

Empathetic Relationships Through Emotional Literacy in Early Childhood

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood. The research employed a quantitative method with a correlational approach. The sample consisted of 16 children aged 3-6 years, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using validated and reliable empathy and emotional literacy scales. Pearson correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood ($r = 0.291$, $p > 0.274$), as young children have not fully developed an understanding of empathy toward others. These findings suggest that children's emotional literacy is not solely dependent on empathy but is influenced by other factors. Young children can recognize others' emotional states without necessarily engaging in empathetic responses. This study provides insights for educators and parents in designing learning programs aimed at enhancing children's emotional literacy.

Keywords: empathy, emotional literacy, early childhood, correlational study

Abstrak. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memeriksa hubungan antara empati dan literasi emosional pada anak usia dini. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kuantitatif dengan pendekatan korelasional. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 16 anak usia 3-6 tahun yang dipilih secara purposive sampling. Data diperoleh menggunakan instrumen skala empati dan literasi emosional yang telah teruji validitas serta reliabilitasnya. Analisis dengan uji korelasi Pearson mengungkapkan tidak adanya hubungan empati dan literasi emosional pada anak usia dini yang berusia 3-6 tahun karena anak usia dini belum sepenuhnya memahami empati pada orang lain ($r = 0.291$, $p > 0.274$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada hubungan literasi emosional anak dengan tingkat empatinya sebab tingkat literasi emosional anak tidak tergantung pada empati saja tetapi pada faktor yang lain, anak usia dini hanya dapat melihat keadaan emosional orang lain tanpa melibatkan empati. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pendidik dan orang tua dalam merancang program pembelajaran yang berorientasi pada peningkatan literasi emosional anak.

Kata kunci: empati, literasi emosional, anak usia dini, studi korelasional.

A. INTRODUCTION

Empathy is one of the important components in children's social-emotional development that involves empathy, which allows them to understand and respond appropriately to the feelings of others. (Eisenberg, 2020). Emotional literacy, which includes the ability to identify, understand, and manage emotions, is crucial for developing empathy in early childhood. (Denham & Bassett, 2019) However, there are still limited studies that examine the relationship between these two variables quantitatively. The development of empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood is greatly influenced by various factors, including interactions with parents, caregivers, and the social environment. (Haidatun Nisa & Raudatussyifa, 2023). Children who receive less support in managing their emotions tend to be less empathetic, whereas children who frequently receive appropriate emotional stimulation have higher empathy. (Morris, 2020). In addition, previous research shows that emotions in early childhood can help them handle social conflicts and build healthier relationships with others. (Fuadia, 2022) Children who are able to understand and control their emotions tend to have an easier time building positive relationships with their peers and are better able to handle social challenges. (Damayanti et al., 2023).

Early emotional education is crucial for developing a child's social intelligence. Several studies have shown that children who receive emotional education from an early age are better able to demonstrate empathy and have better social skills as they grow older. (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Consequently, more systematic efforts are needed to incorporate emotional literacy into early childhood education programs. Children develop empathy through social interactions and their personal experiences with various emotional situations. (Lulu Rahma Aulia et al., 2024). Children who are consistently taught to recognize and express their emotions in healthy ways are more likely to develop high levels of empathy. Therefore, it's important for parents and teachers to provide children with opportunities from an early age to express and

understand their emotions.

Approaches based on play and storytelling have also been shown to be effective in enhancing emotional literacy and empathy in early childhood. Children can learn about others' feelings and manage their own emotions through role-playing and narrative storytelling. (Mardiyah et al., 2020). However, research quantitatively examining the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy remains scarce, particularly in early childhood. Most studies focus on theoretical aspects without conducting in-depth empirical measurements. Therefore, the correlational analysis conducted by this study aims to fill this gap and increase our understanding of how these two variables interact with each other.

By understanding the relationship between empathy and literacy, the results of this research are expected to form the basis for developing more efficient educational programs to enhance emotional intelligence in early childhood. This will impact children's social development and help them build more balanced and harmonious lives in the future.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

According to Barton, literacy means the ability to read and write. Literacy can also be called literacy, which is important to introduce to children from an early age so they develop a literate spirit. Parents play a role in instilling literacy through habits and direct examples, because children learn from habits practiced at home. Early literacy relates to reading and writing for preschool-aged children. The five principles of early reading include: appropriate reading materials, a focus on oral language skills, discovering the meaning of writing, introducing reading before writing, and enjoyable activities in play. (Inten, 2017).

Nurbiana Dhinie explains the stages of early childhood reading development. The first stage is fantasy, where children begin to recognize books and turn pages. Next is the formation of self-concept, where children feel like "readers" and engage in reading activities. Then comes the picture reading stage, where children begin to become aware of writing and discover words. The

reading recognition stage occurs when children use three signal systems and become interested in reading signs in their environment. Finally, the fluent reading stage, where children read a variety of books. After reading, children begin to write after becoming accustomed to seeing writing activities at home, developing an interest in understanding the meaning of writing. (Inten, 2017).

According to Orbach and Killick, emotional literacy is the ability to communicate our emotional reactions to ongoing situations and as knowledge about our own responses and how they influence our thoughts and actions. According to Brackett and Rivers in Hughes et al., emotional literacy is the ability to identify, understand, express, and regulate emotions, including social, intellectual, and personal emotions. Emotional literacy is the ability to understand and express one's emotions. This includes recognizing and acknowledging one's emotions, as well as knowing how to manage them. Furthermore, emotional literacy also encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and relate to the emotions of others. (Pangastuti & Wiryo, 2019).

Child development encompasses physical, social, and emotional growth. Healthy social and emotional development is essential for helping children behave appropriately and understand the meaning of life. Emotions influence how children socialize with others, including their ability to cooperate and transition between activities. Social interactions in elementary school involve relationships in the classroom and during play, as well as bonds with peers. Emotions are strong feelings that can be happy or unhappy, and they influence children's social development. Children who experience emotional problems may have difficulty forming friendships and may feel isolated. Therefore, emotional literacy is important to support good social interactions, namely the ability to recognize and manage emotions appropriately, as explained by Sharp. Researchers want to explain the role of emotional literacy in the social interactions of elementary school children. (Susanti et al., 2019)

The word "einföhlung," popular in the 1800s, is the origin of the word empathy. This term originates from German aesthetic philosophy, which studies

formal abstractions and focuses on content, symbols, and emotions. Its long history shows that the understanding of the idea of empathy has undergone many shifts, from shifts in ideas across scientific fields to deeper understandings of its true meaning. The main principle of the idea of empathy is that empathy occurs in two distinct aspects: the cognitive and the affective. In general, researchers disagree on whether the cognitive or the affective aspect is most important, or whether there is a balance between the two. (Badriyah et al., 2019).

Empathy begins in infancy, as evidenced by the fact that when one baby cries, another baby cries too. A person's capacity for empathy is reflected in attitudes of tolerance, compassion, caring, and the ability to control anger. The development of empathy is influenced by age and environment, including school, which plays a role in optimizing a child's empathy. Each individual has a different level of empathy, influenced by several factors such as age, gender, intelligence, emotional experiences, parental role models, emotional security, temperament, similar circumstances, and social ties. A person tends to be more empathetic toward those with similar experiences or closer relationships. (Nugraha et al., 2017)

C. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. According to Sugiyono, research data using a quantitative approach consists of numbers, and analysis uses statistics. Research data using a quantitative approach is synonymous with numbers or statistics in data processing. (Alawiyah, 2020). According to Winarno Surkhmad, a survey is a process of collecting data from many people in large numbers at the same time. (Fadli, 2019) Survey research uses questionnaires as the primary data source. To obtain relevant information, this type of research uses a distribution of questions to respondents. Through this method, researchers can predict and understand certain phenomena. In the context of the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood, surveys can be used to describe how emotional literacy contributes to the development of children's empathy. This approach is expected to provide deeper insight into the relationship between these two aspects and their

implications for the learning process and social interactions of early childhood.

The research design used in this study was an explanatory survey with a quantitative approach. The time used in this study was 5 days, namely February 2025. This study was conducted on early childhood education (PAUD) at RA Baitus Sholihin Al-Mustofa, Bengkulu City.

The study involved children aged 3-6 years old enrolled at the Baitus Sholihin Al-Mustofa Kindergarten in Bengkulu City, the location of the study. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, with 16 children meeting the research criteria. The instruments used in this study were an empathy scale and an emotional literacy scale, both of which have been tested for validity and reliability.

To analyze the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood, this study used a Pearson correlation test as a data analysis technique. The results showed no significant relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood ($r = 0.291$, $p > 0.274$). This indicates that children's emotional literacy is influenced not only by empathy but also by other factors, such as interactions with parents, teachers, and the social environment.

In this study, data collection was conducted using a questionnaire whose validity and reliability had been tested. The data obtained were then analyzed using SPSS software version 19. The data analysis process included data classification based on research variables, data tabulation, systematic presentation of results, and statistical calculations to answer the established research questions. Furthermore, data analysis also included hypothesis testing using Pearson correlation to understand the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood.

D. RESEARCH RESULT

This study was conducted on early childhood children aged 3-6 years at RA Baitus Sholihin Al-Mustofa in Bengkulu City to analyze the relationship between empathy and emotional literacy. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire designed to address the research variables. The data obtained

were then processed and analyzed using SPSS version 19 software to statistically test the relationship between the two variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Test

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
total	4.06	1,124	16
totalEm	5.38	1,147	16

Source: SPSS 19 for Windows

Based on the data above, it shows that early childhood children have higher empathy scores than emotional literacy, with an average score of $5.38 > 4.06$. This indicates that children in the study sample tend to have better emotional understanding and management.

Table 2. TestCorrelation between Empathy and Emotional Literacy

Correlations			
		total	totalEm
Pearson Correlation	total	1,000	.291
	totalEm	.291	1,000
Sig. (1-tailed)	total	.	.137
	totalEm	.137	.
N	total	16	16
	totalEm	16	16

Source: SPSS 19 for Windows

From the table above, it can be seen and concluded as follows:

1. There is a positive correlation (0.291) between empathy and emotional literacy, but the correlation is weak.
2. The p-value (0.137) is greater than 0.05, so this correlation is not significant.

In other words, although the results showed a slight relationship between empathy and emotional literacy, the relationship was not strong or significant enough in this study.

Table 3. TestRegression

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.291 ^a	.085	.019	1.113	.085	1.294	1	14 ^a	.274

a. Predictors: (Constant), totalEm

b. Dependent Variable: total

Source: SPSS 19 for Windows

From the table above, it can be seen and concluded as follows:

1. The relationship between empathy and emotional literacy is very weak ($R = 0.291$) and not significant ($p = 0.274$).
2. Empathy was only able to explain 8.5% of the variation in emotional literacy, the rest was influenced by other factors.
3. This model is less good at predicting emotional literacy, because the Adjusted R Square value is only 0.019.
4. The F test shows that the empathy variable does not contribute significantly in this model.

In other words, although there is a slight relationship between empathy and emotional literacy, the relationship is not strong or significant enough in this study.

Table 4. ANOVA test

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1,602	1	1,602	1,294	.274b
	Residual	17,335	14	1,238		
	Total	18,938	15			

Based on the results of the ANOVA analysis, this study found that the

relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood was not statistically significant ($F = 1.294$, $p = 0.274$). These results indicate that empathy only explains 8.5% ($R^2 = 0.085$) of the variation in emotional literacy, while the remaining 91.5% of the variation is caused by other factors not analyzed in this study.

In other words, this research shows that other factors more dominantly influence early childhood emotional literacy, such as parenting styles, social environment, and learning experiences. However, empathy remains a crucial component of children's emotional development.

E. DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed no significant relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood; however, there was a positive correlation of 0.291, with a p-value of 0.137, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is not strong enough or significant. This suggests that early childhood emotional literacy is influenced by many factors, not just empathy.

According to previous research, the development of empathy in early childhood is still very new and is influenced by many things, including the child's social experiences, interactions with parents and teachers, and the social environment that supports the child's emotional development.(Morris, 2020). In addition, emotional literacy in early childhood is associated with empathy and emotional stimulation from the environment and support for managing emotions.(Morris, 2020)

Furthermore, the regression analysis showed that only 8.5 percent of the variation in emotional literacy could be explained by empathy, with the remainder influenced by other factors not analyzed in this study, such as parenting styles, learning experiences, and broader social interactions. This suggests that emotional literacy is not solely dependent on empathy.

Additionally, this research suggests that young children may have an early understanding of emotions, but may not yet be able to fully connect them to empathy for others.(Syamsul Hadi, 2013). Therefore, it is very important for

parents and teachers to encourage their children to improve their emotional literacy through stimuli such as fun activities like role-playing and reading stories that involve emotional expression.

These findings have important implications for early childhood education, particularly in developing programs that emphasize emotional literacy. Learning strategies that involve emotional expression, deep social interactions, and supportive environments may be key to enhancing children's emotional literacy without relying solely on their empathy.

F. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between empathy and emotional literacy in early childhood aged 3-6 years. Although there is a positive correlation between the two variables, the relationship is weak and insignificant. This suggests that early childhood emotional literacy is influenced not only by empathy but also by other factors such as parenting styles, social environment, and learning experiences.

The results of this study provide important advice for parents and educators on how to create learning programs that can more effectively improve children's emotional literacy. Learning strategies focused on improving emotional literacy, such as storytelling, role-playing, and meaningful social interactions, should be balanced with efforts to foster empathy.

This study was limited to one early childhood education institution in Bengkulu City and used a relatively small sample size. Therefore, future research is expected to expand its scope by involving a larger sample and further exploring other variables that influence early childhood emotional literacy.

Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this study can form the basis for developing more efficient educational programs that enhance early childhood emotional intelligence. This will contribute to children's future social and emotional development.

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