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EXPLORING TEACHER KNOWLEDGE, CHALLENGES, AND PRACTICES IN PRESCHOOLERS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This study explores the knowledge, practices, and challenges preschool educators in Kedah, Malaysia, encounter when assessing children's social and emotional development. Data from structured questionnaires filled out by 47 teachers provide important insights: Despite the fact that 65% of educators claim to be confident in their ability to assess students, 50% claim to lack culturally relevant resources, 42% claim to be time-constrained, and 35% point to a lack of chances for professional growth. Preschool teachers have limited access to culturally relevant tools and the time to implement them, along with challenges surrounding their own professional development needs, all of which combine to inhibit their capacity to support children's holistic social and emotional development appropriately. This study seeks to overcome these limitations in order to enhance and advance the holistic development of preschoolers through early childhood education.

Keywords:

Assessment Practices; Preschool Teachers; Social And Emotional Development; Teacher Challenges

Introduction

Social-emotional development is a cornerstone of early childhood education, profoundly influencing children's academic achievement, social functioning, and lifelong well-being. According to recent studies, social and emotional learning (SEL) helps children develop important abilities including empathy, self-awareness, and relationship management, all of which are crucial for success in both the social and academic spheres (Blewitt, O'Connor, Morris, Nolan, Mousa, Green, ... & Skouteris, 2021). In a variety of cultural contexts, SEL treatments have proven to be successful in raising academic achievement, socioemotional skills, and school preparation.

However, there are significant obstacles to SEL adoption in Malaysia. Preschool teachers frequently do not have access to organized learning modules, culturally appropriate resources, or sufficient professional development opportunities that are suited to the Malaysian environment (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Effective SEL treatments are desperately needed, as evidenced by the estimated 19.7% of Malaysian preschoolers who struggle with peer-related issues and 13.5% who struggle with prosocial behaviors (Rahim et al., 2023). Additionally, children from low-income families continue to be especially at risk; studies show that urban regions' greater maternal stress levels are linked to deficiencies in children's socioemotional development (Khairuddin et al., 2023).

These difficulties have been made worse by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has led to more obstacles to the adoption of SEL. Teachers found it difficult to meet the unique developmental norms of Malaysian students while modifying SEL methods for virtual environments. Their capacity to deliver treatments that meet the various needs of their pupils is further hampered by the absence of culturally appropriate SEL evaluations and focused teacher preparation (Bagea, Ausat, Kurniawan, Kraugusteeliana, & Azzaakiyyah, 2023). According to research, Malaysian preschool teachers only adopt SEL moderately, which might jeopardize attempts to offer comprehensive early childhood education (Mohammad et al., 2022). The levels of SEL implementation in Malaysian kindergartens are summarised in Table 1 below, which also highlights the need for focused interventions and shows differing levels of teacher participation and classroom activities.

Table 1: Levels of Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in Malaysian Kindergartens

Item	Frequency and Percentage				
	1	2	3	4	5
Are children in your kindergarten always feel uninterested to participate in activities in the kindergarten	10 (33.3%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)	4 (13.3%)	4 (13.3%)
Are children often cry when they are sent to kindergarten	6 (20%)	10 (33.3%)	8 (26.7%)	6 (20%)	-
Are children in your kindergarten get along well with their peers	-	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	18 (60%)	10 (33.3%)
Learning that emphasizes on social and emotional of children is often conducted in your kindergarten	-	-	5 (16.7%)	14 (46.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Are all teachers in your kindergarten emphasized to apply social and emotional learning in the classroom	-	1 (3.3%)	6 (20%)	11 (26.7%)	12 (40%)
Is the learning environment in your kindergarten fun	-	-	4 (13.3%)	16 (53.3%)	10 (33.3%)

Source: Mohammad, N. A., Satari, N. A., & Mohamed, S. (2022). Needs analysis for development of learning module in shaping children's social-emotional intelligence. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 11(4), 74-84.

To solve these problems, a multifaceted strategy is needed. This include the creation of SEL resources that are culturally appropriate, thorough teacher preparation, and methodical assessment of SEL activities. Social-emotional development may be greatly enhanced by implementing evidence-based SEL programs, which can also lead to better long-term academic results, interpersonal skills, and emotional control. Fostering equality and inclusion in Malaysian early childhood education requires making sure these interventions reach vulnerable communities.

Research Gap
Social and emotional development is critical to their holistic growth and can impact their lifelong wellbeing, their academic performance and their relationships with others. These include foundational skills such as empathy, self-control, and peer relations (Chung, Lam, & Liew, 2020) which are the cornerstones of their academic and social journeys. There are limited formal assessment available in this field (Yang, Peh & Ng, 2021), particularly in the case of Malaysia where various problems were known to educators from the training aspects, as well as materials that are considered culturally unsuitable. Research suggests that even when teachers can deliver targeted, research-based interventions, their ability to do so is limited by a lack of culturally relevant assessment practices and a shortage of professional development support (Tan et al., 2023). It involves developing relevant learning materials that take into account the local background and cultures, and improving the quality of teacher traineeto suit the development needs of Malaysian preschoolers. In conclusion, the elimination of certain impediments to more efficient aid, necessitates the establishment of comprehensive assessment frameworks that reflect regional cultural contexts, to guarantee reliable assessments, and efficient aid for the socioemotional growth for children (Bagea et al., 2023).

Objectives

The aim of this study will be to explore the following key objectives:

1. To explore the knowledge and practices of preschool teachers with regard to the assessment of social and emotional development in Kedah, Malaysia.
2. To ascertain the challenges confronting these educators, especially regarding access to culturally relevant assessment tools, professional development, and parental engagement.
3. To offer recommendations to teachers on improving their assessment practices, specifically through developing recommendations for teacher training and designing localized assessment that are culture sensitive to Malaysia.

Significance of the Study

The study is tackling challenge preschool teachers face regarding how to assess how students are developing emotionally, highlighting that emotional competence is one of the best predictors of academic readiness and social-emotional wellbeing. And this indicates to the need of equipping educators with the tools to help support the emotional growth of student and culture a framework to other cultural context (Milojević, 2022).The findings also suggest the need for teacher training and policy initiatives to facilitate learning environments, particularly relevant in the context of educational upheaval due to COVID-19 (Bailey et al., 2022; Chen & O'Donnell, 2022), paired with the provision of consistent emotional support to promote preschool adjustment and regulation. Based on the insights gathered, this study makes recommendations for teacher training and policy suggestions to enhance early childhood education and ensure that children receive the necessary care for development (Martinsone et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Early childhood education is based on social-emotional development, which shapes children's potential for lifetime wellbeing, social integration, and academic success. Core competencies that are essential for long-term success and holistic development include social interaction, empathy, and storytelling abilities (Chung et al., 2021). But measuring and evaluating these abilities is still very difficult, especially in non-Western settings like Malaysia where there are few culturally appropriate resources (Tan et al., 2023). This emphasises how urgently localised frameworks and examinations that take into account the region's social, cultural, and educational circumstances are needed.

Even though the value of social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education is acknowledged, teachers everywhere—especially in Malaysia—face several obstacles when putting it into practice. The lack of culturally appropriate evaluation instruments is one of the most urgent issues. According to research, the cultural quirks necessary for assessing SEL in collectivist countries like Malaysia are not captured by the current instruments, which were primarily created for Western contexts (Tan et al., 2023). Teachers are forced to use unofficial techniques, including daily observations, which are useful but lack the uniformity required for regular assessment (Bulotsky-Shearer, Carter Clopêt, Williford, Alamos, & Hasbrouck, 2023). These restrictions point to a serious weakness in the resources available for SEL assessment in preschool environments in Malaysia.

The dearth of options for teachers to pursue professional development is another widespread problem. Citing a dearth of resources and training catered to the particular requirements of Malaysian classrooms, many educators express a sense of being unprepared to execute SEL

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successfully (Blewitt et al., 2021). These difficulties are further exacerbated by socioeconomic inequality, which puts children from low-income families at higher risk of developing socioemotional delays. These differences are especially troubling in Malaysia, where access to high-quality SEL therapies is restricted by systemic injustices (Khairuddin et al., 2022). The COVID-19 epidemic, which upended conventional learning environments and revealed weaknesses in teachers' capacity to modify SEL practices for online contexts, has made these difficulties even worse (Chen & O'Donnell, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Early childhood social-emotional development assessments are firmly based on recognised developmental theories that offer a thorough comprehension of the mechanisms behind children' social and emotional development. In addition to clarifying the processes of social-emotional growth, these theoretical stances tackle important issues like SEL evaluation in culturally heterogeneous settings like Malaysia. Through the identification of crucial developmental phases, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory provides a fundamental framework. The phases of initiative vs guilt (4–6 years) and autonomy versus shame and doubt (2–3 years) for preschool-aged children demonstrate their developing abilities for independence and self-initiative.

These phases highlight how important it is to develop social skills and emotional resilience, as these are essential for children to overcome obstacles in social situations. Teachers are key players in this process because they see how children handle group projects, interact with others, and control their emotions, which gives them important information about how they are developing (Erikson, 1963). Building on this framework, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights how important social interactions and cultural background are in influencing how children learn and grow. The zone of proximal development (ZPD), which defines the difference between what a kid can do on their own and what they can do with directed help, is at the heart of this paradigm.

Research from comparable collectivist cultures, like Singapore, shows that using guided cooperative activities based on Vygotsky's ideas greatly improves children' ability to control their emotions and work together. This provides Malaysian preschools with a useful model to adopt (Yang et al., 2021). Teachers mediate learning experiences in this framework, helping children develop their socio-emotional skills and better navigate social situations.

By analysing the interaction between a child's local surroundings (microsystem) and larger social effects (macrosystem), Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a macro-level perspective. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises the necessity of SEL practices that conform to family and community norms in Malaysia, where collectivist ideals place a high priority on interdependence and communal peace. Teachers are in a unique position to monitor and react to how external variables, including cultural norms, community resources, and familial stresses, impact children's social-emotional abilities since they are members of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The significance of customising SEL evaluations to represent the complex reality of Malaysian children's developmental environments is further supported by this contextual understanding. Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, which emphasises self-control, empathy, and social skills, gives these viewpoints a skills-based component. This approach gives teachers a useful

starting point for evaluating students' emotional reactions, empathy, and peer relationships. Teachers can assist individual needs by implementing focused interventions after recognising particular strengths and weaknesses. Goleman's focus on emotional intelligence is consistent with the increasing understanding that SEL is essential for long-term social and emotional well-being as well as academic preparedness (Goleman, 1995).

When taken as a whole, these theories offer a strong and comprehensive framework for dealing with Malaysia's SEL evaluation difficulties. They draw attention to the practical processes of social interactions, the contextual complexities of cultural and societal norms, and the skills-based techniques required for successful SEL implementation. By using these frameworks, educators and policymakers may create evidence-based, culturally sensitive approaches that cater to the particular requirements of Malaysian preschoolers, eventually fostering their overall development and preparedness for issues in the future.

Previous Research on Teachers' Knowledge, Practices, and Barriers to Assessing Social and Emotional Development

A key component of early childhood education is social and emotional development, which shapes children' ability to grow holistically, become socioemotionally competent, and be prepared for school. However, evaluating and promoting this area of development is still a global concern, especially for early childhood educators who frequently confront obstacles that their primary and secondary school counterparts do not. Teachers' capacity to adopt culturally relevant and consistent assessment practices is hampered by these limitations, which include a lack of time, money, and training opportunities (Blewitt et al., 2021; Fettig et al., 2021).

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of SEL for young children. By equipping children with critical abilities like empathy, self-control, and interpersonal skills, SEL paves the way for their future academic achievement and social integration. Blewitt et al.'s research from 2021 emphasises how important it is to incorporate SEL into early childhood education in order to prepare children for the challenges of social and academic life. Nevertheless, despite the acknowledged advantages, structural obstacles and a dearth of useful, research-based tactics can make it difficult for educators to adopt successful SEL approaches.

The use of informal evaluation methods is one of the most urgent issues. Teachers usually rely on anecdotal recordings and daily observations, which are informative but lack the rigour and standardisation of formal evaluation tools (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2022). Because of their complexity, high expense, and lengthy administration time, standardised instruments are sometimes viewed as impracticable, despite their value in producing accurate and dependable data (Steed, Shapland, & Leech, 2022). Accordingly, educators indicate a preference for methods that are easy to incorporate into their everyday schedules without sacrificing the impartiality or dependability of the tests (Blewitt et al., 2021).

Another crucial aspect of SEL evaluation is cultural sensitivity, especially in multicultural and collectivist cultures like Malaysia. Teachers are forced to use frameworks and methods created in Western contexts due to the lack of culturally sensitive assessment tools, which may not adequately represent the social and emotional dynamics of children in non-Western environments (Tan et al., 2023). Singaporean research provides insightful information on how to close this gap. In this regard, teacher-led research has shown that adding culturally relevant techniques to SEL curriculum greatly improves children' capacity to control their emotions,

handle conflict, and form wholesome bonds with others (Yang et al., 2021). These results highlight how crucial it is to adapt SEL techniques to the target population's social and cultural circumstances.

The possibility of significant results is further highlighted by holistic methods to SEL integration. Mondi, Giovanelli, and Reynolds (2021), for instance, looked at SEL curriculum that stressed the smooth integration of social-emotional skills into regular classroom activities. Their research showed that children's prosocial behaviours, emotional intelligence, and general social abilities had significantly improved. The argument for using comprehensive and integrated SEL frameworks in early childhood education is strengthened by such data.

Prioritising teacher training and professional development is essential to addressing these issues. Well-designed professional development (PD) programs, especially those that use culturally sensitive methods, have been found to help teachers assess and assist children' social and emotional development (Adams, MacLeod, Kim, Behm, & Porto, 2022). It has been demonstrated that thorough professional development approaches, such as workshops, observational feedback, and individualised coaching, improve teachers' self-efficacy and expand their knowledge of SEL techniques (Kaye et al., 2022; Fajriyah, 2023). These results demonstrate how important focused professional development programs are in closing the gaps in SEL implementation.

Moreover, the socio-economic disparities that impact children's social-emotional development further complicate the landscape for early childhood educators. Research by Khairuddin et al. (2022) highlights the heightened risk of socio-emotional delays among children from low-income families, necessitating targeted interventions that address these vulnerabilities. Similarly, Abd Rahim, Ibrahim, Ab Rahman, Yaacob, and Hashim (2023) emphasize the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems among preschool children in Northeast Peninsular Malaysia, further reinforcing the need for context-specific and culturally responsive interventions.

To meet these challenges, it is imperative to equip teachers with practical tools and strategies that can be implemented in their classrooms. By providing professional development programs that are both contextually relevant and culturally sensitive, educators can be better prepared to identify and respond to emotional and behavioral difficulties. This approach not only promotes equitable access to high-quality SEL support but also ensures that children across diverse educational and cultural settings can develop holistically and thrive in an ever-changing world. The table 2 provides a synthesized summary of key findings from past research and their relevance to the present study.

Table 2: Overview of Past Research Supporting SEL Assessment Practices

Study	Focus	Findings	Relevance to Current Study
Chung et al. (2021)	SEL competencies	Narrative skills, empathy, and social interaction are foundational for holistic development.	Highlights the need to foster core SEL skills in early childhood education.
Tan et al. (2023)	SEL in Malaysian preschools	Teachers face challenges due to lack of culturally relevant tools and training.	Supports the need for localized tools and

			professional development programs.
Yang et al. (2021)	Culturally adapted SEL frameworks	Teacher-led practices improved student outcomes in collectivist cultures like Singapore.	Reinforces the importance of culturally adapted SEL frameworks.
Abd Rahim et al. (2023)	SEL challenges in Northeast Malaysia	Emotional and behavioral problems among preschoolers are prevalent in low-income areas.	Demonstrates the need for culturally responsive interventions and training.
Kaye et al. (2022)	Professional development for SEL	Workshops and coaching significantly improve teachers' SEL competencies.	Highlights the effectiveness of professional development models for SEL.
Mondi et al. (2021)	SEL integration in early education	Improved prosocial behaviors, social skills, and emotional awareness in children.	Emphasizes the value of integrating SEL into curricula to enhance holistic growth.

Sources: Chung et al. (2021), Tan et al. (2023), Yang et al. (2021), Abd Rahim et al. (2023), Kaye et al. (2022) & Mondi et al. (2021)

The literature emphasises the important possibilities and difficulties that come with evaluating early children social-emotional development, especially in the Malaysian environment. This study intends to offer practical insights for promoting SEL practices in Malaysian preschools by filling in the gaps in culturally appropriate evaluation instruments, strengthening teacher preparation, and utilising well-established theoretical frameworks.

Methodology

Preschool teachers' knowledge, practices, and difficulties in assessing the social and emotional development of their students were investigated in this study using a quantitative research approach. To methodically record trends and insights, a descriptive survey methodology was used (Creswell, 2014). Preschool teachers in Kedah, Malaysia, who represented a range of early childhood education experience levels (from less than a year to more than two decades) and credentials, provided data for the study. Despite its acknowledged shortcomings in terms of generalisability, a convenience sample strategy was employed due to its practicality (Taherdoost, 2020).

To guarantee its applicability to the cultural and educational environment of Malaysia, the survey questionnaire was modified using validated instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). It had both open-ended questions intended to elicit qualitative insights and closed-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey was reviewed by early childhood professionals to confirm its validity, and its cultural appropriateness and clarity were improved through pilot testing with a small group of preschool teachers. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability and demonstrate appropriate internal consistency.

To increase accessibility, all data collection was done online. Surveys were disseminated by email and online teacher networks, enabling respondents to finish them whenever it was most convenient for them. To increase response rates and reduce nonresponse bias, follow-up reminders were given. Strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained, which included

getting informed permission, protecting participant confidentiality and anonymity, and enabling withdrawal at any moment.

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used in the analysis. While qualitative data from open-ended replies underwent thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step framework, quantitative data were descriptively analysed using Pallant's (2021) criteria to find trends and patterns. The study faced a number of difficulties, such as the possibility for response bias in self-reported data and the low representativeness of convenience sampling. Nonetheless, the methodical approach—which is depicted in the flowchart that goes with it (Figure 1)—offered crucial insights for creating evaluation instruments that are culturally appropriate and focused professional development initiatives.
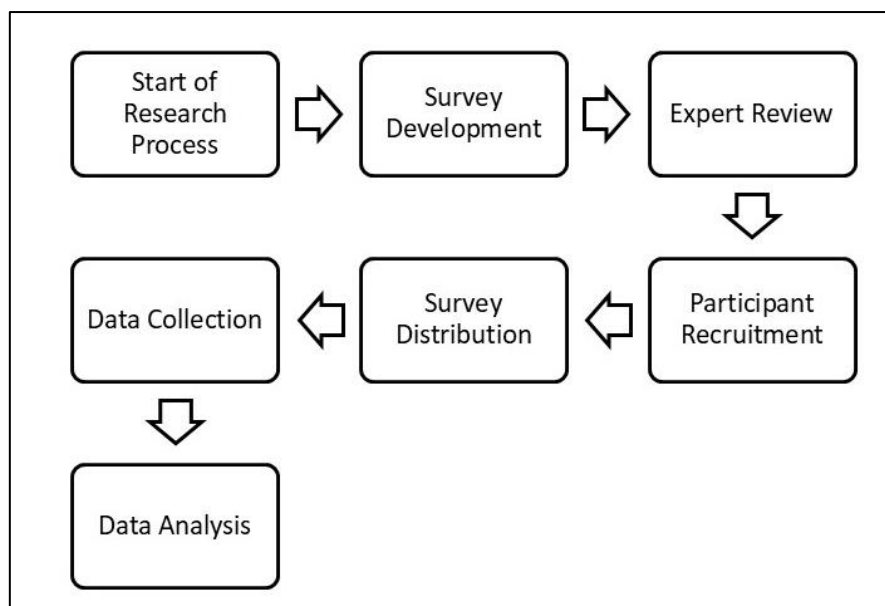

Figure 1: Flowchart of the Research Methodology Process

Findings
The findings of the study will be discussed according to the theme below:

Knowledge and Confidence in Social-Emotional Assessment
This indicates the assuredness that preschools have in assessing the social and emotional learning of their children. Notably, 65% of individuals rated their confidence level as moderate to high (mean confidence level score 3.8 out of 5). The teachers stated that they were familiar with some of the essential principles and practices for assessing students' social and emotional growth, such as identifying behaviours associated with self-regulation, empathy, and peer interactions.

Three out of ten (35%) of those surveyed said even with confidence, they could use more training – along with better tools – to help improve the accuracy and reliability of assessments. These educators admitted that they were familiar with many concepts regarding social and emotional assessment, but they did not know how to systematically assess social and emotional skills. The data show diversity in confidence levels, with more confident teachers than those

who have spent longer in the profession. This trend suggests that exposure and practice in the field, that is, professional development, may be crucial to confidence and competence in social and emotional assessment practices (Adams et al., 2022).

Challenges in Current Practices
We have identified three primary challenges faced by preschool teachers in Kedah when it comes to assessing children's social and emotional development type of social and emotional development challenges among preschool teachers in Kedah. The main issue is the lack of tools to assess behaviour in the culture of developing children and the lack of time and parental commitment.

Cultural Inappropriateness of Assessment Tools
50 percent (n = 23) reported that the assessment tools that are currently available were not modified for this country. These teachers were worried that many existing tools are developed on norms of Western development which would not match the social behaviours, values, and cultures of Malaysian children.

Time Constraints
Forty-two percent of participants noted time constraints as a major barrier. Teachers pointed out the difficulties in coordinating socioemotional evaluations with the organised, academically orientated preschool curriculum standards that prioritise academic and cognitive accomplishments. There were very short, stipulated time frames for carrying out holistic development assessments leading to them not being as comprehensive.

Lack Of Engagement Of Parents
Another major barrier was limited parental involvement, reported 38% of teachers. Respondents mentioned the difficulty of obtaining parental input — information that is critical to understanding children's socio-emotional behaviours in school and homes. **Table 3** gives an overview of the main problems described by participants in the study with the proportion of teachers reporting the issue as well the mean score (on a 5-point scale) provided by responders.

Table 3: Key Findings on Social and Emotional Assessment

Aspect of Assessment	Percentage of Teachers Reporting (%)	Mean Rating (out of 5)
Confidence in Social & Emotional Assessment	65%	3.8
Need for Additional Training	35%	3.5
Lack of Culturally Relevant Tools	50%	3.2
Time Constraints	42%	2.9
Parental Involvement in Assessment	38%	2.7

Source: Data Collected and Analysed in This Study

Table 3 displays the data that highlight the main challenges preschool teachers faced in assessing these social and emotional development domains such as the lack of need for culturally relevant tools, lack of time to prepare and execute assessments, and poor levels of parental involvement. Overcoming these issues through specific strategies and localized

resources is tremendously important to improve the assessment practices in Malaysian preschools (Fanny et al., 2022).

Suggestions for Enhancing Assessment
Following the identification of the challenges, preschool teachers in Kedah put forward several suggestions that could improve social and emotional assessment practices. Workshops focusing on the assessment of social and emotional learning (SEL) as subject-specific professional development were the most frequent teacher recommendations (55%). Additionally, half of the respondents indicated that the culturally relevant assessment tools should be scientifically developed as grounded in the Malaysian settings. In addition, 38% of subjects proposed improving collaboration between schools and parents, to guarantee more complete and accurate assessments of children´s socio-emotional development. This study's key findings can be seen in **Figure 2** which illustrates the percentage of preschool teachers in Kedah who reported different levels of confidence in social and emotional assessment, the key challenges they face, and their proposed suggestions for enhancing the assessment process.
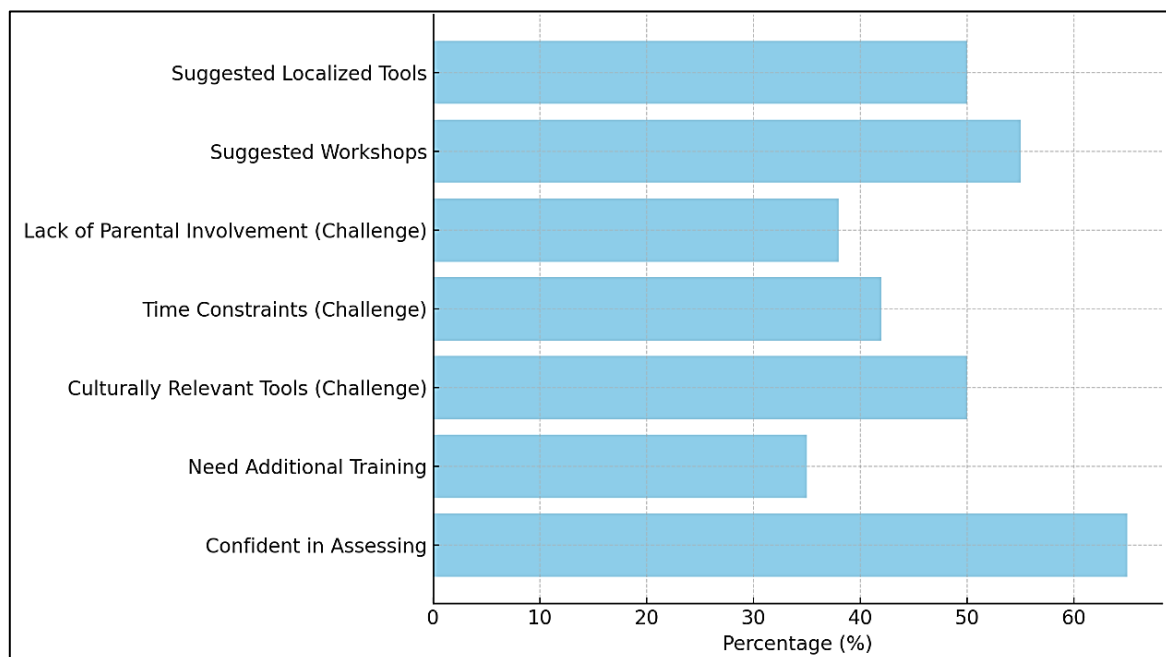

Figure 2: Results of the Survey on Knowledge, Difficulties, and Possible Suggestions of Preschool Teachers to Improve the Social and Emotional Assessment
Source: Data Collected and Analysed in This Study

Along with identifying challenges, however, study participants recommended several ways to improve the process of assessing preschool social and emotional development. These recommendations included better teacher training, culturally relevant assessment tools and more cooperation between teachers and parents.

Table 4: Enhancing Social and Emotional Assessment

Recommendation Area	Percentage of Teachers (%)	Key Recommendation
Professional Development Workshops	55%	Teachers suggested mandatory workshops focusing on social and emotional learning (SEL) assessments. These workshops would provide practical skills and tools for effective evaluation.
Development of Culturally Relevant Tools	50%	Teachers emphasized the need for localized assessment tools that align with Malaysia's cultural context to improve the accuracy of social and emotional assessments.
Strengthening Parent-Teacher Collaboration	38%	Teachers advocated for increased collaboration with parents to gain a more complete understanding of children's social and emotional development across home and school environments.
Enhanced Time Allocation for Assessments	42%	Teachers recommended allocating more time for socio-emotional assessments within the existing curriculum. This recommendation stems from challenges identified in balancing structured academic demands with holistic assessments.

Source: Data Collected and Analysed in This Study

Table 4 is the summary of the key recommendations provided by preschool teachers to improve social and emotional assessment practices, focusing on professional development, cultural relevance, and parent-teacher collaboration. Thus, here are the suggestions for each key recommendation:

Professional Development Workshops
Respondents unanimously called for more comprehensive professional development workshops, which would focus on increasing teachers' confidence and skill levels around social and emotional evaluation. Such courses, teachers said, would give them the knowledge and tools they need to keep up with children's emotional and social development.

Culturally Relevant Tool Development
The two teachers who expressed a desire to use culturally relevant tools in their assessments accounted for half of the experiences. They said that the existing tools centres on the Western context and do not reflect the behaviours and milestones in the daily life of Malaysian children. These teachers have also called for Malaysia-centric tools to develop under a colourful cultural ecosystem (Salim and Mohamed, 2023).

Enhancing Partnership Between Parents and Teachers
In order to improve the efficacy of social and emotional evaluations, several educators stressed the significance of fostering closer cooperation between parents and educators. To better understand children's socioemotional behaviours in both the home and school settings, culturally relevant methods must be used. A thorough understanding of children's development is provided by actively including parents in the evaluation process, which also guarantees that their social and emotional needs are satisfied (Muratović et al., 2022).

Key Findings on Social and Emotional Assessment

The findings highlight several key aspects of preschool teachers' knowledge, confidence, and challenges in assessing social-emotional development. Teachers reported varying levels of confidence in their ability to assess social-emotional competencies, with a majority expressing moderate to high confidence. However, many educators identified significant barriers, including the lack of culturally relevant tools, time constraints, and limited parental involvement. These challenges were further compounded by the need for additional training to improve the accuracy and reliability of assessments. **Table 5** below summarizes the main findings, including the proportion of teachers reporting specific challenges and their corresponding mean ratings on a 5-point scale.

Table 5: Summary of Key Findings *Social and Emotional Assessment*

Aspect of Assessment	Percentage of Teachers Reporting (%)	Mean Rating (out of 5)
Confidence in Social & Emotional Assessment	65	3.8
Need for Additional Training	35	3.5
Lack of Culturally Relevant Tools	50	3.2
Time Constraints	42	2.9
Parental Involvement in Assessment	38	2.7

Source: Data Collected and Analysed in This Study

Discussion

Comfortability and Confidence with Social-Emotional Assessments

Teachers were much more confident about observing children's development than working on their social and emotional behaviours. The overwhelming majority of respondents (over 50%) are "somewhat confident" (mean confidence score of 3.8 on a scale of 1-5) in their ability to execute best practices for social-emotional assessments. That underlines the difficulty of moving theory into action. This is because confidence level correlates with teaching experience, and experienced teachers benefit from tacit knowledge gained through rehearsal. Teaching is a performative art, and things never go exactly according to plan. New teachers initialize their practice faced with few experiences and support (Baajour, 2021; Mananay & Sumalinog, 2024). According to Khongsankham, (2024), understanding and applying rational social-emotional learning (SEL) concepts are distinct yet interconnected processes essential for effective educational practices. While understanding SEL involves grasping its principles and benefits, applying these concepts requires targeted training, culturally aligned tools, and ongoing professional development to effectively support children's social and emotional growth. Teachers must recognize how their interactions influence students' emotional and social development, highlighting the importance of teacher social and emotional competencies (Jennings et al., 2021).

Issue in Current Practice

The findings highlight contextual and structural challenges in conducting social-emotional assessments at preschools in Malaysia. One of the prominent barriers in the Malaysian context is the absence of approved tools for culture. Since Western-oriented frameworks often neglect the culture and social norms in collective societies such as Malaysia, literature emphasizes using culturally responsive studies to fill the gap (Tan et al., 2023). This highlights the

importance of having locally relevant evaluation instruments based on developmental norms specific to Malaysia.

One major challenge was time; many preschool teachers struggled to find enough time to devote to social-emotional assessments, sandwiched in between their academic responsibilities. The current focus on academic outcomes sidelines social-emotional learning and other, non-academic developmental goals. Such disconnect highlights the importance of reevaluating curriculum priorities in order to better integrate cognitive and socioemotional objectives (Cooper et al., 2023).

Another important problem is parental engagement, which is obstructed by elements like inadequate systems of communication, ignorance, and scarcity of opportunities for parents and teachers to cooperate. Research (Ata & Oğuz-Atıcı, 2023) indicates that organized events such as workshops together with open communication between parents and teachers will provide the opportunity to close the gap between the home and the school for children in their overall development. These challenges underscore the urgent need for structural responses — on the creation of culturally apt resources, curricular adjustments that better weigh academic and extra-curricular goals, and strategies to enhance parent-teacher collaboration. This will allow educators to implement assessment with greater integrity and precision, benefitting children's development and readiness for challenges ahead.

Enhancing Parent-Teacher Collaboration
Thus, it is obvious that teacher-parent collaboration strongly affects social-emotional assessments. If done without parents' input, these assessments can be incomplete or biased towards school-only behaviors. According to Grace (2022), strong teacher-parent interactions are core in helping a child; social engagement, emotional regulation improve, and other aspects of development. For example, marks of formalized communication, such as parent conferences or action plans, provide essential information on the children's requirements.

These activities help in creating a coordination that is helpful in learning and from home. Conducting the previously mentioned workshops can help parents feeling empowered, as they are equipped with knowledge and tools for promoting social-emotional development at home. However, the identified problem is still relevant, as only 38 percent of teachers associate parental participation with time concern, lack of knowledge and a national role for teachers. In this way, more flexible approaches could also help, and the problem could be solved in the future (e.g., online meeting or asynchronous forms of communication). Such a bridge widens and teachers introduce in school educational process more balanced.

Conclusion
In addition, this research provides practical knowledge into the processes, challenges, and significance of social-emotional assessments in Malaysian preschool settings. Despite many teachers' confidence in their own assessment abilities, you noted the challenges providing culturally relevant assessment tools and time to do thorough assessments. To cater to the unique developmental milestones of Malaysian society, culturally sensitive frameworks and locally pertinent forms of evaluating instruments are vital (World Bank, 2022). Also, parents and teachers must interact closely to connect home and school so that children can develop more holistically (Senin & Halim, 2021). It has been demonstrated that social-emotional learning (SEL)-focused professional development gives educators the tools they need to assess and

intervene effectively (Deli et al., 2021). In order to promote child development, teachers and parents must collaborate, with planned activities that build mutual understanding and trust (Putri, 2023). Teachers' self-care and reflection practices are crucial, since mindfulness techniques have also been connected to changes in children's social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes (Jeon et al., 2022).

The research highlights the pressing necessity of systemic adjustments, such as the creation of culturally appropriate resources, improved parent-teacher cooperation, and focused professional development. Enhancing early childhood education will improve children's overall development in the social, emotional, and cognitive domains as well as the accuracy and effectiveness of socio-emotional examinations (Bagea et al., 2023; Johnstone et al., 2022).

The study provided comprehensive insights into the research topics and effectively met its objectives. By carefully analysing preschool teachers' knowledge and techniques for assessing social and emotional development in Kedah, Malaysia, it was possible to determine how comfortable and knowledgeable they were with important assessment ideas. The research also successfully brought attention to important problems that these educators deal with, such limited access to culturally relevant materials, a dearth of chances for professional growth, and minimal parental participation.

Last but not least, the study offered important recommendations for enhancing assessment practices, emphasising the necessity of developing culturally relevant materials, establishing targeted teacher development initiatives, and promoting more collaboration between educators and parents. These results not only support the stated goals but also provide a substantial contribution to the discussion of enhancing social-emotional evaluation procedures in Malaysian preschool environments.

Acknowledgements

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