

Parental Socioeconomic Variables and Their Impact on Soft Skills Development in Secondary School Students in Sri Lanka: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate relationship between parental socioeconomic variables and the development of soft skills among secondary school students in Sri Lanka. The research surveyed 1350 secondary school students in Sri Lanka in a quantitative approach, employing a rigorous stratified random sampling technique. The survey instrument, validated through expert input and assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, focused on demographic information and self-perceived soft skills measured on a Likert Scale. Descriptive analysis provided insights into the extent of students' soft skills, while multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) explored variations based on parental income and educational levels. The findings reveal a moderately high level of soft skills among students, with significant differences based on parental income levels. Fathers' tertiary education is associated with the highest mean scores in soft skills enhancement. Aligning with existing literature, the study emphasises the multifaceted nature of soft skills and their importance for adaptability. Parental influence is acknowledged as a primary shaping factor for soft skills, with parental income and education affecting access to resources and skill development. The study concludes that parental income and educational levels are pivotal in shaping students' soft skills, providing nuanced insights into the specific impact in the Sri Lankan context. The research contributes to educational policies by highlighting the necessity of tailored interventions that consider academic and non-cognitive aspects.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Parental Income, Parental Education, Secondary School Children, Manova

Introduction

In recent years, the role of soft skills in shaping an individual's success in academic and professional domains has garnered increasing attention from researchers, educators, and policymakers globally. Soft skills encompass a range of non-cognitive attributes such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, which are integral for personal and professional development. As societies evolve, the acquisition of soft skills

has become recognised as a crucial component of a well-rounded education, preparing individuals for the challenges of an ever-changing world.

The significance of soft skills is particularly pronounced in secondary education, where students are in the formative stages of their intellectual and socio-emotional development. Beyond the classroom, the family environment, precisely the parent's socioeconomic status, is acknowledged as a potential influencer in shaping a student's holistic skill set. As the primary socialising agent during a child's formative years, the family unit is posited to play a pivotal role in fostering or constraining soft skills development.

Sri Lanka, a nation marked by its rich cultural heritage and a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape, is an intriguing backdrop for investigating the interplay between parental socioeconomic variables and soft skills development among secondary school students. The socio-economic landscape in Sri Lanka is characterised by a diverse range of income levels and educational attainments, making it an ideal setting for examining how these variables may correlate with the cultivation of soft skills in the younger population.

This research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by employing a quantitative approach to systematically evaluate the relationship between parental socioeconomic variables and soft skills development among secondary school students in Sri Lanka. This study aims to uncover potential patterns, correlations, and insights that may inform educational policies, interventions, and strategies aimed at enhancing soft skills acquisition in the secondary education system.

As we embark on this exploration, we hope that the findings will not only deepen our understanding of the intricate dynamics at play but also offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents striving to create an educational environment that nurtures the holistic development of the younger generation in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework for evaluating the relationship between parental socioeconomic variables and soft skills development in secondary school students in Sri Lanka draws upon Ecological Systems Theory, specifically Urie Bronfenbrenner's model. This framework provides a comprehensive perspective on the interplay between the individual, their immediate environment, and the broader socio-cultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1992, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The study explores how parental income and educational levels, as critical components of the microsystem and macrosystem, influence the soft skills development of secondary school students within the Sri Lankan context.

Microsystem

The microsystem represents individuals' immediate and direct interactions with their environment. The microsystem includes the family, school, and peer groups in the study context. The focus is on understanding how parental income and educational levels impact the day-to-day experiences and interactions within the family and school, which, in turn, influence the development of soft skills in students (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem explores the connections between different microsystems. This study investigates how the relationships between family, school, and peer groups collectively

contribute to soft skills development. For instance, how parental involvement in school activities or communication between parents and teachers influences the acquisition of soft skills by students (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Ecosystem

The ecosystem considers the broader community and cultural influences on an individual. Here, the study will explore how factors such as community values, cultural norms, and extracurricular activities impact soft skills development among secondary school students. It aims to understand the ecosystem's role in shaping the socio-cultural context within which soft skills are fostered (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Macrosystem

The Macrosystem encompasses the more prominent societal and institutional factors. This study examines the influence of societal structures, government policies, and economic conditions on parental income and educational levels. Understanding how these macrosystemic factors intersect with the microsystem will provide insights into the broader societal context shaping soft skills development in secondary school students (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem considers the impact of time on development, including historical events, cultural shifts, and changes in societal norms. In the context of the study, exploring how changes in economic conditions or educational policies affect the soft skills development of students provides a dynamic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

By employing the Ecological Systems Theory as the theoretical framework, the study aims to analyse the multifaceted and interconnected factors that contribute to the development of soft skills in secondary school students in Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on the influence of parental socioeconomic variables (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998). This approach acknowledges the complexity of the interactions between individuals and their environments, providing a holistic understanding of the processes involved in soft skills development.

Soft Skills Development

Soft skills are a person's overt and covert personality characteristics that make a person a positive, dynamic, friendly, and influential person in his or her operational settings. Everyone must face and live in many different settings during one's life. Human beings grow up as children in a family, classroom, and school setting. As adults live in the family, community, workplace, and many specific and general settings, each setting demands different behavioural adaptations. A person's satisfaction, as well as effectiveness, depends on behavioural adaptability. These are referred to as non-cognitive attributes. Non-cognitive means that these are not intellectual abilities or motor skills but personality-related performance qualities. One may call it personality characteristics. Soft skills are what define a person's strength as a human being to live, associate, lead, listen, negotiate, and mediate conflict. These factors contribute to a person's success in all areas of life (Sedere 2019). To achieve happiness, earn respect, and achieve success in all spheres of life, it is critical to develop 'soft skills.' Some scholars refer to it as 'people skills' (Crady, 2015).

Creative and critical thinking skills are essential for pupils who plan to excel and work in the 21st-century workforce. Creative people work hard continuously to improve ideas and solutions by gradually altering and refining their works (Sedere, 2019). The literature comprehensively explores the relationship between students' soft skills and various educational factors. Sedere (2019) advocates for a collaborative effort among the home, school, classroom, teacher, and school community to shift from the prevalent convergent thinking model in schools, which may hinder creative students. Akpur (2020) establishes a significant correlation between critical thinking, creative thinking, reflective thinking, and academic achievement.

Tanujaya et al. (2017) find a strong correlation between higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), specifically creative and critical thinking, and students' GPA. Seechaliao (2017) emphasises the role of instructional strategies in fostering student involvement, new ideas, and innovation. Marcos et al. (2020) demonstrate an improvement in students' creative thinking skills through cooperative classroom learning, with a positive correlation between creative thinking and academic achievement.

Summarisation skills, considered soft skill, are discussed by Pečjak and Pirc (2018), highlighting the importance of systematic training to enhance summarising abilities. Problem-solving skills, crucial for educational outcomes, are shown to benefit from a problem-based learning approach (Khoiriyah & Husamah, 2018), physical education and sports classes (Nopembri et al., 2019), and parental democratic attitudes (Tösten et al., 2017).

Time management, as a fundamental soft skill impacting academic performance, is positively associated with educational outcomes (Nasrullah_PhD & Khan_PhD, 2015). Leadership skills are discussed in the context of curricular and co-curricular activities, with Chen (2019) highlighting improvement through teamwork and Ab Ghani et al. (2020) emphasising the role of co-curricular programs and parental support.

Parental influence, as a central component of a child's socialisation process, significantly shapes the development of soft skills (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Parents serve as primary role models, influencing the acquisition of communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, and other essential soft skills (Belsky, 1984). The quality of parent-child interactions has been linked to the development of socioemotional competencies in children (Brody & Flor, 1997).

Parental income has been identified as a crucial determinant of various aspects of a child's educational experience (Sirin, 2005). Research suggests that students from lower-income households may face challenges in accessing educational resources, which can impact the acquisition of soft skills (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

Parental educational level has been linked to children's cognitive development and educational attainment (Davis-Kean, 2005). Parents with higher educational levels are often better equipped to provide a supportive learning environment, facilitating the development of essential soft skills in their children (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995).

The interplay between student soft skills, parental income, and educational level is complex. While some studies suggest a direct correlation between higher parental socioeconomic status and enhanced soft skills in students (Hsin & Xie, 2014), others emphasise the mediating role of various factors, such as parental involvement and family communication patterns (Cheadle & Amato, 2011). The importance of recognising the intersectionality of these factors is highlighted by research indicating that the influence of parental socioeconomic status on soft skills may vary across cultural and contextual settings (Sirin, 2005).

In conclusion, the significance of soft skills in shaping individuals into positive, dynamic, and effective members of society cannot be overstated. Soft skills often referred to as non-cognitive attributes or personality characteristics, play a crucial role in a person's adaptability to various operational settings throughout their life. As children grow up in family and school settings and later navigate community, workplace, and other diverse environments, the demand for different behavioural adaptations becomes evident. Developing soft skills, encompassing creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, leadership, and summarisation skills, is essential for success and satisfaction in all spheres of life. Moreover, the intricate interplay between student soft skills and parental socioeconomic variables, including income and educational level, adds a layer of complexity to this dynamic. Recognising and understanding these nuances is particularly crucial in the Sri Lankan context, where cultural and contextual factors may influence the relationship between parental background and student soft skills. Hence, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the variations of student soft skills based on parental income and educational level, providing a foundation for tailored educational interventions in the Sri Lankan educational landscape.

Problem Statement

While the importance of soft skills in shaping the future success of secondary school students is widely acknowledged, a notable gap exists in our understanding of the specific factors that contribute to or hinder the development of these skills, particularly within Sri Lanka. The socio-economic status of parents, a critical element of the familial environment, has been identified as a potential influencer in the soft skills acquisition process. However, a comprehensive and quantitative investigation into the relationship between parental socioeconomic variables and the development of soft skills in secondary school students in Sri Lanka needs to be more present.

The lack of empirical evidence on this specific nexus poses a significant challenge for educators, policymakers, and parents vested in optimising students' educational experiences. To formulate targeted interventions and design educational policies that effectively foster soft skills development, there is an imperative need to bridge this gap in knowledge. This study addresses this critical gap by quantitatively investigating the nuanced relationship between parental socioeconomic variables and soft skills development among secondary school students in Sri Lanka. Through rigorous data analysis and interpretation, the research endeavours to provide evidence-based insights that can inform strategic initiatives to cultivate a generation of students with the diverse skill set required for success in the 21st-century landscape.

Methodology

This research employed a survey-based and quantitative research design to investigate the correlation between parental socioeconomic variables and the development of soft skills in secondary school students in Sri Lanka. The study's survey population consisted of secondary school students, with a meticulous sample of 1350 participants selected using a rigorous stratified random sampling technique. The survey instrument, thoughtfully crafted to align with the research objectives, comprised two distinct sections. The primary section focused on gathering crucial demographic information about the participating students, while the secondary section aimed to assess their self-perceived levels of soft skills. Soft skills were

quantified using a Likert Scale, providing respondents with five response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (coded as 1) to "Strongly Agree" (coded as 5).

Stringent measures were implemented to ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability. Input and validation from experts specialising in the sociology of education were sought, and the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The resulting high-reliability coefficient of 0.917 attested to the instrument's commendable level of reliability. The analytical framework encompassed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis, including calculating means and standard deviations, offered valuable insights into the extent of students' self-perceived soft skills. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23 served as the primary software tool for data analysis.

To investigate potential differences in students' soft skills based on parental income and educational levels, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. The primary objective of this analysis was to determine whether significant variations existed among different parental income and educational level categories concerning students' self-perceived soft skills. This robust methodology aims to contribute nuanced insights to understanding the complex interplay between parental socioeconomic factors and soft skills development in the context of secondary education in Sri Lanka.

Objectives of the Study

01. Determine the proficiency level of students' soft skills
02. Examine disparities in student soft skills based on parental income.
03. Evaluate variations in students' soft skills depending on the educational qualifications of fathers.
04. Assess distinctions in student soft skills concerning the educational qualifications of mothers.

Null Hypotheses

01. Student soft skills have no significant difference based on parent income
02. Student soft Skills have no significant differences based on the father's highest educational level.
03. Student soft skills have no significant differences based on the mother's highest educational level.
04. Student soft skills have no significant interaction between the fathers' and mothers' educational levels.

Results

Socio-Economic Background of Parents

This section provides information on the demographic characteristics of the student respondents from 1,350 secondary schools in Sri Lanka, encompassed by the scope of this study. The analysis of respondents' demographic information utilised frequency and percentage measures. The demographic factors under scrutiny included the educational levels of both fathers and mothers, as well as the income of the parents. A detailed presentation of the demographic profiles of the respondents surveyed for this study is meticulously outlined in Table 1.

Table 01

Profile	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Parent Income	Less than Rs. 15,000	487	36.1
	Rs. 15,001 -46,000	609	45.1
	Rs. 46,001- 150,000	215	15.9
	More than Rs. 151,001	39	2.9
Father's level of Education	No schooling	56	4.1
	Primary	332	24.6
	G.C.E O/L	565	41.9
	G.C.E A/L	307	22.7
	Tertiary education	90	6.7
Mother's level of Education	No schooling	47	3.5
	Primary	292	21.6
	G.C.E O/L	613	45.4
	G.C.E A/L	320	23.7
	Tertiary education	78	5.8

The respondents' parental income distribution indicates that a substantial proportion (609 or 45.1%) reported their parents' income falling within the Sri Lankan Rupees 15,001 to 46,000 range. Additionally, 487 respondents (36.1%) disclosed their parents' income was below Rs. 15,000, while 215 respondents (15.9%) specified a range between Rs. 46,001 to 150,000. A minor percentage of respondents (39 or 2.9%) mentioned that their parents' income exceeded Rs. 150,000.

Examining fathers' educational backgrounds, the predominant response (565 or 41.9%) indicated that their fathers had achieved the G.C.E 'O' Level qualification. However, a minority of respondents (56 or 4.1%) noted that their fathers lacked formal schooling, while a substantial number (332 or 24.6%) acknowledged their fathers' completion of only primary education. Conversely, some respondents reported higher educational qualifications for their fathers, namely G.C.E 'A' Level (307 or 22.7%) and Tertiary Education (90 or 6.7%).

Concerning mothers' educational attainment, most respondents (613 or 45.4%) reported that their mothers held G.C.E 'O' Level certificates. In contrast, a small fraction of respondents (47 or 3.5%) mentioned that their mothers had no formal education, while a significant number (292 or 21.6%) specified their mothers' completion of only primary education. The remaining respondents reported their mothers' higher educational qualifications, with 320 (23.7%) possessing G.C.E 'A' Level and 78 (5.8%) having attained Tertiary Education.

These findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the demographic characteristics of the surveyed student population, particularly about parental income and the educational levels of both fathers and mothers.

Proficiency Level of Student Soft Skills

Descriptive analysis values have been employed to assess the extent of improvement in students' soft skills. Seven specific items were formulated to gauge respondents' agreement levels concerning enhancing students' soft skills, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Level of Soft Skills Development

No.	Item	Mean	S. D	Interpretation
My ability has been increased to.....				
1	think critically and creatively	3.931	0.954	Moderately High
2	draw conclusions in every detail	3.788	0.995	Moderately High
3	solve a problem critically and with arguments	3.745	1.078	Moderate High
4	mentor, motivate and lead other students in the group work	4.071	0.966	High
5	do homework and assignments on time	4.158	0.977	High
6	present new ideas in discussion sessions	3.805	1.026	Moderately High
7	solve various problems	3.914	1.013	Moderately High
Overall		3.916	0.737	Moderately High

Table 2 shows the level of items in the students' enhancement of soft skills functioning and capabilities with an overall mean of 3.916, overall S.D. of 0.737, and the interpretation being moderately high. The highest item for this aspect is 5, which is about enhancing students' skills in terms of time management skills; this item, which says 'do homework and assignments on time', has a mean of 4.158 with an S.D. of 0.977 and high interpretation. The second highest item, 4 is about enhancing students' leadership skills by calling upon them to 'mentor, motivate and lead other students in the group work'. The mean for this is 4.071, S.D. is 0.966, and the interpretation is high. The next highest item (1) is about enhancing students' critical thinking and creativity; this has a mean of 3.931 (S.D. =0.954), and the interpretation is moderately high. The lowest item is about critical problem-solving skills with valid arguments, which have a mean of 3.745, S.D. of 1.078, and moderately high interpretation.

Soft Skills Differences Based on Parental Income

Multiple MANOVA tests were used to see the differences between the mean scores of all dependent variables in the students' soft skills based on their parents' income level. To control the Type 1 error for this multiple test, the Bonferroni test was used, and each MANOVA test showed a level of significance of 0.05 (Green et al., 1997). Table 3 shows the MANOVA analysis for the difference in mean scores on students' soft skills based on parental income.

Table 3

MANOVA Difference Aspects of Students' Soft Skills based on Parent Income Level

Income Level	N	Mean	S. D	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Total Square	F	Sig.
>Rs. 15,000	487	3.823	0.758	10.985	3	3.662	6.827	0.000
Rs.15,001-46,000	609	3.924	0.722					
Rs.46,001-150,00	215	4.088	0.702					
< Rs.151,001	39	4.011	.7055					

Table 3 shows there are significant differences in enhancing soft [F = 6.827 and sig = 0.000] based on the parent income.

Table 4

Post Hoc Analysis of Difference Aspects of Student Soft Skills based on Parent Income.

(I)Parental Income	(J)Parental Income	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig
>15,000	15,001-46,000	-.10135	.04452	.159
	46,001-150,000	-.26526*	.05997	.000
	<151,001	-.18787	.12188	.498
15,001-46,000	>15,000	.10135	.04452	.159
	46,001-150,000	-.16391*	.05810	.047
	<151,001	-.08652	.12097	.916
46,001-150,000	>15,000	.26526*	.05997	.000
	15,001-46,000	.16391*	.05810	.047
	<151,001	.07738	.12747	.947
<151,001	>15,000	.18787	.12188	.498
	15,001-46,000	.08652	.12097	.916
	46,001-150,000	-.07738	.12747	.947

According to Post Hoc test results shown in Table obtained using the MANOVA analysis, students' soft enhancement aspects showed a significant difference between parental income below Rs. 15,000 and parental income in the Rs. 46,001-150,000 range.

Based on Table 3 and Table 4, it can be concluded that the children's educational well-being in terms of enhancement of soft functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life is highest among the Upper-Middle-Class children than Upper-Class, Lower-Middle-Class, and Poor children. On the other hand, Poor children's educational well-being in terms of enhancement of soft skills functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life are the lowest in Sri Lankan secondary schools.

Soft Skills Differences Based on Parental Educational Level

Multiple Two-Way MANOVA tests were used to see the difference in mean scores for each dependent variable in the student's soft skills based on parents' education level. Table 5 and 6 show the MANOVA analysis for the difference in mean scores on students' soft skills based on parental education level.

Table 5

Two Way MANOVA Difference Aspects of Soft Skills based on Parental Educational Level

Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Father's Highest Educational Level	6.481	4	1.620	3.106	0.015
Mother's Highest Educational Level	3.798	4	0.950	1.820	0.122
Father's*Mother's Highest Educational Level	12.672	15	0.845	1.619	0.062

Table 6

Mean Scores Difference Aspects of Student Soft Skills Based on Parent Educational Level

Father's Educational Level	Highest Mother's Educational Level	Highest Mean	Std. Deviation	N
No Schooling	No Schooling	3.56	0.84	21
	Primary	3.90	0.68	19
	G.C.E(O/L)	3.56	0.71	14
	G.C.E(A/L)	3.00	2.82	2
	Total	3.65	0.84	56
Primary	No Schooling	3.86	0.70	17
	Primary	3.75	0.84	183
	G.C.E(O/L)	3.86	0.69	116
	G.C.E(A/L)	3.86	0.88	15
	Tertiary Education	5.00	0.00	1
G.C.E(O/L)	Total	3.80	0.78	332
	No Schooling	3.77	0.83	5
	Primary	3.65	0.78	77
	G.C.E(O/L)	3.92	0.68	357
	G.C.E(A/L)	4.03	0.65	113
G.C.E(A/L)	Tertiary Education	4.12	0.65	13
	Total	3.91	0.69	565
	No Schooling	3.78	0.30	2
	Primary	3.74	0.61	10
	G.C.E(O/L)	3.83	0.76	114
Tertiary Education	G.C.E(A/L)	4.15	0.69	159
	Tertiary Education	4.21	0.54	22
	Total	4.02	0.72	307
	No Schooling	5.00	0.00	2
	Primary	4.28	0.74	3
Total	G.C.E(O/L)	3.69	0.78	12
	G.C.E(A/L)	4.28	0.52	31
	Tertiary Education	4.12	0.59	42
	Total	4.14	0.63	90
	No Schooling	3.76	0.79	47
	Primary	3.74	0.80	292
	G.C.E(O/L)	3.88	0.70	613
	G.C.E(A/L)	4.10	0.69	320
	Tertiary Education	4.16	0.59	78
	Total	3.91	0.73	1350

Table 5 shows there are significant differences in students' enhancement of soft skills [$F = 3.106$ and $\text{sig} = 0.015$] functioning based on father's highest education level. Table 6 shows that students who have fathers with tertiary education have the highest mean compared to other students concerning enhancing soft skills. Based on the mother's highest educational level, Table 5 shows no significant differences in improving soft skills [$F = 1.820$ and $\text{sig} = 0.122$]. Table 5 shows no significant interaction between the father and mother's educational levels towards enhancing soft skills [$F = 1.619$ and $\text{sig} = 0.062$].

Table presents the post hoc analysis from which we can see the mean differences in students' educational well-being based on the father's highest education level.

Table 7

Post Hoc Analysis of Difference Aspects of Student Soft Skills based on Father's Highest Educational Level

(I) Father's Highest Educational Level	(J) Father's Highest Educational Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
No Schooling	Primary	-0.14	0.10	0.724
	G.C.E(O/L)	-0.25	0.10	0.183
	G.C.E(A/L)	-0.35*	0.10	0.017
	Tertiary Education	-0.48*	0.12	0.003
Primary	No Schooling	0.14	0.10	0.724
	G.C.E(O/L)	-0.10	0.04	0.377
	G.C.E(A/L)	-0.21*	0.05	0.007
	Tertiary Education	-0.33*	0.08	0.004
G.C.E(O/L)	No Schooling	0.25	0.10	0.183
	Primary	0.10	0.04	0.377
	G.C.E(A/L)	-0.11	0.05	0.302
	Tertiary Education	-0.23	0.08	0.080
G.C.E(A/L)	No Schooling	0.36*	0.10	0.017
	Primary	0.21*	0.05	0.007
	G.C.E(O/L)	0.11	0.05	0.302
	Tertiary Education	-0.12	0.08	0.727
Tertiary Education	No Schooling	0.48*	0.12	0.003
	Primary	0.33*	0.08	0.004
	G.C.E(O/L)	0.23	0.08	0.080
	G.C.E(A/L)	0.12	0.08	0.727

Table 7, shows a significant difference in students' educational well-being regarding enhancing soft skills between students who have fathers without schooling and students with fathers who have G.C.E (A/L) and tertiary education. There is also a significant difference in students' educational wellbeing regarding soft skills between students with fathers with only primary education and students with fathers with G.C.E (A/L) and tertiary education.

Table presents the post hoc analysis, where we can see the mean differences in students' educational well-being in greater detail based on the mother's highest education level.

Table 8

Post Hoc Analysis of Difference Aspects of Student Soft Skills based on Mother's Highest Educational Level

		(J) Mother's Highest Educational Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Soft Skills	No Schooling	Primary	0.02	0.11	1.000
		G.C.E(O/L)	-0.11	0.10	0.887
		G.C.E(A/L)	-0.33	0.11	0.064
		Tertiary Education	-0.39	0.13	0.067
	Primary	No Schooling	-0.02	0.11	1.000
		G.C.E(O/L)	-0.14	0.05	0.109
		G.C.E(A/L)	-0.36*	0.05	0.000
		Tertiary Education	-0.41*	0.09	0.000
	G.C.E(O/L)	No Schooling	0.11	0.10	0.887
		Primary	0.14	0.05	0.109
		G.C.E(A/L)	-0.21*	0.04	0.001
		Tertiary Education	-0.27*	0.08	0.037
	G.C.E(A/L)	No Schooling	0.33	0.11	0.064
		Primary	0.36*	0.05	0.000
		G.C.E(O/L)	0.21*	0.04	0.001
		Tertiary Education	-0.05	0.09	0.982
	Tertiary Education	No Schooling	0.39	0.13	0.067
		Primary	0.41*	0.09	0.000
		G.C.E(O/L)	0.27*	0.08	0.037
		G.C.E(A/L)	0.05	0.09	0.982

Table 8 shows significant differences in students' educational wellbeing in terms of soft skills between students with mothers with primary education and those with mothers with

G.C.E (A/L) and tertiary education. There is also a significant difference in students' educational wellbeing in soft skills between students who have mothers with G.C.E (O/L) and students who have mothers with G.C.E (A/L) and tertiary education.

Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the proficiency level of students' soft skills and the impact of parental income and educational levels on these skills in the context of secondary schools in Sri Lanka. The descriptive analysis of students' soft skills, indicates a moderately high. Further data exploration reveals significant differences in students' soft skills based on parental income levels. Post Hoc analysis, as presented in Table 4, highlights specific differences, indicating that children from families with an income above Rs. 15,000 demonstrate higher soft skills enhancement than those in lower income brackets. Similarly, the influence of parental educational levels on students' soft skills is evident, particularly in the case of fathers' education. The MANOVA analysis reveals a significant difference based on the fathers' highest educational levels. Post-hoc analysis indicates that students with fathers who have tertiary education exhibit the highest mean scores in terms of enhancing soft skills. In summary, these findings suggest that both parental income and educational levels play a pivotal role in shaping students' soft skills. Higher parental income and educational attainment, especially at the tertiary level, appear to contribute positively to students' proficiency in soft skills. The literature review and conclusion of the study underscore the paramount importance of soft skills in shaping individuals into positive, dynamic, and effective members of society. Soft skills, encompassing non-cognitive attributes and personality characteristics, are crucial for adaptability to diverse operational settings. The study, contextualised within secondary schools in Sri Lanka, delves into the intricate relationship between students' soft skills and parental income and educational levels.

Sedere (2019) posits that soft skills, including creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, leadership, and summarisation skills, are indispensable for success and satisfaction in various life domains. The review aligns with Sedere's argument, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these skills and their role in fostering adaptability. Furthermore, the literature underscores the connection between higher-order thinking skills, such as creative and critical thinking, and academic achievement, advocating for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to nurture creativity among students (Sedere, 2019; Akpur, 2020; Tanujaya et al., 2017)

Parental influence emerges as a pivotal factor in developing soft skills, with parents serving as primary role models shaping communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, and other crucial skills in their children (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Belsky, 1984). The study acknowledges the influence of parental income and educational levels on a child's educational experience, affecting access to resources and soft skill development (Sirin, 2005; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Davis-Kean, 2005).

The conclusion of the study aligns seamlessly with the literature review, offering valuable insights into students' soft skills proficiency and the impact of parental income and educational levels in Sri Lankan secondary schools. The descriptive analysis reveals a moderately high level of soft skills among students, echoing Sedere's assertion on the importance of these skills for success. Notably, significant differences in soft skills based on parental income levels are unveiled, with higher-income families correlating with enhanced soft skills (Nasrullah_PhD & Khan_PhD, 2015). The influence of parental educational levels,

particularly fathers' education, is evident, with tertiary-educated fathers associated with the highest mean scores in soft skills enhancement (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995).

In conclusion, the study contributes nuanced insights to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the specific impact of parental income and educational levels on students' soft skills in Sri Lanka. These findings underscore the necessity of tailored educational interventions that consider both academic and non-cognitive aspects, aligning with the broader literature advocating for a holistic approach to education (Chen, 2019; Ab Ghani et al., 2020). Understanding the interplay between soft skills and parental socioeconomic factors is imperative, particularly in diverse cultural and contextual settings, as highlighted by Sirin (2005). This research provides a foundation for informed educational strategies to enhance soft skills in Sri Lankan students and promote their holistic development in the 21st century. Skills. These insights hold implications for educational policymakers, practitioners, and parents, emphasising the importance of considering socioeconomic factors to enhance students' holistic development and prepare them for a successful and fulfilling future.

Theoretical and Contextual Significance

This research's theoretical and contextual contribution is multifaceted, enriching existing knowledge in soft skills development, particularly within the Sri Lankan context. The study's foundation on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate dynamics between parental socioeconomic variables and developing soft skills in secondary school students. By exploring the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, the research offers a holistic perspective that acknowledges the interconnectedness of individual, familial, societal, and temporal factors in shaping soft skills. Moreover, the study contributes significantly to the existing literature by offering nuanced insights into the specific impact of parental income and educational levels on students' soft skills in Sri Lanka. The findings reveal a moderately high level of soft skills among students, emphasising the importance of recognising and nurturing these attributes for success and adaptability in diverse life domains. The research unveils significant differences in soft skills based on parental income levels, shedding light on the role of economic factors in skill development. Additionally, the influence of fathers' tertiary education on the highest mean scores in soft skills enhancement highlights the importance of parental educational levels in shaping students' proficiency.

In the Sri Lankan context, characterised by its rich cultural heritage and diverse socioeconomic landscape, this research becomes a valuable resource for educational policymakers, practitioners, and parents. The insights gained from this study provide a foundation for informed decision-making in designing tailored educational interventions that consider both academic and non-cognitive aspects. Recognising the interplay between soft skills and parental socioeconomic factors is crucial, particularly in diverse cultural and contextual settings, as highlighted by Sirin (2005). This research serves as a guide for fostering the holistic development of Sri Lankan students in the 21st century, aligning with the broader literature advocating for a comprehensive approach to education.

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