

EXAMINING SELF-AWARENESS THROUGH DRAWING ACTIVITY AMONG PRESCHOOLERS WITH HIGH SOCIO EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mohd Zafaren Zakaria¹, Faridah Yunus², & Suziyani Mohamed³

^{1,2,3}Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor

farenzakaria@gmail.com¹, faridahyunus@ukm.edu.my², & suziyani@ukm.edu.my³

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ABSTRACT

Socio emotional development is an important element in the development of preschoolers. This study aims to identify a high level of socio emotional development among preschoolers. This is a qualitative case study and data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The study involved three participants who were chosen through purposive sampling technique. All three preschoolers were interviewed based on the drawings they made during the drawing activity at school. The study found that high socio emotional development in preschoolers fulfil the characteristics of early childhood development through the themes highlighted in this study, namely; (i) self-confidence; and (ii) ability to interpret emotions. Socio emotional development reflects the learning that a child acquired. In this regard, socio emotional competence is evident when a child reaches the desired level of achievement. Good socio emotional development plays an important role in the development of preschoolers and will help shape their lives in the future. Overall, good socio emotional development among preschoolers contribute to their development and promote good behaviour.

Keywords: self-awareness, socio emotional development, preschoolers, children's painting, drawing activity

INTRODUCTION

Socio emotional development presents a major challenge for children when they are in preschool (Anthony et al., 2005). Studies have found that children with high socio emotional development can build positive relationships with their peers and teachers in preschool (Elias & Mocer, 2012; Lintunen & Gould, 2015). Therefore, socio emotional development is considered an important factor for children in their early years (O'Conner et al., 2017). This puts children at risk for stress and helps them prevent serious social and emotional problems in the future (Payton et al., 2000; Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2016). In addition, healthy socio emotional development ensures children's success in academic and social contexts as they grow older (Pellitteri & Smith, 2007; Denham et al., 2014).

According to a study by Aubrey and Ward (2013), socio emotional problems began in early childhood. Children who have good social emotions can foster positive behaviours and pay attention to self-control in their first educational environment (Aubrey & Ward, 2013), while stunted socio emotional development could cause serious behavioural problems among preschool children. In this light, teachers need to adopt different strategies to improve children's socio emotional development and foster good behaviour among preschoolers (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Poulou et al., 2018).

Problem Statement

Good socio emotional development is a factor in children's behaviour that can be effectively controlled in preschool. Preschool is a social place and learning is a social process for children to understand and apply these behaviours in their lives (Elias & Mocer, 2012). However, teachers often focus on the development of only disadvantaged children in preschool (Maguire et al., 2015). Children with high socio emotional development also need to be identified by teachers in order to ensure their future well-being.

In such social contexts, teachers often focus on reducing problem behaviours, including internal behaviours such as social withdrawal and depression and externalizing behaviours such as aggression and harassment (Maguire et al., 2015; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Therefore, children with high levels of socio emotional development should also be given attention in the classroom so as not to create a teacher's bias in paying attention to each child in the preschool. It is thought to have an impact on children who have good socio emotional development and potentially disrupt external behaviours, especially in the classroom (Payton et al., 2000).

Justifying the Use of Drawings for Research

Drawings can illustrate a child's perception or confession that may not be expressed through conversation or in writing (Majita Ahmad Sultan et.al, 2016). Thus, drawings may produce a more detailed expression of an object or situation (Anning & Ring, 2004). Preschoolers may have limited resources to express ideas or objects in written language because they have not learned to use the letters of the alphabet or to produce complete sentences (Christensen, 2004). Therefore, these children use other resources, such as observation and environmental influences, and paintings, to express things that they wish to convey (Clark, 2011).

Children's drawings are unique as the environment influences each child's interpretations, situation, or context they are in (Im et al., 2014; Mohd Kamal Mohd Ali et al., 2013). Cox (1993) argued that children's drawings are not just a natural act of maturation but also involves their development. Studies also found that this process is influenced by their cultural environment (Cox, 2005).

Children as Study Participants

The progressive development of social and cultural perceptions in childhood and the selection of children as study participants indicate that children can be involved in the research process (Christensen, 2004; Clark, 2011; James & Prout, 1997). Many researchers perceived paintings as child-friendly (Coates & Coates, 2011); hence, the use of drawings could guarantee child-centred research (Muhamad Firdaus Ramli & Rofidah Musa, 2020). Previous studies have shown that children's paintings are used as a tool that enables children to respond and engage in research openly (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

Children draw for several reasons, including to facilitate their development and expression, translate feelings and emotions, communicate information, as aesthetic objects or simply as a leisure activity (Matthews, 1997; 2003). Similarly, a study by Einarsdottir et al. (2009) found that children's drawings could serve as a means for expressing their emotions.



Research Objective

This study aims to explore self-awareness of preschoolers with high socio emotional development. Some specific objectives have been developed as follows:

1. To identify preschoolers self-confidence with high socio emotional development.
2. To explore preschoolers ability in interpreting emotions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design is a procedure for collecting and processing data based on specific design and systematic data. This study use qualitative method. This case study was used to obtain data from interviews and document analysis (Silverman, 2017). This is because the study carried out the characteristics of qualitative research (Ali & Mukhtar, 2017), which focus on the objectives that have been established, namely, identifying the self-confidence and ability of preschoolers in interpreting an emotion.

Research Sampling

Methods of data collection for qualitative studies are usually derived from smaller samples and in-depth exploration as they take longer period (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, in this study, three preschoolers were selected as participants in the study. All three preschoolers (K1, K2 and K3) were six years old and identified in a national school in Selangor were the participants of the study. The children involved in this study were identified using purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was chosen because the study participants were preschoolers with high socio emotional development. Preschoolers with high socio emotional development have the following characteristics such as self-awareness, social awareness, communication skills, self-management and good decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2016; Blair & Razza, 2007; McClelland & Cameron, 2012) . The preschoolers involved were selected and identified by the researcher with the help of preschool teachers based on these characteristics.

Data Collection Method

Data collection process is done using triangulation method in the form of interview and document analysis. The purpose of this triangulation is to complement, enhance and strengthen the collection of data in qualitative studies. The instruments used in this study were semi-structured interviews and document analysis. To identify high levels of socio emotional development in preschoolers, a set of semi-structured interview questions consisted of open-ended questions used to interview the three preschoolers. Meanwhile, document analysis involved the use of drawings as a medium during the interview process with the three preschoolers. The topics selected for the drawing activity are based on the theme 'Me, My Family, and My Friend' as stated in the Standard National Curriculum for Preschool (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017).



Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in case studies is thematic, which is a technique for identifying and analysing forms (themes) in data. In this study, all transcriptions were collected through interview method and relevant document analysis. Researchers have planned steps to make data easy to analyse such as drawing ideas arising from interview transcripts, disseminating ideas by writing memos and field notes by researchers, coding the beginning set of materials obtained from interviews and field notes and manage new discovery using NVivo12 software. Researchers form codes from chunks of data and these processes are systematically performed, carefully and repeatedly. Finally, the researcher forms the subthemes that are developed from the process of organizing the relevant categories, and those categories support the subthemes that are formed, thus generating appropriate themes.

RESULTS

This section discusses the findings of the interview. Data were obtained from the interviews to identify high socio emotional development among the selected preschoolers.

Self-confidence

Two key themes namely self-esteem and recognising their strength have been identified in exploring children's self-confidence in preschool. Both themes are discussed as follows;

a. Self-esteem

Self-esteem allows a child to achieve a high level of confidence in themselves. Children with high self-esteem can interact with people around them. In addition, children with high self-esteem put high trust in themselves, do not want to be like others, and can distinguish themselves from others.

... other faces, all have different faces ... I'm the same as everyone else ... if he must change ... I only want to be me ... (K1)

.... I want to be me ... don't want to be someone else because I am good ... I don't want to be others ... (K2)

I like myself ... why do I want to be someone else ... when I see other people are not good ... I am the best because I am good ... (K3)

Children with high self-confidence are confident in dealing with things around them. This is because self-confidence can guide the children to a better path for their future development.

b. Recognising their strength

Recognising one's strength is an attitude demonstrated by children with high socio emotional development as they cope with different situations. Children with high socio emotional development can express themselves in different developmental aspects. It is widely acknowledged that children with high socio emotional development can show good development in various developmental aspects, including cognitive aspects, learning styles, and engagement in desired behaviours.

I like myself ... I know I can do things because a lot of friends don't know how to do it all, but I can ... ermm ... when learning, I knows how to answer ... (K1)

I is good, and everyone wants to be my friends ... ermmm, I is clever, and I teaches a friend who is not good ... so I can do a lot of things in school ... (K2)

I love everyone because I'm good with everyone ... friends love me because I'm clever... (K3)

Recognising one's strength is a good attribute in early childhood socioeconomic development. This is because children with high self-esteem can think critically about their behaviour and set an example for other kids in the classroom. Thus, acknowledging one's strength can lead a child to become a useful person in the future.

Ability to Interpret Emotions

Two themes have been identified in exploring preschoolers' ability to interpret emotions. Each theme is discussed as follows;

a. Identifying emotions

Preschool-aged children with high socio emotional ability can interpret emotions clearly as they acquired knowledge of the various emotional reactions they encounter in different situations. They can recognise an emotion that they want to translate well to others. Children with high socio emotional status can also predict their own emotions and able to respond to others' emotions.

... always see him sad that he cries because he wants to go back home ... well ... I don't like that ... (K1)

I do not like to be angry at people ... I also don't like to see angry people... I will feel sad if people are angry at me... (K2)

When my friend loses, he must be sad ... he wants to cry because he loses... I do too, but I am ok because I can win next time ... (K3)



Identifying these emotions is a good skill in children's social development, especially in their early development. This is because the ability to identify emotions can make a child behave positively; at the same time, it allows them to think about the causes and consequences in dealing with different emotional situations.

b. Self-perception

Children with high socio emotional development have a good sense of self. This is related to the nature of the children themselves, and subsequently, they place a high value of themselves as well as being valued by their peers and other people. Furthermore, children with accurate self-perception show harmonious behaviours when interacting with their classmates. This is beneficial in children development as it could reduce interaction problems with their peers.

I am good to everyone ... I don't like to fight... If you fight, you will not have fun with your friends ... (K1)

I don't like to fight with others... I don't ever want to fight... if fight then cannot play together again ... (K2)

I like to be nice to everyone ... if I is nice to people then more people will like to be friends with me ... (K3)

Having an accurate self-perception in the early developmental stage would allow them to have higher self-value as well as being valued by others. Children with this ability demonstrate an accurate perception of themselves and bring out the positive in others. In this regard, these children are highly accepted by their peers in the social context of the preschool.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this analysis, this study showed that good children's self-awareness has a significant impact on their emotional development in the future. This is because, children with high confidence can understand the reason or cause of these feelings that dominate them. This is also supported by Grazzani and Ornaghi (2016) who explained that children with high self-esteem are able to recognize their feelings and act to gain control of themselves. The findings of this study are aligned with the study conducted by Shechtman and Abu Yaman (2012) that children with self-esteem can understand that others also show different situations and feelings. In addition, children with self-esteem can understand that their emotions can change according to circumstances and environmental conditions so as not to interfere with the well-being of others. This is in line with a study conducted by Elias and Mocerri (2012) which stated that children also understand that they should be able to control their feelings so as not to affect their communication and communication with others.

Furthermore, children who have the ability to interpret an emotion are able to act and take an approach to mastering a situation. Children who are able to identify their emotions well are able to control their emotions and are more prepared to deal with the situation than other children who are unable to identify their emotions (Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2016). Aubrey and Ward (2013) also explained that these skills lead to the willingness of the individual or child to accept the reality of the cause and effect of an event. In addition, children who are



able to interpret an emotion have the ability to share and live with others. When children show appropriate self-perceptions, some of the outcomes are reflected in their behaviours and actions in daily life (Maguire et al., 2015). The results of these skills is that children are capable of being rational in their future actions and behaviours.

Based on this finding, it is clear that children with high socio emotional development can continue to live well because they are able to make decisions based on their circumstances and to appreciate others' feelings. This is because, children are able to build self-esteem and are able to interpret emotions well. In addition, they can also highlight the various emotions that they have in themselves, including recognising the feelings they have, including sadness, grief, happiness, contentment and pleasure. These skills further enhance their level of self-esteem and enable them to interpret the kinds of internal feelings that exist within them and are able to identify a situation and how those emotions can change within them (Aubrey & Ward, 2013). Therefore, these skills give children the opportunity to become more aware and able to reflect more deeply on the kinds of emotions that exist within them (Elias & Mocerri, 2012).

Therefore, the present study could be continued by other researchers in the future by engaging more preschoolers to raise their awareness. Other studies can also be done by focusing on children with low socio emotional development in exploring their self-awareness compared to children with high socio emotional development. With advanced research as suggested, research on early childhood development can serve as a reference to preschool teachers to ensure a better future for children.

CONCLUSION

Children are able to perceive the existence of these emotions within themselves and accept them as an important thing to deal with in life. These skills enable children to develop good classifications and are able to control their emotions and be prepared to deal with any possibility of a mature and positive life. Moreover, they can also recognize positive and negative emotions. Children are able to draw differences between positive and negative emotions and the consequences they will face if they act on negative or positive emotions. Considerations about positive and negative emotions also involve them to be able to predict the results and consequences of their actions on themselves. As a result, children will be able to use their emotions in the right ways and make positive decisions in their lives to ensure their own well-being and life.

Furthermore, children who are able to master socio emotional skills make it possible to distinguish between mind-based or emotional actions. Knowing how children feel in themselves can tell whether an action taken by them is dominated by senses or rational thoughts (M Nael, 2019). Children who are able to distinguish the consequences of emotional or mental action can make decisions in a calm and controlled manner and act in rational and mature ways. With these skills it is hoped that the children will be more successful and able to make proper judgments.

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