

Implementation of Nature Loving Education in a Malaysian kindergarten: teachers' retrospective

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i></p> <p>Received: March 4, 2022 Revised: March 10, 2022 Accepted: March 18, 2022 Published: April 1, 2022</p>	<p>Environmental awareness has three concepts that include emotional, attitude and practice of sustainability awareness (Hassan, Noordin, & Sulaiman, 2010). It is critical to emphasize humanity's development in order to awaken human benevolence and raise environmental awareness. One of the aims of the study is to investigate the teacher's incorporation of Nature Loving Education into an early childhood lesson. Data collection was conducted through interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. The findings of this study indicate that teachers used a variety of teaching methods to impart Nature Loving knowledge to the children, including activities and games, drawing, reading a picture book, and speech and drama. As for the impact of study, teachers are an important influence on multiple levels of learning for children during the earliest years of school. Nature loving education promotes environmental awareness among pre-schoolers that include emotional, attitude and practice of sustainability awareness. It is the ability of a teacher to transfer knowledge into attitude and daily practice in order to increase children's environmental awareness. The study concludes that Nature Loving Education could be incorporated into a school program or lesson to educate children to become whole person who are balanced in their physical, spiritual, mental, and intellectual development, and to become environmental monitors who shape positive environmental behaviour and attitudes.</p>
<p><i>Keywords:</i></p> <p>Nature Loving Education Early Childhood Education Environmental Awareness Implementation Whole person</p>	

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INTRODUCTION

The world has reached a point of agreement on environmental issues. A study in 2016 showed that environmental awareness and behaviour in Malaysia do not appear to be strongly related to environmental awareness (Mei, Wai, & Ahamad, 2016). This is the typical awareness of the environment that most people know. Therefore, in order to enhance the environmental content of the syllabus, a more organised and well-planned curriculum must be developed.

The teacher's responsibility is very crucial in this area of environmental education. Teachers who want to be role models and employ appropriate and efficient educational approaches must first expand their expertise (Uzuna&Kelesa, 2012). This is because only an environmentally conscious teacher can effectively educate students about the environment (Moseley, Huss,& Utley, 2010). The children's participation in activities is influenced by the teacher's behaviour and techniques (Renick, 2009).

Thus, teachers should not only use appropriate methods of teaching and learning, but also inculcate, nurture and preserve environmental education, whether in the classroom or outside the classroom, through school activities (Mohammad Zohir &Nordin, 2007). The chalk and talk method is a method commonly used among teachers in teaching and learning sessions, but this method does not generate interest among students, and the delivery techniques are ineffective due to a lack of a real teaching and learning environment (Isaac, 2004).

Nature Loving Education is a new curriculum spectrum that integrates academic development and environmental education into their program, and there has been no specific research on Nature Loving Education to date. As a result, researchers are encouraged to provide additional information on how the teachers incorporate about Nature Loving Education in their daily lessons. To accomplish the study's objective, the research question is developed as follows:

“How do teachers incorporate Nature Loving Education into their daily lessons?”

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature Loving Education

Nature Loving Education is a part of environmental education. It emphasises on Aesthetic Art of Humanity which concerns the correct understanding of acceptable moral and behavioural standard and the right concept of living. The core curriculum of Nature Loving is related to nature; balanced, harmonious, natural and compassionate (Kuang, 2016).

Nature Loving Education comprises of four components: Life Education, The Art of Living, Moral and Civic Education and Integrated Studies. Life Education enables students to identify the purpose of living and the way to a meaningful life. Additionally, it examines the various levels of harmonious relationships, from individualism to social integration, as well as the interactions that impact the environment (Kuang, 2016, p. 8). The Art of Living is a continuous development to become a better person. It is a life skill that involves practices in managing daily chores which include problem solving techniques, social etiquette, personal hygiene, nutrition, health and others. It is inseparable from the physiological needs as the characters development processes begin in daily habits practices.

The development of moral character begins before a child enters school. It is a holistic approach for child development and based upon the elements of truth, compassion, aesthetics and sanctity. Additionally, it promotes positive attitudes and instilling appropriate values in children to prepare them to become future active, responsible, contributing, and harmonious members of society. Integrated studies are general knowledge and subjects that children should learn, such as language, science, and mathematics. This part is more to academic components that influence children's development in cognitive and intellectual.

Nature Loving Culture

Nature Loving Education also promotes Nature Loving Culture to the public. Nature Loving Culture includes the songs of nature, the dance of nature, the joyful exercise of nature and the drama of nature. The melody and rhythm of Nature Loving songs are peaceful, catchy and harmonic. Nature Loving's lyrics are cheerful, meaningful, and beautiful, embracing the wonders of nature and humanity. Aside from that, children who sing these songs could learn creatively from the lyrics, given children opportunities to bond tightly with nature, earth and people. Thus, by singing and dancing, children tend to learn and love nature, at the same time enhancing their physical and health development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research allows researchers to learn about a core phenomenon by collecting and analysing data from a variety of resources and exploring and holistically describe "how people consider and take into account, take action and otherwise handle their everyday circumstances in specific settings" (Punch, 2005).

Therefore, a single exploratory case study was selected in this study. The explanation for this analysis is that "case study" will "close" circumstances in real life and evaluate opinions directly on phenomena as they occur in reality." (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The exploratory case study approach allows the researcher to ask questions of "what" and "how" as it was based on the design structure as primarily described by Yin (Yin, 2014). Apart from this, researcher can also delve into the Nature Loving Education Curriculum in depth.

Population and Sample

In this research, a kindergarten was selected and pseudonyms were given. This kindergarten is the main criterion for selection because Nature Loving Education is implemented in their kindergarten programme. This gives the researcher the opportunity to examine this curriculum and gather in-depth information.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the case. It is a technique widely used in qualitative research to classify and pick informational cases to use scarce resources most efficiently (Patton, 2002). Two teachers were chosen to participate in this study. These two teachers have a foundation in Nature Loving Education and have both taught in early childhood settings, which typically include children ages 4-6. Both of them are primarily responsible for designing the Nature Loving Education lesson plan and activities for kindergarten children.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers spent three months conducting observation, data collection, and interviews. First, prior to conducting the observation, the teacher was asked to participate in the first part of the interview. The interview is estimated to take between 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

After completing the first part of the interview, the researcher conducted observations for three months. Observations were carried out according to the school's schedule. The researchers conducted regular observations based on the class timetable at the beginning of the month. In the second and third month, researchers conducted observations from 10.10am to 11.55am during their combined classes. After three months of observation, the teachers moved on to the second part of the interview.

The data were first analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is "a qualitative interpretation that is both dynamic, imaginative, iterative and disciplined." (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Researchers prefer to manually organise and analyse the data so that they can be accurately monitored.

Each interview and observation field note was turned into a transcript by researchers immediately after the procedure done. The interview and the note contents were sent to participants after the transcript, in order to ensure consistency and accountability. A file was produced for each participant and all the interview transcripts and observational field notes were documented accordingly.

FINDINGS

The data of the application of Nature Loving Education contents in learning lesson were recorded. The study showed that application of Nature Loving Education components in teaching methods enhances children's achievement in the classroom.

Activities and Games

Every child loves to play since children have a natural instinct to have fun (Sharifah & Ali, 2013). "The immersion in children's play shows how plays allow them truly to enjoy themselves" (Ridgway & Quinones, 2012).

"Children will enjoy a simple music experience in very simple activities.

Children run when the music play, music stops children need to stop and stand there. Children were felt enjoy and happy."

(TB/I1:6-7)

In the stage of early childhood, children learn through play. The power of play builds lifelong learner and supports many development skills of a child. Lesson plans designed by teacher included different activities and games in relation with Nature Loving Education contents. Activities and games created were then separated into two parts, indoor and outdoor.

Outdoor activities in the morning were related to farming activities with the purpose of giving opportunities for children to have close contact with nature in this concrete forest. Children

were required to water and fertilise the flowers under teacher's guidance. Apart from that, they also offered a helping hand to clean the weeds together with the teacher.

Children are born as a learner with great curiosity. The desire of learning and curiosity motivate them to explore, discover, and figure things out on how the world works. During the observation period, ladyfingers were planted in the garden. Children would automatically take care of it and observed the growth of ladyfingers. They felt excited and shared the latest growing process to parents after school.

Apart from that, outdoor activities also included having fun in the playground. They took turns to play swing and slide, enjoyed playing and running around together with friends. A successful teaching and learning progress is formed when the knowledge learnt in the classroom is being practiced and applied to daily activities. As an example, after children experienced the hardship of farming via planting progress, they tend to cherish and appreciate on what they have.

Nature Loving Education contents are also able to be implemented in Science and Mathematics subjects as well. Rocks and leaves are the best teaching materials when counting. A variety of simple experiments has been conducted in Natural Science subject. Teacher guides children to understand the fundamentals of science via experiments. For example, volcano experiment with mixture of vinegar and soda, mirror and water to reveal the rainbow. This will inspire children's interest in exploration, and new knowledge will be found in discovery.

Picture Book Reading

Picture books are an essential source for young children to learn new languages, concepts and lessons (Strouse, Nyhout, & Ganea, 2018). Picture books turned word into 2D or 3D images and easy for children to understand. A picture book is selected by teacher before story-telling session or thematic lesson.

Picture books reading session totally grabs children's attention and inspires children to have story-telling session based on the pictures. Story-telling helps children to gain self-confidence and enhance development of oral and literature.

“Illustrations in picture book help children understand what they are reading and allow young readers to analyze the story. Illustrations can help them figure out the meaning of what they are reading. It also can improve their comprehension.”

(TB/I1:8-12)

Drawing

Drawings play major part in a child's life. Children's drawings come out of their own lives and close friends of children, families and educators can be the focus of these drawings in their social setting (Oguz, 2010). Drawing is considered as one of the communication tools for children. Throughout drawing, children are able to have better understanding of thought and feeling.

“I showed them a video of the pollution on Earth day. After that, I let them draw on their feelings and after seeing this video? Loh drawn a big circle with two line and another circle with two line. Loh was explained that is

rubbish, big and small rubbish. Another kid named Wong drew a circle with different colour lines on the top of it. He explained this is earth, the lines mean many rubbish on earth.”

“I was really impressed with their drawing. They can recall the scene that was seen in the video and draw it out.”

(TB/I2:10-16)

Drawing ultimately becomes children's way of expressing her understanding of the world and all the things that are important to. Their feelings, thought and ideas will reflect in their drawing.

Speech and Drama

Drama is seen as a successful way to develop communication skills for young students while providing them an authentic and imaginative environment (Hazar, 2019). Speech and drama was included in the lesson plan to enhance language development and strengthen the children's impression of Nature Loving Education. Based on the theme, the teacher prepared a simple and easy story script for children to practice.

Firstly, the teacher went through the story with children before the drama began. Teacher acted as a narrator whereas children as actors. Children started to act after the sentence was finished.

The teacher was inspired and she said:

“The most powerful of kid is imitating. But we are children's mirrors, what we do, children will learn and imitate. If the adults throw the garbage in anyway, the kids would do the same thing. This shows that being a good model is very important in education.”

(TA/I2:4-6)

After that, children were given chances to become narrator. They stood out and tried to read the script. However, most of the students remembered the actions that they did rather than reading out the script. In order to build self-confidence, children who provided narration were requested to give instruction clear and loud. However, most of the children were only able to give simple instruction like “head was out”, “raining, drink water” whereby these instructions were generally heard and practiced in children's everyday life. The teacher also mentioned:

“.....simple wording has always been used by parents, particularly some instruction words like stand there, get out, don't cry and so on. Via children talking patterns, we also know how parents talk patterns. The parent is the child's first language teacher. If we can't speak kind words in life, then the child's gradually growing up language and vocabulary would be negative.”

“.....the typical situation now is that parents are playing their mobile phones, while children are watching YouTube. Parents should have more contact with their children and more parent-child interactions. This will help the child improve their communication and language skills.

(TB/I2:5-14)

DISCUSSION

Teachers Play an Important Role

Researchers found that the teachers mainly used activities and games, drawing, reading a picture book and speech and drama. Nature play and outdoor activities were the activities and games being implemented. The children's favourite activities were gardening and playing in the playground. Nature Love Education encourages children to interact with nature and appreciate all of the gifts that Mother Nature has bestowed upon them. One of the tools used in the lesson was a picture book. Children can appreciate what they're reading by looking at the illustrations in a picture book, which encourages them to look at the plot. As a result, children gain confidence, which encourages them to talk about what they see on the page, what happens in the book, what the characters do, and how the events unfold.

After the teacher shared the story, the teacher gave the topic to the children and asked them to draw on it. Teacher used drawing as a teaching technique to allow children to make a revision of the story, as well as a tool for children to express their thoughts and feelings. Speech and drama are the new methods that the teachers use in class. The teacher used speech and drama to help children build up their vocabulary and sentence structure and also to build up their confidence too.

Implication

In the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory, teacher plays as an important influence on multiple levels for children during the earliest years of school (Macias-Brown, 2011). This research highlights the pivotal role of educators and therefore the vital need for them to develop understanding, expertise and experience relevant to both children and nature. There is ample evidence that educators have a strong role to play in shaping their students' attitudes towards the environment. In addition to Biophilia theory, social experiences, including teaching, contribute positively to children's connections with nature.

Both teachers had drawn on their skills and experience in the field of Nature Loving and children to promote the formation of loving relationships between children and nature. They broke down the lesson to different themes according to the degree of children's comprehension. Teachers also often strive to use a range of teaching approaches to impart knowledge. They provided classroom with activities and materials that children could use to connect to or extend their direct experiences in Nature Loving. In Earth Day, the teacher asked children to write thank you in different languages on a piece of coloured paper and then clipped the paper on flowers, grasses and plants, the purpose of which is to thank nature.

Teacher must be intentional about placing caring relationships with nature at the core of their classroom. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory, school is one of the

factors that has a direct impact on a person's development (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Teachers expressed their views on indoor activities and outdoor activities in their teaching practises. Therefore, Nature Loving Education could be incorporated into a school's program or lesson. Teacher can also begin with a thematic lesson and expand on the activities for the children to participate in.

Teachers' personal experiences or teaching approach may have influenced their involvement with nature-based learning. Teachers were always reading and researching about nature teaching in order to keep the class interesting and fun.

CONCLUSION

In the future, Ministry of Education Malaysia can collaborate with INLA to integrate the core concepts of Nature Loving Education into KSPK. Then, create optimal learning environments for children that support full-bodied learning and child-led exploration with the nature-based setting. Through this learning setting, it would be supporting positive changes in learning and behavioural outcomes in children (Dennis & Kiewra, 2018). The primary focus of this study is on the teacher, who will learn about the contents of Nature Loving Education and how to implement it in daily lessons. A more in-depth study could be conducted to determine how children respond to or change after learning Nature Loving Education. It could be carried out using experimental research methodology. However, in comparison with current research, the size of the sample should be increased in order to obtain more accurate findings.

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