

Concept Modelling of Children's Socio-Emotional Regulation in the VUCA Environment

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Abstract

The uncertain world left us with fearful and unsettling thoughts as the current environment of the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world affects people in all aspects, specifically the economy and well-being. Notably, the fluctuated economy stained the working adults' world by impacting their current living situation and subsequently influenced the children's well-being both positively and negatively. As children's development is shaped by their closest individuals, the affected parent-child and teacher-child relationships impact their well-being, specifically, children from the B40 families. Considering the worsening condition of B40 households due to VUCA, it is significant to raise concerns about their development. Therefore, this article aims to propose a conceptual model for children's socio-emotional regulation in the VUCA environment. The VUCA environment becomes the significant external force in the conceptual model due to its adverse effects on parents and teachers. Hence, this study also attached a compilation of questionnaires that could be applied to prove the current VUCA environment's effectiveness on children's regulation and socio-emotional development.

Keywords: VUCA; B40; children's development; socioemotional development

1. Introduction

The development of social and emotional well-being in children from birth through the age of five helps them build trusting relationships with adults and peers, channel their emotions appropriately, be independent, and comfortably observe their surroundings (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). It leads to a concrete foundation in schools and sequentially promotes their sense of belonging, which corresponds with positive affect, academic self-efficacy, and academic achievement (Nix et al., 2013). Besides, this development shows us how emotional reactions can significantly influence a lifetime social behaviour and how emotional growth can be affected by social experiences (Thompson & Virmani, 2012). Therefore, it is ultimately crucial for the children to acquire positive social and emotional development.

Significantly, children’s social and emotional development begins with the involvement of their closest individuals. Their social and emotional well-being depends on numerous individuals and situational factors, including the quality of a parent-child relationship, child temperament, family circumstances, school, and the broader community (O’Shaughnessy, 2016). In the study context, teachers and parents are the individuals who have the most consistent relationships with the children. Lewis-Morrarty et al. (2015) stated that a solid parent-child relationship aids in building the foundation of children’s social and emotional well-being development. The teacher-child relationship can also immensely affect the children’s school experience, including social, emotional, and behaviour development and academic domains (Farmer et al., 2011).

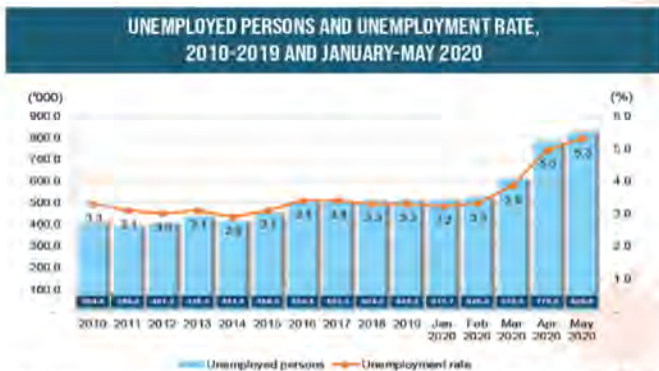


Figure 1: Malaysia unemployment rate (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020)

However, both parents and teachers are greatly affected by the VUCA world, which eventually influences their relationships with the children. The VUCA world

requires people to determine and plan for the unpredictability of general situations and entirely uncontrollable events (Adamson, 2013; Woo et al., 2021). Pandemic Covid-19 is the ideal example for the VUCA world (Nangia & Mohsin, 2020). Consequently, the current global issue of increasing unemployment and socioeconomic crises can be viewed as the effect of the VUCA world (Akhtar Gul et al., 2020). These worsening issues do not only take place globally but are also a crucial issue in Malaysia. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) reported that unemployment escalates to 5.3% in May 2020, from 3.2% in January 2020. Hence, it could be seen that unemployment keeps on increasing due to the pandemic Covid-19 in the VUCA world. With this environment persists, there is potential that it will leave long-term consequences on the child's well-being development (Parolin, 2020).

In the current situation, the parents from the B40 households face a more significant challenge as they are unprofessional workers who have low academic achievement, acquire insufficient income, and are thus unable to accommodate the living costs in urban areas (Hamid et al., 2019). On top of that, unemployment leads to income instability causing the B40 households to run out of savings (Ibrahim & Othman, 2020). These problems arise, lead to stress, and change to a higher level of parenting stress, affecting the quality of the parent-child relationship (Chung et al., 2020). Consequently, the effect of the parent-child relationship not only haunts children in their childhood but also remains until adolescence (O'Connor et al., 2020).

Prior to the effect of VUCA, teachers from the education sector are also affected. The advancement of technology and restrictions from face-to-face interactions, physical and online teaching, and learning transitions have caused great confusion and stress. It is because the teachers feel uncertain about how to maintaining their relationship with the students (Aperribai et al., 2020). When technology becomes the primary medium to interact with the children, the teachers must invest money in technology. To ensure the teaching and learning be effective without unnecessary interferences, it is a must for the teacher to obtain high-quality devices, stable connection, and power source. However, the tools for online teaching cause financial difficulties (Jain et al., 2020), which adds stress to the teachers. Thus, the stress teachers face in the current situation makes it difficult for them to protect their relationship with the children (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

Above all, the effect of the VUCA world on the parents of B40 households and teachers will indirectly affect children's social and emotional development through their changes in relationships with the children. Besides, it is essential to note that both parent-child and teacher-child relationships influence the children's development differently. Therefore, this study is significant in identifying the impact of VUCA on

the children's social and emotional development in the highest B40 households in Selangor, Malaysia.

2. Research Objectives

This study aims to answer the research objectives below:

1. to propose a conceptual model of children's socio-emotional regulation in enhancing children's socio-emotion development during the VUCA environment.
2. to suggest suitable survey questionnaires for determining children's regulation and socio-emotional well-being development.

3. Research Method

This study aims to propose a conceptual model and suggest suitable survey questionnaires to identify the impact of the VUCA environment on children's socio-emotional well-being development. Data will be collected by distributing four questionnaires to the respective respondents for future research. The group of respondents includes the teachers, parents, and children from a poor urban area situated in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Important to note that all sets of questionnaires are adapted and will be written in dual language as respondents' background and comprehension of language should be considered. Concentrating on the questionnaires, teachers must complete the Teacher-Subjective Well-being Questionnaire adapted from Renshaw et al. (2015). An additional questionnaire will be assigned to the teachers on behalf of the children, namely the Child's Behaviour Scale from Lad and Profilet (1996). Besides, parents will be required to complete the Emotion Regulation Checklist by Shield and Cicchetti (1995) on behalf of their children. On the other hand, students will be instructed to fill in the Achievement Emotions Questions adapted from Fierro-Suerro et al. (2020).

The survey questionnaires align with the Ecological Model of Bronfenbrenner (1979). The suggested questionnaires show children's direct contact and bidirectional relationship with their closest individuals involving both parents and teachers. Hence, the following questionnaires that teachers and parents would answer reflect their well-being and how significant their relationship with the children could influence their ability to regulate and thus affect their socio-emotional development.

3.1 The Ecological Model of Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Children's social and emotional well-being development is jeopardised due to the current risky environment of the VUCA world. Pandemic represents the VUCA world, leads to income instability through the increasing unemployment and transition of teaching and learning, and fosters the parents' and teachers' stress. Consequently, the stressful experiences eventually affect their quality of relationships with the children. It is because children spend most of their time with their closest individuals and thus are easily influenced by the environment and interactions they provide. Concerning the current environment, the Bioecological Model of Human Development by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989) supports and explains how parent-child and teacher-child relationships affect children's social and emotional development.

The bioecological model of Human Development asserts that human development is a joint interaction that happens to an individual in which development is mainly influenced by the interactions with different aspects and contexts of the environment (Parel, 2011). In the current VUCA world, parents from the B40 households who experience income instability treat children with less attachment and cold treatment. Developmental psychologists and sociologists expressed that children's social, emotional, and behavioural are vulnerable as economic difficulties cause parents' stress and influence the quality of parent-child relationships (Conger et al., 2010). Besides, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) elucidate development as the permanent change of how an individual understands and engages with his environment. For instance, the positive or negative teacher-child relationship left the children to act according to the teachers' environment.

Moreover, Hill et al. (2013) stated that development happens through the repetitive and constantly evolving interactions between individuals and objects, described as proximal processes. Equally important, proximal processes must continuously occur to promote healthy development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this study context, the parent-child and teacher-child are the proximal processes that aid the children's interaction with the environment linked to the children's social and emotional development. Dereli and Dereli (2017) supported the statement by mentioning that positive parent-child relationships promote positive children's development while negative parent-child relationships will cause a conflict in the relationship, resulting in negative emotions and severe punishment.



Figure 2: The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Important to emphasise that parents and teachers are the most salient individuals to the children. By referring to the Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in Figure 2, these two individuals are within the children's microsystem, influencing the children's development. However, the relationship between the microsystems, and mesosystem-level relationships, is likely to benefit or adversely affect the children (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). Concerning the study, parent-child and teacher-child relationships are categorised as the mesosystems-level relationship. The environment that affects the children's relationships with their parents and teachers (microsystems) is referred as exosystem. The exosystem is defined as a formal and informal setting that does not involve the children but indirectly influences them (Guy-Evans, 2020). In this study, the VUCA world does not directly affect the children, but it gave the parents and teachers a downright effect to experience high-stress levels. Thus, their affected relationships have a profound effect on children's development.

Therefore, the following proposed conceptual model shows how the integration of the systems and bioecological model of human development works in the study context. In addition, the proposed conceptual model guides the researchers in explaining how the VUCA world-impacting parents and teacher interrupt their interactions with the children. Thus, it helps explain how the current environment constrains the children's social and emotional well-being development as they tend to be neglected and their daily routines are disrupted.

3.2 Proposed Conceptual Model

This article proposes a conceptual model of children’s socio-emotional regulation in overcoming the uncertainty and the effect of VUCA on their social and emotional development seen in Figure 3. The said model aims to study the effect of the current pandemic on B40 households and teachers that affect both parent-child and teacher-child relationships.

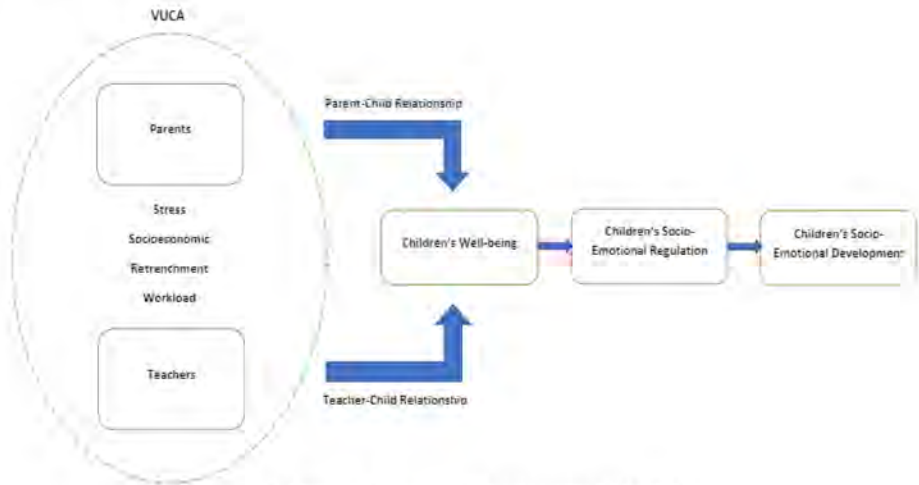


Figure 3: Proposed Conceptual Model

3.2.1 VUCA

VUCA is a peculiar, yet remarkable term infrequently used to describe an environment. However, these past two years, with the emerging pandemic COVID-19, VUCA is the most relevant term to explain the uncertainty in the world we live in. Hadar et al. (2020) defined VUCA in Psychology Education as Volatility (the nature, speed, volume magnitude, and dynamics of education); Uncertainty (the lack of predictability of issues and events); Complexity (the confounding of issues and surrounding factors); and (the haziness of reality and the mixed meaning of conditions). In conjunction, Bennett and Lemoine (2014) stated that VUCA emphasised how significant technology adaptation can improve environmental change at designated times and stages to adjust to dynamic environments concerning a digital economy.

Furthermore, the frequent changes in the environment and sometimes unpredictable, however, help to increase the usage of technology. Moreover, pandemic

acts as VUCA enhance social services amongst families, cleanliness, sanitation, and behaviour changes (Anjankar Ashish, 2020). Nevertheless, the VUCA world has increased unemployment and economic crises (Akhar Gul et al., 2020). Challenging the volatile situation, the world becomes more complex as political instability, damage to environmental conditions, and uneven wealth distributions (Senge et al., 2015). Correspondence to VUCA definitions, the deteriorating economic issues and unemployment increases resulted in sharp differences in the household incomes, specifically in Malaysian B40 households situated in urban areas.

3.2.2 VUCA on Socioeconomic Status (B40 households)

As VUCA globally impacts unemployment and causes economic crises, Malaysia's B40 households are at risk. Based on the Implementation Coordination Unit (2018) statistics, Petaling Jaya, the urban area, has the highest B40 households in Selangor. B40 households possess a threshold income of RM 4849. Thus, any household with a monthly income below Rm 4849 is considered B40. In addition, B40 households come from lower education qualifications, employed in lower-skill jobs that provide lesser earning potential (Hamid et al., 2019). Therefore, facing retrenchment in this crucial time could not encourage them to view things positively as they cannot cater to the living cost, primarily in urban areas. The monthly income they get is insufficient to make ends meet (Mayan & Nor, 2020). According to Ibrahim and Othman (2020), 12.58% of B40 households lost their jobs, and 37.73% face income instability; hence, 42.56% run out of savings. This situation becomes even more crucial as it happened during this unstable condition in which getting new jobs are challenging and thus causes stress towards them.

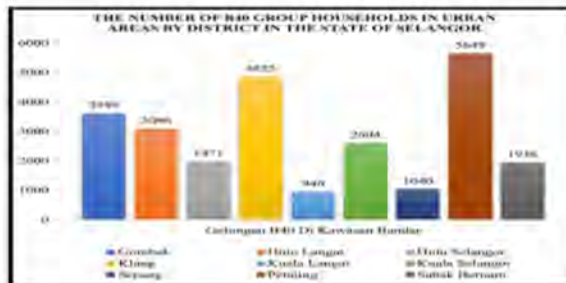


Figure 4: Number of B40 households by district in Selangor (ICU, 2018)

3.2.3 Relationship of VUCA with Parents and Teachers

Equivalent to how VUCA plays a vital role in determining the current environment, this ambiguous situation has greatly but differently affected parents and teachers. Focusing on the effect of VUCA on parents, experiencing job and income loss increases their stress and depression, and they exhibit abusive parenting behaviours towards their children (Kalil et al., 2020). Furthermore, the stress that they experience is indirectly channelled through the parent-child relationship. This statement is supported by Chung et al. (2020), which state that the poor quality of the parent-child relationship is due to soaring parental stress. It is important to note that poor parent-child relationships do not fix in childhood but remain until adolescence (O'Connor et al., 2020).

VUCA does not only affect parents but also teachers from the education sector. The sudden transition from physical to online teaching and learning has impacted teachers, raising their confusion and stress in maintaining their relationship with the children (Aperribai et al., 2020). Moreover, the current environment of VUCA has caused a vast interference in the teacher-child relationship. Like the parent-child relationship, positive or negative teacher-child relationship in preschool or early elementary years leaves persistent consequences for the children (Rudasill, 2011; Lippard et al., 2018). Likewise, the children are incapable of developing a reliable and reassuring relationship with the teachers due to the boundaries in their relationship (Cardullo et al., 2021).

3.2.4 VUCA on Children's Social and Emotional Well-being Development

Children's social and emotional development starts with their relationship with their parents. Parents' consistency in attending to the children's needs generates a trusting relationship and confidence between the children and parents during the first year of life (Malik & Marwaha, 2020). Similarly, relationship development and purposive teaching are effective practices integrated to promote children's social and emotional development. Besides, building a trustful relationship helps the children with dependability. For example, children become more courageous to ask questions, work independently, try new activities, and voluntarily give opinions (Funk & Ho, 2018).

It is vital to ensure positive parent-child and teacher-child relationships in sustaining children's social and emotional development. Since a concrete foundation of children's social and emotional development can be supported through the parent-child relationship (Lewis-Morrarty et al., 2015), the quality of the teacher-child relationship in terms of social and emotional can determine the children's academic success (Jeon et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, the VUCA world has affected both individuals that have a notable influence on children's development. Experiencing job retrenchment, income loss, and environmental changes lead to high-stress levels, which they channel to the children. Thus, affecting their relationships with the children makes this study necessary to identify how children regulate their socio-emotional well-being in overcoming the stress above.

4. Discussion

Following the Ecological Model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the proposed conceptual model, four suitable survey questionnaires have been summarised accordingly. Referring to the sub-sections below, a reference of questionnaire adaptation, type and design of the questionnaires was provided. Explanation of the questionnaires aims to bring upon the questionnaire's differences and how it could be linked with the future study on children's socio-emotional development.

4.1 Teacher-Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ)

Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ) is adapted from Renshaw et al. (2015). TSWQ attempted to cater to teachers' performance, well-being, and personal problems (Renshaw et al., 2015). In correlation with uncertain environment changes, from physical teaching and learning to online learning, it is imperative to figure out the teacher's well-being. It can indirectly affect the children's socioemotional adjustment and academic performance (Moolenaar, 2010). TSWQ has 8- items of a self-report instrument that functions via subscales measuring school connectedness and teaching efficacy. As this questionnaire is adapted and revised according to the needs of the study, the joy of the teaching subscale remains even though the previous result from Renshaw et al. (2015) shows that this subscale does not leave any significant contributions. Therefore, the adapted TSWQ has three subscales, namely School Connectedness, Teaching Efficacy, and Joy of Teaching, together with four items. In addition, Items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

4.2 Child Behaviour Scale

Child Behaviour Scale adapted from Ladd and Profilet (1996) includes 35 items comprising six dimensions (subscales) to assess several facets of social functioning (Hipson et al., 2017). In addition, CBS is a teacher-report scale that assesses children from preschool and primary school behaviour in an interactive context, particularly classroom environment. Moreover, CBS only acquires teachers to evaluate behaviours

that happen in the classroom (Marcone & Costanzo, 2013). In conjunction with the current VUCA world, teachers need to change the observation from physical to the online classroom. Children are yet allowed to be in school, and technology is their medium of instruction that connects the teachers and students. In CBS, the six dimensions are aggressive with peers, prosocial with peers, exclusion by peers, asocial with peers, hyperactivity, and anxiety. The distributions of the items are not even, and each subscale contains different numbers of items. Nevertheless, all items in this questionnaire used a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Does not apply) to 3 (Certainly Applies). Additionally, CBS can be an effective tool in determining children with developing antisocial behaviour and generative implementation of preventing measures (Marcone & Costanzo, 2013).

4.3 Achievement Emotions Questionnaire

Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ), adapted from Fierro-Suero et al. (2020), is a self-report instrument that evaluates children's emotions in academic situations (Peixoto et al., 2015). According to Blansali & Sharma (2019), it is crucial to be aware of their emotions. Positive emotions can be rewarding for most children, while negative emotions will adversely affect their academic learning. The AEQ is constructed with nine different emotions: enjoyment, hope, pride, relief, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, and boredom. It is categorised into three dimensions, specifically valence (positive vs negative), activation level (activating vs deactivating), and object focus (activity vs outcomes (Peixoto et al., 2015). However, this study only focuses on the six emotions: pride, hopelessness, enjoyment, anger, anxiety, and boredom. The adapted questionnaire contains 24 items, and each emotion includes four items. All items are rated with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

4.4 Emotion Regulation Checklist

Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) by Shields and Cicchetti (1997) is a parent-report of child emotion regulation and is used to make comparisons and analyse the results by referring to the child's self-report measure of emotion regulation (Brannon, 2013). Besides, ERC asks parents to evaluate the children based on the frequency of certain behaviours related to appropriate development reactions during positive and negative emotions (Dillon, 2009). In addition, Reis et al. (2016) mentioned that Kidwell & Barnett (2007) used ERC to evaluate Emotion Regulation that assessed the impact of low socioeconomic status. Therefore, ERC is a noteworthy instrument to be used in this study as this study focuses on the low socioeconomic (B40) children as a consequence of the VUCA world. Furthermore, ERC comprises 24 items to assess the children's

capability to control their emotional experiences (Brannon, 2013). Focusing on the study, the ERC is revised, and only 21 items are being used to assess children's ability to manage emotional experiences. The 21 items then adapted a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, children's social and emotional well-being greatly depends on their relationship with parents and teachers. However, it is essential to note that parents and teachers are experiencing socioeconomic circumstances resulting from VUCA, which have placed them in a complex situation. Concentrating on B40 parents and teachers, stress due to multiple aspects of their working system during the VUCA environment added more pressure to both parents and teachers, thus channelled the negativity to children through the parent-child and teacher-child relationship. Furthermore, the unfavourable environment they are exposed to at home and school perpetuates the problem in their relationships. Despite the unfavourable situations, the parents and teachers must restrain themselves from expressing their stress towards the children as it can influence their social and emotional development.

Equally important, the affected children's social and development will positively or negatively prompt behaviour change. However, the children may express negative emotions and behaviours as an act of coping with the stressful environment due to the inability to regulate their emotions appropriately. Therefore, parents' and teachers' awareness of the children's emotions and regulation are crucial in enhancing positive children's development during the VUCA world. Correspondingly, sustained and improved children's development would help children in the other aspects of their lives, including academic success, better social and emotional skills, and positive self-esteem that would help them transition to adulthood.

In conjunction, the proposed conceptual model of children's socio-emotional regulation could be the foundation for determining the relationship between the children's environment and their development. Additionally, to prove the children's development, the identified instruments could be integrated and thus analysed to state the B40 children's condition as the effect of the VUCA world.

6. Recommendations for Future Studies

In a particular condition of exploring children's socio-emotional development, it is more convenient for future researchers to direct their focus on a particular group of age. Children's development is classified into five stages: newborn, infant, toddler, and preschool. With the current environment of VUCA, the influence of parent-child and

teacher-child and their interpretation on children's development could vary depending on the stages. Based on the proposed conceptual model, a future study investigating the effects of children's exosystem and macrosystem on their socio-emotional development during challenging situations is recommended. Hence the numerous dimensions of children's relationships could help expand the references on the children's development.

7. Acknowledgements

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