Needing to attend to others	Not detailed	Interview finding
Change	Gradual changes	Immediate responses	Related; does not confirm longitudinal change

Table 2 presents a comparison of interview findings and observational evidence to identify areas of agreement, complementary information, and differences in the interpretation of practices used to support children's emotional and behavioral regulation. The findings indicate that the teacher's approach involves recognizing behavioral signs, helping children label their emotions, establishing behavioral limits, offering choices, and providing verbal guidance. Observations 1–4 generally support the interview accounts by demonstrating how these practices are implemented in actual interactions. For example, the teacher's efforts to prevent pushing, offer alternative

activities, and provide assistance during calming reflect the application of supportive guidance and clear behavioral boundaries. The findings also show that verbal encouragement does not necessarily indicate that children can communicate independently, as the observations primarily document teacher-directed guidance. Furthermore, the evidence concerning calming and returning to activities suggests that support continues beyond the initial emotional response and includes follow-up assistance. However, the teacher's need to divide attention among several children presents a practical challenge that was reported in the interview but was not described in detail in the observations. Although the interview and observational findings are related in their descriptions of children's immediate responses, they do not establish gradual or long-term behavioral changes because longitudinal evidence is unavailable. Overall, the comparison demonstrates consistency between the teacher's reported practices and observed interactions while highlighting the importance of distinguishing documented actions from broader interpretations of children's emotional development.

Discussion

Strategies as an interactional process

The findings show strategies operating through relationships among situations, actions, and responses. The teacher approached the child, supported emotional language, set limits, offered alternatives, and remained involved. Following guidance or choosing an alternative represented actions during assistance. Their developmental significance was not equated with the occurrence of an immediate response. The discussion therefore centers on the support process and challenges in implementation. The early approach demonstrates the use of the teacher's knowledge of the child. Faster movement was interpreted as discomfort and followed by proximity. This contextual interpretation needs to be distinguished from the observed behavior. Foreground situational interpretation and decision-making in research on co-regulation (Kostøl & Mänty. 2024). Their relevance lies in understanding strategies alongside the considerations informing them, rather than as actions that always serve the same function.

Proximity created opportunities for guidance and communication. In other episodes, involvement centered on behavioral limits or calming. These relationships show a repertoire without forming a fixed sequence. Reading the findings as a responsive process preserves variation across episodes. The case thus contributes an explanation of when and in what contexts actions were used, beyond a simple inventory of strategies. The distinction between a strategy repertoire and an evaluated intervention is central to positioning this case within the literature. Provide synthesized evidence concerning early childhood social and emotional learning programs (Blewitt et al, 2018 ; Murano et al, 2020). Those studies establish a broader rationale for supporting social and emotional development, whereas this case explains how support is enacted in particular moments. The analytic contribution lies in making the interaction visible: a situation is encountered, the teacher interprets the child's response, and an available form of assistance is introduced. Describing these connections helps explain why the same teacher may approach promptly in one episode and offer alternatives in another.

This interactional reading also clarifies the relationship between pedagogical intention and observed response. A teacher may intend to prevent escalation, but the documented episode establishes the approach and the guidance that followed. The resulting account is useful because it identifies the action and its context without requiring every response to be interpreted as a developmental outcome. Teacher

knowledge of the child informs situated decisions; evidence of movement toward a peer provides the observable event to which that interpretation relates.

Emotion labeling and behavioral limits

Labeling connects expression with language supplied by the teacher. When the child cried while waiting, the teacher helped name the feeling and explained the activity. This assistance can be understood as an opportunity to learn about emotional experience. Nevertheless, teacher action does not substitute for evidence of the child's understanding. Verbal responses would be needed to explain how the label was used or understood. In these data, the strongest interpretation concerns support through labeling. Limits on pushing demonstrate attention to peers' safety. The teacher explained acceptance of anger while rejecting harmful actions. Connect emotion socialization with the norms of preschool interaction (Cekaite & Ekström, 2019). This case shows support taking place within shared classroom life: the child's needs are attended to while peers' rights are maintained. A limit is understood as clarification of behavior rather than rejection of the child. Acknowledgment of feelings and behavioral limits should not be assumed to be equally evident in every episode. The interview explained the teacher's principle, while observation supported the stopping of pushing. This distinction clarifies what evidence is integrated. Becoming calmer during assistance remains an episode-specific response and does not prove that a single action caused it. This interpretation preserves pedagogical value without extending the conclusion beyond the evidence.

Identified intervention strategies for emotion dysregulation and challenging behavior among children and adolescents on the autism spectrum (Nuske et al, 2024). Their review distinguishes teaching regulation skills and alternative behavior from merely responding to disruptive actions. This distinction offers an analytical comparison for the present findings: naming feelings addresses emotional language, while stopping pushing addresses the safety of an ongoing interaction. The review concerns a specified diagnostic population and therefore supplies a conceptual comparison rather than evidence about the child's diagnosis or the effectiveness of this teacher's approach. Within this case, the two forms of assistance are understood through their different immediate purposes.

Choices, communication, and calming as co-regulation

Choices provide available actions when a wish remains unfulfilled. The child could wait or select another toy, allowing interaction to continue beyond prohibition. Choosing showed engagement in that situation. Analytically, the child's wish remained part of the context, but its fulfillment was situated within shared use of objects. A choice provided an opportunity to adjust an action rather than evidence of a lasting change in ability. Verbal guidance involved providing ways to express wishes. The teacher offered language for requesting, borrowing, or seeking help. Where utterances were not detailed, observation supported the communication opportunity rather than independent use. This distinction matters when evaluating responses without equating the teacher's intentions with the child's achievements.

Both strategies concerned alternatives for action and communication made available during interaction. Examined emotional dialogue in special education through teacher involvement and sensitive guidance (Spilt et al. 2021). A dialogue perspective helps interpret conversations after calming. Inviting conversation indicates follow-up, but the child's involvement and the meaning of the conversation require evidence from the responses. This case therefore explains the presence of communication opportunities without inferring understanding solely from teacher actions. Support continued after the

behavior was stopped. The teacher remained present and guided subsequent participation. Co-regulation provides a framework for interpreting interaction involving active assistance rather than a measure of independent ability.

Teacher presence alone does not always establish a regulatory process, but in these episodes presence accompanied guidance, choices, or emotional assistance. This combination grounds the relational interpretation used here. Examined relationships between co-regulation and children's regulation in preschool (Silkenbeumer et al, 2018, 2024). Their findings contextualize the importance of assistance without directly transferring their results to this case. The child began to calm or returned to an activity while the teacher was involved. A temporal relationship can be described, while the ability to repeat the response without support remains unestablished. Distinguishing assistance from independence maintains consistency with the study's purpose.

Conversation after calming can provide an opportunity to discuss an event. Because the responses were not detailed in the findings, its contribution is described as continued support. Returning to an activity also matters for participation but does not automatically measure emotional change. Both indicate attention to classroom life after the episode, so the strategies include assistance toward re-engagement. Reinforce the need to specify what is being interpreted when discussing emotion regulation in children with additional support needs (Berkovits et al., 2017 ; Cai et al, 2018). In the present episodes, selecting an alternative, following guidance, and returning to an activity have different meanings. Selection indicates engagement with an offered option; following guidance identifies a response to adult direction; re-engagement concerns participation after an emotional episode. Taken together, they describe supported adaptation within classroom activity. Keeping these responses distinct allows the co-regulation framework to explain adult–child assistance while preserving the meaning of each observed action.

The distinction also affects how targeted intervention evidence is used. Synthesized studies addressing different social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes in early childhood settings (Blewitt et al., 2021). The present case benefits from a similarly precise outcome vocabulary: emotional language, communication opportunities, calming during assistance, and continued participation are discussed individually. This makes practical interpretation more specific. A teacher reflecting on toy-related conflict can consider whether an offered alternative was selected, while reflection on crying during waiting can examine the assistance provided during calming.

Challenges and activity contexts

The teacher reported that responses were not always the same. The child sometimes followed guidance and was difficult to calm in other situations. Observation captured smoother responses, while the interview covered broader experience. Their relationship need not be forced into complete confirmation. Variation underscores the importance of understanding strategy use by episode and attending to situations requiring adjustments in assistance. Cxamined emotion-focused practices across preschool activities. In this case, choices were offered when a peer used a toy, labeling occurred during waiting, and a limit followed pushing (Curby et al., 2024). Context helps explain differences in actions. This does not establish that activities caused particular responses, but demonstrates the relevance of recording activities to understanding practice. Reflection needs to consider what preceded and followed an action.

Divided attention adds an organizational condition. Individual support occurred alongside group activities. Describe interpersonal and sociocultural dimensions of

teacher emotion; this perspective helps situate available attention within working conditions (Qin et al., 2024). In this case, that condition came from the teacher's account and was not used to assess staffing adequacy. The implication is that strategies need to be understood together with opportunities to implement them. Preparation and working conditions provide two complementary ways to interpret this challenge. Examined attitudes and preparation for early childhood inclusion, directing attention to how teachers develop confidence and knowledge for inclusive practice (Yu and Cho, 2022 & D'Agostino & Douglas, 2022). These findings help explain why professional learning should address the decisions involved in emotional episodes rather than provide strategy names alone. In this case, the teacher's account concerns implementing support while attending to other children; it offers an example of the practical demands that preparation needs to address.

Situates early childhood educator well-being within professional and organizational conditions (Cumming, 2017). Likewise reviewed teacher outcomes associated with social and emotional learning programs, extending attention beyond child outcomes to the adults implementing support (Blewitt et al, 2020). These perspectives support discussion of divided attention as part of the work of sustaining emotional assistance. The case does not assess educator well-being, but the teacher's report shows that access to individual attention matters when strategies are put into practice. Pedagogical reflection can therefore consider how individual assistance is coordinated with the continuity of group activities.

Contribution and implications for practice

The contribution concerns relationships among situations, actions, responses, and challenges. The strategies are already known, but the case explains their use through evidence serving different functions. Triangulation strengthens descriptions when reported practices are observed while preserving distinctions between teacher intentions and the child's responses. Agreement across techniques therefore does not automatically validate every claim. For practice, reflection can focus on triggers, actions, responses, and subsequent participation. This structure supports episode documentation beyond judgments of success or failure. Communication assistance, alternatives, limits, and calming support provide considerations requiring contextual adjustment. The findings do not establish a uniform procedure; they offer examples of relationships between actions and context for teachers' reflection. Encourage attention to support in everyday school life. Their relevance lies in documenting assistance embedded in routine activities without inferring the child's diagnosis (Bennett et al., 2024). Also highlight the need to specify dimensions of emotional competence in inclusive education (Calandri et al. , 2025). This case contributes a description of supportive practice rather than a comprehensive competence assessment. The discussion retains strategies and challenges as its focus and co-regulation as its interpretive framework.

A practical implication is to organize reflection around specific episodes: the activity and expressed wish, the sign noticed, the action provided, the child's immediate response, and subsequent participation. This structure follows the relationships presented in Tables 2 and 5 and provides a basis for comparing situations without assigning identical meanings to all calm or compliant responses. It also brings teacher-reported challenges into the discussion of implementation, so that decisions are understood alongside the demands under which they occur. At the methodological level, triangulation contributes most when it remains specific to the claim being examined. Agreement about offering choices establishes the presence of that practice, while observation adds evidence that an

option was selected. Emphasize transparent reporting of the connection between evidence and interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017 ; Levitt et al., 2018). The contribution of the present case is strengthened by this explicit connection: strategy descriptions, immediate responses, and perceived changes serve different analytical purposes. This approach enables discussion of emotional support that is both educationally meaningful and traceable to classroom evidence.

Conclusion

This study describes the strategies and challenges involved in a teacher's support for the emotion regulation of a child with special needs in an inclusive kindergarten. Strategies included recognizing early signs and approaching promptly, helping to name feelings, setting behavioral limits, offering choices, guiding verbal communication, and supporting calming and re-engagement in activities. Different combinations were used according to the situation. The teacher reported challenges involving sudden responses, variation in the child's responses, a continuing need for guidance, and divided attention across pupils. Triangulation of interview and observation evidence strengthened descriptions of several practices. Immediate responses included following guidance, choosing an alternative, beginning to calm with assistance, and returning to an activity. These responses occurred within active teacher support and were interpreted through co-regulation. Gradual changes represented the teacher's reported experience. The study contributes an explanation of relationships among strategies, implementation situations, challenges, and the child's responses. The findings provide a basis for teachers to reflect on episode contexts, offer communication alternatives, maintain behavioral limits, and attend to continued participation. Understanding the case informs context-sensitive support rather than establishing strategies that apply uniformly to all children.

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