

Multi-Age Grouping In A Montessori Classroom Effects Positively On A Child's Social And Emotional Development

S Khurram Khan Alwi, Zobia Zaman, Romana Bano Ghaffar, Saima Tabasum

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Abstract

This research study was conducted to see and understand the importance and positive effects of multi-age grouping classrooms on children's social and emotional development. The multi-age grouping study emphasizes that a child can learn and become more confident in a group of fellows of different ages in a better way than of in the same age group. The Research works on different social and emotional aspects in a child's life through discussing views of educationalists and psychologists. Some of them have been noted in literature review, then there is an analysis and conclusion too. There is an interview conducted with a head of a pre-school which follows system of mixed-age classroom and a questionnaire has been made to get reviews of the teachers. The findings concluded that the children getting education in multi-age grouping are far more active socially and emotionally than the children in regular same age group classrooms, however it is also needed to give awareness regarding the system of education as it is not very common in our society.

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Introduction

Multi-age grouping is to place children who are at least a year apart in age into the same classrooms group. As we all know this fact that a child's first eight years are very important in terms of growing physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. During these years the span of a child's brain is much bigger than of an adult. Montessori education believes that keeping children of different ages together can work like a proper institute for them. The learning curiosity of a young child from the older one makes him adopt things faster as well as the older child builds tremendous confidence while teaching to younger one. These mutually reinforcing perceptions thus create a climate of expected cooperation beneficial to children and to teachers who often can feel that they must do all the givings. Multi-age grouping has also been common in small rural schools, and cross tutoring has been used in way or another, for hundreds of years (Zindell, undated). Throughout infancy, toddlerhood and pre-schooling years, developmental changes occur in the young child's social and emotional behavior. Not only do these changes follow predictable stages, they also support one another and develop structurally (Zelazo, P. D., & Carlson, S. M. 2012). Children can better express their feelings to each other in comparison to adults, if we notice in a classroom we see most of the children are always busy discussing their petty issues to each other with seriousness. Sharp minded children have good judgment power while slow minded children take time to make their perception. Middle ground can be found in the argument that social and emotional development in the first years of life can be conceptualized as the gradual emergence of social emotional abilities through continuous interactions between social and cognitive processes, increasing in complexity over time and with experience and the appearance of qualitatively new capacities. Thus, development can be conceptualized as the result of the interaction between the developmental processes and the growing differentiation and specialization of brain functioning and physiological structures from earlier and simpler levels (Fivush, R., & Nelson, K. 2004). Multi age grouping helps children develop a sense of community and supports social and emotional development. Children who are given the freedom to interact with different ages build a sense of themselves and a sense of confidence that provides a foundation for them which help them move through life with a belief that they can try new things and not to be afraid of stepping out of their comfort zone. Montessori philosophy supports multi-age grouping and Montessori teachers have implemented it for over 100 years. This concept has recently moved into the mainstream due to the work of many educational theorists and researchers. Some states are now recommending their preschools classrooms implement multi-age grouping. Another positive aspect of multi age classroom is teachers and children have opportunity to work together for more than one year, this helps forming of positive relationship and continuity of learning between teachers and children and between children. Research that I have found has been favorable about multiage classes. When compared to children in single age classes, children in multiage classes are

superior in study habits, social interaction, self-motivation, cooperation, and attitudes toward school. Academically, children perform just as well or even better than those in single grade classes. (Gajadharsingh, J. 1991). A young child always seems keen to learn from the older one in a multi age classroom. One major advantage to children inherent in multiage classrooms is the modeling that takes place. Modeling is described as "Probably the strongest instruction piece you can have" (Thompson). Modeling is the natural process by which younger students pick up behaviors they observe in older students. "Direct tutoring by the older child is not required" (Merrick). Modeling occurs even when it is not intended. "If older students and younger students are in close proximity while engaging in learning activities, the younger students will seek to imitate the behaviors modeled by the older students" (Merrick). Children are more likely to cooperate than compete. The spirit of cooperation and caring makes it possible for children to help each other as individuals, not see each other as competitors.

Literature Review

Mixed-age, or multiage, grouping is defined as "placing children who are at least a year apart in age into the same classroom groups" (Katz et al., 1990, p. 1). Several sources (Blackmore, 1996; Bredekamp, 1987; Katz et al., 1990) propose mixed-age grouping as a developmentally and individually appropriate educational alternative which seeks to optimize learning by individualizing instruction according to the needs of each child. The rigid, age-graded expectations of children in schools is not appropriate for many young children (McLain et al., 1995). Children are born into naturally occurring mixed-age groupings in their families which throughout human history have informally provided much of children's socialization and education (Flora, H. K. I. 2005).

Children can spend longer periods of time with the same teacher. This allows the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of a child's strengths and needs, and is therefore in a better position to support the child's learning (The Association for Childhood Education International ACEI) - Children are viewed as unique individuals. The teacher focuses on teaching each child according to his or her own strengths, unlike in same-grade classrooms that often expect all children to be at the same place at the same time about ability. Children develop a sense of family with their classmates. They become a "family of learners" who support and care for each other. - Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles. - Children are more likely to cooperate than compete. The spirit of cooperation and caring makes it possible for children to help each other as individuals, not see each other as competitors. - Older children model more sophisticated approaches to problem solving, and younger children are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. This dynamic increases the older child's level of independence and competence. - Children are invited to take charge of their learning, by making choices at centers and with project work. This sense of "ownership" and self-direction is the foundation for lifelong learning. - Children have almost an extra month of teaching time, because the teacher does not have to spend the early weeks in the school year getting to know each child. - Children are exposed to positive models for behavior and social skills. Many other questions have yet to be explored. For example, "Are there age spans two, three, four years that are most beneficial to the social development of children in a mixed-age classroom?" (Katz, 1990) In conclusion, it appears from previous research that mixed-age grouping may be one aspect of a classroom- environment that enhances the development of social and cognitive abilities (Nicolopoulou, A. 1999) aggression than mixed-age classrooms may be of particular importance. (Hautamaki, J. L., & Anderson, D. L. 2011) argues that the concentration of same-age peers is a major factor in the extremely high incidence of aggressive, anti-social, and destructive acts in United States society. On the other hand, individuals who are familiar with one another are more likely to avoid aggression and respond positively to one another than are individuals unfamiliar with one another. Prosocial behaviors include helping, sharing, cooperating, and caring for or taking responsibility for another (McClellan, D. E., & Kinsey, S. 1997). The capacity for prosocial behavior has been shown to increase with age in cultures where children are given opportunities and expected to help in the care of younger children. Mixed-age education has its roots in the one room school house of the nineteenth century (Theilheimer, 1993). Like today's mixed-age classrooms, younger children were often tutored by older children. The classroom functioned much like a family in that close relationships developed and children were both protected and nurtured. Classmates worked together with a blend between cooperation and competition, and students experienced a degree of flexibility in learning progression (Blackmore, L. 1996).

The psychosocial theory developed by Erikson proposed that people will face many psychological and social challenges as they develop and it is important they resolve the conflicts of each developmental stage in a positive manner (Bacharach et al., 1995). Multiage education benefits students because it permits them to practice working through developmental conflicts with different-age peers.

Piaget's cognitive theory views children as active constructors of their own learning which is a dynamic process, experiential, and maturational (Bacharach et al., 1995). In multiage settings, teaching is individualized and interactions with peers helps to broaden perspectives and develop social skills.

Vygotsky also focused on the social aspect of children's learning through observing others, but his sociocultural theory additionally stressed the importance of each child's zone of proximal development, the distance between

the child's actual and potential developmental level facilitated in collaboration with others (Bacharach et al., 1995; Katz et al., 1990). In mixed-age classrooms, peers work together and stimulate each other's thinking and cognitive growth (Dever, Zila, & Manzano, 1994; Katz et al.)

Objectives of the study

This study is designed to explore:

- To see the rapid changes in emotional and social behavior of a child during early years.
- To explore the factors in a multi age classroom which play positive role in a child's social and emotional development.
- To see how a child, adopt to learn and to explore new things from a multi-age group quickly without any hesitation.

Hypothesis

H1: Multi-age classroom helps children learn during their early years quickly.

H2: Social and emotional development of a child in a multi- age group during his early years results a better personality.

Research questions

- How are the behavioral incidents between the children tackled?
- How do children interact with each other?
- How long does it take a child to adjust in a multi age classroom?
- Discuss any positive/negative changes in a child's behavior after 6 months of joining a multi age classroom
- Do you observe a child building confidence within time?

Methodology

This research is based on mixed method. To get facts and figures the first activity happened was visiting the mixed age grouping pre-schools. The main instruments to collect data were an interview with the female head of Secondary School West Karachi (pre-school branch) and a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 10 close ended questions based on Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were presented to 40 mixed age classroom teachers from 4 different schools. The data analyzed via SPSS and the method was simple random sampling.

Data Analysis

Table 1
One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
complete their worksheets	9.952	19	.000	1.750	1.38	2.12
Imitating	9.970	19	.000	1.900	1.50	2.30
Q3	9.488	19	.000	1.700	1.32	2.08
Q4	11.020	19	.000	2.100	1.70	2.50
Q5	11.000	19	.000	1.650	1.34	1.96

The above result shows that children learning capability grows tremendously in a multi-age classroom. They learn in a friendly environment by seeking help, asking questions and discussing petty issues with each other. This curiosity of knowledge takes them to a leading role in life and helps them emerging as a fearless and confident personality.

Table 2
One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Q6	11.255	19	.000	2.000	1.63	2.37
Q7	10.485	19	.000	1.800	1.44	2.16
Q8	9.970	19	.000	1.900	1.50	2.30
Q9	15.158	19	.000	2.050	1.77	2.33
children obey	10.563	19	.000	1.950	1.56	2.34

The above result shows that multi age classroom provides a prepared environment for the children to groom their personalities. Discussing personal experiences, giving arguments and healthy debates with each help in developing healthy minds. Children learn the habit of listening and obeying their elders. The process of this learning is a good experience of early years throughout life.

Discussion/Conclusion

Multi-age grouping is highly appreciated system in western society where educationalist understand the importance of early years in an individual's life. When Dr.Maria Montessori introduced multi-age grouping in early 1900's, her intention was to engage the children of different age in a single classroom which she found killing time in leisure. By understanding that a hand is an actual teacher of a child she designed different tools for their activities. That proved to be a successful experiment and the core idea driven from it that the environment of mixed age grouping helps children growing their social and emotional development. Though it is proved methodology but still not applied in many schools in both eastern and western societies. The reason is the system requires a lot of attention. Experienced,observant and attentive teachers are required to run a setup of mixed age classroom. During research we observed that those schools which are following this high standard system of education are actually very much satisfied with it.They feel a tremendous response in a child's personality after spending 6 months in a mixed age classroom. The result shows that the children are developing them socially and emotionally in the company of different age fellows in a good manner. Children are quick learner in their early years; they adopt behavior from older ones once they make sure that teachers are appreciating it. The other factor of social development is discussion, in a mixed age classroom when children are busy with practical learning they continue discussing their home and school experience with mates and make an analyses on their experiences. Teacher's duty is to observe their attitude and note down it on their monthly progress to make a difference between the present and previous one. Hence the conclusion we got from this whole research is that

other essential ingredients for success included:

- Small class size with mixed- age students are important
- It is important to teach children, not the curriculum.
- The pairing of teams and teachers who can work together is important.
- It is vital to have lots of discussions, in service, and trial-and-error.
- Self-confidence is crucial to success!
- Planning is crucial for up growing students in the next level.
- Instead of force teaching strategy it is important to supporter of multiage.
- Parents should be given a choice whether or not they want multiage for their child; for very slow, weak kindergarteners, multiage can be stressful.
- Teaching assistants are crucial for successful implementation.
- A carefully planned and monitored system of tracking individual progress is essential.

though Montessori mixed age grouping is a system which is applied on an individual result in yearly years but continues its effects throughout life.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study following recommendations are given:

- Parents should understand the importance of mixed age grouping in the social and emotional development of their children.
- Parents should find a montessori mixed age schools to further promote this system of education in the society.
- Parents and teachers should bring children on discussions to observe their social and emotional development.
- Montessorians should explain the advantages and disadvantages of mixed age grouping so parents can get clear defination.

- Schools should follow the mixed age grouping system to improve the quality in education by further exploring it.

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Author Information

Dr. S Khurram Khan Alwi

Adjunct Professor, SZABIST Karachi

Romana Bano Ghaffar

Assistant Professor in Education, Malir University ,
Karachi

Dr. Zobia Zaman

Trainer at IQCS INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS PTY
LTD 7 Korana Street Plympton, South Australia

Dr. Saima Tabasum

Chairperson, Department of Business Administration,
Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi,
Pakistan
