Emotion Recognition Education for Early Childhood: A Community Engagement Programme at Indria Kindergarten, Bantul

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ABSTRACT

The Emotion Recognition Education Programme is a community service initiative conducted by students of Mercu Buana University Yogyakarta to introduce three basic emotions—anger, sadness, and happiness—to early childhood. The programme was implemented at Indria Kindergarten, Padukuhan Nglampengan, Dlingo, Bantul, through interactive methods such as songs, storytelling with coloured sticks, and drawing activities. A total of 15 children participated in the programme. The results showed that most children were able to recognise and distinguish emotions accurately, although the level of speed and depth of understanding varied among individuals. The programme also enhanced children's confidence in expressing emotions and provided creative opportunities for emotional expression through drawing. In addition, teachers observed that the activities could serve as a practical model for strengthening emotional literacy in early childhood education. This community service programme demonstrates that playful and interactive media can be effective tools in fostering emotional awareness among children while also involving teachers and parents in the process.

Introduction

Childhood, especially ages 5 to 6, is considered the golden age of human development, as this phase is regarded as an important foundation for overall individual development. At this stage, children experience rapid growth, including physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological aspects (Putri & Chairilsyah, 2025). This phase is a critical phase for children in terms of social and emotional development. All forms of learning obtained from

the surrounding environment greatly influence children and become crucial (Bardhoshi, Swanston, & Kivlighan, 2020).

According to Piaget's cognitive theory (Rahmawati & Basri, 2023), cognitive development in early childhood is called the preoperational stage, which lasts from ages 2 to 7. This is related to emotional and social development in early childhood, when children tend to want to communicate their emotions when interacting with others. This emotional development is a gradual process in which children learn to manage their emotions through calming experiences or when they feel comfortable.

Children's ability to respond emotionally is present from birth. General excitement is the first indication of emotional behavior. As they get older, there is an expansion of emotional responses that are more concentrated, more familiar, and learned by children by observing how others react to emotional outbursts. Children at this stage have a strong desire to express their emotions, because at this stage children learn from their surroundings how to express emotions (Hurlock, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to introduce emotions to children so that they are able to control, feel, and communicate their feelings to those around them. Moreover, during this phase, children will experience psychosocial development. This includes emotional development commonly experienced at this stage, namely anger, fear, jealousy, curiosity, joy, and sadness (Thahir, 2018).

Referring to previous research, there are several ways to introduce emotions to children, such as puzzle games that can improve cognitive skills, for example, recognising colours and counting the number of puzzle pieces, while also developing social-emotional skills, such as when children patiently complete puzzles without giving up and appreciate their friends around them through mutual help and interaction (Akbar, Karta, & Astawa, 2022).

Therefore, it is necessary to introduce emotions to children so that they are able to control, feel, and communicate their feelings to those around them. The students of Mercu Buana University Yogyakarta initiated an emotion recognition education programme at Indria Kindergarten, Padukuhan Nglampengan, Dlingo, Bantul. This programme focused on three primary emotions—happiness, anger, and sadness—through interactive methods such as songs, storytelling, and drawing. The programme was designed not only to help children identify emotions but also to support teachers and parents in recognising the importance of early emotional literacy as a foundation for healthy psychosocial development.

Method

An emotional awareness education programme designed for kindergarten students at Indria Padukuhan Nglampengan, Dlingo Bantul. Three media were used by students from Mercu Buana University Yogyakarta to introduce emotions to children. The three media used were as follows:

1. Learning and Singing Songs with Emotional Themes

    The students have prepared songs with simple themes and lyrics to help children understand various emotions and how to express them. The lyrics of the songs are as follows:

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    "Kalau kau senang hati,

    tepuk tangan (2x)

    Kalau kau sedang sedih,

    menangislah hu hu (2x)

    Kalau kau sedang marah

    dan ingin meluapkan,

    kalau-kalau sedang marah, injak bumi."

    </center>

    This song is an initial step in helping children understand what to do when they feel happy, sad, or angry. The lyrics describe that when happy, children can clap their hands; when sad, they are allowed to cry; and when angry, they are encouraged to express their feelings by stomping their feet. This song is sung while performing movements to make the learning atmosphere more enjoyable. Thus, learning about emotions can be carried out joyfully and without boredom.

2. Inserting the Stick into the Cup to See Children's Understanding of Recognising Emotions

    After the children were invited to sing and learn, the next stage was to see and observe the extent to which they understood the three emotions that had been taught through the songs, namely happy, sad, and angry. The method used was to respond to a story. Each child was given a stick that had been coloured according to the emotion symbol (colour theory): red for angry, green for happy, and blue for sad.

    After all the children have received the three coloured sticks, the students read a story containing certain emotions. After listening, the children are asked to put the sticks into cups according to the emotions in the story. Example of a story: 'Andi got a star for being able to read fluently in front of the class. He smiled broadly.' This activity

is carried out so that children can practise what they have learned in the previous stage, as well as being a means of measuring the extent to which children understand the three emotions. In addition, this activity also trains listening comprehension skills.

3. Drawing Balloons with Emotions

The final stage is to give children space to be creative by drawing balloons with symbols of emotions. Children can draw balloons according to their own creativity, with the condition that each balloon must represent a specific emotion, namely angry, sad, or happy.

In addition to training creativity, in this activity children are also asked to write a description of the balloon they have drawn. For example, if a child draws an angry balloon, the word 'angry' is written next to it. This aims to ensure that children not only learn to understand emotions, but also practise their writing skills.

Results and Discussion

The emotion recognition education programme was implemented on Wednesday, 30 July 2025, at Indria Kindergarten, Padukuhan Nglampengan, Dlingo, Bantul. The activity involved 15 children who actively participated, while a few others were absent. Although attendance was not complete, the number of participants was still representative for observing the effectiveness of the programme (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Indria Kindergarten Students (Nglampengan, Dlingo)

The session began with the introduction of songs containing emotional themes. Repeatedly singing simple lyrics with body movements allowed the children to memorise and understand the representation of emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger. The use of music proved to be highly effective, as songs can facilitate children's socio-emotional learning. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences emphasises that musical intelligence enables children to perceive rhythm, melody, and sound patterns, which can be used to strengthen their emotional understanding (Zaafirah et al., 2023). The combination of songs and movements also created an enjoyable learning atmosphere, reducing boredom and fostering positive emotional expression among children.

Figure 2 Students guide Indria kindergarten pupils in understanding emotions through coloured sticks

The next activity assessed the children's comprehension using coloured sticks (red for anger, green for happiness, and blue for sadness). After listening to a short story, the children were asked to insert the sticks into cups corresponding to the emotions represented in the narrative. The children's responses indicated a generally high level of enthusiasm and understanding, although some needed more time to process the instructions (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The use of tangible objects in this activity reflects Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which children learn effectively when supported by concrete learning aids and adult guidance (Ma'mun et al., 2024). This method also encouraged active listening and comprehension, in line with Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence, which highlights recognising emotions as the foundation of emotional competence (Rostamaji et al., 2022).

Figure 3 Indria Kindergarten pupils hold coloured sticks as a medium for learning about emotions.

As the activity progressed, children were encouraged to respond individually without the aid of sticks, thereby testing their confidence in identifying emotions. This stage revealed differences in self-efficacy, with some children eagerly raising their hands while others hesitated. Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in one's confidence to take action. In this case, children who felt capable demonstrated their answers more confidently. To strengthen motivation, rewards were given to children who dared to answer, which proved effective in building their courage (Figure 4).

The final stage involved drawing balloons that represented different emotions (Figure 5). This creative task allowed children to express emotions symbolically while practising their writing skills by labelling their drawings. Some children demonstrated high creativity by adding details such as human-like features to the balloons, while others drew simple shapes. This variety reflects individual differences in cognitive and emotional development. According to Hurlock (2011), children at this stage of development tend to express emotions both through verbal communication and symbolic representations such as drawings. This stage also functioned as a reinforcement of the previous activities, helping children consolidate their understanding of anger, sadness, and happiness.

Figure 4 Indria Kindergarten pupils showed active engagement in answering questions about emotional recognition.

Figure 5 Indria kindergarten pupils draw emotion balloons

Overall, the children's responses throughout the programme were active and positive. Repetition across the three stages—singing, storytelling with coloured sticks, and drawing— proved effective in reinforcing learning outcomes. Most children demonstrated the ability to identify emotions accurately, though with varying levels of speed and depth. This finding aligns with Bardhoshi, Swanston, and Kivlighan (2020), who argue that structured social– emotional education interventions in early childhood can enhance children's ability to recognise and manage emotions. Thus, the programme showed that interactive and playful learning media are powerful tools for introducing emotional literacy in early childhood education.

Conclusion

The programme proved effective in helping children identify and differentiate the three main emotions—anger, happiness, and sadness. Most children were able to demonstrate their understanding both verbally and through creative activities. This indicates that interactive

methods such as songs, storytelling, and drawing can strengthen emotional literacy at an early age. For sustainability, it is recommended that similar programmes be integrated into kindergarten curricula and conducted regularly in collaboration with teachers and parents.

Acknowledgment

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