

Effects of a Soccer Program on Preschool Children's Social Development

-- Based on self-awareness, interpersonal, and pro-social behavioral factors

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate how soccer programs influence the social development of preschool children, focusing particularly on self-awareness, interpersonal interactions, and prosocial behavior. The study utilized both questionnaire surveys and experimental observations. Preschool children from multiple kindergartens in a city were selected as participants. By comparing the social development of children participating in soccer programs with those who did not, the study analyzed the impact of soccer programs. Interviews with teachers were also conducted to gain insights into their perspectives on soccer classes, complementing the research findings. The results indicated significant improvements among preschool children participating in soccer programs in terms of self-awareness development, interpersonal skills, and prosocial behavior. Soccer programs have been shown to be effective in promoting the development of social skills in preschool children[12]. Therefore, it is recommended that soccer-related programs be widely implemented at the preschool level to promote the all-round growth and development of children.

Keywords: Soccer Programs; Preschool Children; Social Development; Self-awareness; Interpersonal Interactions; Prosocial Behavior.

1. Preface

1.1. Background of the Study

Globally, soccer, as a popular sport, not only contributes to physical health, but also has a profound impact on children's social development. In recent years, more and more studies have focused on the multifaceted effects of soccer programs on preschool children's development, especially on social development. Social development is an important part of preschool education and includes aspects such as self-awareness, interpersonal and pro-social behavior. With the gradual promotion of early childhood soccer in the education systems of various countries, it has become particularly important to explore the specific effects of soccer programs on the social development of preschool children.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

1.2.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the specific impact of soccer courses on preschool children's social development, focusing on how soccer courses promote the formation and development of preschool children's self-awareness, enhance interpersonal skills and promote the development of pro-social behaviors[9]. Through empirical research, we will understand and verify the specific mechanism of the soccer program's role in preschool children's social development, so as to provide educators and policy makers with scientific basis and practical guidance.

1.2.2. Significance of the Study

This study enriches the theoretical framework of preschool children's social development, particularly at the intersection of physical education and social growth. Practically, it offers pedagogical recommendations for designing effective soccer programs and provides empirical support for policymakers to

improve early childhood soccer curricula, enhancing both physical and mental development in preschoolers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Significance of the Study

2.1.1. Preschool Children

Preschool children are those who have not yet reached the age of formal school enrollment, which usually covers the age range from 3 to 6 years old. Preschoolers are at a critical time in their physical and mental development, when they need to be exposed to a variety of influences such as good family education and social norms[11].

2.1.2. Self-awareness

Self-awareness involves a person's understanding of their own existence, identity, emotions, and actions, as well as their perception and evaluation of others and their environment. In the field of psychology, self-awareness is regarded as a core concept that relates to an individual's perception and understanding of his or her own identity and how to better understand themselves and others in social interactions[17].

2.1.3. Interpersonal Interaction

Interpersonal communication refers to the process by which an individual interacts and communicates with others in a social environment[13]. Social interaction theory reveals that people's behaviors in daily life are shaped by interconnected factors, influencing how they manage social connections and express emotions.

2.1.4. Pro-social Behavior

Pro-social behavior refers to the positive attitudes, supportive actions, and cooperation individuals show in social interactions, including helping, sharing, teamwork, and respecting others. During preschoolers' development, cultivating pro-social behavior plays a key role in their social

skills and emotional growth, which not only helps them establish positive interpersonal interactions, but also promotes the formation of social norms and values[1].

2.1.5. Toddler Soccer

Toddler soccer activities and training programs are tailored for preschoolers. It is a group class or group dance with games as its basic form, and its main components include aspects such as shuttlecock, kicking and passing. The purpose of this physical activity is to promote the overall development of physical coordination, teamwork, and motor skills of young children through participation in a soccer game. Children learn through play, thereby gaining knowledge and skills related to soccer. In this series of activities, children not only experience the joy of soccer, but also develop their self-confidence, form a positive competitive mindset, and learn how to cooperate with others. At the same time, they can also feel the sense of accomplishment that soccer brings to them. These experiences play a positive role in their overall growth in both the physical and social realms.

2.2. Research Related to Soccer Curriculum

Research on early childhood soccer emphasizes its role in improving physical health, teamwork, social skills, and self-confidence. Most studies focus on soccer activities in kindergartens and overlook its integration into elementary school physical education. Scholars suggest that early childhood soccer education should prioritize fun and playfulness over competition to sustain children's interest. At present, most of the domestic research on the concept of early childhood soccer education focuses on the practice of kindergarten soccer teaching[15]. Through in-depth analysis of relevant research literature at home and abroad, we have designed a soccer curriculum that is adapted to the developmental stages of young children and will focus on respecting the physical and mental developmental characteristics of young children, emphasizing individual differences and developmental potential.

Research on early childhood soccer education focuses on teaching methods, curriculum structure, and implementation strategies. Emphasizing game-based teaching, researchers highlight the need to stimulate children's enthusiasm through diverse activities. Despite some progress in China, there are still shortcomings. The study advocates for teachers to possess strong soccer expertise and early childhood education backgrounds to design appropriate activities tailored to children's developmental stages.

The study analyzed the developmental status of early childhood soccer, identifying challenges like insufficient facilities, low teacher specialization, and lack of parental support. Researchers proposed solutions including facility enhancement, teacher training, and parent education. They also emphasized the need to foster children's interest in soccer and advocated for policy support from the government and relevant organizations to promote early childhood soccer development.

2.3. Research Related to Pro-social Behavior

Pro-social behavior is the spontaneous altruistic behavior of an individual based on the views of others (Eisenberg 1986). This mainly refers to friendly behaviors in interpersonal interactions that bring benefits to others or the group as a whole (Kou Yu 2006). This behavior includes self-sacrifice for others, which helps to promote social harmony (XiaoZheng & Chen 2014). This behavior meets the

expectations of society, and demonstrates the development of an individual's abilities in society (Xiao Fengqiu 2014)[8]. This study explored adolescents' pro-social behavior and its relationship with parenting styles through a combination of questionnaires and interviews. From this point of view, the characteristics of pro-social behavior are beneficial to the individual, the collective or the whole society.

Pro-social behavior is measured using experimental and questionnaire methods. The questionnaire assesses pro-social tendencies based on perceptions of others' behavior, while the experimental method observes task responses. Carlo's Pro-Social Behavior Tendency Scale was revised by Kou Yu and Cong Wenjun, with their versions having 26 and 23 questions on a 5-point scale. Yu Juan's 30-question Pro-Social Behavior Scale for Middle School Students uses a 6-point scale and explores the link between pro-social behavior and parenting styles. Kou Yu's scale is widely used among Chinese adolescents.

Early studies linked pro-social behavior to psychological factors like empathy and moral values. Research since the 21st century has focused on interventions, revealing its complex cognitive processes. Donald (1984) and Rushton (1982) emphasized unconscious imitation and peer interactions, while Grant highlighted the positive impact of gratitude on adolescents. Qi Dongxing's study found that sports games promoted pro-social behaviors in young children, while another study with 233 preschoolers showed that outdoor physical activity enhanced self-regulation and interpersonal skills. These findings underscore the need to explore how contextual factors influence pro-social behavior in secondary school students to guide educational practices. Berger Rony's ESPS program effectively enhanced pro-social attitudes in middle school students through gratitude-themed activities. Overall, there is a strong connection between students' pro-social behaviors and them, and fostering such pro-social behaviors is a key way to promote healthy student development.

3. Research Design

3.1. Purpose of the Study

To investigate the current situation of preschool children's soccer curriculum affecting self-awareness, interpersonal communication, and pro-social behavior, and to clarify the relationship between the three variables.

3.2. Research Hypotheses

(1) There are significant differences in demographic variables of preschool children's soccer curriculum affecting self-awareness, interpersonal communication and pro-social behavior.

(2) The three variables are positively correlated: soccer curriculum influences self-awareness, which in turn positively predicts interpersonal interactions, and these interactions positively predict pro-social behaviors.

(3) Soccer curriculum influences interpersonal interactions to mediate between self-awareness and pro-social behavior.

3.3. Research Methodology

3.3.1. Research Subjects

In this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted in a soccer specialty school in Zhejiang Province, where some of the students have been participating in soccer courses for a long time. Because of the ease of implementation of whole

group sampling, this method was chosen for this study to survey all preschool children in preschool classes in a city, with a total of 1,300 questionnaires distributed, of which 1,188 were valid, with a validity rate of 91.38%.

3.3.2. Research Tools

(1) Self-Awareness Questionnaire

The Self-Awareness Questionnaire for Preschoolers developed by Zhang Wei (2009) includes five dimensions: environmental introspective experience, frictional conflict, psychological support, learning atmosphere and centripetal cohesion, with 40 questions, a five-point scoring system, and a Cronbach's coefficient of 0.944, where 1, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27, 30, 36, 38, and 39, 40 were titled reverse scoring.

(2) Interpersonal Communication Questionnaire

The Interpersonal Communication Questionnaire (PRS) developed by Wo Jianzhong (2000) consists of six dimensions: sharing help and guidance, companionship and recreation, acceptance of affirmation and concern, intimate revealing and communication, conflict competition, and conflict resolution strategies, with a total of 40 questions, a five-point scale, and reliability coefficients ranging from 0.507 to 0.768, of which 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 28, 32, 35, and 36 questions were reverse scored.

(3) Pro-Social Behavior Questionnaire

The Pro-Social Tendencies Scale for Preschoolers, compiled by Kou Yu (2007), consists of six dimensions: openness, anonymity, altruism, dependence, emotionality, and urgency, with a total of 26 questions, a five-point scoring system, and a Cronbach's coefficient of 0.899. And all items are positively scored.

In addition to the above scales, basic demographic information of the children was collected, which included, whether or not they were involved in the soccer program, gender, and age.

3.3.3. Process of Administering the Test

The researcher herself distributed the questionnaires in the classroom, explaining individual questions after the instructions had been read out and requesting that a quiet environment for answering be maintained.

3.3.4. Statistical Analysis

Variance analysis was conducted by SPSS 23.0.

4. Conclusion

This study explored through empirical analysis the impact of soccer courses on preschool children's social development, particularly in three areas: self-awareness, interpersonal communication and pro-social behavior. The results of the study showed that preschool children who participated in the soccer program showed higher motivation and self-confidence in the formation and development of self-awareness, were more effective in interacting and cooperating with their peers in interpersonal interactions, and had more pronounced pro-social behaviors. Specifically, the soccer program not only promotes preschoolers' self-awareness, but also enhances their interpersonal skills through teamwork and group activities, as well as fosters empathy, helping behaviors, and a sense of social responsibility. Future research could further explore the effects of different types of soccer programs on preschool children's social development and compare the effects of various teaching methods and program designs. In addition, a long-term follow-up study can be considered to observe the long-term effects of soccer

programs on children's social development. Educational policy makers should pay attention to the application of soccer curriculum in preschool education and provide more resources and support to promote the popularization and optimization of soccer curriculum in early childhood education. Meanwhile, the improvement of teachers' professional quality and parents' active participation are also important factors to promote the effective implementation of soccer curriculum. Through the efforts of many parties, the soccer curriculum will play a greater role in the comprehensive development of pre-school children.

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