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**An exploration into how a child's socio-economic background effects the
development of social and communication skills.**

A study conducted by Charis Brooks

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An exploration into how a child's background effects the development of social and communication skills.

Abstract

This research aims to delve into the influential role of a child's background with a key focus on the progression of their social and communication skills. Motivated by a profound curiosity about the often-underestimated resilience inherent in children, this study seeks to shed light on the extent to which numerous factors shape neurodevelopmental outcomes. The researcher aims to develop professional practice by understanding a basis of diverse backgrounds of children. A primary school in Wales will serve as the focal point for data collection, allowing for a comprehensive examination of socio-economic diversity among participants.

The researcher will conduct a literature review to identify current knowledge and understanding and build upon this. The study seeks to explore the relationship between socio-economic status and free school lunch eligibility in the chosen primary school. This will allow for the discovery of associations between background characteristics and skill development. The literature review found that children from households with low incomes might not have as many opportunities for extracurricular activities or exposure to a variety of social settings as children from caring and supporting families. Children's social and communication skill development is also influenced by their culture. Cultural standards concerning interpersonal interactions, communication methods, and societal expectations exhibit significant variation across many nations.

Throughout this document the researcher looks at methodological considerations. A mixture of methods was used. In order to get the necessary data, the researcher intends to design a longitudinal study that uses surveys and observations as triangulated research methodologies.

Probability sampling was considered preferable to non-probability sampling by the researcher. Considering simple random sampling is impartial and treats individuals equally, the researcher selected it for their study.

Fifteen members of the reception cohort of a school in Wales will be used by the researcher to configure the study.

Ethical considerations are paramount, with the research process prioritizing complete anonymity and confidentiality for all participants, safeguarding their privacy, and ensuring the integrity of the findings. Through this investigation, the researcher aims to recognise and appreciate the resilience demonstrated by children across diverse backgrounds, this research aims to contribute valuable insights to educational practices and policy development, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environments for all young children.

It is important to recognize that every child is unique, and the ways in which their background influences their development can vary widely. Some children may demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, while others may require additional support to overcome obstacles. Regardless of their background, providing children with a nurturing and stimulating environment that encourages positive social interactions and communication is essential for fostering healthy development.

Literature review

The research sets to explore an analysis of free school meal eligibility within the selected primary school as a proxy for socio-economic status, thereby enabling the identification of potential correlations between background factors and skill development. The British Educational Research Journal (BERA) (2017) states that free school meals are a measure of socio-economic deprivation used in the English school system. BERA (2017) also states that the free school meals can be used to monitor the socio-economic gap in achievement in the education system and can additionally be used to identify particular children at risk of low achievement and attainment. Some governments have emphasised the need to narrow this socio-economic gap in attainment to improve social mobility (Child Poverty Act, 2010; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission,2015).

In the first instance having explored the literature of the chosen topic, the researcher has found that there are many diverse backgrounds that form any class at any given time. A child's background plays a significant role in shaping their development,

particularly concerning social and communication skills (Hoff, E, 2006). From the moment a child is born, they are influenced by a range of factors within their environment, including family dynamics, socio-economic status, cultural norms, and educational opportunities. The family environment plays a critical role in shaping neurodevelopmental outcomes (Front Psychiatry, 2020).

A nurturing family background

Primarily, the family environment is crucial in laying the foundations for a child's social and communication abilities. Children learn by observing and imitating the behaviours of those around them, their parents, caregivers, and peers (Piaget, J, 1951). According to The University of Queensland (2019) A nurturing and supportive family environment typically provides many opportunities for interaction and communication, fostering the development of language skills and social understanding.

Children from a lower socio-economic background

The Hammil Institute on Disabilities (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on the influence of how lower socio-economic status (SES) plays a significant role in shaping a child's development. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face numerous challenges that can impact their social and communication skills. SES is determined by combinations of variables such as marital status, income, and parental education level.

Additionally, children from low-income families may have fewer opportunities for extracurricular activities or exposure to diverse social environments, further limiting their social and communication experiences. A study by Douglas, R *et al* (2009) found that the more frequently a child attended extracurricular activities reflected as their grades also increased.

Cultural backgrounds

Huang, Ching-Yu (2018) stated that cultural influences also shape the development of social and communication skills in children. Cultural norms regarding communication styles, interpersonal relationships, and social expectations vary

widely across different societies. This can be seen on a national scale whereby German mothers tend to prioritise the needs, desires, or personal development of their infants. In contrast, mothers of the African tribal tribe place greater emphasis on social context. This may encompass the way the child engages with others and the regulations pertaining to it (Huang, Ching-Yu,2018).

Children raised in collectivist cultures, for example, may prioritize group harmony and cooperation over individual expression, leading to differences in communication patterns compared to children from individualistic cultures. Exposure to multiple cultures can also enrich a child's social skills by fostering empathy, tolerance, and an appreciation for diversity (Priti P. Desai, Bernice A. Dodor, Elizabeth B. Carroll, 2019)

Access to interventions

Furthermore, access to quality education and early intervention services can significantly impact a child's social and communication development. Access to early intervention (EI) has been identified as a global priority for research in developmental disability and communication issues (Collins et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2014). Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are neurodevelopmental disorders that can be characterized by impaired social communication skills and isolated areas of interest (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) An American academy of Paediatrics has recommended screening for ASDs at 18 and 24 months of age (Myers, SM , Johnson, CP, 2007).Early childhood education programs that emphasize social interaction, language development, and emotional regulation can provide essential skills that serve as building blocks for future social success (Heiphetz, L and Oishi, S, 2021). Additionally, Georgiou, N and Spanoudis, G (2021) stated that timely identification and intervention for communication disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder or language delays, can mitigate potential challenges and support healthy development.

Methodological considerations

According to Nooyens, A (2015) Methodological considerations in research encompass the systematic planning and execution of the study. This involves selecting appropriate research designs, data collection methods, and sampling techniques. Ensuring the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the research process is paramount. Researchers must carefully analyse data using rigorous analytical methods to draw valid conclusions. Methodological considerations also involve addressing potential biases, controlling confounding variables, and adhering to ethical guidelines to uphold the credibility and integrity of the research findings (Bhandari, P, 2023).

The researcher aims to create a longitudinal study. According to Caruana, E, Roman, M, Hernandez-Sanchez, J and Solli, P (2015) Continuous or frequent measurements are used in longitudinal studies that monitor specific individuals across extended time periods, frequently years or decades. Cross-sectional analysis, on the other hand, is an alternative form of study that may examine several variables at once but, by definition, is static, consequently it cannot demonstrate how time impacts the variables being examined. The researcher chose to create a longitudinal study as opposed to a cross-sectional study as they feel the research needed to form the study would take a few years to complete. The researcher would need to evaluate the child participant at the beginning of their primary school journey and the end. The length of the study would allow an analysis of how deep of an impact the socio-economic of a child has on their social and communication development. According to Dis Thorac, J (2015) the advantages of longitudinal research are the capacity to recognise and connect specific exposures to events, as well as to further characterise exposures in terms of their timing, presence, and chronicity. Additionally, defining the order in which the events occur and observing changes over time in specific members of the cohort are key strengths of a longitudinal study. However, incomplete, and sporadic individual follow-up, as well as attrition leading to a gradual loss of follow-up are factors that can be detrimental to a longitudinal study (Dis Thorac, J, 2015).

Roberts-Holmes, G (2014) states that to gain a greater understanding of the research issue, triangulation entails comparing and combining material from several sources. As a result, the researcher's observations, participant interviews, and questionnaire responses generate distinct pieces of information that may be merged and contrasted to provide a triangulated interpretation. The researcher felt that the use of triangulation in terms of surveys and observation would be the most suitable to gain an appropriate view of the child and development.

According to Kayode-Sanni, A (no date) All the various categories that make up a target population are collected into a sample frame. Sampling is the process of choosing participants for the research from the sample frame. The researcher has decided to use a school in South Wales. They will select a reception cohort at the beginning of the study and observe their social and communication development from reception to year six (the end of their primary school experience). The researcher will comprise the study of child only participants. Over the past twenty years, there has been a significant rise in the amount of participatory research that involves children as informed, active, and active agents (Humanium, 2021).

The researcher will use a group of fifteen out of the reception cohort as to not be struggling with data handling. The group of fifteen will consist of equal parts male and female however the researcher will use a probability sampling and narrow the research down to simple random sampling to proceed with the study. According to Hassan, M (2024) probability sampling is simple there is a known, non-zero chance that any individual in the population will be chosen to be included in the sample. This indicates that every person in the population has an equal probability of being chosen for the sample, and the choice of one person has no bearing on the choice of any other person. The researcher felt that probability sampling was better as opposed to non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling refers to a sampling technique in which participants are chosen based on non-random factors like judgement, quota, availability, or convenience (Hassan, M, 2024).

According Emerg, T (2017), simple random sampling is where the researcher draws a random sample from the sampling frame using lottery method or using a computer-generated random list as to avoid bias. The researcher chose simple random

sampling as it avoids prejudice and treats everyone fairly when selecting participants. Although the stratified random sampling technique is a variant of simple random sampling, it also depends on the availability of the sample frame. Nevertheless, this approach divides the entire population based on a demographic component (in terms of gender, age, and religion) into homogenous strata or subgroups. The researcher felt that dividing the sampling frame would not be useful to gain a broad understanding of how socio-economic deprivation affects the development of social and communication skills. Systematic random sampling, also known as interval sampling, involves the investigators choosing participants for the sample using a predetermined interval and a systematic process. It is employed in situations where the vastness of the population makes it hard to create a sample frame (Emerg, T, 2017). The researcher felt that the sampling frame was structured enough to be able to handle the data as the population size was small enough to be able to conduct the study so simple random sampling was decided on.

The researcher has decided to use surveying and observations as triangulated methods of research to compile the data needed. According to organizational behaviour (no date) A survey involves asking participants to respond to a number of questions. The questions can be close-ended or open-ended. The questions in the survey can be quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative, or sometimes ethnographic, interpretative research refers to studies of subjects that are hard to quantify. Qualitative research tends to be a category for almost any kind of non-quantitative research (Sociol, Q, 2019). Alternatively, Quantity refers to that property of something that can be determined by measurement. Quantitative research is usually concerned with pre-determined variables.

Firstly, surveys are an effective way to collect a great amount of data from a large number of respondents. The advantage of cost-effectiveness is linked to the generalizability of a survey because surveys make it possible for researchers to affordably get data from extremely large groups. Survey study is likewise frequently a dependable approach to investigation. This is a result of polls being uniform in the sense that respondents are asked the same questions in precisely the same manner allowing for a general fairness (DeCarlo, M, no date). A survey study avoids the halo

effect as it is anonymous. A form of cognitive bias known as the "halo effect" occurs when we draw conclusions about someone, or something based just on one feature. Even in cases when there is little or no evidence to support forth our beliefs, people often presume that someone who exhibits one desirable feature also possesses additional positive traits (Forgas & Laham, 2016).

The method of observation is qualitative. Information is gathered by observing the individuals in their natural environment, and the data is then analysed. The subject's behavioural habits, psychological makeup, attitude, and beliefs all play a role in the observation process. Surveys are self-reported, participants have the option to select what information they choose to provide to researchers (Kohler, T, 2023). However, there are also some limitations to observational research, Watson, R. *et al.* noted that observational research should be considered invaluable for studying kinds of human behaviour as children feel watched and act differently as a result of direct contact. This is an example of the Hawthorne effect. According to Epidemiol Clin, J (2014) The Hawthorne effect is concerned with research involvement, the ensuing knowledge of being a subject of study, and potential behavioural effects. The researcher felt that other methods were not suitable for the study. Interview methods were not suitable for this study due to the lack of anonymity and lack of accessibility (Sociology Group,2019). The researcher felt that for a study that can be considered personal an interview would be quite difficult for some parents to discuss their socio-economic status.

Hart, R (1992) exhibited a typology of children's participation which is presented as a metaphorical "ladder," with each ascending rung representing an increase in levels of child agency, control, or power. The methodology of this study would be based on rung five and six of Hart's ladder metaphor. Rung five is where the participants are consulted and informed, the researcher would make the children aware of the observation and purpose and inform the children of what the research is for. Additionally, rung six of the ladder is where something is adult initiated and shared decisions with children are made. The researcher will share decisions made with the children, in terms of making the children aware of the observation and what they are seeking in their study.

Ethical considerations

The concepts and procedures that researchers must adhere to in order to make sure that their studies are carried out in an ethical and responsible manner are known as ethical considerations in research. These factors are intended to safeguard research participants' rights, safety, and wellbeing as well as the validity and integrity of the study itself (Hassan, M, 2024).

In order for the researcher to adhere to the ethical consideration guidelines they must gain consent from the participants or assent from the parents if the participant is not deemed mature enough to make an informed decision. Consent can only be given by individuals who have reached the legal age of consent which in the UK is eighteen, whereas assent is the agreement of someone not able to give legal consent to participate in the activity (UAF, No date). In the case of the study at hand the researcher would need consent from the parents to analyse their socio-economic status and the assent of the participants parents to be able to carry out ethically informed observations.

The researcher will establish that all participants have provided voluntary informed consent. According to Palmer B, (2015) It is imperative to obtain voluntary informed consent before using participants in any kind of ethical study. The absence of coercion or undue influence, giving participants information essential to the issue at hand, and guaranteeing that participants have the capacity to utilise the information to make an informed decision about whether to participate are considered the three pillars around which valid consent is based.

By ensuring compliance with the UNCRC (United Convention Rights of a Child) the researcher will consider article three and twelve. Article three stipulates that any aspect concerning children, the interests of the child must be at the forefront of primary consideration. Article twelve also states that children who are deemed capable of forming their own views must be allowed to express their views freely (UNCRC, 2019). The researcher will comply with these articles by keeping the children fully informed about any and all decisions concerning them and their wellbeing. The researcher will also inform the children that they are free to leave the study at any given time if they do not wish to participate any longer. The researcher

will also follow the Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) which states that when conducting research on children under the age of sixteen, researchers should make sure that the parents or guardians are made aware of the purpose of the study and given the option to remove their child from it at any time. There is no one-size-fits-all method for establishing morally competent procedures to guarantee that children participate in research willingly and freely and have a sufficient grasp of the risks involved (BPS Ethics Committee, 2021).

Whilst considering the ethical considerations the researcher must consider themselves, the participants, and the university. In the first instance the researcher must mitigate the issues and risks that could be raised whilst collecting and analysing data. BERA (2024) states that it is important for researchers to be conscious that participants' perceptions of their privacy in each setting, particularly online, may not be realistic. There is uncertainty regarding privacy within particular online groups. There are further ethical questions raised by the content given or the sensitive or unlawful subjects being addressed. In addition, keeping in mind any agreements made respecting confidentiality and anonymity, researchers should think about what content they may be required to submit to internet service providers and/or appropriate authorities under what circumstances. If the researcher witnesses illegal or harmful behaviour may be necessary to inform authorities and break anonymity to ensure that no harm comes to them and other children.

The international hub for advancing evidence-based ethical guidelines for studies involving children and adolescents is called Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC). According to Powell, A, Graham A, and Truscott, J (2016), the ERIC method demonstrates a dedication to the rights of children, the importance of relationships, and the requirement for researcher reflexivity in improving ethical research. The researcher must comply with the ERIC framework to ensure that the study avoids bias and misconceptions. The ERIC framework is great for boosting universal ethical principles while provoking critical engagement that can be required for navigating the ethical tensions that interact with the decision-making in research involving children.

The researcher must also reduce the risk of being named an unethical study by avoiding the use of incentives. The regulation of research incentives is a contentious

and inconsistent region due to the lack of clarity surrounding whether financial incentives constitute unfair inducements by reducing participants' awareness of the risks involved in the study or unfair inducements by favouring the enrolment of marginalised groups (Halpern, S *et al.*, 2021). The researcher can avoid this risk by keeping the participants fully informed and not using any kind of bribery to coerce an expected response from the participants.

The researcher must also mitigate the risks that can be imposed on the university. According to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) (2022) researchers at the University, regardless of their level of education—undergraduate, graduate, or staff—always understand the highest standards of rigour and integrity in their work and uphold these standards. UWTSD is able to uphold a research environment that fosters ethical research practices, supports researchers in understanding and acting in accordance with expected standards, values, and behaviours, and stands up for them when they uphold these expectations in trying situations. Addressing data protection laws specifically, this implies that everyone covered by this code must abide by it, even though the University, as the data controller, is required to put in place the necessary organisational and technological safeguards.

In addition to this the researcher is obliged to consider all aspects of data management and handling. The Data Protection Act of 2018 regulates how companies, governments, and organisations utilise personal data. The Data Protection Act (2018) is the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). A personal data is subject to pertinent guidelines known as "data protection principles." The researcher must ensure that the data is utilised in a transparent, legitimate, and equitable manner for the intended, clear reasons. The data must be stored for as little time as is required and managed to provide proper security, including defence against unauthorised or illegal processing. The GDPR has strict guidelines about the confidentiality of participants when it comes to personal data such as race, gender, ethnicity, health and sexual orientation.

For personal information pertaining to criminal convictions and crimes, there are distinct protections. The participant must have the right to know what information the government and other organisations have about them, as per the Data Protection Act

of 2018. They must be able to see and determine how information is being used and have access to personal information. Additionally, the participants have the right to amend inaccurate data

wipe data and limit data processing. The researcher will follow the GDPR guidelines and keep the participant informed about what information is stored and the period of which it will be stored.

GDPR embraces privacy through design. The GDPR mandates that the protection of citizens' data be considered from the outset of the design process. You ought to comply with this new rule and consider regarding how to utilise technology and data in an ethical and proper manner. The GDPR has up-front fines for noncompliance (Welsh Government, 2024). An acceptable retention duration for the study data must be agreed upon between the participant and the researcher.

Although general results from user research might be useful for a long time, most unprocessed user research data becomes obsolete rapidly. The Welsh Government recommends that user research data be retained for two or three years. This will not be applicable for the means of this study as it a longitudinal study and will need to keep data for a longer period of time. Research data from cameras and voice recorders need to be transferred as quickly to a more secure location by the researcher. Only locations that the organisation has authorised for the storage of personal data may be used to store research data. The researcher must limit the people who have a special need to access the data. It is crucial that the researcher only utilise the study data for the purposes for which the participants provided consent. The researcher must also keep a firm record of consent. When research data is no longer needed or has reached the end of its retention term, the researcher must set up a procedure for deleting it. The extracts utilised should be completely anonymized to prevent participant identity. There are no issues with broadly portraying the results, including making them public, when using anonymized. Additionally, if a participant requests access to their personal data or withdraws their consent, the researcher is unable to do anything with the study outcomes. Regardless of whether the study is completely anonymized, experts advise to always

conceal or remove explicitly identifiable personal information, like names or badge numbers to hide identities (Welsh Government, 2024).

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