

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES) DIFFERENCES IN PRESCHOOLERS' SOCIAL SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Socioeconomic status (SES) exert different influences on child development. However, very few studies had examined the effects of SES on positive socio-emotional development including social skills. Thus, this study aims to examine the level of social skills and explores the differences across SES.

Methodology: Parents of 339 preschoolers in Selangor, Malaysia were selected through stratified random sampling. The questionnaires were distributed to parents through pre-school children. In this study, the 34-items of social skills scale from Preschool and Kindergarten Behavioural Scale-Version 2 (PKBS-2) was used and descriptive and one-way Welch's F-tests analysis were conducted.

Findings: The study showed that the level of social skills was average. Analysis found that the preschoolers' social skills were differed significantly across maternal education, Welch's $F(2, 78.95) = 19.88, p < .0001$ and paternal education, Welch's $F(2, 78.95) = 19.88, p < .0001$. Moreover, there was a significant difference in social skills across parental income, Welch's $F(2, 83.48) = 13.59, p < .0001$.

Contributions: Knowledge of the level of pre-school social skills and the differences across SES can provide basic information and recommendations to the parents, teachers and authorities to improve preschoolers' social skills.

Keywords: Family income, parental education, preschoolers, social skills, Socioeconomic status (SES).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Good social skills are important skills needed to be equipped by everyone including children, adolescence and adult. People with adequate social skills are able to build a harmonious relationship in society. Children with high social skills are more adaptable in the social environment and will easily get peer-acceptance (Talib & Yunus, 2010). However, children with deficits social skills, often faced with peer-rejection and behavioural problems (Hay, Hudson, & Liang, 2010; Poulou, 2014), including aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity, anxiety and over-dependent on others. Besides, social skills deficits during childhood will lead to a range of high-risk behavioural problems at higher age such as crime, school dropout, dismissal and unemployment (Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2008; Niepel, 2011).

According to the Institute for Public Health (2015) report which evaluated four developmental categories namely speech/hearing development, social skills, fine motor skill and gross motor skills found that the percentage of children between the ages of 6 and 59 months who were having development delay was 2.8%. Of these percentages, the report found that the percentage of social skills development delay was the second highest (1.2%) after speech/hearing development (1.7%) and that percentage outweighed development of fine motor (0.7%) and gross motor (0.6%). This figure shows that out of every 100 children, there is one child who has delayed in social skills development which is higher than the development of fine motor and gross motor skills.

Furthermore, the 2015 National Health and Morbidity Survey report on children of the age of 5 to 15 years old showed that children of this age experience the highest rates of peer problems compared to behaviour problems, emotional problems and hyperactivity (Institute for Public Health (IPH), 2015). Problems with peers in the report include children's prefer to play alone, having at least one friend, being bullied by peers, being disliked by peers and being more comfortable with adults than peers (Goodman, 1997), which leads to issues of communication and interaction with peers that related to social skills deficiencies.

These two national reports have identified the existence of social skills problems in childhood. Therefore, the issue of social skills needs to be taken into account to ensure that the development of good social skills at all levels must be implemented. Attention should be given

to early childhood as early intervention is a good step in implementing good social skills as it will save time and have a lasting impact on the individual through adulthood (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011). As a first step in understanding the issue of social skills, information on the social skills level of preschool children in Malaysia should be studied before any intervention can be implemented.

Studies demonstrated that the socioeconomic status (SES) has been proven to have associations with various child development level (Erola, Jalonen, & Lehti, 2016; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Hassan & Rasiah, 2011; Ramsey, 1988). Related to SES, negative effects are likely to have long-lasting on the cognitive and non-cognitive development when poverty was experienced in childhood years, as compared to the poverty experienced later in life (Mistry, Biesanz, Chienc, Howes, & Benner, 2008). SES may exert different influences on child social skills through investments and socialization perspectives. The investments perspective proposes that a high family SES can invest more in their children's growth and development, provide good living facilities and environment on home learning (Li et al., 2016). While the socialization perspective explains the associations of family SES, parenting and children's development on the child's social skills level (Li et al., 2016; Mistry et al., 2008).

The family stress model (FSM) proposed by Conger and Elder, 1994, predicts that economic problems will lead to economic pressure, increased risk for emotional distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, anger, and alienation) and behavioural problems (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). Economical stress facing by low SES parents causes bad parenting practices towards their children and eventually, it contributes to the behavioural problems of the children (Kohen, Brooks-gunn, Leventhal, & Hertzman, 2002; Kiernan & Mensah, 2009) and social skill deficiencies (Carapito, Ribeiro, Pereira, & Roberto, 2018; Kroenke, 2008).

The high SES parents are found to adopts authoritative parenting styles (Kroenke, 2008; Rubin & Kelly, 2015) whereby the authoritative parenting is related to good child social development (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Connell & Prinz, 2002; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017b; Patterson, Debaryshe, & Ramsey, 1990). However, the lower SES parents are more authoritarian in parenting (Kroenke, 2008; Rubin & Kelly, 2015) whereby the harshness adopted in authoritarian parenting contributes to social skills deficiencies (Abu Taleb, 2013) and negative behaviour (Rinaldi & Howe, 2012; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Narine, Logie, & Lape, 2014).

In addition, children from low SES family usually reared in environments under poverty neighbourhood and may have few supportive social networks (Kohen et al., 2002). The low SES residential area is exposed to a high-risk environment and high rate of crimes (Duncan,

Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). These conditions will influence the behaviour and social skills of children in society (Kalff et al., 2001; Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011). In contrast, the high and middle SES usually have safer and convenient residential and school area (Duncan et al., 1994). The good social supports from the community such as family, friends and neighbours will benefit the child's social skills (Kohen et al., 2002).

Studies found that children from high SES experienced good developmental effects than children from low SES (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brophy-herb, Lee, Nievar, & Stollak, 2007; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a). However, these studies only focused on the effects of cognitive aspects (Christensen, Schieve, Devine, & Drews-Botsch, 2014), academic (Kumar, 2013), negative socio-emotional development such as behavioural problems (Bøe et al., 2014; Kalff et al., 2001; Kiernan & Mensah, 2009; Larson, Russ, Nelson, Olson, & Halfon, 2015; Letourneau, Duffett-Leger, Levac, Watson, & Young-Morris, 2013; Santiago et al., 2011) and ADHD (Schonberg & Shaw, 2007). Very few studies have examined the effects of SES on positive socio-emotional development such as social skills. In addition, previous studies showed inconsistent findings, with some studies found that there was an insignificant effect of SES to the social skills (Barbarin & Jean-Baptiste, 2013; Li et al., 2016). However, studies from Brophy-herb et al. (2007), Hartas (2011), Hosokawa and Katsura (2017a) and Ramsey (1988) showed significant aspects of SES to the child's social skills development.

Other studies also found different and inconsistent effects of SES on child development. A study conducted by Mollborn, Lawrence, James-Hawkins, and Fomby (2014) showed that family income gave significant effect to the social skills compared to other components. However, other studies found that family income did not have significant effects on early childhood development (Erola et al., 2016) and non-cognitive skills (Khanam & Nghiem, 2016). Moreover, research by Erola et al. (2016) conducted on 29282 children found that maternal education had a significant effect on child development compared to paternal education. The inconsistencies of the findings thus needed more studies, especially across culture and region.

The objectives of the study are to explore the level of child social skills and the differences of SES on child social skills level. The research questions for the current study are as follows:

1. What is the level of preschoolers' social skills?
2. Is there any significant difference in child social skills according to the level of parental education?
3. Is there any significant difference in child social skills according to the level of parental income?

Hypotheses are as follows: (1) preschoolers' social skills would be higher in children from parents with a higher level of education. (2) preschoolers' social skills would be higher in children from higher-income parents.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Social Skills and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Social skills are certain behaviours that lead to social reactions desired by individuals who initiate the interaction (Merrell, 2003). Social skills include interpersonal behaviour, self-reliance, academic-related skills, assertive behaviours, peer-acceptance and communication skills (Gresham & Elliott, 1987). In this study, social skills refer to the behaviour of preschool children encompassing three dimensions of social skills namely social cooperation, social interaction and social independence (Merrell, 2003). Social cooperation refers to cooperative and self-restraints behaviours and ability to follow adult's instruction; social interaction describes the social initiation behaviours includes the ability to obtain and sustain friendship and acceptance; while social cooperation reflects the behaviours in getting independence within the peer group such as confidence, assertiveness and ability to separate from caregivers.

Social development and the process of socialization of an individual begin from infancy which begin with early interactions with parents and then develops with increasing age and expansion of social networks (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). According to Jean Piaget in Theory of Cognitive Development, when children are between two and seven years old, children are egocentric. They cannot understand what other people are experiencing and seeing what they see and feel is not the same as what others feel.

According to Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (2007), in early childhood years, children involvement with adults and peers was through regular activity and play. At this age, they learn to initiate and actively engage in social interaction. Although infants around the age of one may have limited social space, they are able to give smile and show intended body gesture towards their play partner, showing interest in socializing by paying attention and responding to the behaviour of play partners. Toddlers (ages 1-3) are already able to adapt their behaviour to their

peers, imitate peers' behaviours and realized their behaviour was imitated, are able to take a turn, help, share and respond appropriately towards their peers' behaviours (Rubin et al., 2007).

When children are sent to caregivers in a childcare centre or attend preschool education, their social environment is expanding to their peers and teachers. With social development, children also begin to develop a sense of self which is the belief in them as a unique individual that includes attitudes, behaviours and values (Kail, 1998). This self-esteem or self-concept is built around social backgrounds such as family, religion, nation and country. Child self-concept is based on concrete, clear and present (Kail, 1998).

In addition, the process of socialization develops into the ability to differentiate oneself from those of others (Frønes, 2016). As they grow up, children are able to express their differences, understand others' views, and build their perception of others. Children in pre-operational developmental stages of around two to seven years of age are more self-centred and think that other people see things as they see it. As their thinking levels improve, they begin to understand other people's differences and are able to put themselves in other people's situations. At this point, they begin to feel empathy, concern, respect for differences and understand equality (Kail, 1998).

By understanding oneself and others, children are ready to build relationships and interactions with peers (Kail, 1998). Interaction and peer relationships are important to children as they are elements that help promote social competence, self-understanding of relationships with others and good friendships (Rubin, Wojslawowicz, & Oh, 2007).

Although children experience social development as well as their physical, emotional and cognitive development, some conditions and situations may hinder their social development. Cultural, family and environmental factors also affect children's development including the socioeconomic status (SES) (Eamon, 2001; Nangle, Hansen, Erdley, & Norton, 2010; To, Helwig, & Yang, 2016; Tompkins, 2015).

The SES is a social position (level of education, income or job) or a construct consisted of several dimensions of the social position such as educational, occupational and economical level (Bornstein, 2002). Entwisle and Astone (1994) suggested that the SES is measured separately to see the effects contributed by the respective dimension. In this study, the SES is measured separately according to the level of parental education and the level of family income. These two components of SES were chosen since many studies showed the important effects of both components in early childhood years (Erola et al., 2016; Hartas, 2011; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a) compared to the parental occupation (Erola et al., 2016).

Studies have found that socioeconomic status affects early childhood development (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Santiago et al., 2011). For example, Hosokawa and Katsura (2017a) study found that low SES children had low social skills and high behavioural problems, but children from high SES had high social skills and less behavioural problems. The study also found that the level of parent education is a significant predictor of social skills while the level of maternal education does not significantly contribute to the social skills of children. Most of the children from high and middle-SES are more adaptable in school because the values practised in the school may be similar to the educational values at home (Talib & Muslim, 2007).

2.2 Social Skills in Malaysian Education

In today's 21st century, social skills such as interacting skills, self-confidence and self-control, are needed in a global world that connecting people across the globe. The importance of social skills has been stressed in 21st-century education that makes social skills as one of the skills that must be sown among students. In Malaysia, 21st Century Learning (PAK21) is introduced by the Ministry of Education by highlighting student-centred learning processes based on communication, collaborative, critical thinking and creativity elements as well as the application of moral and ethical values. The communication and collaborative elements are aimed for the development of good social skills among students through the application of teamwork skills and communication skills.

In the National Standard Preschool Curriculum (KSPK) revision 2017, has been explicitly incorporated the 21st-century skills. Among the goals of the 21st-century skills incorporated in the curriculum are the preschoolers would have the ability to communicate and express their thoughts, ideas and information with confidence and creativity; verbally and in writing, as well as have a skilful teamwork ability, that enable them to work effectively, are responsible, respect and appreciate the contributions of each team member, have interpersonal skills through collaborative activities and are good leaders and team members. The values highlighted in the goals showed the need for having a good socio-emotional development among preschoolers including good social skills.

However, the implementation and the support needed to achieve the goals are the main issues in Malaysia, especially in early childhood education. A study by Sukani and Karim (2018) found that the level of teaching and learning of PAK21 among preschool teachers are still at a moderate level although their understanding of PAK21 is good. Besides, the use of play as a learning strategy (that can contribute to the development of social skills) is also not

fully practised (Bakar, 2010) due to some issues such as limited play space and lack of teachers' knowledge and skills that eventually lead to teacher-centred learning in the classroom (Puteh & Ali, 2013). In addition, the issues of current preschool education in Malaysia are still about emphasising of academic aspects whilst neglecting the other aspects (Majzub, 2013; Ting, 2018) including the socio-emotional development (Mohamed & Toran, 2018).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey to gather information on the preschoolers' social skills and its differences across SES. The data were analysed in the quantitative method.

3.2 Measurement

A set of questionnaires were distributed to parents through pre-school children. The questionnaires consisted of Part A and Part B. Part A contained demographic information of children (i.e. age, gender, race) and their parents (i.e. age, race, education, income). The level of parental education was categorised into three levels; (a) lower secondary and below, (b) high secondary, (c) tertiary education for each mothers' and fathers' education. While, the parental income is calculated by summing up both income of mothers and fathers. The level of parental income was then divided into three categories; low-income (RM 3860 and below), middle-income (RM 3861-RM 8319) and high-income (RM 8319 and higher) based on the Report of Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey 2016 (Department of Statistics Malaysia).

Part B of the questionnaire contained a scale of social skills from Preschool and Kindergarten Behaviour Scales-Second Edition (PKBS-2) (Merrell, 2002). The 34-items of social skills scale from PKBS-2 comprised of 3 dimensions (Social Cooperation, Social Interaction and Social Independence) was used to measure the social skills of the child. The numbers of items for Social Cooperation, Social Interaction and Social Independence dimensions are 12 items, 11 items and 11 items respectively. All items used the 4 points Likert Scale i.e. (0) Never, (1) Rarely, (2) Occasionally and (3) Always. To get the score of each child's social skills, the score of every item were summed up. The higher score indicates higher social skills that the child had. This instrument had been translated into Bahasa Malaysia and repeatedly translated by two translator experts in the study conducted by Osman (2015). Table 1 shows the example of items in each dimension of social skills in PKBS-2.

Table 1: Items of Social Skills Dimension in PKBS-2

Dimension	Items	Examples
Social cooperation	2, 7, 10, 12, 16, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32	Is cooperative.
		Follows instructions from adults.
		Shows self-control.
Social Interaction	5, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24, 27, 33, 34	Tries to understand another child's behaviour.
		Participates in family or classroom discussions.
		Asks for help from adults when needed.
Social Independence	1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 18, 26, 31	Works or plays independently.
		Smiles and laughs with other children.
		Plays with several different children.

An adequate Cronbach's alpha coefficient was recorded for the sample. The Cronbach's alpha values obtained were 0.90 for total social skills, 0.84 for social cooperation, 0.80 for social interaction and 0.69 for social independence. Hence, the instruments had fulfilled the reliability test and could be used in the study.

3.3 Respondents of the Study

There were 106 classes of government preschools in Hulu Langat District in 2018 (Statistics from Selangor State Education Department), with 2650 children enrolment, whereby 1825 children were from the urban area and 825 children were from the rural area. In this study, the table suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was used in the selection of the sample. According to the table, based on 2650 population, the recommended minimum sample size is 338 samples.

In selecting the sample from the population, the stratified random sampling method was used. In the first stage, the population of the study had been divided based on location (urban and rural). Next, preschools selection was made randomly from each of the location's group. A total of 339 preschool children in Hulu Langat District were selected which 231 preschoolers (68.1%) were from urban preschools and 108 preschoolers (31.9%) were from rural preschools. The inclusion criteria were the following: the children's age was five or six years old and living with both parents. The exclusion criteria were the following: known physical and mental health problems and stay with a single parent or other caregivers.

3.4 Ethical Consideration

Prior to data collection, approval was sought from Educational Planning and Research Development (EPRD), Ministry of Education Malaysia to conduct the study through

government preschools in Hulu Langat District in Selangor, Malaysia. Following this approval, additional approvals were obtained from Selangor State Education Department and Hulu Langat Education Office.

Then, school principals of the selected preschools were contacted to enquire permission for their preschool participation in the study. With the approvals from the principals, the class teachers were given envelopes containing a statement regarding the background of the study, the aim of the study and a set of questionnaires, to be passed to parents through preschoolers. In the statement, the anonymity and confidentiality of the data given were also been stated. The parents were given a week to fill in the questionnaires and were asked to return the completed questionnaire to the class teachers.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 21 for Windows. Skewness and kurtosis testing (Table 2) indicated that the preschoolers' social skills according to the parental level of education and income were normally distributed. However, the Levene's test revealed that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met, $p < .001$ for maternal education and parental income, and $p = .046$ for paternal education. Therefore, Welch's Adjusted F ratio was used with null hypotheses that there were no significant differences between the mean of preschoolers' social skills across SES. Post-hoc comparisons, using the Games-Howell post-hoc procedure, were conducted to determine which pairs of the level of education and income differed significantly as suggested by Field (2009).

Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis Testing of Preschoolers' Social Skills Based on SES

	Level	Skewness	Kurtosis
Maternal education	Lower secondary and below	-.472	-.291
	High secondary	-.254	-.384
	Tertiary	-.208	-.307
Paternal education	Lower secondary and below	-.283	-.032
	High secondary	-.415	-.102
	Tertiary	-.393	-.338
Parent income	Low (< RM3860)	-.330	-.242
	Middle (RM 3860.01 – RM8319)	-.127	-.227
	High (> RM8319)	-.268	-.825

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Respondents Demographic

Respondents of the study consisted of 339 preschoolers aged 5 and 6 and their respective parents. A total of 231 preschoolers (68.1%) from urban preschools and 108 preschoolers (31.9%) from rural preschools participated in this study. The total number of boys was 191 (56.3%) while the girls were 148 (43.7%). Based on the number of siblings, 108 preschoolers (31.9%) had siblings less than 3 people, 225 preschoolers (66.4%) had siblings between 3 to 6 people and only 6 (1.8%) had siblings more than 6 people.

Based on mother's demography, 145 (42.8%) were under 35 years old, 181 (53.4%) were 35-45 years old and 13 (3.8%) were above 45 years old. While most of the fathers were 35-45 years old (214 people, 63.1%), 90 (26.5%) aged 35 and 35 (10.3%) were above 45 years old. Table 3 presents the demographic information of children and their parents involved in this study.

Table 3: Demographic information (N=339)

Variables	N (%)	
Age (year)		
5 years	56 (16.5%)	
6 years	283 (83.5%)	
Gender		
Boys	191 (56.3%)	
Girls	148 (43.7%)	
Race		
Malay	331 (97.6%)	
Indian	2 (0.6%)	
Others	6 (1.8%)	
Preschool Location		
Urban	231 (68.1%)	
Rural	108 (31.9%)	
Parents Characteristics		
Age (year)	Mothers	Fathers
<35 years	145 (42.8 %)	90 (26.5%)
35 - 45 years	181 (53.4 %)	214 (63.1%)
> 45 years	13 (3.8 %)	35 (10.3%)
Level of Education		
Lower secondary school and below	31 (9.1%)	54 (15.9%)
High secondary school	188 (55.5 %)	190 (56.1%)
Tertiary education	120 (35.4%)	95 (28.0%)
Occupation Status		
Employed	160 (47.2 %)	336 (99.1 %)
Unemployed	179 (52.8 %)	3 (0.9 %)
Parental Monthly Income		
Low-income	210 (61.9%)	
Middle-income	100 (29.5%)	
High-income	29 (8.6%)	

4.2 Research Question 1: What is the Level of Preschoolers' Social Skills?

Descriptive analysis was used to determine the level of child social skills. The level was interpreted based on the functional level proposed by Merrell (1994) as in Table 4:

Table 4: Functional Level of Social Skills Scale

Functional Level	Range score of social skills' dimension			Range of total social skills
	Cooperation	Interaction	Independence	
High	35-36	31-33	32-33	95-102
Average	25-34	23-30	21-31	76-94
Moderate deficit	20-24	15-22	20-25	59-75
Significant deficit	0-19	0-14	0-19	0-58

Table 5 showed the frequencies and percentage of child social skills according to the functional level. The finding showed that there was a similar pattern of the level of social skills dimension (social cooperation, social interaction and social independence). There were 9.7-13% preschoolers had a high level of social skills, about 58.4-69% preschoolers were at the average level, 15.6-25.7 % preschoolers were at a moderate deficit and 2.4-5.6% preschoolers were at significant deficit level. According to the total score of social skills, most of the preschoolers (N=203, 59.9%) had an average level of social skills, 36 preschoolers (10.6%) had a high level of social skills and the rest of the preschoolers were in the level of moderate deficit (N=85, 25.1%) and significant deficit (N=15, 4.4%).

Table 5: Level of Preschoolers' Social Skills (N=339)

Functional level	Social Skills Dimension			Total of Social skills N (%)
	Cooperation	Interaction	Independence	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
High	33 (9.7%)	44 (13.0%)	41 (12.1%)	36 (10.6%)
Average	234 (69.0%)	198 (58.4%)	208 (61.4%)	203 (59.9%)
Moderate deficit	53 (15.6%)	87 (25.7%)	82 (24.2%)	85 (25.1%)
Significant deficit	19 (5.6%)	10 (2.9%)	8 (2.4%)	15 (4.4%)

The descriptive analysis based on mean and standard deviation was also done to analyse the level of child social skills. Based on Table 6, the findings showed that the level of social skills of preschoolers is average. The three dimensions of social skills (social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence) are also at an average level.

Table 6: Level of Preschoolers' Social Skills

Social skills	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Social Cooperation	28.31	4.88	Average
Social Interaction	24.91	4.77	Average
Social Independence	27.49	3.58	Average
Total Social Skills	80.71	11.63	Average

4.3 Research Question 2: Are There any Significant Differences in Preschoolers' Social Skills According to the Level of Parental Education?

The one-way ANOVA of the preschoolers' social skills from mothers with lower secondary and below, mothers with high secondary and mothers with tertiary education differed significantly, Welch's $F(2, 78.95) = 19.88, p < .0001$. The estimated omega squared ($\omega^2 = .10$) indicated that approximately 10% of the total variation in preschoolers' social skills is attributable to differences between the three-level of maternal education. See Table 7 for the means and standard deviations of preschoolers' social skills for each of the three-level of maternal education.

Table 7: Preschoolers' Social Skills Based on Level of Maternal Education

Level of Maternal Education	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Lower Secondary & below	31	72.61	14.16
High Secondary	188	79.18	11.65
Tertiary	120	85.20	8.90

Games-Howell post hoc analysis showed that preschoolers from mothers with tertiary education ($M = 85.2, SD = 8.90$) had statistically significant higher social skills compared to preschoolers from mothers with high secondary education ($M = 79.2, SD = 11.65$) and mothers with lower secondary and below education ($M = 72.6, SD = 14.16$) at the $p < .0001$. The effect sizes for these two significant effects were 0.58 and 1.06, respectively. Additionally, the preschoolers' social skill from mothers with high secondary education was statistically significantly higher than mother with lower secondary education at the $p = .05$, with an effect size of 0.51. These results are given in Table 8.

Table 8: Post Hoc Results for Preschoolers' Social Skills by Maternal Education

(I) Level of maternal education	(J) Level of maternal education	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Lower Secondary & below	High Secondary	-6.56*	-13.11	-0.02
	Tertiary	-12.59*	-19.11	-6.06
High Secondary	Lower Secondary & below	6.56*	0.016	13.11
	Tertiary	-6.02*	-8.79	-3.26
Tertiary	Lower Secondary & below	12.59*	6.06	19.11
	High Secondary	6.024*	3.26	8.79

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to paternal educational level, the analysis showed that the level of social skills of preschoolers from fathers with lower secondary and below education, fathers with high secondary level and fathers with tertiary education differed significantly, Welch's $F(2, 127.88) = 7.69, p = .001$. The estimated omega squared ($\omega^2 = .04$) indicated that approximately 4% of the total variation in preschoolers' social skills is attributable to differences between the three-level of paternal education. The means and standard deviations of preschoolers' social skills for each of the three-level of paternal education are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Preschoolers' Social Skills Based on Level of Paternal Education

Level of Maternal Education	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Lower Secondary & below	54	75.13	13.93
High Secondary	190	80.89	11.18
Tertiary	95	83.51	10.00

Games-Howell post hoc analysis showed that there was no significant difference between preschoolers' social skills from fathers with tertiary education ($M = 83.51, SD = 10.00$) and preschoolers from fathers with high secondary education ($M = 80.89, SD = 11.18$). However, the preschoolers from fathers with high secondary education had statistically significantly higher social skills than preschoolers from fathers with lower secondary and below education ($M = 75.13, SD = 13.93$) at the $p = .018$ with an effect size of 0.46. Additionally, the preschoolers' social skill from fathers with tertiary education ($M = 83.51, SD = 10.00$) was statistically significantly higher than fathers with lower secondary and below education ($M = 75.13, SD = 13.93$) at the $p = .001$ with an effect size of 0.69. These results are given in Table 10.

Table 10: Post Hoc Results for Preschoolers' Social Skills by Paternal Education

(I) Level of paternal education	(J) Level of paternal education	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Lower Secondary & below	High Secondary	-5.77*	-10.70	-0.83
	Tertiary	-8.38*	-13.52	-3.23
High Secondary	Lower Secondary & below	5.77*	0.83	10.70
	Tertiary	-2.61	-5.70	0.48
Tertiary	Lower Secondary & below	8.38*	3.23	13.52
	High Secondary	2.61*	-.48	5.70

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

4.4 Research Question 3: Are There any Significant Differences in Preschoolers' Social Skills According to the Level of Parental Income?

The analysis showed that there was a significant difference in preschoolers' social skills according to the level of parental income, Welch's $F(2, 83.48) = 13.59, p < .0001$. The estimated omega squared ($\omega^2 = .07$) indicated that approximately 7% of the total variation in preschoolers' social skills is attributable to differences between the three-level of parental income.

Games-Howell post hoc analysis showed that preschoolers from high-income ($M = 84.86, SD = 8.67$) and middle-income ($M = 84.33, SD = 8.59$) had statistically significant higher social skills than preschoolers from low-income ($M = 78.41, SD = 12.64$) at the $p = .003$ and $p < .0001$, respectively. The effect sizes for these two significant effects were 0.60 and 0.55, respectively. However, there was no significant difference in preschoolers' social skill from high- and middle-income status.

Table 11: Post Hoc Results for Preschoolers' Social Skills by Parental Income

(I) Level of income	(J) Level of income	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low	Middle	-5.92*	-8.81	-3.04
	High	-6.45*	-10.89	-2.02
Middle	Low	5.92*	3.04	8.81
	High	-0.53	-4.95	3.89
High	Low	6.45*	2.02	10.89
	Middle	0.53	-3.89	4.95

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings showed that preschool children have an average level of social skills for all three dimensions (social cooperation, social interaction and social independence). The research by Maleki, Chehrzad, Leyli, Mardani, and Vaismoradi (2019) in Iranian preschoolers social skill and Benavides-nieto, Romero-lópez, Quesada-conde, and Corredor (2017) in Spain also found that the level of child social skills was at the average level. This study also found that the level of children's social interaction was lowest compared to other dimensions and approaching a moderate deficit. Similarly, Major, Seabra-Santos, and Albuquerque (2017) also found that Portuguese children's social skills were at the average level and social interaction is the lowest. The low level of social interaction shows that preschool children are facing problems in interacting with peers and adults. This finding shows the need for social skills especially the social interaction among preschool children to be improved.

The study also found that there were significant differences in preschoolers' social skills based on SES (parents' educational level and family income). This finding was consistent with other research that found the significant effect of SES on child social skills (Brophy-herb et al., 2007; Hartas, 2011; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Maleki et al., 2019; Ramsey, 1988).

Based on parental education, both maternal and paternal education showed significant differences in child social skill. Researches had found the proportional association of parental education with child development. With higher education background, the parents have the ability to process information, have the tendency to acquire more knowledge and skills regarding the development of children, which, in turns, give good effects to their parenting practices as well as to their child development (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Maleki et al., 2019).

For maternal education, there were very clear differences in child social skills in the three-level of education. Preschoolers 'with maternal from lower secondary and below had the lowest social skills while preschoolers' from maternal tertiary education had the highest social skills. This finding is similar to the study by Maleki et al. (2019) in Iranian preschoolers whereby there were also significant differences between every level of maternal education. Education affects the way mothers interact with their children. Mothers with high educational level have knowledge in handling children behaviour (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Maleki et al., 2019), less use of negative punishment (Bøe et al., 2014) and have better social environment than mothers with low educational background. Thus, these factors might give effect to the way of mothers' interaction in upbringing their children and in turns, toward child social skill.

Besides, our findings also showed that there was a significant difference in preschoolers' social skills based on paternal education. However, some of the effects of the paternal educational level were not significant across the levels. There was no significant difference in preschoolers' social skills between fathers with tertiary education and high secondary level. This means that the preschoolers from fathers with tertiary education and high secondary background had a similar level of social skills. The significant difference of preschoolers' social skills only occurred between fathers with high secondary and lower secondary and below which the preschoolers from fathers with high secondary had higher social skills compared to the other level.

These findings indicated that the effect of paternal educational level only can be seen between higher and lower secondary level whereas the effect of maternal educational level can be seen in each level of education. This result might indicate that the maternal educational level has more effect on preschoolers' social skills than paternal educational level. The differences of association of maternal and paternal education with the preschoolers' social skills may be caused by the differences of paternal and maternal roles in the non-western region whereby the mothers were more involved in child-rearing and engaging in educational activities and child's welfare (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017a; Ruiz-ortiz, Braza, Carreras, & Muñoz, 2017; Tulananda & Roopnarine, 2001). Furthermore, the differences of association of paternal and maternal education also might be related to the age of the child whereby findings found that the maternal education had more effect during childhood years compared to paternal educational, however, the paternal educational effect was more obvious in children at a later age (Erola et al., 2016).

Our study also found that there were significant differences in preschoolers' social skills according to family income. The significant difference was found between high- and medium-income with a low-income level. This finding indicated that the children from high- and medium-income had higher social skills than children from a low-income family. This finding supported by Talib and Muslim (2007) which stated that most children from high- and middle-income family were more adaptable compared to children from a low-income family. The adaptable children will easily build peer relationship and get peer-acceptance. Thus, this condition will lead to the good development of social skills among children.

Besides, children from high- and medium-income family are having more good social skills due to the ability of their parents to invest more in their children's growth and development, provide good living facilities and environment (Li et al., 2016). In addition, more educated and high-income parents are more likely to adopt an authoritative style (Rubin & Kelly, 2015) whereby this style contributes to the development of good social skills (Baumrind

1967, 1971; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017b; Kazemi, Solokian, Ashouri, & Marofi, 2012; Rubin & Kelly, 2015).

In contrast, the association of low-income families with the low level of social skills might due to unstable economic status that leads to instability of parents' emotion such as the stress of poverty (Kohen et al., 2002; Kiernan & Mensah, 2009). The parents' stress might cause them to interact negatively and used authoritarian styles in upbringing their children such as using harsh punishment that finally will give a negative effect to the development of child social skills (Carapito et al., 2018; Rubin & Kelly, 2015). Moreover, the low-income family might live in high crime residential and school area thus gives a negative effect on child development (Duncan et al., 1994).

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study found that the SES based on parental education and income level had significant associations with the preschoolers' social skills. The maternal educational level has more effects on preschoolers' social skills compared to paternal educational level. Preschoolers from high- and middle-income family had higher social skills compared to children from a low-income family.

However, the current study has some limitations. First, the information about preschoolers' social skills was taken from the parents' perspective. Parents have a higher perception of social skills and children's behaviour problems than teachers (O. Major, Seabra-Santos, & P. Martin, 2015). In addition, parental observations of children's social skills are limited at home. Therefore, future studies should seek information from the perspective of preschool teachers to assess children's social skills at school. This is due to children may behave differently at home and at school. In addition, the increasing number of children attending preschool education and the longer time they spend in school is the justification for considering the importance of teachers' perspectives in assessing children's social skills development. In addition, teachers have the advantage and knowledge that they can evaluate a large number of children's samples and observed children's behaviour.

The second limitation is the current study was limited to children living in Selangor State and the majority were from Malay families, which the findings cannot be generalized to all ethnic groups. Therefore, future studies should address this gap. As Malaysia is a multicultural and multiracial country, further studies are suggested to be conducted across cultures and races as different culture or races might have different types of social skills that are valued.

The third limitation in this study was, only a few variables were focused. Further research can be conducted by expanding the scope of the study to include variables that have the potential to contribute to children's social skills such as other demographic factors (i.e gender and age), children's personality, type of education (government/private) and preschool quality.

Overall, this study recognized the importance of parental education and family income on children's social skills. The knowledge of the level of child social skills and the differences of SES in child social skills can provide basic information and recommendations to the parents, teachers and the Ministry of Education, Malaysia in effort to improve the social skills of children as preparation in providing individuals with the competency of 21st-century skills. More attention should be given to children from lower education and low family income in enhancing the development of social skills in children.

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