

# The Effectiveness of an Emotional Intelligence Promotion Program in the Emotional Intelligence of Preschool Children in Kanchanaburi Province

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of an emotional intelligence promotion program (EIPP) in the emotional intelligence of 35 preschool children at Wat Nong Pling School, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand. The study followed a quasi-experimental design and employed the Emotional Intelligence Promotion Model (i.e., goodness, intelligence, and happiness) as a conceptual framework. The data gathered were analyzed and identified by calculating percentages, averages, and standard deviations and performing an independent *t*-test. The results showed that the EIPP can improve the emotional intelligence of preschool children on the basis of five activities: (1) performing recreational activities; (2) analyzing situations; (3) educating and practicing emotional regulation; (4) doing creative problem-solving; and (5) showing self-esteem. The result reveals that students possess significantly high levels of emotional intelligence after the emotional intelligence promotion program before intervention support ( $t = 0.24$ ,  $p = .04$ ). The results suggest that the EIPP can be used to improve the emotional intelligence of preschool children. Also, parents, teachers, school administrators, and health care providers should strive to promote emotional intelligence in preschool children because this age is appropriate for learning and memorizing. Encouraging emotional intelligence in early childhood can prompt children to grow into quality adults.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, preschool children, intervention, Thai school

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## INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence—otherwise known as emotional quotient—is the potentiality to perceive one's own and others' emotions or sentiments.<sup>1,2</sup> Emotional quotient also increases one's ability to control, manipulate, and express appropriate emotions in various situations, such as knowing how to live happily with others, which in turn leads to a successful life.<sup>2,3</sup> In Thailand, the concept of emotional intelligence among children aged 2–3 years has three components: (1) the goodness or emotional readiness of children to live with others; (2) the intelligence or emotional readiness of children to successfully develop themselves; and (3) the happiness or emotional readiness of children that makes them happy.<sup>4</sup> If children possess all of the three components, it is expected that they would exhibit good qualities, such as self-control, consideration, knowledge, energy, adaptability, and enjoyment of activities.<sup>1,5</sup> Currently, the emotional intelligence of Thai children is deteriorating as a result of the burgeoning temptation caused by globalization.<sup>6</sup> Modern Thai children show inappropriate emotions and behaviors. In 2007, the Department of Mental Health conducted a situation assessment survey and normalization of the emotional intelligence of Thai children aged 3–5 years and reported that the children scored between 128 and 202 compared to 2002, when the scores were 139–202. Considering these results, it can be said that the mean scores of emotional intelligence have been decreasing over the years (mean = 9.47).<sup>7</sup>

Problems concerning early childhood aggression caused by emotional intelligence have a wide variety of social situations, such as lacking self-confidence, lacking self-

expression or self-act, suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, stealing, being addicted to games, and speaking profanity.<sup>8,9</sup> Emotional intelligence is related to parenting style and emotional intelligence.<sup>10,11</sup> Paterson *et al.*<sup>12</sup> mentioned that emotional intelligence is inherited through life skills, particularly the emotional learning that children personally experience throughout childhood from their parents or guardians.<sup>13</sup> Several studies have indicated that parents or guardians with a high level of education tend to raise children who are more intelligent emotionally than those whose parents or guardians have a lower level of education. Another factor that affects the emotional intelligence of children is the environment. If parents are able to promote and control the environment in such a way that it is appropriate for their children, such children would develop good emotional intelligence.<sup>14,15</sup>

The development of emotional intelligence should begin early, particularly around the age of 2–6 years, because of the structure and function of various nervous systems and brain regions.<sup>16</sup> Rapid development happens in this age group—this is when children prepare themselves to learn, imitate behaviors or expressions of their caregivers, and connect uncomplicated experiences, but they are unable to completely reason at this stage.<sup>17</sup> When displeased, children express resentment or anger, which often results in conflicts between empathy, aggression, and leadership.<sup>16</sup> Negative emotions make it easy for children to show inappropriate behaviors.<sup>18</sup>

Early childhood spans from 2 to 6 years, which is the age for learning, remembering, and social participation.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, if emotional intelligence is properly promoted in children in their early childhood, they will grow into quality adults, having fewer social problems associated

with violent behavior, which may otherwise arise.<sup>20,21</sup> Currently, Wat Nong Pling School, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand, has 34 primary school students, including 20 male and 14 female.<sup>22</sup> The school has two teachers to teach the students as well as promote their overall development. Most of the early childhood children in Wat Nong Pling School had received their primary education from the school. As most parents work on a regular basis, there was no time for them to fully promote their children's emotional intelligence in early childhood. Thus, through this study, the researchers have tried to determine the effectiveness of an emotional intelligence promotion program (EIPP) in the emotional intelligence of preschool children. The results of this study can be adapted to properly promote emotional intelligence in early childhood and enable parents, teachers, and administrators to recognize the importance of emotional intelligence. The results can help health care providers promote the emotional intelligence of children in early childhood in order to assist them to grow into quality adults.

## STUDY PURPOSE

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of an EIPP in preschool children at Wat Nong Pling School.

## METHODS

### Study Design

This study was investigated using a quasi-experimental design with a pre- and posttest. The researchers used the EIPP on the emotional intelligence of preschool students. They applied the concept of emotional intelligence—as devised by the Department of Mental Health—in three dimensions: (1) goodness, (2) intelligence, and (3) happiness.

### Participants

The study population included children studying in an early childhood school, Wat Nong Pling School. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) students aged 2–5 years; (2) those enrolled in the 2020 semester; and (3) those who were able to communicate verbally in Thai. The exclusion criteria involved (1) students who were unconscious and incapacitated and (2) those who were uncomfortable participating in this study.

### Sample Size

This study used the convenience random sampling technique. The number of participants was calculated to be 35 for the pre- and postintervention groups.

### Intervention

In this study, the EIPP (i.e., goodness, intelligence, and happiness) was used as a conceptual framework to determine the effectiveness of emotional intelligence promotion in preschool children. The Emotional Intelligence Promotion Model employed in the study organized five activities, which included the following: (1) performing recreational activities; (2) analyzing situations; (3) educating and practicing emotional regulation; (4) doing creative problem-solving; and (5) showing self-esteem. The total number of interventions was one activity per week for 5 weeks. The duration of each activity was 60 minutes. The intervention was as follows:

1. “Goodness dimension” included putting yourself in someone else's shoes and throwing the ball activities.

1.1. Teach children to recognize their own emotions.

This activity is the basis for future emotional control. When children express negative emotions, such as anger

or displeasure, adults should help children recognize their emotions without blaming them. However, adults should act in ways that they understand, such as hugging the child; hugging will be relaxing for them. In addition, they should ask questions in order to allow children to think about their emotions themselves—for example, “Do you know that you are angry?” and “I feel that everyone loves you more than me, right?”

1.2. Train children to be generous, sharing, and helping.

This activity is for the benefit of teachers and their coexistence of children. The researchers taught children how to share snacks and toys with others and praised them when they helped each other do something.

1.3. Train children to know what is right, what is wrong, and admit it when they do it.

This activity is the starting point for virtue, such as accidentally bumping into someone. In this activity, the researchers taught children how to apologize because hitting others can hurt them and apologizing makes others less angry.

2. “Intelligence activities” included keeping feet close and asking, “Who am I?”

2.1. Encourage children to be enthusiastic or curious.

Children who are interested in knowing love to study, which affects their learning and future success. In this activity, the researchers encouraged children to be curious about the new world around them using storytelling questions or reading a picture book, such as asking children if they wanted to know “what's inside a chicken egg?” When students became interested or suspicious and questioned, the researchers explained more with simple words and encouraged them to find simple answers themselves, for example, by conducting experiments or activities that were safe for them to do.

2.2. Teach students to adapt to change.

This activity helps children be flexible and learn how to *get along* well with other people or adjust to their surroundings. When students experience emotional changes, they tend to vacillate. Therefore, the researchers had students discuss how to behave in a new environment so that they became confident and adaptable. In addition, they allowed children to meet other people outdoors or indoors—for example, taking a family tour to the library, which allowed children to learn about how to live with other people or their surroundings.

2.3. Dare to speak or dare to tell.

When children express their feelings or opinions, adults should listen to them with interest. They should ask for the reasoning, showing an attitude that encourages children to gain self-confidence and express themselves more clearly.

3. “Happiness activities” included the ball of memories, and I love you (myself).

3.1. Help children be satisfied.

Adults should encourage children to do things for themselves or to show individual abilities. When children do this, adults should praise them and make them proud and happy.

3.2. Show warmth.

All children need adults to be close, protective, and supportive, especially when they are doing something on their own for the first time. Supporting children helps give them a feeling of warmth, lessens their anxiety, provides emotional stability to them, and encourages them to do things on their own as they grow up.

3.3 Help children experience enjoyment.

Adults should give children the opportunity to play or have fun with their friends; playing with friends is essential to a

child's life. Parents may also contribute to the stimulation by engaging in activities with the child, as this would train the child to have good mental health and soothe the frustration. For each week, there was a random selection of activities in order to make early childhood learning fun.

#### Statistical Analysis

This study analyzed the demographic characteristics of the participants by calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The study also performed a *t*-test to compare scores before and after emotional intelligence promotion in children. The effectiveness of interventions between the pre- and postscores was tested using the generalized estimating equation with the *p*-value set to be less than .05.

#### Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand. All the participants signed informed consent forms before any data were collected from them.

## RESULTS

### Participant Characteristics

This study evaluated 35 parents of the participants who were mostly female and between 36 and 40 years of age. The majority of the parents had two children. Most families had an average monthly income of less than 135 US dollars (4,000 baht) per month, and most of them had enough money to spare but did not have any savings. The main source of income for the participants was the parents.

The results indicate that the emotional intelligence of the preschool children at Wat Nong Pling School was  $3.10 \pm 0.80$  (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation [SD]). Most of these children showed a moderate level of emotional intelligence ( $n = 27$ , 77.14%), followed by a low level ( $n = 6$ , 17.5%), and the highest level of emotional intelligence was shown the least frequently ( $n = 2$ , 5.71%; Table 1).

**Table 1** Analysis of Emotional Intelligence Promotion in Preschool Children

Emotional Intelligence Level	N	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total emotional intelligence	35	100.00	3.10	0.80
High level	2	5.71		
Moderate level	27	77.14		
Low level	6	17.15		

Table 2 presents the emotional intelligence of preschool children; the pre- and post-emotional intelligence promotion intervention was  $49.16 \pm 3.35$  (mean  $\pm$  SD). The level of emotional intelligence (constant) was 88.57% ( $n =$

31), followed by a lower level of emotional intelligence at 8.57% ( $n = 3$ ), and the increased level was at 2.86% ( $n = 1$ ).

**Table 2** Analysis of Emotional Intelligence in Preschool Children Program

Emotional Intelligence Level	N	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
			49.16	3.35
Constant level	31	88.57		
Decreased level	3	8.57		
Increased level	1	2.86		

As provided in Table 3, the level of emotional intelligence before participation in the early childhood emotional intelligence promotion program was  $2.40 \pm 0.025$  (mean  $\pm$

SD), whereas after participation, it was  $2.70 \pm 0.02$  (mean  $\pm$  SD), with a statistically significant increase in the mean level of emotional intelligence at a *p*-value of .04.

**Table 3.** Comparison of the Levels of Emotional Intelligence Pre- and Post-participation in the Emotional Intelligence Promotion Program

Participants	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Preschool children	2.40	0.025	2.70	0.02	0.24	.04*

\* *p*-value < .05. SD, standard deviation.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of emotional intelligence promotion in preschool children at Wat Nong Pling School. The findings revealed that the emotional intelligence in preschool children promotion program had a significant effect on increasing the emotional intelligence in preschool children. This study also found that most participants had a moderate level of emotional intelligence, whereas the second-largest group had a low level of emotional intelligence, and the smallest

number of participants had a high level of emotional intelligence.

This study indicates that preschool children had similar levels of emotional intelligence, with the mean score of emotional intelligence in early childhood at 49.16. As all preschool children had a similar emotional intelligence, this study showed that the children were educated mainly by their parents or guardians. Educational institutions play an important role in promoting emotional intelligence in children, as they are in school from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm during normal hours, Monday to Friday. Most

children learn activities about coexistence through their teachers at school. They rest at home at night and spend most of their daytime participating in intense learning activities at school. Hence, children develop behavioral imitations and know how to be generous with their friends, peers, and teachers. Therefore, various abilities are mainly obtained from parents and schools.

This study also found that the level of emotional intelligence of children before and after participating in the EIPP was constant (88.57%), and there was an increase of 8.57% in the emotional intelligence of these participants. However, there were still children who had a low level of emotional intelligence (2.86%). This may be because the EIPPs organized there were inconsistent in their approach. This can be the reason for the decline in emotional intelligence in early childhood. On the basis of these results, it can be said that after participating in the EIPP, the average level of emotional intelligence in children had increased. This study found that the EIPP for promoting emotional intelligence included recreational activities, analyzing situations, educating and practicing emotional control, creative problem-solving, and self-esteem. It consisted of (1) good activities (putting yourself in someone else's shoes and throwing the ball), (2) talent activities ("keep your feet close" and "who am I?"), and (3) health activities (memory ball and "love you [myself]").

The findings of this study are similar to Scherer *et al.*<sup>23</sup> and Charoensakulchai *et al.*<sup>24</sup> found that people who had good emotional intelligence were cognizant of the emotions of themselves and others. Hence, emotional intelligence brings great creative benefits, as well as makes them and others happy.<sup>25</sup> According to Therdsak<sup>26</sup> and Therdsak<sup>27</sup> the benefits of emotional abilities can be said to have individual, family, and environmental aspects. In terms of self-intelligence, children are able to study with concentration, make achievements, are eager for knowledge, and are able to adjust their mood accordingly.<sup>28-30</sup>

A previous study has shown that people with a high level of emotional intelligence have common qualities.<sup>31</sup> These include having emotional maturity, making good decisions, being able to control their emotions, understanding others, understanding social situations, being able to tackle life problems, and being able to manage stress.<sup>32-35</sup> One can say that it is important to organize activities in order to promote emotional intelligence in early childhood. Therefore, teachers should select activities that are appropriate for children at different stages for them to learn more. The EIPP aims to increase the emotional intelligence of children in early childhood to a higher level.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Considering the results of this study, it is recommended that the research be applied as a model activity to participants in different areas, and the examination should include qualitative questions, such as in-depth interviews, or observing a sample to get more accurate information.

#### LIMITATIONS

Because of the coronavirus epidemic, this study conducting research into the activities in emotional intelligence promotion had to be discontinued. It was resumed after the situation eased. Unfortunately, with coronavirus prevention measures, group activities were limited in many ways. The researchers believe that emotional intelligence promotion models in early

childhood should be reapplied to further confirm the findings.

#### CONCLUSION

This quasi-experimental study indicates that the EIPP can improve the emotional intelligence of preschool children. Teachers, nurses, and school administrators should increase emotional intelligence promotion in preschool children because this age is appropriate for learning and memorizing. Encouraging young children to learn would enable them to grow into quality adults. Therefore, parents should regularly support emotional intelligence promotion in their children, as children spend most of their time with their families. However, teachers and school nurses should screen for students' emotional intelligence. These measures are expected to lead to emotional intelligence and positive life assets of students.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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