

# Teachers' Awareness Level of Children's Emotional Development in Shah Alam

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## Abstract

Children's emotional development significantly influences their social relationships, enabling them to manage emotions and interact effectively with their environment. This study examined teachers' awareness of their knowledge and practices in managing children's emotions within an educational context. A survey research design was adopted, utilising a random sampling technique to select participants. A total of 60 kindergarten teachers participated in the study. Data collection involved a questionnaire adapted from previous research, which was distributed to teachers via the online platform Google Forms. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistical analysis. The findings revealed that respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of children's emotional development. In addition, respondents also demonstrate high level of understanding and practices of emotional development in teaching and learning activities. These results suggest that respondent may receive sufficient pre-service training and in-service training throughout their career as a preschool teacher.

**Keywords:** Emotional Development, Children, Kindergarten Teachers, Practice, Knowledge

## Introduction

Early childhood environment shape children's interaction and relationships with peers and adults through play and learning activities. Social and emotional competence is necessary to manage this environment. Social competence includes integrating skills that support the effectiveness of social interactions between a person and the environment (Morkel & McLaughlin, 2015). Emotional competence involves the process of individuals understanding their own emotions and those of others, and controlling and expressing emotions in accordance with acceptable social situations (Eisenberg, Cumberland & Spinrad, 1998). Children will face major changes in their environment, challenges in managing relationships with peers and teachers and learning at school (Mohd Sharani, 2006). Therefore, understanding students' emotional development characteristics at this critical stage is vital for children's future.

Preschool is an important educational dimension for children before entering formal school education. Preschool education provides learning experiences for children aged 4 to 6 years for one year or more before entering Year 1 in standard school (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2003). Preschool students should have basic socio-emotional development (Hazrad Khan et al., 2010). They can more easily adapt to the new school environment through good socio-emotional development due to their social skills in interacting with friends and teachers. Early education teachers must have knowledge of socio-emotional development to help children develop their socio-emotional skills to succeed.

Early childhood education teachers have new roles, such as planning lessons, guiding, teaching and assessing children's learning, and organising the classroom environment for children's learning (Morrison, 2014). Recognising each child's characteristics will assist teachers in designing an appropriate curriculum and tailoring instruction that responds to each child's strengths and needs. Teachers' inability to be aware of children's development can affect their self-development. This can lead to behavioural problems that will disrupt learning and teaching sessions in the classroom.

An educator must be aware of and identify normal and challenging behaviours. Early screening or identification of children's emotional development problems is crucial to encourage healthy growth. Teachers must have a high level of awareness to help children's emotional development. The level of teacher knowledge includes different categories, such as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge about students and their characteristics (Hill & Chin, 2018; Ball et al., 2008). In this context, the teachers' level of knowledge about their students' emotions is prioritised.

Research on teachers' awareness of children's emotional development is crucial, as children and adolescents with well-developed emotional skills will be more successful in school and in their lives. Strengthening social and emotional skills is less emphasised, especially in controlling emotions, which should be cultivated early. Apart from parents, teachers play the most important role in supporting the development of these skills.

Study by Pan and Zhang (2023), indicated that children's emotional development has cultural and individual differences, and it is impossible to assess children's emotional development apart from these factors. This is supported by Geok et al. (2023), who found more diverse variables in the same population, and the intervention in social-emotional research in Asia must be investigated. Teachers and students in Asia, especially Malaysia, are from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Teachers' education and experience are crucial to help address this problem and help children of diverse ethnicities understand their emotions.

In addition, emotional abuse or neglect can also affect children's emotional development. Tatlicali and Berkmen (2017), found that preschool teacher candidates aged from 22 to 25 were emotionally neglectful or abusive. As the level of education increases, teachers tend to refuse or ignore children's emotions. Therefore, the length of teacher experience also affects how they deal with children's emotions.

Socio-emotional development has been the main topic in numerous studies, but awareness and support are rarely discussed. Thus, this study emphasised teachers'

awareness of children's emotional development and regulatory support. It is important for us to reflect on how a teacher interacts with children as they learn how to regulate their emotions when interacting with others, thus developing emotional skills. Teachers should know how children's emotions develop, which helps them identify appropriate methods and techniques to enhance children's socio-emotional development (Hafizah et al., 2019). Socio-emotional is essential for children to have fun and enjoy their daily lives. Therefore this research aims to identify the level of teacher's awareness of children's emotional development.

Research on children's emotional development is less done by researchers. This is so because this field is often linked to the social field in social-emotional learning. This study will focus on the level of teachers' awareness of children's emotional development. This is important because this study can benefit relevant parties such as the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM), school administrators, counseling teachers, teachers and students' parents. The results of this study can provide useful input to the KPM, school administrators and teachers to be sensitive and take appropriate action to help children's emotional development.

### **Literature Review**

Children's awareness of emotions is elevated through their interactions with adults, other children, and new situations. They gradually learn to describe, manage, and express their emotions in socially appropriate ways. This skill is known as self-regulation. Although children learn the basics of self-regulation and emotional awareness during normal childhood development, they may need additional support to understand and manage their emotions more effectively and socially appropriately. When children can effectively regulate their emotions, they can learn, interact with others, and become more independent. Most educators agree that children's emotional well-being contributes greatly to their social and intellectual development.

Children's emotions involve their body language and attention to speech and behaviour. This allows teachers to respond more effectively to children's needs and offer specific guidance to help them manage their emotions. Studies related to teacher's awareness of children's emotional development are scarce since emotional development is often associated with social development. Nor Ilyanah (2021) studied preschool teachers' perceptions of the importance of children's socio-emotional learning using the survey method through quantitative approach. The study selected 370 preschool teachers in the Southern Zone under the Ministry of Education to answer the questionnaires distributed. The questionnaire was adapted from "Preschool Teachers' Readiness Level in Teaching and Learning Socio-emotional" to evaluate teachers' perception levels. The data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The mean score of preschool teachers' perceptions was 4.41, and the standard deviation was 0.59, indicating a very high interpretation. Based on teaching experience, there was no significant difference in preschool teachers' perceptions.

Hanisah et al. (2020), surveyed teachers' perspectives on the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) for primary school students in Sabah. The relationship between demographic factors and teachers' perspectives was also studied. The study also identified

socio-emotional issues frequently experienced by students and surveyed the resources and techniques applied by teachers in dealing with these issues. About 580 teachers in several primary schools in Sabah participated in their study. The data were analysed using the frequency analysis and chi-square test. The study found that almost all respondents (99.5%) perceived that SEL was important to students, with 43.1% focusing on the importance of PSE for students' success. In contrast, the remaining respondents perceived SEL as very important (40.9%) and important (16.0%).

Based on the respondents' demographics, education level influenced the difference in the perspectives of graduate and non-graduate teachers. The socio-emotional issues found among students were diverse, including family changes, isolation, bullying, emotional behaviour disorders, and autism. The study also reported that most respondents (36.9%) used various coping resources, where they received special support from counsellors when dealing with students' socio-emotional issues.

Mohamed et al. (2019), studied the perceptions of early childhood teachers in Malaysia on social-emotional development. Survey and quantitative approaches were employed in their study. The questionnaire was self-developed and contained four variables: overall picture of social-emotional development, factors related to social-emotional development, social-emotional learning in the classroom, and social-emotional skills. A total of 332 early childhood education teachers participated in the study, which were selected using a random sampling technique. The results showed that early childhood education teachers in Malaysia have a moderate perception of social-emotional development. Descriptive analysis showed that early childhood education teachers in Malaysia have a good understanding of the overall picture and social-emotional skills. However, factors related to social-emotional development and how social emotions should be taught in the classroom were poorly understood by teachers (Mohamed e tal., 2019).

Humphries et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to explore the perceptions of early childhood education teachers (ages three to eight) towards classroom-based social-emotional programmes for young children living in urban areas, particularly in Midwestern city. The study also examined teachers' beliefs as a critical component and challenges of the programmes. The content analysis identified five themes: responsibility, curriculum/program design, contextual relevance, support, and challenges. The results indicated that teachers believed their professional responsibility was to promote their students' social-emotional abilities and competencies. Although some early childhood education teachers (n=9) had no experience with social-emotional learning programmes, their experience with classroom curricula and other school-based programmes governed their perceptions of implementing them. Overall, teachers understood the importance of social-emotional competencies for young children in school settings.

Reynolds (2016), measured the extent to which teachers are confident in their ability to address the social-emotional needs of their students and the strategies and interventions implemented in the classroom to manage social-emotional learning. The study also determined whether special education and general education teachers were familiar with the Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards. The study also analysed whether university and professional development programmes adequately prepare teachers to address the

social-emotional needs of their students effectively. A quantitative method was employed on 25 certified special education teachers and 25 certified general education teachers. The results indicated that universities must prepare teachers with social-emotional learning. The data also supported the need for the district level to offer more workshops and professional development programmes on the social-emotional needs of students.

### **Methodology**

Teachers' awareness of children's emotional development among preschool teachers in Shah Alam was evaluated quantitatively through a survey study. Shah Alam was selected as it has various characteristics that meet the research objectives. Data were collected through questionnaires to establish population opinions based on the population sample (Creswell, 2019).

#### *Research Population and Sample*

The population of kindergarten teachers in Shah Alam is less than 300. This study employed the random sampling method to obtain the sample size of 60 kindergarten teachers in Shah Alam, Selangor, consisting of private and government teachers. This method ensures that each subject in the population has an equal chance of being selected, facilitating the data collection and reducing the cost and time.

Based on Table 1, the majority of teachers were in the age category of 36 to 40 years old, which was 46.7%. This was followed by 25 to 35 years old with 26.7%, over 40 years old with 16.7%, and under 25 years old with 10.0%. The involvement of more experienced teachers (> 36 years old) may indicate a more mature and in-depth understanding of children's emotional development based on their experience in education. The data also showed a significant imbalance between genders, where 83.3% of respondents were female, while 16.7% were male.

Regarding education level, most teachers have Bachelor's degree, with 71.7% respondents. This was followed by 20.0% teachers with Diploma and 8.3% Master's degree. No respondents have SPM or Doctoral Degree. The high number of teachers with Bachelor's degrees implied their sufficient formal education, which should equip them with basic knowledge of psychology and child development.

Table 1 also shows that 53.3% respondents, had teaching experience between 4 and 7 years. This was followed by 16.7% respondents with more than 7 years of experience, 20.0% respondents, with 1-3 years of experience, 10.0% respondents, had less than 1 year of experience. Significant teaching experience reflected that children's emotions could be educated and managed better, as experience is often associated with improved interpersonal skills and deeper understanding of children's emotional dynamics.

This demographic analysis helps understand how teachers operate, and their backgrounds influence their emotional education approach. The results of this study can be used as a basis for further discussion on training needs and support that can be tailored to enhance teachers' awareness and understanding of children's emotional development, taking into account these demographic factors. Table 1 shows the demographics of the respondents involved in this study.

Table 1

*Respondents' Demographics*

ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 25 years	6	10.0%
25-35 years old	16	26.7%
36-30 years old	28	46.7%
Over 40 years old	10	16.7%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	10	16.7%
Female	50	83.3%
<b>Education Level</b>		
SPM	0	0%
Diploma	12	20.0%
Bachelor's Degree	43	71.7%
Master's Degree	5	8.3%
Doctoral Degree	0	0%
<b>Length of Teaching Experience (in years)</b>		
Less than 1 year		
1-3 years	6	10.0%
4-7 years	12	20.0%
More than 7 years	32	53.3%
	10	16.7%

*Research Instruments*

The questionnaire was developed according to the conceptual framework to meet the research objectives. Respondents' attitudes and behaviours in imparting their opinions from several statements were measured using the Likert scale. These statements usually range from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Kumar, 2019). Zikmund (2003) explained that respondents will usually choose a response from a set of five statements, each given a weight and then allowing the researcher to conduct statistical analysis. The respondents' choice indicates their level of agreement with the statement and allows them to express their feelings (Zikmund, 2003). The questions presented in the questionnaire must be structured according to categories to make it easier for the respondent to follow (Saunders et al., 2009).

The research questionnaire was divided into three (3) sections: A, B, and C. Section A outlined the respondents' demographic information, such as gender, age, race, marital status, education level, employment sector, and length of teaching experience in kindergarten. Section B measured the level of knowledge about children's emotional development. Section C assessed teachers' practice level towards children's emotional development based on five (5) answer options according to the Likert scale. 5-point Likert scale includes the following options, each assigned a numerical value 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree. This scale allows respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement, providing a clear numerical representation of their opinion.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

The Google Forms platform was used to distribute the questionnaire. The respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey. The completed questionnaires were downloaded from the platform and analysed using SPSS version 26. The data were analysed descriptively, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Results**

The purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which teachers are aware of and understand the critical aspects of children's emotional development, as well as how their teaching experiences influence their perceptions and actions related to emotional education. The study found teachers' awareness on children's emotional development is high with  $M = 4.1115$  and  $SD = 0.2848$ . Table 2 provided details information on teacher awareness on emotional development.

Table 2

*Teacher Awareness on Emotional Development*

No.	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Score Mean Interpretation
1	Knowledge on emotional development	4.1767	0.4260	High
2	Practices on emotional development	4.0463	0.1436	High
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.1115</b>	<b>0.2848</b>	<b>High</b>

*Teacher Knowledge About Children's Emotional Development*

Table 3 shows teachers' knowledge about children's emotional development, which was analysed based on responses from the questionnaire. Based on Table 3, the results showed a high level of understanding among teachers, with 90% of respondents believing they understood children's emotional development level. They have high confidence level in understanding and identifying children's emotions. This was further reinforced by 85% of respondents stating that they know how to identify emotional changes despite higher standard deviation, which may indicate variations in certainty among some teachers.

Regarding teachers' understanding of emotions in learning, 96.6% of teachers understood that children's emotional development could influence their learning. Awareness of the interaction between emotions and learning ensures teachers can plan and implement learning strategies considering children's emotional needs. In addition, 95% of respondents were familiar with the techniques used to manage children's emotions. This demonstrated the readiness and ability of teachers to integrate emotional management approaches into their daily practice, which is critical in supporting children's socio-emotional development.

However, speed and certainty in identifying emotional factors required improvement. About 85% of respondents were able to identify factors that influence children's emotional development. Thus, teachers need further education and additional resources to understand better the external and internal factors that influence children's emotions. In applying knowledge and updating information, 100% of respondents were confident that they could apply their knowledge about children's emotional development in learning activities. This reflected a very high ability to apply theory into practice. In addition, all respondents stated

that they always seek the latest information about emotional development, signifying a dedication to continuous learning and updating their knowledge.

These results illustrated teachers' high understanding of children's emotional development and related techniques. Nevertheless, some aspects need to be improved, particularly in identifying and understanding the complex factors that influence children's emotions. Continuous professional development and access to up-to-date resources can help enhance understanding and skills.

Table 3

*Teachers' Knowledge of Children's Emotional Development*

Code	Item	n (f)				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
B1	Level of children's emotional development.	0	0	6 (10.0%)	39 (65.0%)	15 (25.0%)
B2	Changes in children's emotions.	0	2 (3.3%)	7 (11.7%)	37 (61.7%)	14 (23.3%)
B3	emotional development affects children learning.	0	0	2 (3.3%)	44 (73.3%)	14 (23.3%)
B4	Specific techniques to help children manage their emotions.	0	1 (1.7%)	2 (3.3%)	43 (71.7%)	14 (23.3%)
B5	Differences between positive and negative emotions in children.	0	0	7 (11.7%)	43 (71.7%)	10 (16.7%)
B6	Factors that influence children's emotional development.	0	2 (3.3%)	7 (11.7%)	41 (68.3%)	10 (16.7%)
B7	Latest information on children's emotional development.	0	0	0	41 (68.3%)	19 (31.7%)
B8	Integrated children's emotional development in learning activities	0	0	0	24 (40%)	36 (60.0%)
B9	Relationship between emotional development and children's behaviour	0	0	11 (18.3%)	33 (55.0%)	16 (26.7%)
B10	Strategies to deal with anger or frustration	0	0	6 (10.0%)	39 (65.0%)	15 (25.0%)

*Teachers' Practice on Children's Emotional Development*

Table 4 shows the levels of teachers' practice in integrating children's emotional development in education, indicating high readiness and effectiveness in this practice. This study



highlighted various approaches applied by teachers to manage and support children's emotional needs in the educational environment.

Table 4 shows that 96.7% teachers took children's emotional development into account in designing learning activities. This indicated that teachers proactively incorporated emotional considerations into their design process, ensuring that learning activities support academic learning and children's emotional development. Moreover, the level of children's involvement in activities that support understanding and regulating their emotions was also high, with 100% of teachers involving them in this process. This reflected an inclusive approach and child-centred education, where they were encouraged to actively recognise and manage their emotions.

Furthermore, strong commitment was also demonstrated by 96.7% teachers to create a supportive environment where children can share their feelings without fear of being ridiculed. A safe and open classroom environment is essential for healthy emotional development. In addition, 96.7% of respondents showed good examples of controlling their emotions in front of children. Children often model teachers' behaviour. Classroom rules and structures explicitly supported emotional control, indicated by 98.3% of teachers. 98.3% teachers were also very active in praising and recognising children who manage their emotions well. Recognition of emotional abilities is part of overall learning. The resources provided to help children also achieved 100% positive responses, indicating the availability of sufficient support materials.

Overall, the results indicated that teachers adopted a supportive approach to integrating emotional development into their teaching. They provided knowledge, created a supportive environment, actively engaged students in managing their emotions, and provided adequate supporting structures and resources. The willingness to implement this practice reflected a strong commitment to the overall development of children, involving both their academic and emotional aspects.

Table 4

*Teachers' Practice towards Children's Emotional Development*

Code	Item	<i>n (f)</i>				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
C1	Take into account children's emotional development when planning learning activities	0	0	2 (3.3%)	55 (91.7%)	3 (5.0%)
C2	Attention to the emotional needs of children in the classroom	0	0	3 (5%)	50 (83.3%)	7 (11.7%)
C3	Engage children in activities that help	0	0	0	53 (88.3%)	7 (11.7%)

	them understand and manage their emotions					
C4	Encourage children to share their feelings without fear of being ridiculed	0	0	2 (3.3%)	54 (90.0%)	4 (6.7%)
C5	Set a good example in dealing with my emotions in front of children	0	0	2 (3.3%)	55 (91.7%)	3 (5.0%)
C6	Rules or structures in the classroom that help manage children's emotions	0	0	1 (1.7%)	59 (98.3%)	0
C7	Praise and recognise children who can deal with their emotions well.	0	0	0	59 (98.3%)	1 (1.7%)
C8	Provide resources or materials to help children identify and manage their emotions.	0	0	0	55 (91.7%)	5 (8.3%)
C9	Take action when I see children having difficulty managing their emotions	0	0	0	55 (91.7%)	5 (8.3%)

## Discussion

The results showed that teachers demonstrated a good level of understanding regarding children's emotional development and practices related to integrating emotional aspects in education. Several main aspects were the focus of this study. First, teachers demonstrated a high level of understanding in recognising children's emotional changes and the effect of emotional development on learning. This is important as teachers can design more effective learning strategies sensitive to children's emotional needs (Elias Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes & Shriver, 1997).

Second, teachers used various supportive approaches to support children's emotional development and integrated it into education. It considered emotional development in designing learning activities, paid attention to emotional needs in the classroom, involved children in activities that helped them understand and regulate their emotions, and modelled teachers' positive behaviour in regulating their emotions in front of children. In addition, teachers were also active in creating a supportive environment where children could share their feelings without fear. Teachers provided appropriate rewards and recognition to

children who could regulate their emotions well and provided resources or materials to help children identify and regulate their emotions.

It was also revealed that teachers have taken proactive steps to support children's emotional development in the educational environment. However, improvement is necessary in several aspects, particularly in recognising factors that could influence children's emotional development (Mohamed & Toran, 2018). Overall, this study provided important insights into teachers' awareness and practices in supporting children's emotional development, emphasising the need for further education and professional development.

### **Conclusion**

This study provided an overview of teachers' awareness of their knowledge and practices in managing children's emotions in education. The results indicated significant teacher awareness differences based on their teaching experience. Teachers with longer teaching experience tended to be more aware of children's emotional development. However, the differences in teachers' practices did not reach the same significance level. Therefore, additional support should be given to teachers with lower awareness of children's emotional development, especially new teachers. Professional development programmes tailored to teachers' needs have the potential to elevate their knowledge and skills in managing children's emotions in the classroom.

The data collected in this study could not be generalised to all teachers in Malaysia, but the results are applicable as a guide for further research. Other factors influencing teachers' awareness and practice, such as teaching approaches, organisational support and external pressures, can be studied further. In addition, the effects of specific interventions designed to elevate teachers' awareness and practice in managing children's emotions can also be investigated in future studies. Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding teachers' roles in supporting children's socio-emotional development. By understanding the factors influencing teachers' awareness and practices, appropriate steps can be taken to improve the quality of education and children's well-being in schools.

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