

Improving the Social Development among Four Years Old Children through Playing while Learning Activities

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the improvement of social development among four years old children through playing while learning activities. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher formed three research objectives: to identify the level of understanding among teachers about playing while learning method, to identify playing while learning activities in children's social development and to identify the level of effectiveness of playing while learning activities the teaching and learning process. This study was conducted using a qualitative study through interviews and observations using an observation checklist with the participants to collect data. The research participants were two teachers who taught in a childcare and three children, all were selected randomly as the research sample for the observation. The research findings revealed that the improvement of children's social development was effective through play while learning method.

Keywords: Children, improvement, social development, four years, playing activities, while learning

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Introduction

The application of playing while learning is an approach that is often used by most childcare centres, kindergartens and preschools. Playing is an activity that can help children to improve their proactive level and social development. In fact, playing is one of the ways for children to express feelings, feel the pleasure and satisfaction while playing, as well as be able to improve their social development (Ismail, Abdul and Mohamad, 2019). Therefore, children should be given the opportunity to play on their own at corners of their choice. In addition, playing is also an activity that can help children to cultivate student leadership as well as eliminate feelings of fear, anxiety and frustration. In fact, in the National Preschool Curriculum Descriptions, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003, the Learning while Playing Approach has become the basis and concept as well as the principles for the early childhood education.

At the childhood stage, playing is a major activity that becomes their agent in socializing. However, the development and social skills of these children are influenced by various aspects, both internal and external. According to Albert Bandura, (Jaslinah Mankatal, 2012), the social development of an individual is influenced by three main factors, namely behaviour, individual and environment. Such influences are factors that shape the characteristics of an individual's social skills.

Problem Statement

The main focus of this study is to investigate the social development of children in a childcare centre. According to Jaslinah Makantal (2012) children's social skills are the ability of children to create interactions with others and awareness of behaviours that are acceptable and those that are not acceptable to others. According to Syamsul Yusuf (2007) social development is the achievement of maturity in social relationships.

This means that children will mature quickly, have high confidence, learn quickly if they are often involved in social relationships with people around them whether parents, teachers and peers.

Social development is an important aspect for children. This is because through socializing, it helps children to get ideas easily and understand their surroundings. Noraini, (2001) stated that teachers today are more focused on text alone and are teacher-centred. This can give a negative impact on children's social development because children have fewer opportunities to interact with people around them. Some of the instructors do not know about the importance of socializing for children in the learning sessions. Even, there are some teachers who do not provide opportunities to children to interact with their peers. This has caused these children not to be unable to develop their social skills.

These playing while learning activities can create friendly relationships between teachers and children. Apart from that, these playing activities can also encourage children to socialize with their friends and adults around them. However, there are some of them who find it difficult to interact with people around them. It may be due to several factors that have influenced their social development. However, there are steps that can overcome problems among children who have less interaction so that these problems do not affect their social development. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of playing while learning activities to improve the social development among children.

Research Objectives

The main aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of playing while learning technique to increase the social development among children in a childcare centre. Specifically, the objectives were as follows:

1. To identify the level of teacher's understanding about playing while learning,
2. To identify playing while learning activities in the children's social development,
3. To identify the level of effectiveness of the playing while learning technique in the teaching and learning process

Literature Review

Friedrich Wilhem Froebel (1837) explored and built an early childhood education system based on the concept of learning through playing. He believed that playing is the basis for children to learn something. Froebel also stressed that social development is very important in human life and should be learned from an early age. In addition,

the basic social skills that children need to master are the skills to attract the attention of others, share and give, request and ask questions, give ideas, and praise or give appreciation. In fact, this technique also includes the way in which children can interact with other children including adults in their lives.

Children's Social Development

According to Nor Fauzan Kassim (2015), the process of children's social development will occur starting from infancy and increasingly develop when children begin to reach an older age of two to six years old. This development occurs in line with the rapid development of children's language and cognitive aspects. This is because, this social development involves the way a person thinks about himself and tries to communicate with others in the context of social relationships.

Learning through Playing

Additionally, Ramlah Jantan (2013) in her study stated that playing is a natural activity and a need for every child, playing is a very important activity to help children's development because it contributes to the development of their cognitive, physical, social and emotional health. In her study, she stated that through playing, parents have the opportunity to participate in their children's activities. Through playing as well, they can learn and explore the environment through playing activities because of their high imaginations (Erikson (1985). Next, Mariani (2013), in a study by Ramlan Jantan (2013), explained that play or playing refers to any activity that gives joy and satisfaction to children without considering what the outcome of the activity.

Furthermore, through previous studies related to playing while learning activities, in a study conducted by Suppiah Nachiappan, Rachel Mildred Edward Munovah, Norazilawati Abdullah, Sandra Suffian (2017), they mentioned the importance of playing techniques in the teaching and learning children in preschools. In addition, this study was conducted to identify the ways the teachers conduct the teaching and learning process through playing techniques and the students' responses towards these playing techniques and their positive impacts on the cognitive development of children in preschools. This study revealed the importance of playing techniques in the cognitive development of preschool children as well as the positive effects of the techniques to diversify playing activities, use of the technology in playing activities and pay attention to children's development.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design used is a qualitative design. According to McMillan Schumacher

(2003), a qualitative research refers to an approach, also known as an investigative approach, in which researchers usually collect data face-to-face and interact with people at the research site. This qualitative research is also intended as a type of research in which findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or other forms of calculation (Strauss & Corbin, 2003). Thus, the data collected from a qualitative research makes it possible to analyse through a calculation.

A research design serves to help in finding accurate answers to the problems being studied. This study was qualitative in nature and employed observation and interview methods. This study involved teachers with the intention of collecting and obtaining information, while children in a childcare centre were used as tools for observations in this study.

At the final stage, the data was analysed, interpreted in detailed form, revised the research questions and then the research findings were written more completely and accurately.

Research Sample and Population

The research sample selected for this study were 3 children aged 4 years old (two girls, one boy) and two teachers.

Research samples and population of a study are the sources of researchers to obtain data. The research population includes all members in the group to be studied while the sample is only a few individuals selected to represent the population. According to Gay and Airasian (2003), the population is the target group of researchers, that is, the group in which the results of the study will be generalized. The study sample is the respondents for a study selected to represent a population.

Whereas according to Rohana Yusof (2004), population refers to a group of individuals, objects or something that have the same characteristics to be studied and each individual or object in a population may differ in many ways, but it must have at least one same feature. The importance of the population for this study is to investigate any possible probabilities which may occur in the study conducted.

Sampling means enabling information to be obtained from a larger group or to obtain a sample from the target population.

Research Instrument

In general, the selection of research instruments is very important to obtain information in a study. A research instrument refers to any tools, or means or methods of obtaining and collecting research data. According to Azhar Harun (2004), research instruments are the means used to gather information. Among the research instruments used by the researcher in this study

were observations and interviews methods to obtain information and collect data.

Observation

Observation is a way of collecting data by directly studying the respondents and the research conducted. This method is a frequently used research technique. The researcher also used this method in conducting this study.

According to Beaty, (2006) observations on children need to be conducted for this study because through observations made by the researcher, it helped to obtain accurate information about the level children's social development and also understand how children develop in an environment and provide knowledge about the influence which affects their social development.

The purpose of this observation was to investigate the children's social development whether there was an improvement or vice versa after they participated in the playing activities by using an observation checklist.

Interviews

According to Ahmad Suwari Long (2010), interviews are conducted to obtain direct and in-depth information on an issue in a research. This interview was used by the researcher during the interview sessions with the teachers at the childcare centre. The researcher interviewed the sample teacher to obtain information about the sample that can be studied. The questions asked to the teachers were more open.

These interviews were related to the implementation of playing while learning activities to improve the children's social development. The researcher interviewed two teachers to obtain some responses to some questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher used the observation and interview methods to collect the data with children. The observation method, using an observation checklist, was conducted while the children were participating in the playing activities with their peers. In addition, this study also used an interview method to obtain data and information related to the research topic. The interviews were conducted through voice recordings between a teacher and the researcher.

Data Analysis Methods

After going through the data collection process, the researcher conducted the data analysis. Content analysis of the findings was used to analyse this qualitative data which were the interviews, observation checklist and audio recordings. For content analysis steps and qualitative interviews, the researcher focused on

important information to answer the research questions.

Apart from this, through the content analysis of the observation checklist, the researcher selected important items related to the study.

Research findings

To identify the level of teacher's understanding about playing while learning

To answer Research Question 1, the interview method was conducted to identify the level of teachers' understanding about playing while learning.

According to the table 1, the researcher conducted interviews with two participants who were two female teachers, and both are Malays. In terms of education, the first participant has a *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*, while the second participant has a *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*.

Table 1 Profile of Interview Participants

Demographic Factor	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
Gender	Female	Female
Race	Malay	Malay
Teaching Experience	6 years	5 years
Level of Education	<i>Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia</i>	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>

To identify playing while learning activities in the children's social development

To answer Research Question 2, observation method was conducted on the participants. Table 2 illustrates a summary of the profile of observation participants: a total of 3 children involved in this study to identify playing while learning activities in the children's social development

Through this playing while learning technique, it is evident that it can help children to be more focused in their learning and can help to improve the social development among them. In addition, the researcher also provided some checklist items of observation (table 3) to collect the data wanted.

Table 2 Profile of Observation Participants

Demographic Factors	Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C
Gender	Male	Female	Female
Age	4 years	4 years	4 years
Race	Malay	Malay	Malay

To identify the level of effectiveness of the playing while learning technique in the teaching and learning process

To answer the last research question, Research Question 3, the researcher conducted several teaching and facilitation activities on several students including the research participants.

Table 3 Observation Checklists used during the Teaching and Learning Process

RESPONDENTS	OBSERVATION 1		OBSERVATION 2		OBSERVATION 3	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO

1	Express the words 'please' and 'thank you' while communicating in the activities					
2	Ready to share materials or game equipment					
3	Like to participate in group activities					
4	Responsible for his or her own mistakes or himself or herself.					
5	Enthusiastic and ready to participate in group activities					
6	Start a conversation with friends during a discussion or during a conversation					
7	Children answer the teacher's questions					
8	Children interact with the teacher					
9	Children pay attention to the teacher					
10	Understand the feelings of others by showing empathy or praising					
11	Can communicate politely					
12	Use simple words when interacting					
13	Follow simple and conditional instructions					
14	Can focus on the tasks performed					

Discussion and research implications

The researcher conducted a study to investigate how effective these playing while learning technique to improve the children's social development.

To what extent teachers understand about the playing while learning technique

From the interviews and observations conducted related to the extent of the teacher's

understanding about this playing while learning technique, the researcher discovered that the teachers in the childcare centre really understood about the playing while learning technique, in fact in this childcare centre, they used and applied this technique in the teaching activities.

These findings can be further strengthened based on the observations conducted by the researcher at the childcare centre to collect data related to this study. The researcher discovered that this method of playing while learning is very suitable to be

practiced in all the subjects taught, in fact the use of this method was seen to be able to attract children to be more focused and excited to learn without being asked by the teacher. In addition, this technique is also able to improve the children's social development.

To what extent the playing while learning activities help in the children's social development

From the interviews conducted previously, generally, the teacher stated that a child can be moulded through the method of playing while learning, and even if they are grouped together, these children began to interact and work with their peers. This was evident during the observations conducted with three children.

At the beginning, the researcher observed that these children had less interaction with their peers, they preferred to be alone than to be in groups in doing activities and had less practice of the value of cooperation in themselves. However, after several activities conducted with them through this technique, they began to show changes in themselves in which they began to like doing activities in groups and they also preferred to cooperate in doing activities and often interacted with each other during activities.

Is this playing while learning technique effective to be used in the teaching and learning process?

From this study, the researcher discovered that this method of playing while learning is helpful and effective and should be practiced in all the teaching and learning sessions and in fact it helps children to improve their level of social development. In fact, this method does not only help in the children's social development, but also helps in the development of physical, language and emotional among children.

Furthermore, this playing technique indirectly helps teachers in helping children to better understand what are taught by their teachers in the teaching sessions. This technique can also help teachers to achieve the teaching and learning objectives which are planned by them. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of playing while learning technique is very suitable to be used and even practiced in the teaching and learning sessions.

Research Implications

This study had some implications which include children and teachers in the childcare centre. Among them are, this study provided a clear benefit that this method of playing while learning is very helpful and effective to be use with children in the childcare centre. This is evident from this study in which children improved their level of social development very well.

Therefore, it is evident that this technique has positive implications for children if compared to teachers only using the usual method during the teaching and learning process. In addition, evidently, this is proven in the findings through interviews and observations conducted by the researcher. This technique used is also seen to help children to get rid of the feelings of easily get bored while in class during the teaching and facilitation process.

Furthermore, the researcher discovered that this study also helped teachers in improving the level of children's social development. Therefore, this technique, to some extent helps teachers in providing exposure with ways and methods of better learning especially interesting methods that can help to attract children to be more interested and focused in learning activities.

In fact, through the interview conducted by the researcher and the teacher, the teacher stated that this method of learning is very helpful for children to better understand and make them feel happy and excited with this way of teaching. In addition, this practice of playing while learning can help teachers to generate more creative ideas in the teaching and learning sessions.

This technique is more interesting and can help teachers to achieve the objectives planned in their daily teaching and learning process. Indeed, the use of this technique of playing while learning is very effective and helpful in every teaching and learning session for each subject and it also helps to improve the level of children's social development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this playing while learning technique is a learning method that can help children recognize and approach real experiences or learn directly especially when the teaching is related to concepts or skills. When this method is used effectively it will increase children's responses and their sensitivity to the feelings of others, in other words, students will not be able to understand or apply the principles learned effectively and meaningfully unless they are given the opportunity to see for themselves the real situation and evaluate the results of their application in that problematic situations.

Through this study as well, the researcher discovered that playing while learning is an effective method or technique used in the teaching and learning sessions for children. This method indirectly provides fun and satisfaction to the children in the teaching and learning sessions delivered by the teachers. Furthermore, through this playing, children will be able to master the development and physical skills as well as be able to master the language in terms of vocabulary and grammar speech in the world of children. This

study provided a lot of guidance to teachers to use this method of playing while learning in the

teaching and facilitation activities that will be used in the childcare centres or kindergartens.

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