

Tiny Voices, Big Feelings: Early Childhood Teachers' Approaches to Supporting Children's Emotional Literacy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to gain insights into the challenges, strategies, and factors that enable effective support for young children's emotional literacy in real-world settings. By understanding the experiences and perspectives of practicing teachers, the researchers can better prepare for their future role and make informed decisions about teaching practices. A qualitative research design was utilized in this study, and data was gathered via an interview guide that was distributed to the target Early Childhood teachers. This study aims to gather recurring themes on their Observable improvement in children's emotional awareness, self-regulation, and expression, Positive behaviour and self-control in classroom settings, Assessment through observation and interaction in daily routines, Emotional literacy fosters empathy and positive peer relationships, enhances focus, motivation, and classroom participation, supporting academic success. The findings seek to offer insights that will highlight that emotional literacy is more than just a social skill it is a foundation for lifelong success.

Keywords: Emotional literacy, early childhood education, teachers' experiences, classroom behavior, motivation,

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teachers (ECTs) provide approaches to support emotional literacy for children who attend. Children's emotional literacy refers to the ability to recognize, understand, express, and manage their own emotions as well as empathize with others and regulate emotions. During preschool, the emotional literacy of children is just beginning to develop the ability to express their feelings in words and understand what causes emotions, and regulate their emotions. Correspondingly, Rana (2022) demonstrated that aesthetic and creative activities, such as drawing, movement, and drama, enhanced self-regulation of emotions alongside self-awareness and empathy in young children. Additionally, Ong (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of discovery learning in formal education, the specific context of early childhood, especially those located in urban, near roads, and busy locations, raises concerns. The lack of natural spaces and environments for learning can hinder opportunities for hands-on exploration and focused learning activities. Teachers must have deeper relationships with children so they can support the unmet behavioral needs of the children, particularly the positive and sensitive emotional ones. Toddlers' emotional literacy skills, including their abilities, are just beginning to develop. To manage their emotional well-being, toddlers need support from their teachers. (Clarke, 2021). It is important to support emotional intelligence or literacy in early childhood to enable children to be emotionally healthy and cope with difficulties by working with teachers' support. During early childhood education, emotion regulation is important for success and well-being in later life. It is developed in interaction with teachers (Thummler, 2022). And also accordingly to Ong and Ancheta (2024) assert that students reassess their prior beliefs and behaviors when assimilating new concepts, which aligns with the observed improvement in posttest scores. Innovative emotion-training programs are being used globally to improve young children's emotional literacy in early childhood education settings (Life, 2023). Similarly, the Roundies Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program in Finland provides early childhood educators with structured emotion-coaching training, and it leads to significant improvements in children's altruistic behavior and decreased behavioral challenges (Moazami-Goodarzi, 2021). In Europe, children who took part in an emotion-training program significantly

outperformed children in traditional settings in terms of prosocial conduct, emotion awareness, and regulation. The need to develop emotional literacy in early childhood education is becoming more widely acknowledged as well in the Philippine context. Within the Philippine framework, educators actively work to nurture the emotional competencies of children, albeit in unstructured ways. Filipino teachers, for instance, utilize stories, songs, and dialogues centered on values to help preschool children manage their emotions. As their observations show, teachers incorporated emotional management routines, reflective discussions, and “peace corners” to help children regulate their emotions, providing calm down spaces to discuss their feelings safely (Mingoa 2024). In a study conducted by Walog, et al. (2024), children's empathy, emotional control, and classroom engagement significantly increased when they used techniques like storytelling, group play, and structured reflection. Besides, pedagogical approaches that are based on hands-on, child-centered learning provide a solid adherence to teacher empowering as the inventor of educational resources and promoting the holistic development of a child through creative expression (Pratiwi, et al., 2020) (Wulandari, et al., 2020) (Noviyanti, 2020).

This study is anchored on four psychological theories that provide a solid foundation for understanding how early childhood teachers can support and nurture children's emotional literacy. These are Freud's Psychodynamic Theory, Skinner's Behavioral Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. These theories have been utilized in related studies to explain various aspects of children's emotional and social development, and are vital in shaping developmentally appropriate emotional behavior. This study aims to determine the challenges, approaches, and factors that influence emotional literacy in early childhood education. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions: 1. What challenges do early childhood educators face in supporting the development of emotional literacy among young children? 2. What strategies or approaches are commonly used by early childhood educators to foster emotional literacy in the classroom? 3. What factors influence the effectiveness of emotional literacy interventions in early childhood settings?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers used the phenomenological method in gathering data. A phenomenological method was chosen in an attempt to gain some understanding of the meaning and significance of an embodied experience. As this study is going to examine the lived experiences of early childhood teachers, this research design is the most suitable for this study. According to Bryne (2001), the phenomenological method examines life experiences in an effort to understand and give them meaning. This involves systematically collecting and analyzing narrative materials using methods that ensure the credibility of both the data and the results. In this study, phenomenology will be used to explore the lived experiences of early childhood teachers in handling emotional literacy.

Settings and Participants

This study was conducted in Catbangan Central School in the City of San Fernando. The participants of this study will be the early childhood teachers of Laboratory Elementary School (LES). This study will employ the purposive sampling method. Ten (10) early childhood teachers, who meet the criteria, will be the respondents. In order to participate, the respondent should possess the following criteria: (1) The respondent is an early childhood teacher, (2) The respondent is willing to be subjected to interviews and observations, and (3) The participant must have 1 year of experience teaching in early childhood.

Instrument

The research instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview guide developed to explore early childhood teachers' approaches to supporting children's emotional literacy. The interview guide is designed with two sections: (1) introductory questions to gather demographic and background information on the respondents, and (2) a set of open-ended questions focused on teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and strategies for helping children name, express, and regulate their emotions. The interview guide was validated by the six experts: (1) Dean of the College of Education, Guidance, (2) one Psychometrician, (3) BECED program chairperson, (4) one

doctoral-level BECED instructor, and (5) two BECED faculty members. These experts will review the instrument to ensure that questions are clear, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data Collection

The validation and pilot testing confirmed the instrument's flexibility and effectiveness in exploring the challenges, strategies, and factor inputs related to Early Childhood Teachers' approaches to supporting children's emotional literacy. Questions were designed to be concise and neutral to avoid ambiguity, and interviews were conducted with consent through voice recording to ensure accurate documentation of responses. Data Gathering was collected through scheduled individual interviews with early childhood teachers, either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on respondents' preferences and availability. Each interview will be audio-recorded (with respondents' consent) to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Respondents will receive clear information about the purpose of the study, and informed consent will be obtained before each interview begins. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained, and all data will be anonymized and securely stored. Only the researcher and authorized research team members will have access to the recordings and transcripts.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Significant statements were coded and grouped into themes aligned with the research questions. Member checking and peer review were conducted to enhance credibility and ensure consistency of interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

The information gathered was strictly academic and after the study was done they were destroyed. To gain the ethical clearance, the study was forwarded to the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) Research Ethics Committee so that the study could be conducted within the provisions of the code of ethics (CODE 2025-1220 - children emotional literacy) or be conferred upon.

Trustworthiness Of The Study

To ensure rigor, credibility was established through expert validation and member checking. Transferability was ensured through detailed contextual descriptions. Dependability was achieved by maintaining systematic documentation of procedures. Confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in participants' actual responses.

RESULTS

The results in challenges include Supporting Language and Emotional barriers, Having Emotional Support and Empathy, Using Calm and Safe Responses, Understanding and Responding their needs, and Creating a positive and approachable classroom. This variety of Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) do to support the challenges of developing emotional literacy, can cater to the needs of young learners in ECE. The following strategies include Calm and Emotionally Aware Classroom, Practicing Calmness in the Classroom, Learning Emotions Through Stories, Positive Praise and Rewards, and Using Rewards and Positive Reinforcement. These strategies can help future Early Childhood Teachers. These factors include Observable improvement in children's emotional awareness, self-regulation, and expression, Positive behaviour and self-control in classroom settings, Assessment through observation and interaction in daily routines, Emotional literacy fosters empathy and positive peer relationships, enhances focus, motivation, and classroom participation, supporting academic success.

Three major themes emerged from the analysis. First, teachers experienced challenges such as children's limited emotional vocabulary, frequent tantrums, and diverse emotional needs influenced by home environments. Second, teachers implemented strategies including calm communication, storytelling, role-playing, positive

praise, and structured routines to guide emotional expression. Third, observable improvements were noted in children's emotional awareness, empathy, self-control, classroom engagement, and participation.

DISCUSSION

The Findings shows that early childhood teachers play an important role in helping children understand and manage their emotions. Teachers face challenges such as children having limited words to express their feelings, crying or having tantrums, and coming from different home environments. Because of these challenges, teachers need to be patient, calm, and understanding when handling children's emotions. Even with these difficulties, teachers use simple and effective ways to support emotional learning. They stay calm, speak gently, set clear rules, and guide children to say how they feel instead of acting out. Teachers also use stories, role-playing, pictures, and fun activities to help children learn about emotions. Giving praise, stickers, or small rewards helps children feel proud and encourages good behavior. The discussion also shows that these strategies help children improve their emotional skills. Children learn to control their emotions better, express their feelings using words, and understand the emotions of others. They become kinder, more cooperative, and more confident in class. When children feel safe and supported, they show fewer tantrums and behave better.

Implications For Practice

The study emphasizes the importance of integrating structured emotional literacy activities into early childhood curricula. Schools should provide professional development programs that enhance teachers' competence in emotional coaching strategies. Strengthening emotional literacy instruction contributes to improved classroom behavior and academic success.

CONCLUSIONS

After conducting the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Even though Early Childhood Teachers face challenges in supporting children's emotional development, such as language and emotional barriers, staying calm, and creating a positive classroom, their patience, calmness, and empathy help children feel safe and willing to express their emotions. This shows that teachers need support and training to strengthen these skills so they can guide children effectively.
2. The strategies used by Early Childhood Teachers, like having a calm and emotionally aware classroom, practicing calmness, teaching emotions through stories, giving praise, and using positive reinforcement, help children feel secure and supported. This suggests that future teachers should learn and apply these strategies consistently to encourage emotional growth and confidence in children.
3. The factors noticed by Early Childhood Teachers, such as growth in emotional awareness, self-control, empathy, peer relationships, focus, and active participation, show how emotional literacy practices benefit children's overall development. This implies that teachers who focus on these areas can help children manage their emotions better, improve social skills, and engage more in learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Early Childhood Teachers receive regular training to strengthen their patience, calmness, and empathy, which helps them support children who face emotional or language challenges and create a safe and caring classroom environment.
2. Teachers consistently use strategies such as maintaining a calm and emotionally aware classroom, teaching children about emotions through stories, giving positive praise, and applying rewards and reinforcement to guide children in managing their feelings and building confidence.

3. Early Childhood Teachers are supposed to emphasize the emotional awareness of children, their self-regulation, empathy, their relationships with peers, their active involvement, that is, helping them to acquire high social skills, positive behaviors, and show more interest in learning activities.
4. Future researchers may explore the role of parents in supporting children's emotional literacy, how culture affects emotional learning, and how training programs can improve the skills of Early Childhood Teachers. They may also include more schools and participants to gain a deeper understanding of children's emotional development.

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