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Promoting Preschool Children's Psychological Development Through Montessori Education

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Abstract---Psychological development during early childhood provides the foundation for children's lifelong learning, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Montessori education has gained increasing international recognition as a child-centered educational approach that supports children's holistic development through self-directed learning, prepared learning environments, and experiential activities. This study aims to examine the contribution of Montessori education to preschool children's psychological development through a qualitative documentary research approach. Secondary data were collected from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, conference proceedings, and official educational documents published primarily between 2011 and 2025. The selected literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes related to children's psychological development. The findings indicate that Montessori education promotes multiple dimensions of psychological development, including autonomy, emotional regulation, social competence, intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and psychological resilience. The review also reveals that effective implementation depends on qualified teachers, carefully prepared learning environments, institutional support, and fidelity to Montessori principles. Furthermore, the study discusses the relevance of Montessori education to preschool education reform in Vietnam, highlighting both implementation challenges and practical implications for educational policy and teacher professional development. The study concludes that integrating appropriate Montessori principles into preschool education can contribute significantly to children's holistic psychological development while supporting child-centered educational innovation.

Keywords---Montessori education, preschool children, psychological development, child-centered learning, early childhood education.

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period for children's psychological development, during which cognitive, emotional, social, and self-regulatory capacities undergo rapid and interconnected growth. Experiences during the preschool years significantly influence children's future learning, well-being, and lifelong development. Consequently, early childhood education has increasingly shifted from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward child-centered approaches that foster autonomy, exploration, creativity, and holistic development. Among these approaches, Montessori education has attracted sustained international attention because it emphasizes children's active participation in learning within carefully prepared environments that support independent thinking, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being (Lillard, 2012, 2017; Seldin & Epstein, 2003).

Developed by Maria Montessori in the early twentieth century, the Montessori approach is grounded in the belief that children possess an innate capacity for self-construction when provided with appropriate learning materials, freedom within limits, and supportive adult guidance (Sablić et al., 2025). Rather than relying on direct instruction, Montessori classrooms encourage children to make independent choices, solve problems, collaborate with peers, and engage in purposeful activities that correspond to their developmental needs. These pedagogical characteristics have

been recognized as important contributors to children's cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, social competence, executive functioning, and intrinsic motivation (André Roberfroid & Helfrich, 2011; American Montessori Society, 2023; Association Montessori de France & Institut Supérieur Maria Montessori, 2016).

An expanding body of empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of Montessori education in promoting multiple aspects of preschool children's development. Comparative studies have reported that children educated in Montessori settings often achieve higher levels of academic readiness, language development, social interaction, and self-discipline than peers in conventional educational programs (Kayili & Ari, 2011, 2016; Lillard, 2012, 2017). Research has also shown positive effects on phonological awareness, early literacy, and print awareness, which form essential foundations for later academic success (Buldur & Gokkus, 2021). Furthermore, Montessori education has been associated with improved social competence, emotional regulation, resilience, and adaptive behavior among preschool children (İman et al., 2019; Sezgin & Şener, 2024). A systematic review by Randolph et al. (2023) concluded that Montessori education produces positive academic and non-academic outcomes across diverse educational contexts, while a recent meta-analysis confirmed its overall effectiveness in supporting preschool children's holistic development (Güzeltas & Türkoğlu, 2025).

The effectiveness of Montessori education is closely associated with the quality of educational implementation. Successful Montessori programs require carefully prepared learning environments, scientifically designed instructional materials, professionally trained teachers, and effective educational leadership (Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñañiel, 2021; Fadhillah & Supriyanto, 2023). Studies conducted in different countries indicate that maintaining fidelity to Montessori principles while adapting to local educational contexts is essential for achieving positive developmental outcomes (Eacott et al., 2022; Efe & Ulutas, 2022). Consequently, increasing attention has been devoted not only to children's learning outcomes but also to teacher competence, institutional quality assurance, and sustainable implementation of Montessori pedagogy (Ackerman, 2019; Montessori Australia, 2011).

Despite the growing international evidence supporting Montessori education, previous studies have largely focused on academic achievement, cognitive development, or classroom practices, whereas fewer studies have synthesized its broader contributions to preschool children's psychological development. Psychological development encompasses multiple interrelated dimensions, including emotional well-being, social competence, resilience, autonomy, self-confidence, and self-regulation, all of which are fundamental for children's lifelong learning and healthy adjustment. A comprehensive understanding of how Montessori education promotes these psychological characteristics remains necessary for informing educational innovation and preschool practice.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how Montessori education contributes to preschool children's psychological development through a qualitative documentary analysis of contemporary research. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, the study identifies the principal psychological benefits associated with Montessori pedagogy and discusses the educational conditions necessary for its effective implementation in preschool settings. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on child-centered education while providing useful implications for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to promote children's holistic psychological development in early childhood education (Loprinzi & Trost, 2010).

Literature Review

Montessori education has become one of the most influential child-centered educational approaches in early childhood education. Since its establishment by Maria Montessori, the approach has emphasized respect for children's natural developmental processes, self-directed learning, and the preparation of learning environments that foster independence and holistic development. Unlike conventional instructional models that primarily focus on knowledge transmission, Montessori education seeks to cultivate children's intellectual, emotional, social, and behavioral competencies simultaneously, thereby supporting comprehensive psychological development (Seldin & Epstein, 2003; André Roberfroid & Helfrich, 2011).

A central principle of Montessori pedagogy is that children learn most effectively through active engagement with carefully designed learning materials within a prepared environment. The prepared environment provides opportunities for children to make meaningful choices, solve problems independently, collaborate with peers, and regulate their own learning activities. Teachers function primarily as observers and facilitators rather than direct instructors, allowing children to develop autonomy, concentration, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence through purposeful experiences. International Montessori organizations have consistently identified these characteristics as essential components of authentic Montessori practice (American Montessori Society, 2023; Association Montessori de France & Institut Supérieur Maria Montessori, 2016; Montessori Australia, 2011).

Previous empirical studies have reported numerous developmental benefits associated with Montessori education. Lillard (2012, 2017) demonstrated that preschool children participating in Montessori programs showed stronger academic achievement, executive functioning, social understanding, and enjoyment of learning compared with children enrolled in conventional educational settings. Similarly, [Courtier et al. \(2021\)](#) found that Montessori education significantly improved cognitive, academic, and social development among disadvantaged preschool children, suggesting that learner-centered educational environments can reduce developmental disparities. A systematic review by [Kiran et al. \(2021\)](#) further concluded that Montessori education positively influences multiple developmental domains, including cognitive performance, language acquisition, social interaction, emotional competence, and motor development.

Recent research has increasingly focused on the psychological dimensions of Montessori education. Social competence and emotional regulation are widely recognized as fundamental indicators of preschool children's psychological well-being because they influence interpersonal relationships, classroom adjustment, and future academic success. [İman et al. \(2019\)](#) reported that children educated through the Montessori method demonstrated significantly higher levels of emotional regulation and social competence than their peers in traditional classrooms. Likewise, [Sezgin & Şener \(2024\)](#) found that Montessori education contributed positively to children's psychological resilience, enabling them to cope more effectively with challenges and adapt to changing learning environments. These findings indicate that Montessori education extends beyond cognitive achievement by strengthening children's emotional stability and psychological adjustment.

Another important body of literature concerns children's readiness for formal schooling and early academic competence. [Kayili & Ari \(2011, 2016\)](#) demonstrated that Montessori education improves school readiness, social skills, and independent learning behaviors among preschool children. Similarly, [Buldur & Gokkus \(2021\)](#) found that Montessori-based instruction significantly enhanced children's phonological awareness and print awareness, two foundational skills supporting later literacy development. These findings suggest that psychological development and academic readiness are mutually reinforcing outcomes within Montessori learning environments, where children acquire cognitive competencies alongside confidence, motivation, and self-regulation.

The effectiveness of Montessori education has also been examined through large-scale evidence syntheses. [Randolph et al. \(2023\)](#), in a systematic review of international studies, concluded that Montessori education generally produces positive academic and non-academic outcomes, although implementation quality remains an important moderating factor. More recently, [Güzeltaş & Türkoğlu \(2025\)](#) conducted a meta-analysis confirming that Montessori programs have a significant positive effect on preschool children's overall development across cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral domains. These comprehensive reviews provide robust evidence supporting Montessori education as an effective pedagogical model for early childhood education.

Successful implementation of Montessori education depends not only on instructional philosophy but also on teacher competence and institutional support. [Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel \(2021\)](#) emphasized that effective Montessori practice requires teachers to possess specialized pedagogical knowledge, observation skills, and the ability to prepare developmentally appropriate learning environments. Similarly, [Efe & Ulutas \(2022\)](#) highlighted the expanding professional roles of Montessori teachers in initiating educational innovation and maintaining learning quality. Educational leadership and instructional supervision also contribute substantially to sustaining Montessori implementation, particularly through teacher professional development and continuous quality improvement ([Fadhilah & Supriyanto, 2023](#)). Furthermore, comparative studies from Australia and the United States demonstrate that successful Montessori implementation requires adaptation to national educational policies while maintaining fidelity to Montessori principles ([Ackerman, 2019](#); [Eacott et al., 2022](#)).

Overall, the existing literature consistently demonstrates that Montessori education promotes children's cognitive, academic, social, and emotional development while encouraging autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and lifelong learning. However, many previous studies have examined these developmental outcomes separately, with relatively limited attention given to psychological development as an integrated construct encompassing emotional well-being, resilience, self-regulation, social competence, and positive self-concept. Therefore, synthesizing contemporary evidence regarding the contribution of Montessori education to preschool children's psychological development remains an important research objective and provides the theoretical foundation for the present study ([Blackwell et al., 2014](#)).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative documentary research approach to examine the contribution of Montessori education to preschool children's psychological development. The research relied on secondary data collected from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, conference proceedings, and official educational

documents related to Montessori pedagogy, early childhood education, child psychology, and preschool development. Most of the selected publications were indexed in Scopus and Web of Science to ensure the credibility, academic quality, and reliability of the evidence.

The research was conducted in several stages. First, relevant studies were identified through searches of major academic databases using keywords such as “*Montessori education*,” “*preschool children*,” “*psychological development*,” “*social-emotional development*,” “*self-regulation*,” and “*early childhood education*.” The literature review primarily focused on publications published between 2011 and 2025 to capture recent theoretical and empirical advances in Montessori research.

After data collection, the selected publications were screened according to their relevance, methodological quality, and contribution to understanding the psychological development of preschool children. The documents were then analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes regarding the influence of Montessori education on children's cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral development. Particular attention was given to evidence concerning children's autonomy, emotional regulation, social competence, resilience, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation. Finally, the findings were synthesized into major thematic categories to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Montessori education supports preschool children's psychological development and to identify key educational implications for early childhood practice.

Findings

The documentary analysis demonstrates that Montessori education positively influences multiple dimensions of preschool children's psychological development. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that Montessori pedagogy promotes children's autonomy, emotional regulation, social competence, intrinsic motivation, and psychological resilience through learner-centered educational practices. Table 1 summarizes the major psychological outcomes identified across the reviewed literature.

Table 1
Psychological Development Outcomes Associated with Montessori Education

Psychological dimension	Montessori educational practices	Reported developmental outcomes	Key references
Autonomy and independence	Freedom of choice, self-directed activities, practical life exercises	Increased independence, responsibility, and self-confidence	Lillard (2012, 2017); Kayili & Ari (2011, 2016)
Emotional regulation	Calm learning environment, uninterrupted work cycles, individualized learning	Better emotional control, reduced anxiety, improved self-regulation	İman et al. (2019); Sezgin & Şener (2024)
Social competence	Mixed-age classrooms, collaborative learning, respect for others	Greater empathy, cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution	Courtier et al. (2021); Kiran et al. (2021)
Intrinsic motivation	Self-selected learning activities, hands-on materials	Increased curiosity, engagement, persistence, and enjoyment of learning	Seldin (2017); Buldur & Gokkus (2021)
Cognitive development	Concrete learning materials, active exploration	Improved executive function, language, early literacy, and problem-solving	Lillard (2012, 2017); Courtier et al. (2021)
Psychological resilience	Supportive classroom climate, independent problem solving	Higher resilience and adaptability	Sezgin & Şener (2024); Randolph et al. (2023)

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that Montessori education encourages children to become active participants in their own learning. Opportunities to make independent decisions and complete meaningful tasks strengthen children's autonomy and self-confidence while reducing excessive dependence on adult guidance. Previous comparative studies found that Montessori children generally demonstrate higher levels of executive

functioning, self-control, and independent learning than children enrolled in conventional preschool programs (Lillard, 2012, 2017; Kayili & Ari, 2011, 2016).

Another recurring finding concerns emotional development. Montessori classrooms provide predictable routines, carefully prepared environments, and individualized learning experiences that create emotional security. Such environments enable children to regulate emotions more effectively, maintain concentration, and respond positively to challenges. Studies by İman et al. (2019) and Sezgin & Şener (2024) provide empirical evidence that Montessori education contributes significantly to emotional regulation and psychological resilience.

The literature also emphasizes the importance of Montessori education in promoting children's social competence. Mixed-age classrooms encourage cooperation rather than competition, allowing older children to mentor younger peers while younger children learn through observation. Consequently, children develop empathy, communication skills, and respect for others. Courtier et al. (2021) and Kıran et al. (2021) reported consistent improvements in social interaction and collaborative behaviors among Montessori preschool children.

Intrinsic motivation represents another important psychological outcome. Because children are allowed to select activities according to their interests and developmental readiness, learning becomes internally rewarding rather than externally controlled. Montessori materials encourage exploration, experimentation, and sustained attention, thereby increasing children's curiosity and enjoyment of learning (Seldin, 2017; Buldur & Gokkus, 2021). Besides child outcomes, the literature identifies several educational conditions that determine the effectiveness of Montessori implementation.

Table 2
Educational Factors Supporting Preschool Children's Psychological Development

Educational factor	Contribution to psychological development	Supporting references
Prepared learning environment	Encourages exploration, concentration, and independence	Montessori Australia (2011); American Montessori Society (2023)
Qualified Montessori teachers	Guide children's learning without excessive intervention	Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafield (2021); Efe & Ulutas (2022)
Child-centered pedagogy	Supports autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and emotional well-being	Seldin & Epstein (2003); André Roberfroid & Helfrich (2011)
Professional supervision	Maintains instructional quality and developmental outcomes	Fadhilah & Supriyanto (2023)
Fidelity to Montessori principles	Ensures consistency and effectiveness across educational contexts	Ackerman (2019); Eacott et al. (2022)

Discussion

The present study synthesizes contemporary evidence demonstrating that Montessori education contributes significantly to preschool children's psychological development by promoting autonomy, emotional regulation, social competence, intrinsic motivation, and psychological resilience. These findings suggest that Montessori education should be understood not merely as an alternative teaching method but as a comprehensive educational philosophy that creates conditions for children's holistic psychological growth. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that children's psychological well-being develops most effectively when learning environments encourage active exploration, meaningful choice, independence, and positive social interaction rather than excessive teacher control or academic pressure.

These findings are highly relevant to the current direction of preschool education reform in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Early Childhood Education Curriculum emphasizes child-centered education, experiential learning, and the comprehensive development of children's physical, cognitive, language, emotional, and social capacities. These educational objectives are closely aligned with the core principles of Montessori education. Rather than introducing an entirely new curriculum, Montessori pedagogy may serve as a complementary approach that enriches existing educational practices by creating learning environments where children actively construct knowledge, regulate their own behavior, and develop positive interpersonal relationships. Such an approach is particularly valuable in the context of increasing attention to children's mental health and social-emotional development during the early years.

Despite these advantages, implementing Montessori education in Vietnamese preschools remains challenging. One major challenge is the limited availability of professionally trained Montessori teachers. Effective Montessori

practice requires educators to possess specialized knowledge of child development, systematic observation skills, and the ability to guide rather than direct children's learning. However, many preschool teachers in Vietnam have received limited formal preparation in Montessori pedagogy, making it difficult to implement its principles consistently. Furthermore, Montessori classrooms require carefully prepared learning environments and specialized educational materials, which may not be readily available in many public preschools because of financial and infrastructural constraints.

Another challenge concerns the adaptation of Montessori principles to local educational conditions. Vietnamese preschools often have relatively large class sizes, fixed daily schedules, and curriculum requirements that may restrict opportunities for individualized learning and extended periods of uninterrupted child-directed activities. In addition, some schools adopt Montessori materials or classroom activities without fully understanding the educational philosophy underlying the approach. Such partial implementation may reduce its effectiveness in promoting children's psychological development. Therefore, successful application of Montessori education requires thoughtful adaptation that preserves its essential child-centered principles while remaining compatible with the Vietnamese educational context.

The findings also generate several practical implications for educational policy and preschool practice in Vietnam. First, teacher education institutions and professional development programs should strengthen training in child-centered pedagogies, including key Montessori principles such as observation-based teaching, prepared learning environments, and support for children's independent learning. Second, preschool administrators should encourage the creation of flexible classroom environments that provide children with greater opportunities for exploration, decision-making, and collaborative learning. Third, policymakers should consider integrating appropriate Montessori-inspired practices into existing preschool curricula rather than adopting the Montessori system in its entirety. Such integration would allow schools to improve children's psychological development while remaining consistent with national educational goals and available resources. Finally, stronger collaboration between schools and families is essential to ensure that children's independence, emotional regulation, and social competence are consistently supported across both educational and home environments.

Although this study provides a comprehensive synthesis of international research, its conclusions are based on documentary evidence rather than empirical data collected in Vietnam. Future studies should therefore investigate the effectiveness of Montessori-inspired educational practices in Vietnamese preschool settings through experimental, longitudinal, and mixed-method research designs. Such studies would provide stronger evidence regarding the feasibility, effectiveness, and contextual adaptation of Montessori education for promoting preschool children's psychological development.

Conclusion

This study examined the contribution of Montessori education to preschool children's psychological development through a qualitative documentary analysis of contemporary international research. The findings demonstrate that Montessori education provides a comprehensive educational approach that supports children's autonomy, emotional regulation, social competence, intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and psychological resilience. These psychological outcomes are achieved through core Montessori principles, including prepared learning environments, self-directed learning, experiential activities, and supportive teacher guidance.

The review further indicates that the successful implementation of Montessori education depends on multiple educational conditions, particularly teacher professional competence, high-quality learning environments, effective educational leadership, and faithful application of Montessori principles. These factors collectively create an environment in which children can develop not only academically but also emotionally and socially.

For Vietnam, Montessori education offers valuable pedagogical insights that are highly compatible with current preschool education reforms emphasizing child-centered learning and holistic child development. Although challenges remain in terms of teacher preparation, educational resources, and contextual adaptation, integrating appropriate Montessori principles into existing preschool practices represents a feasible strategy for enhancing children's psychological well-being without replacing the national curriculum.

Despite relying on documentary evidence rather than primary empirical data, this study provides a comprehensive synthesis of current international knowledge concerning Montessori education and preschool children's psychological development. Future research should conduct empirical studies in Vietnamese preschool settings to evaluate the effectiveness of Montessori-inspired practices under local educational conditions and to develop contextually appropriate implementation models. Overall, Montessori education represents a promising

educational approach for fostering psychologically healthy, confident, resilient, and socially competent children, thereby contributing to the continuous improvement of early childhood education quality.

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