

ART THERAPY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (Enhancing Emotional Well-being through Creativity)

Freudi Fernando, Trimulat, Ismawati Safitri

¹²³The Islamic Institute of K.H. Sufyan Tsauri Majenang

¹freudifernando@gmail.com, ²trimulatvevian@gmail.com ,

³ismayafitri91@gmail.com

Abstract

Art therapy has been recognized as an effective method for enhancing emotional well-being, particularly in children. This study is a literature review aimed at examining the impact of art therapy on children's emotional well-being. Through the analysis of various literature sources, the research explores how the creative process in art therapy can help children express emotions, cope with stress, and improve social skills. The study highlights various forms of art therapy, such as painting, drawing, and clay modeling, which provide a space for children to freely express themselves without fear of judgment. Additionally, art therapy has been proven to support psychological and emotional development, especially for children with trauma or emotional disorders. This research is expected to provide insights into the benefits of art therapy in the context of children's education and mental health.

Keywords: *Art therapy, emotional well-being, early childhood*

A. Introduction

Childhood is a critical phase in individual development. During this period, children undergo rapid physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. One important aspect that requires special attention in early childhood is emotional development. This is because this age represents a golden period in human life, where individuals have a great opportunity to grow quickly and significantly. Early childhood children are in the preoperational stage of development, where they begin to develop the ability to think symbolically, but still struggle to understand others' perspectives or manage their emotions effectively. In this context, emotional well-being becomes a crucial part of a child's development that needs to be supported by appropriate interventions.

One important aspect of early childhood development is emotional development. Managing emotional behavior in children aged 3 to 6 is critical to their growth. It is expected that with good emotional control, children will understand more stable ways to

express their feelings when facing various problems. Children often experience emotional development issues, which are commonly characterized by naughty behavior. The mischief displayed by children is often considered normal because they are seeking attention from those around them. Whenever a child faces emotional issues such as being easily offended, angry, traumatized, or even throwing tantrums, these are signs that the child's emotions are not being appropriately expressed. This can be reduced through therapy, a fun therapy process where the child feels comfortable (Fauziyyah, Ifdil, and Putri 2020).

Children are unique individuals who experience rapid development in every aspect, undergoing changes in their developmental aspects. Early childhood is also known as a critical period because if children do not receive proper attention in terms of education, care, parenting, healthcare services, and nutritional needs, they will not grow and develop optimally. Early childhood education aims to guide, stimulate, sharpen, and provide activities that will help children develop their skills and abilities (Silvi Aqidatul Ummah 2020).

In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), it is important to recognize that art plays a very significant role. Art has been proven to be an effective learning tool and provides many benefits for young children. Art offers children opportunities to express themselves, create, and enhance their fine motor skills. Art is not just a fun activity, but also provides a strong foundation to support a child's growth and development in various aspects of their life. Emotions are psychological and physical discomforts that arise when a person feels threatened. These emotions can include fear, stress, sadness, depression, or frustration, which may lead to aggressive behavior. Emotions are not limited to feelings of anger, but also include feelings of being loved, valued, safe, and competent, all of which are important for children. During preschool age, children are at a stage of development where they learn to master and express various emotions they experience.

Emotional well-being in children includes their ability to understand, express, and manage their emotions effectively. When a child lacks the ability to manage their emotions, it can affect their social interactions, learning abilities, and mental health in the future. Research shows that emotional problems in early childhood, such as anxiety,

stress, and aggressive behavior, can persist into adulthood if not properly addressed (Chris Beckett 2016). Therefore, it is important to develop interventions that can help children learn to manage their emotions from an early age.

One approach that can be used to support emotional well-being in young children is art therapy. Art therapy is a therapeutic form that uses the creative process as a tool to express emotions and address various psychological issues (Cathy A. Malchiodi 1998)). Art has long been recognized as a medium that helps individuals, including children, express feelings that may be difficult to verbalize. In a therapeutic context, art allows children to express emotions through pictures, shapes, colors, and movements without having to rely on verbal skills that may not yet be fully developed. Several studies show that art therapy can provide various benefits for young children, indicating that art therapy can enhance emotional expression and psychological well-being, especially for those facing difficulties in communication or self-expression.

In early childhood, art therapy holds great potential in helping children manage their emotions. Children often do not have sufficient language skills to effectively express their feelings or traumatic experiences (Case, Dalley, and Reddick 2022). Therefore, art provides an alternative channel for non-verbal self-expression, which can help them express feelings that they may have repressed. Through creative activities like drawing, painting, or crafting, children can freely express their emotions, which in turn can reduce stress, anxiety, and other emotional tensions.

In recent decades, art therapy for young children has received greater attention in both the educational and psychological fields. Additionally, art therapy can also help children build self-confidence and self-esteem. In the process of creating artwork, children are given the freedom to explore their ideas and feelings without fear of judgment. This provides them with the opportunity to feel control over their environment and experience success through the work they create. Success in creating something can boost feelings of competence and self-confidence in children, contributing to their overall emotional well-being.

In the digital age, children are also becoming increasingly familiar with technology and digital media. While technology offers various benefits, excessive use

can negatively impact children's emotional development. Research shows that children who are overly exposed to digital media tend to experience problems with social interaction and emotional regulation (Groves and Anderson 2015). In this context, traditional art therapy offers a more holistic alternative, where children can directly interact with physical art media, such as paint, paper, and clay, which can help them become more aware of themselves and their surroundings.

B. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Art therapy is an approach that utilizes various art mediums such as drawing, painting, music, dance, and drama to help individuals express their feelings, overcome emotional issues, and develop social and cognitive skills. Studies in Indonesia and abroad show that art therapy plays a significant role in supporting the emotional well-being of young children in a fun and non-coercive way.

1. Definition of Art Therapy

Art therapy is a discipline that combines art with therapeutic practices to help individuals express themselves and process their emotional experiences. In art therapy, individuals are not required to have high artistic skills, as the primary focus is not on the final artwork but on the process of creation and what emerges from the activity (Cathy A. Malchiodi 1998). In this approach, children are given the freedom to explore various art media such as crayons, paint, clay, and paper. This process helps them understand and express their feelings, develop sensory and motor skills, and improve interpersonal relationships. Art therapy is also frequently used in clinical settings to assist children experiencing emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and trauma (Rubin, Berntsen, and Bohni 2008).

Art therapy is an approach that integrates creative expression through art to help individuals express their feelings and address emotional issues. Art therapy is not only about producing artwork but about the creative process that provides space for children to express emotions and respond to life experiences. In art therapy, children are given the freedom to choose the art medium they prefer, whether it is drawing, painting, or other forms of art. This process encourages children to connect more with themselves, which helps them recognize and manage their feelings. The basic principle of art therapy for children is to provide them with the freedom to

create without limitations or judgment. This is important because through this freedom, children feel valued and are given the space to express themselves, which in turn boosts their self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Emotional well-being refers to a child's ability to understand, manage, and express feelings and interact with others in a healthy way. In early childhood, emotional well-being is closely linked to the ability to form positive relationships with adults and peers, manage feelings of anger or disappointment, and develop self-confidence. A child who experiences good emotional well-being is generally more prepared to face challenges in both social life and learning. Several factors can influence a child's emotional well-being, including family conditions, school environment, interactions with peers, and support from parents and educators. In this context, a holistic approach that goes beyond formal academic methods is necessary, one of which is through art therapy.

Benefits of Art Therapy for Emotional Well-being in Early Childhood, is:

a. Expression of Emotions

One of the main benefits of art therapy is that it provides children with an opportunity to express feelings that may be difficult to articulate in words. Art allows children to portray emotions such as joy, anxiety, fear, or anger in a more visual and creative form. Through this activity, children can gain a better understanding of their own feelings and learn how to manage them in a healthier way.

b. Enhancing Social Skills

Group art activities also play a significant role in developing children's social skills. Through interactions with peers during the creation of art, children can learn to collaborate, share, and respect others' perspectives. This can also help them learn how to manage conflicts and strengthen empathy.

c. Boosting Self-confidence

When children complete an artwork, they feel proud and confident. The process of creating art, which does not demand perfection, allows children to feel valued and acknowledged. The self-confidence built through artistic achievements has a positive impact on their emotional well-being.

d. Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Art therapy can help children reduce stress and anxiety, which often arise from academic pressures or personal issues. Through art, children can release the tension they feel in a fun, pressure-free activity.

e. Improving Cognitive Abilities

Art therapy can also play a role in enhancing children's cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving, creative thinking, and fine motor skills. Art activities that involve critical thinking and hand-eye coordination can improve children's overall intelligence.

2. Research on Art Therapy in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the use of art therapy for young children has gained significant attention in recent years. Art therapy in Indonesia not only focuses on artistic expression but also on how art can be used to address emotional issues in children from various social and economic backgrounds. This research indicates that art therapy can yield positive results in helping children who experience trauma or emotional difficulties due to parental separation, violence, or unstable living conditions.

Furthermore, a research by Zaini (Zaini 2019) shows that art as a medium of learning for young children provides significant benefits, especially when combined with a play-based learning approach. This is in line with the research by Setiawan, Hardiyani, Aulia, & Hidayat (Setiawan et al. 2022), which found that children who participate in art activities in a fun and exploratory manner—typically through play—tend to be more creative and develop fine motor skills as well as other aspects of development more effectively.

Another study by Mayar, Sari, & Hijriani (Mayar, Sari, and Hijriani 2019) showed that art activities combined with play help children enhance their social and emotional skills, such as sharing ideas, collaborating with peers, and facing creative challenges. Therefore, the concept of learning through play becomes an ideal framework for supporting early childhood art education while maintaining enjoyment and engagement in the learning process (Nurhayati et al. 2021). In this context, playing with art materials such as drawing, painting, or sculpting functions as a fun therapy,

where children can express emotions and create creative and expressive artwork (Muthmainnah 2017).

According to research by Wahyuni (Sandy, Wahyuni, and Masruri 2022) in Indonesia, art therapy can help young children recognize and manage their emotions, significantly improving their emotional well-being. In this study, art therapy was applied through activities such as drawing and painting, which provided children with the opportunity to express their feelings in visual form. The findings of the study showed that children who participated in art therapy exhibited improvements in managing stress and anxiety, as well as enhanced social interaction with their peers.

Meanwhile, a study shows that the use of art therapy in the context of early childhood education can enrich children's learning experiences and support their emotional development. Art activities such as music, dance, and drama provide children with opportunities to develop social skills, empathy, and emotional regulation. In this regard, art therapy not only focuses on achieving technical art skills but also on building character and fostering healthy emotional management in young children. Based on the findings of these previous studies, it can be concluded that art therapy plays a crucial role in enhancing the emotional well-being of young children. Through creativity, children can learn to recognize, express, and manage their emotions in a healthy way. Therefore, art therapy should be an integral part of early childhood education and development approaches.

C. Research Method

This study uses a literature review approach to examine various sources related to the implementation of art therapy in enhancing emotional well-being in early childhood. The literature review method was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic being studied through the synthesis of previous research findings. The literature used includes books, journals, scientific articles, and other relevant sources that focus on the impact of art therapy on children's emotional development, particularly in early childhood.

According to Sugiyono (Sugiyono 2016) in his book *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Educational Research Methods), which explains literature reviews, this method allows researchers to identify trends, debates, and results from various previous

studies focusing on a specific topic. Additionally, this approach enables researchers to build a strong theoretical foundation in understanding the connection between art and children's emotional development.

In the first stage, this study collects literature related to art therapy, such as painting, music, and dance, and their relation to emotional health in early childhood. The literature includes research conducted by experts in the fields of child developmental psychology and early childhood education. In this literature, the researcher looks for empirical evidence on how art activities can reduce stress, improve self-expression, and enhance emotional well-being in children.

The results of this literature review are expected to provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of art therapy in improving early childhood emotional well-being, as well as offering recommendations for educational practices and therapeutic interventions in Indonesia.

D. Discussion

In childhood, especially early childhood, emotional development is one of the most important aspects that influences various areas of a child's future life. Along with the child's physical and cognitive growth, emotional well-being requires special attention. Emotions are an integral part of human life, and the ability to manage and express emotions in a healthy way greatly impacts a child's social and mental development. Therefore, applying art therapy to early childhood can be an effective approach to enhancing their emotional well-being. Through art therapy, children are given space to express feelings that may be difficult to convey through words, while also gaining significant psychological and social benefits crucial to their development stage.

1. The Importance of Emotional Well-being in Early Childhood

Emotional well-being refers to a state where a child can understand, manage, and express their feelings in a healthy way. In early childhood, this ability is still developing, and often, children are not yet able to express their emotions verbally. In this case, art offers an expressive outlet that doesn't rely on verbal or language skills. Art provides space for children to communicate their feelings, whether through images, colors, or shapes. Good emotional well-being enables children to form positive social relationships, increase self-confidence, and prepare them to face

challenges in daily life. Emotional well-being in early childhood is also closely linked to their ability to manage feelings such as anger, disappointment, or anxiety. Children who can manage their emotions well are more likely to be ready to face social situations and learning.

However, in this digital era, children are often overly exposed to digital media, which can negatively affect their emotional regulation. Research by (Groves and Anderson 2015) shows that children who are overexposed to digital media may struggle to regulate their emotions and interact socially. This is where art therapy provides a more holistic alternative, where children can interact with physical art media such as paint, clay, or paper, encouraging them to become more self-aware and aware of their surroundings. Art therapy offers children the opportunity to reduce stress and anxiety and improve their social interactions through creative expression free from academic or digital media demands.

2. The Role of Art Therapy in Enhancing Emotional Well-being in Early Childhood

Art therapy is not just about creating artwork, but about the creative process that allows children to express themselves without fear or judgment. One of the main benefits of art therapy is providing children with an outlet to express emotions that may be difficult to convey verbally. Malchiodi states that art therapy allows children to communicate through artistic media such as drawing, painting, or even making crafts, giving them the freedom to explore and express their feelings in ways not limited by language. This activity is very useful for children who have not yet mastered language skills or who face difficulties in expressing their emotions through words (Cathy A. Malchiodi 1998).

A very important aspect of art therapy is its ability to reduce stress and anxiety in children. In many studies, art therapy has been found to be an effective tool for reducing anxiety and emotional tension in children, especially those who have difficulty communicating. Art provides an opportunity to release tension through enjoyable and creative activities. In this context, art is not just about creating something beautiful, but about addressing feelings that may be hard to face with words.

In addition, art therapy plays a role in the development of children's social skills. Art activities conducted in groups allow children to learn to work together, share ideas, and communicate with their peers. Through the social interaction that occurs in art activities, children can develop empathy, understand the feelings of others, and learn to manage conflict constructively. These social skills are very important for a child's emotional development, as they learn how to interact with others and build healthy relationships.

3. The Success of Art Therapy in Boosting Children's Self-confidence

Through the process of creating artwork, children can experience achievement and success, which are very important for their self-confidence development. Moon (Moon 2010) states that success in creating artwork can increase feelings of competence and self-confidence in children. Art activities give children the opportunity to overcome challenges in creating, which in turn gives them a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. This success is not only limited to the final product of the artwork but also to the process they go through during its creation.

Art activities that do not demand perfection and give freedom to experiment also allow children to feel valued for their efforts. This process is crucial in building self-confidence, which can help children face challenges in the future. The self-confidence developed through art therapy also contributes to strengthening their overall emotional well-being, as children feel that they have the ability to cope with the feelings and challenges they face.

4. The Importance of Integrating Art Therapy in Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

In Indonesia, although the benefits of art therapy for early childhood have been proven through various studies, its implementation still faces several challenges. One of the main obstacles is the lack of understanding among parents, educators, and practitioners about the importance of art therapy as part of psychological interventions to enhance children's emotional well-being. Many parents and educators still view art as merely a recreational activity and do not understand its potential as an effective therapeutic tool. Therefore, it is important for

stakeholders to raise awareness of the benefits of art therapy through educational campaigns and training for teachers and child counselors.

Early childhood schools in Indonesia are starting to recognize the importance of art therapy in supporting children's emotional well-being. Integrating art into early childhood education curricula can give children the space to explore their creativity and develop important emotional skills. Schools and educational institutions need to collaborate with art therapy experts to design programs that support the holistic emotional development of children.

5. The Use of Art Therapy for Children

The following are examples of emotional conditions experienced by children and types of therapy that can be applied:

a. Child Experiences Anxiety and Fear

A 4-year-old child often shows high anxiety, especially when separating from their parents at school. This child frequently cries and feels scared in a new environment. Art therapy that can be used includes drawing or painting with the theme "*A Place that Makes Me Feel Safe*." The child is encouraged to draw a place where they feel safe and comfortable, such as a home, park, or playground. The child can also be encouraged to participate in expressive art activities such as creating a mural or large painting where they can freely create. This activity helps the child feel freedom in expression, increases self-confidence, and gives them an opportunity to showcase their talents and creativity. In addition, the child can be encouraged to create a positive self-image or symbols that empower them. This activity helps the child express feelings that are difficult to verbalize and gives them a sense of control over the fears they experience. With several sessions, it is hoped that the child can recognize and express their fear in a healthier way and feel calmer and safer.

b. Child Exhibits Aggressive Behavior

Another example is a 5-year-old child who displays aggressive behavior at school, often hitting or pushing their friends while playing. Art activities that involve manipulating clay or playdough to create figures or shapes that represent angry feelings (like a fireball or broken shapes) can be used. The child is asked to talk

about the shapes or figures they made and how they felt while creating them. The child can also be encouraged to make a collage or painting that reflects their emotions, such as anger, frustration, or annoyance. This therapy provides an opportunity for the child to express these feelings without acting them out on others. Art therapy can also teach the child ways to calm down, such as drawing soothing patterns or shapes that can help reduce aggression. This activity helps the child recognize and express their anger without physical action. The goal is to redirect the child's attention from aggressive behavior to a more creative activity. The expected outcome is that the child can learn to express their anger in a more constructive way, improving emotional regulation skills.

c. Child Struggles with Social Interaction

An example is a 3-year-old child who has difficulty interacting with peers. This child often chooses to play alone and shows little interest in interacting with others. Art activities that can be used include collaborative art, such as creating a group mural or doing crafts together. The children are encouraged to work together on a large piece of art, such as drawing or making shapes together. Art therapy can be done with activities like coloring or playing with clay. These activities give the child the opportunity to develop fine motor skills and express their feelings or ideas non-verbally. This therapy helps the child express themselves in a way that is easier to understand and reduces frustration caused by difficulty with verbal communication. This activity aims to build a sense of togetherness, introduce the concept of sharing, and improve social skills through creativity. The child is expected to become more capable of interacting with peers and feel more comfortable in a social group.

d. Child Experiences Stress Due to Environmental Changes

An example is a 4-year-old child who has just moved to a new environment and seems isolated and stressed by the change. Art therapy using collage can be used here. The child is asked to collect images that represent their feelings or hopes about the new environment. The collage can contain pictures of their new home, new friends, or places they wish to explore. This activity helps the child express their stress or anxiety while giving them an opportunity to imagine positive things

that can come from the change. The expected outcome is that the child will adapt more easily to the new environment and feel more positive about the change.

e. Child Experiences Anxiety Due to Negative Experiences

Another case is a 5-year-old child who shows signs of anxiety after experiencing a traumatic event, such as a minor accident or a frightening event. An activity that can be done is art therapy where the child creates a narrative drawing or painting that depicts themselves as a hero overcoming challenges or fears. The child is encouraged to create images showing how they overcame fear in a positive way. This activity gives the child a sense of control and boosts their courage, helping them reconstruct their experience in a more empowering way. The expected result is that the child feels stronger in facing anxiety and can develop positive ways to cope with traumatic experiences.

6. Advantages and Disadvantages of Art Therapy for Early Childhood in Enhancing Emotional Well-being through Creativity

Here are the advantages and disadvantages of art therapy to consider when conducting therapy. Advantages of Art Therapy:

a. Safe and Directed Expression of Emotions

Art therapy allows children to express feelings and emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally. By drawing, painting, or creating other art forms, children can safely release feelings such as anxiety, happiness, or frustration.

b. Improves Self-confidence

The creative process in art can boost a child's self-confidence because they feel proud of their work. Achievements in creating something unique provide personal satisfaction that contributes to emotional well-being.

c. Reduces Stress and Anxiety

Art activities can function as a relaxation technique, helping children cope with stress and anxiety. These activities calm the mind and help reduce both physical and emotional tension.

d. Enhances Social Skills

In group art therapy, children learn to work together with their peers, share materials, and communicate in a positive context. This can improve social skills and help children manage interpersonal relationships better.

e. Development of Motor Skills

Art activities involving hand skills, such as drawing, coloring, or sculpting, support the development of fine motor skills that are essential for both physical and emotional growth.

Disadvantages of Art Therapy:

a. Guidance and Supervision by a Professional

For art therapy to be effective, it requires guidance from a trained professional. Without proper supervision, children may struggle to express themselves or understand the meaning of the activity.

b. Not All Children Are Comfortable with Art

Some children may not feel interested or comfortable with art activities. If a child does not enjoy the creative process, art therapy may be less effective in helping them address emotional issues.

c. Requires Resources and Time

Art therapy requires adequate tools and materials, as well as enough time to truly experience its benefits. Resource limitations in some environments or educational institutions can be a barrier.

d. May Not Immediately Solve Emotional Problems

While art therapy can help children express and understand their emotions, it does not always guarantee an immediate solution to deeper emotional issues. Ongoing supervision and a more comprehensive approach may be needed for optimal results.

e. Limited in Emotional Communication

Children with limited communication skills or verbal expression may find it difficult to communicate their feelings through art, requiring a more focused approach with clearer instructions and assistance in understanding.

E. Conclusion

Emotional well-being in children is crucial for developing social skills, managing emotions, and building self-confidence. Art therapy provides a medium for children to express their feelings in a creative way, without relying on verbal skills that they may not have fully developed yet. Through activities such as drawing, painting, and crafting, art therapy helps children manage emotions like anxiety, fear, and aggression. Additionally, this therapy enhances social skills and self-confidence, as children experience a sense of accomplishment from the creative process. Group art activities strengthen children's ability to interact with others, foster empathy, and teach them how to resolve conflicts constructively.

Despite its many benefits, art therapy has some drawbacks to consider, such as the need for professional guidance, resources, and sufficient time to see its effects. Art therapy may also be less effective if children are not interested in art or have difficulties expressing themselves through this medium. Overall, integrating art therapy into early childhood education, especially in Indonesia, can help support children's emotional well-being.

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