

EXPECTED CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND ACTUAL OCCURRENCE IN CHILDREN: PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASPECTS, IN A SELECTED KINDERGARTEN IN NONTHABURI

Ploenpis Kowae
Graduate School of Education
Assumption University of Thailand

Background of the Study

One must consider children as important human resources and future leaders of the country. Fifteen years from now, these children are going to be active adults who will be responsible citizens in society. Are they being prepared to be good citizens of the country? There is a Thai proverb that says, "We can bend the branch of the tree only when it is young?" If the tree grows older, the branch will break if you bend it. This Thai proverb has the same meaning, as "It's hard to teach old dogs new tricks." You cannot teach old dogs new tricks." This brings one to the realization and urgency that personal, social and emotional skills should be reinforced during the early ages of childhood development.

Early childhood, from birth through age 5, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social skills that provide the foundation for lifelong healthy development. The early childhood setting offers an ideal opportunity for young children to develop personal, social and emotional skills with peers and adults. As with any skill, it is through practice in real situations that children develop competence in adult and peer interaction. The many naturally occurring opportunities of day-to-day life allow children to be sympathetic and helpful to peers (Honig, 1982). These social skills include many strategies children learn to help them initiate and continue social interactions, to negotiate, and to settle conflicts (Smith, 1982).

As reported by the Ministry of Education, the educational system according to the National Scheme of Education provides opportunity for individuals to develop themselves in accordance with their ages. As per a release on 20th of January 2000, Ministry of Education issued a set of pre-school educational policies that by the end of children's education in the kindergarten, children should: know what is right and wrong; be willing to share and take turns with others; be able to relate to others; be curious and able to explore; be able to listen and speak with understanding; be comfortable and happy with themselves; have developed physical co-ordination and healthy habits as well as love their families, friends, teachers and school. From the report, the emphasis for preschool education is on social skills and attitudes rather than on academic skills. This reveals to one that personal, social and emotional skills and expression/communication are very important. Teachers should devote more of their time to help preschool children acquire a positive disposition, which will prepare them for future learning.

Anvida Kindergarten has been opened for admission since May 2005 with the mission to nurture and develop children of ages 2-5 to be competent learners, effective communicators and to adjust well in their community. The school believes that personal, social and emotional development in preschoolers will bring about the children's character development by providing great value for current and future success in endeavors. Therefore, personal, social and emotional aspects are integrated across the whole curriculum and are an integral part of all teaching and learning. Many research findings have shown the importance of children becoming: independent, developing a sense of personal control; of becoming emotionally capable, having empathy and being able to live and learn with others; and of developing positive attitudes or dispositions to learning.

Statement of the Problem

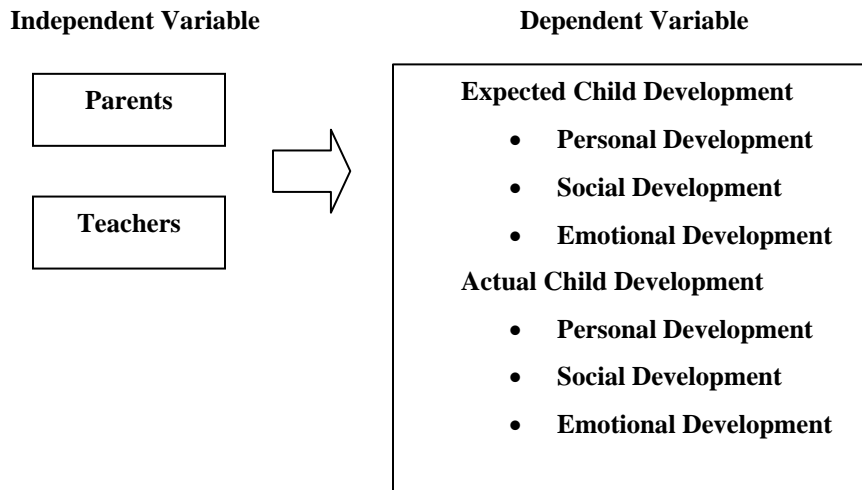
Asian education methods have valued academic development while damaging other aspects of children's growth, which hampers rather than helps them to live and achieve in society (Winter S., 1998). Many early childhood educators and parents in Thailand still put more emphasis on academic attainment with little attention being placed on personal, social and emotional development. Even though the Thai Government has set up a set of early childhood policies with the emphasis on character development, it is inescapable that cognitive domains are considered to be of prime importance. Do early childhood educators, policy

makers and parents understand how children's personal and intellectual development is linked and how one affects the other?

Early childhood educators and parents should understand the importance of personal, social and emotional skills that have significance in terms of their implications for children current and their future success. Therefore, it is now important to focus study on the understanding of the main caretakers, teachers and parents, in the preschool child's personal, social, and emotional development: This combines with the need to learn more about the effect on the child's actual personal, social and emotional traits that arise in part due to the effects of interactions with caretakers and parents and their expectations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is part of a process of planning in clarifying the research problems and data analysis. It shows two types of information which are the perceptions on expected behaviors of preschoolers under the perceptions of parents and teachers for the three domains of personal, social and emotional development. The other aspect that was clarified is the actual behavior of preschoolers in personal, social and emotional development.



Preschooler's Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Erikson (2001), stated that childhood is very important in personal development. Erik Erikson (1963), claimed that children are active, curious, seek to adapt to their environments, rather than passive slaves to biological urges who are molded by parents. He believed that personality development begins with a sense of trust since the infancy stage. Infants must learn to trust others will care for their basic needs, both physical needs and emotional needs. These needs include food, adequate clothing, safe shelter, play, rest, sleep and love. Sense of trust in caregivers and environment makes children feel secure and have a strong impulse to explore the world independently. This kind of attachment develops over time as a result of satisfying interactions with responsive caretakers. Some learning theorists suggest that the visual, auditory, and tactile stimulation that adults provide in the course of their daily interactions with an infant are the basis for the development of attachment (Gewirtz,1969) cited in Hetherington, M.E. and Parke R.D. (1999). In Erikson's view, if the child does not develop trust in the caretaker, he/she will cling to adults excessively and have less of self-confidence plus a lower level of exploratory impulse. When children reach the toddler stage at about 1-3 years, they are physically active and are better in controlling their physical parts. Healthy toddlers strive to develop skills that enable them to become less physically dependent upon adults (Marion Dowling, 2000). Erikson claimed that the children must learn to be autonomous. They should show care and concern for oneself and become more independent in doing simple things by themselves, especially the self-care such as self-feeding, self-dress and undress and managing own personal hygiene. In preschool years, ages of 3-5 years, as children enter into the widening social world, they encounter new challenges and responsibilities. Children are asked to assume responsibility for their bodies, their behaviors, their toys and their pets. The developing of a sense of responsibility increases initiative. Children at this age beginning to assert power and control over the world

through initiating, directing play and social interaction: The child who successfully pass through this stage will build up their leadership power while the ones who unfortunately fail at this stage will be left with a sense of guilt, self-doubt, and lack of initiative.

Maslow as noted in State of Maine Early Childhood Learning Guidelines, (1970) advanced a hierarchy of needs that must be satisfied before any individual can become self-actualized.

Physiological needs, include survival needs such as food when hungry or clothes when wet and other essentials that are necessary to maintain life. Safety needs is the need to feel secure, safe and free from danger. This means that each child needs to get protection from dangerous situations before he/she develops confidence in exploring the world and having good attitudes towards learning. Love and belonging needs involve the desire for affectionate relationships with people around the child. The child wants to be accepted as a group member. If the child succeeds in this stage, he/she will be able to play alongside peers and adults. The child will develop a sense of trust and form special friendships with other children. Esteem needs are fulfilled when children feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. To arrive at this stage each child must receive approval and recognition of his or her own worth. Self esteem, is the children's evaluation of their worth in positive or negative terms (Essa & Rogers, 1972; Marshall, 1989; Samuels, 1977), cited in Essa E. (1996). Self-actualization needs means self-fulfillment, the achievement of one's full potential. The child is striving to fulfill one's potential. As they move toward self-actualization, they become more comfortable with themselves and who they are. At this level, they are self-directed in ideas and actions. A self actualized person maintains his or her individuality. Creativity, a sense of humor, and respect for the welfare of others are fundamental to this level of achievement.

Essa, (1996) described the characteristics of 3-5 year-old children's social development as following; *Three-year-olds* are much more socially aware than are younger children. Short-lived friendships begin to form, and children will play with each other or near each other. Social problem-solving skills are just beginning to emerge. With guidance, threes may share and take turns, but they still find such behaviors difficult (Allen, Marotz, 1994; Ames et al., 1980), cited in Essa E. (1996). *Four-year-olds*, peers have become very important. Taking turns and sharing become much easier because four-year-olds begin to understand the reciprocal benefits of cooperation. The social sphere of *five-year-olds* revolves around special friendships, which take on more importance. By five, children are quite adept at sharing toys, taking turns, and playing cooperatively.

Lawrence Kohlberg -cited in Windmiller, M., Lambert, N., and Turiel, E. (1980), noted that under age 10, moral reasoning is in pre-conventional level. Preschoolers' moral judgments are characterized by individual perspective. Preschoolers obey the rules that are set by authority figures that have close relationships such as; parents, caretakers, and teachers, to avoid punishment or get rewards. The rightness depends on individualistic sense.

In contrast to cognitive psychologists, social learning theorists believe that 'rightness and wrongness' are internalized in the child at a very early age and become the basis of his or her moral system. Usually, people are more likely to perform the modeled behavior when it brings rewarded outcomes rather than when it results in unrewarding or punishing effects (Bandura & Barab, 1971) cited in Windmiller, M., Lambert, N., and Turiel, E. (1980). As a result, by reinforcement, the child is learning that which of the learned moral behaviors will be internalized. Bandura (1969), cited in Windmiller, M., Lambert, N., and Turiel, E. (1980), also notes that parents are not the sole models for the child. Other adults, peers, and symbolic models are also imitated.

Recently, thinking has recognized children as powerful learners who are beginning to make sense of situations and to develop their own moral stances from an early age. The aim must be to enable a child to understand about right and wrong and so to behave morally from their own motives. Mia Kelmer-Pringle, cited in Dowling M. (2000), describes inner-directed behavior as a tall order for a three or four year old, but where seeds are sown which are reflected in beliefs and behavior in later life. Young children start to find out what they are allowed to do - what is acceptable behavior and what is not. At this age, children are dependent on family members, early educators to provide this information by setting up clear boundaries as rules for them to learn and by regulating their own behavior.

Salovey and Mayer cited in Goleman D. (1996), first described emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action." Emotional intelligence refers in part to an ability to recognize the meanings of such emotional patterns and to reason and solve problem on the basis of them (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) cited in Goleman, D. (1996).

Goleman believes that the first opportunity for shaping the ingredients of emotional intelligence is in the earliest years, though these capacities continue to form throughout the school years. During the preschool years, children's emotional understanding expands. With the development of language abilities, children have the capability to label their emotions. Older children spontaneously talk about simple feelings (e.g., "I'm so happy, Grandma"), as well as about the feelings of others (Saarni et al., 1998) cited in Meece J. (2002).. Preschoolers also demonstrate an increased ability to tolerate frustration and to delay gratification. For example, when a favorite toy is not available, older preschool children respond with less anger and frustration than younger children (Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1989) cited in Meece J. (2002). Children are expected to control negative emotions or redirect inappropriate behavior. They are more aware of other's feelings and able to read feelings that are expressed through non-spoken clues. Empathy is a key component of emotional intelligence; sensitivity to others' feelings is a prerequisite to developing strong relationships.

Denham (1998) refers to the ability to express, understand and regulate emotions. When functioning optimally, these sets of skills are intricately interdependent and work together in an integrated way.

Among the most important changes in emotional development in early childhood are an increased ability to talk about their own and others' emotions and an increase in understanding of emotions (Kuebli, 1994) cited in Santrock, J. W. (2007). Between 2 and 4 years of age, children increase the number of terms they use to describe emotions (Ridgeway, Waters, & Kuczaj, 1985) cited in Santrock, J. They also learn about causes and consequences of feelings (Denham, 1998).

From differing perspectives, the experience throughout the early childhood stage has a major influence on a total child's development under personal, social and emotional factors. It is an important time during which the child develops trust, confidence, autonomy plus initiative and is improving his or her social skills such as sharing, helping and cooperating in practical life situations. Through interactions with peers and adults, the child learns about his or her emotions and ways to express those feelings appropriately.

Social learning theorists argue that pro-social behavior in children is influenced by the learning processes, namely, reinforcement-consequences, influences on behavior, and observational learning. Reinforcement processes do play a role in maintaining altruism in everyday circumstances. Skinner contended that a behavior that was followed by a desired event would be strengthened or reinforced. Children are most likely to repeat a response that results in reinforcement and is least likely to repeat one that results in punishment (Hartup, 1983). The concept of observational learning evolved from awareness that much learning is based on observing and imitating other people's behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). For young children, imitation provides a mechanism for the rapid acquisition of new behavior and they also learn a good deal by observing. Children have been found to imitate aggressive, altruistic, helping and stingy models of behavior. They are most likely to imitate models from caretakers, peers and the mass media, given that these are, at least to the child, prestigious and in control of resources, or who themselves are rewarded.

Lastly note that the children's development reflects how caretakers and peer groups have brought them up.

Method Procedure

The researcher gathered information through survey. After the collection of 68 questionnaires from parents and 12 questionnaires from teachers, the information was summarized and analyzed.

Measures

For this research, a self-administered questionnaire was developed from the literature reviewed and from experience. The 5-point rating scale was used as a tool that indicated the degree to which a child possessed a certain trait or behavior under personal, social and emotional development. Each behavior was rated on a continuum that went from the lowest to the highest level. For this study, the respondents, teachers and parents, are asked to identify the child's level of personal, social and emotional development by rating the child's current position in regard behaviors on each item. The interpreted data on expected child development from parents and teachers were listed from 1-5 representing-very low, low, moderately high and very high. While the interpreted data on the actual occurrence was listed from 1-5 representing- never

happens, seldom happens, happens sometimes, often happens and always happens. There were 27 items in the questionnaire, which were subdivided into 3 parts. The first 8 questions corresponded to the child's personal development. The next 12 questions corresponded to the child's social development and the last 7 questions corresponded to the child's emotional development. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the parents' and teachers' expected and actual occurrence of child development in personal, social and emotional factors. A paired samples t-Test was used to examine the differences within the same group of respondents. An independent samples t-Test was used to examine the differences between two contrasting groups.

Research Findings

This research was done purposely to examine the group of parents and teachers regarding their expectation of children's development under 3 with aspects of: personal, social and emotional as well as to find out the actual occurrence in children from both parents and teachers' perceptions. Comparisons were made within the group and between two groups under each domain of child's development. Based on the research conducted in this study, the findings are reported below according to each research objectives.

Research Objective 1: "To determine the parents' expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal, social and emotional factors"

In response to the first research questions, the findings have been separated into 2 parts, expected development and actual occurrence, as follows:

a. About 50% of parents have rated high in expected personal development, 55.8% have rated high in expected social development and 50.1% have rated high in expected emotional development. The mean score in all three aspects of child development is relatively high. Parents have rated expected personal development with a mean score of 3.89, social development with a mean score of 4.07 and emotional development with the mean score at 4.00.

b. The percentage of parents that have rated on actual occurrence as "often happen" is quite high. 60.3% have rated for actual occurrence in personal development, 49.9% have rated for social development and 70.4% have rated for emotional development. According to table 14, parents have rated the actual occurrence of personal development with a mean score of 3.82 which is equal to the mean score of the actual occurrence in emotional development. Lastly, the actual occurrence in social development is rated with a mean score of 3.67. As a result, parents view that children exhibit the characteristics under each aspect as "often happen".

Research Objective 2: "To determine the teachers' expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal, social and emotional factors"

In response to the second research questions, the findings have been separated into 2 parts; expected development and actual occurrence, as follows:

a. About 66.5% of teachers have rated high in expected personal development, 50% have rated high in expected social development and 66.7% have rated high in expected emotional development. The mean score in all three aspects of child development is relatively high. Teachers have rated expected personal development with a mean score of 4.11, social development with mean score of 3.96 and emotional development with the mean score at 3.88.

b. The majority of teachers, about 50% have rated for actual occurrence in personal development as "often happen", 58.2% have rated for social development and 58.3% have rated for emotional development. According to table 18, parents have rated the actual occurrence of personal development with a mean score of 3.54, social development with the mean score at 3.44 and emotional development with the mean score at 3.47. As a result, teachers describe that children exhibit the characteristics under personal as "often happen", while social and emotional aspects as "happen sometimes".

Research Objective 3: “To determine the differences of parents’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal, social and emotional factors”

The paired sample t-test statistic method has been used and the results are as follows:

Hypothesis 1 “There are differences between the parents’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal factor”. At significance probability of .365 ($> .05$), data analyses indicates that the first hypothesis has been rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in parents’ expectation and actual occurrence of child development in personal aspect.

Hypothesis 2 “There are differences between the parents’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in social factor”. The second hypotheses testing outcome at significance probability of .000 ($< .05$), the hypothesis 2 has been accepted. The differences show that the mean score of parents’ expectation on social development (4.07) is higher than the actual occurrence mean score of (3.67). Therefore, there are differences between parents’ expected and actual occurrence of child development in social factor.

Hypothesis 3 “There are differences between the parents’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in emotional factor”. The third hypothesis testing result supports the acceptance that at the probability significance of .032 ($< .05$), there are differences between parents’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of the child development in emotional factor.

Research Objective 4: “To determine the differences of teachers’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal, social and emotional factors”

The paired sample t-test statistic method has been used and the results are as follows:

Hypothesis 4 “There are differences between the teachers’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in personal factor”. The testing outcome has brought about the acceptance that at significance probability of .003 ($< .05$), there are differences between the teachers’ expectation and actual occurrence in personal development factor.

The result from the testing of Hypothesis 5 ,“There are differences between the teachers’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in social factor”, supports the acceptance that at significance probability of .028 ($< .05$), there are differences between the teachers’ expectation and actual occurrence in social development factor.

At significance probability of .136 ($> .05$), the data analyses indicates that hypothesis 6, “There are differences between the teachers’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence of child development in emotional factor”, has been rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in parents’ expected and actual child development in emotional aspect.

Research Objective 5: “To determine the differences between parents’ and teachers’ expectation and perception on actual occurrence regarding personal, social and emotional development”

The independent samples t-test statistic method has been used and the results are as follows:

At significance probability of .229 ($> .05$), the data analyses indicate that hypothesis 7, “There are differences between parents’ and teachers’ expectation on child development in personal factor”, has been rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in parents’ and teachers’ expectation of child development in personal aspect.

The result from the testing of Hypothesis 8, “There are differences between parents’ and teachers’ expectation on child development in social factor”, that at probability significance of .537 ($> .05$), the hypothesis has been rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in parents’ and teachers’ expectation of child development in social aspect.

At significance probability of .522 ($> .05$), data analyses indicate that hypothesis 9, “There are differences between parents’ and teachers’ expectation on child development in emotional factor”, has been rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in parents’ and teachers’ expectation of child development in emotional aspect.

The result from the testing of hypothesis 10, “There are differences in the perception on actual occurrence in the child’s personal development between the group of teachers and parents”, that at probability significance of .081 ($> .05$), the hypothesis has been rejected. Therefore, parents and teachers report that there is no significant difference in children’s actual occurrence in personal aspect.

At significance probability of .171 ($> .05$), data analyses indicate that hypothesis 11, “There are differences in the perception on actual occurrence in the child’s social development between the group of teachers and parents”, has been rejected. Therefore, parents and teachers report that there is no significant difference in children’s actual occurrence in social aspect.

The result from the testing of hypothesis 12, “There are differences in the perception on actual occurrence in the child’s emotional development between the group of teachers and parents”, at probability of significance at .050 the hypothesis has been accepted. Therefore, there are differences in children’s actual occurrence in emotional aspect between parents’ and teachers’ opinions.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that parents and teachers who are the main caretakers have set up a high standard of expectations towards the child’s development in personal, social and emotional aspects. Consequently, the children do perform well in all three factors. The findings also reveal that parents and teachers perceive that the behavioral characteristics of children on these three areas of development are important and need to be developed during preschool years. The schools have done well in the integration of personal, social and emotional aspects across the whole curriculum. Consequently, the children do perform well in all three factors.

Discussion

Students’ achievements in school and their daily life interactions are influenced by their early childhood educational experiences. Schools should incorporate new knowledge in child development into the early childhood curriculum and set up a clear policy to educate teachers and parents on what to expect from children of 3-5 years of age. Communication is the key to managing expectations. Students’ success in personal, social and emotional development is facilitated, when parents and teachers clearly state expectations for desired behavior and performance, in children. Quality early childhood education should provide experiences that will produce long-term improvements of the child in personal, social, emotional and intellectual development.

Heckman prescribes that we must, “invest in the very young and improve basic learning and socialization skills” (Heckman, 2000). He continues, “As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age- a time when it may be too late to intervene” (Heckman, 2000). He believes that “investing in the young” can begin by providing children with interventions that increase social-emotional competence in early life, particularly during the preschool years (Heckman, 2000).

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