



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Effect of a Social Emotional Learning Programme for Primary School Students



Agnes S.K. Wong, Cecilia W.P. Li-Tsang*, Andrew M.H. Siu

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China

Received 25 November 2013; received in revised form 25 October 2014; accepted 11 November 2014
Available online 13 January 2015

KEYWORDS

primary school students;
problem behaviours;
social emotional learning;
social skills

Summary *Objective/Background:* This study evaluates the effect of a social emotional learning (SEL) programme for primary school students who have difficulties in social and emotional management, as reported by their teachers or parents.

Methods: Twenty-seven primary school students were recruited and randomly assigned to the treatment group ($n = 14$) and the control group ($n = 13$). The elementary school version of the Social Skills Rating System was used to assess the social skills and problem behaviours of the participants before and after the programme. The treatment group joined a six-session SEL programme, which was modified and localized based on the Strong Kids Programme. The programme aimed to improve participants' social emotional skills, such as dealing with anxiety and understanding and identifying the emotions of self and others. Each session lasted for about 1 hour and was run in small groups.

Results: Problem behaviours were significantly less frequent in the treatment group after the programme ($p = .008$), but not in the control group. However, no significant changes were found in the measures of social skills.

Conclusion: The results of this pilot study show that the SEL can effectively reduce the problem behaviours of primary school students. Implications and future research directions are discussed. Copyright © 2014, Hong Kong Occupational Therapy Association. Published by Elsevier (Singapore) Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Over the past decade, there have been growing concerns about the increase in mental health problems among

children and adolescents. Recent studies have consistently reported an alarming increase in mental health problems and suicide rates among children and adolescents in Hong Kong and worldwide (Choi & Hung, 2011; Collishaw,

Conflicts of interest: All contributing authors declare no conflicts of interest.

* Corresponding author. Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China.

E-mail address: Cecilia.li@polyu.edu.hk (C.W.P. Li-Tsang).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hkjot.2014.11.001>

1569-1861/Copyright © 2014, Hong Kong Occupational Therapy Association. Published by Elsevier (Singapore) Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.

Maughan, Goodman, & Pickles, 2004; van Heeringen, 2001; Yip, Liu, Lam, Sunita, & Chen, 2003). Parents and students in Hong Kong and many Chinese populations often see the pursuit of academic success as a top priority. Children and young people often spend endless hours and great effort in pursuing academic achievements, as an academic achievement is often seen as the best indicator of school adjustment. Development of intellectual and academic skills is encouraged over holistic development, and there appears to be a lack of attention to the social and emotional well-being of children and adolescents in the school curriculum (Shek & Chan, 1999). However, to adapt well in modern societies, it is important to learn to become compassionate and responsible individuals who are able to manage emotions effectively, to be resilient, to communicate effectively, and to build friendship with others. There is a great need to re-establish social and emotional development as one of the key objectives of the elementary school curriculum around the world (Elias & Arnold, 2006).

Social emotional development plays an important role in children's ability to function in the school setting and achieve academic success (Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006; Denham, 2006; Klein, 2002). Good social emotional competence is related to many positive outcomes of development, including prolonged attention span, better memory, and self-regulation, which are all crucial for academic success (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Isen, 2003; Ray & Smith, 2010). Children with poor social emotional development are at risk of a wide range of negative outcomes, such as psychopathology, substance abuse, and academic failure (Aviles et al., 2006; Denham, 2006; Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009). Many strategies have been proposed to promote social emotional well-being in children, such as promoting early attachments, building emotional and social competence, or providing a secure environment that promotes wellness, encouraging empowerment about the future, and learning of coping skills. Social emotional learning (SEL) is an emerging focus in education, which tends to use strategies to promote well-being. Many SEL programmes use a prevention-oriented approach by teaching students skills to regulate their emotions and to interact appropriately with others. It is generally believed that preventing social emotional problems is more effective in younger than in older children, when behaviours are more malleable (Fisak, Richard, & Mann, 2011; Lock & Barrett, 2003). There is increasing evidence that SEL programmes could make a positive and long-lasting impact on the well-being of individuals (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Saarni, 1999), including children's school adjustment and academic achievement (Greenberg et al., 2003; Merrell, Juskalis, Tran, & Buchanan, 2008).

SEL programmes, such as the Strong Kids in the United States, incorporate a range of methods to promote resilience; facilitate the development of social and emotional competence; teach social, emotional, and life skills; and prevent negative life outcomes (Greenberg et al., 2003; Merrell et al., 2008). SEL is based on prevention science and is designed for the 70% of students who do not have substantial mental health risks or problems (Merrell et al.). In this study, we developed an SEL programme for junior primary school students based on the curriculum framework of Strong Kids (Merrell et al.). The Strong Kids was selected as our framework because it is prevention oriented (Cowen, 1994), concise and well

written, evidence based, and feasible for implementation in educational and health care settings without the need to be certified (Merrell et al.). Based on the Strong Kids programme, our programme attempts to provide a systematic guide to the teaching of social and emotional competence, including the skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Merrell, 2010; Merrell et al.). The programme is expected to enhance social emotional outcomes of children without mental health risks, as well as promote universal mental health (Caldarella, Christensen, Kramer, & Kronmiller, 2009; Merrell, 2010). Although there are a number of evaluation studies of SEL programmes in the United States, very few studies have been published on the effectiveness of SEL programmes in Chinese populations.

The SEL programme developed in this study was based on the Strong Start curriculum for Grades K-2 and Strong Kids for Grades 3-5. Strong Start for Grades K-2 focuses on the following: (a) Facilitating the understanding of the six universal emotions (i.e., happy, sad, angry, afraid, surprised, and disgusted); (b) Learning how to manage anxiety and worry; (c) Using basic thinking skills, like clear thinking; (d) Conflict resolution; and (e) Stress reduction and relaxation. The Strong Start programmes are about 35 minutes in length/lesson, whereas the Strong Kids lessons are about 50 minutes in length/lesson (Merrell, 2010).

Because the Strong Kids programmes have been found to be effective in reducing participants' problem behaviours (Caldarella et al., 2009; Marchant, Brown, Caldarella, & Young, 2010; Merrell et al., 2008), with strong treatment fidelity and social validity (Merrell, 2010), and have great potential to be adapted for the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Castro-Olivo, 2007), this study develops a culturally adapted version of an SEL programme for Chinese children in Hong Kong and evaluates whether it is feasible and beneficial to elementary school students in the local context. If the programme can be implemented effectively, teachers may be trained to run such programmes in the long run (Barrett & Turner, 2001). In the long run, the SEL programmes could become a part of the school curriculum, instead of being interest classes conducted outside of formal classes. This study could provide preliminary evidence on the effectiveness of SEL programmes for young children, so that schools could consider incorporating it as part of the formal curriculum. This study translates and adapts the curriculum for primary school students and then evaluates the effects of the programme on social and emotional outcomes in the Chinese culture. It was hypothesized that participants' social skills would be significantly improved, while the frequency of problem behaviours would significantly decrease after the intervention compared with that prior to the intervention. It was also hypothesized that participants in the control group would not show any significant changes in either measure.

Methods

Participants

The participants ($N = 27$; 18 males) were recruited from a church and two mainstream primary schools located in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5872671>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5872671>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)