The Cultural Role on Emotional Competence Development in Early Childhood

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Abstract: Emotional competence in early childhood is a multi-dimension construct consists of emotion knowledge, emotion expression, and emotion regulation. Previous research findings consistently reported emotional competence as the predictor of the child's school and social competence. One of the factors that are influencing the development of emotional competence is the cultural context. Culture does not only affect the way children recognizes his/her own emotion and the emotion of others, but also determine how an individual expresses emotion and regulates emotion in socially acceptable ways. This literature review aims to explore previous research findings and theoretical approach of cultural roles on emotional competence, which can be used as a foundation to develop a culture-based theory of emotional competence and culture-based interventions to optimize early childhood emotional competence. A number of research articles that specifically examine the relationship between culture and emotional competence were obtained through electronic journal articles databases (Proquest, Science Direct, and Google Scholar) in span of time publication between 2008-2017, with keywords culture and emotional competence, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation. The findings suggest the cultural role on emotional competence in early childhood as a developmental context through parental emotion socialization. Recommendations for further research in methods of assessment dan culture-specific emotions are discussed.

1   INTRODUCTION

Emotional competence in the context of early childhood is defined as the ability to express emotions, regulate emotional expressions and emotional experiences, and understand the emotions of oneself and the emotions of others (Denham 1998). Emotionally competence preschoolers are able to express a variety of emotions, which increasingly fit into the social-cultural context (Denham et al., 2016). At that age, they also experience a decrease in anger, frustration, and tantrum behavior, as well as learn to direct and monitor their behavior, express their feelings verbally, and use language to influence others to meet their needs and goals, which indicate the existence of emotional regulation development (La Freniere, 2000). Preschoolers are also capable of labelling various feelings of self and others, demonstrating an understanding of emotional experiences, and demonstrating the ability to predict emotional reactions (LaFreniere, 2000).

Emotional competence will help the child's success in fulfilling the developmental task of preschool age (Denham et al., 2016). Some developmental tasks of preschool age are building positive relationships with the social environment, managing emotional impulses in social interaction, staying connected to adults while shifting to peers, as well as learning skills such as concentrating and following teacher direction (Denham et al., 2016). The importance of emotional competence for children is also supported by some previous studies. Emotional competence correlated with children's social competence (Carlo et al., 2012; Denham et al., 2015; Farina and Belacchi, 2014; Herts, et al., 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2011). Besides, emotional competence is also correlated with the child's academic competence (Denham et al., 2013; Herndon et al., 2013; Magdalena, 2013).

One of the factors that influence the development of children's emotional competence is the cultural context. Unlike the emotional intelligence that is innate potential, emotional competence is a number of skills acquired or developed through cultural and contextual influences (Lau and Wu, 2012). This article aims to explore previous research findings and theoretical approach of cultural roles on emotional competence and its impact on emotional competence development of early childhood. It is expected to stimulate further research to develop a cultural-sensitive framework of emotional competence and intervention to optimize emotional competence in early childhood.

1.1 Emotional Competence

Emotional competence is a construct that encompasses three dimensions, namely understanding emotions, expressing emotions, and regulating emotions (Denham, 2016). The first dimension is emotion knowledge, which includes an understanding of basic emotions, as well as emotional expressions, situations, causes, and consequences, an understanding of more complex emotions, and using of display rules, mixed emotions, and more complex emotions such as shame and guilt (Denham et al., 2007). The second dimension is emotion expression, which refers to the specific emotions showed by the child with varying purposes, and the overall expression of emotions (Denham et al., 2007). The third dimension is emotion regulation, which is done by the child when the child's emotional experience is too severe, or the child's emotional expression is inconsistent with the expectations of others, by using physical, cognitive or behavioral strategies to overcome internal emotional experiences or external emotional expression (Denham et al., 2007).

1.2 The Individualistic-versus-Collectivistic Cultural Framework

Culture values does not only affect the way each ethnic group identifies emotions, but also how they express and manage emotions in socially acceptable ways. Culture would restrict and regulate to whom, when and where any person may express and conceal certain emotions, as well as in the way to express emotions through nonverbal behaviors and facial expressions (Kurniawan and Hasanat, 2007). According to Matsumoto et al. (2008a), the role of culture can be explained by one of dimensions of Hofstede's cultural values of individualism-collectivism (IC). IC dimensions have four attributes, namely self, purpose, relationships, and determinants of behavior. Individualistic culture supports independent self-development, emphasizes personal goals, encourages rationality and interpersonal relations, and places attitudes as a determinant of behavior. Free emotional expression confirms the importance of individuals more than groups. On the contrary, collectivistic culture supports an interdependent self, emphasizes group goals, encourages communal relations, and places norms as determinants of behavior. In addition, there is a within-culture diversity, namely interindividual variability or individual differences in norms of expression in various contexts and emotions, and intraindividual variability or variation in individuals in various contexts and emotions (Matsumoto et al., 2008a).

Furthermore, Halberstadt and Lozada (2011) describe that the culture of collectivism emphasizes interdependence, group identity, interpersonal harmony, and the achievement of shared goals; emotions are characterized by self-control to promote interpersonal harmony and group goals. In contrast, the culture of individualism emphasizes independence, individual identity, personal assertion, and achievement of personal goals; emotions are perceived to be unique to the individual, emotion expressiveness is encouraged, and emotions are identified on the basis of subjective experience. Parents with collectivism cultural backgrounds tend to support the children individually (see Halberstadt and Lozada, 2011). Matsumoto et al. (2008) also emphasized that the cultural display rules are an important concept to explain cultural differences in emotional expression. In Indonesia particularly, children would be expected to control the overt expression of negative emotions and emotionally driven negative behaviors, so that they behave in a manner that promotes group harmony and avoids interpersonal conflict (Eisenberg , Pidada, and Liew, 2001).

2 METHOD

A number of research articles that examine the relationship between culture and emotional competence were obtained through some search systems for electronic journal articles databases, such as Proquest, Science Direct, and Google Scholar in span of time publication between 2008-2017, with keywords culture and emotional competence, emotional understanding, emotional

expression, and emotional regulation. The articles selection criteria are specifically examining the relationship between culture and emotional competence.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Culture and Emotion Recognition or Emotion Understanding

There is limited amount of cross-cultural research on emotion recognition or emotion understanding. One of them is a study of 120 participants from Germany, Rome, and Indonesia by Jurgens et al. (2013). They reported that emotion recognition is influenced by the complex interactions between universal and cultural factors. They used conversations that contain angry, sad, happy, and frightened emotions from German radio. These conversations are played back by professional actors, consisting of spontaneous emotional conversations and acted conversations. The result indicates that participants from Germany showed better emotion recognition, but there is no difference between Romanian and Indonesian in the overall emotion recognition. In short, these findings confirm that the cultural-specific differences in emotion recognition or understanding.

3.2 Culture and Emotion Expression

The results of cross-cultural studies show that there are cultural-specific differences in emotion expression. Wilson et al. (2012) compared the emotional expressions of 180 children aged 6-9 years old from city India, suburban India, and suburban United States. Compared to US Children, Indian children are less likely to express their anger, sadness, and pain. They are also less likely to exhibit verbal expressions directly. The Indian child states the reason for controlling angry and sad emotions is to keep the social norm, while the U.S. child perceives that express all emotions is to communicate perceived emotions.

Similarly, Lewis, Takai-Kawakami, and Sullivan (2010) asserted cultural-specific differences in emotional expression of preschoolers. They investigated the emotional responses to success and failure of 149 Japanese, African American, and White American mixed European preschoolers. The results indicate that Japanese children express less shame, pride, and sadness, but more exposure and evaluative embarrassment. American children indicate more evaluative embarrassment. This finding confirmed that success and failure are interpreted differently by Japanese preschoolers. The low amount of sadness and shame expression, and the limited range of numbers of different expressions observed in the Japanese children and the children of East Asian infants and young children differ from Western infants and children primarily in the display of negative expressions. These results demonstrate that cultural differences influence how children respond to achievement situations.

In addition, Adrianson and Rhamdani (2014) described the cultural-specific experiences of envy in two cultures, namely Indonesia and Sweden. The research findings show that in the Indonesian language there is a broader envy meaning and emotional vocabulary that is rarely found in Swedish. The Swedish's description of envy relates to a malicious (ill will) meaning, while the Javanese use the concept of envy without ill will. Jealousy and envy seem to overlap each other more in Bahasa Indonesia than in the Swedish. Swedish had *schadenfreude* that was lacking in Bahasa Indonesia. According to the Swedish respondents, the central feature of envy is wanting to have what other person possesses, such as prosperity or competence. On the other hand, the Javanese respondents stress more on relationships, achievements and personal characteristics as primary causes for envy.

However, there are also some findings that indicate inter-cultural similarities as well as culture-specific differences in emotional expression. Matsumoto et al. (2008b) involved more than 5,000 respondents in 32 countries completed the Display Rule Inventory Assessment. They reported that there are some universal effects, including greater expression toward in-groups, and an overall regulation effect. Respondents with a background of individualistic and collectivistic cultures differed on expressivity and norms concerning specific emotions in group situations.

Also, Tsai et al., (2016) examined the effect of positive and negative emotions on interpersonal and intrapersonal function at 155 Asian American and 74 European American college students. The results reported no cultural differences in the tendency to express positive and negative emotions, or in the relationship between positive emotional expression and intrapersonal function. Nevertheless, there are differences in ethnic groups in the relationship between the expression of negative emotions and their functions. In contrast to European American respondents, Asian Americans respondents with negative emotional expression show lower

intrapersonal functions. Individuals who have a high level of interdependence have a positive emotional expression that correlates with a higher positive mood, lower interpersonal problems, and lower depressive symptoms.

Likewise, Novin, Riefe, and Mo (2010) examine the role of individualistic versus collectivistic goals and the presence of an authority figure (father) versus an equal status figure (peer) on 24 Dutch and 23 South Korean children's negative emotions experience and emotion expression motives. The results indicate the cultural similarity of the situational goals and audience and the cultural differences in their emotional expression. More specifically, cultural differences in how negative emotions would be expressed in 'father' situations but not in 'peer' situations. There is also a cultural difference in children's motives for emotion expression in situations with collectivistic goals. Dutch children's emotion expressions are more context-sensitive than South Korean children.

Also, Safdar et al., (2009) compares emotional display rules of 835 Canadians, US Americans, and Japanese university students across as well as within cultures. The results indicate that Japanese display rules permit the expression of anger, contempt, and disgust significantly less than the North American. Japanese also think that they should express happiness and surprise significantly less than the Canadian.

In brief, these results indicate that cultural context partly explained cultural differences in emotional expression.

3.3 Culture and Emotion Regulation

Research findings of emotion regulation among cultures also indicated the differences and similarities. The cultural differences in emotion regulation are reported by Arens, Balkir, and Barnow (2012). They investigated the emotion regulation of 26 healthy and 25 depressed German women and 28 healthy and 29 depressed Turkish immigrants living in Germany. Healthy Turkish immigrants reported higher balance infrequently using of suppression and frequently using of reappraisal, which was associated with more positive outcomes of expressive suppression. Both of patient samples showed great use of emotional suppression than cognitive reappraisal. Results suggest that the mediating cultural role between emotional suppression and well-being is associated with greater emotion regulation balance in healthy Turkish.

Moreover, Matsumoto, Nakagawa and Yoo (2008a) confirmed differences of emotion regulation process across 23 countries. Cultures that emphasized the maintenance of social order tended to have higher scores on suppression, and reappraisal and suppression tended to be positively correlated. In contrast, cultures that minimized the maintenance of social order and valued individual affective autonomy and egalitarianism tended to have lower scores on suppression, and reappraisal and suppression tended to be negatively correlated.

Miyamoto, Ma and Petermann (2014) examined whether there are cultural differences in emotional regulation based on Eastern belief about negative emotions after experiencing a negative event on 72 Asian American undergraduates and 41 Asian and European American undergraduates. By assessing online reactions of hedonic emotion regulation (i.e. up-regulation of positive emotions and down-regulation of negative emotions) to a recent negative event, the study found that European Americans were more motivated to engage in hedonic emotion regulation. The cultural differences in hedonic emotion regulation is mediated by cultural differences in beliefs about motivational and cognitive utility of negative emotions, but not by self-efficacy beliefs.

Furthermore, Stupar, van de Vijver and Fontaine (2015) reported a study of how emotion regulation strategies can be predicted by emotion valence and intensity in 389 Dutch majority members and members of five immigrant groups, i.e. Turkish and Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese, Indonesian, Western and other non-Western immigrants. The research results confirmed that emotion regulation strategies were significantly and similarly correlated to emotional valence and intensity across the groups. Negative emotions were more reappraised and suppressed than positive emotions. Emotional intensity was positively related to social sharing and negatively related to reappraisal and suppression. The Dutch majority group scored higher on emotion valence than Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Also, the Dutch majority group scored lower on reappraisal than all non-Western groups, and lower on suppression than Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

To summarize, these findings demonstrate that cultural context affect emotion regulation.

3.4 Culture and Emotion Socialization

The ability to regulate emotion is learned within a developmental context, such as family situations and

relationship (Matsumoto et al., 2008a). The socialization process takes place throughout children's development, even since the infant stage, through the way parents communicate and calm down their infants, which further develop the infant's ability to recognize and to respond the facial emotional expression (Halberstadt and Lozada, 2011).

There are three possible mechanisms of emotion socialization mechanisms stated by Halberstadt (in Denham et al, 1997). They are modeling, contingency, and coaching. The first mechanism according to Halberstadt is modeling, states that the ways parents express emotions implicitly teach children about emotions that are expected and acceptable in the family, as well as how to express and regulate emotions. The second mechanism according to Halberstadt is contingency, stating that the response of parental support will help children to maximize the expression of positive emotions, to minimize the expression of negative emotions, and to distinguish among emotions. The third mechanism according to Halberstadt is coaching, stating that the ways parents teaches emotions contribute to the child's emotional expression and emotional reaction to their peers.

The results of cross-cultural studies show the differences among cultures in emotion socialization. Camras et al., (2009) compared emotional expression within 40 European American, 39 Chinese American and 36 Mainland Chinese mothers of 3-year-old. European American mothers reported more positive emotional expression than Mainland Chinese mothers. There are no significant differences for negative emotional expressions. Results of this study confirm the cultural differences in mothers' emotional expressivity.

Further, Chen et al. (2014) examined the emotional expression of parents in the family in 252 foreign-born Chinese American immigrant parents by using self-reported emotional expressivity and observed emotional expression during a parent-child interaction task. Results showed that parents' self-reported expressivity was only related to their own reports of children's regulation, however parents' observed emotional expression was related to both parents' and teachers' reports of children's regulation. These results suggest that self-reported expressivity and observed emotional expression reflect different constructs and have differential relations to parents' cultural orientations and children's regulation.

In addition, Keller and Otto (2009) examine families in two environments represent different sociodemographic contexts, i.e. an ethnic group of rural Cameroon villagers in Northwest Cameroon and German urban middle-class families in Southern Germany. The emotional socialization strategy of the Nso aims for early emotional control with emphasis on the negative emotion suppression, while German urban middle-class parents emphasize the expression of emotions, especially instantiating and maintaining positive emotions. Emotional control from an early age is considered as part of a self-definition and relatedness is regarded as the developmental organizer; early emotional expressiveness is acknowledged as part of a self-definition and autonomy is examined as the developmental organizer. Related with family context, Gao and Han (2016) examined the effect of family expressiveness on children's emotional development in the context of familial risks. Participants were 178 school-aged children and their parents. The results show that the familial risk index is related positively to emotional dysregulation and negatively to adaptive emotion regulation, mediated by positive family expressiveness.

In summary, these findings confirm that cultural context contribute to cultural differences in emotional socialization.

4 DISCUSSION

Based on previous studies on culture and emotional competence, it can be known that there are differences among cultures in emotional recognition or emotion understanding, emotion expression, and emotion regulation. Those findings support the cultural model of interdependence and the cultural model of independence (Trommsdorff and Rothbaum, 2008). They stated that in a cultural model of interdependence, emotion regulation centers on socially engaging emotions, on the well-being of other persons, and on maintaining group harmony. In contrast, in a cultural model of independence, emotion regulation centers on socially disengaging emotions, on self-esteem, and on individuals' well-being. The development of emotion regulation in non-Western cultures is related to empathy, interpersonal accommodation, and norm orientation. The development of emotion regulation in Western cultures is related to autonomy and self-expression.

Besides, those previous findings are in line with the relational-cultural model and the autonomous cultural model (Keller and Otto, 2009). A relational cultural model views the individual as part of a

social system, in particular the family, maintains a harmonious relationship, accepts hierarchy primarily of age and gender, upholds cooperation and conformity, and identifies social roles. On the other hand, an autonomous cultural model views individual as competitive, unique, self-reliant, assertive, and have personal opinions. Furthermore, individualistic or collectivistic cultural values related to emotion are transmitted to children through parental emotion socialization. Parents play a significant role in the development of the emotional competence of children through the process of emotion socialization.

However, there are still some inconsistencies in cross-cultural research findings on emotional competence. Many works of literature confirm the existence of inter-cultural similarities in recognition of basic emotions and situational antecedents of emotion, and cultural variations in the way people conceptualize, control and communicate emotions as well (Wilson et al., 2012). In addition, culture is dynamic and can change over time, so that the effects of globalization can cause a shift in the cultural dimension, so that individuals from a culture can absorb values and thought patterns from other cultures, which then lead to changes in the origin culture or variations in culture (Hashim, 2016).

Also, one thing that seems related to the inconsistencies of research results is assessment issues. There are rich variations of instruments used to measure emotional competence. To measure emotion recognition, researchers used the test (Jurgens et al., 2013). Emotional expression was measured using self-report on questionnaire (Adrianson and Rhamdani, 2014), daily diary surveys (Tsai et al., 2016), Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire (Tsai et al., 2006), child emotion interviews with hypothetical vignettes (Novin, Riefe, and Mo, 2010; Wilson et al., 2012), games and observations (Lewis, Takai-Kawakami and Sullivan, 2010), and self-report on the Display Rule Assessment Inventory (Matsumoto et al., 2008b). The instruments used to measure emotion regulation are Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Matsumoto, Nakagawa, and Yoo, 2008a; Arens, Balkir, and Barnow, 2012; Stupar, van de Vijver, and Fontaine, 2015), and assessment of online reaction to a recent negative event and retrospective memory of reactions to a past negative event (Miyamoto, Ma, and Petermann, 2014). While emotion socialization is measured by a self-report on Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire (Camras et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2014), interview (Keller and Otto, 2009), self-report on Family

Expressiveness Questionnaire (Gao and Han, 2016), self-report on Display Rule Assessment Inventory (Safdar et al., 2009), parents' observed emotional expression (Chen et al., 2014), and Child Behavior Questionnaire (Chen et al., 2014).

However, as a multi-dimension construct, emotional competence should be assessed with battery-tests (Denham et al., 2016). Each dimension should be assessed with multi-methods as well, such as self-report, teacher report, and observation as well. Further research is needed to obtain more consistent results.

One of the limitations of this literature review is including only a few research articles with young children participants. Further longitudinal and cross-sectional research is needed to further clarify the cultural context of emotional competence throughout the lifespan from early childhood to adulthood. Next research can also explore the culture-specific emotion vocabularies to bring a more comprehensive perspective on the cultural context of emotional competence development. For example, Suswandi et al. (2017) examine sad emotion in Javanese. In the Javanese language, there are rich variations in the use of sad emotion vocabulary, and each vocabulary contains slight meaningful difference. In terms of lexical semantics, it was found 15 Javanese vocabularies of sad emotions. Some of them are *karantaranta* means to grieve, be in a sorrowful; *ngĕrĕs* means 'so sad'; *nglangut* means 'so sad', *nlangsa* means 'heartbroken, crushed with grief or hardship'; *ngĕnĕs* means 'so sad'; *rudatin* means 'sad, sorrowful, worried'. Therefore, indigenous research related to emotional competence and emotion socialization need to be explored.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the cultural role on emotional competence in early childhood is as a developmental context. Through parental emotion socialization, cultural values are transmitted to children from an early age, which is the foundation for the development of emotion expressions, emotion understanding, and emotion regulation of children. Most of the previous findings support the relationship of cultural models of interdependence and the cultural model of independence with emotional competence dimensions. However, there are still inconsistencies in the results of cross-cultural research on emotional competence, which

may be related to the dynamics of culture and assessment issues.

Some recommendations for further research are to use multi-methods of assessment, to extend the age range of participants from early childhood to adulthood through a combination of longitudinal and cross-sectional methods, and to explore the culture-specific emotion vocabularies to bring a more comprehensive perspective on the cultural context of emotional competence development.

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