

The Impact of Parent-Child Communication on Young Children's Social-Emotional Competence: The Moderating Role of Teacher Support

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Abstract: To examine the impact of parent-child communication on the social-emotional competencies of 3- to 6-year-old preschoolers and the moderating effect of teacher support, this study employed a questionnaire survey method. A sample of 278 preschoolers, their parents, and teachers from four kindergartens in Qingdao was selected, and SPSS was used to conduct hierarchical regression and simple slope analysis. The results showed that: (1) parent-child communication significantly and positively predicted young children's social-emotional competencies; (2) teacher support played a significant moderating role between the two variables, exhibiting both compensatory and facilitative effects. The study indicates that the home and kindergarten systems jointly influence young children's social-emotional development, providing guidance for home-school collaboration practices.

Keywords: Preschool Children; Parent-child Communication; Social-emotional Competence; Teacher Support; Moderating Effect.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The ages of 3–6 represent a critical window for the development of young children's social-emotional competencies. Abilities such as emotion recognition, emotion regulation, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution not only form the foundation for young children to adapt to group life in kindergarten and establish peer relationships but also hold long-term predictive value for their subsequent academic adaptation and mental health [1]. However, there has long been a tendency in China's current early childhood education practice to “prioritize cognitive development over social development.” Some kindergartens place excessive emphasis on knowledge transmission while neglecting the cultivation of children's emotional experiences and social skills, which can lead to issues such as emotional outbursts and social withdrawal [2].

The family is the primary environment for young children's socialization, and parent-child communication is the core mechanism influencing their emotional and social development. Supportive communication (such as patient listening and emotional responsiveness) helps children establish a sense of security and develop empathy and prosocial behavior; in contrast, obstructive communication (such as criticism, blame, indifference, and avoidance) undermines children's sense of security and increases the risk of emotional anxiety and aggressive behavior [3]. As children enter kindergarten, teachers become “significant others” in their development. The emotional support, classroom management support, and instructional support provided by teachers not only directly promote young children's social-emotional development but may also play a moderating role in family influence pathways [4].

From a theoretical perspective, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model posits that young children's development is embedded within interconnected microsystems such as the

family and preschool, and that interactions among these microsystems are key mechanisms influencing development [5]. Social learning theory posits that young children acquire rules for emotional expression and patterns of social behavior through observation and imitation [19]. Attachment theory, meanwhile, suggests that teachers can serve as “surrogate attachment figures” in the preschool setting [20]. Grounded in these theories, the present study hypothesizes that parent-child communication and teacher support interact to influence young children's social-emotional competencies.

1.2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Existing research consistently finds that high-quality parent-child communication is a significant positive predictor of young children's social-emotional competencies [28]. Supportive communication is positively correlated with children's emotional stability, empathy, and prosocial behavior, while obstructive communication is positively correlated with emotional anxiety and social withdrawal [21, 18]. Regarding teacher support, teachers' warm acceptance and emotional responsiveness can significantly enhance young children's peer acceptance and social initiative [22], while classroom management and instructional support help young children master emotion regulation and conflict resolution skills [23].

However, empirical research directly examining the interaction between parent-child communication and teacher support remains scarce [6, 24]. Some studies have found that teacher support can buffer the negative effects of an adverse family environment (compensatory effect), while others have indicated that a positive family environment and high-quality teacher support can produce a synergistic effect (facilitative effect) [25, 24]. However, existing research has largely focused on family factors such as parent-child relationships and parenting styles, and there remains a significant gap in studies that systematically examine the

moderating role of teacher support with respect to the core variable of “parent-child communication” [26].

In summary, existing research still has three shortcomings: First, research perspectives are fragmented, lacking a framework that integrates the family and preschool contexts [7]; second, the mechanisms of action are unclear, and the specific manifestations of the compensatory and facilitative effects remain to be verified [25, 27]; third, there is a lack of localized research [8, 9]. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses: H1: Parent-child communication significantly and positively predicts young children's social-emotional competencies; H2: Teacher support plays a significant moderating role between the two, where H2a represents the compensatory effect and H2b represents the facilitative effect.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Study Participants

Using convenience sampling, this study selected 3- to 6-year-old preschoolers, their parents, and lead teachers from four kindergartens in Qingdao as the research participants. A total of 300 paired questionnaires were distributed, with 278 valid responses collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 92.7%. Among the participants, there were 142 boys (51.1%) and 136 girls (48.9%); 89 children (32.0%) were aged 3–4, 102 (36.7%) were aged 4–5, and 87 (31.3%) were aged 5–6.

2.2. Research Instruments

All scales used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Parent-Child Communication Scale: Consists of two dimensions—supportive communication and obstructive communication—and 20 items. In this study, the Cronbach's α for the total scale was 0.84, with $\alpha = 0.81$ for the supportive communication dimension and $\alpha = 0.79$ for the obstructive communication dimension.

Teacher Support Scale: Developed based on the CLASS assessment system, it comprises three dimensions—emotional support, classroom management support, and

instructional support—and consists of 18 items. The Cronbach's α for the total scale was 0.87, with α values for each dimension ranging from 0.80 to 0.83.

Preschoolers' Social-Emotional Competence Scale: Developed with reference to Zhang Yuan's [10] “Peer Interaction Competence Scale for 4–6-Year-Old Preschoolers” and Li Yanju's [11] validation study; it is jointly rated by parents and teachers.

2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 26.0 was used to perform descriptive statistics, Harman's one-way test, Pearson correlation analysis, hierarchical regression analysis, and simple slope analysis.

3. Research Results

3.1. Common Method Bias Test

The results of Harman's single-factor test showed that the first common factor explained 28.7% of the variance, which is below the 40% threshold, indicating that common method bias was not a severe concern in this study.

3.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix for each variable are presented in Table 1. The mean for parent-child communication was 3.72 (SD = 0.58), the mean for teacher support was 3.85 (SD = 0.53), and the mean for young children's social-emotional competence was 3.68 (SD = 0.61); all three were at the upper-middle level. Correlation analysis revealed that parent-child communication was significantly positively correlated with young children's social-emotional competencies ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$); teacher support was significantly positively correlated with young children's social-emotional competencies ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$); and parent-child communication was significantly positively correlated with teacher support ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix for Each Variable (N=278)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Parent-Child Communication	3.72	0.58	1		
2. Teacher Support	3.85	0.53	0.31***	1	
3. Social-Emotional Competence	3.68	0.61	0.52***	0.47***	1

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. Test for Main Effects

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression of Parent-Child Communication as a Predictor of Preschoolers' Social-Emotional Competence (N=278)

Step	Variables	B	β	t	R ²	ΔR^2
1	Gender	0.06	0.08	1.42	0.02	0.02*
	Age	0.13	0.11*	2.01		
2	Gender	0.04	0.06	1.15	0.25	0.23***
	Age	0.11	0.09	1.64		
	Parent-Child Communication	0.51	0.48***	8.72		

Note: * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with children's gender and age as control variables, parent-child communication as the independent variable, and children's social-emotional competence as the dependent variable. In the first step, control variables were included ($R^2 = 0.02$, $F = 2.87$, $p < 0.05$); after including parent-child communication in the second step, the model's explanatory power significantly increased ($R^2 = 0.25$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), and the regression coefficient for parent-child communication was

significant ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1 was supported.

3.4. Moderation Effect Test

Teacher support and the interaction term were included in addition to the main effects. The results (Table 3) show that after including teacher support, $R^2 = 0.29$ ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < 0.001$); after including the interaction term, $R^2 = 0.31$ ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$), and the interaction coefficient was significant ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H2 was supported.

Table 3. Testing the Moderating Effect of Teacher Support (N=278)

Step	Variables	B	β	t	R^2	ΔR^2
1	Gender	0.04	0.06	1.15	0.25	0.23***
	Age	0.11	0.09	1.64		
	Parent-Child Communication (PC)	0.51	0.48***	8.72		
2	Gender	0.03	0.05	0.98	0.29	0.04***
	Age	0.10	0.08	1.51		
	PC	0.44	0.41***	7.35		
	Teacher Support (TS)	0.30	0.28***	5.12		
3	Gender	0.03	0.05	0.95	0.31	0.02**
	Age	0.10	0.08	1.48		
	PC	0.41	0.39***	6.98		
	TS	0.29	0.27***	4.96		
	PC $\times$ TS	0.06	0.15**	2.83		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

3.5. Simple Slope Analysis

Participants were divided into high and low groups based on the mean teacher support score ± 1 SD. In the low teacher support group, the predictive effect of parent-child communication was significant ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$); in the high teacher support group, this predictive effect was markedly stronger ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). At low levels of parent-child communication, the social-emotional competencies of children in the high teacher support group were significantly higher than those in the low teacher support group, confirming the compensatory effect (H2a supported); at high levels of parent-child communication, the facilitative slope for the high teacher support group was significantly greater than that for the low teacher support group, confirming the facilitative effect (H2b supported).

4. Discussion

4.1. Main Effect of Parent-Child Communication

This study confirms that parent-child communication significantly and positively predicts young children's social-emotional competence, consistent with the findings of previous studies [12, 28]. Supportive communication provides young children with a safe and nurturing emotional environment through emotional responsiveness and

empathetic understanding, helping them establish secure attachments and learn to recognize and express emotions; in contrast, criticism, blame, indifference, and avoidance in obstructive communication undermine children's sense of security, leading to anxiety and social withdrawal. These findings highlight the foundational role of the quality of family interactions in young children's social-emotional development.

4.2. The Dual Moderating Effect of Teacher Support

A core finding of this study is that teacher support exerts both compensatory and facilitative effects, validating the theoretical hypothesis that home-school collaboration influences young children's development [6, 27, 14]. Regarding the compensatory effect, for children with lower-quality parent-child communication, high levels of teacher support can buffer the negative impact of adverse family interactions. The warmth, acceptance, and emotional responsiveness provided by teachers create a "safe base" for children within the preschool setting, compensating for gaps in emotional support at home [25]. Regarding the facilitative effect, for children with high-quality parent-child communication, high levels of teacher support further reinforce the positive role of such communication, creating a synergistic effect of positive home-school interaction [29]. This result corroborates the core tenet of bioecological theory

that the family and preschool microsystems work synergistically to promote children's development.

4.3. Educational Implications

For Parents: Regularly listen to children's thoughts, empathize with their emotions, and respond patiently to their emotional expressions, while avoiding dismissive or negative reactions; when problems arise, adopt an approach of encouragement, guidance, and joint discussion [18].

For Teachers: Provide more warmth, acceptance, and positive attention to children who have poor communication with their families, are emotionally sensitive, or are socially withdrawn, and encourage them to participate in group activities [16, 17]; for children with high-quality communication, offer more opportunities for social practice and guide them to serve as role models.

For Home-School Collaboration: Preschools should regularly hold parent-teacher meetings, open houses, and parent-child activities to share information about children's behavior at school; parents should proactively provide feedback on their children's behavior at home and cooperate with the preschool's educational efforts [15, 14].

4.4. Study Limitations

First, the cross-sectional study design does not allow for the inference of causal relationships; second, the sample was drawn exclusively from public kindergartens in Qingdao, limiting the generalizability of the findings; third, potential confounding variables such as children's temperament and family socioeconomic status were not included.

5. Conclusion

(1) Parent-child communication significantly and positively predicts children's social-emotional competencies; supportive communication promotes development, while obstructive communication inhibits it.

(2) Teacher support plays a significant moderating role between the two: it exerts a compensatory effect when parent-child communication is low and a facilitative effect when it is high.

(3) The family and kindergarten systems jointly influence young children's social-emotional development; home-kindergarten collaboration is a key pathway for promoting healthy social-emotional development in young children.

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