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Socio-Emotional Development in Sixth Grade Elementary School Children from Two Public Schools

Efrain Duarte Briceño, Martha Vanessa Espejel López, María de Lourdes Pinto Loria and Jorge Carlos Aguayo Chan

Autonomous University of Yucatan (Mexico)

*Corresponding author:

Efrain Duarte Briceño
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Abstract: The purpose of this work was to improve socio-emotional development of the participants as a basis to strengthen prosocial behavior. The sample was conformed by 89 sixth grade students of two public schools between 10 and 14 years old. For the evaluation of socio-emotional traits, the following instruments were used: (1) Battery of socialization, BAS-3, (Silva Moreno & Martorell Pallás, 2018), (2) Questionnaire of antisocial and criminal conducts, A-D, (Seisdedos, 2001); (3) CP, Questionnaire of prosocial conduct (Weir & Duveen, 1981); (4) Scale of assertive behavior for children CABS (Mencia Padilla, 2016); (5) Questionnaire of cognitive strategies for the resolution of social situations, EIS, (Garaigordobil, 2000); and (6) Scale of self-concept for children (Cortés Ayala & Flores Galaz, 2010). The work consisted of an applied research with a multi-group design of pretest-posttest repeat measures and a control group. There were significant differences found by sex in: prosocial behavior reported by teachers; antisocial and criminal behaviors; and socialization behavior; where women show a Medium high and men a Medium low level. The diagnostic-evaluation differences by group, as well as the differences between experimental and control groups after the intervention are discussed.

Keywords: Primary education, prosocial behavior, school well-being, self-concept, socio-emotional development.

INTRODUCTION

School is an important setting for the human well-being development and childhood is a critical moment to foster such well-being. Also, this stage of life is a vulnerable moment for the socio-emotional development. Cooper, Masi and Vick [1] found that approximately 14% of the children experience socio-emotional problems, and that boys show a greater prevalence compared to the girls. On another hand, these authors propose that there are risk factors that make children even more vulnerable regarding socio-emotional issues, in which two of them are closely linked with the present study: (1) living in districts of low socio-economic level and (2) having a family with low income levels.

In accordance with the latter, research has shown that experiencing domestic violence increases the possibility that children present issues of aggression, anxiety, depression or hyperactivity, also these problems in childhood are often predictors of antisocial

behavior and delinquency in adolescence [1]. In this way, emotional development during childhood lays the basis for development in adolescence and adulthood [2].

Various studies with children and adolescents in educational contexts, in order to prevent violent conduct, have confirmed the positive effects of the interventions on the improvement of prosocial behavior [3, 4, 5], empathy, self-concept, self-esteem and emotional stability [6-10], the positive image of others, the ability to analyze feelings, as well as the violence prevention, dispute settlement, prosocial values, human rights, psychological well-being and antisocial behaviour [7, 8, 11, 12, 10], all of these traits and characteristics that conform the personality of an individual.

On another hand, it has been recommended to implement training programmes for teachers, in order to help them promote socio-emotional competences, which are linked to the increase of social skills in

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children, reducing behavior problems and promoting academic learning [1, 2, 13].

Also, taking into account that the incidence of violence in schools across the country (Mexico) has been expressed with certain precision as proven by the studies conducted by the National Institute of Educational Evaluation [14], it can be stated that: (a) the acts of violence in the school centers are more frequent among primary school student than secondary school ones, (b) the students who are victims of violence, usually incur this type of behavior, (c) the levels violence increase when the students live in one-parent homes or where parents are absent, (d) when they perceive that coexistence is conflicting within their homes, and (e) when the parents are not attentive to what their children do outside the school.

Based on their deep meta-analysis, Savina and Wan [13] suggest that the sociocultural context must be seriously be taken into account when socio-emotional intervention programs are developed and implemented. In addition, it has been found that factors such as family environment, school performance and social context where the school is located influence the possibility of engaging in acts of violence, as well as personal interaction factors of students within the school center - including gender- as it was observed that males participate and are victims of violence more frequently than females [14].

This scenario requires to establish targeted education initiatives starting from having reliable information about the types, frequencies and main actors of the most recurrent conflicts in schools; the perception of gender stereotypes and school safe-unsafe spaces, as well as the role of teachers and directors in these processes, so that they contribute to provide different timely and strategically guidance prevention and care [15].

Therefore, the demand for quality education must be more radical and urgent in schools with students from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors, in order to break the links of poverty with exclusion and ignorance. The criteria for quality improvement should be applied to teacher training, syllabi and curricula updating, pedagogical approaches, teaching methods and teaching resources [16].

In the research presented by the National Report on Gender Violence in the Basic Evaluation 2009 [17], in the case of sixth grade students of primary and third grade of secondary school, it was found that the house chores, care of the siblings and household tasks are delegated to the girls, and that the children are responsible for providing, playing football or other rough games. However, children tend to feel more scolded and reprimanded by teachers than girls, experience more incidents of physical violence among

them, are more likely to be pointed as responsible for insults and humiliations, reproducing the stereotype that men are strong and aggressive. In the case of primary school level, violence was considered a more severe problem in urban schools with low levels of marginalization.

Another study conducted in Mexico with urban high school students reported a high incidence of verbal abuse patterns (gossip, insults, offensive nicknames) and not least, physical aggression. It is mentioned that men receive more insults and women are more subject to gossip. The authors comment that disrespect and abuse of people in schools become forms of socialization because they are hiddenly permitted and endorsed by the institution itself. The youngsters themselves are used to being mistreated, they prefer receiving a nickname than being ignored by their peers, they are insulted, hit them and threatened, and then they comment "we get along" or "the relationships are normal", which is an indicator of socialization for violence [18].

Consequently, we believe that social and emotional competencies are the foundation for overall development and the future success of children. Likewise, the research suggests that these competencies should be promoted by parents and educators during childhood, to achieve long-term individual and social well-being [3]. Accordingly, among the public policy proposals, there are promoting socio-emotional development among students to deal with difficulties they face in schools; for this reason, it is important to develop intervention programs with the purpose of promoting prosocial, cooperative and creative skills.

Under this perspective, studies which have approached the prosocial behavior, define it as a voluntary behavior that intends to benefit another person, with or without altruistic motivation [19, 20], where the results have evidenced very positive impacts of the cooperative experience for personal and social development in educational contexts. According to all the above, this work was based theoretically on:

(a) The conclusions derived from studies that have used the links between play and child development, which have demonstrated the vital importance of cooperative game activity in human development and its effects on prosocial behavior [10, 21].

(b) The conclusions derived from studies which consider parents and teachers as evaluators, given that socio-emotional development tends to be an infrequent behavior and difficult to observe reliably in a direct way [2], and

(c) Finally, according to the review by Savin and Wan [13], the conclusions that indicate

socioemotional development and learning are modeled by cultural practices and values, therefore, socio-emotional intervention programs must be sensitive to the context where they are conducted.

In This sense, the following objectives were proposed: (1) Identify the socioemotional development levels of the participants in the psychoeducational intervention program before the intervention, (2) Design a program of prosocial and collaborative play activities for the participating children with the purpose of preventing violent behaviors, and (3) Significantly improve the socio-emotional development of the participants allowing the development of prosocial behavior.

Method

Participants

The study involved 89 students in 6th grade primary school from two sub-urban public schools with characteristics of marginality, of the city of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico; 35 females (39.32%) and 54 males (60.67%), with an average age of 11 years, in a range of 10 to 14. The sample was directed non-probabilistic [22]. With the technique of convenience sampling, two groups were formed in each school: experimental with 42 participants (47%) and control with 47 participants (53%).

These sub-urban locations, according to the school authorities' reports, have characteristics of marginality and poverty (lack of employment, alcoholism, vandalism, etc.) and both schools exhibit problems of aggressive behavior among their students.

Ethical concerns

In concern to the informed consent the current procedure is developed in this sequence:

First, the research project including the ethical issues is validated by the ethics committee "Postgraduate and Research System" from the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, in this case with the ID number: FPSI-2012-0014. The later means that the consent procedures followed were approved by the Ethics Committee that approved the study.

Second, likewise, we accomplished the written informed consent from the principals from each participant school. Third, in a meeting with the participants' parents, were the non-risk taking is established, the informed consent was obtained in an oral way.

At last, it is important to clarify that in our cultural context is not imperative to obtain the written informed consent for all participants, it is enough with a parent's oral consent, furthermore, considering that some parents are non-literacy ones.

Intervention Program

A total of 20 sessions of 2 hours each were held, along with their corresponding feedback meetings with the teachers and collaborating students. In each of the sessions various cooperative and creative play techniques were presented; starting with directions about the activity to be developed, the work groups organization, the game development and -in the end- the reflection on the achieved performance. Each session was structured according to the following objectives:

a) Learning to give opinions, listen to others, respect points of view and promote friendly and cooperative interactions, and

(b) Learning to give and receive help to achieve common goals, make decisions, resolve conflicts and carry out goals that the group established with the agreement of all members.

Instruments

For the evaluation of the social and affective emotional development factors before and after conducting the psychoeducational intervention program, the following instruments were used:

1. Socialization Battery, BAS-3, [23], which includes the social behaviors of: consideration, leadership, self-control, withdrawal and anxiety.

2. Questionnaire of antisocial and criminal behaviors, A-D [24]; which includes antisocial and criminal behaviors.

3. CP, Questionnaire of prosocial behavior [25]; which includes the prosocial behavior of the child, reported by parents and by teachers.

4. Children Assertive Behavior Scale, CABS [26]; which includes assertive, aggressive and passive social behavior.

5. Cognitive strategies for the resolution of social situations questionnaire, EIS, [27]; which includes cognitive strategies for solving social situations.

6. Self-concept scale for children [28]; which includes the self-concept as: person, son/daughter, brother, friend and student.

Type of study and design

This research was quantitative, applied, and quasi-experimental, with a design non-equivalent control group [8].

Procedure

(1) Diagnosis. It was performed at the beginning of the school year, through the test administration to the experimental and control groups.

(2) Program design. The intervention program was designed based on cooperative play, taking into account the diagnosis results.

(3) Training. The two professors who participated in the development of the intervention activities in the classroom and two Bachelor in Psychology undergraduates were trained for the observations during the intervention sessions.

(4) Psycho-educational intervention. A total of 20 sessions of 2 hours each were held, with their respective feedback meetings with the teachers and collaborating students.

(5) Evaluation. At the end of the intervention program, the students were administered the same instruments as in the diagnostic phase to evaluate the effects of the program.

RESULTS

Regarding the participants' characterization, according to the results, a general profile of socio-emotional development was structured. Table 1 shows the categorization of each of these characteristics in four levels: High (4.0 to 2.1), Medium high (2.0 to 0.1), Medium low (0.0 to -2.0) and Low (-2.1 to -4.0). In this categorization, the positive and negative standard rating values used (z) and mean value (0.00) were taken into account.

Table-1: General diagnosis profile of socio-emotional development

Characteristics	Scorings*	Classification
Prosocial behavior reported by professors	1.39	Medium-High
Passive solution of social situations	.99	Medium-High
Self-concept of self (I)	.46	Medium-High
Antisocial and criminal behavior	.39	Medium-High
Self-concept as a son/daughter	.26	Medium-High
Self-concept as a student	.22	Medium-High
Socialization	.14	Medium-High
Self-concept as a sibling	.11	Medium-High
Assertive behavior	.03	Medium-High
Prosocial behavior reported by parents	.00	Medium low
Self-concept as a friend	-.13	Medium low
Aggressive solution of social situations	-.27	Medium low
Assertive solution of social situations	-1.09	Medium low

* z grades

In order to establish differences by sex, a differentiated profile of men and women were structured (table 2), in which the socio-emotional development characteristics were presented according to this variable. Also, a variance analysis of a single factor was performed, which yielded significant

differences in: (a) the *prosocial behavior* reported by the teachers; (b) the *antisocial and criminal behavior*; and (c) the *socialization behavior*. In all cases, women reached a Medium high level and men a Medium low level.

Table-2: Diagnostic profile of socio-emotional development by sex

Characteristics	Comparative scores *		F	p
	Women	Men		
Prosocial behavior reported by professors	.33	-.20	6.320	.014
Passive solution of social situations	-.08	.05	.460	.499
Self-concept of self (I)	-.14	.09	1.193	.278
Antisocial and criminal behaviors	.46	-.30	14.437	.000
Self-concept as a son/daughter	-.09	.05	.499	.482
Self-concept as a student	-.01	.00	.006	.937
Socialization	.31	-.20	5.587	.021
Self-concept as a sibling	-.05	.03	.128	.721
Assertive behavior	.20	-.12	2.316	.132
Prosocial behavior reported by parents	.11	-.07	.546	.463
Self-concept as a friend	.00	.00	.004	.950
Aggressive solution of social situations	-.18	.12	2.082	.153
Assertive solution of social situations	.15	-.10	1.475	.228

* z grades

Once the intervention concluded, a diagnostic-assessment comparative analysis was carried out for each of the groups (experimental/control); it can be observed in table 3 that significant differences were found only in the prosocial behavior reported, both by

the parents as well as the teachers. It can be observed the experimental group showed a change in prosocial behavior from Medium low to Medium high; in the case of the control group, the change was the inverse way.

Table-3: Diagnostic-evaluation differences by group

Group	Behavior	z average		t	p
		Diagnosis	Evaluation		
Experimental	Prosocial behavior reported by professors	-.54	.30	-5.57	.000
Control	Prosocial behavior reported by parents	.26	-.26	3.57	.002
	Prosocial behavior reported by professors	.52	-.20	7.99	.000

On another hand, a one-factor analysis of variance was performed, comparing the scores of the experimental group's final evaluation with those of the control group; the result confirmed this difference in the prosocial behavior reported by parents ($F = 5.78$, $p = .019$) and by teachers ($F = 7.56$, $p = .007$).

Finally, the variance analysis of the evaluation scores divided by sex showed significant differences in the prosocial behavior reported by the teachers ($F = 4.17$, $p = .044$) and in the socialization ($F = 6.66$, $p = .012$); in both cases, women are placed in a Medium high level (z prosocial = .26, z socialization = .33) and men in a Medium low level (z prosocial = -.17, z socialization = -.21).

DISCUSSION

The Diagnosis and Evaluation analysis results show significant differences in prosocial behavior (reported by parents and teachers). The experimental group presented a change in prosocial behavior from Medium low to Medium high; in the case of the control group, the change was the inverse way. According to this, it is important to consider that directed educational actions should be established starting from the social and cultural context [13, 15]. In addition, comparing the final evaluation scores of the experimental group with those of the control group, this difference in prosocial behavior is confirmed.

Taking into account the differential profile according to sex, significant differences were found in: (a) the *prosocial behavior* reported by the teachers; (b) the *antisocial and criminal behavior*; and (c) the *socialization behavior*. In all cases, women show a Medium high level and men a Medium low level.

Regarding prosocial behavior and socialization, the results of other investigations are confirmed, however, there is a contradiction in relation to antisocial and criminal behavior with what has been previously found [14, 18, 17].

After the intervention, the significant differences by sex in the experimental group were found in prosocial behavior (reported by parents and teachers) and in socialization, all this, based on the average scores obtained; however, the classification levels remain in the range (Medium high), only in the socialization men were located in the Medium low level. This implies that the intervention was effective for both, although it is evident that the girls display a behavior that avoids conflict, such as saying what they think and trying to solve social situations in a peaceful manner [17], which is not totally fulfilled in the case of children.

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