

# DELVING INTO PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' APPROACHES AND KNOWLEDGE ON SOCIAL SKILLS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL READINESS

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**Abstract:** *The adage 'it does not take too much schooling to become a preschool teacher' needs addressing. Teachers play a pivotal role in educating preschoolers' educational journey, by preparing children for overall readiness to school and to learn. The first objective of this qualitative study is to discover if the preschool teachers' teaching approaches on social skills. Secondly, it is to determine teachers' knowledge and understanding on the relationship between social skills and school readiness towards preschoolers' readiness for future success. The data retrieved were from two Malaysian preschools with ten teachers as respondents and interview questions were recorded according to protocols. The interviewing and observation session took over a period of three days for two weeks for each school. The study's conceptual 2 framework discusses on the two facets of social skills namely communication and emotion, with theories and approaches to nurture school readiness. The finding through interviews and questionnaire found that teachers from School A and B understood and has knowledge of social skills. However, during numerous visits to both school researcher's findings indicated there is a difference in teaching approaches between School A and B. In School A, researcher saw the application of the Montessori approach, whilst in School B researcher found there was no specific approach. Henceforth, the study observed the relapse between social skills and school readiness due to lack of teaching approaches. Thus, reintroducing and reshaping social skills curriculum with theories and approaches that relates to school readiness. These contributions allow preschoolers to enjoy the benefit of learning with knowledgeable teachers' curriculum and teaching methods that has been up-scaled to meet the needs of today's children.*

**Keywords:** *preschool teachers' knowledge, preschoolers, social skills, school readiness.*

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## Introduction

Teachers are often described as one that is committed, inspiring, warm and caring, who aids students to gain knowledge with competence through virtue of their teachings. Henceforth, during early childhood environment children ought to be led by teachers that are able to create a conducive learning settings according to Dewey (Balakrishnan & Thambu, 2017). Education begins from preschool where teachers educate young children to improve their quality of life. Inspirational teacher's sequel child's productivity, creativity, independence, and social courage that are detrimental for a child's future. A child's competency to problem solving, gift to work with others, talent to communicate, attentiveness, creativeness and cognitive improvement are prompted by social skills (Courtier, et al., 2021).

In this modern proficient age, teachers ought to be properly trained with necessitous accreditation. Teachers' readiness applies to their proficiency status and challenges they faced which is consistent with their knowledge, experience and aptitude (Yusof, Ismail; 2021). Basically, an early childhood teachers' expertise and their proficiency procreate the pendulum that swing towards a child's drastic progression and accomplishment which is essential (Nurani, et al; 2020). This same research points to teachers' teaching method and fundamentals consequence for excellent tutelage. The research's aim is to examine teachers' understanding on the dimensions of social skills, that leans towards a child's wittiness and progression acquisition. Hence, outcoming a broadminded child, through their experience, and innovative teaching techniques.

Teacher's holds the key for a child's development in this present-day learning settings, by acquainting and being abreast with new progressive child friendly ideas with teaching approaches. A teacher is one that divulges information or skills to one or more persons. Teaching is an art of creativity and innovation, whilst the science of teaching is to impart the teaching of rationality, technicality and practicality, aiming towards goals achievements (Rajagopalan, 2019). The adverse effect of teachers that are not well versed in these areas, may hamper children's knowledge and social skills experience, which then hinders children's goals (Derapa & Mohamed, 2018; Derapa et al., 2020). This is further aggravated when parents and stakeholders whom are intense on children's good grade academic performance.

Therefore, the original believes that preschool as a place of interaction and making friends takes a change. Instead, preschools are the start of fulfilling parents' expectations, of children that can read, write, arithmetic's (3R's), which is undeniably important. Parents' attitude change, effects social, emotional and soft skills as this subject suffers a setback and are neglected (Gregoriadis, et al., 2013; Taha, et al., 2020). Reviving social skills learning is by ensuring on teachers' expertise, experience, training and comprehension as it heightens school readiness. An important signature for school success are pre-schoolers' attitude that shows readiness upon primary school admission (Barbu, et al., 2015). According to Gresham and Elliot (1990) social or prosocial skills is the learning of acceptable social behaviours that allows one to blend with others yet steering away negative social behaviours. Understanding social skills enables one to display the behaviour of being concerning, putting oneself in another man's shoe (Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018).

In 2019, UNICEF postulated that the qualities of a child's ability to be attentive, sitting at designated area, raising hands before speaking, knowledge of alphabet and numbers are indication of school readiness (Needham & Ülküer, 2020). The significance of preschool is to lay the roots of pre-academic, social and future over-all life skills. Preschool is the stage for

cognitive and social skills development; hence the combination lays the foundation to future academic triumph (Rakap, et al; 2018). Question arises, if these children are adequately prepared to cope with the changes in differing school environment after preschool? Are they ready to move to different settings, different educators, different friends, different teaching techniques and methods? In short are preschoolers armed with school readiness?

A research in Australia demonstrated that the conclusion of early education is to consequence a child that has pride, confidence, self-acceptance, positiveness, empathy, respect with ability to interact (Gregory, et al; 2021). Social skills experience leads to school readiness, which is preparing children to proper school admission as they are receptive and interested to learn (Children's School Readiness Based on Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions, 2018). An observation by UNICEF (2012), submitted that children should enter school ready to succeed. Hence the child's future educational journey is in the hands of teachers who will brace them for proper school. The objective of this qualitative study being to; 1) to delve into preschool teachers' teaching approaches on social skills. 2) to explore teachers' understanding on the relationship between social skills and school readiness for future success.

### Literature Review

Children's phase of 0-6 years age is pivotal and idyllic for their development and growth. Preschools act a place of transition, where children spend time before proper schools, therefore it is crucial, as a time of adjustments for children themselves, parents, teachers and schools (Needham & Ülküer, 2020). Malaysia's Ministry of Education 2020 (MOE) envisage future citizens that are academical successful, has 5 personality, with social skills and cognitive knowledge (Shaari & Ahmad, 2016). Hence preschool teachers are required to attain a PERMATA certificate that is a compulsory requirement by the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Early research affirmed that school success and school readiness resulted to academic achievement. Preschools and stakeholders however, favours and value language and cognitive skills during preschools as a notion that links to academic triumph (La Paro & Pianta, 2013, High, 2021). This then effects social skills education as it is overlooked, and labelled as not crucial, which is parents' firm stance on 3R's. Parents and schools stand firm is this believe even though many research indicated that social and emotional skills act as indicators that prompt to future academic success (Collie, et al; 2018).

Another research advanced that social and emotional skills in a child's first formal learning are related to future learning triumph (Gregory, T., Dal Grande, E., et al 2021). Preschool is often referred as a child's first school experience, first stage of socialization outside the comfort of home and family. Consequently, if not under the hands of trained and qualified teachers it can be devastating for children. Therefore, in the best interest of their children, parents, and community, ought to investigate teachers' qualification as their comprehension elevates a child's progress (Zdanevych, et al, 2020; Cinantya et al., 2019).

The learning of cognitive and social skills development like communication, behaviour, emotions, self-esteem, interaction, awareness, competence and more during preschools are the roots to future academic and social well-being (Cristovao, et al; Rakap, et al; 2018). Further understanding on social skills gifted children's cognitive aptness and affluency that begins from young to adolescence (Rehan, 2022). A similar research by Sucuoglu and Cifci (2004), mentioned that a child's pragmatic aptitude sequel potential academic and social relationship

are the outcome of social skills education (Rehan, 2022). Consequently, the study looks into the followings;.

## **Social Skills**

### **Communications Skills**

Communication is about expressing one's needs, and is children's first social skills experience that has occurred at home and later in preschool (Hutchins-haavisto, 2018). Further research also accounted that a child's adeptness to fend off differences are through their coherent communication skills (Jurevičienė, et al; 2018). Hence, Chomsky quantified that language enables a child to communicate (Banga, & Suri; (2015). Communication is the dove of peace, when interacting between one-another occurs, by conforming to social behaviour guidelines (Takahashi, et al., 2015). Another research mentioned that cultural divergence can be resolved through communication thus preventing delusion (Askeland, 2019). Therefore, like most skills it begins from home to school, the constructivism of reinforcing and amplifying children's communication skills ought to be strengthen (Williams, 2017). Social skills is one's competence in starting and up-keeping positive social rapport with peer relationship, accepting school and social environment efficiently (Sharma, et al 2016). In summing communication is when teachers talk with the child, and not talk to the child. Talking with the child is about respecting, appreciating their views, values and introducing peer consideration. Whereas, when teachers talk to the children it appears to be a condescending attitude, where children must listen and not given the chance to be heard (MacDonald & Carroll, 1992). In the long-term communication is the essence of a two-way conversation whereby benefitting the listener and the presenter thus, gaining knowledge, create understanding and forging harmonious living in a multicultural world.

### **Emotional Skills**

Integrating of intelligence to emotion, is one's skill to correlate past experiences that relates to emotions, by responding befittingly according to situation encountered, a view by psychologist Mayer and Salovey. This research continued by pointing 7 Darwin's perception on one's need for emotional feelings to survive. This same research observed that emotional intelligence is gauging the emotions of others and one-self, thus tagging these emotions fittingly by thinking and behaviour thus avoiding prejudices (Cahya & Ningsih, 2020).

Previous research mentioned social and emotional skills development are imperative, as good social and emotional skills conjectures school readiness (Denham, 2006) and upshot academic outcome (Walker, et al;2004). Emotions are affiliated to the 'how' and the 'what' that effect a child's learning (Zins, et al; 2007). More studies describe social skills as shaping-up relationship with adults and peers (Cristóvão, et al; 2020). Additionally, teachers strive to initiate excellent learning through social and emotional skills to resolve problematic conducts (Cristóvão et al., 2020).

## **Theory and Approaches**

### **John Dewey**

John Dewey's visualised preschool teacher as an agent of social learning in a natural social background. He is pragmatist, progressivist, philosopher, an educator and a social reformer (Williams, 2017). Dewey's approach is a child-centred and pragmatic theory that believed a child's learning is inspired by their preconceived beliefs and knowledge. Educators ought to

allow children to partake and experience school happenings by allowing children to gain their own experience that will increase children's self-knowledge. Hence, children should not learn by listening to educators' reliving their past experiences, instead relate their own experience. John Dewey, noted that school environment is a natural setting, where a child learns and enjoy with meaningful experiences through playing and participating.

Herewith, children get to associate the present occurrence with the past happening thus making sense of the present and past (Williams, 2017). Child's learning of new information may be linked to previous knowledge and processing of individual's mental depiction. Previous research referred preschool as an establishment of social learning whereby, children encounter developmental age friendly experiences. It focuses on educational curriculum where children can experience effective learning educational process and how they enjoy successful learning (Schiro, 2013; Williams, 2017). Thus, a child's behavioural change is brought about by a child's own experience and social interaction, hence the apex of experiential learning during schooling arena.

### **Reggio Emilia**

A constructive, environmental and child centred friendly approach by Loris Malaguzzi, the founder, named his approach as Reggio Emilia after a town in northern Italy. This approach formulated the ideals predicated on a coexistent knowledge of children's needs, interest, and differences, believing that children must participate in the classroom for learning to take place. (Helm, & Katz, 2001; Birinci, 2018). In order for learning to transpire, modification and active actions has to occur for young kids to get involved (Gardner & Jones, 2016).

Reggio Emilia's approach considers children's pre-existing skills to be refined by allowing them to experience painting, music, photography, movies, and what media has to offer, allowing reinforcement and amplifying of previous knowledge (Williams, 2017). Previous research indicated that children may take the form of dancing, drama, and sculpturing as a means of communication and expressing themselves. Gresham and Elliot (1990) predicated that Reggio Emilia's approach guide children with the affability of good manners, ability to communicate, integrate with peers, is mindful of others, and their culture too (Gürbüz & Kıran, 2018). This approach is all about the different needs of each child and what they like and enjoy (Helm & Katz, 2001; Birinci, 2018). Most importantly, Malaguzzi encourages schools and parents everywhere to pay attention to the method of education practiced in preschools

### **School Readiness**

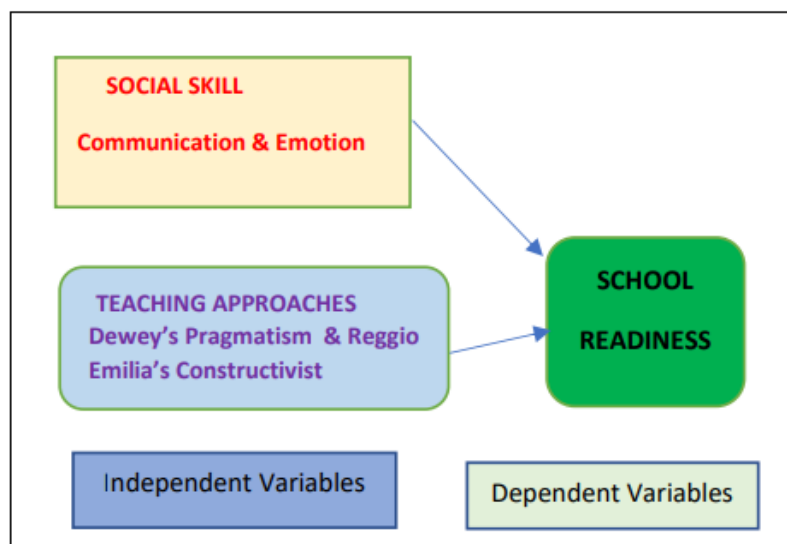
This study continues by probing into UNESCO's 2030 educational framework that defines school readiness as 'the achievement of developmental milestones across a range of domains, including adequate health and nutritional status, and ageappropriate language, cognitive, social and emotional development' (UNESCO, 2016: 39). The domino effect of when a child possess school readiness, leads to readiness for school, out-coming readiness to learn, with the finale that up-shoot academic accomplishment (Kagan, 1990; "Children's School Readiness Based on Teachers' 9 and Parents' Perceptions," 2018). An interesting observation by Brown (2010), where school readiness is referred as a 'fluid construct' influence by the child's society (Kay, 2018).

School readiness is achievable with teachers' knowledge and teaching practices that backs-up children's learning and school readiness in the present educational requirements. A study by Bransford and friends specified that school readiness advances creative thinking, self-

management, goals accomplishment, independency, and understanding (Bransford, et al;1999; Pekdogan & Akgul, 2016), having acquired a higher command of intelligence with age. Past research further implied school readiness improves self-management, academic attainment, communication skills, and peer interactions Therefore school readiness influence school success and children’s accomplishment by achieving the objectives of educational bodies (Greenwood 1991; Keogh 1992; Ladd, et al; 1999). Pekdogan & Akgul, 2016).

This study investigates if educationalists are conscious that a child’s competency on cognitive ability, maturity, on-the-job, learning social skills, and self-adjustment experience relates and is labelled as “school readiness”. Keeping in mind that a child’s age is also an indicator for readiness (Encyclopaedia of Early Childhood Development, 2017). A child that possesses social skills is one that is able to walk with confidence, and is able to fend-off pessimistic response (Ergenekon, 2012; Ergin & Ergin, 2017).

## Methodology



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The study uses a qualitative approach, to uncover the research objectives on importance of teachers’ approach used, their social skills knowledge for school readiness, with ten respondents. Data were retrieved from two preschools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, through interviews and questionnaires. The research expects teachers with innovative effective teaching techniques. Teachers that allow children to express by communicating and has emotional skills, in line for school readiness and academic triumph, thus concludes this research.

This study aims firstly to delve into preschool teachers’ teaching approaches on social skills. Secondly, is to find out teachers’ knowledge and understanding on the relationship between social skills and school readiness towards preschoolers’ readiness for future success. The numerous visits to both schools’ where researcher’s findings indicated there is a difference in teaching techniques between school A and B. In school A, researcher saw Montessori approach application towards an objective by explaining. Whilst in school B researcher found that teachers adhered to PERMATA curriculum 2007 (Taha et al., 2020) The study’s prominence is driven by beliefs, values, logical thinking, and intelligence, with the objective that is to propose

to early childhood bodies to reconsider the importance of social skills, and that it should begin in preschools. In order to meet this goal, teachers teaching approaches or theories practiced in preschools should support values of social skills for school readiness. Respondents' profile, and general behavior, culture understanding, communication, and attitude assist data collection. Teachers' inadequacy to collaborate and construct social skills knowledge and experience hinders their foresight to capitalize the affiliation of social skills and school readiness. Therefore, the yardstick to measure preschool teachers' knowledge are their teaching approaches through defined organized teaching strategies.

### **Findings**

The study hopes to discover a collaborative, constructive, reflective, inquiry and integrative approach application in teachers' teaching method during the course of this research. Thus, outcoming teachers' that are proficient, and professional in the classroom they teach. The finding discovers that teachers in both schools understood the precepts of social skills. However, the study spotted the disparity between these two schools as;

School A teachers are conscious the relationship between social skills and school readiness. Researcher views that with the in-house training it supports a child-friendly learning environment with proper child-staff ratio that exudes social skills. The researcher noticed that school A teachers receive in-house training, more years of experience with qualifications. The research observed children were orderly, yet friendly, are inquisitive yet respectful, as teachers had meaningful deliverance technique. The researcher witnessed that these children were focused on the days' lesson, listening to teachers' explanation, its relevance, because teachers allowed inquiry learning, and answering to children's questions. The finding also indicated that children in this school were emotionally involved in their aim to do school work, enjoying school environment, and are emotional confident to mingle and are expressive not only to teachers, friends but to visitors. These social skills learnings and experience indicate a child's learning for school readiness

Whereas, in School B teachers has minimum qualification, detecting less years of teaching experience. The study uncovered there was no teaching approaches used, instead teachers here observed the procedures of PERMATA. During the visits researcher noticed that the classroom management was lax, whereby children were jumping over friends that was sleeping and was easily distracted when there was visitors. Teachers were unable to conduct an encouraging, interesting and captivating classroom hence resorting to the use television as a mode to teach singing and exercise. Here researcher saw happenings of social skills were not captured by teachers through communication or emotional experience thus losing the 'moment' of experiential teaching.

### **Discussion**

The aim was to identify teachers to knowledge on social skill. Proceeding to investigate preschool teachers approaches and strategies that will facilitate the implementation of social skills to enhance school readiness with high-quality teaching strategies. The researcher identified and suggest the domains of approaches by Vygotsky, Dewey, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, with social skills like communication, emotion and more as indicator in the process of change or improvement to preschools curriculum. This investigation echoes the findings from previous research towards insight to the use of approaches, that points to better young children outcome rather than the regular use of teaching methods. Thus admitting that there is no single

teaching approach that can assure better student outcomes, but various research underlined the use of approaches facilitate learning (Le Donné et al., 2016).

During the interview, researcher observed in School A teachers' Montessorian approach on social skills aspects like communication and emotional conduct was noticeable in a session. Here, teachers listen to children's interpretation, which initiate conversion, and teachers' facial expression that was encouraging therefore building up children's competence. Whilst in School B, teachers were attentive towards performing the daily lesson plan, by showing how to do. Teachers missed out to explain the values of the exercise as children were participating aimlessly, without understanding the importance of the exercise.

A standard teacher training for the primary teaching and learning has to be a progressive journey. Thus, a thematic and designation for a) learning, activities and teaching methods, b) defining indicators of teaching approaches to magnetise young children's learning, c) teaching of social skills values that heightens school readiness, d) determining the implementation of these themes nationwide to arouse child's attentiveness towards learning and school readiness. Therefore, based on the findings of the study school readiness is not entirely dependent on the child but is transferred to teachers, parents, school and even community. Such an endeavour proposes refining approaches, policy improvement and training which is the subject of the study's discussion.

### Conclusion

The finding seems to suggest the reintroduction and reshaping social skills curriculum with theories and approaches by reopening the 'hidden' social skills curriculum. The study's contribution and compulsion are to ascertain and strengthen teachers' teaching approaches, knowledge on social skills that shows a relationship to school readiness. This study's contribution is envisaging preschoolers the enjoy and benefits of learning with knowledgeable trending teachers' teaching techniques as they face today's technological children. Knowledgeable teachers are the main actors on the school stage, to infuse preschoolers' readiness and academic achievements by collaborating, reflecting and integrating theories and teaching approaches, to inspire children's learning.

Early childhood educational bodies should be awakened and realize the finale to educational success is to be in possession of rounded young children with personality, as well as academic achievement. The tunnel vision of graded academic system success are past perceptions that must be done away with. Instead, tiered teaching approaches by knowledgeable teachers on social skills tenets will stem-up school readiness pathway and finally academic success. The study therefore, envisions to borne future young educated citizens with social skills talents to live harmoniously in diversity within the nation and the world.

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