Are There Short-Term Effects of Social, Emotional and Physical Competence in Early Childhood Education and Care Centres?

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Abstract—A national early childhood education and care programme known as Permata Negara (literally translated as ‘National Gems’) was carried out under the patronage of Malaysian First Lady, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor since 2007. This study was carried out in Johor state, one of the 13 states in Malaysia, involving 45 centres to assess the development of children within age 1 to 4 years old in three developmental aspects, namely physical, emotional, and social. Observation based on check list of Monitoring and Evaluation Program National PERMATA 2010 developed by the evaluation committee headed by Prof. Dato’ Dr. Aminah Ayob was used to obtain the quantitative data in two observations within a three-month period in early October and at the end of December 2010. All age groups showed encouraging development in the aspects studied. These results provide a better understanding on the performance and assessment of children in the PERMATA nursery in Malaysia thus implying the positive results of this noble project in moulding children to be smart and emotionally mature citizens in future. It is suggested that more research needs to be carried out especially in longitudinal perspectives to provide a better measurement of the success of this project.

Keywords:—Early Childhood Education, PERMATA

1 Introduction
The PERMATA Early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program in Malaysia was first proposed by Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor, the First Lady of Malaysia and was allocated the first grant of RM20 million by the Cabinet on 21 June 2006. This program adopts the community-based integrated approach practiced by Pen Green Corby, United Kingdom under the Surestart Programme. Themed “Every Child a Jewel” (Setiap Anak Permata), the aim of Permata ECEC centres is to raise the standard and quality of childhood education and care for the children below five years old, which will focus on children living in rural areas from low-income or disadvantaged families including ethnic minorities. At the opening ceremony of the International Conference on Early Childhood and Special Education at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor said “Just after a year of operation, a study by Universtiy Pendidikan Sultan Idris revealed that Permata children are one to two years ahead of their peers in cognitive, social and emotional development.” [1] A total of 457 Permata ECEC centres was established until October 2009, which successfully nurtured 17,565 children [2]. Johor as one of the highly developed states in Malaysia also have built and applied this positive programme. The effect of this early childhood programme is encouraged to be examined. This study is mainly focused on observing the three aspects (physical, social, and emotional) of development on children nurtured in Permata ECEC centres in Johor.

Most researches in early days mainly concentrated on the cognitive aspect of early childhood development. Recently, more and more researchers are starting to be concerned with the social and emotional development of children. The importance of these two developmental aspects were confirmed by numerous previous researches, which found that peer, teacher-child relationship, and anti-social disorders were related to future problems, such as behavior and
peer relationships [3]–[6]. Social and emotional competence are regarded as the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of other’s and individuals’ themselves, sustain relationship with others and regulate behavior and emotion [7]. The curriculum studies to improve the competence of these two aspects (social and emotional) are increasing and have achieved some positive results. Krammer, Caldarella, Christensen, and Shatzer (2009) who examined the effect of “Strong Star” lessons showed decreases in internalizing behaviour [8]. A study focused on emotional regulation skills reported that there were positive relationships between child’s emotion regulation and academic success, early literacy and math achievement scores [9]. The positive changes in the children’s behaviors were found to be related to the social skills curriculum [10].

Physical development is the most easily observed aspect in children’s development and develops especially fast in the early childhood stage. It includes various aspects, e.g. height, weight, motor skills. Children who are overweight have more risk on physical health such as bone, joint problems, sleep apnea; social and psychological problems (e.g. poor self-esteem) compared with normal weight ones. The prevalence of children in the overweight category has been increasing in the past 30 years [11]. Hence, it is important to develop appropriate physical activities, as well as a conducive environment order to nurture a child’s health and other development aspects [12], [13] well as restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, activates and interests [4]. It is difficult to find an effective method to totally reverse this condition currently.

2 Objectives
This study is aimed to examine and observe the effect of The PERMATA Early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program on three aspects of children’s development (physical, social, emotional) in Johor Permata ECEC centres.

3 Method
3.1 Subjects
This is a short-term longitudinal study which conducted two observations over three month period (October to December). A total of 180 children from Permata Early Childhood Education centers in Johor were selected to participate in this study. The subjects in this study were divided into three age groups - 1-2 years old, 2-3 years old, and 3-4 years old.

3.2 Measure
An observation checklist was applied to examine three aspects of development in children which is physical, social and emotional development. The observation checklist has three measure scales - good, average, and weak.

4 Results
4.1 Social Development
A shown in Figure 1, the number of children in a good social development condition is a similar level for groups of 1-2 years old and 2-3 years old in October. More children are in the good condition for 3-4 years old age group than the other two age groups. After three months of education, the same observation was applied to identify the number of children in different level of condition. From the second observation, it was found that all three age groups showed an improvement after the three months of education. In other words, the Permata programme in this study presented a positive effect on children’s social development.

4.2 Emotional Development
The observation on emotional development in October indicated that the number of children in a good condition is the highest in the age group of 3-4 years old, followed by 2-3 years old and 1-2 years old. The

Figure 1: Two Observation of Social Development on Three Groups
second observation in December showed a considerable increase in the number of children at a “good” level for all of the three groups (Figure 2). It means that there are children who were in an average or weak condition in October who have showed progress and improved to a good condition after three months of education.

![Figure 2: Two Observation of Emotional Development on Three Groups](image)

4.3 Physical Development
The first observation in October on physical development showed a different frequency from the other two aspects development (social, emotional). The 3-4 years old age group showed the highest number of children in good condition, followed by the 1-2 years old group and the 2-3 years old group. The second observation in December found that more children now have good physical development after the three months of education, and this finding holds true across all three age groups (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Two Observation of Physical Development on Three Groups](image)

5 Conclusion and Future Study
This short-term longitudinal study showed a consistent positive tendency to improve among three groups of children in the 1-2, 2-3, and 3-4 years old age groups under the PERMATA early childhood education program. The results showed that this program helped to increase the number of children who are at good level for all three developmental aspects measured which are social, emotional and physical developments.

This observation study only provided the frequency of children in each of the three developmental levels - the performance of children and a performance comparison suggested to be included future studies. More samples and longer-term observations should be introduced in the future studies. A qualitative study is suggested to examine the positive factors resulting from the PERMATA education curriculum.

References


