



## The Influence of Social Support during the Primary Years of Schooling among Tertiary Students towards their Social Competence

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### Abstract

This study investigates the influence of social support during primary years on the development of social competence in tertiary education. Recognizing the pivotal role of early experiences in shaping lifelong outcomes, the researchers draw upon extensive research to investigate the nuanced relationships that unfold across these critical stages of human development. Hence, this study aims to probe the relationship between social support during the primary years and self-competence among the randomly selected tertiary students of a private sectarian University in Cebu City, Philippines through a descriptive correlational study. Data were gathered online and face to face using valid and reliable 4-point adapted Likert-type survey questionnaires. Results revealed that both social support ( $\bar{x} = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) and social competence ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) were described as high. Pearson's  $r$  correlation was also found to be significant,  $r(180) = 0.17$ ,  $p = .02177$ ,  $p < 0.5$ , thus rejecting the null hypothesis and concluding that there is a relatively weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.17$ ) between the levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy among the students while engaging in online learning. In essence, the findings imply that students perceiving elevated levels of social support during their formative years are likely to exhibit heightened social competence later in life. This study recommends that future research endeavors adopt an extended timeframe; tracking participants from primary through tertiary education as such, an approach would provide insights into how these factors evolve and exert lasting effects.

## Introduction

The significance of social competence as a crucial determinant of personal and professional success is increasingly recognized, emphasizing the impact of early childhood social support on an individual's ability to navigate social situations. In the Philippines, strong familial bonds contribute significantly to children's development of social skills, as evidenced by a 2018 poll by the Social Weather Stations (SWS), revealing that 92% of Filipinos value family support. However, a persistent issue arises for children lacking sufficient social support, negatively influencing their social competence and academic performance. Wang et al. (2023) study highlights how a lack of social support buffers the adverse relationship between social isolation and academic success among college students, emphasizing the detrimental effects of limited social interactions.

To address this, enhancing academic support services for primary schoolers is proposed, creating an environment that prioritizes both academic achievement and the emotional and social needs of students (Gueldner et al., 2020; Duchesneau, 2020). Early intervention at the primary school level becomes crucial, providing children with tools to navigate social

challenges and fostering a positive trajectory for academic and social development (Parker et al., 2022).

Considering these factors, this study aims to collect and analyze empirical data on the correlation between early-age social support and later-life social competence (Burr et al., 2020). The research fills a crucial gap by exploring the lifelong impact of early social support on an individual's current level of social competence. While existing studies have delved into social competence or social support individually, limited research has investigated the correlation between these variables. Moreover, the relationship between social support and social competence remains unexplored in a school setting among tertiary students (Chen et al., 2020). Through this correlational study, researchers seek a comprehensive understanding of how social support in childhood shapes social competence, addressing concerns related to the social competence of adolescents and adults in educational settings.

To comprehend the main concepts and variables in this study, it is essential to define the variables at hand: social support, as defined by Cutrona (1996) and emphasized by DiMatteo (2004), is crucial for solid relationships and stable mental health. It encompasses various types, including emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support, but the misuse of these types in different situations may yield unintended effects. In the early years, parents serve as the primary source of social and emotional support for children. However, as children age, peers become increasingly vital in their social-emotional development, replacing parents as essential providers of support and pleasure. Peers offer opportunities for fantasy play, enabling children to take on different roles, understand diverse perspectives, and grasp social norms and traditions (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2005).

In the educational realm, McWhirter et al. (2019) advocates for schools to facilitate close relationships among students, enhancing their aspirations for college. School regard, as highlighted by a Florida State University study, correlates with students' drive and perseverance during the transition from basic to tertiary education, emphasizing the similarity between school regard and perceived social support (Hersh, 2024). This underscores the imperative role of social support in navigating challenges throughout college life, aligning with the present study's aim to assess the correlational relationship between social support during primary schooling and the social competence of tertiary students. Strategies promoting social support are crucial for improving academic achievement, raising expectations, and increasing college attendance, particularly for underprivileged students (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Enhancing access to structured social support, including peer support, mentoring, personalized assistance, parental involvement, and early college preparation, becomes essential for the success of students entering tertiary education.

Social competence, as defined by Orpinas & Horne (2006), encompasses age-appropriate knowledge and skills for peaceful and creative functioning within one's community or social environment. It involves getting along well with others, forming and maintaining close relationships, and responding adaptively in social settings. The complexity of social competence is further underscored by its dependence on developmental characteristics, specific social situations, and cultural norms, with cultural expectations influencing specific acts of social competence. Strong social competence equips individuals to articulate thoughts, actively engage in class discussions, collaborate in peer groups, and fully leverage academic opportunities (Rajaram & Rajaram, 2021).

During adolescence, peer relationships play a pivotal role in developing social competence. This period involves the crucial developmental task of forming identity and aspirations for adulthood. Peers act as social stepping stones, aiding adolescents in transitioning from

emotional dependence on parents to autonomous functioning. Interacting with peers allows teenagers to experiment with various social roles, crucial for effective interpersonal relationships in adulthood. However, rejection within peer relationships can lead to a negative developmental spiral, excluding adolescents from positive peer circles integral to social skill development (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2005). In education, social competence is indispensable for students transitioning from primary school to college. These social skills derived from competence become crucial tools for navigating the developmental challenges of this transformative period. Recognizing the significance of social competence in tertiary education emphasizes the need for educational institutions to actively contribute to the development of these skills, fostering both academic success and personal growth (Kennedy, 2018).

Acknowledging the toll that academic responsibilities take on students, this study further delves into the extensive impact of social support on mental health at various educational levels. Social support, as highlighted by Ozbay et al. (2007), is crucial for maintaining both physical and mental well-being, offering resilience against stress and trauma-related psychopathology, including disorders like PTSD. Maymon et al. (2019) emphasize the significance of the transition to tertiary education in influencing stress and mental health, especially during the initial university years. In contrast, Ulmanen et al. (2022) study focuses on social support during primary and lower secondary education in Finland, paralleling the scope of the present study but with a distinct focus on perceived support during the early academic years.

A local study by Anque & Ceballo (2023) in Cebu explores the relationship between perceived social support and loneliness among senior high school students, demonstrating that a strong perception of support correlates with lower levels of loneliness. These findings resonate with the core theme of the present study, investigating how social support in primary school shapes the coping mechanisms of tertiary students facing stressors affecting academic performance. Utilizing the Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) social support survey, this paper examines the impact of received support on social competence at the tertiary level. Acknowledging the responsibility of academic tasks, the study seeks to analyze the delicate balance between academic demands, stress, and their impact on students' social competence, aiming to contribute to future research in enhancing social support strategies.

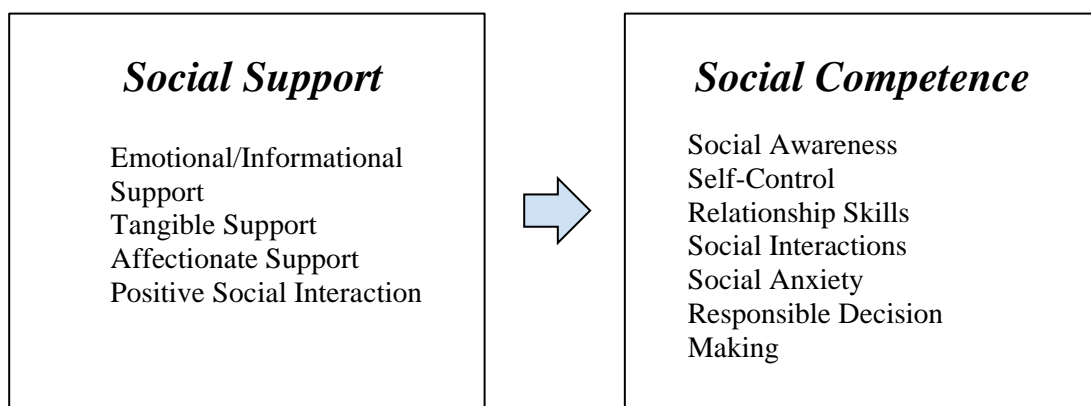
Social competence, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional abilities, plays a pivotal role in an individual's interpersonal relationships (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2017). Tabassum et al. (2020) emphasize its significance among university students, linking it to increased social harmony and meaningful relationships. Their correlational study, focusing on 4078 students in Pakistan, reveals a substantial connection between social competence and academic achievement, highlighting its importance in a university context. Similarly, a local study by Muring (2022) explores the link between social competence, emotional intelligence, and work commitment among school administrators in Bohol. The study underscores the impact of social competence on work performance, offering insights into its role in both education and professional settings.

While social competence among college students in the Philippines is not extensively studied, Cuenca et al. (2023) investigate the relationship between social-emotional learning competence and reasoning skills among Grade 12 students. The study reveals a significant correlation between perceived social-emotional learning competence and mathematical reasoning skills, emphasizing the importance of social-emotional skills in academic performance. The evaluation tool employed, the QACSE-P-SF, measures social and emotional competencies (Coelho et al., 2016) and has been utilized in previous studies. Additionally, research, such as

Van der Zanden et al. (2018) study, indicates a strong influence of social competence on college students' academic achievement, underlining its role in academic engagement and overall success. The relevance of social competence among college students in the Philippines is emphasized in a study by Galang & Reyes (2009), which underscores the significance of family and peer relationships in motivating students and facilitating positive learning experiences. Overall, these studies collectively underscore the critical role of social competence in academic achievement, both locally and globally.

While there is existing research examining the influence of social support during primary schooling on various outcomes, the researchers felt a need for more longitudinal studies that can provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of social support on social competence. The researchers also observed that most of the related studies focused on parental support, so it raises concern about the relative importance of support from different sources outside of familial relations. Lastly, the researchers also concluded that there is a need to further understand the impacts of social support that may change during key turning points within the educational years of an individual, such as the transitions from primary to secondary schooling and from secondary to tertiary education.

In this conceptual framework, the researchers aim to dissect the nature of this relationship. The researchers will scrutinize the extent to which social support during the primary years, from primary caregivers, peers, teachers, and our broader social network, influences the social competence of individuals as they transition into tertiary education. The researchers will also explore the pathways through which these influences take shape, be it through academic performance, emotional well-being, or the dynamics of social interactions during their higher education years.



*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework*

The study acknowledges that individual differences, socioeconomic factors, and cultural norms act as influential moderators shaping complex relationships, highlighting the intricate nature of human development and its impact on social competence.

The main goal of this study is to investigate the correlation between social support received during the early years of schooling and social competence among tertiary students in a private sectarian university in Cebu City, Philippines in the first semester of the academic year 2023–2024. The result of this investigation would be the basis for improving the academic support services provided for primary schoolers. Specifically, the researcher seeks to answer the following: (1) What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of Age, Gender, College Year, College Course. (2) What is the extent of social support received during primary schooling? Emotional/Informational Support, Tangible Support, Affectionate Support, Positive Social Interaction. (3) What is the extent of social competence received during tertiary

education? Social Awareness, Self-Control, Relationship Skills, Social Interactions, Social Anxiety, Responsible Decision-Making. (4) Is there a significant relationship between the level of social support experienced during primary schooling and the social competence of tertiary students? (5) What recommendations can be made based on the study?

The researchers hypothesize that there is a significant and positive relationship between the level of social support experienced during primary schooling and the social competence of tertiary students. Additionally, the researchers propose that specific factors within the aspect of social support significantly influence the social competence of college students. The study is limited due to the environment and participants chosen. Limiting a research study has advantages, such as focused research, cost-efficiency, and control. However, it may limit the generalizability of findings beyond this specific group and introduce biases. Therefore, when the researchers chose to restrict the environment and participants, they carefully weighed the benefits against the limitations and remained transparent about these limitations when presenting their findings. Additionally, a significant constraint lies in the temporal scope, as the study primarily relies on retrospective data, potentially introducing recall bias. Moreover, the long period between primary school years and college complicates isolating the influence of early social support amidst the myriad developmental factors, similar to how Costa et al. (2018) noted in their study that the dynamic nature of social interactions and changing environments make it difficult to determine the long-term impact of early social support. The dynamic nature of social interactions and changing environments further underscores the challenge of pinpointing the lasting impact of primary school social support on current social competence. Hence, while the findings offer valuable insights, the temporal limitations call for caution in drawing definitive conclusions about causation and emphasizing the need for longitudinal research designs.

## Methods

This study employs a quantitative, non-experimental research design to examine the influence of primary school social support on the social competence of tertiary-level students using a descriptive-correlational approach to explore relationships between variables without establishing causation. The study was conducted in a private sectarian university in Cebu City, Philippines, which is well-known for its dedication to quality education. The school also provides its students with educational settings, encouraging both academic achievement and lifelong learning, ultimately producing future professionals who will make a lasting impression as leaders in their respective fields. Drawing from the 2023-2024 academic year enrolment list, the study utilizes convenience sampling, gathering data from the one hundred eighty-two (182) readily and conveniently accessible college students (Simkus, 2023).

Table 1. Respondents of the study

Age	f	rf (%)	Gender	f	rf (%)	Year	f	rf (%)	Course	f	rf (%)
18	24	13.19	Female	105	57.69	1	70	38.4	SAFAD	15	8.24
19	64	35.16	Male	77	42.31	2	84	46.15	SAS	50	27.47
20	54	29.67				3	15	8.24	SED	2	1.10
21	18	9.89				4	13	7.14	SOE	39	21.43
22	12	6.59							SHCP	30	16.48
23	7	3.85							SBE	40	21.98
24	2	1.10							SLG	6	3.30
25	0	0									
26	1	0.55									
<b>Total</b>	182	100		182	100		182	100		182	100

This study utilized two adapted survey questionnaires. (1) is the 19-item Social Support Survey Instrument from the Medical Outcomes Study (MOS), covering emotional/informational support, tangible support, affectionate support, and positive social interaction; and (2) the 52-item Social and Emotional Competencies Evaluation Questionnaire Teacher’s version, Short Form (QACSE-P-SF), encompassing social awareness, self-control, relationship skills, social isolation, social anxiety, and responsible decision-making. Both instruments employ a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (SD-1) to strongly agree (SA-5), with scoring adjustments for consistency (Blanco et al., 2020).

Sourced from Rand Corporation, the MOS social support survey ensures comprehensiveness in measuring social support dimensions, distinct from related measures (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). The research instruments underwent pilot testing in the new setting, reinforcing their reliability (Villarta et al., 2021). ANOVA results revealed a high-reliability score ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) which was considered to be acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003 in Blanco et al., 2020), while the MOS social support survey and an acceptable score ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) for the social competence survey, as interpreted using Cronbach's alpha.

The four point Likert-type questionnaire scale used in this study was adapted and treated as continuous data instead of ordinal data. These survey questionnaires were then administered through Google Forms and face to face on two (2) different campuses. The data gathering procedures involved securing a transmittal letter from the Principal, ensuring respondents signed an informed consent, and distributing the letter to inform the respondents about the nature of the study. Ethically, participants were informed about privacy, confidentiality assurances, and potential minimal risks. The right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point was emphasized for each respondent's autonomy. All the tools used in this study were approved by cross-examiners during the research defense hearing conducted at the university. For the post data gathering, Microsoft Excel facilitated the entry and evaluation of information. Microsoft Excel and a statistical package for social sciences were the chosen software for accurate data analysis. The study employed straightforward statistical measures, including simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation, utilizing the Pearson (r) formula to establish the correlation between social support and social competence among the respondents since they were continuous and interval variables.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the gathered data, Table 2 shows the extent of students’ social support received during their primary years.

Table 2. Level of Social Support

Level of Social Support	Mean	SD	Description
Tangible Support	3.35	0.92	Very High
Positive Social Interaction	3.27	0.79	Very High
Affectionate Support	3.17	0.90	High
Emotional/Informational Support	2.97	0.91	High
<b>Totality</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>High</b>

Interval: 1.00-1.75 (Very Low), 1.76-2.50 (Low), 2.51-3.25 (High), 3.26-4.00 (Very High)

The table above presents the data collected in the survey results of students' social support received during their primary years of schooling, encompassing tangible support, positive social interaction, affectionate support, and emotional/informational support. The results indicate that most of the items were rated highly by the students.

Two items emerged as very highly rated: students' tangible support, which was rated very high ( $\bar{x} = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), and positive interactions between peers, which was also rated very high ( $\bar{x} = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). A primary schooler's main source of social support during those days is most likely to be their parents. Bunijevac (2017) increased parental involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, enhanced parent and teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate. These findings suggest that during the student's primary schooling, they were able to gain access to material goods and services tailored to their needs by their parents as they grew up and an added reflection on a positive social environment where the student experiences constructive and affirming interactions with their family and peers.

Furthermore, a few items that received high ratings include the affectionate support received by the students ( $\bar{x} = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) and emotional/ informational support ( $\bar{x} = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). This suggests that they feel emotionally supported, likely experiencing warmth, care, and encouragement from their surroundings. Parents' participation in school governance can bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the table, leading to better decision-making and a more inclusive and responsive school environment (Desforges & Abouchaar., 2003). This can also mean that they feel supported not only emotionally but also in terms of receiving relevant information or guidance.

This table presents how tertiary school students measure their social support from when they attended primary school and how that is a conducive and nurturing environment for a student. The combination of tangible support, positive peer interactions, affectionate support, and emotional/informational support reflects a holistic approach to fostering the well-being and development of the students. These findings suggest that social support is an important factor in the development of social competence. Parents, teachers, and other adults can play a role in providing social support to students.

Table 3. Level of Social Competence

Level of Social Competence	Mean	SD	Description
Self-Control	3.32	0.68	Very High
Responsible Decision Making	2.99	0.68	High
Relationship Skills	2.97	0.76	High
Social Awareness	2.95	0.71	High
Social Interactions	2.52	0.88	High
Social Anxiety	2.28	0.88	Low
<b>Totality</b>	<b>2.84</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>High</b>

Interval: 1.00-1.75 (Very Low), 1.76-2.50 (Low), 2.51-3.25 (High), 3.26-4.00 (Very High)

Along with the social support of the respondents, their level of social competence was measured. The table above shows the data collected from the survey measuring the respondents' level of social competence during their tertiary years. Social competence is measured by assessing the respondent's response toward a wide variety of social situations. The results imply that the respondents are highly socially competent and have a heightened sense of social awareness and confidence in social settings.

Among all the sub variables under social competence, the respondents scored the highest in self-control, which was rated very high ( $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). This indicates that the respondents naturally understand social cues concerning respecting their peers. High levels of self-control have been found to correlate with a higher grade point average and better adjustment which includes higher self-esteem, less substance abuse, better relationship and interpersonal skills, a secure attachment style, and more optimal emotional responses

(Baumeister, 2018). Moreover, the vast majority of the items under social competence are interpreted to be high. Responsible decision-making is the second highest rated sub-variable ( $\bar{x} = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) which implies that the respondents are skilled in decision-making under pressure, considering many factors when making a decision, and correcting one's own mistakes. Furthermore, the sub-variables of relationship skills ( $\bar{x} = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), social awareness ( $\bar{x} = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), and social interactions ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) were rated high. Based on the rating of all these sub-variables, it indicates that the respondents have an understanding of social cues, are interested in participating in social situations, and can communicate and form relationships with others well.

Based on the data, the respondents have shown to have low levels of social anxiety which was rated low ( $\bar{x} = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). This further supports the totality of the data under social competence being rated as high ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). This further indicates that the respondents are generally comfortable in social situations— little to no traits of social anxiety such as nervousness around others. In addition, social anxiety traits are a result of genetic factors (Stein et al., 1998), stressful social events in early life (Erwin et al., 2006), and an overprotective parenting style from an individual's parent figures (Lieb et al., 2000). Thus, low levels of social anxiety traits may give further insight into the various past experiences of the respondents.

The data regarding social competence suggests that the respondents are highly socially competent not having much difficulty when it comes to social interactions, having confidence when interacting with others, and understanding both verbal and nonverbal messages from others.

Table 4. Correlational Relationship between Social Support and Social Competence

	<b>Social Support</b>	<b>Social Competence</b>
<b>Social Support</b>	1	
<b>Social Competence</b>	0.175604	1

Source: Hinkle et al. (2003). Applied Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; 2003.

The relationship between the level of social support received during primary years and social competence was explored among the tertiary students of the private sectarian University with a sample size of 182. On average, the level of social support was high ( $\bar{x} = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) and the level of social competence was high ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) The correlation between the levels of social support during primary years and social competence during tertiary years was found to be significant,  $r(180) = 0.17$ ,  $p = .02177$ ,  $p < 0.5$  at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Hence, the researchers reject the null hypothesis, stating that there is a significant relationship, and conclude with at least 95% confidence that there is a relatively weak positive correlation between the levels of social support and social competence (Hinkle et al., 2023).

The reported correlation ( $r = 0.17$ ) indicates that there is a corresponding inclination for higher social competence during tertiary years. This implies that individuals perceiving elevated levels of social support in their formative years may not only exhibit heightened social competence in later life but also may be less prone to experiencing other mental health issues (Harandi et al., 2017). The statistical significance of the correlation ( $p = 0.02177$ ) suggests that this observed relationship is unlikely to be a random occurrence, thereby bolstering confidence in the association between social support in primary years and social competence in tertiary years. These findings are consistent with a similar study conducted by Harandi et al. (2017), which similarly reported an average mean size.

Browne (2014) have also contributed to the researcher's understanding by revealing that children's social and emotional development is impacted by various factors, encompassing their temperament, interactions with peers, and relationships with adults. The study emphasizes on the importance of relationships with adults and parallels the notion that a supportive environment during formative years can lay the groundwork for enhanced social competence later in life. The temperament aspect also resonates, suggesting that nurturing a positive and supportive environment in early years may contribute to shaping a child's emotional disposition, thereby influencing their social competence as they progress into tertiary education. The aforementioned studies underscore the significance of social and emotional development for children's achievements in both academic settings and life at large.

Ultimately, in discussing the lack of correlation between social support in primary years and the social competence of tertiary students, it is essential to consider various factors. Possible reasons could include the influence of additional variables not accounted for in the study, assessing the complexity of the correlation among both variables can prove to be methodically challenging, or potential differences in individual experiences that overshadow the impact of early social support. Moreover, variations in interpreting social competence or the nuances of social support could contribute to the observed negligible correlation as the interpretation of both variables is subjective. As students may perceive social support and social competence differently (Walter et al., 1977), their interpretations of these concepts can add significant variability to the data (Harandi et al., 2017; Browne, 2014). In essence, delving into the intricacies of these factors may unravel the elements that influence the reported negligible correlation between social support and social competence among tertiary students of the University.

The sex difference in the link between early social support and later social competence, as revealed in this study, gives a more complex and, sometimes paradoxical, picture within a great body of literature on human development. Altogether, the statistical dependency is rather evident; however, the actual interdependency is low enough to demand a more nuanced and sceptical understanding of what such a connection implies (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). To accept this correlation in its primary form only would be to fail to capture the actual complexity of factors that contribute to the emergence of social competence: a complexity that this research tried to shed the light on only partly.

Thus, the proved comparatively low relation of early social support and later social competence ( $r = 0,17$ ) may cause doubts in the idea of the critical significance of early childhood experiences. However, this finding does not undermine the early social support but rather brings to question on how exactly early social support works. And is it possible that benefits of early social support are less concrete and immediate, and therefore the indicators of the role of social support is also not a simple causa-solution of positive developmental outcome, but rather the gradual modulation of social skills that can then modulate with a whole host of other factors?

Recent study indicate that some mediators and moderators of social competence development do not confine themselves to the early years of a child's life (Parker et al. , 2022). This could be the reason behind the weak correlation noted in this study; this points to the fact that there is a multifaceted interaction where the early social support is a base on which subsequent experiences construct, revise or even erase. In other words our earlier studies indicate that early social support may not produce high social competence in later years independently but in combination with later social experiences, personality development and other contextual factors which makes social outcomes complex and undoubtedly interrelated.

This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory according to which human development transpires within the context of nested social contexts and the proximal processes operating within them. It is further noted that this is because the present study identified a relatively small net social impact of the studied interactions, but the larger pattern of findings may represent the summated effects of these interactions across the course of development, such that early social support is but one of many sources of developmental influence within a larger developmental context or ecology. In doing so, it poses a threat to the simplistic linear models of social development, and requires the adoption of a more dynamic means of outlook on social competence that will be increasingly context sensitive.

Therefore, we have to question and look at critical mediating and or moderating factors that may explain the link between early social support and later social competence. Hill has suggested one possible reason for a small correlation between early social support and later successful functioning where the positive impact of early social support depends on the children's subsequent social experiences, which either augment or inhibit the effectiveness of early intercession. For instance, peer relationships during adolescence a stage development characterized by social and emotional growth must be expected to play a significant part in the development of social competence (Van der Zanden et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2015). If these relationships are positive then these results justify the relevance of social support in the early years; if these are negative, then they can spoil the earlier achievements.

Furthermore, the quality of educational environments within the primary and secondary schooling can cause the development of social competency. Through positive interaction in schools and support, as well as social emotional learning, erasure of social support in early years could be countered by schools (Kennedy, 2018). Environments on the other hand that are socially or emotionally unfavorable do not enhance the development of social competence even if the individual has received early support (Denham, 2006). On this basis, one may reach the conclusion that the establishment of social competence is a Lifelong Learning process that depends on the interaction of early and later conditions.

Also, personal characteristics in terms of temperament and personality may also have important moderating effects on the effects of early social support (Heponiemi et al., 2006). In child development, studies have found that kids with certain temperamental quality respond positively to social support perhaps because they possess high resilience or are sociable while kids with less adaptive qualities require more intervention to get the same results (Burr et al., 2020). Such differences point towards the need to make interventions in social emotional learning more differential, since it cannot be said that what will work for one learner will work for another.

### **The Complexity of Measuring Social Development**

The research method used in this study and more specifically the use of retrospective self-reports as the primary source of data are thus deserving of attention. Retrospective self-reporting is a problematic method at best and there are several issues to highlight: recall bias. Drawing participants' attention to the early childhood social encounters, which can be derived many years later, might interfere with the more recent encounters, the current self-interpretation or the cultural storylines (Harandi et al., 2017). This could make them over estimate or Under estimate the level of social support that they received hence distorting the relationship between the two in later developed social competence.

Also, the concepts of social support and social competence are rather relative, which makes a measurement accurate to a great extent impossible (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Stimuli such as

social support for instance may be appraised differently in terms of its availability, expectations, and culture. This is subtle but what one might regard as strong support, the other will consider as meager. Like social competence, violence also comprises various forms, which includes social interaction and discrete emotional self-regulation and even empathy; commonly used measures are therefore inclined to only provide a simple estimate of the whole construct (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

Such a cultural background of the study also contributes to the picture. Administered to students from a single private sectarian university in Cebu City, Philippines, the study results are therefore influenced by the social cultural context of this region. These exceptionally high scores of social support may actually be influenced by such aspects of Filipino culture as the emphasis on family (Fulgini et al., 1999). This cultural difference means that for further research, the socio-cultural context of the results should be taken into account because the significance of the value of social support can considerably differ depending on a cultural context.

Despite the fact that the results of this study are relatively small in terms of their relationship, they are very important in the context of current issues and trends in developmental theory and social competence interventions. The poor relation between early social support and later social competence thus opens up questions about early caregiving constructs that are often postulated in traditional developmental paradigms (Love & Knott, 2018). Rather than such a simple model a more gradual, adding one more layer to another model is necessary, for social development is not something that occurs in isolation at a certain point and then stops but is an ongoing process where experiences are constantly added together with all other experiences, and events of later life are far from predictable in terms of their impact on previous events.

From the present study, therefore, learning supports the notion that multiple and evolving support is necessary over the developmental process. It will be seen that early interventions are undoubtedly valuable, yet these should be seen as but one aspect of further and continued support that should be available throughout adolescence and beyond. Of particular significance in all this is the education sector, given that institutions are at the heart of society. Indeed, through the development of supportive and socially enhanced environments that follow the transitions of the students, the school can supplement the wants for early social support (Kennedy, 2018).

Most importantly, the findings of the study imply that attempts to enhance social competence must be personalized, considering the students' temperamental characteristics, social history, and culture. This kind of an individual approach takes into account the fact that development, particularly social development is a complex process that is influenced by a host of factors that may be unfolding at different and varying rates. If the teaching of skills for social and emotional learning is more comprehensive and differential then, educators can meet the needs of all students and make them capable enough to be successful not only in the academic curriculum but also in life.

## **Conclusion**

The results showed a statistically significant, although minor, association between the two variables. Despite the statistical significance, the correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.17$ ) was modest, suggesting a little relationship. The findings call for an examination of the numerous variables that may have contributed to the observed insignificant connection. One probable reason is the incorporation of undocumented variables, indicating that the research did not capture all

factors impacting social support and social competence. Methodological difficulties in measuring and interpreting the intricate interaction of these factors might conceivably play a role. Furthermore, the subjectivity of assessing social competence and social support complicates comprehending the relationship.

The study implies that future research should use a more comprehensive strategy to discover and integrate other factors that may influence social support and competence. Furthermore, improving measuring methods while taking into account the subjective character of these constructs might improve the accuracy of results. Understanding these complexities is critical for having a deeper understanding of the complicated interactions that exist between early social support and later social competence among tertiary students. Consider more than just social support and competence. Future studies should look at a wider range of factors like personality traits, surroundings, and academic experiences. This comprehensive approach will give a more complete picture of what influences social competence. Future researchers should also update existing instruments or create new ones that better capture these complex concepts including interviews or discussions that can lend more substance to the experiences of the respondents. Another is to follow participants for a more extended period, from primary to tertiary education. This will show how social support and competence change over time and have lasting effects. Lastly, a recommendation is made for additional longitudinal studies to further illuminate the developmental path of these crucial factors.

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