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**EFFECTIVENESS OF VISUAL ART THERAPY APPROACH
DEVELOPING SOCIO-EMOTIONAL AND COMMUNICATION
FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how effectiveness the use of drawings to the visual art therapy approach improves communication skills or self-expression and encourages socialization of children with autism. Through visual art therapy such as drawing gives positive effectiveness in the relationship of emotional and psychomotor skills in children with autism. The subjects consist of four children with autism aged 9-12 years and 2 therapists at autism centre in Kuala Lumpur. Data collected based on observation and interviews. The results showed that the use of art therapy is very effective through the visual art therapy to see the development and improvement in communication, social-emotional and psychomotor among children with autism as a whole.

Keywords: Visual Art Therapy, Socio-Emotional, Communication and Autism.

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is also called "autism". It is a neurodevelopment condition characterized by qualitative weakness in social interaction and communication as well as patterns of behaviour, interests, limited, repetitive, and stereotyped activity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with autism are

considered to have a developmental disorder or Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) on a massive scale, which is characterized by weakness in social interaction, interests and activities and the development of language. Children with autism lose the source of the development of the mind. For example, children with autism show a deficit of language do not connect well with people, like repetitive, focusing on the things that are small and stubborn behaviour or 'rigid'. Changes in routine, objects in surroundings of children with autism, they will tend to show intensity in emotional. Uncertain in behaviours of children with autism is always challenging the parents and professionals (Green & Luce, 2016).

Characteristics of children with autism are likely to include a variety of social interactions recluses. They are increasingly sensitive to sensory stimulus and respond differently to sounds, smells and tactile materials. Children with autism have difficulties to develop skills to talk and communicate. Eye contact, facial expression and vocal intonation variation in speech is limited. Vocabulary and forms of speech may come as a 'hard' and 'natural' compared with normal children (Kathleen Marie, 2018).

Evans (1998) conducted a study of a model of the practice of visual art therapy. He says the uses of visual art therapy interventions are effective in increasing the specific development of children with autism. He shows how the sensations and feelings raised by the face of new materials and making art can be formed in a way that facilitates the communication skills of children with autism and the relationship with the therapist. Evans and Rutten-Sarins (1998) show how the success of the use of art materials in a series that seeks interaction and intervention by the therapist allows the emotional and cognitive development of children with autism.

Art therapies have focused on the involvement of children with autism in order to make the art of resolving weaknesses in communication and imagination (Evans & Du Bowski, 2017). Art can be solution for children who have lack oral communication. Art therapy sometimes is the first treatment for children, especially if the non-verbal communication as affected by emotional factors behavioural (Kornreich & Schimmel, 1991).

Children with autism are visual oriented and have a strong need for sensory input. Art therapy can use the power of the vision of autism children to solve the goals of treatment and at the same time providing appropriate social way to self-stimulator behaviour and sensory needs. For the autism children, to make them more attractive in art and have desire to complete the finished product (Emery, 2004). Art therapist to ensure the success with children with autism need to adjust the project to suit individual differences to engage in a creative and productive in the conditioning experience (Henley, 1992; Rosal, 1996). Developments of arts for children with autism are associated with the level of mental age such in non-verbal development (Charman & Baron-Cohen, 1993), although often at a slower rate.

OBJECTIVES

Visual Art Therapy and Children with Autism

Visual art therapy provides a safe and fun environment which it allows the therapist and the child with autism to interact while sitting around the table. In the painting sessions, children with autism are not pressured to give suitable answers. Researchers also encourage children with autism to be more spontaneous and allow them to use non-verbal expressions. Environment is important for children with autism who rely on feeling secure to them to communicate more effectively (Bee Cheng, Yap, Amla Salleh & Kamaruzaman Jusoff, 2011).

In Malaysia, there is lack of studies on the use of visual art therapy approaches for children with autism, although there are some who have done used visual art therapy with normal children. Election-related therapy approach for children with autism do not have a specific formula that they can follow to achieve effective communication in the world around them or what they think when they lack the skills to speak. Visual art therapy is very beneficial

to children with autism as art therapy is known to help people to get an understanding of self and self-expression (Evan & DuBowski, 2017).

Lack of communication is one of the most significant struggles faced by children with autism in their lives. According to theory of mind, individuals who suffer from autism are not able to connect emotionally through empathy with others. As a result, the case made by children with autism is not appropriate to their age and they are not able to respond in social interaction and cooperation to participate in the game. A child with autism often portrayed as a hard, awkward, emotionally flat, not socially conscious, and self-adhesive, less empathy and tends to make behaviour that is not socially acceptable and not aware of verbal and non-verbal social cues.

Motor abilities involved in the action, but the action is more complex than motor function. Action also involves perception and cognition that produces the intended behaviour (Anzalon, 2013; Losche, 1990). There are some children with autism skilled in their motor skills, especially in fine motor manipulation of objects (Rapin, 1997). Otherwise slow progress in gross motor or fine motor (Leary & Hill, 1996; Manjiviona & Prior, 1995; MAUK, 1993) and have difficulty in coordination or efficiency (Mailloux, Parham, & Roley, 1998). There are also children with autism who have difficulties in *neuron motor processes* under motor performance and executive functions. Problem with neuron motor processes include reduction in strength and muscle tone low (Greenspan, 1992; Leary & Hill, 1996; zero to three / National Centre for Clinical Programs In Fant, 1994).

In Malaysia, most previous studies focus more on painting therapy among normal children in preschool and child on trauma. Previous studies did not try to look up to the painting as therapy interventions to improve communication and socialization skills in children with autism. So this study will be the first step in the effort to build the empirical evidence on the use of the technique of drawing in children with autism. Studies now made to understand the extent to which therapy is effective in improving art communication skills in children with autism and whether experience art activities in drawing can enhance socialization of children autism with others. The study also tried to determine whether there is relationship between emotional and psychomotor of children with autism in the therapeutic activity of drawing. Are emotions of children with autism are affected by poor psychomotor whether or not the activities of painting therapy. Finally, to the extent effective therapy painting will come up the development of children with autism.

METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Sample

Samples are selected by the researcher in two types of samples intended to consist of four (4) children with autism and two (2) therapists expert in painting. To carry out activities to draw in children with autism as young as 9 to 12 years old and interviewed by the therapist drawing, then the researcher has chosen an autism centre in Kuala Lumpur. The centre has been chosen to allow researchers to conduct a studies on children with autism aged 9 to 12 years old with different race and ethnic backgrounds.

Samples are selected by the researcher of 2 “therapists- paintings” selected from the autism centre as informants study. This is because the researchers wanted to know the effectiveness of art therapy in development of children with autism, and the therapist who teaches painting to children with autism only as sample. Informants were chosen based on the research questions that have been set by the researcher when planning to undertake. However, the main feature of their selection is in line with the principles of research ethics based their willingness or eagerness to engage in this research.

ANALYSIS DATA

These data need to be managed carefully. Data collected through observations and interviews. Interviews and observations of the data in this study were analyzed manually. Creswell (2008) states that researchers who analyze data manually to ally itself with the data. Process data analysis continues to read back the data to find out whether there is a new code or not. Code in this study refers to the taxonomic criteria Bloom. In this process, the words and behaviour of the subjects cited studies used to support the indicated code. Creswell (2010) states that the researcher is recommended to reduce the code list to five to seven themes. Themes in this study refer to the same code to form the main idea of the research question. Themes in this study refer to cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of children with autism.

Next, the interview data were analyzed according to the procedure of typed first the data. Meaningful data have been classified into units that are provided while the data does not give meaning has been neglected. The second step is to analyze the interview data to perform verification process to ensure the validation and reliability of the findings of the interview data. Fraenkel (2014) agrees with the action with the view that "inter-ratter reliability" is able to produce a sound study to increase the objectivity of the research study and reduce errors and ensure consistency in the findings of a study.

RESULTS

Improves the Communication Skills of Autism Children

Verbal communication is using verbal symbols (language). Symbols or verbal communication are all kinds of symbols using one or more words. Language can also be regarded as a system of verbal codes (Deddy Mulyana, 2015). In the case number two pupil of a child with autism who do not have oral signs. However, two students use other means of communication that is non-verbal communication to express himself to the researcher. Kinetic communication is non-verbal communication and the communication consists of three facial expression, communication 'gesture' and communications 'posture'. Communications 'posture' body showed the position of the body in ways such as standing, walking, sitting and others. The rating reflects the emotional, body, the concept of self and others. The results show that students using communication to 'posture' to move the body and also how to sit as a proper way which means the sign of ready to paint. Observational data shows two students using communication 'gesture' as part of the communication to ask something like holding a colour pencil and hand to move towards the direction of the researcher as a sign of want to paint and help researchers hand held. In addition, two students also use facial expression communication involving the eyes. Student uses the eye to open communication channels, such as researchers look to show interest to continue to draw and take note of the researcher.

Promote Socialization of Autism Children with Others

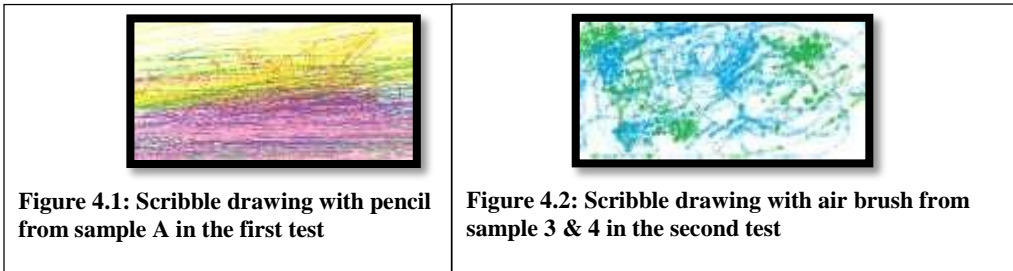
Social skills are interpersonal relations and the process of interaction among individuals positive. Socialization process allows children with autism learn social behaviour or do something or social spheres. Social skills are typically used to assist the development of the conversation, focus and the ability to take turns. The results in figure 4.1 and 4.2 showed that students first get involved in other people focus on when selecting a colour pencil and a continuing focus to complete tasks while drawing painting art happy emotions. The student also respect the rights of others in any one student can return the pencil colour to the researcher when the researcher asked after completion of painting.

There are 2 students as example where they shows their social skills in painting therapy activities even though they poor in psychomotor. However, two students are involved in activities with researchers drawing therapy and

to cooperate when pupils do activities with the help of researchers drawing therapy. Observational data show students 2 can adapt to a particular situation or a situation to receive help researchers to hold his hand to painting therapy an activity despite 2 pupils have a problem controlling the movement of the hands and fingers herself in the art work.

Social skills involve adjustment in accordance with the requirements of other people like to listen and follow instructions. Children 3 and 4 not only be able to focus and respect for others, but also be able to listen to the direction of the researcher and do what is asked.

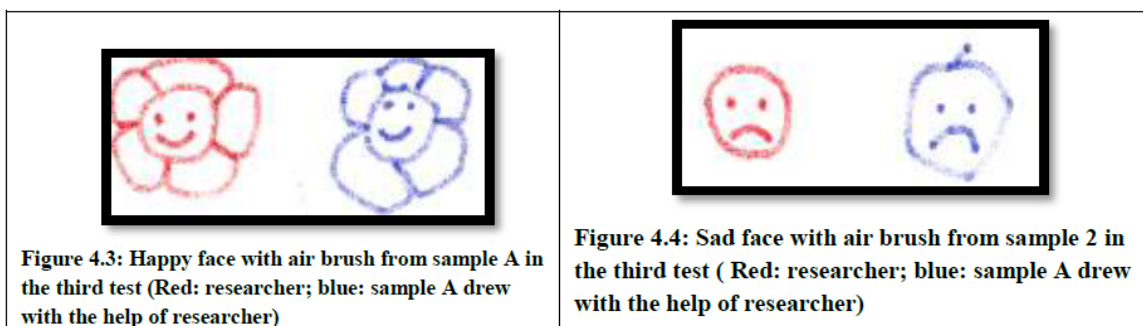
The results in figure 4.2 clearly show the four subjects to interact with researchers before, during and after visual art therapy activities drawing they could able to focus and complete tasks with artistic focus. All study subjects can build a healthy relationship with the researchers where they can understand and appreciate the perspectives of others to engage in activities such as art therapy with the researcher, the researcher listen and follow directions. Apart of that, art therapy also help children with autism to connect with other people at the same time develops their social skills in the world.



Relationship is Between the Emotional and Psychomotor Autism Children through Visual Art Therapy Approach

Observational data of the research shows the two students have problems in controlling their movement of the hands and fingers by their own and their eye coordination in the activities of painting therapy. However, the findings give the impression that the students feel comfortable and fun to do art therapy activities. Emotions are not affected by poor psychomotor factors. Observational data shows students can show smiling faces during painting session. The movement of the visual art therapy activities and fine motor and hand-eye coordination is weak for two children, but the situation did not break the feelings of children 2 to continue drawing.

Figure 4.3 and 4.4 in this study explain here that emotions are not influenced by psychomotor skills factors or weak among children with autism through visual art therapy approach. Even children with autism can be eager to draw even with psychomotor weak. Results from this study showed that children with autism can use the painting to achieve positive emotions.



The Effectiveness of the Visual Art Therapy Approach Drawing on the Development of Autism Children

The effective visual art therapy is to see the development of autism children were obtained through interviews conducted for more information. In certain situations, the researcher interview with therapists of paintings such as Teacher A and Teacher B performing art therapy activities for children with autism in the autism centre. From the interview information highlight that therapy approach effective drawing look at the development of children with autism in the three main aspects of the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

After interviews with therapists, the study also showed visual art therapeutic approach helps cognitive development, communication, psychomotor and psychosocial of children with autism. Overall, the researchers found that visual art therapy approaches can help cognitive development of children with autism. The results of this study clearly show that children with autism are able through the knowledge, understanding and application of the grading the cognitive domain through therapeutic activities such tactile paintings. Children with autism can use verbal and nonverbal communication through art work to express to others. In terms of psychosocial, children with autism can use drawings to interact with others, such as sharing of goods and their works. Children with autism may show feelings of pleasure when doing art work and see the work by their own these findings clearly show the painting therapy can help the development of socio-emotional among children with autism. In psychomotor therapy, many paintings using fine motor and gross motor tasks in performing arts. The study also shows that art therapy approach can help psychomotor development of children with autism in which children are trained to use their hands and fingers and eye- hand coordination for colouring, drawing and painting with the help of art therapist.

DISCUSSION

The results clearly demonstrate the Visual Art Therapeutic (VAT) use of tactile art to help their communication skills in children with autism. The therapeutic approach in art to help promote socialization and communication skills in children with autism and the relationship between emotional and psychomotor skills through the visual art therapy. Evans (2018) conducted a study of a model of the practice of visual art therapy. He says the uses of visual art therapy interventions are effective in increasing the specific development of children with autism. He shows how the sensations and feelings raised by the face of new materials and making art can be formed in a way that facilitates the communication skills of children with autism and the relationship with the therapist. Evans and Rutten-Sarins (2018) show how the success of the use of art materials in a series that seeks interaction and intervention by the therapist allows the emotional and cognitive developments of children with autism are the findings to answer the research questions.

Visual art therapy activities have been introduced to children with autism as a way to help them communicate and the result is positive. This is due to the approach of painting therapy can improve communication skills of children with autism have more use of non-verbal expression through art therapy experience activities to express themselves to others. Some are described its help to improve the communication skills of children with autism and therapy activities to make the communication tools they draw. Participation of children with autism in art helps them to improve their communication skills. As a painting produced by children with autism is the way in non-verbal communication. The two students have problems in the ability to communicate can make its own expression and give a clear and easily understood by a hand gesture as a sign of the movement wanted to paint and also help hold hands or eyes and voice. Therefore, the approach to painting visual art therapy can encourage children with autism who do not have signs to express themselves orally in the form of non-verbal communication through communication '*posture*', communication facial expression and communication '*gesture*' in the process of

the activity of painting therapy. These findings support the results of Osborne (2003) that the visual-tactile art therapy is the best tool for children with autism to communicate because art is not dependent on cognitive skills or oral communication only.

The results shows that the visual art therapy helps increase socialization behaviours among children with autism with the others support the findings of Emery (2014) and Julian (2004) in which art therapy as an exercise to improve the social skills to children with autism. Art therapy provides a safe and fun environment for children with autism to interact with others in painting activities when sitting together. The results shows two students can adapt to a particular situation or situations to accept the help of others to hold his hand to conduct visual art therapy activities despite having trouble controlling the movement of the hands and fingers her in the art work. The findings are similar to Noble (2011) in which the painting can help children with autism learn social skills and also socialize with others and avoid them behave unusually.

Paintings are a process of exploration and excitement for children with autism. In short, visual art therapy activities attract children with autism in the process of making art. So, emotions of children with autism are not easily influenced due to the weakness psychomotor. In this case studies and fine motor movement and hand-eye coordination is weak for two students, however this did not break the hearts of two students to continue drawing. The findings shows that students' confidence and fun be in therapy activities in two students drawing continuous emotional and can show a smiling face four times in the process of painting therapy activities. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of Osborne (2013) in which therapists encourage children to art shows make fun creative activities.

The results shows Teacher A and Teacher B felt that the line drawings therapy can help children with autism psychomotor where art therapy activities to train children with autism to manipulate the movements of the hands and fingers. Way to hold a pencil or brush, or use your own fingers to do the drawing and colouring activities, gross motor skills and fine motor skills are delayed, including locomotors and object manipulation or control they can be improved. Make hand and eye coordination can be enhanced through drawing and colouring and painting through therapist assistance. For example, with the help or prompt of therapist hand drawings to expedite and make hands and eyes to draw a circle. This supports the findings of Martin (2008) in which the therapist paintings have a unique ability to improve all the skills and art therapy is a form of structure to solve goals such as improving fine motor and gross motor skills.

Overall, the Visual Art Therapy (VAT) is effectively enhanced development of socio- communication and socio-emotional of children with autism. This caused a lot of painting activities benefits the autism children in which art therapeutic strategy helps to develop and improve fine motor and gross motor skills, non-verbal communication, socialization, creativity and imagination, expression of feelings and regulations. Therefore, painting activities for children with autism is an important activity-based intervention to promote their growth.

IMPLICATIONS

Visual Art Therapy (VAT) for children with autism will always prove to the evolutionary process that led to the successive stages of development. During drawing, facial expression of children with autism are processing of information about the expression of emotions in facial images with the use of visual, cognitive and motor skills. From the observation, facial expression of children with autism can receive positive reinforcement using the art therapy skills associated with icons so that they become more comfortable with using the human face as a source of information. In theory Gombrich (1972), a pictorial image produced is called *schema* (Pictorial schemata). Constructivist Theory suggests children will acquire or create the schema and the assessment of their perception

of the painting. Drawings produced by children with autism in the process of painting therapy activities can be interpreted based on the development and growth of the mental, physical and social when they are viewed in a holistic manner.

Visual arts therapy can also be used as a sign of intellectual index (Gardner, 1982) and positively to the physical, emotional, and cognitive perception. Abilities and experience to draw in children with autism is not only a reflection of the specific diagnostic indicator but also the function and development of the age of the individual in a holistic manner. Understanding of their development in the drawings helps us to see their progress. Art therapist helps children with autism to create greater all aspects of overall activity and adjust therapy to meet the individual needs of drawings based on background and experience art therapy.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the Visual Art Therapy (VAT) approach of drawings to assist the development of communication or self-expression and socialization in children with autism. Importance of drawing activities approach is also seen from the extent to which emotions are influenced by psychomotor skills in children with autism on the activities of paintings done by therapy. In this study, the overall findings could explain the visual art therapy activities approach to help improve communication skills and socio-emotional and cognitive development effectiveness and psychomotor affective of children with autism aged 9-10 years old. Art therapy is an approach that provides the easiest way to help the development of children with autism through the process of painting therapy activities.

Art therapy activities also enable children with autism who are weak in fine motor to feel fun and comfortable during drawing session. There is a close relationship on the relationship between art therapy activities with emotions of children with autism. Emotions of children with autism are not influenced even have fine motor problems. Therefore, therapeutic approaches can be used to teach drawing skills and social behaviour and also allow them express what they may not able to express verbally. It also enables the integration of children with autism experiences the look and reflection on the work itself through painting therapy.

This study is able to identify intervention therapy effectively in drawing to help children with autism aged 9-10 years old to communicate, socialize and find it fun through activities of art therapy. It is important to be anxious to do further research on this topic so that more intervention therapy approach in painting can be identified and used to help children with autism. Visual Art Therapy (VAT) can be a positive component to the art therapy and children with autism. The study also found that drawing therapy also helps in psychomotor development of children with autism. Using of iconic symbols in drawings help children to remember what they have been taught. When children with autism and therapists work together to create symbols and iconic to teach drawing, the children take their own and integrate into their internal experiences (Gray, 2017). Developments can be achieved if the activity is carried out by adjusting therapy approach in painting and fine motor skills as well as a tool or visual equipment individually and encouragement of therapist. The painting activities through visual art therapy help increase the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of children with autism.

RECOMENDATION

Further research may be conducted with a focus on adults with autism aged 13 to 20 years and above to see how far the visual art therapy approach implies that positive communication skills, psychomotor and socio-emotional among autism adults in secondary schools. In addition, the results are more stimulating if further studies involving a larger process across Malaysian children with autism. In addition, further research can be carried out involving

large-scale study in which the number of subjects used is a total of 6 children with autism who were studied. Finally, further research could also involve the use of Occupational Therapeutic Approach (OTA) Sensory Motor Processing (SMP) and therapeutic approaches in drawing over painting as sculpture, mixed media and murals.

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