

ROLE OF SOCIAL –EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN PROMOTING ACADEMIC LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt has been made to understand and explore the interdependence of academic and cognitive development to the social and emotional competencies acquired by children during their early years. The positive role played by the parents, teachers, peers and other adults in facilitating the various skill sets like relationships, decision making, self-awareness, conflict resolution, peer interactions, emotional awareness and regulation do impact the child's adjustment in school. Studies in the realm of SEL (social and emotional learning) have been instrumental in promoting the social-emotional skills which in turn have a significant impact on the overall wellbeing, mental health, academic success and school related activities. Play is an important factor to promote and understand social relationships. Skills like cooperation, empathy and conflict resolution can be learnt only in social settings. Guided play has been found to be of significance in promoting positive social and emotional competencies.

Keywords: cognitive development, mental wellbeing, social and emotional skills, emotional awareness, emotional regulation, guided play.

INTRODUCTION

Happy voices from the playground, children rushing for their turns to get a swing ride, enthusiastically sharing their experience in school and home, fights for a piece of candy are common day to day experiences which children share during their early years.

A piece of wood can be a great fighter plane or a box can become a house; all these imaginative and make believe play serve an important role in the developing child's personality.

Listening to stories, narrating and reflecting on them is the most interesting activity for children. Stories serve a very important function of making children resilient, enhance their imagination, develop the ability to face adverse situations and challenges along with the ability develop critical thinking skills to name a few.

All such activities in which a child engages and draws fulfilment and enjoyment are the scaffolds for the child's development. Technically speaking, these activities may not be categorized under any play or specific game but such activities are crucial for the wellbeing of children. Through

these playful activities children learn the most crucial abilities like sharing, caring, developing relationships, conflict resolution, resilience. These skills are the building blocks for success in later years. Waiting for their turn, helping friends, the team spirit, resolving conflicts during interactions and playing in a group serve to make the child learn virtues like patience, empathy, managing the self, understanding the feelings and emotions of self and others. All these abilities have been found to promote academic and intellectual skills in school related tasks. Children with better social and emotional competence have been found to be better adjusted in their schools, have better relationship abilities, less conflicts with peers and adults. Children with better skills during early years are academically and professionally successful in later years compared to kids who faced social and emotional challenges during early years.

The significance of developing age appropriate skills in the social and emotional domains have been researched extensively and found to be of great significance. Play and storytelling are activities which automatically draw a child or for that matter any individual to itself.

The importance of play in developing life skills for children needs to be integrated so that the 'learning' becomes a playful experience and crucial social and emotional competencies are mastered early in life. The array of researches across the globe have focused on social and emotional education and their positive outcomes.

The work is based on extensive research work carried out on children in schools in the age group 3-8 years to enhance their social and emotional abilities and integrating the requisite skills through activities in a joyous and playful manner for holistic development of children. The research in the realm of social and emotional domains has conclusively established a strong connection between school related skills, relationships and social, emotional wellbeing.

A child who is better equipped socially and emotionally is also better at academic and school related skills. These competencies have been shown to play a facilitative role even during adulthood. Ability to form and sustain positive relationships and career related outcomes have been found to be associated with the skills and abilities in the social and emotional areas. The inability of children to acquire age appropriate social and emotional skills can have far reaching consequences in cognitive, academic and career related outcomes. The significance of these skills has been a well-documented domain in the areas of early childhood research studies. If we want the children to be well adjusted and happy in their early years, it is deemed that the parents, carers and teachers along with other stake holders put in conscious efforts to inculcate skills for enhancing the competencies in these crucial developmental domains.

Studies on the impact of social emotional skills on cognitive domains of development

Every education system has a main objective to enhance the social and emotional competencies and various skills associated with it. Unfortunately, these domains take a back seat as the academic tasks, and other cognitive activities take the major chunk of school activities.

In a study conducted at different social levels (multilevel Analysis) to understand the role of social-emotional wellbeing and its relationship to cognitive and academic achievement of children. Children in the age group 6-10 years were studied in a Chile elementary school. The assessment was done on the individual level for social- emotional wellbeing, social integration and self-esteem. On the social level the classroom, social atmosphere of the school and related social networks in the schools. The factors were found to be positively correlated. The interactions between the teachers and students were found to be important predictors of school success. The teacher's perception of the self-esteem of the students has been found to play a role in academic achievements of children (Berger, Alclay, Torretti, & Milicic, 2011).

Emerging researches have acknowledged a strong relationship between academic and cognitive development with that of social-emotional skills at the disposal of children. Social emotional competencies have been identified as important factors influencing the school and academic related outcomes (Hoffman, 2009).

The major research studies in the realm of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning) have established with clarity the relationship between the sub-domains of social and emotional skills with school related tasks and learning readiness (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016).

For all practical purposes social and emotional development of young children (0-5 years) has been defined as the ability to “form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn-all in the context of family, community, and culture” (Yates, et al., 2018, p. 2).

A longitudinal study to assess the academic achievement of children with respect to different aspects of social-emotional (SE) development was conducted on children from three to seven years of age. The different SE domains which were assessed in the study were self-regulation, hyperactivity, problems related to emotional and peer relations (Hammer, Melhuish, & Howard, 2018). All these aspects of SE along with the environmental factors and demographic profiles were found to impact the academic outcomes for children in early childhood years.

The non-cognitive domains like the social and emotional components as important factors in determining its impact on cognitive and other outcomes related to school success has received recognition from the researchers (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). Each one of the factor of SE has been independently found to impact the leaning and scholastic outcomes during early years. Unfortunately studies in the domains of cognitive development have “received comparatively less attention and is rarely considered in conjunction with cognitive development factors.” (Hammer, Melhuish, & Howard, 2018, p. 106).

The millennium cohort study clearly delineated the role of social emotional competencies like self-regulation, relationship skills, emotional regulation and decision-making abilities to have a significant impact and its implications with respect to academic and success later in life (www.millenniumcohort.org, n.d.).

The research studies have effectively proven that if the children are given adequate opportunities to use their communicative abilities effectively, to resolve and negotiate conflicts, learn to empathize and manage their relationships and behaviour, learn social and emotional skills; this results in better outcomes in all spheres of life along with the academic outcomes.

The literature is abounding with studies in the social and emotional domains of development and their role in mental wellbeing, academic and school related tasks as well as better life success later in life. It has guided the research fields in the domains of academic betterment and life skills, psychotherapy, and guidance and counselling just to name a few.

“There are indicators that future success and positive outcomes are dependent on the development of children’s social and emotional competencies (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016)” cited in (Kirk & Jay, 2018, p. 472). The study by Kirk & Jay (2018) has contributed to and enriched the knowledge with respect to aspects of environment of early childhood centre (kindergarten), play and relationship as important contributors of the childhood social and emotional skills and their subsequent role in child’s life. The study was conducted using case study methodology and participant observation along with interviews (both formal and informal). The classroom was viewed as a culture in itself which plays a significant role. The environment, play and relationship are instrumental in guided participation which results in positive and desirable qualities in the socio-emotional domains (Rogoff, 2003).

The importance of parent-child interaction, interactions with adults and teachers is critical for the development of skills in the domains of social- emotional, cognitive, academic and behavioural learning. The communication skills and the ability to form relationships are positively correlated (Alzahrni, Alharbi, & Alodwani, 2019).

The positive academic outcomes are closely related to the social emotional skills learnt by children during their early childhood years at school. The early interactions with teachers, peers and other adults do make a significant contribution.

Conclusion:

The role of social and emotional skills in furthering academic success and other aspects of school learning has found unconditional acceptance. The worldwide focus in providing opportunities to children for building relationship skills, self-awareness, emotional awareness and regulation have been integrated in the school curriculum for early classes especially during elementary school education. Social skills like caring, sharing, empathy can be best learnt by children in a school setting. Play, in itself provides great opportunity to children to learn behaviours which get them

peer acceptance. A total school approach, which tends to inculcate skills and competencies in the SE domains have a positive impact on the learning environment. Tools and a module has been developed based on day to day school learning activities to promote social and emotional abilities of children (Sapra, 2019, pp. 2200-2203).

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International Journal of Research in Social Sciences

Vol. 9, Issue 6, June - 2019,

ISSN: 2249-2496 Impact Factor: 7.081

Journal Homepage: <http://www.ijmra.us>, Email: editorijmie@gmail.com

Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gate as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A

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