



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEMPERAMENT AMONG
PRESCHOOLERS**

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PRESCHOOLERS**

By

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SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEMPERAMENT AMONG PRESCHOOLERS

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April 2009

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This cohort observational study was inspired by the current awareness of children's mental health and development. This study attempted to observe the level of social emotional development (SED) of preschoolers aged five and six years old. It examined the differences in social emotional development by preschoolers' temperament, gender and musical programs.

Thirty-nine preschoolers who enrolled in two music schools in Petaling Jaya and Kajang were recruited through convenient sampling as respondents in the study. The Carey Temperament Scale by Mcdevitt and Carey (1995), filled by the parents at the beginning of the study, were used to assess the children's different temperaments in 9 dimensions of



3 temperament types (easy, slow-to-warm up and difficult). Children's Social Emotional Developmental Checklist was used after one month of observation in a natural music classroom setting to assess the preschoolers' SED.

The result of this study showed all respondents had a relatively higher SED score. However, an analysis of variance test found that there is no significant difference among the respondents' SED scores by temperament types (easy, slow-to-warm up and difficult). An Independent-samples t-test analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the respondents' SED scores by gender and music program. This might be due to the sample size in the study is being small and uneven. The non significant findings suggested a bigger sample size in the future study and perhaps a longitudinal experimental study to better examine the influence of music on children's SED.

The findings of this study implied that the children with different temperament types may have achieved similar level of social emotional development if their temperament styles were recognized, accepted and accommodated appropriately, according to each child's individual temperament.



Abstrak tesis ini dibentangkan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian daripada keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**PERKEMBANGAN SOSIAL EMOSI DAN PEMBAWAAN DI KALANGAN
PELAJAR PRASEKOLAH**

Oleh

TEENA SIM

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Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Dr Rohani Abdullah

Fakulti: Fakulti Ekologi Manusia

Kajian cerapan kohort ini dicetuskan oleh kesedaran semasa mengenai perkembangan dan kesihatan mental kanak-kanak. Kajian ini cuba mencerap tahap emosi sosial kanak-kanak prasekolah yang menyertai kelas muzik. Ia juga meneliti hubungkait pembawaan, gender, dan program muzik dengan perkembangan sosial emosi (SED) kanak-kanak.

Tiga puluh sembilan orang kanak-kanak prasekolah berdaftar dalam kelas muzik di dua sekolah muzik di Petaling Jaya dan Kajang telah dipilih sebagai responden dalam kajian ini melalui persampelan mudah. Skala Temperamen Carey oleh Mcdevitt dan Carey (1995), yang siap diisi oleh ibubapa kanak-kanak pada permulaan kajian, digunakan untuk menilai pembawaan berbeza kanak-kanak dalam 9 dimensi dari 3 jenis pembawaan (mudah, lambat maju dan sukar). Senarai semak Perkembangan Sosial Emosi Kanak-kanak digunakan 1 bulan selepas



cerapan dalam keadaan suasana semulajadi bilik muzik untuk menilai SED kanak-kanak berkenaan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa semua kanak-kanak mempunyai skor SED yang agak tinggi. Walaubagaimanapun, Analisis Varians (ANOVA) tidak menunjukkan perbezaan signifikan di antara skor SED berdasarkan jenis pembawaan (mudah, lambat maju dan sukar) kanak-kanak. Ujian t sampel bebas juga menunjukkan yang tidak terdapat perbezaan yang nyata dalam skor SED responden dengan gender dan program muzik.

Hasil kajian yang didapati yang menunjukkan bahawa tiada perbezaan signifikan di antara SED kanak-kanak berdasarkan pembawaan, gender dan program muzik mungkin disebabkan bilangan sampel dalam kajian ini adalah kecil dan tidak seimbang. Adalah dicadangkan supaya bilangan sample yang lebih besar dan kajian eksperimental berbentuk jangka panjang dijalankan pada masa depan, untuk mengkaji pengaruh muzik ke atas SED kanak-kanak. Hasil kajian ini juga memberi implikasi bahawa perkembangan sosial emosi yang sama rata boleh dicapai sekiranya pembawaan kanak-kanak difahami, diterima dan diberi rangsangan yang bersesuaian dengan pembawaan individu kanak-kanak.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citation, which has been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

TEENA SIM

Date: 1 December 2009



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
TITLE PAGE	1
ABSTRACT	2
ABSTRAK	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
APPROVAL	8
DECLARATION	10
LIST OF TABLES	14
LIST OF FIGURES	15
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	16
Case Study: Story about a Shy Boy	18
Problem Statement	19
Significance of Proposed Study	26
Research Objectives	28
Research Hypothesis	29
Theoretical Framework	30
Conceptual Framework	33
Definition of Variables	
Social Emotional Development (SED)	35
Musical Activities	36
Temperament	37
Limitation of Study	38
II LITERATURE REVIEW	
Importance of Social Emotional Development During Early Childhood	40
Theory of Social Emotional Development	42
Milestones of Social Emotional Development in Preschoolers	47
Research on Children's Social emotional development	48
Assessment of Children's Social Emotional Development	52
Temperament	54
Temperament and Social Emotional Development	57
Musical Activities	59
Music Program in Malaysia	60
Musical Activities and Social Emotional Development	63
Gender and Social Emotional Development	67
III METHODOLOGY	
Study Design	69
Location of Study	70
Sampling	70



Procedure	71
Instruments	
SET A: Child Social Emotional Development Checklist	73
SET B: The Carey Temperament Scale	79
Music Programs	83
Data Analysis	87
IV RESULT AND DISCUSSION	
Respondents' Social Emotional development	88
Respondents' Social Emotional Development by Temperament	93
Respondents' Social Emotional Development by Music Program	98
Respondents' Social Emotional Development by Gender	102
V CONCLUSION	
Summary of the Study	105
Implication	110
Suggestion for Future Research	112
REFERENCES	
APPENDICES	
BIODATA OF STUDENT	



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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1-1	Estimated number of children covered by other ECCE programs	21
1-2	Teachers under ECCE programs	21
2-1	An overview of the preschoolers' music program in Malaysia	61
3-1	Composition of the subjects and background information (n=42)	70
3-2	Procedure Of class conducting in Program I and II	85
4.1-1	Respondents' SED scores	87
4.1-2	Respondents' scores in each SED component	90
4.2-1	Mean SED scores by three temperaments	94
4.3-1	Mean SED scores by music program types	97
4.3-2	Descriptive statistic of the Respondents' age in composition of the group	98
4.4-1	Mean SED scores by Gender	101



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
4.1-1	Percentage of respondents in each level of SED	88
4.1-2	Percentage of the respondents' SED scores in each components	88
4.1-3	Percentage of the respondents in each component of SED scores at different level	90
4.2-1	The distributions of subject in different temperament	92
4.2-2	Percentage of the respondents' SED scores in each component by Temperament.	95
4.3-1	Percentage of the respondents' SED scores in each component by music programs.	99
4.4-1	Percentage of the respondents' SED scores in each component by Gender.	102



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research has found that social emotional development of children sets the stage for exploration and later readiness to learn. It is the foundation for all development (Stark, Cohen and Jerald, 2000). Preschool years seem to be the best time to accomplish the social emotional developmental tasks such as to control emotional states, to learn to delay gratification, to build relationships with other people, and to modulate other functions essential for healthy development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). However, this field has not yielded as much study on its importance and impact on children development as that of academic or cognitive development (Team, 2006). As Eisenberg (2006) stated, due to the influence of behaviorism and cognitive approaches in psychology, emotional factor was considered as a nuisance variable in the past until the recent fifteen years.

There are several factors which account for the children's social emotional development; among which temperament has been studied in relation to children's social emotional development. For example, Thomas and Chess (1996) proposed a goodness of fit model to describe how temperament and environmental pressures combined to affect the course



of a child's development. Rothbart and colleagues (1998) defined temperament along two broad dimensions of reactivity and self-regulation, which then subsume multiple subscales that place a greater emphasis on basic emotion, attention and motor processes. Kagan (1991) focused his temperament theory on two extreme types of children — inhibited and uninhibited — that he argued represented distinct bio-behavioral profiles leading to patterns of approach versus withdrawal tendencies across childhood.

The researches cited by the above three authors pointed to the value of understanding of how and why early temperament affects child development. Although acknowledged, important child-environment interactions are minimized in much of the later two works (Calkins, 2005). Greater emphasis on the interaction of temperament and environment, such as the roles of parents, teachers and peers, participating in musical activities and the like in altering early tendencies and facilitating the social emotional development is needed.

In summary, children's social emotional development is the groundwork of all developments and is based on their temperament; that is their behavioral styles when interacting with the environment. However, few studies have focused on how the environmental accommodation may



enhance the social emotional development of children with different temperament.

Case Study: Story about a Shy Boy;

One little shy boy came into my music class 2 years ago. He avoided eye contact when I greeted him and his mother, stayed close to his mother and refused to participate in most of the activities throughout the class even though his eyes glowed with enthusiasm when the instruments were given out. This was not the first time that I had a shy child like him before, and knowing that he needed more time to adapt to the environment before he could join any of the activities, I kept myself a few steps away from him when conducting the class. At the end of the class, all the other children's singing and dancing moved him. He joined in the circle, though without holding other children's hands.

This scenario continued for a couple of months with him getting a little closer to me each time. He started to give me a hug after class on the 3rd month that showed his comfort and security in the class. I was very excited about his build-up in confidence but the mother looked very worried and insisted that he had learnt nothing as he was not participating fully.



In the 6th month, I finally decided to invite him to come into the class without his mother as all the other children were in the class without adult company. I was extremely happy when he joined in the group and danced cheerfully and played his favorite instrument alone while I sang. However, this sort of behavior among children is often overlooked and unnoticed. Our society and educational system have driven us to be highly “result” orientated; results that can be measured through performance and examination based on a marking system are highly expected.

Problem Statement

From the above scenario, two main issues emerged, 1) what are the children’s environmental conditions in the present Malaysia; and 2) how is the children’s social emotional development in relation to different temperament types in a music class. These issues formed the research questions of this study.

Children’s environmental conditions in present Malaysia

Parents have a common wish that their children will grow up to be a happy and successful person. However, a survey conducted by the National Health and Morbidity Council in 1997 found that 13% of Malaysian children encountered psychological problems. In spite of this astonishing figure, not much research has been done to identify factors



that promote or inhibit children's social emotional development in Malaysia.

In a developing country such as Malaysia, young children are being cared for at nurseries, day-care centers, preschools, as well as in relatives' or non-relatives' private homes. The programs, curriculum, the quality of caregiver, teacher's approach, and the ways of parenting greatly affect the children's social emotional development (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005).

Varied early childhood programs are provided according to the economic status of the housing area concerned. Most of them are conducted by private agencies (as shown by the number of students in private agencies in Table 1) and conducted in a corner lot of the housing area. The "teacher or caregivers" range from those who completed 9 years of education with Sijil Rendah Pelajaran(SRP) to those who completed 11 years of education with Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia(SPM), (which is equivalent to O level) and are rarely university graduates.

According to a report on Malaysia Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs prepared for *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007*, it showed no available figure on trained teachers among the 28,198 of preschool teachers in years 2002/03 as shown in Table 2.



Two extreme inclinations seemed to be found in the present day Klang valley preschool or day care center; namely, either too much emphasis was placed on the intellectual preparation of the child for primary school or the center was just purely a food and shelter provider without any appropriate guidelines on child development.

Table1-1: Estimated number of children covered by other ECCE programs in Malaysia

Agency	Under age 4 (0-4)	Under age 6 (4-6)	Total
Ministry of Education*		78,623	78,623
Ministry of Rural Development (KEMAS)*	2,926	213,051	215,977
National Unity Department*		37,819	37,819
Department of Social Welfare*	44,575		44,575
Private Agencies		287,922	287,922
TOTAL	47,501	539,960	664,916

*financed by Government

Sources: Malaysia Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes Compiled by: UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) Geneva, (Switzerland) 2006

Table 1-2: Teachers under ECCE programs in Malaysia

Total number of teachers	Of whom female (%)	Percentage of trained teachers (all)	Percentage of trained teachers (males)	Percentage of trained teachers (females)
28,198	98.8

(...) Not available.

Sources: Malaysia Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes Compiled by: UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) Geneva, (Switzerland) 2006



In the present stressful society, both parents and children are experiencing considerably high tension in their daily lives. Parents try their best to work hard and earn enough to ensure that the material needs of their children are met. On the other hand, the children have to fill up their days with “school”, homework, tuition, computer class, Kumon class, Shicida class, ballet, music class, art class, etc instead of doing their favorite work—play. Parents may feel helpless when they realize that their children are withdrawn, or easily prone to tantrums, or inclined to aggression or experience any emotional dysfunctional behavior.

The young generation is pampered with good shelter, food and a richer materialistic lifestyle, but are their developmental needs well met? Why are many of them either very shy and withdrawn or aggressive and overactive and why are their behaviors not easily rectified? Are their basic needs fulfilled by an appropriate and warm response? Are parents relying more on the available educational centers to help in their children’s growth and development? How much do the parents expect from their children? Most important of all, do parents understand their children’s innermost needs in their growing path? In order to answer these questions, this study was firstly set up to explore what is the present preschooler’s SED.



Children's social emotional development in relation to different temperament types in a music class

There is no scientific survey yet on the purpose of Malaysian parents sending their children to music classes. However, most parents generally walk into a music school to enquire about the courses available for learning an instrument.

Even though the main purpose of children coming to a music school is to learn a particular instrument, in a realistic setting, the author has experienced some very withdrawn toddlers, who came to a music class and actually improved on their social skill and emotional regulation six months later. In addition, some children who behaved aggressively in the beginning responded positively a few months later, while some very attached children, who initially held tight to their mothers' hands and refused to come into the music class, were the ones who helped to comfort others who were upset due to separation from their mothers in the later months.

The ratio between the number of average children and that of children with stronger character encountered by the author is about 3:2. For example, in a class of ten children aged 5 to 6 years old, six would generally respond in a similar way and speed, while the rest would either be looking around, moving around, sitting still and withdrawn,

