Proposal for improving social skills in 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers with disruptive behaviors

Propuesta para la mejora de habilidades sociales en preescolares de 4 y 5 años con conductas disruptivas

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Yeicy Liliana Rodas Mendoza
International University of La Rioja
yeicyrodas@gmail.com

Correspondence:
yeicyrodas@gmail.com

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Abstract

Disruptive behavior occurs in the child as a difficulty in exercising control over their emotions and behavior, which can be challenging and generate interpersonal conflicts due to the presence of aggressiveness, being a problem that requires intervention in the most serious or persistent cases, since they can continue with the passage of time. This work aims to design a proposal for the improvement of social skills in preschoolers with disruptive behaviors between 4 and 5 years of age. It is based on a bibliographic review on disruptive behaviors and on the most used intervention strategies to improve social skills in this population group. Next, the analysis of the educational context of a rural area of the municipality of Cúcuta is made and the type of aggressive behaviors that students have with their classmates, teachers and parents is described. Based on this, an intervention proposal is designed for 30 preschoolers, with the aim of raising awareness and training adults on how to address this problem at home with a school for parents and also with minors through strategies based on in playful, artistic expression and mindfulness exercises. 5 training modules are proposed with different sessions to intervene with the recipients, which can be applied in the different educational institutions of the selected rural context, since the activities to be carried out, the schedule and the evaluation techniques are described in detail. It is concluded that social skills are fundamental in the integral development of individuals. It is necessary to promote from the first years of the educational stage the ability to adapt to social situations, as well as the improvement of expression and understanding of others

Keywords: disruptive behaviors, social skills, preschool education.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, education has taken important turns to achieve optimal results in students, so that they can not only learn but also become individuals who contribute something more than professionals to society; it is also expected to form people with attitudes in accordance with the requirements of human development, so necessary in this era of great global challenges. These educational advances that previously focused on the last years of the basic school cycle, but according to Nerín et al. (2014) and Chacón (2015), scientific studies and clinical applications of social skills reveal the importance from the earliest years.

This is achieved by observing the child holistically in order to detect negative behaviors from their initial stages, in order to avoid or minimize behavioral problems that accompany the student later, and even into adulthood.

With that in mind, this study proposes to design a proposal for the improvement of social skills in 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers with disruptive behaviors.

Considering the significant role that social development plays in children's overall lives (Ardila et al., 2021), this study begins with a literature review on disruptive behaviors in children aged 4 and 5. This allows for the conceptualization of the most commonly used intervention strategies to improve social skills in this age group. The purpose is to design intervention activities that enhance social skills in preschool students who exhibit disruptive behaviors.

Furthermore, this study through documentary analysis expects to consistently show the existing relationship between children's social skills and the social, academic, and psychological functioning of the child. Taking into account that students' social skills are related to school readiness and adaptation, which is a process that begins from the child's first contact with classrooms, where intervention could occur not only from preschool, but also from kindergarten and even before (Ardila et al., 2021). This is important, because as the same author points out, the social skills and capacity of the individual in training must adapt and fully integrate into the educational system from childhood and is closely linked to academic success (Pérez, 2015).

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the different theoretical postulates that support the research are presented, starting from the study of social skills, as well as the necessary strategies to promote them.

Social skills

Social skills are frequently defined as a requirement for achieving a good life (Pasche et al., 2019), which is important for an individual to achieve autonomy, the ability to adapt to social situations, express themselves, and understand others. For Montalvo (2019), it is the ability to communicate specific events, maintaining good interpersonal skills, which are those that make possible the harmonious development of the person with their peers and their environment. Social skills being an important condition for a balanced life in a social group, where the possibility of a person functioning effectively in a social environment

is the necessary ingredient for social success (Horna et al., 2020).

Social skills in 4- and 5-year-old children

Many children have the ability to speak, while others use other languages and communication methods that hinder social interactions (Pasche et al., 2019).

Along these lines, social interaction skills in a child are important according to Calderón et al. (2020) for developing responses to situations that arise to implement them according to needs in all aspects of a child's life. It is teachers who have the opportunity to help improve children's social skills, being able to discuss with a student why they need social skills and explain how adults use social skills every day at work, on the phone, when shopping, and when talking with friends, finding many more examples that they themselves can share (Machado, 2018).

However, when talking about 4- and 5-year-old children, mechanisms must be employed in which teachers can identify weaknesses in general social skills present in children, such as: distraction, inexplicable facial expressions, use of negative vocabulary, low empathy, refusal to celebrate when winning and accept lost games, not asking for help, use of inappropriate tone and volume, inability to resolve conflicts, not listening, inability to maintain attention on a topic, inability to share ideas, and little patience.

Strategies to promote social skills in the school context

Social skills are added to different areas of the educational field, since they are not only interpreted as personal relationship, communication, and cooperation skills, but also as self-management or problem-solving skills (Machado, 2018). Social skill being related to personality traits; according to Montalvo (2019), social skills are defined as social comprehension capacities that include effective communication and good relationships with others.

For Machado (2018), when working with a student on social skills, activities should focus on a single skill at a time, being able to choose one skill to focus on each week. For example, teaching a student the rules could become an overwhelming task; however, if one starts with simple elements such as arguing that it is important to look at the person speaking to you and not talk while being spoken to, it can be even simpler if the child is asked if they agree with the explanation.

Based on what was pointed out by Montalvo (2019), there are three factors to take into account: recognizing that the child is not born with social skills; they must be taught; being clear about what one wants and needs to teach the child according to their age and cognitive development; and finally knowing how to communicate this to the child. In the first two factors, according to Machado (2018), there are no major complications; however, in the third—knowing how to communicate—the greatest proportion of school failures occurs.

The reason is that 4- and 5-year-old children only feel tempted to participate in activities that captivate their attention and give them pleasure; if these two essential requirements are not met, knowledge to identify and know what should be taught will be useless; learning will always be zero (0) (Isaza, 2018).

For this reason, Pasche et al. (2019) point out that play, art, music, games, entertainment, and other activities that promote the exploration and satisfaction of the child are the most suitable for developing intervention activities that promote the teaching of rules and behavioral norms.

Therefore, the strategies that are carried out must be accompanied by elements that capture attention and based on the postulates of meaningful, constructivist learning, which, guided by what Machado (2018) stated: "discovery learning is the most suitable for treating children under six years of age" (p. 28). Because the student is motivated by the pleasure generated by exploring everything new around them, this being directly related to their emotional and affective capacity, sensitive and undeniably important at that age.

What are disruptive behaviors?

The vast majority of children have occasional tantrums (Aguilar et al., 2020). This is normal behavior, but when they are recurrent and become repetitive behaviors that make them stubborn and unable to control their anger, it can affect their cognitive performance and cause family and school violence. The first challenge in helping a child improve their behavior is understanding why they do what they do. Which, according to Zambrano et al. (2021), can be explained by psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches or fever; however, they can also be caused by many other factors, such as excessive tension or "emotional dysregulation," which can indicate different problems, not only in health but in the social and affective field (Quecho and Samanez, 2019).

For Allauca and González (2022), a specialist can easily conclude that a child suffers from disruptive behaviors when: they push, hit, or throw tantrums when angry, and are also stubborn and hostile. However, in many cases, aggressive behavior, including outbursts, stems from stress or frustration that may not be evident to parents or teachers. However, there are some diseases that are associated with disruptive behavior disorders in children. For this, it is important to understand what is behind children's behavioral problems in order to treat them properly (Lucero and Toalongo, 2017).

Internal elements that act in the disruptive behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old children

Children need a good general environment to stay engaged, active, and committed; to learn to be good citizens, they need to experience the social rewards of following orders and regulating their emotions (Ottati and Prieto, 2020). It should be noted that when children are placed in situations that go beyond their capabilities, they lose those opportunities and learn the wrong things: for example, that they cannot meet standards because they consider them unfair or selfish (Qqecho and Samanez, 2019).

Following what was mentioned above, many children with ADHD, especially those who experience hyperactivity and impulsivity, may seem defiant on purpose.

These children may have difficulty staying still, taking things from other children, making inappropriate comments, having difficulty waiting their turn, interrupting others, and acting without thinking about consequences; that is, they exhibit patterns of disruptive

behavior. In a recent study by Zambrano et al. (2021), more than 75% of children with disruptive disorders also met the criteria for ADHD. The above does not mean that they should be diagnosed with ADHD; in fact, the disorder can go unnoticed in children who have a history of abuse.

Another internal factor that causes disruptive behavior is the inability to learn; when a child repeats a behavior at school, it may be due to an undiagnosed learning disability (Lucero and Toalongo, 2017). Children with learning disabilities may show behaviors of maladjustment to rules, because they need to distract others so that they do not recognize their difficulties (Aguilar et al., 2020).

One of the most common problems in diagnosing DDD is that behaviors considered normal at age three may indicate a serious problem or illness at age five. Most children gain control over their desires and develop social skills in response to the structure and expectations established by their parents and caregivers, through the maturity proper to their age (Qquecho and Samanez, 2019). The identified problems can be significant; for example, the study by Ottati and Prieto (2020) indicates that children with disruptive disorders were more likely to be diagnosed with a mental illness or with anxiety or mood disorders and even ADHD.

Table 1. Indicators of disruptive problems versus normal behavior in preschool-age children

3. Design of the proposal

In this section, the elements related to the design of the intervention proposal for improving social skills in 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers with disruptive behaviors are presented. First, the objectives of the proposal are addressed, such as: Raising awareness among parents about the need for their participation in the intervention of challenging behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old children. Providing parents with strategies on how to address the challenging behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old children. Improving the challenging behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old preschool children within the classroom through play and artistic expressions. Developing activities focused on 4- and 5-year-old children with disruptive behaviors through mindfulness exercises. Practicing with students and parents playful and mindfulness activities to face different disruptive situations at home.

Additionally, this intervention proposal is aimed at groups of 30 preschool students from the Educational Institutions of the Esperanza township of the municipality of San José de Cúcuta, which are part of the department of Norte de Santander, Colombia. Specifically, the population must belong to the transition grade where disruptive behaviors have been presented, such as: non-compliance with rules, disobedience, hitting, pushing, throwing objects, having an aggressive attitude; as well as frequently yelling at their classmates and teachers.

4. Methodology of the proposal

For the development of the activities proposed in each of the objectives, different methodologies are applied that support the design of the different actions to follow. For this reason, as part of the intervention, play-based methodology is applied based on the development of art, music, games, and

entertainment, since as pointed out by Pasche et al. (2019), these promote the exploration and satisfaction of the child, becoming the most suitable for developing intervention activities that promote the teaching of rules and behavioral norms. Therefore, the sessions that are carried out are accompanied by elements that capture attention and based on the postulates of meaningful, constructivist learning, which, guided by what Machado (2018) stated: "discovery learning is the most suitable for treating children under six years of age" (p.28). As part of the methodology, sessions are applied based on the principles of mindfulness developed by Shapiro et al. (2006), which is a practice that has its origin in many contemplative and philosophical traditions, but that can be effectively adopted for the training and practice of mindfulness in the absence of traditions or vocabulary; that is, in child individuals who do not yet effectively develop language as a primary form of communication.

5. Sessions

In order to facilitate the development of the activities proposed in the intervention, in this space the timeframes corresponding to each training module and session in weeks are established. It should be noted that the schedule takes into account the development of sessions within the school calendar and within the normal academic agenda of the educational institution. In this way, 5 modules are scheduled over 20 weeks, which include several rest periods, so the intervention would take place over a period of 5 months.

A first module titled: parent awareness, in which the first two sessions of the intervention are developed; next, the module called: parent strategies is presented, in which sessions 3 and 4 proposed in the intervention are developed; consequently, module 3 is presented, called: we learn by playing, this block being directed at children, where sessions 5, 6, 7, and 8 are presented. Likewise, module 4 is presented, which is also directed at children and is composed of sessions 7 and 8; and finally, module 5 is presented, which presents sessions 9 and 10 oriented toward the participation of parents and students.

Focusing on the first module 1 of the intervention proposal, with the objective of practicing with parents playful and mindfulness activities to face different disruptive situations at home. Also, the guiding question is posed, which is to answer the following:

¿What are challenging behaviors and how can they be identified in children? This module includes a first session with a participatory and expository talk by the teacher, based on practices developed under the concept of the parent school. In the second session, under the same methodology as the first, an argumentation phase is proposed where parents participate and are addressed as a group, in order to demonstrate their learning about disruptive behaviors in their children and how to identify them.

In module 2 of the intervention proposal, with the objective of providing parents with strategies on how to address the challenging behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old children. Also, the guiding question is posed, which is to answer the following: What strategies should be adopted as a parent in the face of children's challenging behavior? In this module, the first session is a participatory and expository talk

by the teacher, based on the parent school methodology; while a second argumentation session where parents participate and are addressed as a group to demonstrate their learning about strategies to face challenging behaviors in their children.

Module 3 of the intervention proposal focused on improving the challenging behaviors of 4- and 5-year-old preschool children within the classroom through play and artistic expressions. The guiding question is: Why should I treat my friends well? To guide the first session with practical activities mediated by play, where children learn while playing; while in the second session, artistic activities are used and they interact with their classmates positively. Next, the different resources to be used within the module are presented, the duration being five weeks for 5 sessions (5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) and the rest time. Finally, it is important to mention that in the first session an evaluative activity is developed to identify the degree of social skill of the participating children, applying the questionnaire selected for this purpose.

Similarly, module 4 of the intervention proposal to develop socialization activities focused on 4- and 5-year-old children with disruptive behaviors, through the mindfulness methodology, and the guiding question is: What is relaxing and why should I do it? This module develops in its sessions mindfulness focused on the experience of the moment, where the student is invited to forget external and everyday elements and is asked to think about the now, about what they feel in the classroom, through touching themselves on their limbs and body.

For module 5 of the intervention proposal, which aims to develop socialization activities with the participation of parents and focused on 4- and 5-year-old children with disruptive behaviors, applying the mindfulness methodology, where the guiding question is:

How can I help my child relax? This module includes in all its sessions expository and practical activities, following the parent school method, where first the procedures to be used through play and mindfulness are explained orally, and then they practice with their children in the classroom.

6. Conclusiones

Through this project, the design of an intervention proposal to improve the social skills presented by 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers with disruptive behaviors belonging to the rural context of the city of San José de Cúcuta, in the department of Norte de Santander, Colombia, was achieved. It is clear that disruptive behaviors limit the learning of preschoolers and the ability to develop skills for subsequent entry into the primary education stage.

On the other hand, social skills are fundamental for individuals to achieve a good life, which is important to ensure from the first years of the educational stage so that they can in the future have autonomy, ability to adapt to social situations, better expression, and understanding of others.

When conducting a bibliographic review on disruptive behaviors in preschoolers, it was determined that it can be confused with normal rebellious behavior in children, but it must be intervened when it is recurrent and becomes a repetitive behavior that generates lack of anger and rage control, which can affect cognitive performance, be a focus of domestic violence, and low school performance. That is why, from the conceptual analysis of social skills as an intervention strategy, it was found that proposals that combine playful and artistic methodologies

offer better tools to teach preschoolers to face different everyday situations where they must manage emotions and interact assertively with their peers.

Likewise, scientific evidence indicates that there is an association between parenting styles and social skills in preschool-age children, which indicates that it is necessary to involve parents within the strategies that are planned to make an intervention in issues related to disruptive behaviors.

Finally, an intervention strategy was proposed to improve social skills in 4- and 5-year-old preschoolers who show disruptive behaviors in the educational environment, for which different sessions grouped in 5 modules were proposed.

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