

TEACHING EMOTIONAL FEELING AND REGULATION FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Mastering emotions is an essential skill that needs to be developed since childhood. The critical period of emotional development occurs in preschool children because they learn to encounter a new social environment. They are also increasingly aware of their emotions and feelings. This study explores teachers' strategies to teach preschool children emotional feelings and regulation in school. In addition, the challenges of teaching emotional feelings to preschool children are addressed in this study. The Qualitative approach is used through in dept-interviews focusing on a purposive sample of 4 preschool teachers in urban and rural areas. The initial findings reveal that emotional feelings and regulation can be taught through storytelling, role-playing, and self-reflection journaling. Lack of the ability to express emotional feelings through verbal language and parenting style are considered as a major challenge in teaching young children about emotions.

Keyword: Preschool Children, emotions, regulation

1 INTRODUCTION

Mastering emotions is an essential skill that needs to be developed from an early age. The critical period for emotional development happens during preschool (Denham & Burton, in Bierman & Motamedi, 2017). This phenomenon occurs because preschool children face a new social environment that requires them to explore emotions and feelings. In this period, they are also considered in the progress of learning to explore and express their emotion and to regulate their emotions (Nurmitasari, 2015; Papalia and Martorell, 2014). According to the Ministry of Education and Culture Act No.137 (2014), National Standards for early childhood education explain several indicator achievements for children's development at age 4 to 6 years is related to the regulations of children's emotion, including the ability to express the emotions and feelings in a simple word, the ability to regulate the emotions and feelings, the ability to respect for others, the ability to understand words and rules conveyed by other people, as well as the ability to show empathy to others.

Teaching emotional regulation skills to preschool children is crucial for their emotional development because this matter will have an important impact on emotional development in the next period. According to Zuddas (2012), emotional regulation will increase the skills of

social competence and problem-solving. In line with that, Goleman (in Nurmalityari, 2015) stated that emotional maturity in the childhood period is a key in social interaction, having positive emotion in the interaction with peers (Spinrad et al.; Trentacosta, & Izard; in Blair et al, 2016). Furthermore, Santrock (2011) argued that children with low levels of emotional regulation tend to be rejected by their peers as compared to children with high levels of emotional regulation. This indicated that emotional regulation influences the acceptance and the rejection of peers in social interaction. Additionally, Drupadi and Syafrudin (2019) found a significant positive correlation between emotional regulation and social behavior of children in the early childhood period. Children who have the ability to regulate their emotions tend to have less potential for aggression at any level of age (Denham, 2006).

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) has reported many psychological and physical violence committed by preschool children such as verbal bullying, hitting, and kicking others (Syarifah, 2014). In addition, a study by Dwinadia (2021) shows that many preschool children cannot follow the teacher's instructions and experienced mood changes. They are also not yet capable of recognizing their wishes, and sometimes cannot control their emotions according to the circumstances). It also was found that some preschool children speak in a high tone, shout, and are rude to their peers when facing a conflict, as well as show an attitude of frustration by throwing any objects Putri (2017). These phenomena occur due to the lack of ability to regulate emotions and feelings.

According to Molina et al. (2014) emotional regulation is defined as the ability to reduce, manage, or regulate the existing emotions. In the context of children's emotional development, Denham (2006) stated that emotional regulation is the ability of children to manage and regulate their emotions in circumstances as well as how to modify them so that they can adapt to the existing situation and environment. In addition, Papalia and Martorell (2014) explain emotional regulation as one's ability to recognize and be aware of self-emotions and others and express his feelings.

Since teaching preschool children about feeling and emotional regulation is necessary, this study addressed the issues related to teaching emotional feeling and regulation for children: the strategies and challenges.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study was utilized a qualitative research design. A qualitative method is aimed to collect narrative data to obtain data from a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2012). This study used a case

study design, in which the data was obtained from the preschool teacher's view about the challenges of teaching emotional feelings and regulation to young children. The study used in-depth interviews focusing on a purposive sample of four kindergarten teachers in selected urban and rural areas. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview to collect the data. For the data collection process, the focus group discussion consisted of four teachers (two female and two male teachers), each group was interviewed for an average of 60 minutes. Two participants from urban kindergarten were directly interviewed face-to-face, whereas two participants from rural kindergarten were interviewed via zoom meeting.

The demographic information of participants who participated in this study is summarized in table 1. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, the codes were created and analyzed using content analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of participants' demographic (n = 4)

Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	2	50%
<i>Female</i>	2	50%
Age		
40-44	1	25%
45-50	2	50%
51-55	1	25%
School Location		
Urban	2	50%
Rural	2	50%
Highest Education		
Undergraduate	4	100%
Experience as teacher		
More than 10 years	4	100%

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Strategies and challenges to teach preschool children about emotions and feeling

The initial findings reveal that emotional feelings and regulation can be taught through storytelling, role-playing, and self-reflection journaling. Teaching children about their emotional feeling and regulation involve a series of strategies and techniques designed to help children to identify, understand, and manage their emotions.

3.1.1 Story telling

Based on the interview results, the respondents believed that storytelling is considered a medium of instruction to teach children about their emotions and feelings. By utilizing book storytelling, the respondents can teach various emotions and feelings that children experienced every day in their life events. Through book storytelling, the respondents can easily share values, thoughts, or ideas to make meaning about experienced emotions. As one respondent explained:

“In my class, I used book storytelling on fable to teach the children about their emotions and feelings. Through storytelling, it is not only narratively telling a story but also teaching them about expressions, values, and emotions.” (T2).

According to Andani et. Al., (2017), a book storytelling has a significant impact in children's emotional development because. Through story telling children get release emotional through experience fictional ones that are not What they experience in life (Jossete Frank in Supratna, 2015). Similarly Painter, Cook, & Silverman (in Brouzos, Vassilopoulos, & Moschou, 2016) revealed that *storytelling* capable of fulfilling the need of children with disturbance emotions and problems behavior. In line with that, research from Solichah (2020) shows that *storytelling* is capable of lowering aggressiveness in children. Finally, Yabe et al. (2018) argued that when children are being read a story, the brain activity in the cortex prefrontal part is activated. Cortex prefrontal has a crucial role in processing emotional regulation. It means that storytelling can stimulate the processing and regulation of emotion with the activated prefrontal cortex.

Moreover, another respondent explained that he used puppets as the medium of instruction to teach children about the variety of emotions and how to regulate emotions in proper way. As he stated:

“Usually, I used puppets to teach the children about one character and its' feelings. I may use puppet animal characters such as cat, tiger, and elephant to teach about the basic emotions and feeling of happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise, and fear. The children learn about emotions faster when they learn it through puppet as the medium of instruction.” (T4)

This opinion highlights using puppets as the medium of instruction to teach children about emotions and feelings and their regulation. According to Lin (in Bartan, 2020), storytelling using puppets is considered a tool that enables children to listen to a story that involves their feelings and emotions. Utilizing book storytelling and puppet as medium of instruction to teach the children about emotions have many advantages. It is easier to understand because it relates to their life's reality. Furthermore, it helps children to reconstruct a meaning based on their personal experience about emotion (Brouzos Vassilopoulos, & Moschou, 2016).

3.1.2 Role Playing

Play is considered as the vehicle for children's emotional development because it is the cardinal source of children's interaction with their environment. Through play, children can learn about feelings, emotions, empathy, imagination and expand interpersonal relationships which is beneficial for adolescent life and adult life (Walker & Weidenbenner, 2019).

One type of play that is believed to enable children to improve emotional development is role play (Choi & Ohm, 2018). Role-playing or pretend play is considered as a developmental tool in shaping children's emotional maturity. Role-playing involves a series of play activities utilizing symbols characterized by subjects, objects, and actions. Children can explore or experiment with themselves and their playmates; thus, role-playing has a crucial role in emotional and social maturity because the involvement of children in a situationally dramatic play will create a process of interaction and emotional maturity (Lillard et al., 2013). The advantages of role-playing were outlined as follows:

“The most favorable activity in the school is role-playing. Sometimes they initiate to play "pretend play" with their peers. They pretend as animals or any characters that they imagine in their mind, and they are happy with the activities. “ (T1)

Similarly, another respondent stated :

“Children’s world is “a playful word”, when they play, it means they learn many things. When they play a dramatic play in class activities, they learn to express their emotional feelings and tend to develop a sense of empathy to their peers.” (T2)

Findings from previous studies explained that role-playing plays a significant role in children's emotional development (Happ et al., 2017; Kalkusch et al., 2021). Similarly, Jaggy et al., (2023) revealed that children who did role play showed many positive changes in social skills with peers, understanding social situations, and displaying better emotional control Goldstein & Matthew (2017)

3.1.3 Journal Reflection

Journal reflection is notes about reflection of somebody about his emotions and feelings. According to Lindroth (2015) journal reflection is an effective method to train individuals to think reflectively. Writing a journal reflection on emotional feelings might encourage preschool children to express their feelings through simple notes and drawing. This journal reflection helps them to develop more understanding and awareness about their own emotional pattern. As one respondent expressed:

“Children in my class were happy when I asked them to draw and write about “what is your feeling today dan yesterday?” they drew many types of faces in their worksheet; one of them drew a happy smiling face for his feelings today and drew a sad crying face for his feeling yesterday. After that, I asked them what make them feel happy today and what make them felt sad yesterday? One of my students wrote a simple word in his drawing, and he wrote on his worksheet, "I am happy today because this morning my mother cooked my favorite food -- fried chicken. I was sad yesterday because my mom forced me to wake up and take my bath in a hurry.” (T3).

This opinion is in line with Leigh (2019) who argued that journal reflection is used as a tool to identify, understand, and manage emotions. It helps children realize more about themselves, their bodies, and how they feel what they experienced. Awareness of the self and feelings is

important in emotional regulation. Furthermore, writing about emotions in notes or journals can become a method of catharsis to release emotions and help to organize emotions (Rachmawati , Hardjajani , Karyanta 2015).

3.1.4 Challenge in teaching preschool children about emotions

Regarding challenges in teaching preschool children about feelings and emotional regulation, the participants commented that lack of the ability to express emotional feelings through verbal language and parenting style are considered a major challenge in teaching young children about emotions. As one of the participants commented :

“The inconsistency between parents' styles and teachers' styles in teaching the children about emotional regulation is the most difficult part, it is the biggest challenges that we have faced. Parents have different values from the teachers in school on how to teach the children to regulate their feelings. Parents with permissive parenting style tend to let their children do whatever they want, so they tend to be bossy with unstable emotion” (T3).

4 CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored teachers' views on teaching emotional feelings and regulation for children: strategies and challenges. The initial findings revealed that emotional feelings and regulation could be taught through storytelling, role-playing, and self-reflection journaling. Lack of the ability to express emotional feelings through verbal language and parenting style are considered as a major challenge in teaching young children about emotions. In addition, it is suggested that future research should be done in the area of experimental research for interventional programs in teaching preschool children about feeling and emotional regulation.

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