

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**MALAYSIAN PRE-SCHOOL
TEACHERS' APPROACHES IN
NURTURING SOCIAL SKILLS
AMONG PRESCHOOLERS FOR
SCHOOL READINESS**

RAFIAH BINTI KASSIM

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

March 2025

ABSTRACT

Social skills play a vital role in the early developmental stages of children, as deficiencies in these skills can result in social isolation, diminished self-esteem, and adverse effects on both emotional and physical well-being. This research examines the ways in which teachers impart social skills within kindergarten settings by analyzing their understanding of social skills and school readiness, as well as their instructional methods aimed at equipping preschoolers for a successful transition to school. The study was conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed limitations on preschool selection and participant availability. Ultimately, only two kindergartens consented to take part, resulting in the involvement of ten teachers who expressed their willingness to participate. Qualitative design using semi-structured interview were adopted to collect rich data from the respondents. The research questions are as follows: What are teachers' understanding of the dimensions of social skills with preschoolers? How can a preschool teacher's knowledge of school readiness help prepare preschoolers for formal education? How do teachers' teaching approaches affect the development of social skills in preschoolers for school readiness? Finally, what challenges do teachers encounter in nurturing social skills when teaching preschoolers? The primary themes emerging from teachers' perceptions of social skills in preschool-aged children include communication, emotional confidence, respect, and the capacity to adhere to instructions. Thematic analysis revealed that preschool educators' comprehension of school readiness plays a crucial role in preparing children for formal education, especially when teachers demonstrate knowledge, motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the researcher noted a preference for teaching methods that emphasize motivational strategies and child-centered approaches. The analysis also highlighted that the challenges in promoting social skills are significantly affected by the attitudes of both teachers and parents. This research highlights the critical role of repetitive instruction and comprehension, coupled with practical application, in equipping educators and parents to tackle challenges. It advocates for teachers to develop social skills and knowledge necessary for preparing children for their educational journey. The findings indicate that it is vital to focus on improving social skills among kindergarteners through the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies, which can be effectively realized by ensuring that teachers possess sufficient knowledge of social skills and relevant qualifications. The Malaysian preschool system may tend to overlook the integration of social skills in their educational practices, primarily due to the significant focus on cognitive development and academic success. Educators may feel inadequately prepared or lacking in the necessary skills to teach these competencies, as they have not received training in social skills during their own educational and professional journeys. It is imperative for the Ministry of Education to embed social skills instruction within the preschool curriculum, while parents should also emphasize the importance of fostering these skills in their children. In summary, effective social skills are crucial for readiness for school. Children who exhibit strong social competencies are more likely to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially, thus setting the stage for a successful future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

BISMILLAHHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

The success and outcome of this study required a lot of guidance and assistance from many people, and I am extremely fortunate to have had support all along. Whatever I have achieved is only due to such guidance and assistance and I sincerely thank them for their help. I am indebted, grateful and wish to thank Dr Fatin Mohd Radzi, my main supervisor, and Associate Professor Dr Sharifah, my co-supervisor, especially for their valuable guidance. In their busy schedule, their feedback, tolerance, patience, endurance, motivation and respect for each other were my beacon. Their knowledge and experience were instrumental in the completion of the dissertation.

I would not forget to remember Dr Siti Akmar Abu Samah and Professor Dr. Norlia Kassim, for their timely support, insight, and continuous guidance. Their critical questions and comments pushed me to sharpen my thinking and depth of this study. My being here is through the kind effort and perseverance of Dato Professor Dr Hj Kamaruzaman Jusoff, which I heartily thank him for.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my ailing husband Rahim, sons Najib, Nazri and Nizam and my daughters-in-law Ili and Riana. Thanking Mira for assisting me technologically regardless of the time of day. Thank you, Eda, Siti, Ayep and Zana. I also wish to thank my dear 'twin' Tessa Smith and my teacher Dorothy Gale, not forgetting the dearly departed Wayne Smith from down under.

I dedicate this endeavour to my grandchildren Cik Mia, Cik Adam, Cik Aidan and Cik Alan, this is to remember me by. Remember there is no age limit to acquiring knowledge thus, do not make excuses. Never give up, and do not be ashamed to acquire wisdom from someone younger. Remember to 'tunduk macam padi as you 'Ojigi' in respect when respect is due.

May Allah SWT bless my parents for their wisdom and belief in education. To my late father, against all odds you brave the criticism by sending me to a Convent school. Alfatihah.

Thank you

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
 CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Study	6
1.2.1 School Readiness	6
1.2.2 Social Skills for School Readiness	8
1.2.3 Teachers and Social Skills	11
1.3 Problem Statement	14
1.4 Research Objectives	20
1.5 Research Questions	20
1.6 Significance of The Study	21
1.6.1 Parents and Parenting Skills	21
1.6.2 Preschool Teachers	22
1.6.3 Curriculum Design	22
1.6.4 Body of knowledge	23
1.7 Limitations of The Study	24
1.7.1 Accessibility of Kindergartens During COVID-19	24
1.7.2 Availability of Potential Participants During COVID-19	24
1.7.3 Small Sample Size Restrict Generalization	25
1.7.4 Limited Choice of Teachers to Interview	25
1.7.5 Potential Bias in Analysing Qualitative Data	26
1.8 Definitions of Terms	27

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Children in pre-school today are the nation's future young citizens. It is their right to attend pre-school for their readiness before entering the doorsteps of primary school, secondary school, college, and university. Research shared that teachers are responsible for enhancing students' potential and for recognising students as social beings (Wang, 2020), with the introduction of social skills. Pre-school is important as children build up their social, emotional, cognitive, and competence skills that encourage "one-on-one" interaction. Children learn positive behaviours amongst peers, in an educational program taught by qualified and knowledgeable teachers (Ng & Bull, 2018; Alzahrani, Alharbi, & Aloduan, 2019).

In educating young children, their learning is to be laid on a strong and solid foundation by educators who are knowledgeable and experienced. The learning is not to be compromised by weak and shifting grounds of educators who are not only inexperienced but also one that lack knowledge. A strong foundation is essential for children to develop the skills necessary for successful adulthood. Social skill development during kindergarten is vital, however, the challenge comes with individual occurrence (Flynn et al, 2015; Zhu et al., 2021). Previous studies by Bandura (1973) have shown that children's future with social skills can significantly be predicted by the discipline and punishment imposed by parents (Zhu et al., 2021).

Society should be concerned about the social skills and academic setbacks that are due to the poor understanding of the importance of social skills education. Educators should not be presumptuous to assume that all young learners entering school know or have social skills qualities, besides giving attention to knowing the child's background. A nation should avoid having her young live in isolation, failing in school, and being one with delinquent behaviour. Hence, the development of social capabilities is to begin at an early age making pre-schools the vital life setting for social skills learning. A study conducted in Japan mentioned that children are social learners. This same study indicated that experiences like making friends, playing together, caring, playing in a group, working together, not being aggressive as well as being concerned (to seek help