



Students Social Development Through Peer Interaction at Early Childhood Level

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Abstract

The study explored students' social development through peer interaction at early childhood level in district Vehari. The major objective of the study is; to find out students social development through peer interaction at early childhood education. All teachers who are teaching to early childhood classes at primary schools in district Vehari were the population of the study. A sample of four hundred primary school teachers were selected from the population of the study. Frequency, mean score and standard deviation were used as statistical techniques. Data was collected through questionnaire and it has fifteen items in total. After analyzing data it was found that students enjoy school with friends because they understand their peers' feelings and also express their feeling to their classmates. It is also found that students do socialize with their classmates at early childhood level. The study concludes that students enjoy school with friends due to early childhood environment while early childhood experience boosts academic enthusiasm and supports of classmates.

Keywords: Social development, peer interaction, early childhood education

1. Introduction

When a country invests in its young children, it invests in its future, which is why this program is so beneficial. Young children are a reliable barometer of a country's potential for future greatness. The years between infancy and six are known as "early childhood." During this time, a child's personality and habits must grow and change (Yuliani Sujiono, 2009). A child's development and growth are at their peak in the early years of life. A healthy diet and lots of stimulation are essential for growth and improvement. Gardner (2003) says that a child's first four years are the best time to build relationships and grow.

Two distinct types of change occur in a person throughout their lifetime: (1) growth, or the natural, inevitable, and progressive alteration of a person's physical size and shape, and (2) development, or the progressive, stable, and cyclical evolution of one's personality. Growing up means becoming a more mature person with better fine and gross motor skills. Another way of looking at it is that speech-social interactions exemplify clothed psychosocial behavior. An early childhood education program could be very helpful for a child's social and emotional growth (Erbil, 2020). Any positive experience a child has in their formative years, according to Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich, and Gill (2013), helps them develop socially and academically.

One definition says that psychosocial development is "related to a person's social environment or relationships with other people, which can affect how they act." From the first caregiver, the mother, to the rest of the family, friends, school, and other sex differences, a young child undergoes many transitions in the first few years of life (Santrock, 2002). The eight stages of human emotional and social adjustment provide the basis of the process known as psychosocial development, which occurs from early childhood through maturity (Gunnar & Donzella, 2002).

Children who participate in preschool programs have a leg up on the social adjustment curve compared to their peers who do not (Ting, 2007). The first few years of a child's life are important for their mental and social growth, and they can be helped by having positive role models, a safe environment, and a challenging curriculum. Preschool children regularly develop their psychosocial skills. It is a big reason preschool education is important (Ekaningtyas, 2020).

At this stage in their development, preschoolers need to feel safe, like they can trust people, be comfortable, get help from adults, build their confidence, and play (King, Pattwell, Glatt, and Lee, 2014; Ali & Saleh, 2022). Evidence suggests that helping kids emotionally and socially in their early years pays dividends later. Martin and Bolliger (2018) say that the experiences students have in the classroom greatly affect how they grow as people and as members of society.

An individual's growth and maturation are lifelong endeavors. It helps them develop their skills, figure out what they want to do with their lives, and reach their fullest potential. It is time to start working on one's own growth and development. Happily, formative events allow us to mature appropriately at each stage of life. A child's cultural functions "appear twice: first on the social level, and then on the individual level," as Vygotsky (1978) put it. What this indicates is that interacting with others facilitates one's educational growth.

Because each child is good at different things, they also need a different amount of freedom to grow. A child's sense of self-worth, individuality, and empathy can greatly affect how much they are loved, supported, and driven. Teachers have a lot on their plates, and it would be impossible for them to shape their students' personalities into whole and stable people on their own. For a long time, schools were seen as merely a place to acquire knowledge rather than as a springboard for a kid's overall growth and development. The idea has evolved as individual institutions emphasize developing students' moral and social character.

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When a child is young, they need someone who will encourage and help them learn and grow. For a child's healthy mental and social development, they need to learn things in the classroom, like being self-confident, original, and honest. A child with self-confidence can take charge when needed, trust or not trust others, experience autonomy, and doubt, grow up independent, hard-working adult, and even have an inferiority complex. Academic success, outlook, ability to engage in the scientific method, stamina, determination, and critical thinking are all factors that a child's personality formation can influence in the early years. Early in life, a child can benefit from exposure to pleasant, healthy, and supportive influences. Consequently, this research aims to investigate early childhood students' psychological and personal growth.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To find out the factors that contributes toward students' psychosocial development at early childhood level.
2. To sort out the individual needs of students for their personal development at early childhood level.
3. To find out teacher perception about students psychosocial and personal development at early childhood level.

2. Review of Related Literature

According to Gordon and Browne (2004), early childhood education spans the first eight years of a child's life. Furthermore, research shows that the ages 0–8 are included in the definition of early childhood. According to the literature, preschool begins with class play and continues through the third grade. From kindergarten through grade three, kids have the option of making use of this extra time. Early childhood education (ECE) benefits children in many ways, including their social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and problem-solving development and their preparedness for the challenges of later life (Lemke, Lecusay, Cole, and Michalchik, 2015).

One of the main goals of schooling is to mold students into citizens who are open-minded, considerate, appreciative of diversity, self-motivated problem solvers, and contributors to society at large. Individualists who want to have the above traits must also be good at school and have a solid set of life skills. Applying acquired social skills in appropriate contexts enhances one's character. Future difficulties with school dropout and poor grades can be mitigated by utilizing all of a student's acquired social skills.

Learning is a group effort that involves not just the classroom teacher but also the student's family, community, and peers. Individual learning takes place in the company of parents, teachers, and peers, according to Schlesinger et al. (2020). In elementary school, learning is proactive because students care about the values and expectations of their classmates. Today's kids learn not just from their parents and teachers but also from their peers.

According to Allison (2011), youngsters take the time to consider the perspectives of others, view the world through the lens of their worldview, and pay little attention to the perspectives of others around them. Because of this, they are egocentric or focused on their own experiences in the world and do not think about how other people might see things. As kids get smarter in preschool, they are taught to see things from different points of view. They also learn to understand and consider the points of view of others.

People are a country's most valuable asset. Thus, every culture trains its members to be responsible and mature custodians of the nation's future. It will only be possible once the next generation has reached full mental, physical, emotional, and social maturity. Children are inevitably society's future adults. Research confirms the old adage that kids reflect their parents perfectly. According to Malik (2012), the brain activity of children is twice that of adults until it begins to decline around puberty. It is why there are so many ECDCs worldwide if a child requires treatment.

According to Santrock (2002), an individual's behavior can be influenced by factors linked with their psychosocial development, such as the people and institutions with which they interact. Preschoolers experience developmental shifts in their interpersonal relationships, sense of identity, peer dynamics, and gender roles. According to the eight stages of human psychological and social maturity, psychosocial development is an individual's adjusting to their environment as they grow from childhood into adulthood.

As Ekaningtyas (2020) pointed out, educators can use a variety of methods to foster children's social and emotional growth in the classroom; however, it seems clear that ECE teachers' awareness of the importance of nurturing children's social and emotional growth at a young age continues to place a premium on the emotional and social aspects of their student's development. In their article "The Consequences of Helping and Advising Tasks on the Psychosocial, Objective, and Talent Development of Students," Sukenti, Tambak, and Siregar (2021) detail these effects. Schools require instructor guidance and counseling services to play their expected duties.

Muscle use, both large and small, is an aspect of physical development in children. Strong muscles allow us to move around, jump, and lift heavy things. Muscles in the hands and fingers are put to work when sorting small items, writing, or sculpting. Children benefit from doing their daily chores because they get to do things that help their muscles grow. The youngster is leaving the early stages of his life and the peak of his active physical development behind him. His physical attributes are formidable: he is robust, elastic, and full of vitality. He needs a patient instructor who will accept him for who he is and motivate him to improve (Ali & Saleh, 2022).

Peer engagement is recommended for a child's healthy mental and social growth.

Ability sharing is how kids learn to help each other and do well in different situations. They teach kids how to initiate and complete social interactions in various settings and with varying numbers of individuals. Dealing with peers and adults helps kids develop social skills. Their early upbringing shapes a large deal of a person's later social views and behavior. Because they wish to work with people other than their parents and relatives, they learn a wide variety of new talents.

Involvement with others is crucial to developing one's identity and consolidating one's knowledge. Students learn proper ways to connect with their peers and other members of their social groups (Sukenti, Taback, & Siregar, 2021). They have a sense of duty, uniqueness, and dignity regarding their expertise. Children learn the value of friendship by experiencing its transformative effects in areas such as self-esteem, social skills, and emotional expression. According to the findings, it is undeniable that pupils benefit most from learning in a group setting. Evidence suggests that being around one's peers can help foster a strong sense of personal responsibility, and the modern classroom idea provides students with this opportunity. Because there are many opportunities for growth and improvement in social and emotional well-being, Children become valuable contributors to society and the classroom community when they acquire and hone certain characteristics. Long-term damage can be done to a student's sense of self when they do not have the support of their friends and classmates. The people they hang out with throughout this formative time shape the students' identities.

Studies show that most students do not have a strong sense of civic duty, responsible citizenship, group etiquette, loyalty to the law, or traditional honorable ethics. Students can be influenced to adopt the desired attitudes and behaviors through the instillation of respect and moral values, as well as through the cultivation of academic and social perspectives through carefully planned educational activities based on free analysis, investigation, discussion, and debate.

3. Research Methodology

This study aimed to find out how early childhood educators in south Punjab thought peer contact helped their students learn how to get along with others. A quantitative research method was used to determine how teachers thought their kids' interactions with their peers in early elementary school affected their social growth. Collecting and analyzing numerical data to explain, predict, and regulate events of interest is what quantitative research is all about (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2010). Everyone worked as a public school teacher in the elementary grades. One hundred elementary school teachers were randomly picked from each of the four districts in south Punjab (Bahawalpur, Multan, Muzzafer Garh, and Vehari). The researchers' questionnaire was an important tool that helped them achieve the study's primary goal. The researchers' questionnaire ended up having fifteen questions. The questionnaire was conducted through pilot testing to see if the questions were clear, concise, and focused on the right things. Unnecessary details were removed after the items were created. The district of Vehari was used for the initial tests.

After some initial changes, the questionnaires were given to experts in the field. They were asked to comment on how clear the questions were and how they were put together. Experts in the right fields were asked for their opinions to ensure that all parts of the instrument were adequate and correct. We greatly valued their insightful comments. So, the parts that were unclear or did not make sense were made clearer or taken out completely. A total alpha value of 0.831 was found after testing the questionnaire's dependability. Researchers went to the study area in person to collect data and sent out questionnaires by courier, but the response rate needed to be higher. Four hundred questionnaires were collected, and all responses were thorough and accurate. After cleaning and organizing the data in Microsoft Excel, it was sent to SPSS for statistical analysis. Frequency, mean score and standard deviation were used to help figure out what the data meant.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretations

The above-mentioned table informed us about teachers' perceptions about students' social development through peer interaction at early childhood education. Item 1 indicates that the respondents ($187 + 191 = 278$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students enjoy school with friends" whereas the teachers ($4 + 7 = 11$) show disagree behavior about the said statement. The mean score (4.43) and the standard deviation (.816) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students enjoy their school with their friends.

Item 2 indicates that the respondents ($75 + 201 = 276$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students understand their peers' feelings." whereas the teachers ($39 + 10 = 49$) show disagree behavior about Statement. Similarly, teachers (75) responded that they are undecided about the statement, "Students understand their peers' feelings". The mean score (3.72) and the standard deviation (.878) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students understand their peers' feelings. Item 3 indicates that the respondents ($65 + 233 = 298$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Student express their feelings for their classmates." whereas the teachers ($21 + 4 = 25$) show disagree behavior about statement. The mean score (3.87) and the standard deviation (.778) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students express their feelings or sympathies with their classmates.

Item 4 indicates that the respondents ($55 + 212 = 267$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students treat one another with dignity and respect." whereas the teachers ($40 + 2 = 42$) show disagree behavior about statement. The mean score (3.71) and the standard deviation (.825) shows that majority of the respondents inclined toward the statement that students treat one another with dignity and respect.

Items 5 indicates that respondents ($65 + 223 = 288$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students work with fellow in academics." whereas the teachers ($40 + 5 = 45$) show disagree behavior toward the statement. The mean score (3.79) and the standard deviation (.841) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students work with fellow in academics.

Table 1: Responses of Teachers

S#	Statements	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean	SD
1	Students enjoy school with friends.	187	191	11	4	7	4.43	.816
2	Students understand their peers' feelings.	75	201	75	39	10	3.72	.878
3	Students express their feelings for their classmates.	65	233	77	21	4	3.87	.778
4	The students treat one other with dignity and respect.	55	212	91	40	2	3.71	.825
5	Students work with fellows in academics.	65	223	67	40	5	3.79	.841
6	Students dislike teamwork.	38	77	13	198	74	2.45	1.087
7	Students enjoy assisting classmates.	58	240	74	16	12	3.81	.796
8	Students do socialize with classmates.	65	197	78	55	5	3.48	1.139
9	Student shyness prevents them to converse.	20	110	98	131	41	2.74	1.066
10	The students do not share their belongings with their classmates.	37	77	112	141	33	2.77	1.080
11	School is fun for the students.	81	201	72	36	10	3.79	.903
12	The classroom environment inspires students to learn.	94	268	29	7	2	4.10	1.807
13	Classrooms allow students to interact.	106	260	20	10	4	4.12	.658
14	In school, students behave well.	65	210	91	32	2	3.79	.790
15	In the classroom, students can feel safe.	115	256	22	3	4	4.19	1.783

Item 6 indicates that the respondents ($38 + 77 = 115$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students dislike teamwork" whereas the teachers ($198 + 74 = 272$) show disagree behavior toward the statement, "Students dislike teamwork". The mean score (2.45) and the standard deviation (1.087) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students like teamwork in the classroom.

Item 7 indicates that the respondents ($58 + 240 = 298$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students enjoy assisting classmates." whereas the teachers ($16 + 12 = 28$) show disagree behavior about students enjoy assisting classmates. The mean score (3.81) and the standard deviation (0.796) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students enjoy assisting classmates.

Item 8 reveals that respondents ($65 + 197 = 262$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students do socialize with classmates", whereas the teachers ($55 + 5 = 60$) show disagree behavior about students socialization with classmates. The mean score (3.48) and the standard deviation (1.139) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students are socialized with their classmates.

Item 9 discover that respondents ($20 + 110 = 130$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Students shyness prevents them to converse" whereas the teachers ($131 + 41 = 172$) show disagree behavior about students shyness prevent them to convers. The mean score (2.77) and the standard deviation (1.080) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their disagree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students shyness do not prevent them to converse with classmates.

Item 10 indicates that respondents ($37 + 77 = 114$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "The students do not share their belongings with their classmates", whereas the teachers ($141 + 33 = 174$) show disagree behavior about students do not share their belongings with their classmates. The mean score (2.77) and the standard deviation (1.080) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their disagree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that students do not share their belongings with their classmates at early childhood education.

Item 11 indicates that respondents ($81 + 201 = 282$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "School is fund for the students", whereas the teachers ($36 + 10 = 46$) show disagree behavior about school is a fund for the students. The mean score (3.79) and the standard deviation (.903) shows that majority of the respondents inclined

their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that school is fun for students at early childhood education.

Item 12 indicates that respondents ($94 + 268 = 362$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "The classroom environment inspires students to learn.", whereas the teachers ($7 + 2 = 9$) show disagree behavior about the classroom environment inspires students to learn. The mean score (4.10) and the standard deviation (1.807) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that the classroom environment inspires students to learn.

Item 13 indicates that the respondents ($106 + 260 = 366$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "Classroom allow students to interact.", whereas the teachers ($10 + 4 = 14$) show disagree behavior about classroom allow students to interact. The mean score (4.12) and the standard deviation (.658) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their disagree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that classroom allow students to interact at early childhood education.

Item 14 indicates that respondents ($65 + 210 = 375$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "In school, students behave well.", whereas the teachers ($32 + 2 = 34$) show disagree behavior about students behave well in school. The mean score (3.79) and the standard deviation (.790) shows that majority of the respondents inclined agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that in school, students behave well.

Item 15 indicates that respondents ($115 + 256 = 371$) show agree behavior towards the statement, "In the classroom, students can feel safe.", whereas the teachers ($3 + 4 = 7$) show disagree behavior that in the classroom, students can feel safe. The mean score (4.19) and the standard deviation (1.783) shows that majority of the respondents inclined their agree behavior toward the statement. So, it can be concluded that in the classroom, students can feel safe.

5. Findings and Conclusions

Data analysis yielded these results.

- i. The study found that majority of the respondents ($187 + 191 = 278$) responded that students enjoy school with friends at early childhood education level.
- ii. The study also found that majority of respondents ($75 + 201 = 276$) responded that students understand their peers' feelings.
- iii. It is revealed that majority of respondents ($65 + 233 = 298$) responded that student express their feelings for their classmates.
- iv. It is also revealed that majority of respondents ($55 + 212 = 267$) responded that students treat one another with dignity and respect.
- v. It is found that majority of respondents ($65 + 223 = 288$) responded that students work with fellow in academics.
- vi. It is also found that majority of respondents ($198 + 74 = 272$) disagree that students dislike teamwork.
- vii. The study found that majority of respondents ($58 + 240 = 298$) responded that students enjoy assisting their classmates.
- viii. The study also found that majority of respondents ($65 + 197 = 262$) responded that students do socialize with classmates.
- ix. It is found that majority of respondents ($131 + 41 = 172$) disagree that students shyness prevents them to converse.
- x. It is also found that majority of the respondents ($141 + 33 = 174$) responded that students do not share their belongings with their classmates.
- xi. It is found that majority of respondents ($81 + 201 = 282$) responded that school is fun for students at early childhood level education.
- xii. It is also found that majority of respondents ($96 + 268 = 362$) responded that classroom inspires students to learn.
- xiii. The study found that majority of respondents ($106 + 260 = 366$) responded that classroom allow students to interact with each other at early childhood education.
- xiv. The study revealed that majority of respondents ($65 + 210 = 375$) responded that in school, students behave well.
- xv. The study discovered that majority of respondents ($115 + 256 = 371$) responded that in classroom, students can feel safe.

In Pakistan's public education system, memorization is prioritized over reasoning, cognitive and theoretical understanding, creativity, and critical thinking, according to a study that surveyed early childhood educators about their students' social development as a result of their interactions with their classmates. According to the study's findings, the social environment of early childhood contributes to the fact that pupils love going to school. Early childhood education has a greater impact on children's socio-emotional and personal development. Having positive experiences in early life might enhance academic motivation and encouragement from classmates. A child's personality will be formed by their environment, even if they do not have any peers. Therefore, having a positive learning environment benefits the development of personality. They are reliable in completing assignments on time and following class norms.

Preschool children at this level have essential core needs that include proper care, love, care, attention, correct nourishment, health and growth of physical body parts, development of the mind, and language development. The study's results show that most preschoolers' basic needs are met. Preschoolers can quickly understand what they are taught because they have good large and small motor skills, and their minds are developing quickly. Children in preschool have more self-assurance and ask more questions. The vast majority of children are engaged during the lesson. Early childhood education helps kids feel good about themselves, make lots of friends, and want to take part in activities outside of school. Students cooperate. The educators think that students should be able to communicate what they like and do not like, demonstrating that the kids get along better with the teachers. Students request assistance. Children have good experiences with their preschool teachers because they are kind, caring, and interested in the kids' well-being.

Personal growth is ongoing after a student has finished their formal education. However, the first five years of life are crucial for developing brain networks. As a result, this study showed that most students could finish the tasks needed in this time frame. They can develop new ideas, care for themselves, and solve problems by figuring out what is wrong and working to fix it.

5.1. Recommendations

- i. Authorities may need to implement early childhood education plans for holistic child development fully.
- ii. Motivating public and private ECE teachers to promote ECE education in Pakistan.
- iii. Parents may be educated on the importance of early childhood education to the program's success and student growth.

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