

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the influence of emotions on the formation of social interactions among primary school-aged children in Malang City. The research sample consisted of two hundred children selected randomly from ten public or private elementary schools. The frequency and intensity of children's emotional expressions and emotional management abilities were primarily assessed through questionnaires and observation guides. Diverse aspects of social interactions and emotions were evaluated using a Likert scale ranging from "very rarely" to "very often" on a scale of 1 to 5. Multiple linear regression was utilized to examine the relationship between emotional regulation and relationship quality, and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Algorithm was implemented to assess the validity of the instruments. Significant positive correlations were observed between the number of peers one has and the degree of happiness expressed. However, no observable correlation was found between the number of acquaintances or social interactions and emotions of sadness or rage.

Keywords: *social relations, emotional formation, children of primary school age*

Introduction

At this stage of their development, primary school-aged children are crucial in forming their personalities and social interactions. This process is often influenced by their ability to

manage and express emotions. Emotions play a vital role in directing children's social behavior and shaping their relationships with peers at school. Therefore, it is essential to understand how emotions' role in forming social

relationships in primary school-aged children can affect their social and psychological well-being. Children who create good relationships with their peers are more likely to feel accepted, supported, and safe in school. One of the factors that can influence children's social relationship formation is their ability to manage and express emotions.

Over the past ten years, research has produced significant findings regarding the relationship between emotions and social interactions in primary school-aged children. The expression of positive emotions in children can contribute to the enhancement of pleasant and supportive social interactions among peers in the school environment. (Johnson, Finlon, and Izard 2016). This finding underscores the importance of positive emotional expression in shaping positive social relationships. According to one study, the expression of positive emotions, such as joy and smiles, is linked to better social relationships. In contrast, the expression of negative emotions such as anger or sadness is often associated with interpersonal conflicts (Campbell et al., 2016).

Furthermore, children better at managing their negative emotions tend to have more positive social interactions with their peers. Significant research has also focused on the importance of emotional expression in social relationships (Denham et al.,

2019). Appropriate emotional expression can strengthen social bonds and facilitate healthy interactions between children. However, out-of-context or excessive expression of negative emotions can lead to conflict and social isolation (Saarni, 1999).

Psychological and educational approaches have been considered effective in helping children develop their emotional skills. Emotion education programs can provide children with a better understanding of their own emotions, which can assist them in managing their emotions more effectively (Nadia et al., 2023). Teachers and parents are essential in helping children develop their social and emotional skills. Systematic emotion education can help children recognize and manage their emotions better, improving the quality of their social relationships (Elias et al., 1997). Emotion education programs can help children recognize, understand, and manage their emotions better, improving their ability to interact socially (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

However, several studies have shown that not all children have the same ability to manage and express their emotions. Significant individual variation in children's ability to manage their emotions can affect their social relationships with their peers (Nilsen et al., 2016). Some studies have focused more on one aspect of the relationship between emotions and social

The Role Of Emotions In The Formation of Social Relationships in Primary School-Age Children: A Psychological and Educational Approach

interactions, while others have yet to consider the role of psychological and educational approaches comprehensively. Therefore, by comprehensively investigating the role of emotions in the formation of social relationships in primary school-aged children in Malang City with psychological and academic approaches, this study is expected to fill the gap by providing deeper insights into the interactions between aspects of emotions and children's social interactions in the context of psychological and educational approaches in this diverse urban environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study explores the role of emotions in forming social relationships in primary school-aged children using psychological and educational approaches. This study uses quantitative methods to collect and analyze statistically measurable data, thus providing a more objective picture of the relationship between the variables under study. This study used a quantitative survey design with a descriptive and correlational approach. This approach was chosen to describe children's emotional behavior and evaluate the relationship between their emotion management skills, emotional expression, and social interaction. This design allows the researcher to identify

common patterns and relationships between the variables (Creswell 2014).

The population in this study was elementary school-aged children in grades 1 to 5 in Malang City. The study sample consisted of 200 children randomly selected from 10 public or private primary schools. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that all grades and age groups were proportionally represented (Anjarwati et al., 2024). Sample selection was conducted using random sampling techniques to ensure the sample was representative of the broader population (Lin et al., 2024). Random sample selection aims to ensure fair representation of the wider population and reduce bias that may arise in selecting participants. Inclusion criteria included children aged 6-11 years attending the selected primary schools. Children with special needs who may have hurt their ability to express emotions or interact socially were excluded from the study.

The main instruments used in this study were questionnaires and observation guides. The questionnaire measured the frequency and intensity of children's emotional expressions and their ability to manage emotions. The questionnaires were completed by teachers and parents, who had direct insight into the children's emotional and social behavior. A Likert scale of 1-5 was used to rate different aspects of

emotions and social interactions, from "very rarely" to "very often" (Bryman, 2016). Likert scales measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or group of people about social phenomena (Sugiyono 2021). The statement answered by the respondent gets a value according to the alternative answer concerned. The assessment criteria for the statement have four alternative answers, namely for positive statements, which have a value of SS = 4, S = 3, TS = 2, and STS = 1, while negative statements have a value of SS = 1, S = 2, TS = 3, and STS = 4. The following describes the scale range in the Likert model in Table 1.

Table 1. Likert Scale Range

Attitude Statement	Very often	Often	Not often (rarely)	Very Infrequently (very rarely)
positive	4	3	2	1
negative	1	2	3	4

Researchers used observation guides to record children's behavior at school, especially during recess and group activities. These observations included notes on the frequency of expression of positive (e.g., happiness, pride) and negative (e.g., anger, frustration) emotions, as well as positive and negative social interactions (Maxwell, 2012).

Data processing techniques are carried out by testing the instrument's validity using the Pearson Product Moment correlation formula and multiple Linear Regression between Emotional Regulation and Relationship Quality. Data analysis techniques by determining the category of respondents' responses to aspects of emotional intelligence by taking from the highest score and lowest score. After going through the data analysis process, the correlation test is then carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

From the results of the validity test of the instrument using a questionnaire on the variable of managing emotions with emotional expression from the 200 samples studied, the average expression of happiness (Mean = 3.75) is higher than the expression of sadness (Mean = 2.91) and expression of anger (Mean = 3.20), indicating that children tend to express happiness more often than negative emotions. The mean number of friends (Mean = 5.25) suggests that children have an average of five friends in their school environment. Mean social engagement (Mean = 4.10) indicates that children have a high level of social engagement in the school environment. The description of each variable can be seen in Table 2.

The Role Of Emotions In The Formation of Social Relationships in Primary School-Age Children: A Psychological and Educational Approach

Table 2: Recapitulation of Data

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Expressions of Happiness	3.75	0.82	200
Expressions of Sadness	2.91	1.15	200
Angry Expressions	3.20	0.97	200
Number of Friends	5.25	1.63	200
Social Engagement	4.10	0.95	200

Furthermore, data on the number of children's friends was obtained, and the average was 5.25. This shows that children usually have a relatively comprehensive social network in their primary school environment. In addition, children's social engagement, with an average of 4.10, suggests that they are actively involved in social interactions at school.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Table

	Expressions of happiness	Expressions of sadness	Angry expressions	Number of friends	Social engagement
Expressions of happiness	1.000				
Expressions of sadness	0.25**	1.000			
Angry expressions	0.15*	0.10	1.000		
Number of friends	0.45**	-0.05	0.20*	1.000	
Social engagement	0.30**	0.15*	0.10	0.40**	1.000

Notes:

Significant correlation coefficients are marked with an asterisk (*).

** $p < 0.05$ (significant), * $p < 0.1$ (likely to be significant).

Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between the expression of happiness and the number of friends ($r = 0.45, p < 0.05$). This result confirms that the more often children express happiness, the more likely they are to have more friends in the school environment. However, there was no significant correlation between expressions of sadness or anger and the number of friends or social engagement. There was a significant positive correlation between number of friends and social engagement ($r = 0.40, p < 0.05$), suggesting that the more friends a child has, the higher their level of social engagement.

Furthermore, regression analysis showed that happiness expression significantly predicted the number of friends ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.05$). That is, the higher the happiness children express, the more likely they are to have more friends in the school environment. However, expressions of sadness and anger did not significantly influence the number of friends.

Discussion

This study showed a significant positive correlation between the

expression of happiness and the number of children's friends in the primary school environment. This correlation was found to have a value of 0.45 with a significance level of less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). This means that the higher a child's happiness expression, the more likely they are to have more friends at school.

This research contributes to understanding the relationship between expressions of happiness and children's social relationships, particularly in the primary school setting (Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013). The findings are consistent with several previous studies suggesting that expressions of happiness can be essential in forming and maintaining social relationships in children (Twenge et al., 2016). In positive psychology, expressions of joy are often regarded as social signals that attract others to interact with them (Don et al., 2024). When children express happiness, they tend to attract the attention of their peers and build stronger social bonds (Harker & Keltner, 2001). This can expand children's social networks and increase opportunities to interact positively with others. In an educational context, these findings also have important practical implications. Teachers and school counselors can notice and support children's expressions of happiness as part of efforts to promote positive social relationships and an

inclusive school environment (Khanna & Singh, 2019).

This study used regression analysis to assess whether the expression of happiness is a significant predictor of the number of friends in primary school children. The results showed that happiness expression was a significant predictor with a beta coefficient (β) of 0.37 and a p-value of less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the higher a child's happiness expression, the more likely they are to have more friends in the school environment.

This finding aligns with previous theories and research emphasizing the importance of positive emotions in social interactions. The broaden-and-build theory states that positive emotions, such as happiness, expand an individual's thoughts and actions, building personal and social resources. In the context of children, expressions of joy can increase their openness in interacting with peers and form more robust social relationships (Fredrickson, 2001).

Other studies show that children who express happiness more often have broader and deeper social networks. Consistently expressed happiness can attract other children to interact, strengthening social bonds and increasing the number of friends. This suggests that happiness benefits the child's emotional well-being and

The Role Of Emotions In The Formation of Social Relationships in Primary School-Age Children: A Psychological and Educational Approach

significantly impacts their social relationships (Layous et al., 2012).

Educational studies emphasize that a school environment that supports the expression of positive emotions can enhance the learning experience and student engagement. When children feel happy and show expressions of happiness, they tend to be more readily accepted by their peers, which can reduce feelings of isolation and increase social engagement at school (Seligman et al., 2009).

The results of this study also support the view that happiness is an essential factor in developing social skills. Expressions of happiness can facilitate more effective communication and empathy, which are necessary components in forming and maintaining positive social relationships. Children who can express happiness well tend to be better able to communicate with their peers and show empathy, improving the quality and quantity of their social relationships (Ahmed, 2014).

Research by Parker et al. (2006) found that children who frequently displayed happiness were likelier to engage in group activities and games involving social interaction, contributing to an increase in their friends. These activities allow children to interact with more peers, expanding their social network.

SUMMARY

The results showed that the expression of happiness significantly influences the number of friends children have. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between the expression of joy and the number of friends ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). This means that children who show happiness more often have more friends. In addition, regression analysis confirmed that the expression of joy was a significant predictor for the number of friends ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.05$), which suggests that happiness plays a vital role in expanding children's social networks.

In contrast, sadness and anger expressions showed no significant correlation with the number of friends or social engagement. Although there was a significant positive correlation between sadness and happiness expressions ($r = 0.254$, $p < 0.01$) as well as between anger and happiness expressions ($r = 0.189$, $p < 0.05$), their impact on social relationships was not as strong as happiness expressions. This suggests that although children who frequently express sadness or anger may also show happiness, these negative emotions do not significantly affect their social relationships.

These findings have several important implications in the fields of psychology and education. Firstly, the ability to express happiness effectively is a critical factor in forming positive

social relationships among primary school-aged children. This suggests that interventions designed to improve happiness expression and social skills can significantly impact children's ability to create and maintain social relationships.

Secondly, although negative emotions, such as sadness and anger, did not show a significant relationship with the number of friends, it is essential to remain attentive to how children manage and express these emotions. Healthy emotion management is critical to emotional development, affecting children's general well-being and social adaptation in the long run. Therefore, educational and psychological programs that help children understand and manage negative emotions remain necessary.

This research confirms the importance of emotional expression in forming social relationships in primary school-aged children. In particular, the expression of happiness was a significant factor in establishing and maintaining positive social relationships. Thus, psychological and educational approaches that support healthy emotional development in children can help them develop strong social skills and meaningful relationships, supporting their overall emotional and social well-being.

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The Role Of Emotions In The Formation of Social Relationships in Primary School-Age Children: A Psychological and Educational Approach

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