

Breaking the Cycle: How Parenting Interventions Can Mitigate Socioeconomic Disparities in Emotional Development

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Abstract: *Children's emotional development is a critical determinant of their overall well-being and future success. While socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting styles are known to influence emotional growth, their combined effects remain underexplored. This study employs a quantitative approach, using correlation and regression analyses to examine data from a sample of children and their families. The results reveal significant positive associations between SES and emotional development, as well as between parenting styles and emotional health. Notably, SES exerts a slightly stronger influence than parenting practices, though positive parental involvement remains a key factor. These findings underscore the need for integrated interventions addressing both economic stability and parenting support, particularly for disadvantaged families. Schools and community programs should prioritize educational resources and emotional support for at-risk children. Additionally, economic empowerment initiatives should be complemented by parenting education campaigns. Future research should incorporate contextual variables such as parental stress and cultural influences to further elucidate the mechanisms shaping emotional development.*

Keywords: Emotional development, socioeconomic status, parenting styles, child well-being, quantitative analysis, intervention strategies

1. Introduction

This study examines the critical relationship between family socioeconomic factors including income, parental education, and professional roles and child-rearing methods in shaping emotional development during early childhood (ages 3–6). While prior research has often analysed these elements in isolation, this investigation adopts an integrated approach, assessing how parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful) interact with socioeconomic conditions to influence children's emotional health, social skills, and self-regulation. The background establishes the foundational role of emotional development in lifelong well-being and underscores how disparities in income and parenting practices may contribute to divergent developmental trajectories. A key gap identified is the lack of holistic studies examining the synergistic effects of these factors. The problem statement further emphasizes the scarcity of empirical work exploring how socioeconomic and parenting dynamics jointly predict emotional outcomes in early childhood. Guided by explicit research objectives and questions, this study employs a quantitative design incorporating parent surveys and teacher evaluations. Its findings aim to inform evidence-based strategies for parents, educators, and policymakers to better support emotional growth in young children. While the

study offers actionable insights, its cross-sectional methodology and geographic limitations are acknowledged, highlighting the need for future longitudinal and culturally diverse research.

Background of the Study

Early childhood emotional development constitutes a foundational determinant of lifelong psychosocial functioning, with empirical evidence consistently demonstrating dual modulation by socioeconomic factors and parenting practices (Denham et al., 2012; Bradley & Corwyn, 2016). Socioeconomic status (SES) operates through material and psychosocial pathways to shape developmental contexts (Conger et al., 2010), while parenting styles differentially predict emotional regulation capacities (Pinquart, 2017). Notably, authoritative parenting demonstrates protective effects against SES-related disadvantages (Zhang et al., 2020). This study systematically investigates the intersectional effects of SES indicators (income, education, occupation) and Baumrind-derived parenting typologies on emotional development outcomes in preschoolers, addressing critical gaps in developmental psychopathology literature.

Statement of Research Problem

While early childhood emotional development fundamentally shapes regulatory capacities, social competence, and resilience (Bradley & Corwyn, 2016; Pinquart, 2017), critical gaps persist in understanding the interdependence of socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting practices in shaping these outcomes. Current literature predominantly examines these factors in isolation (Dearing et al., 2016), neglecting their synergistic effects across diverse socioeconomic contexts. Studies correlate low SES with emotional difficulties (Mistry et al., 2010) but rarely analyze how parenting styles mediate/moderate these effects, particularly the viability of authoritative parenting in resource-constrained settings (Elam et al., 2017). Research often dichotomizes economic status (Conger et al., 2010), overlooking how discrete components (education, occupational stability) differentially predict outcomes. Minimal attention to cultural/environmental moderators limits the generalizability of existing frameworks. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the transactional relationships between multidimensional SES indicators, parenting typologies, and emotional development in preschoolers, with implications for targeted policy interventions.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the differential contributions of socioeconomic indicators (parental education, household income, occupational status) to emotional development outcomes in children aged 3-6 years.
2. To assess the comparative effects of Baumrind's parenting typologies (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) on early childhood emotional regulation and social competence.
3. To elucidate the mediating role of parenting styles in the relationship between family socioeconomic characteristics and emotional development during the preschool period.

Research Questions

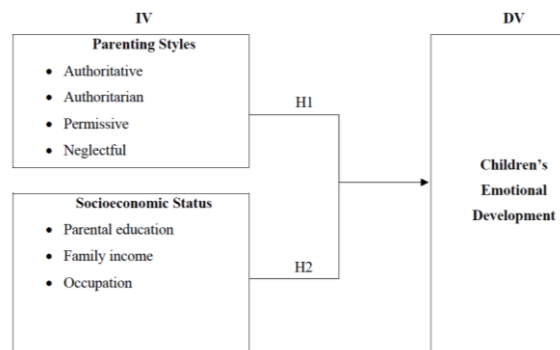
1. To what extent do specific socioeconomic components (income, education, occupation) independently and collectively predict variations in early childhood emotional development?
2. How do distinct parenting styles differentially associate with (a) emotional regulation capacities and (b) social competence in preschool-aged children?
3. Through what mechanisms do socioeconomic factors shape parenting practices, and how do these mediated pathways ultimately affect emotional development outcomes?

Significance of Research

This study explores the joint impact of socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting styles on early childhood emotional development, integrating Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Baumrind’s Parenting Styles Theory (1967, 1991). By examining these factors holistically, the research advances understanding of how household environments shape children’s emotional resilience, self-regulation, and social skills. The findings offer practical insights for parents, educators, policymakers, and child psychologists. Parents gain strategies to support emotional growth across economic contexts, while educators can design inclusive classroom programs. Policymakers and social workers may use the evidence to develop targeted interventions, such as parenting support initiatives and community services, to enhance child well-being.

Research Framework

This study incorporates Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1988) to examine how early caregiver-child bonds shape emotional development. Secure attachments, fostered by warm, responsive (authoritative) parenting, enhance emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and social competence. In contrast, neglectful or authoritarian parenting—marked by low emotional responsiveness often leads to insecure attachments, resulting in emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and reduced empathy. The theory enriches the analysis of family dynamics and parenting styles, particularly in low socioeconomic (SES) contexts, by highlighting the emotional foundations of child development. These insights deepen understanding of how caregiver interactions influence lifelong emotional and social outcomes.



2. Literature Review

Socioeconomic status refers to a multi-dimensional construct typically measured based on parental education, family income, and income occupation (Sullivan et al., 2019). Lower SES has been linked to adverse outcomes in childhood such as emotional dysregulation and increased stress levels (Johson et al., 2020). They often experience more adversity in their upbringing and have a higher incidence of emotional problems, such as anxiety and depression (Clark et al., 2018). The level of education of the parents has been considered an important factor on the emotional development of children, where parents with higher levels of education, tend to apply more effective parenting and management strategies on children emotional development (Kumar & Walker, 2020). Occupation, specifically, can affect parents work schedules and stress levels while also contributing to the availability of resources for their children which directly affects their emotional development (Zhou & Wang, 2017). Parenting Styles Methods of parenting fall into four primary categories; authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful (Baumrind, 2018). Authoritative parenting is high on responsiveness and high on expectations. Research has shown that this type of style encourages

emotional intelligence and resilience in children (Tariq et al., 2020). Authoritarian Parenting: High Demand, Low Responsiveness. Studies also demonstrate that children raised under authoritarian parents have reduced levels of emotional competence and greater levels of aggression (Zhou et al., 2019). Permissive parenting has high responsiveness and low expectations. These children may have trouble regulating their emotions, behave impulsively, and struggle with authority (Lee & Choi, 2021). Neglectful parenting is characterized by both low responsiveness and low demands, which can create significant emotional development challenges, including difficulties with attachment and emotional stability (Nelson et al., 2019).

Limitations

This investigation into how parental factors affect emotional development in Malaysian preschoolers encountered several constraints that warrant consideration when interpreting the results. The study's restricted timeline fundamentally shaped its methodology, preventing the implementation of more rigorous longitudinal approaches that could better reveal developmental trajectories. Compressed data collection periods limited both sample diversity and size, ultimately comprising only 30 participants primarily from accessible urban centers rather than representing Malaysia's full geographic and cultural spectrum. Significant recruitment barriers further constrained the research. The investigator's physical absence from Malaysia during the study and professional networks concentrated among parents of older children (ages 7-12) created substantial difficulties in accessing the target preschool demographic. These logistical challenges yielded a sample that underrepresents Malaysia's socioeconomic diversity and varied parenting traditions, particularly from rural communities and lower-income groups. Methodologically, the cross-sectional design cannot establish causal relationships or document emotional development over time. The exclusive reliance on parent-reported measures introduces potential response biases absent observational validation. These limitations collectively reduce the findings' generalizability across Malaysia's multicultural parenting landscape. Future research would benefit from extended timelines enabling longitudinal designs, strategic local partnerships to ensure representative sampling, and mixed-method approaches combining surveys with observational measures. Such enhancements could better capture how Malaysia's unique cultural contexts moderate relationships between parenting practices and emotional development outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

This study investigates the relationship between parental factors—socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting styles—and emotional development in early childhood education. Employing a structured quantitative research design, the study utilizes standardized questionnaires to collect numerical data from a large sample, ensuring validity, reliability, and generalizability. The questionnaire method enables efficient, uniform data collection, allowing for systematic analysis of patterns and correlations. Statistical techniques are applied to test hypotheses and determine how parental factors influence children's emotional growth. Findings aim to provide evidence-based insights into the interplay between family dynamics and early emotional development, with implications for educators, parents, and policymakers.

Population and Sample/Participants/Respondents

This study surveys parents of preschool-aged children (3-6 years) to examine how socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting styles influence early emotional development. The diverse participant sample ensures representation across varying SES, education levels, and parenting approaches. Using questionnaire responses, the research analyses parental factors

(independent variables) as predictors of children's emotional development (dependent variable), enabling data-driven insights into these key relationships.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Tools

This study employs a non-probability convenience sampling approach to efficiently gather data from 30 parents of preschool-aged children within a limited timeframe. Participants were recruited via social media platforms (WhatsApp groups, parenting forums) and personal referrals, ensuring they met inclusion criteria (parent of a 3-6-year-old, willing to complete the survey and provide consent). While non-random, this method allowed for diverse parent-reported insights on the interplay between parenting styles, education levels, and children's emotional development, serving as a practical foundation for this preliminary correlational research.

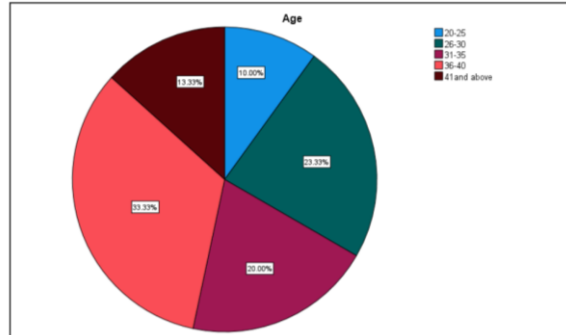
Procedure for Data Collection

This study utilizes an online Google Forms questionnaire to efficiently collect data from participants within a one-week timeframe. The structured questionnaire comprises four key sections which are Section A, captures demographic details (age, gender, education, income, family size, residence). Section B, examines socioeconomic factors, including financial stability, access to emotional/social activities for children, parental education, theoretical child-rearing knowledge, and occupation-related time constraints. Section C, classifies parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) based on self-reported behavior and Section D, assesses children's emotional development in the Malaysian context through parent-reported indicators. This method ensures accessible, high-quality data collection while addressing the study's objectives through a systematic, multi-dimensional approach. This study employs a structured questionnaire designed to systematically assess parental factors and early childhood emotional development among Malaysian parents of preschoolers. The questionnaire combines adapted and literature-informed items to ensure validity. Reliability will be tested via Cronbach's alpha (target $\alpha \geq 0.70$) in SPSS, alongside descriptive and correlation analyses to examine variable relationships.

4. Results and Findings of the Study

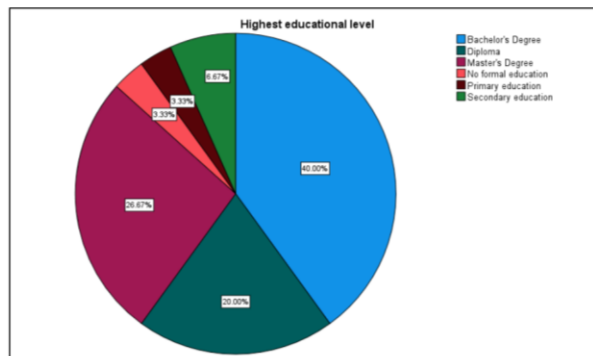
This study examines how parental socioeconomic status (SES) and parenting styles collectively influence emotional development in preschool-aged children (3-6 years). Using a quantitative approach, researchers collected data through structured online questionnaires from 30 Malaysian parents, employing convenience sampling via social media platforms. The four-part survey captured: (1) demographic details, (2) SES indicators (income, education, occupation), (3) parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful), and (4) children's emotional competencies (regulation, expression, coping). Initial findings reveal key demographic trends about participant families, establishing the study context. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$) confirmed the instrument's validity. Statistical analyses uncovered significant correlations—Pearson tests identified relationships between parenting approaches/SES factors and emotional outcomes, while regression modelling pinpointed which variables most strongly predicted developmental results. Notably, the research highlights how authoritative parenting may buffer SES-related challenges, whereas time constraints from occupational demands emerged as a potential barrier to emotional support. These evidence-based insights can guide parental practices, inform early childhood education programs, and shape policy interventions targeting at-risk families. While limited by sample size, the study provides a foundational framework for future large-scale investigations across diverse cultural contexts, ultimately contributing to more equitable emotional development opportunities for children.

Age	N	%
20-25	3	10.0%
26-30	7	23.3%
31-35	6	20.0%
36-40	10	33.3%
41 and above	4	13.3%



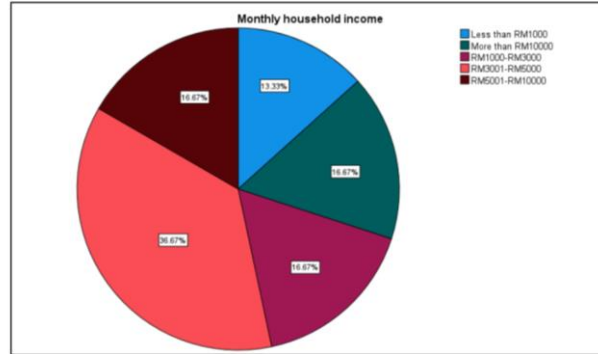
The demographic analysis reveals important patterns in the age distribution of respondents, which may influence the study's outcomes. As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of participants (33.3%, n=10) fall within the 36-40 age bracket, indicating that middle-aged parents dominate the sample. This is followed by younger parents aged 26-30 years (23.3%, n=7) and 31-35 years (20.0%, n=6), while those above 41 years represent 13.3% (n=4). Notably, the 20-25 age group constitutes the smallest segment at just 10.0% (n=3).

Highest educational level	N	%
Bachelor's Degree	12	40.0%
Diploma	6	20.0%
Master's Degree	8	26.7%
No formal education	1	3.3%
Primary education	1	3.3%
Secondary education	2	6.7%



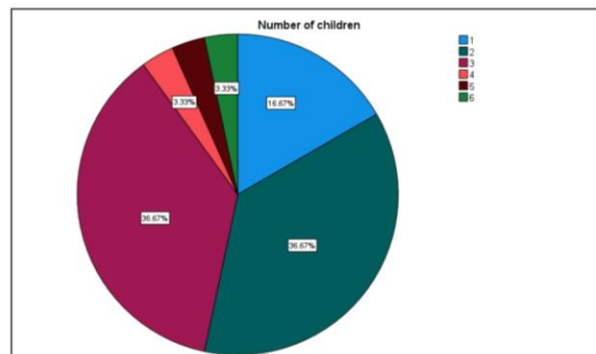
This study's participant pool consisted primarily of highly educated individuals, with 40% holding bachelor's degrees and 26.7% possessing master's degrees. An additional 20% had diploma qualifications, while only 13.3% reported secondary education or below. This distribution indicates the findings predominantly reflect perspectives from parents with tertiary education. The educational skew presents both strengths and limitations. On one hand, it provides valuable insights into how educated parents understand and facilitate children's emotional development, as research shows education level often correlates with parenting knowledge and style. Highly educated parents typically demonstrate greater awareness of child development theories and more intentional parenting approaches.

Monthly household income		
	N	%
Less than RM1000	4	13.3%
More than RM10000	5	16.7%
RM1000-RM3000	5	16.7%
RM3001-RM5000	11	36.7%
RM5001-RM10000	5	16.7%



As for the respondent’s monthly household income, the majority of the respondents were within the range of RM3001–RM5000 with percentage representing of the entire sample of 36.7% (n=11). 15.8% (n=5) of the sample earns RM1,000–RM3,000 per month, 16.7% (n=5) earn RM5001–RM10,000, 16.7% (n=5) earn more than RM10,000. On the other hand, the percentage of the respondents is 13.3% (n=4) for the income level below RM1000. This indicates that more than half of the respondents belong in the middle-income category, followed by a significant number in both lower and higher income ranges. Such distribution of income could affect financial behaviors, spending patterns, and perspectives pertinent to the study objectives.

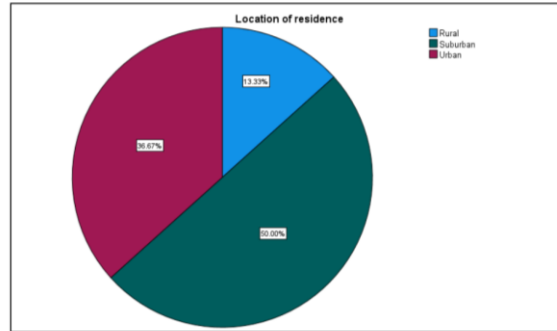
Number of children		
	N	%
1	5	16.7%
2	11	36.7%
3	11	36.7%
4	1	3.3%
5	1	3.3%
6	1	3.3%



The distribution of respondents according to their number of children shows that most of them have two (36.7%, n=11) or three children (36.7%, n=11). A lesser subset of respondents has one child (16.7%, n=5), whilst four (3.3%, n=1), five (3.3%, n=1), and six children (3.3%, n=1) are the least common in the sample. In our sample, many of the respondents had two to three children, presumably indicating a moderate family size overall within the study population.

This could contribute to how financial decisions are made, lifestyle choices, and other specific behaviors relevant to the research.

<i>Location of residence</i>		
	N	%
Rural	4	13.3%
Suburban	15	50.0%
Urban	11	36.7%



For the respondents' resident location, most of them is in suburb area (50.0%, n=15), then urban location (36.7%, n=11). 13.3% (n=4) of the respondents are from rural areas. These results indicate that the majority of the participants come from suburban and urban areas of the country, which could potentially have implications on their lifestyle habits, financial attitudes, and access to resources. The underrepresentation of people in rural areas may also capture some underlying economic opportunities and infrastructural.

The parents' socioeconomic status and parenting styles are significant predictors of children emotional development. Parenting styles, however, tend to have a slightly greater impact. The presence of multicollinearity indicates that there are likely interactions and or dependencies between these factors and this topic could be explored in future research.

Hypothesis Statements:

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between socioeconomic status and children's emotional development.

H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between parenting styles and children's emotional development.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	B	t	p-value	Result
H ₁ : There is a significant positive relationship between socioeconomic status and children's emotional development.	0.482	2.580	0.016	Supported
H ₂ : There is a significant positive relationship between parenting styles and children's emotional development.	0.512	2.770	0.010	Supported

The study conducted by the relationship between parental factors and children's emotional development in the context of early childhood education shows the impact of both

socioeconomic status and parenting styles on children's emotional development and states the need for attention from early childhood educators. The data shows that children thrive with a stable financial environment and positive parental strategies that help emotionally them develop during early childhood education. This shows that parenting styles ($B = 0.512$) have a somewhat greater influence than socioeconomic status ($B = 0.482$) — strengthening the notion that on an emotional level, the involvement of parents and quality of parenting, together with emotional and discipline strategies, are fundamental in emotional development of children rather than their economic status.

5. Discussion and Recommendation

This study reveals the dual influence of parenting styles and socioeconomic status (SES) on children's emotional development. While financial stability provides important resources for nurturing environments, the research highlights how positive parenting practices can foster emotional resilience even in economically disadvantaged households. These findings carry significant implications for creating comprehensive support systems for families. The results demonstrate that authoritative parenting - characterized by warmth, clear boundaries, and emotional responsiveness - serves as a protective factor for children's emotional well-being. This suggests that parenting education programs teaching these approaches could help mitigate some challenges associated with low SES. Schools and early childhood centres are particularly well-positioned to deliver such programs through workshops and social-emotional learning initiatives. At the policy level, the study underscores the need for integrated interventions that address both economic and parenting factors. This includes financial assistance programs to reduce family stress, combined with mandatory training for childcare professionals to ensure quality emotional support. Community-based services like counselling and parenting mentorship could further bridge gaps for disadvantaged families. However, several questions remain unanswered. Future research should explore how cultural values mediate these relationships, examine the role of extended social networks, and track long-term outcomes across diverse socioeconomic contexts. Larger, more representative studies could help identify the most effective intervention strategies for different populations. These findings ultimately argue for a holistic approach to supporting children's emotional development. By simultaneously addressing economic challenges and enhancing parenting skills through accessible education programs, communities can help all children build the emotional foundation for healthy adulthood - regardless of their family's socioeconomic starting point. The study confirms that while money matters, how parents interact with their children matters equally in shaping emotional well-being.

Implications of the Study

This review identifies several critical avenues for advancing research on socioeconomic status (SES), parenting styles, and emotional development in preschool-aged children. To strengthen both theoretical understanding and practical applications, future studies should adopt more robust methodologies while expanding their scope of investigation. First, methodological improvements are essential. Current findings would benefit from longitudinal designs that track children's development over time, revealing how early parenting and socioeconomic factors influence long-term emotional outcomes. Researchers should also recruit larger, more diverse samples that adequately represent various cultural groups, geographic regions, and socioeconomic strata. Such sampling would enhance the generalizability of results across different populations. The scope of inquiry should expand beyond SES and parenting styles to include other influential factors. Parental mental health, stress levels, family dynamics, and community support systems likely interact in complex ways to shape emotional development.

Cross-cultural comparisons could reveal whether observed patterns represent universal truths or culturally specific phenomena, particularly important in multicultural societies. Intervention studies represent another crucial direction. Experimental and quasi-experimental research should evaluate the effectiveness of parenting programs, financial assistance initiatives, and school-based interventions. Schools deserve particular attention, as teacher training and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs may help mitigate disadvantages for children from low-SES backgrounds. These research directions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of children's emotional development while identifying practical strategies for support. By combining rigorous methodology with expanded scope and applied focus, future studies can better inform both policy and practice to promote emotional well-being across all socioeconomic groups.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant interplay between socioeconomic status, parenting styles, and early childhood emotional development. While authoritative parenting fosters resilience, financial stability and education further shape emotional outcomes. However, limitations in sample diversity and scope call for future longitudinal and culturally inclusive research. To promote equitable emotional well-being, policymakers and educators must address both economic disparities and parenting support through targeted interventions. By bridging these gaps, we can better nurture children's emotional foundations for lifelong success.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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