

The impact of teacher-child interaction on children's social skills from the perspective of positive psychology

Yue Zhang

Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

ABSTRACT

Early childhood represents a critical period for social skill development, where teacher-child interactions serve as vital interpersonal experiences shaping children's social competence. From the perspective of positive psychology, this horizontal study investigated 120 preschoolers aged 5-6, revealing two key findings: Firstly, high-quality teacher-child interactions significantly enhance children's social abilities. Secondly, children with heightened environmental sensitivity demonstrate greater developmental gains in these interactions. The results underscore the educational value of implementing diversified interaction strategies that integrate social skill development within daily classroom exchanges.

KEYWORDS

Positive Psychology; Social skills; Teacher-child interaction; Continuous Happiness

1 Introduction

Early childhood constitutes a critical window for social competence development^[1], where teacher-child interactions function as primary socialization mechanisms. While existing research predominantly focuses on special populations, the proactive cultivation of social skills in typical preschoolers remains understudied, despite its preventive value against later socio-emotional challenges. This gap persists as early social development involves mastering norms, roles, and adaptive behaviors through environmental interactions—processes significantly shaped by individual temperament differences.

Drawing on positive psychology's emphasis on interpersonal strengths and emotional scaffolding^[2], this study investigates how intentional teacher-child interactions enhance social skill acquisition. Good teacher-child relationships and positive teacher-child interactions not only enhance children's learning motivation and cognitive abilities through flexible teaching strategies and social skills guidance, but also have a profound impact on their social abilities and self-esteem^[3,4]. Such interactions transcend basic emotional support to incorporate strategic guidance in social problem-solving, creating environments where children confidently experiment with interpersonal exchanges. Crucially, we examine how children's environmental sensitivity modulates these developmental effects, this is also an important factor

Analyzing 120 preschoolers aged 5-6 through behavioral observations and standardized assessments, this research addresses two core questions:(1) Does teacher-student interaction have a significant impact on children's social skills? (2) How do temperamental environmental sensitivity differences influence intervention effectiveness? The findings aim to elucidate mechanisms through which intentional pedagogical interactions can cultivate social adaptability, ultimately informing evidence-based strategies for proactive social skill development in early education settings.

2 Positive psychology

The concept of positive psychology was first proposed by Martin Seligman in 1998. It mainly studies the individual's positive subjective experience, positive personality and positive organizational system. Its core is to focus on the individual's positive traits, based on constructiveness, virtue and kindness, and reinterpret psychological phenomena from an optimistic perspective. Lyubomirsky et al.'s continuous happiness model shows that happiness can be continuously improved through conscious activities^[5]. For example, young children will gain a sense of accomplishment after successfully using social skills to interact with others. This diverse social interaction can maintain freshness, thereby enhancing happiness, promoting the mastery of social skills and the improvement of individual social abilities.

3 Teacher-student interaction

3.1 The impact of teacher-student interaction on children's development

According to social constructivism and cultural history theory, the transmission of adult experience is crucial to children's development^[6]. When teachers provide children with rich cognitive materials, create opportunities to demonstrate complex skills and provide appropriate support, children's potential and learning investment will be

significantly improved^[7]. Teachers' behavioral demonstration and guidance can also promote the development of children's self-regulation ability^[8]. Teachers and parents are the social roles that children are most exposed to. High-quality teacher-student interaction helps children develop complete social and emotional abilities^[9]. Studies have shown that teacher-student interaction can promote children to show more cooperative and prosocial behaviors, and has a significant positive impact on children's growth^[10].

3.2 Penetration of social knowledge in teacher-student interaction

Social ability was originally defined as an intellectual component. Gardner proposed interpersonal intelligence in his theory of multiple intelligences, believing that it is the ability to get along and communicate with others, manifested as the ability to perceive others' emotions, feelings and intentions and respond appropriately^[11]. Social ability is affected by four factors: behavior, emotion, cognition and situation. Behavior includes verbal behavior (such as asking questions, speaking time) and non-verbal behavior (such as gestures, eye contact^[12]). Studies have shown that children's communication strategies are developed by imitating adult behavior and in specific social activities^[13]. Therefore, integrating social knowledge into teacher-student interaction has a positive effect on improving children's social ability. Kindergarten's daily activities (such as teaching activities and daily life activities) provide rich opportunities for teachers to interact with children. Teachers can better promote the development of children's social ability by demonstrating and combining social skills in interaction.

4 Temperament and environmental sensitivity

Aron first elaborated on children's temperamental environmental sensitivity in his book "The Highly Sensitive Child", pointing out that highly sensitive children have the "DOES" characteristics, namely deep processing, susceptibility to stimulation, high emotional reactivity and high empathy^[14]. Studies have shown that highly sensitive children may face a higher risk of stress when facing a negative environment, but they can also benefit more in a positive and supportive environment. In the process of teacher-student interaction, highly sensitive children's ability to perceive the environment can help them perceive a positive teacher-student interaction environment and respond more positively, thereby benefiting from it^[15].

5 Research Methods

5.1 Hypothesis

(1) Teacher-child interaction has a significant impact on children's social skills (2) Temperamental environmental sensitivity will moderate the impact of teacher-child interaction on children's social skills.

5.2 Participants

In this study, all participants are children aged 5-6 in a kindergarten. We will invite children aged 5-6 in the kindergarten to participate in social skills tests and temperamental sensitivity tests. We will select 120 children with similar social skills levels, including 60 boys and 60 girls, and 30 boys and girls with high temperamental environmental sensitivity will participate in the experiment. At the same time, we also invited two professional kindergarten teachers to conduct classes for two weeks respectively.

5.3 Measures

(1) Social Skills Scale. This study will use the IPS subscale of the CBRS scale to ask all parents of children to fill out the social skills scale for their children before the experiment begins, in order to understand the average level of social skills mastery of children of this age in the kindergarten. After the experiment, the teachers will report the children's social skills by filling out the social skills scale. The scale contains 8 items and adopts a five-point Likert scale, with 1 point for completely inconsistent and 5 points for completely consistent.

(2) Temperament and Environmental Sensitivity Scale. This study will use the "Chinese version of the Parent-Reported Highly Sensitive Child Scale", which contains 12 questions covering three dimensions: susceptibility to irritation, aesthetic sensitivity, and low sensory threshold, with 4 questions in each dimension. The scale has good reliability and validity, meets the standards of psychometrics, and can effectively measure the sensory processing sensitivity of Chinese preschool children^[16].

(3) Experimental process: 120 children were divided into four groups, each with 30 children and 15 boys and 15 girls. Group 1 and Group 3 included 7 highly sensitive boys and 8 highly sensitive girls. Group 2 and Group 4 included 8 highly sensitive boys and 7 highly sensitive girls. Group 1 and Group 2 will be taught by professional kindergarten teacher No. 1 for teacher-child interaction, and the use of language and non-verbal social behavior will be infiltrated into the interaction. At the same time, Group 3 and Group 4 will be taught by professional kindergarten teacher No. 2 for simple teacher-child interaction^[17].

6 Research results

Table1 Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	3.85104	120	.471425	.043035
	Posttest	2.17708	120	.361117	.032965

Table2 Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest & Posttest	120	-.158	.085

Table 3 Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	1.673958	.637438	.058190	1.558737	1.789180	28.767	119	.000

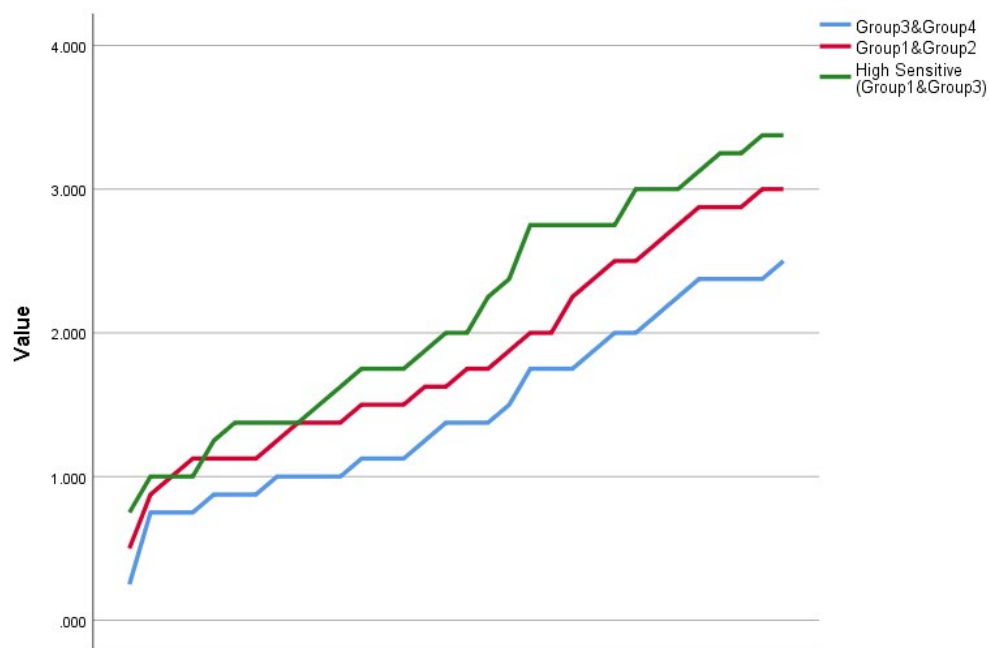


Figure 1 Comparison of differences between different groups before and after the experiment(owner-draw)

6.1 The quality of teacher-child interaction significantly affects the development of children's social skills

The experimental results show that the children in the groups that adopted complex teacher-child interaction (integrating language and non-verbal communication) (Group 1 and Group 2) scored significantly higher on the social skills scale than those in the simple interaction group (Group 3 and Group 4). This finding is consistent with the core view of the continuous happiness model: diversified social activities can enhance children's happiness through differentiated successful experiences, thereby promoting the mastery of social skills^[5].

6.2 Temperamental environmental sensitivity has a moderating effect on the intervention effect

Children with high environmental sensitivity (Group 1 and Group 3) showed a stronger gain effect in high-quality teacher-child interaction. Such children have a higher ability to perceive and integrate social cues such as teachers' language intonation and facial expressions, and can more efficiently internalize interactive experiences into social

schemas. This is consistent with Lyubomirsky's "intentional activity" theory^[5], indicating that refined interaction strategies are particularly effective for highly sensitive groups. Therefore, educators need to design differentiated guidance programs for different temperament types to maximize the intervention effect.

7 Conclusion

The study highlights the critical role of teacher-child interaction in developing children's social skills. By integrating language and non-verbal communication, complex teacher-child interactions simulate diverse real-world social scenarios, aligning with the continuous happiness model's emphasis on activity diversity^[5]. This interaction mode maintains children's cognitive engagement, enhances their happiness through differentiated successful experiences, and forms a positive cycle of "achievement-happiness-skill improvement." Teachers' guidance in rich and varied social interactions not only improves children's social skills but also boosts their self-esteem and confidence, laying a foundation for future social life.

Children with high environmental sensitivity are particularly affected by teacher-child interactions. These children have stronger abilities to perceive and integrate social cues from teachers, supporting Lyubomirsky's intentional activity theory. With refined interaction strategies, highly sensitive children can more effectively internalize social schemas and benefit from positive environments. Educators should recognize these individual differences and provide tailored support.

8 Future Research Directions

Future research should further explore the specific mechanisms through which teacher-child interactions influence children's social skill development, especially for those with high environmental sensitivity. Longitudinal studies could examine how early social experiences shape long-term social competence. Additionally, research should investigate the effectiveness of tailored intervention programs for highly sensitive children, focusing on enhancing social interaction predictability and feedback timeliness.

9 Limitations

Although this study has important theoretical and practical significance, it still has certain limitations. First, the sample size of participants is relatively small and is limited to 5-6-year-old children in a kindergarten. The generalizability of the results may be limited. Future studies need to expand the sample range to enhance the external validity of the research results. Second, the study used self-assessment and parent-assessment scales to measure social skills and temperamental environmental sensitivity, which may be affected by subjective bias. It is recommended that subsequent studies combine observation methods and teacher professional evaluation to provide more comprehensive and objective data support. In addition, the cross-sectional design of this study limits the in-depth discussion of causal relationships. Future longitudinal studies or experimental designs may be more helpful in revealing the causal relationship between teacher-child interaction and children's social skills. Finally, changes in environmental factors, such as family background and cultural differences, also have potential effects on the development of children's social skills, but this study did not explore them in depth. Subsequent studies may consider incorporating these variables into the analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the comprehensive impact of various factors on the development of children's social skills.

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