

Importance of Emotion Understanding on Academic Outcomes

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- New tasks were developed to measure Singaporean children's emotion understanding.
- Better emotion understanding was associated with better academic outcomes among Singaporean children, especially for girls and 4- to 7-year-olds.

BACKGROUND

Emotion understanding is a fundamental skill and it predicts children's social competence, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Izard et al., 2001). Emotion recognition is the most basic facet and a prerequisite of more complex aspects of emotion understanding (Pons et al., 2004).

Cross-cultural studies have shown differences between Asian and European American preschoolers' emotion understanding. Asian

children had lower performance on emotion situation knowledge (Doan & Wang, 2010), but better performance on emotion recognition (Markham & Wang, 1996). However, majority of existing studies were conducted among Western children, ignoring the important role of culture.

Furthermore, given that academic achievement is highly valued in Singapore, identifying the predictive factors, will be beneficial to children and their families. Emotion understanding is a factor that potentially affects children's academic achievement.

FOCUS OF STUDY

In this project, the authors developed several tasks to measure Singaporean children's emotion understanding and used them to examine Singaporean children's ability to recognise emotions from faces, word meaning and vocal tone. We compared Singaporean

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children's emotion recognition with their international peers. Then we explored the relations between emotion understanding, anxiety and academic achievement among Singaporean children.

KEY FINDINGS

The emotion recognition tasks we developed were found to be suitable to measure Singaporean children's emotion understanding and we further developed new online tasks.

The emotion recognition tasks were administered with children in Germany, US and China for cultural comparison:

- Singaporean children outperformed German children in facial emotion recognition.
- Singaporean children judged the emotional tones more accurately than European American children in the US.
- Singaporean children judged both word meaning and emotional tone faster than Chinese children in China.

Regarding developmental outcomes, better facial emotion recognition predicted better early reading skills and alphabet writing, particularly for girls and young children aged 4 to 7 years old.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Singaporean children's emotion understanding predicted better academic achievement. This could inform early intervention programmes and preschool curriculum or activities that are targeted at improving children's social emotional skills as well as reading and writing skills.

PARTICIPANTS

To examine the relations between emotion understanding and academic achievement, we collected data from 122 Chinese Singaporean children (61 girls) aged 4 to 9 years old ($M = 6.91$, $SD = 1.75$). Participants were recruited through local preschools, primary schools and social media advertisement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Children completed the emotion recognition tasks, and academic achievement was evaluated with six subtests from Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third UK Edition. Parents filled a questionnaire with demographic information, Spence Anxiety Scale and Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales.

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