

Preschool Teachers' Perspective on The Influence of Singing Activity covering Expression of Children's Emotion in Malaysia

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The most important question in the psychology of music is how music affects an individual's emotional experience, which has been the subject of extensive research. However, the outcome appeared from a variety of perspectives, and at times it devolved into endless debates and arguments. When it comes to music, every individual's emotional state will have a different impact on how it is influenced, depending on whether the emotion is expressed through listening, playing, or participating in musical activities. Musical activities such as singing in preschool are examples that can be used to demonstrate how music can influence an individual's emotional responses. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of teachers' perspectives on the influence of singing activities on the expression of children's emotions because they are the ones who organize the activities and can observe the children's participation. This qualitative study was conducted by interviewing 7 preschool teachers that are currently teaching in Shah Alam, Selangor to study their perspectives on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotions. For this research, a qualitative method approach will be deployed to analyze the teachers' perspective on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotions. Data for this research was collected in the form of recorded audio interviews. The analysis is then done based on the transcriptions. The findings of this research acknowledge that music can influence human emotion. The outcome of this research can be used to contribute knowledge to other music researchers and psychologists on the importance of music and emotion.

Keywords: *Music, singing activity, children emotion, preschool teacher perspective*

Introduction

In Malaysia, there are various types of preschool such as private bodies, associations, churches, or the government and they are conducted in their vernacular language, such as Chinese, English, Tamil, or other languages (Chan & Kwan, 2010). Government preschools on the other hand, are developed for the needs of Malaysian children regardless of their ethnicity and cultural background. The medium of instruction is done in Bahasa Malaysia which is the national language. Under the structure of the National Preschool Curriculum (after this will be referred to as KSPK), music is part of the creative and aesthetic component. Music is described as one of the tools that contribute to the development of children as a whole, which includes aesthetic development, social, emotional, physical, and also intellectual. The reason behind this decision is that musical activities in a child's daily life contribute to the child's growth. The Ministry of Education of Malaysia has constantly made improvements to promote creativity in children as one of the main goals for preschool education. Since the preschool curriculum was drafted and introduced in 2001 up until the drafting of KSPK in 2011, the ministry of education has never pushed aside emphasizing creativity in teaching and learning processes to produce creative and progressive students (Ministry of Education, 2001).

The academic world and the society teacher's readiness and ability in teaching music have been raised at large (Chan & Kwan, 2010). The three main contents for music were listed by The National Preschool Curriculum of Malaysia include music enjoyment, singing, and creative movement. Preschool teachers in Malaysia usually use traditional Malay songs such as *Ikan Kekek* and many more in their singing activity with children during their free time as part of a musical approach in their teaching. Songs like these resonate well with Malaysian culture and it is easy to sing and be remembered by the children. According to (Choksy, 1988), Zoltan Kodaly, a Hungarian scholar has suggested applying folk music when teaching kids in school due to the fact that music is taken into consideration to be the kid's "musical mother tongue".

One of the teaching methods used to stimulate children's emotional development is by teaching based on musical activity in the form of singing activity (Anuar & Ismail, 2020). In many parts of the world, singing activities are a preferred method by preschool establishments to promote positive engagements. This is because it is reported that children like to respond positively, listen and participate when music is played (Mawuse, 2015). To understand the extent of the influences singing activities have on the children's emotion, this research was carried out to analyze these expressions based on the information relayed by the preschool teachers conducting the classes.

Emotion and Expression on Children

From a psychological point of view, emotions are defined in a detailed perspective. According to (Nevid, 2012), emotions can be evaluated into three components; firstly, is bodily arousal,



secondly is cognition, and third is by expressed behavior. From these three components, we might be able to observe the emotion and expressions of the children. Emotion is closely related to facial expression. What we experienced in a particular situation can integrate into a facial expression such as smiling on the face. Facial analysis quickly informs a person about their emotions and the behavior of others during social interaction (Moscovitch et al., 2000; Magali et al., 2006). Children cannot easily hide their facial expressions whether they feel happy, fearful, or sad.

Children can get the opportunity to socialize with peers during class activity that is provided in the school which can lead to positive emotional expression developing within the child's cognitive development besides gaining educational knowledge. Children who are seen as more socially competent by their peers and teachers are more emotionally positive, possess appropriate responses to emotional situations, and are considered more school-adapted (Susanne, 2003; Nana, 2011). For young children to successfully engage in interpersonal exchanges and form the relationships necessary for positive school experiences, they must learn to send and receive emotional messages in ways that are beneficial to themselves and others (Amy et al., 2001).

Music influence Human Emotion

Music can elicit strong emotional reactions such as goosebumps and excitement in listeners as well (Ismail & Anuar, 2020). Positive emotions dominate musical experiences. Pleasant music may trigger the release of reward-related neurotransmitters, such as dopamine. This can be concurred with (Salimpoor, 2011); Valorie, 2013) who mentioned that listening to pleasant music was also found to release dopamine in the striatum. Dopamine plays a role in our feelings of happiness. It is a huge part of our special human ability to think and plan.

Besides listening to music, being involved in other musical activities such as singing also influences a person's emotions. According to Davis (2002), choral singing participants enjoy singing in the choir and feel that choral singing improves their mood. Willingham (2005) found that choral singing brings joy and happiness to the choristers. Moreover, according to (Clift & Hancox, 2001), choral singing allows participants to feel relaxed. It can be said that singing activity gives positive impacts on the emotion and expression of the person who is involved. Thus, it has been suggested that the reason why people engage in musical activities is because of the emotional effects of music itself (Jus-lin & Laukka, 2004; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001).

Benefits of Singing Activity

Singing is one of the musical activities that is usually used in preschool. The benefits of singing activity are correlated with the research that has been done on the benefits of choral singing as both of these are involved in group participation. Research shows that there are many benefits

of choral singing. For example, according to the research on the effects of group singing on mood (Davis, 2002), choral singing participants enjoy singing in the choir and feel that choral singing improves their mood. Another piece of evidence from Willingham (2005) found that choral singing brings joy and happiness to the choristers. Moreover, according to (Clift, & Hancox, 2001), choral singing allows participants to feel relaxed. Thus, it can be said that singing activities give positive impacts on the emotion and expression of the person who is involved.

One strong piece of evidence regarding how singing activity gives such a profound impact on emotion can be seen in research with choristers from a homeless men's choir, conducted as qualitative research and conducted by (Bailey, & Davidson, 2002). Based on the findings, the emotional benefits that were observed from the participants showed positive reviews as a musical outlet towards the seven men that have been interviewed. They all felt that singing within a group promoted their emotional well-being and that the power of music created a second life for them. There was an emotional connection established between the members themselves. Choir singing can enforce a sense of comradeship (Mohammed, 2021).

Methodology

This research involved 7 preschool teachers who are teaching in Shah Alam, Selangor who were being interviewed to identify their perspectives on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotions. All 7 respondents are from Eduwis preschool Setia Taipan, Kindie World Premier, Little Ones Eduworld (LOE) Preschool Seksyen 4, Little Bumble Bee Montessori Preschool, Little Oak Tree, The Caliph's Tree Integrated Montessori Preschool, and Preschool Amazing Seed Seksyen 7 Shah Alam. All of the respondents have the minimum certified qualification for Diploma in early childhood education and have the experience of implementing singing activity for more than 3 years.

For this research, a qualitative approach is relevant to discover an in-depth understanding of the teachers' perspective on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotions. After obtaining consent and permission from the school authorities and teachers; the interview session was conducted. The interview questions were then developed based on the three research questions. There are 12 questions in total for the participants to answer. The questions are divided into four sections; section A, section B, Section C, and Section D. Each section explains each focus in the study. Section A consisted of 5 questions regarding the respondent's demographic information which includes name, age, years of teaching, qualification, and experience of implementing singing activity (years). Section B consisted of 4 questions that focused on the perception of the teachers on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotion, while Section C consisted of 5 questions that focused on the supportive factors that contribute to the successful singing activity that affects children's

emotion and Section D consisted of 3 questions focused on the ways the teachers use to observe the children's emotion.

Before conducting the interview these candidates were approached through phone calls and whatsapps messengers to invite them to participate in this research along with the approval letter as an evidence for this research. An appointment with the selected participants was made before the interview was held. The interview is conducted via video call interview depending on the availability of the participants and which they prefer to do. The interview questions given to the participants before the appointment so that they are well prepared.

Results

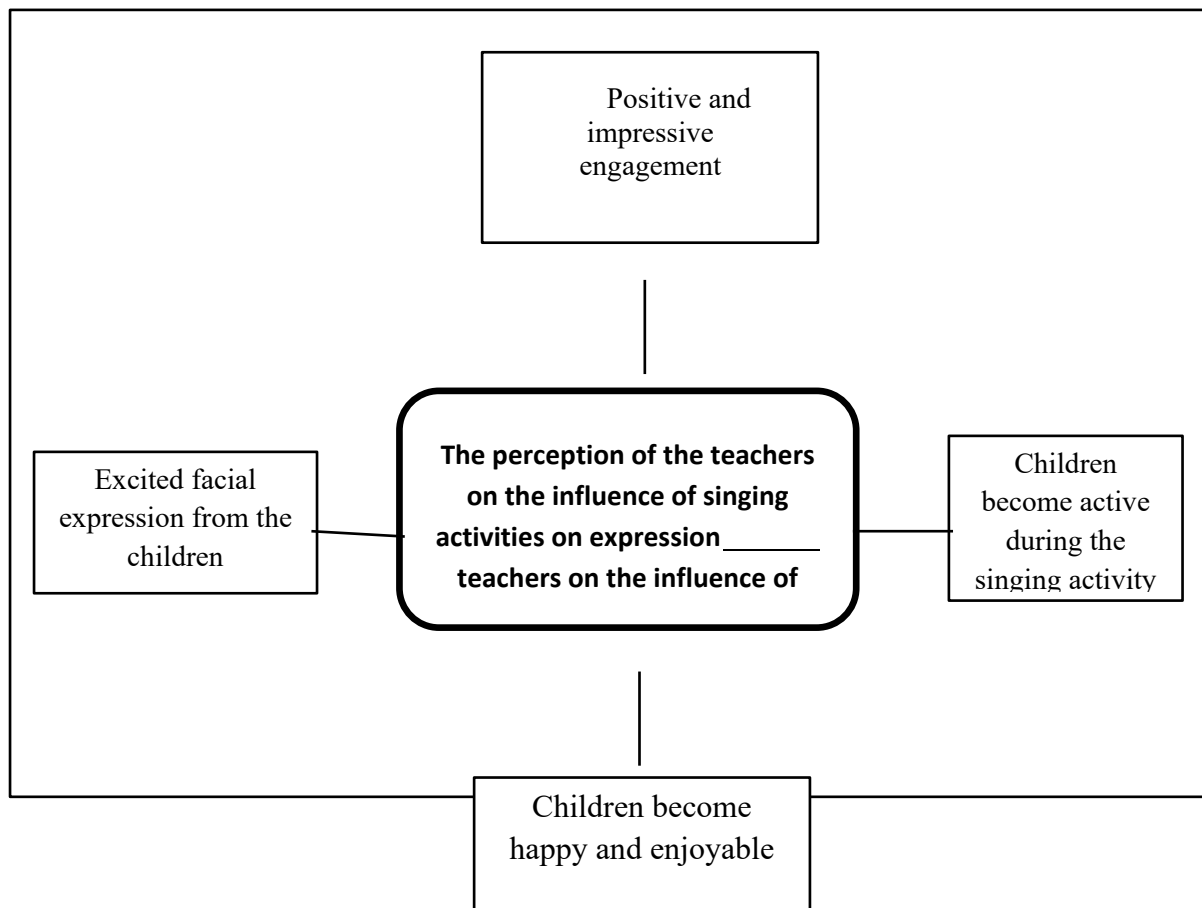


Figure 1: Research Question One. What is the perception of the teachers on the influence of singing activities on expression?

Every singing activity the preschool teachers noticed that the children become happy and enjoyable. They saw excited facial expressions on the children every time a singing activity started. The children's behavior becomes very active and more friendly with their friends after

the singing activity started compared to before it was done. Their faces started to smile with happy expressions, not looking sleepy but looking cheerful. Apart from that, all the preschool teachers have the same opinion on their suitable style of singing activity where they mentioned that they choose to put movement in singing activity as it was able to increase children's interest. Changes in the behavior of the children before participating turn out to be more active with their friends which are aligned with Ismail et al. (2021). Besides that, they noticed that the children have a good sense of social interaction with their peers, and, there is some interaction between children and the preschool teacher as well during the singing activity. The children are more willing to engage, interested to involve and attentive, and also they look more captivated especially when there is movement in the singing activity. Some of the children even approach their friends by themselves doing the singing activity movements together.

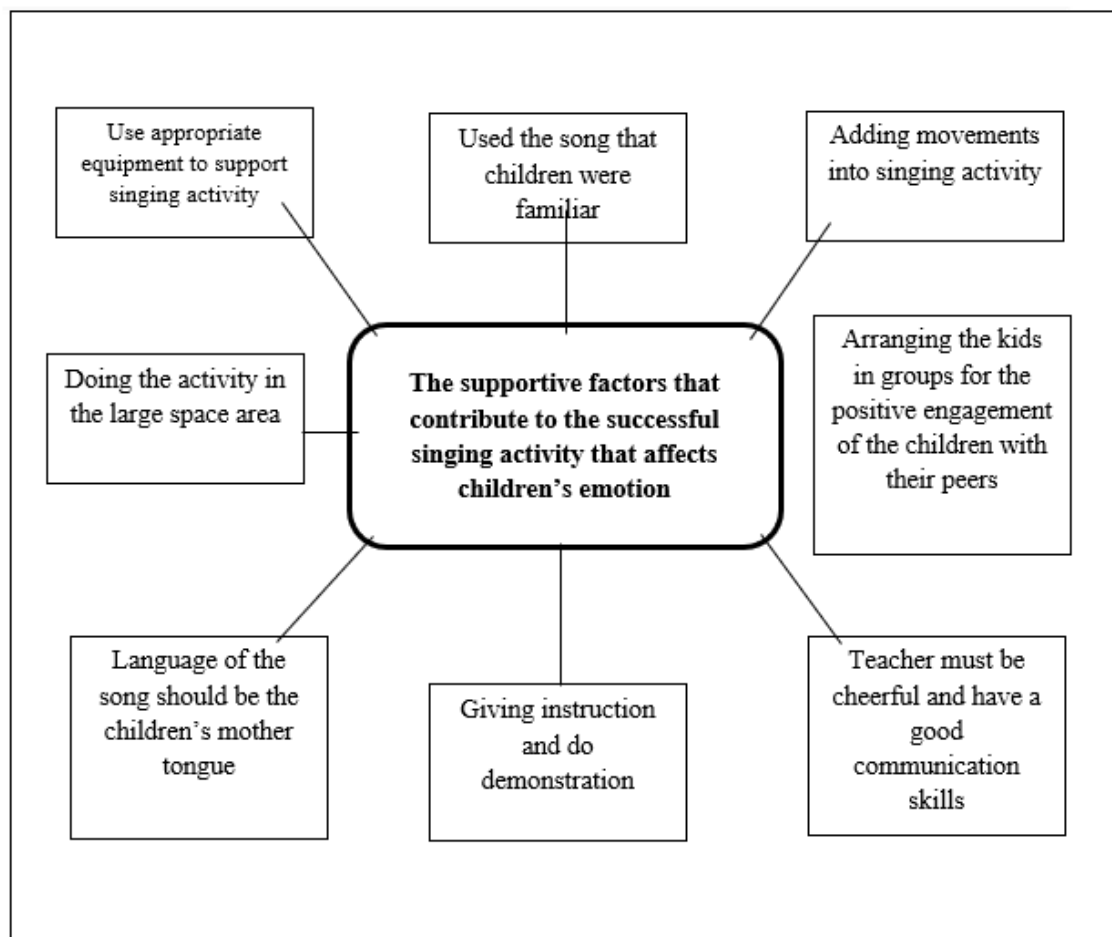


Figure 2 : Research Question two. What are the supportive factors that contribute to the successful singing activity that affects children's emotions?

From the analysis above, one of the supportive factors that contribute to the successful singing activity that affects children's emotions is by using suitable songs that children are familiar with for singing activity. All the respondents mentioned that they used the song that children

were familiar with for every singing activity. It enhances the children's involvement in the singing activity. The repertoire that is used by the preschool teacher is commonly the popular Malay language children's songs that nowadays are still in trend which is by "Didi & Friends" showing YouTube to the children as it is very familiar to children. Malay folk songs such as "Kalau Rasa Gembira", "Chan Mali Chan", "Burung Kakak Tua", "Rasa Sayang", "Bangau Oh Bangau" and "Nenek Si Bongkok Tiga" were also used by the other preschool teachers in the singing activity. Besides that, incorporating the popular English nursery rhymes such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", "Rain, Rain Go Away", "Row Row Your Boat" and "Head Shoulders Knees and Toes" were also used. The teachers initiate the singing activity by first giving some instruction and demonstration to the children before starting the activity. One way of setting up the singing activity is by arranging the kids in groups. This is to encourage positive engagement from the children with their peers. Setting of the equipment includes speaker, laptop, projector, and projector screen are used to help the children to pay attention during the singing activity. Another way to make the singing activity become more exciting and effective is by adding movements in the singing activity. This is in line with the statement from Zoltan Kodaly who's an educator in Hungary mentioned that music is taken into consideration to be the kid's "musical mother tongue".

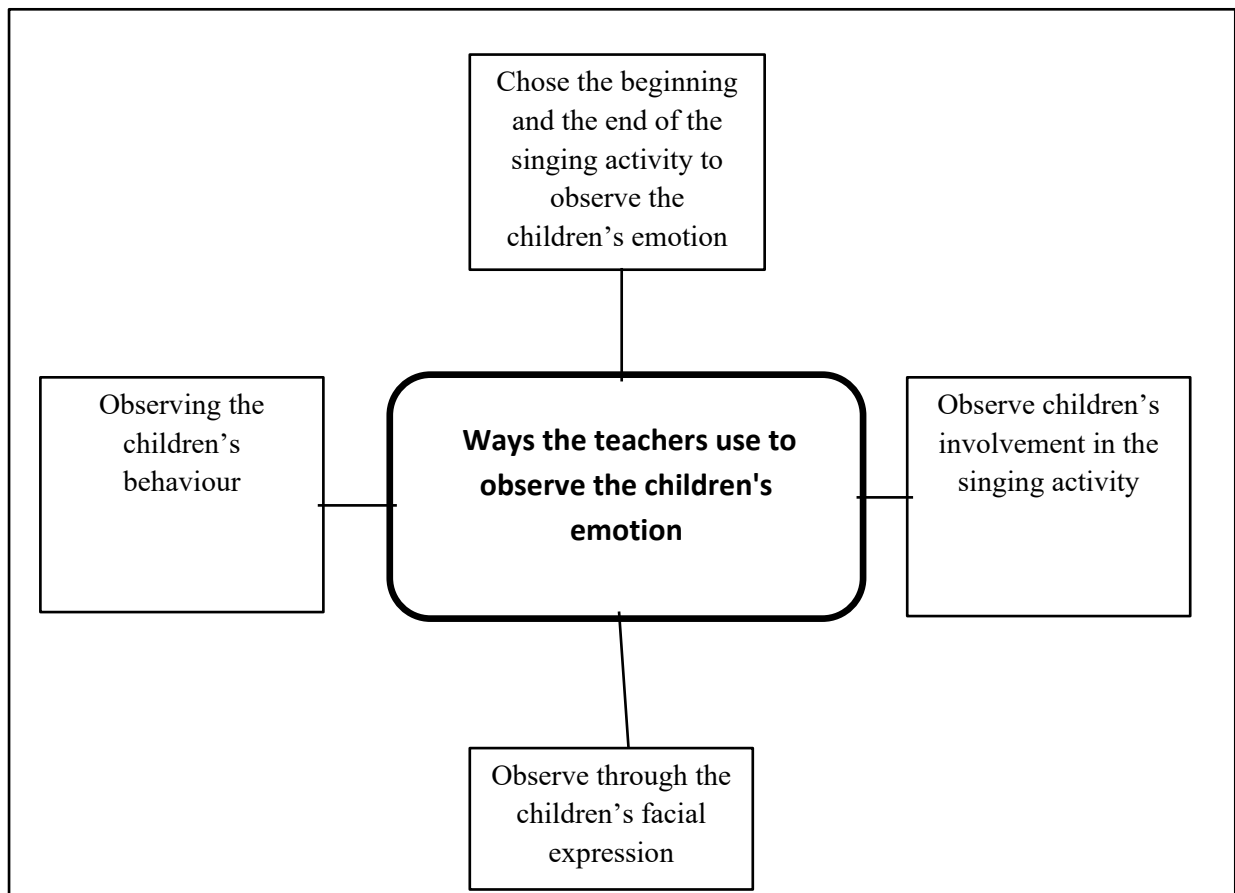


Figure 3 : Research Question Three. What way do the teachers use to observe the children's emotions?

The analysis shows that the preschool teachers chose the beginning and the end of the singing activity to observe the children's emotions. Some of them observe children's emotions before the activity begins and after the activity ends through the children's facial expression during the singing activity as it was the simplest way. Other than that, the preschool teacher noticed that the children's facial expressions are normally like those who are shy and always awkward in the beginning and when the songs are played, they start to engage and get excited when they sing and move their bodies. In addition, all preschool teachers mentioned that singing activities will be one of the exciting activities that will make the children excited to go to school every day.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate awareness regarding the importance of the musical approach to preschool education in Malaysia. The arguments support the government to include and mandate the musical approach in curriculum plans since preschool education essentially. Data collection was done via semi-structured interviewing sessions with the preschool teachers. The research questions were divided into three sections which includes the perception of the teachers on the influence of singing activity on the expression of children's emotion, the supportive factors that contribute to the successful singing activity that affects children's emotion, and the ways the teachers use to observe children's emotion. There were seven respondents of preschool teachers in total and all of them had minimum Diploma and Degree certificates in early childhood education, had more than 3 years of teaching experience, and implementing singing activity experience. These respondents are teaching at different preschools, which are from Eduwis preschool Setia Taipan, Kindie World Premier, Little Ones Eduworld (LOE) Preschool Seksyen 4, Little Bumble Bee Montessori Preschool, Little Oak Tree, The Caliph's Tree Integrated Montessori Preschool, and Preschool Amazing Seed Seksyen 7 Shah Alam.

From the data collection, the researcher found out that the preschool teachers understand the influence of singing activity on children's expression of emotion as it reveals what factor triggered the children's emotion. Singing activity affects children's emotion because it brings joy to the children, it will make them easier to sing and it enhances their involvement in the singing activity. Applying the physical movement during the singing activity increased children's interest and also built a positive and impressive engagement.

The results also found that the important ways of setting up a singing activity in the classroom are by doing the activity in a large space area, giving some instruction, and demonstrating to the children before starting the activity as recommended by Ismail and Loo (2018). To create the most exciting and effective singing activity which is through the addition of physical movements during their singing. Besides that, the use of suitable and familiar songs to children that are in the language of their mother tongue. Furthermore, the personality and the character of their teacher should be cheerful, also having good communication skills and the desire to be well prepared.



The teachers explained ways of observing expressions of children's emotion, where the result found that they usually used to observe through the children's facial expression and behavior of the children during the singing activity. There were differences in the expression of children's emotions before and after the singing activity started. The children expressed their happiness and cheerful facial expression during the singing activity and the children's behavior turns out to be very active and more friendly with their friends after the singing activity started compared to before the singing activity. Singing should be a significant classroom activity that should be implemented by all preschoolers because they believed it would serve as a kind of encouragement for children to attend school in terms of joy and excitement. Singing should also be an important activity in the classroom to be implemented for children's development in terms of social-emotional and cognitive development.

Thus, from the perception of the preschool teachers, these research findings can support and contribute that music can influence human emotion in general. Furthermore, it will be advantageous to the psychologist as it gives them research content in the study of music and emotion.

Acknowledgment

This study has been supported by Research Nexus (ReNeU), Research Management Centre, Office of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. No conflict of interest as a result of this study.

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