

Socio – Emotional Competence among Homeschooled and Traditionally Schooled Children: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study examined the differences in socioemotional skills between children who were homeschooled and those who attended standard schools. The ability to comprehend, regulate, and communicate emotions while establishing and preserving healthy relationships is known as socioemotional competence. Personal accountability, positive thinking, goal-directed behaviour, social awareness, decision-making, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, and self-management are its eight essential elements. A quantitative comparative design was used in the investigation. Convenience sampling was used to choose the sample, which consisted of 62 children aged 5 to 8. The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) K–8 exam was given by parents. Using SPSS version 20, descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test were used to analyse this data. The socio-emotional competence of homeschooled children ($M=45.55$, $SD=8.67$) and traditionally schooled children ($M=47.84$, $SD=10.99$) did not differ statistically significantly ($t(60)=-0.911$ at $p>.05$). This implies that school environments may not be the only factors influencing early childhood socioemotional outcomes.

Keywords: *Socio-emotional Competence, Traditional schooling, Homeschooling, DESSA, Emotional development*

1 Introduction

The comprehensive concept of socio-emotional competence can be characterised by the abilities required for social interactions, behaviour adaptability, and efficient emotion control. It requires skills including self-awareness, empathy, discernment, and the capacity to establish and maintain meaningful connections (LeBuffe et al., 2018). Early and middle childhood skill development is proven to be a significant predictor of future social adjustment, psychological health, and academic success (McClelland et al., 2000; Tarasova, 2016).

The educational environment has a big impact on socioemotional development. Understanding how different educational contexts impact children's social and emotional development is crucial since children spend a large portion of their early years in structured learning situations. Traditional education provides a structured environment with frequent peer interaction, cooperative learning, and formalised programs for social-emotional learning, all of which support the development of socio-emotional abilities (Gaspar et al., 2018; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005).

On the other hand, homeschooling offers a flexible, individualised educational approach where children receive the majority of their training outside of the traditional classroom from their parents or private tutors. Although this approach allows curriculum personalisation and often lowers academic stress, concerns have been raised regarding the restricted opportunities for peer socialisation it may offer (Medlin, 2013). However, research indicates that children who are homeschooled typically demonstrate great social and emotional skills, often surpassing their peers who attend traditional schools in a number of areas (Adkins, 2004; Medlin, 2006; Wolfe, 2019).

Despite a growing quantity of research on the socio-emotional consequences of children in various educational situations, there are still few comparisons between homeschooled and officially schooled children in the Indian context. Furthermore, few studies have used standardised assessment tools like the DESSA to examine these competencies across both populations. The current study compares the socio-emotional competence of 5–8-year-old homeschooled and conventionally schooled children using a validated, norm-referenced measure in an effort to close this gap. It has significant implications for practice and policy to comprehend how the educational environment influences socioemotional development. The study's findings can guide educators in developing socioemotional learning programs, help parents make decisions, and support legislators in ensuring equitable developmental outcomes in a range of educational contexts.

The study also helps eliminate common misconceptions about homeschooled children's social skills.

2 Review of Literature

When analysing the development of socio-emotional competence in elementary school pupils, Tarasova (2016) found no significant difference in competence levels across grade levels, which is contrary to the expected developmental trajectory. Maleki et al. (2019) evaluated preschoolers' social skills using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). They discovered that the majority of the children had mediocre social skills and that there was minimal correlation between the assessments made by parents and teachers. McClelland et al. (2000) identified learning-related social skills as critical markers of early academic progress, highlighting the importance of socio-emotional development in educational settings. Additionally, Hansenne and Legrand (2012) demonstrated a positive correlation between children's academic success, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

The literature on homeschooling frequently discusses the idea that children who are homeschooled are emotionally and socially secure. Adkins (2004) found that homeschooled teenagers frequently outperformed their peers who attended traditional schools in addition to demonstrating adequate social skills and emotional intelligence. Similarly, Medlin (2006) discovered that students who were homeschooled perceived themselves as more cooperative, powerful, compassionate, and self-controlled than their peers in public schools. Wolfe (2019) found a significant correlation between trait emotional intelligence and attitudes toward social isolation among 8–12-year-old homeschooled adolescents in Alaska, suggesting that higher emotional intelligence may serve as a protective factor against sentiments of social exclusion in this group.

In traditional educational environments, peer interaction and cooperative learning—which are usually seen as essential for socio-emotional development—are arranged. As demonstrated by Gaspar et al. (2018), school-based socio-emotional therapies have a positive effect on children's interpersonal and personal skills. Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi (2005) found a correlation between the quality of the school environment and students' motivation and experience, highlighting the impact of institutional structure on emotional involvement. Furthermore, Al-Elaimat et al. (2018) discovered a positive correlation between democratic parenting—a style commonly associated with parental engagement in both home and school environments—and greater emotional intelligence in all domains in kindergarteners.

3 Method

3.1 Objectives

- To find out the difference in socio-emotional competence among homeschooled and traditionally schooled children.
- To find out how many children needed further instructions for developing social and emotional skills.

3.2 Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant difference in socio-emotional competence between homeschooled and traditionally schooled children.

H₁: There is a significant difference in socio-emotional competence between homeschooled and traditionally schooled children.

3.3 Sample

The sample consist of 62 children (35 boys, 27 girls) aged 5–8 years . Participants were equally divided between the two educational groups (n = 31 per group). Convenience sampling method was used. Data was collected from primary caregiver of children(mother's).

3.4 Data and Source of Data

Primary data was collected through structured google form the primary caregivers(mother) of children of homeschooled and tradionally schooled children in Kerala (India) between the ages of 5-8. A sociodemographic data sheet and the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA; Naglieri et al., 2014) were given. Before participating in the survey, each participant was provided with consent form which explained the purpose of the study and inquired about their willingness to participate. They were also assured that their responses would be kept confidential.

3.5 Instruments Used

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). The DESSA is a 72-item standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses the social-emotional competencies that serve as protective factors for children in kindergarten through the eighth grade. The DESSA, created by Jack A. Naglieri, Valerie B. Shapiro, and Paul A. LeBuffe, attempts to determine children's strengths in important areas of their social and emotional well-

being as well as areas in which they might require more assistance. Self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, goal-directed behavior, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, decision-making, and positive thinking are the eight essential domains that are covered by the DESSA. The DESSA is a useful tool for educational institutions and organizations that support social-emotional learning (SEL) because these groups correlate with the skills of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Research and empirical investigations have shown that the DESSA is a very valid and reliable measure in terms of both reliability and validity. It has good reliability and strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients usually above .90. The DESSA has criterion-related validity in its ability to predict children's social and academic results, while convergent validity is demonstrated by its relationships with other recognized measures of social-emotional skills. All things considered, the DESSA is regarded as a reliable and strong tool for evaluating children's social-emotional skills.

4. Data Analysis

SPSS Version 20 was used to analyze the data. For every variable, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated. Group differences in socio-emotional competency scores were examined using an independent samples t-test. A $\alpha = .05$ was used as the significance level.

5. Result

Table 1: Age of the child (N = 62)

Age (years)	n	%
5	1	1.6
6	29	46.8
7	23	37.1
8	9	14.5
Total	62	100.0

Note. Children aged 6 years constituted the largest subgroup (46.8%).

Table 1 shows, children aged 6 years constituted the largest proportion of the sample (46.8%), followed by 7-year-olds (37.1%), 8-year-olds (14.5%), and 5-year-olds (1.6%).

Table 2: Gender of the child (N = 62)

Gender	n	%
Girls	27	43.5
Boys	35	56.5
Total	62	100.0

Table 2 shows the gender distribution. Boys consists of 56.5% of the sample (n = 35) and girls 43.5% (n = 27).

Table 3: Family Structure (N = 62)

Family Structure	n	%
Joint family	15	24.2
Nuclear family	41	66.1
Single-parent family	6	9.7
Total	62	100.0

Table 3 indicates that the majority of children resided in nuclear family households (66.1%), followed by joint families (24.2%), and single-parent families (9.7%).

Table 4: Level of Socio-Emotional Competence in Homeschooled Children (N = 31)

Level	n	%
Strength	2	6.5
Typical	22	71.0
Need for Instruction	7	22.5
Total	31	100.0

Note. Levels are based on DESSA standardized scores.

Table 4 indicates the great majority (71.0%) of homeschooling kids exhibited typical socio-emotional skills according to developmental expectations. There was a minor number (6.5%) that rated as Strengths and 22.5% who required more lessons.

Table 5: Level of Socio-Emotional Competence in Traditionally Schooled Children (N = 31)

Level	n	%
Strength	4	12.9
Typical	20	64.5
Need for Instruction	7	22.6
Total	31	100.0

Note. Levels are based on DESSA standardized scores.

Table 5 reveals that 64.5% of traditionally schooled children demonstrated typical competence levels, 12.9% scored in the Strength range, and 22.6% were identified as requiring additional instruction, a distribution very similar to the homeschooled group.

Table 6: Mean, standard deviation and t-score of socio-emotional competence among homeschooled and traditional schooled children

Group	N	M	SD	T(60)	p
Homeschooled	31	45.55	8.67	-0.911	.366
Traditionally Schooled	31	47.84	10.99		

Note. $p > .05$.

Table 6 shows the mean value, standard deviation and t-value. For homeschooled children the mean score on DESSA was 45.55 (SD = 8.67) as compared to 47.84 (SD = 10.99) for traditionally schooled children. The independent samples t-test revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups, $t(60) = -0.911$, $p = .366$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted

6 Discussion

The present study aimed to compare socio-emotional competence among children aged 5-8 years old being schooled at home and in regular schools. One of the main findings was that there was no significant difference between the socio-emotional competence of the two groups of children ($t(60) = -0.911, p > .05$). Potential explanatory mechanisms are taken into consideration and this conclusion is examined in relation to previous research.

The view that early childhood socioemotional development is influenced by factors other than the educational setting is raised by the lack of a significant difference between the groups. Both groups' DESSA scores were largely usual, indicating that the majority of children in both settings are developing socioemotional skills within typical developmental ranges. This finding lends credibility to the theory that socioemotional development is influenced by a range of factors outside of the traditional school context, including parental practices, family dynamics, and community involvement (Goodman et al., 2015).

The new findings align with previous research showing homeschooled children do not have socioemotional disadvantages when compared to their peers who attend traditional schools. In terms of social skills and emotional intelligence, homeschooled children frequently outperformed those who attended traditional schools, according to Adkins (2004). Similarly, Medlin (2006) found that homeschooled children perceived themselves as cooperative, aggressive, and compassionate. The current study supports these findings by demonstrating comparable group means on a behaviourally anchored, standardised measure.

Furthermore, Wolfe (2019) found that among Alaskan homeschooled students, higher trait emotional intelligence was associated with lower levels of social isolation, suggesting that homeschooled children may develop compensatory socio-emotional skills. The number of children in the "Need for Instruction" category in the current study was nearly equal for both groups (22.5% homeschooled vs. 22.6% traditionally schooled), underscoring the parallels in socioemotional profiles.

Numerous factors could account for the absence of group differences. First, as homeschooled children in the current sample may have access to sufficient peer connection through extracurricular activities, community programs, or cooperative learning networks, any

possible shortcomings in peer socialisation may be lessened. Second, close parental involvement in homeschooling settings may provide a solid emotional basis that fosters socioemotional growth (Al-Elaimat et al., 2018). Third, the developmental impacts of the structured social-emotional learning programs that are increasingly available in ordinary schools may be consistent across contexts (Gaspar et al., 2018). Finally, because socio-emotional competences at this time are strongly influenced by family and home setting, the sample's very young age (5–8 years) may indicate that disparities owing to the school environment have not yet manifested.

These findings have significant ramifications for parents, educators, and legislators. First of all, these findings show that, given the right socialisation strategies, children can acquire socioemotional skills comparable to those of their classmates in regular institutions. According to the statistics, a sizable portion of the kids in each group (about 22%) need further socioemotional skills training. The findings are in favour of equitable access to socioemotional learning resources for all teaching approaches.

7 Limitations

A number of restrictions must be taken into account while analysing the results. The results' external validity and statistical power were weakened by the small sample size ($N = 62$). Convenience sampling may have increased selection bias and reduced the sample's representativeness. Because the study was conducted in a small region of Kerala, India, its external validity was restricted. There is a chance of reporting bias because data was only collected from moms and the opinions of fathers, educators, and kids themselves were excluded. Because of the cross-sectional design, causal inference is not feasible. Finally, it is impossible to completely rule out the possibility that social desirability had an impact on parent scores on the DESSA.

8 Conclusion

The DESSA test was used to assess the socio-emotional skills of 62 children between the ages of 5 and 8 who were homeschooled and those who attended traditional schools. The findings of an independent samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups' overall socio-emotional competence ($t(60) = -0.911$, $p > .05$). Both groups displayed similar distributions of skill levels, and the majority of the children in each group performed within the normal range.

These findings further contribute to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that homeschooled children do not experience socio-emotional disadvantages when compared to their peers who attend traditional schools. The results challenge conventional wisdom and suggest that early socioemotional development may be more influenced by other contextual factors, such as the family environment and parenting practices, than by the educational environment.

Given its importance as a predictor of long-term well-being and academic success, future research should continue examining the contextual factors that support or impede the development of socio-emotional competence in a range of educational environments. The current study provides an initial empirical foundation for such research in the context of Indian schooling.

Future research should use more geographically diverse samples to increase generalisability. Longitudinal techniques may allow for the examination of developmental trajectories in socio-emotional competence across educational contexts throughout time. Multi-informant approaches that incorporate parent and teacher ratings as well as kid self-report would improve measurement validity. Research looking at specific socio-emotional competence subdomains separately (e.g., self-management, social awareness) may demonstrate differential consequences not captured by composite scores. Future studies should also examine the ways in which extracurricular activities, peer network size, parenting style, and other mediating factors contribute to the explanation of socio-emotional outcomes in various school contexts.

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