

Evaluating the Factors Influencing Child Development and Strategies used by Educators in Teaching Low-performance Children in an International Preschool

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Abstract

Child development entails the psychological, emotional and biological adjustments that occur in human beings between birth and the ending of adolescence. A child's life, from conception to few years of early ages, are considered the most significant developmental period. Various factors influence child development. This case-based study which was qualitative in nature applied the triangulation of data sources to investigate the factors influencing child development and strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children in an international preschool. Based on the findings from in-depth interviews, social media analysis, and comparative analysis of previous literature reviews, six major themes were developed and discussed- participants' background; factors that influence child's development; importance of familiarizing with the concept of child development for teachers; teaching children with low academic performance; teaching children in mixed-ability classrooms; and major constraints to support low-performance children in school.

Keywords: child development; low-performance children; teaching strategies; preschool

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I. INTRODUCTION

Child development implies to the growth of physical, cognitive, psychological, and socio-emotional skills that lead to enhanced competence, autonomy, and independence. The children's experiences during the early years especially from prenatal to the age of 5 years creates a trajectory across the lifespan. Harmful exposures and experiences in early childhood enhance the risk of poor social, cognitive, and health outcomes, including economic dependency, violence, crime, substance misuse, and adult onset of non-communicable diseases. Early discrepancies are intensified and become increasingly difficult to reverse beyond early childhood. Hence, it is very crucial for teachers and schools to understand the factors influencing child development and strategies to teach low-performance children.

A child's life, from conception to few years of early ages, are considered the most significant developmental period. Physical, social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development all play a role in a child's early growth. What happens to a child in these early days has a significant impact on his or her development later in the years. Poverty, lack of nutrition, poor social conditions, parental conduct, dietary deficits, persistent illnesses, zero breastfeeding, inappropriate feeding methods, and a lack of stimulation are all contributing factors to children's inability to reach their full growth potential.

In many nations, early childhood education plays a critical role in providing children with high-quality learning

experiences at a young age, especially those concerning teaching low-performance children. The goal is for most children to have obtained sufficient abilities at the start of formal schooling since the early years are the most critical period of child's development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section begins with describing the definition of the keyword for this research- 'child development' and it then goes into understanding the factors influencing child development. This section then finally focuses on strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children.

2.1 Definition of child development

Kidsense (2021) stated that child development refers to 'the sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood. During this process a child progresses from dependency on their parents/guardians to increasing independence. Child development is strongly influenced by genetic factors (genes passed on from their parents) and events during prenatal life. It is also influenced by environmental facts and the child's learning capacity' (p.1).

2.2 Factors that influence child development

Child development is a gradual unfolding of biologically determined characteristics and traits that arises as the child learns from experiences (Santrock, 2010; 2011).

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Many biological and environmental factors influence a child's health and development, including genetic, familial, environmental, community, and societal factors. More than 200 million children under the age of five in developing nations are not reaching their full cognitive and social potential due to poverty, poor health, poor nutrition, and inadequate care. This representation of interactions among multiple influences that affect children's development is known as 'kaleidoscope model' (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). These interactions between factors may occur within single domains, such as behaviour or social environment, or they may extend beyond domains. Changes in any one factor may influence others, so giving rise to a complex interaction of factors that may all play a role in determining the child's current and future development.

i. Genetic influences

Heredity is the transmission of physical characteristics from parents to children through their genes. It influences all aspects of physical appearance and even intelligence and aptitudes. Diseases and conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, autism, dyslexia, and so on can also be passed through genes, thereby impacting the growth and development of the child negatively. Nevertheless, environmental factors and nurturing can provide the best out of the already present qualities in the genes (Awadhiya, 2019; Rutter, 2006).

ii. Nutrition

Nutrition is a critical factor in growth as everything the body needs to build and repair itself comes from the food is eaten. Malnutrition can cause deficiency diseases that adversely affect the growth and development of children. On the other hand, overeating can lead to obesity and health problems in the long run, such as diabetes and heart disease. A balanced diet that is rich in proteins, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, and fats is essential for the development of the brain and body (Awadhiya, 2019).

iii. Factors in the family

Changes in any one of these factors, including poverty, mother employment, parental education and family structure, can have an impact on others, resulting in a complex interaction of factors that all have a part in determining the child's current and future development (Santrock, 2010).

iv. Parenting

Lack of individualised care in the early years of life has a negative impact on a child's health, development, personality, and cognitive capacity. During the first six months to three years of life, language and cognitive development are very crucial. When children spend their early years in an environment that is less engaging, their brain development is harmed, resulting in cognitive, social, and behavioural delays (Santrock, 2011). Whether they are raised by their grandparents, parents, or foster care, they need basic care, love, and attention to develop as wholesome functional individuals. The most advantageous growth is seen when families invest time, energy and love in the development of the child through activities, such as playing with them, reading to them,

doing sports and activities and having deep meaningful conversations. Families that abuse or neglect children would affect their positive development (Rutter, 2006).

v. Social Culture Factors

Babies and children are naturally sociable and curious, and they like interacting with others through numerous means such as eye contact, body movement, sounds, and facial expressions. Only through play, dialogue, and connection with caregivers and other people can this potential be realised. Bowlby (1969) has also emphasised the importance of early bonds with parents (guardians) in a child's development, as well as the impact of these contacts on later social relationships.

vi. Environmental Factors

The environment performs a critical position in the development of children, and it represents the sum total of physical and psychological stimulation the child receives. Some of the environmental factors influencing early childhood development involve the physical surroundings and geographical conditions of the place the child lives in, as well as his social environment and relationships with family and peers. Research has proven that a well-nurtured child does better than a deprived one because the environment children are constantly submerged in contributes to this (Santrock, 2010; 2011). A good school and a loving family builds in children strong social and interpersonal skills, which will enable them to excel in other areas such as academics and extracurricular activities (Awadhiya, 2019; Rutter, 2006).

Early in life, children go through rapid growth and development, which is heavily influenced by the elements indicated above. Children that have a good start in life will grow up to be well developed adults, with better social, economic, physical, and cognitive outcomes, and they will live better for their families and communities.

2.2 Strategies to use in teaching low-performance children

The literature has also been quite active in discussing how to improve the academic performance of slow learners or low performance students in pre-school. Though it is considered that the development delay of slow learners (of any age) is related to their parents' learning problems, it is also believed that if a well-approach and the appropriate aids/tools are given to these children, their ability to read and do arithmetic can be much enhanced. According to studies, children have trouble learning when they lack specific basic learning skills such as attention, listening comprehension, and social skills.

Slow learners in the ordinary classroom are neither rare nor exceptional, contrary to popular assumption. Slow learners are students who are unable to learn at an average rate using instructional tools, texts, workbooks, and other learning materials intended for most students in the classroom. It takes more than the normal variety in presenting methods, classroom climate, and instructional resources to keep these children actively involved in the learning process (films, workbooks, co-operative games, simulations). Slow learners' shortcomings in basic

abilities (reading, writing, and mathematics), difficulties comprehending abstract ideas, and, most concerning, their frequently unsystematic and haphazard work habits are also instantly obvious.

i. Compensatory Teaching

Compensatory teaching is a method of instruction that adjusts the way knowledge is presented in order to compensate for a student's basic lack or deficiency. This could include adding a visual representation of knowledge to an instructional technique, employing more flexible instructional presentations (videos, photographs, and illustrations), or switching to a different instructional format (self-paced texts, simulations, experience-oriented workbooks).

ii. Remedial Teaching

The use of activities, approaches, and practises to reduce flaws or deficits of the slow learner is known as remedial teaching. For example, by re-teaching previously unlearned knowledge, weaknesses in basic math skills can be lessened or removed. Drill and practise, as well as other traditional teaching methods such as homework practices may be used.

2.2.1 Instructional Strategies for Slow Learners

While no one approach or set of techniques is sufficient for teaching a slow learner, the suggestions below can be utilised as a starting point for developing instructional strategies that are adapted to the slow learner's specific needs.

i. Develop lessons that incorporate students' interests, needs, and experiences

This assists slow learners with their short attention spans. Lesson plans, special projects, and extra-credit assignments can be structured around oral or written autobiographies at the start of the year, or simple inventory in which students list their hobbies, and interesting journeys or experiences. Method of teaching needs to incorporate a more engaging, challenging approach. Teaching learning strategies must be structured and supported systematically by schools, as well as by teachers and their teaching methods of choice (Friedrich & Mandl, 2006).

ii. Diversify teaching methods on a regular basis

Children can see the same subject delivered in multiple ways because of the variety in instructional techniques. This improves the number of options for accommodating the many learning styles that slow learners may have, as well as providing some of the remediation that may be required. Before going on, double-check that everyone understands an important new concept or ability. Massive Media Inc. (2017). To ensure mastery and understanding, use performance assessments. Create a culture of asking for clarification in the classroom. Accommodations, or adjustments, are adaptations integrated into teaching and learning settings to help equalise access to the curriculum and assessment for students with learning challenges or impairments, according to Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA, 2011).

iii. Incorporate individualized learning materials

Slow learners benefit from frequent reinforcement of short learning parts. As a result, programmed texts and interactive computer education are frequently useful in the remediation of slow learners' basic skills. Students with learning disabilities can be identified and tested more precisely, and more "tailor-made" support can be provided Jönsson (2018).

iv. Incorporate Audio and Visual Materials

Slow learners have a tendency to learn more effectively by seeing and hearing things. Emphasizing concrete and visual forms of knowledge can also help slow learners overcome their trouble absorbing abstract ideas and concepts. There are five common teaching methods that teachers use to help students succeed in their classrooms. When teachers vary and flip around what kids need to learn and how they'll learn it, this is known as differentiated teaching review Osewalt (2019). Graphic organization can help younger students with identifying the characters in a story. Mnemonics, or mapping out history, can help students remember the order of operations in math. Diversification in terms of each child's learning ability by customising their learning abilities based on goals, time allocation, rewards, tasks, and learning assistance is one of the keys to differentiation (Nugroho & Mareza, 2016).

v. Develop Own Worksheets and Exercises

When prepared for the ordinary student, textbooks and workbooks often surpass the operating level of the slow learner and can become more of a problem than a help. To modify the vocabulary or difficulty level to the abilities of your slow learners, some tweaks to worksheets and activities are required. Education experts found that students whose teachers have used formative assessment with them significantly improved their performance on standardized tests TeacherReady (2017).

vi. Provide Peer Tutors for Students needing Remediation

Peer tutoring can be a powerful ally in achieving teaching goals, especially when tutors are allocated so that everyone who is tutored is also a tutor (Hartini et al., 2017). Both as a learner and as a tutor, the learner who needs assistance is not singled out and has a stake in making the ideas work.

2.2.2 Learning design of slow learner using the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model

Based on the previously described strategies, it can be concluded that the slow learner's learning strategy is the most important and effective way to assist slow learners in learning to achieve specific learning objectives, and thus the teacher become active in planning and organising slow learners' activities. According to the characteristics, project-based learning can benefit slow learners by allowing them to interact with other children, boost group participation, and learn to adjust to social situations, as well as assisting them in achieving specific learning objectives (Hartini et al., 2017). A teacher must consider

slow learners' abilities differently than other students when planning and implementing slow learner learning strategies. The selection of a project-based learning model is best based on the examination of learning strategies for slow learners. Students are encouraged to learn through a variety of activities, experiences, and interactions. In the type of team teaching, teachers' role in learning activities is that of a facilitator and companion.

The following are the components of a project-based learning model for slow learners:

- The preliminary activities include the provision of perception, the delivery of learning objectives, the verification of prerequisite skills, the creation of a primary material chart, and the delivery of an essential question in accordance with the real world and the reality relevance topic for students.
- Teachers form groups of three heterogeneous students, the teacher assigns group tasks to be completed together (may be observations, experiments, or questions), students are given the freedom to look for sources of information around it, and the teacher determines the outcome.
- The concluding events include awarding prizes to the best-performing group, assessing the learning process and the outcomes of group projects and presentations, and encouraging students and teachers to reflect.
- Assignment and motivation are examples of follow-up activities.

Slow learners face challenges such as low achievement, poor memory, short attention span, slower learning speed than their peers, requiring more stimulus to complete simple tasks, and having difficulties with adaptation and social relations in the classroom. Slow learners can adapt to the group learning approach, learn for extended periods of time due to the information received through direct experience, and increase attention skills by focusing on joint tasks and project coordination. Teachers, therefore, need to carefully choose the strategies that are appropriate to use in teaching low-performance children.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research method used to collect data related to factors and strategies concerning the teaching and learning of low-performance children in an international preschool. On a broader basis, the substantial purpose of this study is to analyze the factors that influence child development and consequently investigate and evaluate the strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children at their respective school.

3.1 Research design

This case study approach employed a qualitative research design using multiple source methods to gain a total and in-depth knowledge on factors that influence child development and strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children.

Case study approach according to Heale and Twycross (2018) is an appropriate research design to gain concrete, contextual, in-depth knowledge about a specific real-

world subject. It allows the researcher to explore the key characteristics, meanings, and implications of the case (Single, 2017).

3.2 Data Collection Procedure and Instruments

To analyse the factors that influence child development and the strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children, this study was conducted in two phases:

i. Phase 1: Selecting target and accessible population

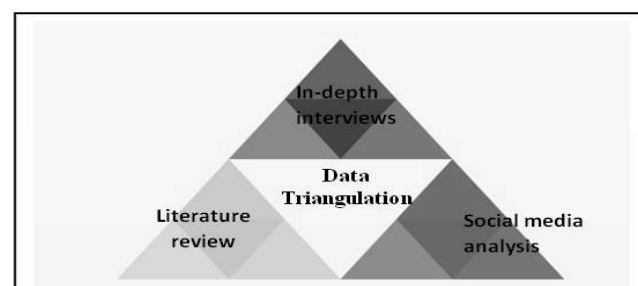
Phase one looked into selecting a target population. The target population for this study was from a recognised international preschool in Malaysia. For this study, a preschool from Ipoh, Perak was chosen because it is an accessible population to the lead researcher as the researcher works at that centre. Since it will not be practical to recruit the entire population of preschool instructors throughout Malaysia for this study, it is necessary to define an accessible population.

The accessible population is a subset of the target population that reflects specific characteristics (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995). Once the specific characteristics of the accessible population are defined, it is important to consider the geographic and time constraints with which both the researcher and potential subjects will have to contend since this study applies the qualitative research design approach. According to Davis (2019), the accessible population is the population in research to which the researchers can apply their conclusions. This population is a subset of the target population and is also known as the study population. It is from the accessible population that researchers draw their samples. For this case study, convenience sampling was used to draw a sample since data collection needed to be facilitated in a short period of time and it is the simplest form of sampling to ease this case study (Saunders et al, 2012).

ii. Phase 2: Analysis on factors influencing child development and strategies used by teachers in teaching low-performance children

In the second phase, the lead researcher personally met and discussed regarding this case study's need for data collection as well as to gain approval and ensure smooth collection of data with the ECCE centre Director and teacher samples, respectively on 3rd September 2021. Post approval and mutual agreement from Director and teachers to participate and provide data required for this study, the lead researcher together with team members devised a conceptual framework for data collection as illustrated in Graphic 1 below.

Graphic 1: Data Triangulation



To strengthen this study, data triangulation method was applied. According to Creswell (2009) qualitative research very much relies on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions, questionnaires on which participants write descriptively, participant-observation, recordings made in natural settings, literature reviews, documents, and artifacts.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers specifically used multiple methods of data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena (Patton, 1990). The rationale for using this approach is that one can be more confident, and triangulation can increase the credibility and validity of the findings when different methods generate the same findings (Creswell, 2009).

The qualitative data collection instruments was mainly done through in-depth interviews. To validate the findings from the interviews, social media platforms of the preschool such as Facebook, Instagram, Business WhatsApp, emails, images, as well as comparative analysis from findings of literature review was done.

3.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Several approaches exist to analyze qualitative data. For this study to be effective, the researchers applied content analysis. Content analysis according to Krippendorff (1980) "is a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from data to their context" (p. 21) and is an important building block in the conceptual analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). The content analysis for this study was done strategically as follow:

1. All content was collected in stages and accordingly (in-depth interview transcripts, social media content and visuals as well as findings from literature reviews related to factors influencing child development and strategies for teaching low-performance students)
2. Next, in-depth interviews were analyzed and coded based on similarities and differences from each verbatim transcript.
3. Then interpretation of data from social media platforms, documents and images was done by researchers based on the codes obtained from the in-depth interviews.
4. Once the codes were compared between in-depth interview transcripts and social media analysis findings, the codes were then further compared with the literature findings.
5. Once coding was complete, the collected data was examined to find patterns and draw conclusions (themes).

The outcome of the analyzed data on factors that influence child development and the strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children are presented and discussed in section 4.0 below.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The preschool selected for this study is located at Ipoh, Perak and was established in year 2017. Currently the preschool accommodates eighty-four early years learners ranging from ages 2 to 6 years old. Total number staff in that centre is 21 with fourteen of them being teachers. For the purpose of this assignment, five participants were randomly selected.

Pseudonyms such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and so on were used in the findings and discussion below instead of actual names to maintain confidentiality.

The major findings formulated from the data analysis on factors that influence child development and the strategies used by educators in teaching low-performance children is presented and divided into six themes followed by discussion for each.

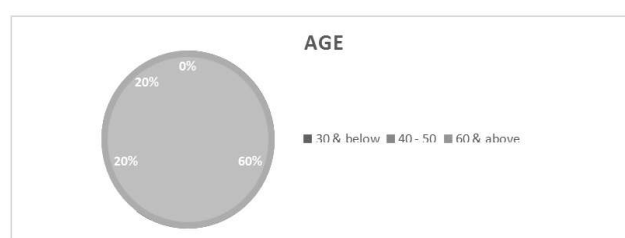
Theme 1

Participants' background

Figure 1 to Figure 3 below illustrates the participants' age, their preschool teaching experiences, and their qualification.

Figure 1

Participant's age



Findings indicated that participants were mostly below the age group of 30. This shows that most teachers are still gaining experience in managing children and the teaching and learning processes at the preschool.

Figure 2

Participants' teaching experience

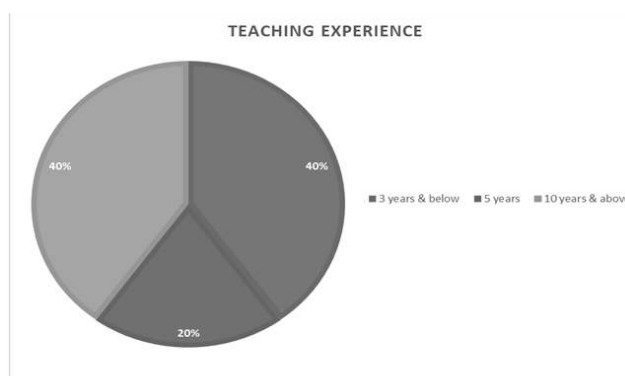
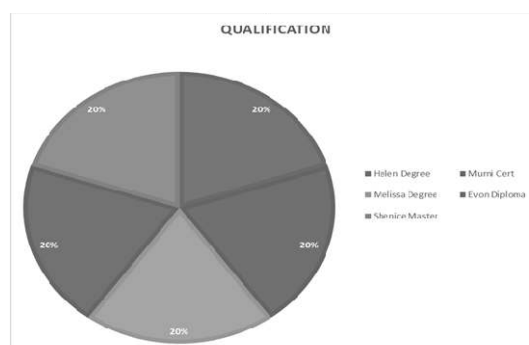


Figure 3

Participants' qualification



Overall, many teachers from this research had less than 10 years' experience of teaching in early years settings. However, almost all of them are qualified educationist with some obtaining highest qualification of a master's degree.

Theme 2

Factors that influence child's development

Numerous factors, from family and environment to genes and biology, influence a child's growth and development. These factors affect a child in many ways including their physical, mental, and social development, along with their health and well-being (NICHD, 2014).

Based on the findings from this study, 100% (5 participants) stated that a child's development consists physical development, social and emotional development, speech/language development as well as cognitive development.

A child development means physical development, social and emotional development, speech/language development as well as cognitive development.

[Participant 2, 15/9/2021]

Physical development, social development, language development and mental development.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

In terms of physical development, all participants agreed that nutrition plays a vital part in the development of children. A nutritious diet can augment physical and mental abilities where as lack of nutrition impacts a child's ability as well as interest to study. It can also damage their physical growth in terms of height, weight, or muscle development.

Physical growth, number one, for my, in my point of view is food.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

In terms of physical growth. The nutrition intake in school because most of time children are in school.

[Participant 3, 22/9/2021]

In this research findings, the pre school ensures all children are given home-cooked balanced nutrition daily as shown in Figure 4 below. Awadhiya (2019) has also stated that a balanced diet that is rich in vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, and fats is essential for the development of the brain and body.

Figure 4

Balanced nutrition



Parallel to Jacobs (2020), the findings from this case study also revealed that brain growth depends critically on the quality of a child's nutrition. Nutrition plays a substantial part in children's growth and development as it impacts not just their health but also strength, growth, and energy levels, which can adversely influence learning. Supporting children with a balanced diet from early years both at home and in school is critical for their growth and development (Jacobs, 2020).

On the psychological aspects such as emotion/affective development, majority (3 participants) stated that teachers play an important role in building a child's psychological growth and 2 participants mentioned family as the initiating factor of a child psychological growth.

And I think the ways that teachers respond to the emotions is very important... how we react, we respond to the emotions because children can actually see, you know how the teacher respond.... to is it negative respond, is it positive respond and that will actually allow the child to feel like 'oh! This teacher understands me'.

[Participant 2, 15/9/2021]

Parents play a very huge role as they are growing. Children wouldn't know how to express their feeling. So, I think parents need to help them identify their emotion, so that they understand how their feeling is and once they understand their feeling, then only they able to regulate the emotion that is taking place and develop healthily.

[Participant 3, 22/9/2021]

As for cognitive development, majority participants agree that environment and people around the environment plays an important role, especially teachers and school because schools serve as the second home for children. Schools must be a nurturing environment rather than an intimidating one. Children need to be comfortable to take on different learning opportunities and socialize. The purpose of school is not only to implant knowledge and facts in the child's brain but it also affects children's attitude to learning, self-esteem and task orientation. It is where they learn how to collaborate, to think critically and to manage their emotions.

According to Vygotsky, so he say that cognitive development is formal result of social interaction. So which is why I think a lot of the child growing up, their environment, the people around them or from social interactions with peers, teachers are important.

[Participant 3, 22/9/2021]

For cognitive I will say, environmental influences like school where children learn through trial and error. Trial and error means, okay you ask them to do something, oh, this is wrong, okay. Do it this way? How can we do this? For me, I believe environment gives them critical thinking. Let them explore. Let them see what they can do.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

As put forward by Papila, Olds and Feldman (2007), cognitive development denotes the changes and stability in

mental aptitudes such as attention, memory, learning, language, reasoning, thinking and creativity. In many of the modern classrooms including the preschool in this study (refer Figure 5 below), Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development which is derived from social interactions that focuses on three elements -environmental influences, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is often used.

Figure 5

Social interactions and environmental influences for cognitive development



The findings from this study also shows the key ideas proposed by Vygotsky that environment and adults in any society foster children's cognitive development in an intentional and systematic manner (Santrock, 2010; 2011).

Theme 3

Importance of familiarizing with the concept of child development for teachers

Although children develop in their own unique way, it is important for every teacher to understand the development of children. Findings from this study has shown that if teachers understand the concept of children's development, then they are able to design and develop plans to maximize the students' success in both academic and social endeavors. The knowledge of these development stages can also help teachers to minimize problems in the classroom.

When we are familiar with the concept of the child development, we can make the most appropriate decision to support the child growth and we can select the most effective matters to scaffold or support the child the children learning and get them with the most correct way and with inclusiveness. And I think with all the understanding towards child development, we can provide the best pedagogy and the best resources to support the child's well-being.

[Participant 1, 15/9/2021]

Yes, we must be familiar, if not we don't know how get to know the level they are in, and we won't know how to identify help. Oh! Especially if special needs kid. Once we know what the actual development is and what the child is lacking, we can design and develop plans to maximize the students' success.

[Participant 4, 24/9/2021]

I would say it is definitely very important. If they have a psychology background, or knowledge related to child development, they will actually know in-depth like what is

every single stage of child developmental and be familiar and understand what must be achieved at certain age level. Then teachers will be able to plan and adapt the lesson plan as well as the activities for the children.

[Participant 2, 15/9/2021]

Theme 4

Teaching children with low academic performance

Teaching low-achieving students requires understanding and a specific set of skills from an educator (McLendon, 2011). Based on the findings from this study, teachers applied various strategies which moves from whole-classroom instructions to individualized instructions, peer coaching, and even computer-assisted instructions.

Participant 3 indicated that she usually moves from whole class instruction to individualized instruction within the lesson in a classroom to teach the low-academic performance.

First, I will teach overall, so both groups and then knowing that a child needs a little bit more attention, then after teaching, I will go to the child again to teach and prompt more. And I will also sit next to them, to the child, to really guide instead of I am focusing my attention to high - performance children.

[Participant 3, 22/9/2021]

On the other hand, parallel to literature findings, participant 1 and 2 generally applies students' needs analysis to understand the low performing student's issues before setting appropriate goals and rewarding student for their achievements in the end.

I will do daily observation and establish a suitable method for the particular students then I will go to my supervisor or my manager and discuss about the most effective way to support the particular students. Then I will set a goal or several goals for the students to reach. I will separate the goals into parts so that the children can achieve one by one slowly. And when the particular students can reach one goal, we will celebrate it with positive compliments then let the children understand.

[Participant 1, 15/9/2021]

As pointed out by McLendon (2011), this study also found that using a computer and the latest technology can assist low performing students. Participant 5 suggests that computer learning about math is "probably more effective than reading or writing".

Google helped me a lot. Computer-assisted instruction can help create interesting activities and generally advocate interest to learn among low-academic performance students. They usually learn better in maths compared to writing and reading using computers.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

Theme 5

Teaching children in mixed-ability classrooms

Ansari (2013) describes a mixed-ability class as comprising of not only learners with various capacities but also those that have a broad range of preferences and learning styles. They can also be referred to as a variation of students in their abilities in grammatical knowledge, fluency and accuracy,

size of vocabulary, receptive and productive skills (Valentic, 2005). There are many factors which may differ from one student to another such as their attitude, motivation, and self-discipline (Light bown & Spada, 2006). This makes it difficult for the teachers to effectively plan for their lessons to ensure that all their students reap the required benefits from the lesson.

Throughout this study, participants have indicated strategies to teach mixed-ability class parallel to that indicated by Bowen (2020) which includes pairing up, drilling through homework and project works.

First, my way if I used to teach that 30 students in one time, you have to handle a lot of mix ability. So I will start by paring the students, mix of low and high ability students. And post the class, I usually do a lot of drilling through exercises and homework... so sometimes I will ask my higher student with their knowledge to come and like tutor their friends.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

I think I would need time to think how but to make it a balance in a sense that its interesting enough for the high academic performance and at the same time not to difficult for the low academic children... it would be definitely not be by myself ... I actually will use a buddy system, I'm not sure if it work with pre-school but I've know that like in high school or even in university a buddy system is actually works which is where we pair a high academic performance child with low academic performance child.

[Participant 2, 15/9/2021]

I think about is I will pair up the fast learner and the slow learner together to work as a team in certain activities. So that they can help each other, in the same time they also understand the about the teamwork.

[Participant 1, 15/9/2021]

Theme 6

Major constraints to support low-performance children in school

Poor academic performance at school is a critical issue that should be tackled immediately by the school authorities. To eliminate this problem, many researchers have pointed that the first thing that must be understood is the constrains to support low-performance children in school, which can be external or internal. External constrains include the school environment, social interaction, teachers' attitude, learning difficulties as well as teaching and learning techniques. While internal constrains may involve poor socio-economic background, lack of nutrition, poor parenting, broken homes, as well as children's emotional state and maturity (Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, 2017; Kail, 2016; Santrock, 2010; 2011).

One of the most researched are a related to low-performance children in school is socio-economic backgrounds. Although students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are not necessarily low performers, the socio-economic status of students does have a powerful influence on performance. OECD PISA (2010b) results show that students with lower socio-economic status (SES) have lower achievement levels on average than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, the findings from this case study did not indicate any matters related to socio-economic backgrounds. Rather some of the major constraints teachers faced in the classroom were permissive atmosphere at home, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, poor parental involvement, and teachers' inability to accommodate differentiated teaching strategies.

Reason being, it's not that low academic performance children are I would say they are bad in their academic, it's just that maybe the tools and the way that we, teachers execute the lesson is not appropriately and strategically and just don't get them as much time to learn and they just don't perform as well as high academic performance.

[Participant 2, 15/9/2021]

I think the very major constrain from my experience is the communication and the teamwork between teacher with teacher and teacher with the parents. Because sometimes the school will practice certain method for the children, but parents may not understand or may not have the time to follow the same methods and then this will be the most difficult part to support the children to achieve their goals. So, I think the most important part and the most challenging part is poor parenting, where parents are not being able to support their child at home. Also, permissive atmosphere at home where the parents aren't even interested in knowing what their child's homework is about can be a bad attitude that significantly reduces a child's performance in school.

[Participant 1, 15/9/2021]

I would say the main constrain is the teachers. Yeah. We have various ability students and not all teachers are trained to perform differentiated teachings in classroom. If teachers know to apply the differentiated instructional strategies and ability grouping, teachers can meet the varying needs of all students to succeed in their academic performances.

[Participant 5, 28/9/2021]

In my class also, I have a lot of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder students especially related to ADHD, something which is characterized by increased motor excitability like running, jumping and difficulty focusing in the classroom. So here, again the interventions have to be different. And unfortunately, we are not special needs trained. Unfortunately, due to a lack of information, I use the term "problem child" but thank god our principal who is an expert in differentiated curriculum is able to detect and treat the disorder and this helps improve the child's academic performance.

[Participant 4, 24/9/2021]

Parallel to research literature, participants from this case study also detailed that student enter classrooms with different personalities, abilities, learning styles, and behaviours. Through differentiated instructional strategies and ability grouping, teachers can meet the varying needs of all students and support them to meet learning outcomes to successfully achieve academic success (Bolic & Rogowsky, 2016; Levy, 2008).

V. CONCLUSION

Children will go through rapid growth and development during their early childhood stages. Strong leadership,

teacher's commitment, strategies and a fundamental belief and confidence that all children can learn is a necessary condition for turning around the low performance children to achieve better academic performance. As we enter a new era now with the New Normal academic settings, schools and educational authorities need to rethink the emerging factors that can contribute towards child development and future strategies to overcome the disparity in educational attainment especially between the low and high performers. In a nutshell, interactions between factors contributing towards child development and strategies to that may influence academic performances needs to be equally reviewed from time to time in determining the child's current and future development.

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