

Increasing Effectiveness of Training for Vulnerable Children in Home for Girls: A Preparation Stage Nexus

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Abstract

Trainers and educators often encounter challenges when working with vulnerable clients, particularly young girls who have endured traumatic experiences and are grappling with mental health issues. These children require a specialized intervention process before they can embark on their core course training. Failure to facilitate the necessary cognitive preparation during the initial stages of training could significantly compromise the quality of education provided to them. This research utilized thematic analysis to uncover three pivotal challenges associated with organizing training programs for children residing in a shelter for vulnerable girls in Thailand. The preparatory process, specifically focusing on positive reinforcement, addressing self-esteem issues, and promoting identity development, emerged as crucial factors that enhance the effectiveness of training for these children. Trainers must remain conscious of the implications of these factors while delivering instructions to ensure the successful delivery of core contents.

Keywords: child learning; vulnerable girls; training; social work education; Thailand.

I. Introduction

Diverse groups of individuals, including the elderly, those with disabilities, disadvantaged children, and individuals facing extreme poverty, pose challenges to global development and require considerable attention (Asavanirandorn et al., 2023; Asavanirandorn et al., 2022; Pechdin et al., 2023). Especially, vulnerable children are those who require extra attention and support in order to make it through the difficult times in life (Côté & Levine, 2014; Garbarino et al., 1991). Children in a reception home may be more vulnerable than those who have loving and supportive families. One factor that can make vulnerable children in a reception home more susceptible to harm is a lack of emotional and physical support from caregivers. Children in a reception home may not have the same emotional and physical support from parents or

other family members as those with families do. Without a secure and stable base in life, young children are more prone to develop serious emotional issues (Fineman, 2010). This is especially true when they face separation from family and friends as the reception homes mostly provide short-term placements for them without family or friends. As a consequence, many of these children may experience significant trauma during the course of their lives and long-term struggles with their mental health.

Social work education for children in reception homes has increasingly faced the challenges of children who leave the home under-prepared and inadequately equipped to face the outside world (Chalayonnavin, 2019). Many of these children have only ever been exposed to the enclosed environment of the home, making it difficult for them to develop the necessary life

skills (Walker & Smithgall, 2009). Some of them suffer from self-comparison to their peers, leading to low self-esteem and an unfavorable attitude (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Smiley et al., 2012). On top that, it was reported that nearly half of the children who leave reception homes fall short and are not ready for the outside world, brought about by insufficient social skills and in particular emotional controls (Hartnick & Boseley, 2010).

It is clear therefore that vulnerable children require appropriate preparation strategies in advance of their departure. While the training program can help these children to get ready, it also presents a difficulty in terms of embedding the children into the curricular goals (Pillay, 2020; Smiley et al., 2012). A complication in overcoming this challenge is the achievement or deficit at the cognitive stage of a training, which is the starting point to inspire the participants to fulfil the goal of involvement in the training (Burger, 2010; Thomas et al., 2021). This stage presents a notably tough hurdle, for they are the fundamental steps of the preparation program and are thus tremendously consequential; if satisfactory steps to break down the barriers of these children are not taken, the achievement of the training program cannot be met (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

In Thailand, there has been a steady increase in the number of girls entering reception homes, thereby catalyzing the creation of a multifarious set of training programmes to support these vulnerable girls (UNICEF Thailand, 2023a). Yet, a deficit in understanding regarding the cognitive requirements for successful training appears to be hindering the process (UNICEF Thailand, 2023b). Should cognitive preparation during the initializing period of training be inadequately performed, the quality of training experienced by weakened children, especially those whose cognitive abilities have been impaired by trauma or other disadvantageous motifs, could be significantly diminished (Chalayonnavin, 2019; UNICEF Thailand, 2023a). This could result in the children becoming progressively detached from the training programme, thus preventing them from achieving training goals (Azzi-Lessing, 2010).

This paper presents reflective narratives derived from a participatory research study involving vulnerable girls at a reception home in Thailand. The research questions used to guide this paper are as follows:

- What are the key factors determining the outcome at the cognitive stage of training for a vulnerable girl in a reception home?
- What potential areas of social work education can be utilized in order to support the training programme at the cognitive stage, so as to promote improved outcomes for vulnerable children prior to them exiting a reception home?

This paper draws on qualitative findings from a participatory approach implemented by the author who was the main instructor in youth training at Ban Thanyaporn Home for Girls, Thailand, as part of the project "Training and Potential Development for Thai Youth in Thai Homes for Girls" supported by the Office of Children and Youth, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand. This project involved an 18-week-long training programme attended by 28 girls. This paper does not offer the final findings of the project; instead, it presents a reflection on the role of the trainer in participatory activities held during the first 3 weeks of the training. The study received prior ethical approval from the author's affiliation before the training programme began.

2. Methodology

2.1 Project Detail and Scope of Work

This paper is a contribution from the 2018 "Training and Potential Development for Thai Youth in Thai Homes for Girls" project that was supported by the Office of Children and Youth, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand. The project was the pilot studies in collaboration with the involved public agencies, academic institutions, and private sectors to ensure the equal opportunities for every child. The project was consisting of an 18-week-long training programme attended by 28 girls from the reception home in

Thailand, focused on the development of entrepreneurial skills in order to provide these vulnerable children with a better grasp of the opportunities available to them, aiding them in their ability to become employed and, thus, better their lives. The educational content of the training was developed by a variety of social workers and organizations, such as the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, private companies and caregivers from the reception home of Ban Tanyaporn Home for Girls.

The course development was based on the concept of cognitive theories, which are rooted in numerous aspects of psychology, including behaviorism, cognitivism, and connectionism (DeKeyser & Criado, 2012). This theory may be described as a neo-Piagetian theory that incorporates elements of both cognitive and behavioristic theories (Parziale & Fischer, 1998). The course can be divided into three phases, namely, the cognitive preparation stage, fundamental skills development, and professional training. Details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 *Full Course Details*

Course detail and time arrangement			
Phase 1:	Cognitive preparation	Phase 2: Fundamental Skilled Development	Phases 3: Professional Training
• Week 1:	Ice-Breaking activities	• Week 4 : Skills Development (1)	• Week 8-9: Professional training (1)
• Week 2:	Self-Esteem investigation	○ Personality development	○ Student choices such as barista and cooking
• Week 3:	Identity development	• Week 5: Skills Development (2)	• Week 10: Partnership meeting and social lab practice
		○ Leadership development	• Week 11-13: Professional training (2)
		• Week 6: Skills Development (3)	○ Student choices such as café and restaurant
		○ Management skills	• Week 14-16: Basic English for business
		• Week 7: Skills Development (4)	○ Basic English for entrepreneurs
		○ Leadership skills	○ Basic English for social engagement and social networking
		○ Marketing techniques	
		○ Service skills	
		○ Social entrepreneurship concept	

Source: Developed by author

This paper offers a reflection on the role of the author as the main instructor in participatory activities conducted during the initial three weeks of the cognitive phase of training. In fact, cognition in this context is a process of both acquiring knowledge and understanding material, typically requiring problem solving, memorization, and/or knowledge acquisition, which can span from a few minutes to a number of weeks, depending on the complexity of the material (Anderson, 1982; Shuell, 1986). It should be noted that the present reflection does not constitute the final findings of the entire project. Rather, the findings derived from this discussion could be leveraged to enhance the understanding of social workers who work with vulnerable clients, furnishing them with techniques and strategies necessary to effectively meet those clients' needs.

2.2 Curriculum Detail for Cognitive Preparation Stage (Phase 1)

At the beginning of the training programme, the cognitive stage was designated to the initial three weeks. This phase was aptly titled since it was principally dedicated to concentrating on the reasoning involved in the acquisition and assimilation of information, prior to hands-on implementation of an acquired skill. During this period, the organised activities were to increase trust and coherence amongst participants, with six hours being scheduled each week. Specifically, the first week was used to become familiar with the programme and introduce themselves; the second week was for self-discovery; and the third week was focused on socializing with their peers. The arrangement of these activities was meant to bolster self-assurance amongst the children, as

well as offer the opportunity to hone interpersonal capabilities. A summary of weekly topics is given as follows:

- Week 1: Ice-Breaking activities and Self-reflection

This week is the first of the course, with the aim of encouraging the children to interact with each other. It may serve as a more effective way of addressing shyness or unfamiliarity than general non-interactive methods. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for the children to form and foster relationships, by exchanging names and making new friends, engaging in activities that break down barriers and build trust and enjoyment. Moreover, it is also an exercise in team building, in order to foster a strong relationship between the children and facilitators involved in the training project. In addition, during this week the children were encouraged to engage in self-reflection; to take an honest look at areas in which they were disappointed, discouraged, or needed to return to and address. In this section, efforts were made to allow the children to draw on their inner strength and harness their own sense of self-efficacy and willpower, and ice-breaking activities were adopted.

- Week 2: Self-Esteem Investigation

During this week the children were encouraged to reflect on strategies that can assist in improving their overall quality of life such as self-confidence, psychological wellbeing, and life planning with the goal of cultivating happiness. The aim is to ensure that the children become fully prepared to review, learn, and devise a plan for their life after leaving the home including economic and social angles, for example, financial planning and formulating a plan for educational and professional development, creating personality traits and expertise essential for functioning optimally in life circumstances, as well as establishing the resoluteness needed to live a fulfilled life in the wider society. During this second week, the children were assigned to complete two main activities, one based on investigating the strengths and weaknesses of

their peers, and another drawing-based activity focused on the prospect of quality of life.

- Week 3: Identity Development

This week marks the conclusion of the cognitive stage of the programme before professional training commences for the next 12 weeks. Most of the vulnerable children have experienced mental challenges, which have resulted in them becoming more aggressive and lacking in the personal skills necessary to socialize and form connections with their peers, thus making them feel isolated. This week's activities were therefore designed to foster individual identity formation and bolster group cohesion among peers while developing interpersonal and communication abilities, cultivating leadership capacity, and refining personality traits so that they could effectively collaborate and support one another throughout the rest of the training programme. Role-play activities were the primary focus of the week. The children were placed in the simulated constraints of a cave environment and were challenged to use their problem solving and communication abilities to seek a way out. This activity was aimed at encouraging the internalisation of skills to install the confidence and self-motivation to strive for a better life.

2.3 Participants

This paper focused on the study of adolescent girls aged between 14 and 18 years residing in the Thanyaporn Home for Girls in Pathum Thani Province, Thailand. Those children were recruited based on consultation with social workers working in the Home and their consents were received from their parents or guardians before participating in the project. On top of that, the inclusion criteria allowed for the participation of those with prior experience of psychological/physical abuse, sexual abuse, or parental abuse/neglect, and the capacity to read and communicate in the Thai language. Conversely, exclusion criteria included rejections of consent from the children's parents/guardians and any objections from social workers regarding the children's inability to actively participate in the training. In

conclusion, 28 girls were included in the training.

2.4 Data collection and Instruments

Qualitative data was acquired through the use of participant observation, in an environment in which the author served as the instructor of the curriculum. Through this observation, it was possible to review the children's efforts in synthesizing the lessons, their attitude and abilities during certain stages of the program, as well as their increased self-esteem. A research team, headed by the principal investigator (the author) was formed, in addition to the research assistants. During the observation process, paper consent from the participants and their parents was acquired and observation sheets used as a research tool. No audio or video recordings were made. Furthermore, all information on participating children for reporting purposes was kept anonymous.

The reliability of qualitative data was ensured by using methodological triangulation (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). The data was reviewed by the principal investigator and team members to confirm the accuracy of the information. The finished paper was presented to the participants' guardians or caregivers to verify its accuracy.

2.5 Participatory Settings

After receiving approval from the Ethics Committee on Human Research from the author's affiliation together with permissions from the participants' guardians, the preparation of the setting environment for organizing participatory research to collect the data included;

- Staff Preparation

This preparation invited all staffs including guest speakers, caregivers in the reception home, supporting staff and research assistants to build a shared understanding of the training objectives and activities. The potential risk factors that may have a negative effect on the participating children were discussed, and the characteristics and personalities of each girl were noted in order to enable more thoughtful

responses when unexpected situations arise or specific assistance is needed.

- Atmosphere and environment preparation

The atmosphere and environment were thoroughly prepared and designed in order to create a peaceful and relaxed space that would not impede the cognitive processes of the participating children. This process involved the preparation of the training room, equipment, lesson translation, lighting, and ambiance. Through the creation of a comfortable and safe environment, the participants were more likely to openly express their opinion.

- Participant preparation:

The 28 girls between the ages of 14-18 were both physically and emotionally prepared for the training. They were informed of the objectives and activities of the training programme, as well as their right to withdraw from it at any point. Furthermore, the children were made aware of the stakeholders, speakers, and trainers involved and the roles they would assume during the training, in an effort to engender trust.

2.6 Analytical techniques

In this study, the thematic technique elaborated by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used, which consists of six steps. First, the qualitative data gathered from observing the participants' behavior during the three weeks of the training programme, defined as the cognitive stage of the training, was contextualized in regard to their experiences/background. Secondly, codes and key words were generated to classify the observed data into related categories to form a structure for analysis. Thirdly, the codes were used to look for themes in the data and how it related to the behavior of the participants. Fourthly, the themes were identified and labelled. The fifth step saw the results of the analysis documented. Lastly, any overlapping themes were adjusted to reduce the data to a single theme or concept that encapsulated the data.

2.7 Ethical Practices

As participants had previous experience of abuse, the study was conducted under authorized regulation by the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by The Human Research Ethics Committee of Thammasat University. No.2 Social Sciences. (Protocol code 0515.56 (EC) 500 no. 061/2561). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. The consent form was applied to both participant's parents. The researcher gave an explanation before data collection and investigation in order to make sure participants fully understood what they were agreeing to including potential risk and benefits. The training gave participants a choice to opt out at any time.

The information was collected in digital ID code in order to protect participants' personal privacy and the recording was deleted after research completion in order to avoid any tracing back to individual participants. The data collected during the study was kept confidential and the researcher was the only person who gained access to the data in order to ensure information was not, in any way, disclosed to unauthorized people.

3. Results

3.1 Positive Reinforcement as an Instrument for Gaining Attention in Initial Interactions

It was found that a majority of the children who took part in the study had experienced issues in life and were exposed to a severely constrained and violent atmosphere. This had the effect of making them feel discouraged and lowering their sense of self-worth. To better help them learn, advice and acknowledgement were also given to them, helping them to realise their potential and promoting good relationships with others. Many of the children lack confidence and feel that they are of no use, which is why reinforcement and empowerment in the activities during the cognitive stage, especially in the first week, were important for them to gain a better grasp of the lessons in the following week.

With regards to empowerment techniques, the children were provided with messages that encouraged them to positively view their future, such as, "Anyone can achieve success through effort no matter the difficulties faced". Additionally, a space and environment were created to allow the children the opportunity to express their feelings, in an attempt to break down the psychological barriers, as depicted in the following dialogue:

"If anyone wants to cry, let them cry and never cry again. Just cry today. We have to start over and make our dreams become a reality. Everyone has a dream and everyone wants success. With heart, we can rise up and become successful, even if we have failed before."

Introducing engaging activities can serve to encourage children to openly express themselves. At the beginning of the activity, it is not unexpected for individuals to initially experience a sense of apprehension due to their unfamiliarity with one another. Therefore, it is imperative for trainers to create an environment of mutual understanding and kindness in order to break down any existing barriers between participants. Activities that promote friendliness and communication were utilized as a way in which to generate an atmosphere of both motivation and happiness for all those involved.

In addition, it was observed that positive reinforcement was a key technique to foster the vulnerable children's belief that they could learn and develop. Many of the participants exhibited challenging emotions, such as dejection or despondency, leading them to give up on life, which could possibly be a factor in their inability to pay attention to the course. This was particularly the case for those with significant past traumas, as some of them still revealed their thoughts and convictions, exemplifying their inadequacies and pessimistic feelings. However, communication and messaging which emphasised their dreams and reinforced their confidence proved to be effective. For example;

"What do you want today? If you say fight, you will never lose. You will win. This is

everyone's dream. Everyone has a bright future ahead. I wish everyone success, be a strong, original, self-reliant person."

With this message, it was observed that when the message regarding the future of the children's career was repeated without any mention of their past experiences, the children displayed interest, and several of them were moved to tears at the prospect of a promising future. This illustrates that the spoken words had a potent effect. On the other hand, it can imply that the reinforcement of future-focused messages can effectively enable the children to contemplate their own situations, thereby providing them with the courage and determination to engage in learning and other activities.

3.2 Self-discovery addressing self-esteem

When vulnerable children can envisage a better future, another important step has been identified to aid them in recognizing their potential, thus amplifying self-esteem. Before organizing the activities during Week 3, it was observed that the strengths or weaknesses of the participating children were more clearly identified by their peers than through self-recognition. This is especially relevant as many of these vulnerable children were averse to sharing their ideas but more likely to present their emotions in relation to other persons. This was detrimental to their lives in that it left them prone to the words of their peers while simultaneously expressing themselves without due consideration of the words spoken, which could eventually damage their relationships with their peers.

During the Week 3's exercise, the participants were asked to analyse both the strengths and weaknesses of their peers, whilst also considering the accuracy of the words spoken by their classmates concerning their own abilities. Many of the participants struggled to be productive and encountered difficulty, with some unwilling to accept the feedback they were offered and others unable to respond. Nevertheless, the situation improved when the trainers made a point of elucidating that

everyone possesses both strengths and weaknesses:

Through this activity, the children had the chance to identify their own aptitudes and strengths. Moreover, they were asked to emulate the abilities they noticed in their peers and reflect on how these developed into their own competencies. This exercise gave the children a chance to become aware of both their own and other people's strengths and weaknesses, thus equipping them with the social skills essential for addressing the difficulties they face in life.

In addition to developing self-esteem, familiarizing children with the concept of quality of life can be integral to their overall wellbeing. In fact, having a healthy sense of self-esteem is associated with having a better quality of life. The children with higher self-esteem tended to have more positive relationships, increased life satisfaction, and improved physical and mental health. Quality of life is largely characterized by a sense of physical and emotional well-being, as well as ensuring safety, rights, and freedoms for the individual and society at large. It was an acknowledged fact that the environment experienced by these children was not conducive to a life of good quality. Therefore, the activities were designed so that the children could still improve the quality of their lives.

In this activity, the children were tasked with describing their current environment and quality of life. To better comprehend the concept, the trainer posed questions to the children concerning the quality of life, eliciting responses such as "to live a happy life", "being with friends", "not worrying", and "having goals". The children were then asked to create a pictorial representation of their answers. During the drawing process, it was observed that the majority of the children articulated their ideas openly and allowed themselves to express both positive and negative emotions. In particular, one child's artwork was particularly telling, showing an attempt to escape from home. This suggests that there may be instances of domestic violence in the child's home life, negatively impacting the overall

quality of life. This activity was designed to encourage children to reflect upon their emotions, uncover the sources of their suffering, and how abandonment had adversely impacted their self-worth. The trainers, in turn, questioned the children on how they could move forward and ensure that their lives brought joyful and productive experiences. Through this process, we hoped to enable the children to combine what they had learned with their previous experiences in order to apply to their won environment and create a new understanding of the world that they can live independently.

After completion of the activities, it was noted that this form of questioning and activity could be of assistance in supporting the children to contemplate the quality of life and their environment, stimulating their interest to seek improvement. As such, several of the children expressed a high degree of enthusiasm about the remainder of the training course, hoping to be able to positively alter their environment.

In conclusion, the results of this Week 3 suggested that the development of self-awareness and understanding of their peers provided the groundwork for constructing relationships with others. Furthermore, the participating children were able to gain insights into how to achieve a high quality of life, imploring them to engage in self-reflection about what constitutes such a life. This motivated them to focus their attention on the training programme in the hope that it would enable them to obtain a higher quality of life. Even if their responses were sometimes inaccurate, the children still participated actively in the contemplation and subsequently, the trainers began to integrate correct knowledge into the process which ultimately led to the positive outcomes of the activities.

3.3 Better me drawing a better future

After assessing their own strengths and weaknesses as well as reflecting on their potentially better lives during the previous weeks, the students were given an opportunity over the final week of the cognitive training stage to explore their capabilities and ascertain

which areas would require further development. Organized activities during this week presented the students with the chance to conduct role-play exercises related to their future aspirations. These activities had the goal of improving the requisite capabilities which endorse socialization in view of the occupation they aspired to pursue. The trainer team was present to only facilitate the process in order to foster the students' ability to express their dreams unabated.

Role play activities were seen as a vital method for these vulnerable children to begin to consider what they ought to do in the future, given that some of the participants were uncertain about their future prospects. Upon completion of such activities, some of the children expressed aspirations to become a judge, soldier or teacher, objectives they felt were beyond their current situation. However, every child needs to be encouraged to set goals and find out how to advance with certainty. Consequently, elements that were found to be key to this process were positive reinforcements such as compliments, in order to enable them to analyse their own character, identify what they want to become in the future and understand how to alter or adjust their behaviors and expressions. This can help them to determine what kind of character changes must be made to form a new persona that is suitable for their future aspirations.

In addition, it was observed that "personal identity" was an influencing factor in the level of expression of the children that participated in the study. Those from deprived backgrounds tended to display lower levels of self-value when engaging in activities, and appeared to lack visions for the future. When asked, these children cited their lack of high regard for their guardians as a contributing factor for their lack of courage and ambition for their aspirations. On the other hand, those who had developed intimate and close relationships with their guardians had a more positive outlook and greater confidence to develop themselves.

Under this circumstance, we found that certain factors may help to mitigate the challenge of building confidence, in particular improving

oneself today to set the stage for a better future. During the group activities, the children were encouraged to propose their own role-play if they were to find themselves trapped in a cave. This activity was implemented to help children learn to present their roles according to the situation and to showcase their skills. The simulation was anticipated to encourage children to explore their skills and attempt to use them to find a brighter way out of any darkness. Utilizing the skills acquired, the children were able to propose innovative solutions to achieve the end goal of exiting the cave. In this situation, it was clear that one key element acting as a restraint on the children's aptitude is a lack of confidence, which, in turn, is detrimental to the efficacy of the training. An inability to cultivate a "can-do" attitude may lead to a decreased level of involvement, impinging upon their ability to benefit from the training and make the most of future opportunities.

4. Discussion and Implications for Special Educational Interventions

Gaining engagement from vulnerable children during training is essential, as they may be hesitant due to prior traumatic experiences and certain mental health issues (Burger, 2010; Walker & Smithgall, 2009). This similar consideration is also found in other demographic groups in Thailand, such as refugees, necessitating special focus within their environment to enhance social engagement (Pechdin & Ahmad, 2023a, 2023b). Therefore, it is critical to approach the early stages with strategies focused on inspiring and invigorating the participants, thereby leading to the successful achievement of the training objectives (Anderson, 1982; Shuell, 1986). The initial three weeks of the fifteen-week programme were devoted to the cognitive stage, with key factors including positive reinforcement, self-esteem, and personal identity development playing an influential role in determining the concentration of those vulnerable children (Fineman, 2010), as discussed in the preceding section.

In terms of positive reinforcement, the results of ice-breaking activities demonstrate that relaxation and comfortability are influential factors impacting the learning of these children (Hardy & McLeod, 2020; Kärnä et al., 2010). Those who felt more relaxed and comfortable were more likely to open their minds and interact not only with their peers, but also with the trainers (Kärnä et al., 2010). It has been demonstrated that children's previous negative experiences can lead to a blocking of learning, similar to icebergs in the ocean, which are concealed beneath the water (Burger, 2010). It is essential to analyze this issue before undertaking the primary training.

Oftentimes, disadvantaged children will show signs of unfavorable behaviors, whether they express it manifestly or subtly; such behaviors can include a condescending, uncompliant, cold, wrathful, or apathetic attitude not only to their peers but also to the instructors (Belsky et al., 2007; Dishion et al., 1999). This phenomenon must be recognized by social workers in education as it has been seen to markedly affect their decision-making in terms of action (Mersky et al., 2019). When these children are subject to a new learning curriculum or social context, they can start to form a psychological dynamic, with an emerging wall of self-protection, reinforcing the individual's sense of insecurity in an unfamiliar environment (Hardy & McLeod, 2020; Pillay, 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). This in turn can disrupt connection building with other members in the learning setting or group society. As such, ice-breaking activities which integrate encouragements and compliments as forms of positive reinforcement are essential to the initial phase of the training period, as they help build solidarity between all members in the class.

In addition, positive reinforcement techniques that promote self-reflection can be used as a critical component in attracting and maintaining the attention of the children (Hägglund et al., 2022; Rafi et al., 2020). Without contextualizing the issue, the learning process of these children can become distorted. Positive reinforcement that encourages the children to make sense of their context and the

reasons why certain situations arise can be particularly beneficial in aiding their understanding of their circumstances (Rafi et al., 2020). As demonstrated after having the children reflect upon their aspirations, this approach can attract the children to engage more fully in the training course and consequently, become more amenable to participate in the activities proposed.

During the second week of cognitive preparation, the self-esteem of the children could be observed through their responses to open-ended questions. After the ice was broken, the children seemingly exhibited an inclination to verbalize their thoughts, thus leading to the trainer's implementation of encouraging tactics in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas, which consequently resulted in the successful reception of the open-ended questions. Employing open-ended questions allowed these children to freely communicate their perspectives and develop self-awareness (Flavian, 2016; Mata-McMahon et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the results of such questions were likely determined by their experiences (Flavian, 2016). The children's experiences stemming from their individual pasts could be observed and required specific attention from the trainers, especially in terms of the way to deal with the answers from the open-ended questions. However, the use of open-ended questions can provide vulnerable children with autonomy in the conversation and the opportunity to express their opinion without feeling forced or inhibited. This presents a challenge to trainers to be careful and manage the circumstances of their class effectively in order to respect the children's backgrounds and experiences (Mwoma & Pillay, 2015). An example of this was seen in the artwork of a girl conveying her attempt to escape home, which could indicate a past of violence that she needs to process. If the trainer is unaware of the origin of the wound and poses risky questions or questions that may lead to a vulnerable response, the child may fail to engage in activities as they are reminded of their painful pasts.

In the third and final week of the cognitive training stage, the aim shifted to accelerating the children's learning process in dynamic situations by implementing a framework of contextualized activities. The introduction of activities, such as those set in a mock 'cave' environment, provide the children with the possibility to develop and modify their abilities. Role-playing games have been identified as a resourceful method of granting learners a more profound understanding of the subject matter than what can be achieved through mnemonic learning (Karolina et al., 2022; Schepers et al., 2018). This problem-based learning (PBL) has been demonstrated to be a viable approach to the instruction of vulnerably situated children. This is partially due to the fact that it takes into account the socio-emotional needs of these children (Schepers et al., 2018). By enabling an interactive learning experience, which inspires dialogue and collective support, trust among the students can be developed, consequently establishing an environment in which the children can productively dialogue their cases and extend encouragement to their peers (Booth, 2005; Bowman, 2010).

This learner-oriented approach has proven to significantly benefit social work education, as it engages the children in a way that allows learning to be evaluated quickly and accurately through immediate feedback activities (Hägglund et al., 2022; Kärnä et al., 2010). In order to give vulnerable children the opportunity to foster self-awareness, self-advocacy, and agency, social workers using this approach must employ it as a guideline for simulation. Through performing tasks such as asking questions, generating and testing hypotheses, and presenting findings, it was observed that this approach helped children to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses and construct courses of action that pertained to their individual needs and experiences. Hence, this process has been found to inspire and motivate learners to concentrate on their professional training during the next stage of their learning journey.

5. Conclusion

The participants of the cognitive stage of the training program developed their learning processes through the utilization of activities, materials, and information that constituted their own lived experiences. In launching the process, it was essential for trainers to build fruitful relationships with the children to increase their participation and foster a sense of solidarity amongst the group. It is pertinent to highlight that positive reinforcement, elevation of self-esteem, and the nurturing of self-exploration are all required tools in order to empower those vulnerably positioned children who have faced traumatic experiences and who cannot envisage a better future, to be more engaged in the training. This contributes towards a dissolution of the mental barriers in the process, enabling the social workers who specialize in educational services for special children to acknowledge the factors that affect their learning.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted under authorized regulation by the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by The Human Research Ethics Committee of Thammasat University. No.2 Social Sciences. (Protocol code 0515.56 (EC) 500 no. 061/2561).

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