

Teacher Perception on the Importance of Keeping the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children in Early Childhood Education

Desni Yuniarni

Tanjungpura University, Profesor Dokter H. HadariNawawi Street, Pontianak, West Kalimantan 78115

ABSTRACT

Children with good mental health and well being are children who grow up and develop optimally and are physically and mentally fulfilled. They can also adapt well with other people and actively learn in their schools. However, in contrary, children with poor mental health tend to be passive and less likely to interact with other people in school. Therefore, the health mental and wellbeing is very important for the development of the children. In this case, the teachers have such important roles to acknowledge the mental health and well being of their pupils. The objective of this study is to find out the perception of the teachers about the mental health and wellbeing of the students in their schools. This is a qualitative study, in a form of case study. The data was obtained through interviews and focus group discussion that were conducted to 7 kindergarten teachers from 4 different classes. The study finding shows that most teachers in the kindergarten agree the importance of keeping the mental health of the children, because the children with mental health will show excitement, cheerful, eager to do activities in the school, can get through obstacles in the school, and are confident. All teachers agree to keep the wellbeing of the children, because the wellbeing children are those who show the joy in interacting with people, relax, is not seemed tense, show the desire to learn new experiences, is open, and be able to express their feelings proportionally. All teachers also be able to demonstrate how to keep the mental health and wellbeing of the children in school, which are by always paying attention to the needs of each child, take a special approach on children who are in needs, and engage children in activities that require various fun activities that make them enthusiast to actively participate in various activities in their class.

Keywords: mental health, well being, teacher perception, early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

Attention on the children health mental can be done in the school. ^[1] This means, the attempt to improve the mental health of the children can also be done by teachers. They are the first people who can quickly find out if there is problem in their mental health and wellbeing by observing their activity and the learning process in the school. This perspective is described as “competence enhancement”, ^[2] in which the teachers should have competences other than teaching to improve the mental health

of children in the school. In line with that argument, it called as “fostering individual and social resources”, ^[3] in which the mental health attention by the teachers occurs as an effort to keep the mental health of the children in their social environment and the teachers are the main social resources of the children in the school in improving their mental health.

In line with this, a study result about Australian primary school teachers’ knowledge and confidence for mental health promotion mentioned that the teachers

should be able to understand the mental health of the children and have sufficient knowledge about how to improve the mental health of their student. ^[4]

World Health Organization (WHO) recommends various activities in school that can improve the children's mental health, such as creating a school that is child-friendly, giving information about the importance of social and emotional education to all students, and developing whole-school approaches to well being. ^[5]

Children with good mental health will also have a good wellbeing. The wellbeing children are children who actively participate in activities in the class. ^[6] Without active participation in class, they will not be able to obtain the benefit in learning in class. Therefore, the teacher should pay attention to their mental health and emotional development for them to grow into a healthy individual. On the contrary, children who have poor mental health will face difficulty in concentrating, thus it will be hard for them to learn and cannot optimally achieve things. ^[7] Children with poor mental health since kindergarten will have negative impact on their social and emotional development in the future. ^[8]

Mental Health

There are many definitions about children mental health that are stated by the experts. The 'mental health' term is often linked to the mental illness, which indicates a mental health problem in an individual. ^[9] Mental health is a state that can convey the ability to adapt and to solve problems both inside and outside oneself. ^[10] According to previous research, mental health plays a vital role in the development of the social and emotional capacities of a student as well as being a key influential factor in potential academic success. ^[11] Therefore, it can be concluded that a good mental health can be defined as a psychological condition of a person who can self-adapt and can solve various problems inside and outside him/herself which enable him/her to interact well with other people as well as being a

key influential factor in potential academic success.

Children who are mentally healthy possess the ability to: a) develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually, b) initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships, c) use and enjoy solitude, d) become aware of others and empathise with them, e) play and learn, f) develop a sense of right and wrong ^[12] also resolve (face) problems and setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them. ^[13]

Wellbeing

Children who have been supported to develop a strong socio-emotional wellbeing foundation demonstrate a greater capacity to manage their own and others' emotions, assert themselves when required, articulate how they are feeling and rely increasingly on verbal reasoning versus emotionally led responses. ^[14] Various studies show that children's well-being and emotional health are affected positively by well-educated caregivers, teachers and parents. ^[15] As children enter formal schooling a wide range of social skills come into play. A developing flexibility that allows them to accommodate between different behaviours and interactions also serves as a basis for wellbeing. ^[16] Wellbeing children have 6 indicators which are: ^[7] (1) show the happiness feeling, is enthusiast of something, (2) relax and calm, (3) have vitality, (4) openness, (5) have confidence, and (6) are comfortable with themselves. (1) Show happiness means they are joyous when they interact with other people or when they do activities. The children look happy, smile, and easily laugh, spontaneously talk or even sing; (2) relax and calm means the children feels relax and do not feel threatened by anyone. It can also be seen by their faces who seemed relax, are not tense or tired. (3) Vitality: it can be seen by the children's face who look excited and expressive. They also have straight posture, are not slumped, slopped, and are not afraid to participate in

any activity. (4) Openness: they are ready to face new experiences from various activities that they are going through. They are also open and willingly accept other people. They like to receive affections from other people such as hug, compliment, soothing word and like to help other people. (5) Confidence: means the confidence that make the children is not get anxiety or intimidated of something. (6) Comfortable with themselves: the children do not seem to be pressured by their feelings, be able to express their emotions, and also can solve their problems.

Four key characteristics that enable schools to be critical members in identifying, preventing, and treating mental health in children and adolescents. [17] Brener et al. (2007) [18] supported the findings from McLennan et al. (2008), [17] specifically the characteristics of schools as being welcoming and containing trained personnel. They identified schools as a location that offer a neutral, safe setting in which trained professionals, which include teacher, counselors, and psychologists, can not only assess but also provide support to address mental health challenges in students. Through early intervention, support, and education, many mental health challenges can be managed before they have a negative effect on student academic achievement. [19]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aim

The main objective of this study is to find out the teachers' perceptions on the mental health and well being of early childhoods in their schools. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To find out how are the perception of teachers on the importance of keeping the mental health of early childhood in their school?
2. To find out how are the perception of teachers on the importance of keeping the wellbeing of early childhood in their school?

3. To find out what are the steps taken by the teachers in keeping the mental health and wellbeing of early childhood in their school?

Study Group

This study involved 7 private kindergarten teachers in Pontianak city who specifically teach children ranged from 3 to 5 years old. Those kindergarten teachers are 25-40 years old, and all of them are the permanent teachers of the agency. They are bachelors of early childhood education degree with teaching experiences 5-18 years. They teach in 4 different classes, and each class has two teachers on the average.

Procedure

This is qualitative study which was designed as a case study. This study analyze about the perception of the teachers on mental health and wellbeing of early childhood in the school.

This school was chosen because it is one of the schools which is accredited A in Pontianak city. Accreditation is the assessment conducted by the National Accreditation Agency of Non-formal Education of Indonesia, in which several assessments were done to examine the items' and the Non-formal Education programs' feasibility based on several established criteria.

This study is conducted by gathering the teachers in the kindergarten after the class is over to be further interviewed one by one to find out about their perception on the importance of keeping the mental health and wellbeing of early childhood. Afterwards, they are instructed to discuss with each other in a focus group discussion. The discussion topic is the topic designed by the author to find out what kind of actions would be taken by the teacher in keeping the mental health and wellbeing of students in the class.

Collected data was obtained from the teachers' group discussion and one-on-one interview. Interview, as one of the data collecting tools in this study, was made by

the researcher according to theories that are relevant with this study. The data was obtained by conducting the face to face interview directly by the researcher and each interview took 30-45 minutes. After collecting data from the interview, the data was analyzed using content analysis method. Content analysis is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data; furthermore, it may be used in an inductive or deductive way. Which of these is used is determined by the purpose of the study. ^[20] Both inductive and deductive analysis processes are represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. Despite this, there are no systematic rules for analysing data; the key feature of all content analysis is that the many words of the text are classified into much smaller content categories. ^[21,22]

Responses from the teachers were analyzed using codes and categories and quotations and the teachers' response were then taken to support analytic claims in the findings section. Besides interview, a teacher group discussion was also done to find out their opinions on kind of actions that need to be taken in facing the poor mental health and wellbeing children.

RESULT

From the interview conducted on 7 teachers about the mental health of children in the school, 6 out of 7 teachers said that it is important to keep the mental health of the children in the school, because the children with mental health will show excitement, cheerful, eager to do activities in the school, can get through obstacles in the school, and are confident.

On wellbeing questions, the teacher answers that they all agree to keep the wellbeing of the children, because the wellbeing children are those who show the joy in interacting with people, relax, is not seemed tense, show the desire to learn new experiences, is open, and be able to express their feelings proportionally.

All teachers also mentioned how to keep the mental health and well being of

each child, by always paying attention to the needs of each child, take a special approach on children who are in needs, and engage children in activities that require various fun activities that make them enthusiast to actively participate in various activities in their class. But, they also think that there should be a special guidance on how to treat the children in order to maintain their mental health. Besides, they also still don't know whether their actions are right or wrong because there is no clear guidance about the proper treatment for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the children in the school.

This study has limitation, which is it cannot be generalized for each kindergarten in Pontianak. Because this is a qualitative research, the study findings are limited for the concerned kindergarten.

DISCUSSION

Teachers have an important role in keeping the mental health and wellbeing of the children in the school. Therefore, the teachers need to have a good perception about the importance of keeping the health mental and wellbeing of children in the school.

A research claimed that teachers play an influential role in recognizing student with mental health problems, whereas schools hold a unique position in positively affecting the mental health of student. ^[23] Another researcher said that teachers may be the most underused resources in mental health delivery. ^[24] Meanwhile, the other research said that teacher must be concerned in promoting some aspects of student's mental health, such as improving the self-esteem of their learners, teaching acceptable ways of relating to others and managing stress. ^[25] In line with all that researches, this study finding shows that almost of the teachers stated that they agree on the importance of keeping the mental health and wellbeing of the children in the school and they also pointed out the actions to keep the mental health and wellbeing of the children in the

school. However, the teachers stated there should be a special guideline on how to keep the mental health and wellbeing of the children which involves all components, both teachers and parents. Besides, they also do not have guidance on how to face the children with troubled mental health and wellbeing. The teachers hope that they are trained in a special program about how to improve the children's mental health and wellbeing and how to deal with poor mental health and wellbeing children. It is necessary because teachers are the first people who might find out if a problem occurs to children in the school, thus, teachers are able to properly handle the problem as needed. If the teachers faced problem in dealing with them, they may also ask for help to a counsellor or psychologist in the school to treat them better.

CONCLUSION

Most teachers in the kindergarten agree the importance of keeping the mental health of the children, because the children with mental health will show excitement, cheerful, eager to do activities in the school, can get through obstacles in the school, and are confident. All teachers agree to keep the wellbeing of the children, because the wellbeing children are those who show the joy in interacting with people, relax, is not seemed tense, show the desire to learn new experiences, is open, and be able to express their feelings proportionally. All teachers also be able to demonstrate how to keep the mental health and wellbeing of the children in school, which are by always paying attention to the needs of each child, take a special approach on children who are in needs, and engage children in activities that require various fun activities that make them enthusiast to actively participate in various activities in their class.

REFERENCES

1. Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal

interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432. doi:10.1111/j.1467–

8624.2010.01564.x.

2. Fledderus, M., Bohlmeijer, E.T., Smit, F., & Westerhof, G.J. (2010). Mental health promotion as a new goal in public mental health care: A randomized controlled trial of an intervention enhancing psychological flexibility. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100, 2372–2378. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2010.196196
3. Kobau, R., Seligman, M.E., Peterson, C., Diener, E., Zack, M.M., Chapman, D., & Thompson, W. (2011). Mental health promotion in public health: Perspectives and strategies from positive psychology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101 (8), e1–e9. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2010.300083
4. Helen Askeff-Williams & Michael J. Lawson (2013) Teachers' knowledge and confidence for promoting positive mental health in primary school communities, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 41:2, 126-143, doi: 10.1080/1359866X.2013.777023
5. World Health Organization. (2011). Mental health: Strengthening mental health promotion. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>
6. Sibel Sönmez & Burcu Ceylan (2016): Teachers' perceptions of wellbeing and involvement in preschool children, *Early Child Development and Care*, DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2016.1150272
7. Leavers, F. (2005). Wellbeing and involvement in care settings. A process-oriented self-evaluation. Leuven: Kind & Gezin and Research Centre for Experiential Education.
8. Cooper, J. L., Masi, R., & Vick, J. (2009). Social-emotional development in early childhood: What every policymaker should know. Columbia: Columbia University. National Center for Children in Poverty.
9. Adelman, H. S. & Taylor, L. (2002). Toward a comprehensive policy vision for mental health in schools. In M. D Weist, S. W. Evans, & N. A. Lever (Eds.) *Handbook of school mental health: Advancing practice and research* (pp. 23-59). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
10. Hanurawan Fattah (2012). Strategi Pengembangan Kesehatan Mental di

- Sekolah. PSIKOPEDAGOGIA, Vol. 1, No. 1
11. Askell-Williams, H. & Lawson, M .J. (2014). Relationships between students' mental health and their perspectives of life at school. *Health Education*, 115, 249-268. doi:10.1108/HE-02-2014-0007
 12. Mental Health Foundation (2002). *The Mental Health Needs of Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. Bright Futures: Working with Vulnerable Young People*. London: Mental Health Foundation.
 13. Alexander, T. (2002). *A Bright Future For All: Promoting Mental Health in Education*.
 14. Mayr, T &Ulich, M (2009) 'Social-emotional well being and resilience of children in early childhood settings', *Early Years*, 45–57.
 15. Wissow, L. S., Gadomski, A., Roter, D., Larson, S., Brown, J., Zachary, C (2008). Improving child and parent mental health in primary care: A cluster-randomized controlled trial of communications skills training. *Pediatrics*, 121(2): 266–275.
 16. Bernard, ME (2012) *A You Can Do It! Education Report; The Importance of Social and Emotional Learning Dispositions to the Achievement and Well-Being of Young Children*. Melbourne, Australia: The Univesity of Melbourne.
 17. McLennan, J. D., Reckord, M., & Clarke, M. (2008). A mental health outreach program for elementary schools. *The Journal of Canadian Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry*, 17, 122-130. Retrieved from http://www.cacap-acpea.org/en/cacap/Journal_p828.html
 18. Brener, N. D., Weist, M., Adelman, H., Taylor, L., & Vernon-Smile, M. (2007). Mental health and social services: results from the school health policies and programs study 2006. *Journal of School Health*, 77, 486-499. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2007.00231
 19. Wei, Y., Kutcher, S., &Szumilas, M. (2011). Comprehensive school mental health: An integrated "school-based pathway to care" model for Canadian secondary schools. *McGill Journal of Education*, 46, 213-229. doi:10.7202/1006436ar
 20. Lauri S. &Kynga 's H. (2005) *Developing Nursing Theories (Finnish: Hoitotieteen TeorianKehitta`minen)*. Werner So `derstro `m, Dark Oy, Vantaa.
 21. Weber R.P. (1990) *Basic Content Analysis*. Sage Publications, Newburry Park, CA.
 22. Burnard P. (1996) *Teaching the analysis of textual data: an experiential approach*. *Nurse Education Today* 16, 278–281.
 23. Aya M. Abd El Latif, Maha Mohamed El Gaafary, Menan Abdel Maksoud Rabie, Hanan Said EzElarab. (2018). Role of School Teachers in Pupils' Mental Health Promotion. *The Egyptian Journal of Community Medicine*. Vol. 36. No. 1.
 24. Lynn, C. J., McKay, M. M., & Atkins, M. S. (2003). School social work: Meeting the mental health needs of pupils through collaboration with teachers. *Children & Schools*, 25(4), 197-209.
 25. Herrman, H., Saxena, S., & Moodie, R. (2005). *Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: a report of the World Health Organization, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in collaboration with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and the University of Melbourne: World Health Organization*.

How to cite this article: Yuniarni D. Teacher perception on the importance of keeping the mental health and wellbeing of children in early childhood education. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2019; 6(4):244-249.
