

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A SUBSTANTIAL SOCIO-BEHAVIOURAL TRANSITION MODULE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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Abstract

This is a conceptual framework in design and development of a substantial socio-behavioural transition module for young children. It aims to assist young children to sail smoothly from home to preschool. It also attempts to help preschool teachers to be well-prepared for a good start with young children. The transition into preschool is a significant milestone in young children's lives. It marks a period of time when they are separated from familiar caregiver, routine and surroundings and placed into a new environment which is full of uncertainties. The socio-behavioural transition module focuses in four elements which are relationships (peers and teachers), rules, routines and remarkable moment using. These elements influence how young children adapt to the new environment in order to construct a sense of belonging throughout the transition process. It adopts the design and developmental research methodology for this module. This module is proposed to evaluate its effectiveness not only by preschool teachers but also by young children using the Mosaic approach in order to include their voice in the proposed research.

INTRODUCTION

This conceptual framework is based on literature review. Transition into preschool can be exciting, challenging or anxiety-provoking but it is not experienced in the same manner for all young children. Some young children will take longer to settle into a new school environment than others. Therefore, young children can experience a range of different transitions due to many new demands and abrupt change in the new environment. Difficulties during a young child's transition to preschool can have long-term academic and social implications in the future (Einarsdottir, 2007; Puccioni, 2018).

During the transition period, a young child's experience of change which involves leaving behind some familiar routines, places, people, roles and relationship to start a "new life" in a place that is likely to include differences in routines, people, roles and relationships. Perry, Dockett and Howard (2000) emphasized young children begin to learn the way of operating as individuals in a group contexts, communicating their needs and requirements in socially appropriate ways, understanding rules and making new friendships with peers in the new setting. These new demands in term of socio-behavioral changes can be stressful for them. Therefore, updated research was needed to understand early childhood teachers' use of strategies and approaches to impact young children's transition experiences.

The term “social-behavioural” refers to human motivations, activities, psychological processes and interactions in small groups, families, communities, and whole societies. The proposed socio-behavioural elements for the research are relationship, rules, routines and remarkable moments.

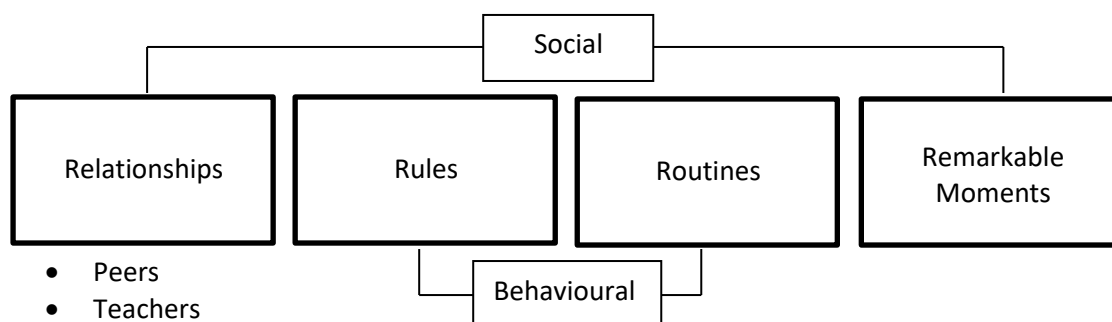


Figure 1.1 Socio-behavioral elements

Socio-behavioral elements are strongly supported from past studies by listening to young children, researchers have learned that they view friendships (Griebel & Niesel, 2001; Potter & Briggs, 2003) and peer relationships (Margetts, 2002) as important for starting preschool. In other research, young children emphasized the importance of rules in the transition to school and implied that they should know the rules at preschool entry (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Margetts, 2002).

Complicating the matter further, is the past studies based on transition. Most studies (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015; Walsh, et. al., 2018; Harper, 2015; Garðarsdóttir & Ólafsdóttir, 2016; Ackesjö, 2017) have been large scale examining parents’ and teachers’ perspective rather than exploring actual transition practices and activities which are involving the main participants. Besides, there is very little information available for teachers about what make the most effective and successful transition practices and activities during the period. Moreover, while it is evident that there are components that contribute to successful preschool transitions, it is not clear whether all of these components mentioned in the studies are suitable for young children. Besides, there are very limited studies which focused on young children’s perspective relating to their experiences in transition into formal schools and other institutional settings are increasingly being conducted (Lindahl, 1996; Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Lancaster, 2006). Therefore, children’s voice is essential in making a sound research which they are the key stakeholder of the issue.

In this proposed research study to design and develop a substantial socio-behavioral transition module for young children, listening to them is an essential and important element to evaluate in the third phase. Interviews session with preschools teachers and parents, and the Mosaic approach to be carried out by young children in order to evaluate the phase two designed and developed activities and practices. Besides, all of the participants are welcomed to voice out their suggestions for the practices and activities in the transition module for the betterment of the young children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The declaration of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, released in 2012, showed that 77% of the young children in the country were either enrolled in a public or private pre-school education. A widely embraced perspective conceptualizes the transition into pre-school as an ongoing effort to establish continuity between young children’s previous experiences and their

new environment and experiences (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). The question arises on whether the current preschool education system is effective for assisting young children to sail smoothly into preschool in order to prepare them to possess knowledge and skills to compete globally in the future.

A wealth of research has been conducted to understand how to support young children's learning during early childhood. It is not a surprise that the research on how to best support early learning is also widely varied. Despite the excitement of achieving a major developmental milestone, entering preschool can cause high levels of stress for young children due to the discontinuities that exist between home and preschool (DeCaro & Gill, et. al, 2006; McGettigan & Gray 2012; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Wildenger, et.al., 2008). Therefore, it is impossible for young children to first start a learning process without a substantial socio-behavioral transition module for them to settle down their emotional, physical and social. In addition to that, there is no document found for recommendation module during transition period for young children.

Varies transition program are introduced in different countries. In The United States, Head Start is a transition program for children at the age of three to five in lower income families. This program provides comprehensive early childhood education which consists of physical development and health, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language, literacy, math, science, creative arts expression, logic and reasoning, social studies, and English language development (Head Start, 2017). The aim of this program is to stabilize family relationships, enhance children's physical and emotional well-being, and establish an environment to develop strong cognitive skills. Countries participated in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development implemented Starting Strong to assist children in transition in their learning journey. The Starting Strong II Report (OECD, 2006) identifies that "facilitating transitions for children is a policy challenge in all systems" (p. 1). However, there are very few studies found in Malaysia context not to say a transition module to assist young children and teachers during this important period.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecological Theoretical Perspectives

This proposed research is based on Ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner which is widely used in education and social sciences in spelling out child development and undergirding practice so that all children would have opportunity to grow up healthy and competent (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Shelton, 2019). This theory provides a perpetual understanding on the underlie participation in the world. The transition to preschool is a complex process and should be understood in terms of multiple, intersecting influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman, et.al., 2000). Bronfenbrenner strongly believed that setting by itself cannot give a holistic understanding about children development. Engagement in the activities, the dyads and relationships, and the roles that occur within the setting help better support in the development. In this proposed research, examination of the important four elements within the setting, how they affect the developing young children, and ways to change settings so they have more positive effects.

Socio-Behavioural Perspectives

In a study examining family concerns during the preschool transition (McIntyre, et.al., 2007), four out of the top five concerns expressed by parents/caregivers regarding their young child's transition to preschool concerned socio-behavioural adjustment, including attending a new setting,

compliance/following directions, behaviour problems, and getting along with peers. Collectively, research suggests that young child's socio-behavioural functioning is emphasized more than academic competencies in preschool across groups of key stakeholders, including educators and parents (Grace & Brandt, 2008; McIntyre et al., 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). It is important to note that behavioural and academic problems frequently co-occur in young children, although the direction of the relationship is unclear (Hinshaw, 1992; Perry & Weinstein, 1998). It has been suggested that social and behavioural preschool adaptation can be viewed as an important pre-requisite to later child's academic development, creating the foundation for quality learning to occur (LoCasale-Crouch, et.al., 2008).

Besides, the research of Puccioni (2018) looked into teachers' beliefs which shape their use of transition practices for the young children. Preschool teachers emphasized the importance of children having the stamina to sit, listen, comprehend, and discuss texts prior to entering school to meet the demands of the newly adopted curricula. They also emphasized the importance of young children being able to communicate in order to help them successfully transition process. Findings showed that a variety of skills and behavioural attributes helped support young children's successful transition to elementary school and employed both traditional and innovative transition practices.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this conceptual framework to understand how to best support children's transition experiences, it is important to identify in specific ways which helps in sailing smoothly into the new environment and later into learning abilities. More specifically, this proposed research identifies four salient areas for understanding young children's transition experiences which are a) relationships, b) rules, c) routine and d) remarkable moment.

Relationships. Ladd, Herald and Andrews (2006) advocated that peer relationships begin early in the development of the young children and support social learning in the young children. Peer relationships are multi-dimensional as they may reflect supportive interactions, such as those found in amiable relationships; or they may reflect unsupportive or aggressive interactions, such as those found in situations of peer rejection (Van Lier & Koot, 2010). Young children who face difficulties responding to their environment in an appropriate manner are likely to have difficulties dealing with peers as well.

All children's development is built on a foundation of close and caring relationships with trusted adults (Skinner, 2018). A teacher may foster a good relationship with young children to build up their ability to adapt to their new environment. Professionals' openness and commitment are the key factors that contributed the most to young children positive transition experiences (Kang, et. al., 2017).

However, such relationships with peers and teachers are not simply dispensed on the first day of school. Instead, they are built through what Bronfenbrenner called "proximal processes" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), that is, through thousands of everyday social interactions and exchanges in the classroom (Mashburn & Pianta, 2010).

Rules. Although relationships with peers and teachers are crucial in the preschool setting, however, a good one needs to arise from understanding. Mutual relationships can come from observing rules. There are different rules for different roles and circumstances. The rules set boundaries and a structure by which everyone in the classroom agrees to behave in different contexts. If the young children know the rules, it is much easier to keep the boundaries. Boundaries play important roles in everyone's life. Rules teach children how to become responsible, respectful and resourceful (Gfroerer, et. al., 2013).

Young children are not responsible or mature enough to take in all the rules within a short period. If young children are given a good understanding of rules, they would be more likely to

abide by them and value them. The participation of obeying rules facilitates a sense of community and a sense of belonging (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Routines. Rules can help everyone to get into a routine. Imagine a day without routines. Imagine if young children were to come to preschool at random, play with toys and keep them as they like. It would be a mess for them, and teachers would be busy receiving young children who come to school at their preferred time. Many researchers claim that routines provide children with a sense of predictability, stability, and feelings of security, which foster their optimal development (Bater & Jordan, 2017; Ferretti & Bub, 2014). When young children have a clear idea about what they are expected to perform at a certain time during the daily routines and living activities, they are more inclined to cooperate and comply (Ren & Fan, 2019). Transitions are more likely to be successful if young children are gradually introduced to the new environment of school routine.

Remarkable moment. Play can be an important link to a young child's success in transition into preschool. Play is an optimal learning activity in the context of a more structured and academically demanding environment (DeVries, 2001). The elements of play (spontaneity, self-expression, flexibility, and pleasure) can actively engage young children to be more creative and imaginative in their learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

According to the finding in Kang, et. al. (2016), it can be said preschool should offer variety of activities to address the diverse abilities and needs of the families to participate. As preschool teachers plan transition activities, they need to take into consideration about the characteristics and needs of young children from different families.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, a substantial socio-behavioral transition module was developed with the principles for the implementation of transition programs are iterated. This study will be divided into three phases: the analysis phase; the design and development phase; and the evaluation phase. The objectives of each phase are as follows:

A: Analysis Phase

- 1) To describe the situation regarding transition process in the following areas:
 - a. Children's behaviors during transition from home to preschool.
 - b. Pre-school teachers' perception on the importance of transition into preschool
 - c. Problem faced by preschool teachers during transition process
- 2) To determine the practices and activities carried out during the transition period in different preschools.

B: Design and Development Phase

- 3) To design and develop a substantial socio-behavioral module during transition period for young children based on the views of a panel of experts for assisting a smooth transition process in the context of the study in the following areas:
 - a. relationship with teachers and peers
 - b. rule
 - c. routine
 - d. remarkable moment

C: Implementation and Evaluation Phase

- 4) To describe young children's response to the substantial socio-behavioral transition module.
- 5) To determine the difficulties in the implementation of the activities in the substantial socio-behavioral transition module for the young children in the context of the study.
- 6) To explore the effects of the substantial socio-behavioral transition module among the teachers in the context of the study.

Based on objectives listed above, this study will answer the following research questions according to the phases of the study:

A: Analysis Phase

- 1) What is the situation regarding the transition process?
 - a. How young children behave during transition from home to preschool?
 - b. What are the preschool teachers' perceptions on importance in transition into preschool?
 - c. What are the problems faced by the preschool teachers during the transition process?
- 2) What are the activities carried out in different preschools during transition period?

B: Design and Development Phase

- 3) What are the views of a panel of experts for a substantial socio-behavioral module during transition period for young children in assisting a smooth transition process in the context of the study in the following areas:
 - a. relationship with teachers and peers
 - b. rule
 - c. routine
 - d. remarkable moment?

C: Implementation and Evaluation Phase

- 4) How young children response to the substantial socio-behavioral transition module?
- 5) What are the difficulties in the implementation of the activities in the substantial socio-behavioral transition module for young children in the context of the study?
- 6) What are the effects of the substantial socio-behavioral transition program among the teachers in the context of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the Design and Developmental Research (DDR) procedures, defined by Richey and Klein (2004) as the “systematic study of design, development and evaluation processes with the aim of establishing an empirical basis for the creation of instructional and non-instructional products and tools and new or enhanced models that govern their development” (p. 1). There are three phases in this study. Phase one is the analysis phase where the transition process from home to preschool is determined from documentation and past studies, and interviews. Phase two is the design and development phase where the substantial socio-behavioural transition module for young children is developed and formative evaluation conducted by experts. The information from experts is used to assist the development of the module. Finally, phase three, the evaluation phase, look at the effectiveness of the implementation of the transition module on the young children. Data for evaluation is obtained via observation, documentations, and interview sessions with the preschool teachers.

The participants of a DDR may vary in each phase (Richey & Klein, 2004). In this study, the participants are young children, teachers, and panel experts. The researchers are the designer and developer of the module who seek the input and guidance from experts in the process of designing and developing the module.

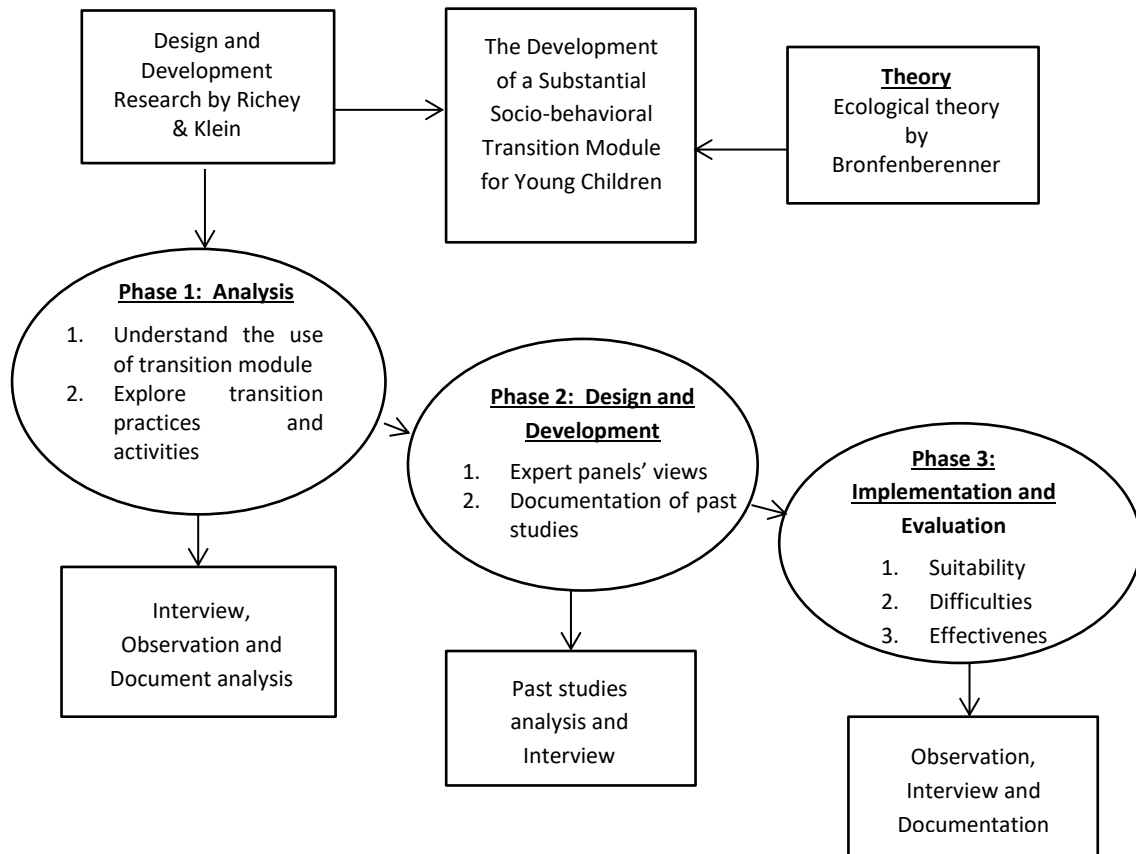


Figure 1.2 An overview of this research study

DISCUSSION

The proposed study is to develop a substantial socio-behavioural module for young children during their transition period into preschool. It plays an important part in understanding the actual scenario of preschool teachers in facing and handling young children who first attending preschool. Besides, the study also gives an understanding on practices and activities preschools are carrying out during transition period. When young children need to be separated from their parents, they normally make their demand by mumbling or crying. However, once the parents or caregivers leave the preschool, they start to settle in, follow routines and mingle with peers. Therefore, it is aimed to provide ways for teachers to handle this situation in ease.

Young children encounter a new social environment in preschools, with different adults and unfamiliar peers to interact with. Besides, they also need to accommodate with different sets of rules and routines. Research suggests that establishing a caring, positive relationship with teachers early on in kindergarten is an important predictor of future school adjustment (Pianta, 1994; Pianta, et. al., 1995). Before starting any preschool curricular, to familiarize with the new environments and people around them are important. Therefore, development of a substantial socio-behavioural transition module helps young children to settle in with ease.

The proposed research also serves the purpose in exploring the effectiveness of the module with young children's voice being listened on how they find the transition activities help them when they first attending preschool. This research is neither to trivialize young children's participation, nor to see them as peculiar, nor to portray them as victims of educational insufficiency (Cannella, 1999). Past study has evaluated the transition period only from the perspectives of parents, teachers, and children above the age of six. Young children especially

aged five years and below are not heard. Young children have a voice of their own, and they should be taken seriously; they should be involved in democratic dialogue, decision-making, and understanding their childhood (Dahlberg, et. al., 2007). Therefore, this proposed research not only focuses on the modules developed for the teachers but also personal experiences of young children by listening to them and involving them in evaluating the module.

CONCLUSION

Preschool in Malaysia is under the Ministry of Education. Given the importance of early childhood education, the ministry has decided to impose a minimum qualification condition for all preschool teachers in Malaysia. By the year 2020, all preschool teachers in Malaysia must possess a minimum qualification of a diploma in early childhood education (Ministry of Education Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2013). In view of this, preschool teachers are yet to build quality workforce for the young children. The development of various modules for teachers and young children are highly in need to bring up the quality of early childhood education in Malaysia.

The study of young children's transition into preschool is important because during the phase of early childhood, young children progress through a critical period of development in self-concept, language, degree of self-control and independence (Hugo, et. al., 2018). The process of the transition period has been found to have a long-standing impact on the young children's success in school.

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