LEARNING WITHOUT FEAR

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Abstract: A safe learning environment is an important provision for children. It affects the children`s development. This paper builds on Bronfenbrenner Ecology System Theory to examine the relationships and development of the children living in a safe learning environment. Nine children were interviewed and revealed that a safe learning environment influence their personal development and social interactions. In conclusion, a safe learning environment will help the children to improve academic performance and have a better social interaction. At the microsystem level, a positive relationship and a nurturing environment directly influence the children development. Taking into account the importance of a safe learning environment that a learner interacts with contribute significantly to the children development.

Keywords: Safe learning environment, Bronfenbrenner Ecology System Theory, children development, relationships.

Introduction

Children learn from the environment. The environment in which they live in significantly affected them. Bronfenbrenner dan Morris (1998) stated that children`s behaviour and development affected by the close interactions with people surround them (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Nowadays, children are growing up in a globally connected world. The children`s interaction with technology and social media has constructed in a new way of learning which is different from decades ago (Jha, 2020).

An environment has a power to influence a child way of learning and see the changes in themselves. This article will explore a safe learning environment is an important aspect for the children to be able to optimize their talent and capabilities. Generally, a safe learning environment will encourage the children to deeply explore their surroundings and learn more about it. Although virtual learning is a common thing in this post-pandemic era and provide many advantages however conventional learning has its own benefits as well. Seeing, listening and touching the object stimulate our brains to digest the information comprehensively. This reinforce that providing a safe learning environment for the children to optimize their growth and development is fundamental (Khairul Amali et al., 2023).

UNICEF (UNICEF, 2024) committed to provide safe learning environment for the children. A safe, responsive and nurturing environment is needed to protect them form any harm. The benchmarks to set up this specific place is measuring all kinds of preventive actions; free from sexual harassment, abuse and violence; free from physical and mental harassment, abuse and violence; and hygiene. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conducted a research that reported around 246 million children experienced abuse within the school environment every year (UNESCO, 2023). This has

negative impact on their academic achievement which will ultimately cause them to drop out from school. This incident will get worse if the school environment or any other learning environment is unsafe for children. In 2019, UNESCO released a report on Behind The Numbers: Ending School Bullying and Violence (UNESCO, 2019) in which the issue of safe learning environment has caught special attention from UNESCO as it will be the main obstacle in obtaining quality education for all children. This report also revealed unsafe learning environment has a significant adverse impact on children`s physical, mental and well-being throughout their life span.

To study the learning environment is vital to set a foundation to manage a supportive learning atmosphere, positive peer to peer relationships, educational activities that stimulate the growth and development of the children. By understanding and applying these key components it can enrich the children`s learning experiences and outcomes. They will develop a love of learning, respect each other, self-confidence, and achieve their full potential.

Literature Review
There are three points will be discussed in this section:

a. Children

The definition of a child in Indonesia context according to The Republic of Indonesia Law Number 35 Year 2014 Amendment to Law Number 23 Year 2022 On Child Protection is an individual below the age of eighteen years, including who is still in the womb.

Children is the plural form of child. Each of them grows and develop at their own stages. They are unique, have their own characteristics, their personalities can not be generalized. Their characteristics are constructed by their environment, community, culture and technology, therefore, establishing a safe and nurturing environment will stimulate their positive characters ((Nitecki & Chung, 2016).

b. Bronfenbrenner Ecology Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner`s Ecological Systems Theory explains children`s development is influenced by multiple systems. There are five systems linked with a child`s development stages and each of the system influence the child in different ways (Iruka et al., 2020).

The five systems are as follow first, Microsystem is the closest system to the child. Parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and neighbours are the people who the child has close interaction with in this system. Next is Mesosystem associates with interactions between the people in the microsystem that involves the child. For example, direct and indirect communication between the child`s parents and teacher build the connection on both parties. bridging the gap between   involves interactions between different microsystems in the child's life. The third system is Exosystem is the environment that influences the microsystem. For example, the lack of school funding may impact the quality of education. The fourth system is Macrosystem that discuss the socio cultural aspects influencing the child`s life. A child from middle-high income family has more advantages to access various formal and informal education compare to a child from low income household. The final system is Chronosystem explains the changes throughout the child`s life span. The changes can be predictable like puberty and unpredictable like parental divorce.

c. Safe Learning Environment

A safe learning environment is a place where the children can learn and do any kind of activities without any fear. This specific environment must be provided by the parents, teachers, and stakeholders as the duty bearers (UNESCO, 2019). Learning in a safe

environment is also a child rights whether it is a formal or non-formal or informal education setting (Jerome, Lee; Emerson, Lesley; Lundy, Laura; Orr, 2015). The basic principles and requirements for a safe and nurturing learning environment for children aiming to ensure they learn without any fear of being a victim of any kind of harm. Therefore, the learning process will deliver in a peaceful situation which will optimize the children growth and development (UNESCO, 2014)

Method

A qualitative approach is used to gather the information for this research. The information is collected directly from the resource persons, analysed purely by emphasizing on the meaning of each statements (Dr. Umar Sidiq, M.Ag Dr. Moh. Miftachul Choiri, 2019). The resource persons are 9 girls who are actively involved in various activities conducted in a community-based literacy program in their neighbourhood since 2018. The program is conducted on the terrace of one of members of the neighbourhood.

Total sampling is applied as only 9 girls meet the requirements as the resource persons. They were asked three questions related to their thoughts and experiences learning in the community-based learning literacy program. Their answers were validated one time at the end of the session.

Result and Discussion

Providing a safe learning environment for the children is align with the sub-theme of 2023 National Children`s Day that is To Create a Safe Environment for Children means to raise concern and awareness of parents, caregivers, teachers, community members, enterprises, and government aiming to fulfil the children`s right to protection in formal, non-formal and informal education setting. It is also to ensure the learning process deliver in a conducive and supporting situation.

The learning environment contribute significantly in shaping student`s learning achievement, attitudes and behaviours. A safe and nurturing learning environment can boost students` academic performance while an unsupportive learning environment can prevent them from achieving good academic performance. Therefore, it is essential to understand the determine factors in creating a safe learning environment (Khairul Amali et al., 2023).

Using Bronfenbrenner Ecology System Theory we analyse how the children see their learning environment in the layer of microsystem. They tend to have a close connection to student development. A learning process constitutes a two-way interaction between students and their learning environment. A student will receive the information, analyse the information, and apply the information to elevate her knowledge, improve her skills, and build her positive character (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). Drawing from Bronfenbrenner Ecology System Theory, a safe learning environment can only be achieved if the persons in the environment exercise positive communication and supportive towards each other. It will also influence our character and how we adapt with others in our social lives.

The children in this study revealed a safe learning environment is a place where their voices are heard; they received compliments for every good deed they do and supportive comments they say; no body shaming; full with activities that improve their knowledge and skills; give them experiences that may only happen once in a life time; and no bullying. Their statements show a safe learning environment is not only about physical facilities but also feeling respected, have friends, and get new knowledge and skills. Understanding how the children perceived their learning environment is essential in developing intervention strategies.

The act of their voices are heard is explained by when one of them has a chance to speak the other children listened and waiting for their turn to share their opinions. Disagreement often happens especially when it comes to decide what activities to do for the upcoming weeks. However, they always solve it by voting so all of the proposed activities are can be carried out. No bullying is the one of the ground rules in the program. The children stated physical bullying is the most common bullying that happens in school. But at the activity centre bullying is forbidden.

Consistent teaching of positive characters has been recognized as a preventive factor. The children are provided adequate knowledge using problem-based learning to open their minds on impacts of our words and behaviours towards others. The children`s tend to copy and encourage each other to practice positive behaviour. Therefore, friends` support is very much needed at their age to prevent adverse effects of the negative impacts of being a victim of bullying. Providing the children with a supportive environment will stimulate their social emotional and behavioural development (Rachman et al., 2023). This positive relationship among the children as well as between the children and their learning environment provides open space to express their feelings about things that upset them and how to deal with it.

The fact that the children have strong sense of belonging with their learning environment because of the intense interactions between the children and the learning environment (Rozana et al., 2021). Under Bronfenbrenner Ecology Systems Theory the close connection can be explained by the interaction that started since they participated in the program; the children are active in developing themselves by following every activities; the learning environment keeps evolving following the needs of the children and the increasing number of the children; the impact of the activities on the children`s growth and development (Crawford, 2020). This analysis highlights the interactions happen in the microsystem contribute significantly in strengthening the children`s sense of belonging towards their learning environment.

Children are prone for social threats. They are facing series issues from home, school and neighbourhood which can affect their resilience. Girls feel insecure with their physical appearances while boys usually scolded by teachers and/or parents. (Bailen et al., 2019) stated as a child grows older her/his social-emotional develops as well. The emotions scale up and the social relationships become more complex. In some circumstances social threats are inevitable but the children resilience can be built to prepare them to deal with adversities.

Respectful to each other is one of the positive behaviours applied in the program. After involving in the program, they develop a behaviour of being respectful to each other. They let someone finish her/his talk first without any interruption, respect every opinion and never look down on each other are the attitudes they develop through times. Their peer relationships grow positive as they learn in an environment that stimulate their positive characters.

Family is the primary setting a child grows and develop. As she/he gets older, the development context expanded in various settings, some connected some are not connected. A common example is a child gains experiences in one setting, apply it on the other setting and it goes on continuously all through her/his life span. To determine key factors contributing to a child`s ability to learn from her/his learning environment are correlated with age, education level, individual resilience, and experiences (Ferreira et al., 2020). In education, as this study discuss about a safe learning environment for children, a child has a quality to adapt and to overcome obstacles in order to attain academic success (Basu et al., 2020).   Living as students in this digital era the children undergo multiple physical, emotional, and social changes that challenges them. They struggle with the conflicting feelings occur when entering teenage years. In order to prepare them for all possible situations that may happen in their future, providing the children with skills that are not taught in school will benefit them.

A safe learning environment extends far beyond four-walls classroom. The children learn and solve problems in the context of their lives and communities. The deep connection between the children and their neighbourhood influenced the children`s perspectives and it is one of their qualities to overcome obstacles in the future. The vision of safe learning environment is a place where the children engage in learning, achieve the best of their capabilities and become productive citizens ((Nofianti, R .; Rozana, 2019)

Supportive learning environment is increasingly recognized issue in education promoting what makes the children experience learning improving their wellbeing (UNESCO, 2023). Promotion of children`s safety in learning environment drive various intervention programmes focused on children`s development, resilience, welfare, and wellbeing (Coulombe et al., 2020). Studying in a safe learning environment aiming to enhance their wellbeing by improving academic growth and utilizing their skills. The field of safe learning environment pursues to focus this inquiry by developing various interventions to ensure appropriate earning approach are applied to maximize children wellbeing.

Positive character is one of the improvements experienced by the children. Indeed, one of the program objectives is to enhance social emotional skills and non-cognitive traits to build up their academic and life skills success in the future (Yuliawan & Taryatman, 2020). Character strength revealed to be morally valued and carried out in an individual way of treating herself and/or others. The character development is correlated with the influence of the positive environment and relationships. Therefore, character education is more effective if instilled and reinforced through learning models (Nofianti, Rita; Munisa ; Agustia, 2022).

Character development involves feelings, logic, and abilities to behave consistently in a positive way throughout time place. Three main aspects in to achieve successful character development are mentors, skill-building, and opportunities to take part as a leadership in activities in the family, school and communities (Yuliawan & Taryatman, 2020). Positive character is the foundation which will flourish other positive traits, for example capability, self-assurance, self-resilience and enable every individuals to contribute significantly to her or his own lives and the society (Sutarman et al., 2022).

The positive character development experienced by the children are they have more respect towards themselves and others, have the courage to tell their opinions, on time, and do not interrupt when someone is talking. They learned it by observing, applying and reflecting the situations in their daily lives. This shows that a supportive learning environment significantly contribute to the children`s growth and development. Analyzing from Bronfenbrenner`s Ecology System Theory, at the Mesosystem level, the interactions and relationships are bidirectional. The children positive character development are influenced by their close interactions with their neighborhood and their positive character affect the neighborhood as well (Crawford, 2020; Jugessur, 2022; Yuliawan & Taryatman, 2020).

According to Bronfenbrenner Ecology Systems Theory, children`s development results from their interactions with their surrounding environment. This theory is applicable to understand how the children`s academic, well-being, and psychological development affected by the environment. Emphasizing on the importance of positive relationships with the environment will set a solid foundation for the child to overcome potential damages generated by the unsupportive environment. A nurturing environment full of caring relationships is adequate to promote positive social emotional development in a child (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Munisa; Siregar, B.; Nofianti, 2021).

Conclusion

The central concept of providing safe learning environment for a child is the fact that the development of a child sense of belonging to her/his learning environment occurs as a result

of positive relationships between the child and the people within the environment. Bronfenbrenner Ecology Systems Theory is considered reliable to understand the relationship between a child and its surrounding environment. The interactions a child has with the people within the environment, the process of building trust towards the environment, the struggle to fit into the environment and the time spent to construct the trust and relationship can describe the various factors that can mutually influence a child`s sense of belonging to her/his learning environment.

Generally, a child personal characteristic including age, gender, temperament, the history of educational background, the achievement of stage of development, the social interactions can collectively develop the child`s sense of belonging and safety to their learning environment. At the microsystem level, a safe learning environment plays a significant role in directly influencing the children development. How the children perceived the meaning of a safe learning environment can be shifted due to the changes in chronological age and life histories of the children.

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