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## The socio-emotional development of preschoolers: a case study

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### Abstract

Human development is accompanied by a balance growth of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual elements of an individual. Basically, these four elements anchored the Malaysian Educational philosophies of producing well-balanced school pupils from very early stage. Hence, pupils of national preschool need to be monitored of these elements on their developmental stages. The objective of this study is to look at the socio-emotional developmental stages of preschool children. The study has been conducted in two preschool classes of Sekolah Kebangsaan King George V, Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The data collection has been done via a survey questionnaire that has been administered to fifty preschoolers observed in both classes. Data collected was descriptively and inferentially analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0. The main findings reveal that the respondents' psycho-socio-emotional development is equivalent among genders, as well as between the age of five and six years old. This initial information would help teachers to affectively prepare the guidance programme for these preschoolers when they enter elementary classes.

**Keywords:** Education, preschool children, socio-emotional development

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## Introduction

Preschool is an essential educational dimension for children before entering school. Preschool education is an early education in one's life development despite of education at home. This preschool education could enhance children's interest and inculcate them towards the love of knowledge as well as to make them eager to go to the school. This preschool education is a program that provides learning experience to 4 years old children up to 6 years old, in one year or more before entering Year 1 in standard school (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2003).

According to Rohaty (2003), preschool education is a crucial years. It is a basic root towards the further education that determines one's success. Preschool education is an early education for children to another step in formal education in school. Those who learn in preschool should have basic development especially in socioemotional development (Hazrad Khan et. al 2010). Through the good socioemotional development, it is an ease for them to enter new school environment since they have social skills in interacting with friends and teachers. Furthermore, it will give positive effects to their learning since it will enhance their confidence level (Mohd Sharani, 2006).

Khadijah (1992) found out that preschool program that stress on academic achievement could make the children fail and lost self-trust. This could make them depress lost interest in learning and create problems in class. Curriculum Development Center draws the characteristics of the fun learning approach, exploration and interaction with environment, self-try out and opportunities for them to focus and flexibility while playing. Learning aids should be suitable and beneficial to children development. The concrete, true and meaningful materials are provided to encourage the communication and imagination as well as enhance their social skills with peers and adults (Surayah, 2004). This approach too enhances the

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emotional control, physical development, manipulation skills, constructive innovation and it is expected that children could express their own feelings.

Surayah (2003) indicated that preschool children's profile is an important document that could tell children development during in the preschool program. The portfolio should be utilized in evaluating the children development. However, the implementation is just a file to collect children's work. It is a great lost not only to the children, but to the whole program too. The implementation of the portfolio is important to ensure the children development is efficiently evaluated. In addition, Mokhtar, Hasnah and Hanafi (2009) found out that the good learning environment could help develop children who have problems in learning. This environment should be provided as early since baby until six years old. Early intervention could help them to interact with the environment and get the maximum development. These academically challenged children's environment is not only to the parents, but to the community and peers. Early intervention is an opportunity for children to interact with their environment. With the early intervention they could adapt with family, society and peers. So when they be in school, they will not feel awkward with the environment. It also contributes to late development as the risky group. Directly, it causes children to experience many development issues for example, in the communication aspect with peers and community.

Children are the precious asset to the country since they are the young generations that will be ruling the nation in the future. For children aged 4 to 6 years old, they should be controlled and guided carefully. Rohaty and Abu Bakar (1989) say, the intervention process in the early stage is a planned effort in order to have the balance, holistic and integrated development in natural process for all individual aspects towards the maximum level for each and every child. Educators in this early education should know the socio-emotional development to help in developing children socio-emotional as well as to help them succeed. Emotion plays an important role in children's life. Emotion gives excitement in children's daily life and it leads to the children's actions. Social development is a development process to enable children to interact with other people accordingly to the particular culture. Suppiah et al. (2008) says, children's interaction could be detected when they are playing. When playing, children could interact with parents, peers, and other people and at the same time expanding the social interaction within them.

Socio-emotional development involves the emotion control and matured social skills. This can help children to control their emotion, thoughts and actions so they could adapt in the society. The socioemotional is essential in one's life. This could influence children's learning. Socio-emotional development starts with the ability to comprehend and handle their emotion, followed by positive emotional achievement. The ability to manage their emotion could help children to understand the needs, emotion and others' perception to build up the social interaction with others. This component too, stress on the ability and confidence to face the full of challenges daily life (Anna 2007).

Social skills are very important and have been learnt ever since in early age. The basic social skills that should be known for children are skill to attract others, giving and sharing, asking and questioning, giving out ideas and praising or appreciating. Unfortunately, there are children who cannot learn to interact positively with peers (Nor Hashimah & Yahya 2003). In Malaysia, children are obligated to attend preschool. Even though children in preschool do not exposed with these skills in school, their socioemotional development which are the usage of the skills in the right context are questioned. Normally, children's problems with socioemotional development is more towards lack of social skills in social interaction and have troubles to build up and maintain the good rapport with peers. It would give negative effects towards the children's learning (Shahizan & Shahabudin 2006). Children social development is related to relationship values and what the relationship means to them. Friendship could be an informal relation between two or more people. When children could be friends with a lot of people, the socio development could be wider. This friendship relationship involves someone's emotion. Meanwhile, it happens naturally. A friend could be a best friend and it is important to share thoughts, to help each others, and as a play mate.

The research objectives are to see the preschool children's socio-emotional development which is the basic skills that has been known by preschool children such as knowing and managing the emotion, positive emotional achievement and building up the social skills based on gender and age. Specifically, two main research questions are as follow: 1) Does gender influence preschool children's socio-emotional development?; 2) Does age influence preschool children's socio-emotional development?

The significance of the study is meant to give clearer picture and to give benefits to parents and preschool teachers especially on the preschool children's socio-emotional development. Furthermore, it

helps teacher in comprehending the preschool children's socio-emotional development. It also could contribute to the society as the guidance to develop the children's development from a very early stage of the education process.

## Method

This is a quantitative research using a cross-sectional design, in which data was gathered via the administration of a survey questionnaire. The general objective was to study the preschool children's socio-emotional development. This research has been carried out in two preschool classes of Sekolah Kebangsaan King George V, Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. A total number of 50 students, age ranged from 5 to 6 years old, whereby they were chosen because of the rapid development rate of children at these levels (Rohaty 2003).

The research instrument used to gather the data was a survey questionnaire developed based on the Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan 2010. The instrument was divided into two sections: (1) the respondents' demographic data, and (2) the respondents' socio-emotional development evaluation consists of emotional management skill, positive emotional achievement, and social skill domains. All of the items in section two were measured using the 5-point Likert Scale. Data was analysed using the SPSS software, version 20.0, both descriptively and inferentially.

## Results and Discussion

Out of 50 respondents, 22 of them or 44% were male and 28 (56%) were female. Table 1 displays the descriptive analysis of the respondents, based on gender.

**Table 1 Respondents' Descriptive Analysis Based on Gender**

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev,	Std. Error Mean
Male	22	2.5015	.49318	.10515
Female	28	2.6798	.53980	.10201

The mean for both genders indicated that the socio-emotional development level of male and female preschoolers were the almost the same.

Table 2 on the other hand, revealed the respondents' socio-emotional development level based on gender.

**Table 2 Respondents' Socio-Emotional Development Level Based on Gender**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances & T-test for Equality of Means									
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variance assumed	.095	.760	-1.203	48	.235	-.17825	.14813	-.47607	.11958
Equal variance not assumed			-1.217	46.853	.230	-.17825	.14650	-.47299	.11650

\* significance at  $p < 0.05$

The data showed that the value of  $t = 0.760$  is bigger the significance  $p$  value of 0.05; thus, gender does not influence the preschoolers socio-emotional development level. In addition, Table 3 displayed the respondents' socio-emotional development level based on age.

**Table 3 Respondents' Socio-Emotional Development Level Based on Age**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances & T-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
<b>Equal variance assumed</b>	.781	.381	-4.152	48	.000	-.97971	.23596	- 1.45413	-.50529
<b>Equal variance not assumed</b>			-5.121	3.911	.007	-.97971	.19132	- 1.51571	-.44371

\* significance at  $p < 0.05$

The data showed that the value of  $t = 0.381$  is bigger the significance  $p$  value of 0.05; thus, age difference does not influence the preschoolers socio-emotional development level.

All in all, the data analysis from this research shows that there is no significant difference the children's socioemotional development level between preschool female children and preschool male children. Furthermore, there is no significant difference the children's socioemotional development between preschool children of the age of 5 and 6 years old. This data gives clearer picture that teachers should think of more creative and innovative way of teaching and learning so that it can stimulate the preschool children's socio-emotional development.

## Conclusion

As the educators for the preschool children, to enhance their socio-emotional and to help them to succeed in life, teachers should know their level of development. Thus, this research could help teachers to cope with the the preschool children's socio-emotional development. Teachers should know how a child's emotional develops, and later on, teachers would know the suitable methods and techniques in enhancing their socio-emotional progress. Socio-emotional is essential in order for children to have fun and enjoy their daily lives and as the trigger for their actions.

In a nutshell, the socio-emotional aspect plays important role to develop children's perception towards the environment, and to decide the adaptation method that they will take. The socioe-motional development is a development from maturity and learning. In brief, the children's socio-emotional development progresses with the children's age. Teachers should know their socio-emotional development to enable them to guide the children in the school setting. In other words, by knowing the the children's socio-emotional development at the very early stage of educational process like preschool level, it could help teachers to prepare a more comprehensive guidance programme when the pre-schoolers enter the elementary level of schooling.

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