

IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTDOOR LEARNING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence is one of the important skills that must be developed in elementary school children. Along with the advancement of educational approaches, outdoor learning has emerged as one of the effective methods in helping children develop aspects of emotional intelligence. In this learning context, children are given the opportunity to interact with the natural environment, peers, and situations that stimulate emotional management and social skills. This article aims to discuss comprehensively how outdoor learning can make a significant contribution to the development of emotional intelligence in elementary school children. With a more natural and practical approach, outdoor learning offers a space to facilitate children's understanding of emotions, stress management, empathy, and collaboration in a more dynamic and enjoyable educational environment.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, outdoor learning, elementary school children, holistic education

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence is an important aspect of child development, especially during the early childhood years (approximately 6–12 years old), which is the initial phase of character, emotional, and social skill formation. The concept of emotional intelligence popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995) emphasizes the importance of the ability to recognize one's own emotions and those of others, manage emotions, motivate oneself, and build healthy social relationships. In the field of education, this aspect is increasingly recognized as a determinant of children's success, both in academic contexts and in daily social life (Goleman, 1995; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Unfortunately, the education system in Indonesia still places significant emphasis on cognitive aspects and academic performance as the primary indicators of student success (Zuchdi, 2011).

Elementary school-aged children often face various social and emotional dynamics, ranging from adaptability, cooperation, to managing frustration and conflict. However, classroom learning that is too focused on sitting, reading, and writing indoors often limits natural movement and social interaction (Marjohan, 2002). This can slow down the development of their emotional intelligence. Therefore, innovative approaches to learning are needed that can integrate real-life experiences, physical activities, and emotional stimulation in a balanced manner (Suparno, 2010).

Outdoor learning has emerged as a promising alternative approach to supporting emotional intelligence development. Learning activities conducted in open spaces, such as parks, school gardens, or educational forests, allow children to engage directly with their environment and peers. In such settings, children are freer to express themselves, learn to cope with natural challenges, collaborate in groups, and manage their emotions when faced with unexpected situations (Waite, 2011). Direct interaction with nature has also been shown to enhance children's inner calm and self-reflection skills (Louv, 2005).

Previous studies have shown that outdoor learning not only increases children's motivation to learn and active participation, but also has a positive impact on their social and emotional skills development (Rickinson et al., 2004). Activities involving teamwork, nature exploration, and post-activity reflection can trigger the growth of empathy, patience, and self-awareness. Additionally, outdoor learning can reduce stress and boredom that children often experience due to monotonous learning routines (Ernst & Monroe, 2004).

In Indonesia, the outdoor learning approach is still relatively new and has not been systematically implemented at the primary education level. Most schools have not yet utilized the potential of their surrounding environment as an active and participatory learning space (Kurniasih & Sani, 2015). This situation is exacerbated by limited teacher training, inadequate supporting infrastructure, and an educational paradigm that remains focused on exam results. Yet, in the face of 21st-century challenges, children are expected to possess non-cognitive skills such as communication abilities, collaboration, and good emotional control (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Given this background, it is very important to examine in depth how outdoor learning can contribute to the development of emotional intelligence in young children. This research is relevant as an effort to bridge the gap between children's emotional development needs and the learning approaches used in schools. By analyzing effective forms of outdoor activities and their impact on the dimensions of children's emotional intelligence, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the field of elementary education (Dhanapal, Alimin, & Subramaniam, 2014).

This study aims to describe the role of outdoor learning in the development of emotional intelligence in elementary school children, as well as to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. The research findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, school principals, and parents in designing more holistic and contextual learning strategies. Ultimately, this study also seeks to promote a paradigm shift in elementary education in Indonesia, moving away from a sole focus on cognitive aspects toward a more balanced approach that takes into account children's affective and socio-emotional dimensions (Suyadi, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research process based on a methodology that focuses on investigating a phenomenon or social problem in individuals within a community (Moleong, 2019: 73). In obtaining qualitative data, researchers use literature studies techniques. Literature studies are one of the techniques for collecting qualitative data through written documents, images, or unwritten documents (electronic media) that can support the research process (Moleong, 2019: 86). In this case, the researcher used several research journals that addressed issues related to emotional intelligence in elementary school children and the benefits of outdoor learning or outdoor education for elementary school children.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Outdoor Learning: A Holistic Approach Outdoor learning is a method that involves learning activities outside, such as in parks, forests, or other open areas. This method emphasizes experience-based learning, where children learn through physical activities, social interactions, and exploration of their surroundings. According to Dymont and Bell (2008), learning outside the classroom can increase children's motivation, curiosity, and social skills because of the direct experiences gained from interacting with the natural environment. Outdoor learning is not only beneficial for children's physical and cognitive development, but it is also very effective in facilitating their emotional development. Children are faced with challenges that require emotional management, such as dealing with fear, failure, or collaborating with peers to solve problems. Additionally, children learn to develop social skills and empathy when collaborating in group activities.
2. The Role of Outdoor Learning in Emotional Intelligence Emotional intelligence consists of several key aspects, such as emotion recognition, emotion management, self-control, empathy, and social skills (Subagja, 2018). The following are the contributions of outdoor learning in the development of each aspect in elementary school children:
 - 1) Emotional Awareness According to Subagja (2018), outdoor learning provides children with the opportunity to connect with themselves and their surroundings. When children encounter unexpected situations in nature, such as sudden rain or physical challenges, they learn to recognize how they feel in those situations. This is important in helping children understand their emotions and how they affect their behavior.
 - 2) Emotional Management Children often experience stress or discomfort when outdoors, especially when faced with physical challenges or interactions with peers. Activities such as hiking, solving puzzles together, or facing difficult situations teach them how to manage negative emotions such as frustration or

fear. This learning teaches self-regulation skills that are very important and have an impact on daily life (Zubaidah, 2016).

- 3) Self-presentation skills Outdoor learning can encourage children to present themselves well in any situation when they are in their surroundings. This includes aspects such as appearance, speech, and body language when speaking and listening. For example, in an activity that requires speed and punctuality, children will appear to be ready, easy to talk to, open, respectful of others' opinions, and trusting of others (Subagja, 2018).
 - 4) Empathy and Social Awareness In outdoor learning, children often participate in group activities that require cooperation. In this process, they learn to understand their friends' feelings and work together to achieve common goals. This strengthens their ability to empathize and fosters better social awareness.
 - 5) Social Skills and Cooperation Outdoor learning encourages children to collaborate with their peers. Activities such as group games or nature-based tasks teach communication skills, collaborative problem solving, and teamwork. In these activities, children not only learn to complete tasks, but also how to interact effectively with others (Sasami & Hariyanto, 2013).
3. Implications of Outdoor Learning in Education The implementation of outdoor learning in the elementary school curriculum in Indonesia still requires further support, both in terms of educational policy, facility provision, and teacher training. The education system in Indonesia tends to focus on academic aspects and tends to neglect the importance of holistic learning experiences, including the development of emotional intelligence and social skills (Zubaidah, 2016: 77). Although the benefits of this method are clear, many schools do not yet have adequate facilities or resources to support outdoor learning. However, with careful planning and proper integration into school programs, this method can be a powerful tool for developing children's emotional intelligence.
 4. Holistic education that emphasizes balance between cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects is the goal of 21st-century education (Goleman & Senge, 2014). Through outdoor learning, children not only gain enjoyable learning experiences but also develop emotional skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Since outdoor learning has the potential to become one of the foundations of character education in Indonesia, aligning with values such as mutual cooperation, environmental concern, and social collaboration—which are integral to local culture—introducing children to nature-based learning also teaches them to appreciate the environment from an early age. This contributes to the development of their character as caring and responsible individuals (Gough, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Outdoor learning contributes significantly to the development of emotional intelligence in young children. Through direct interaction with the natural environment and challenging situations, children learn to recognize and manage their emotions, as well as develop empathy and social skills. Moreover, outdoor learning not only plays a role in the development of children's emotional intelligence but also enhances other important aspects, such as critical thinking skills, creativity, and physical and mental well-being. Therefore, to support a more holistic education, schools in Indonesia should consider integrating outdoor learning into their curriculum. This way, children can grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally intelligent, which will ultimately have a positive impact on their social and mental well-being in the future.

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