



## Studying With Pet Animals: Exploring The Benefits For Children's Development

Sheryl P. Ramirez\*

\*Western Mindanao State University Zamboanga City, Philippines

<b>Abstract</b>	
	<p>Recent years have seen an incomparable advancement in the study of human–animal interaction (HAI), which has led to a sharp increase in our comprehension of the advantages of pet ownership. However, in the last several years, researchers have acknowledged how common nonhuman animals are, as well as how children are connected to other living things, the built and natural environments, and other life forms. Positive pet-human relationships have been shown to support the growth of trustworthy interpersonal relationships, according to this literature review. Nonverbal communication, empathy, and compassion can all be fostered by having a healthy relationship with a pet. Children can learn many things from their pets, including how to be good stewards of their secrets and inner thoughts, how to connect with nature, how to teach life lessons, and how to show respect for all living things. Possessing them satisfies fundamental physical and emotional needs, such as those for physical activity, comfort, affection, and the ability to deal with loss.</p>
<b>CC License</b> CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	<b>Keywords:</b> pet animals, children's development, cognitive development, social development

### Introduction

Child development involves the series of changes in a child's physical, language, thought, and emotional aspects from birth to early adulthood. This journey leads them from relying on their parents to gaining more independence. Genetics, prenatal experiences, environmental factors, and the child's learning capacity all play a significant role in shaping their development. It encompasses not only physical transformations but also changes in emotions, personality, behavior, thinking, and speech as children start to understand and engage with the world.

Beyond human interactions, children also undergo development through their interactions with pet animals. Recent advancements in the field of Human-Animal Interaction highlight the positive impact of pets on cardiovascular health, stress coping mechanisms, overall health and mobility in old age, social connections, and even immune function enhancement (McCune, et. al 2014).

Studying with pets can contribute to mental and physical well-being, productivity, and general health. Pets can serve as great study companions. In addition to the mentioned benefits, it's observed that some children include their pets in their study habits, either by carrying them or having them nearby while studying.

Study habits refer to the methods students use to study. These habits can be systematic, efficient, or inefficient, with efficient study habits often leading to positive academic performance (Ayodele & Adebisi, 2013). Children with pet animals at home commonly exhibit these effective study habits. Plowden (1967)

emphasized that when parents and teachers provide the necessary support system to guide a child's growth, the child is more likely to achieve success in education. Good study habits, coupled with a conducive environment, feedback, and guidance, contribute to the development of a well-rounded personality. Teachers play a role in guiding students at school, while parents should take on this responsibility at home. Therefore, it is the joint duty of teachers and parents to identify a student's positive study habits and provide appropriate guidance.

### **Research Objective**

Discusses the development children could benefit while studying with their pet animals.

### **Methodology**

In order to support the claim, the researcher first designed the type of review based on the quantity of available literature. This paper used a semi-systematic literature review because there is a sufficient amount of literature on the subject. The review was carried out following the gathering and classification of the literature. The analysis stage came in third, and writing the review came last. This procedure was created based on real-world experience and is a combination of different standards and recommendations made for literature reviews (Wong et al., 2013).

### **Discussion**

#### **On the Development Children Could Benefit While Studying With Their Pet Animals**

##### **Children could Benefit Social Development which may Include their Empathy for Other Children**

According to Poresky's (2015) research, three elements - a child's age, the state of their home, and their bond with pets—have an effect on how they develop. The study looks at the impact of having a pet, the quality of the bond between a child and their pet, and the interaction between age, the home environment, and the relationship between a child and a companion animal. The results provide credence to the hypothesis that owning a companion animal improves a preschooler's social, cognitive, and motor development. Age, the standard of the home environment, and the child's bond with a companion animal all influence this development. The influence of a companion animal is primarily seen in the social development and empathy for other children in young children, even though age and the home environment are linked to cognitive, motor, and social development.

There is a general consensus that interacting with animals benefits a child's socio-emotional and cognitive development (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Williams, Muldon, & Lawrence, 2010; Myers Jr., 1996; Poresky, 1996;). Early exposure to household pets appears to be particularly relevant for emotional development. For instance, having a pet during childhood is linked to the development of self-esteem and empathy in later life (Arkow, 1998; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009;). Children with pets tend to exhibit higher scores on self-concept and empathy scales compared to children without pets.

Moreover, Paul (2000) and Endenburg & van Lith (2011) asserted that individuals who had pets as children had better attitudes and more empathy for animals. Lastly, the discovery that people who are kind or empathetic toward animals are also likely to feel good about humans (Paul, 2000; Daly & Morton, 2009) implies that prosociality and empathy toward humans and animals are developed by similar processes. Additionally, since recognizing the emotions of others is widely acknowledged as a necessary component of empathy, recognizing the emotions of animals and identifying some of the signals that correspond with them should be predicated on some shared mechanisms and influences.

Endenburg and Van Lith (2011) provided an illustration of Professor Jay Belsky's 1984 model, which was used to explain which factors affect children's development and how the companion animal–child interaction influences these variables. The usefulness of the AAA/AAT (Animal Assisted Activities/Animal Assisted Therapy) programs in children with a range of clinical and social issues, including behavioral issues and symptoms associated with autism spectrum disorders, was mentioned. The results imply that companion animals have a beneficial developmental impact on kids and can be a useful tool in therapy.

#### **Children's Development of Cognitive and Emotional Reactions to Animals**

According to Kidd and Kidd (1996), children's comprehension of animal emotions is based on Piaget's (1969) model of cognitive development stages. Children's emotional perception of animals is self-centered between the ages of three and five. Between the ages of 7 and 11 years old, they begin to exhibit more cooperative behavior and empathy in place of self-centered thinking, as well as some factual comprehension and

perspective-taking abilities. As children get older, their attitudes toward animals, especially pets, fully develop. They also begin to show concern for moral matters such as animal welfare and conservation (Kidd & Kidd, 1996). Because older children are better at perspective-taking and have developed attitudes, we predict that they will be more accurate in recognizing animal emotions compared to younger children – this is our second hypothesis.

Children develop deep bonds with animals as well as with their peers and family as they get older. Children under the age of five in western urban and rural areas exhibit a markedly anthropocentric attitude toward non-human animals, including their opinions about their needs and features (e.g., Geerdts, Van de Walle, & Lobue, 2015; Medin, Waxman, Woodringa, & Washinawatok, 2010). However, because of their interactions with these non-human social partners, children in this age range are able to modify their behavior to realistically meet the qualities of the animals (Myers Jr., 1996).

### **Knowledge and Attitudes of Children are Improved by Information Exposure and Zoo Visits**

Experience includes various types of interactions, like having pets, reading books or watching TV shows about animals, visiting zoos, parks, museums, and engaging in related activities. Studies suggest that exposure to information and visits to zoos can positively impact children's knowledge and attitudes (Schram, 2011). However, there isn't enough evidence to support the idea that kids who have more contact with animals or information about them are necessarily more attentive or knowledgeable about animal emotions. There is a significant exception when it comes to the impact of having a companion animal. Research indicates a strong positive connection between children with pets and their sensitivity to animal emotional cues (Melson et al., 1991; Endenburg & van Lith, 2011; Poresky, 1996).

Furthermore, the quality of a child's relationship with their pet appears to be more important than the pet itself. Children who have a strong attachment to their pets exhibit greater empathy than children who don't have a pet (Endenburg & van Lith, 2011). Studies show that children who have a stronger bond with animals are more likely to learn about them and develop an increased awareness of the emotions that animals feel, which makes this bond essential. Based on these findings, we can expect direct experiences, like having a pet or regularly playing with animals, to be more strongly linked to accurate identification of animal emotions compared to indirect experiences, such as watching documentaries or reading educational books about animals – this is our fourth hypothesis. Making this distinction is important because how information is acquired and processed can influence the development of understanding and identification of animal emotions.

### **Enhancing Children's Animal Exposure and Giving Them Useful Knowledge About a Specific Species' Expressive Behavior**

According to Di Giorgio, Meary, Pascalis, and Simion (2012), human babies are predisposed to notice and favor the faces of humans over those of other animals. Thus, it will take them longer to become familiar with the characteristics of nonhuman faces. Having a pet in the house increases the child's exposure to animals and gives them pertinent knowledge about the expressive behavior of that species. The child's improved ability to interpret the expressive behavior of familiar species—like canids, felids, or birds—probably extends beyond the species to which they have been exposed, but rather to the taxonomic groups to which they belong. This is due to the generalization of learned stimuli. The problem with this logic is that children in our study saw orangutans and chimpanzees, two species of great apes. (Ílvia Rocha, Augusta Gaspar, Francisco Esteves, 2016)

Another idea is that having pets at home might help improve the ability to understand emotions. This could happen by enhancing basic skills like paying attention to faces, body expressions, or emotions, as well as being more empathetic or understanding others' perspectives. However, it's unclear if the accuracy of identifying emotions would be the same if the pet had different emotional behaviors, like an elephant or a zebra. Choosing great apes for the study was somewhat random, but it might have increased the chances of getting the emotion identification right. To really confirm if having pets helps in developing skills for understanding emotions in animals and maybe even in humans, future studies should repeat these interviews in front of other animal places and also when observing human groups, like in movies or at a playground (Rocha, Gaspar, Esteves, 2016).

According to Morrow (1998), people seem to value social support from animals at all stages of their lives. Children frequently say that their pet gives them comfort, unconditional love, and a place to go when they're upset (Covert et al., 1985). These relationships have also been connected to increases in self-esteem (McNicholas and Collis, 2001).

Therapy animal visits have been shown to reduce children's distress and their perception of pain following surgery, according to Hansen et al. (1999) (Sobo et al., 2006). For senior citizens, the value of social support from pets may be even greater. People's support systems and social networks may shrink as they get older. A study by Garrity et al. (1989) found that among older adults with fewer social connections, those who had a strong bond with a pet reported lower rates of recent illness compared to those who were less attached.

## Conclusion

Many children grow up with animals, especially pets, but in order to make sure that pet ownership is enjoyable for everyone, adults need to take an active role, have honest conversations, and make thoughtful plans. Caregivers continue to decide to integrate pets into their families in spite of the possible risks. A child receives important training in treating people with kindness and patience when they learn how to care for an animal. Research indicates that kids who have pets at home tend to have better immune systems and attend school more frequently. Educational settings also recognize the positive effects of interactions with animals on children. Recent developmental research has focused on the role of animals, especially pets, in child development. The data shows a positive connection between having a pet and feelings of importance, social competence, and self-esteem.

## References

1. Arkow, P. (Ed.) (1998). *Pet therapy: A study and resource guide to the use of companion animals in selected therapies* (8th ed.). Stratford, NJ: self-published.
2. Ascione, F. & Shapiro, K. (2009). People and animals, kindness and cruelty: Research directions and policy implications. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65, 569-587.
3. Ayodele, C. & Adebisi, D. (2013). Study habits as influence of academic performance of students nurses of Banquet State University. *International Journal of Nursing Science*, 5(2), 60-65.
4. Covert, A., Whiren, A., Keith, J., Nelson, C. (1985). Pet, early adolescents, and families. *Marriage Family Rev.*8:95-108.
5. Daly, B., & Morton, L. (2009). Empathic differences in adults as a function of childhood and adult pet ownership and pet type. *Anthrozoös*, 22, 371-382.
6. Di Giorgio, E., Meary, D., Pascalis, O., & Simion, F. (2012). The face perception system becomes species-specific at 3 months: An eye-tracking study. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 37, 95-99.
7. Endenburg, N. & van Lith, H.A. (2011). The influence of animals on the development of children. *The Veterinary Journal*, 190, 208-214.
8. Geerds, M., Van de Walle, G., & LoBue, V. (2015). Daily animal exposure and children's biological concepts. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 130, 132-146.
9. Kidd, A., & Kidd, R. (1996). Developmental factors leading to positive attitudes toward wildlife and conservation. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 47, 119-125.
10. Rocha, S. Gaspar, A., & Esteves, F. (2016). Developing children's ability to recognize animal emotions – What does it take? A study at the zoo. *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin*. <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/full/10.1079/hai.2016.0007>
11. McCune, S. Katherine A. Kruger, James A. Griffin, Layla Esposito, Lisa S. Freund, Karyl J. Hurley, Regina Bures (2014). Evolution of research into the mutual benefits of human-animal interaction. *Animal Frontiers*, Volume 4, Issue 3, July 2014, Pages 49-58, <https://doi.org/10.2527/af.2014-0022>
12. McNicholas, J. & Collis G. 2001. Children's representations of pets in their social networks. *Child Care Health Dev.*27:279-294.
13. Medin, D., Waxman, S., Woodring, J., & Washinawatok, K. (2010). Human-centeredness is Not a Universal Feature of Young Children's Reasoning: Culture and Experience Matter When Reasoning about Biological Entities. *Cognitive Development*, 25, 197-207.
14. Melson, G., Peet, S., & Sparks, C. (1991). Children's attachment to their pets: links to socio-emotional development. *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 8, 55-65.
15. Morrow, V. (1998). My animals and other family: Children's perspectives on their relationships with companion animals. *Anthrozoös* 11:218-226.
16. Myers Jr., O. (1996). Child-Animal Interaction: Nonverbal dimensions. *Society and Animals*, 4, 19-35.
17. Paul, E. (2000). Empathy with animals and with humans: Are they linked? Reviews and research reports. *Anthrozoös*, 13, 194-202.

18. Plowden, B. (1967). Children and their primary schools. A report of the central advisory council for education (England). London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
19. Poresky, R. (2015). Companion animals and other factors affecting young children's development. Taylor Francis Online. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.2752/089279396787001437?needAccess=true>
20. Schram, H. (2011). Looking at people looking at animals – version 0.3. An international bibliography on visitor experience studies and exhibit evaluation in zoos and aquariums. *EAZA Education Committee*.
21. Williams, J., Muldoon, J., & Lawrence, A. (2010). Children and their pets: Exploring the relationships between pet ownership, pet attitudes, attachment and empathy. *Education and Health*, 28, 12-15. Retrieved from <http://www.research.ed.ac.uk>
22. Wong, G., Greenhalgh, T., Westhorp, G., Buckingham, J., & Pawson, R. (2013). RAMESES publication standards: Meta-narrative reviews. *BMC Medicine*, 11 (2013), Article 20, 10.1186/1741-7015-11-20