



UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
BABEȘ-BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM  
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITÄT  
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
TRADITIO ET EXCELLENTIA

**BABEȘ–BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**

**SOCIOLOGY DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**The Relationship between Quality Interaction in Kindergarten and Emotional  
Development in Children**

**By**

**Ebtisam Abu Hamad**

**PhD candidate**

**Coordinator: profesor Maria Roth**

**Cluj, Romania**

**2025**

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	3
<i>Psychological Theories.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Sociological theories.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Educational theories.....</i>	<i>5</i>
Research questions.....	6
Intervention design.....	6
Hypothesis.....	7
Conclusion.....	7
References.....	8

## **Abstract**

Preschool education plays an important role in the learning and development of the child prior to entering school. The quality of the educational framework influences the child's learning in their early years, including the working style of the kindergarten teacher and the quality of the kindergarten teacher's professional training, which in turn can shape the child's development.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Over the years, many different child development theories have been proposed. Not all theories are accepted widely, but they each have added to the collective understanding of child development. Hereby are the main theories used in the current research.

### ***Psychological Theories***

**Attachment Theory.** The Attachment Theory, proposed by John Bowlby, emphasizes the importance of the connection developed between primary caregivers, usually between mother and infant, as a source for his/her emotional and social development. Furthermore, the theory posits that the adult serves as an attachment figure is a source of safety from which it can explore the world – and return to in times of trouble. According to this theory, the quality of the attachment affects fosters emotional security, supporting cognitive, emotional, and social growth, as well as the child's sense of exploration (Bowlby, 1969, 1973 ; Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth (1979) described the way in which they organize their behavior towards their mother affects the way children behave toward other aspects of their environment. (Ainsworth, 1979). Lastly, child-kindergarten teacher relationships are also affected from the attachment of the child (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta et al., 1997).

**Cognitive Development Theory.** Developmental psychology provides a perspective on an individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviors across the lifespan, with early childhood playing a crucial role in shaping physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth (Evans & Kim, 2013). Child development is an interaction between psychological, biological, educational and sociological factors (Spivak & Howes, 2011). Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1929; 1950) offers a foundational framework for understanding how children's intelligence evolves through interaction with their environment, progressing through four distinct stages -

sensorimotor intelligence, preoperational thinking, concrete operational thinking, and formal operational thinking - each building on the last. The later stages are a transformation of the earlier stages, and in addition, the later stages incorporate the earlier stage. The learning process is facilitated through the child's interaction with the environment. Preschoolers, in turn, typically function within the preoperational stage, marked by symbolic thinking and egocentrism.

### ***Sociological theories***

**Social Capital theory.** Coleman's Social Capital Theory (1988) emphasizes how social relationships influence educational outcomes. Social capital, unlike human capital (individual skills and knowledge) or financial capital (material resources), is embedded in social networks, norms, trust, and obligations. Coleman emphasized that closed social networks-such as tight-knit families or communities-facilitate the enforcement of norms and the flow of information, which are critical in promoting behaviors conducive to social stability and academic achievement (Coleman, 1988). In educational contexts, Coleman showed that family and community-level social capital significantly impacts student outcomes. He found that students with strong intergenerational ties or active parental involvement were less likely to drop out, and vice versa for those with weaker connections. Finally, this theory helped define how social structures function as resources critical to student development and educational achievement.

**Social Learning theory.** Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, expanded with Richard Walters (Bandura, & Walters, 1963), emphasizes that learned behaviors can be obtained through observation and modeling. He described social learning in five steps, which include observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The child's attention needs to be focused on the task at hand. The learning occurs when information is retained. The child reproduces the learned behavior when it is called for. The child absorbs behaviors from caregivers and the environment, whether or not they act on them immediately. This process shapes not only behavior but also the child's self-concept and belief in their capabilities—what Bandura termed *self-efficacy* (MacBlain, 2022). Zimmerman (1983) also highlighted that social learning allows children to internalize modeled behaviors into their cognitive framework, underscoring the critical role of adult behavior and a supportive environment in early education.

**Sociolinguistic Theory.** Basil Bernstein's Sociolinguistic Theory (1971) explored how social class influences language use, highlighting the role of language in perpetuating educational inequality. Quality education in the kindergarten is envisioned as an education that breaks the chain of disadvantage. In his research, Bernstein explored the reasoning for the poor performance of working-class students in language subjects, while their performance was on a similar level in mathematical subjects as their middle-class counterparts. Based on that, he distinguished between restricted and elaborated language codes - restricted codes being context-dependent, implicit, and common in working-class communities, while elaborated codes are more explicit and typical of middle-class environments (Littlejohn, 2002). The code used in speaking is a symbol of an individual's social identity (Bernstein, 1971). The type of code used by the individual may influence their perception of belonging to a group, since restricted codes are generally used between closely knit groups of individuals, such as family and friends.

### ***Educational theories***

**Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development.** This theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development, arguing that human development – the intellectual growth of the child - is a socially mediated process that involved communication of the child with more educated members of society - parents, teachers, and peers. Central to his theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, which defines the gap indicates the difference between what the child can do independently and the tasks which the child cannot do by themselves without assistance (Vygotsky, 1987). Furthermore, Vygotsky theorized that teachers and parents interacting with children should provide the necessary guidance for the children in the initial problem-solving tasks and then hand over the responsibility to the child. Vygotsky's theory also provided a basis for promoting the children's language interactions. Vygotsky viewed the development of speech being dependent on social interactions which determine the relationship between words and consciousness (Vygotsky, Hanfmann, Vakar, & Kozulin, 2012).

**Emotional Learning Theory.** Hamre & Pianta (2001) carried out research that began at kindergarten compulsory school age until the eighth grade and found connections between the kindergarten teachers' reports on their relationships with children in reference to effect variables emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. They posited that generally speaking; one can observe

throughout the years that the children's abilities in creating relationships with kindergarten teachers/teachers predict academic achievements and adaptive behavior in the later school years. They suggest referring to this finding based on the quality of the relationship created between the child-teacher reflects the degree by which the child can make use of resources available to him in the classroom environment. This concept expands the understanding of the specific relationship between child and teacher and leads to the general understanding about the classroom atmosphere to which the child is exposed and by which the atmosphere influences their development.

### **Research questions**

- 1. What effect does quality interaction (such as levels of emotional connection and teacher sensitivity) between kindergarten staff and children have on the kindergarten children's development?*
- 2. How does training of staff for early childhood intervention influence the role perception and quality interactions (such as levels of emotional connection and teacher sensitivity) between kindergarten staff and children?*

### **Intervention design**

The research began with a pilot study in two Arab-sector kindergartens in Israel, located through personal connections, to prepare for fieldwork. In the second stage, I selected six localities representing diverse Arab populations (Druze, Muslim, Bedouin, and mixed) and mapped four kindergartens per locality with the help of principals. The third stage began with a thorough investigation about the early childhood education in these areas, collecting organizational data. Thereafter, the research focused on CLASS observations which enabled a deep and meaningful study of the phenomena under study. Following this, 5 children from each of the 24 kindergartens were assessed using the MABATIM tool by the kindergarten teachers, and questionnaires were distributed to their 120 parents. This stage (T1) also marked the start of a pre-post design, using two tools as pre-test: CLASS observations and focus groups with teachers and parents. Following this stage, Following this stage, an intervention program for the kindergarten teachers was administrated, and was intended to improve the quality of early education in the 24 Arab kindergartens between 2019 and 2021. In the fourth and final stage (T2), CLASS observations and focus groups with teachers and parents, were recollected in order to measure change.

## **Hypotheses**

H1: Positive and quality interactions between kindergarten staff and children are positively correlated to children's emotional, social and cognitive development.

H2: Early childhood interventions promote quality interactions between kindergarten staff and children.

H3: there will be no significant correlation between teacher seniority and the MABATIM emotional abilities.

H4: Intervention leads to improvement in children's data in the evaluation forms.

## **Conclusions**

Theoretical implications of Research Question 1 and Hypothesis 1 indicate that high-quality interactions between kindergarten staff and children are central to children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. Practically, fostering these interactions through targeted interventions can yield developmental benefits for the child. Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 2 suggest that staff training programs significantly enhance the quality of teacher-child interactions by improving teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and responsiveness—drawing on socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987). These findings support the implementation of evidence-based training in communication, classroom management, and emotional engagement. H4, which proposed that the intervention would lead to measurable improvements in children's evaluation form data, was supported. This aligns with the qualitative findings, which highlighted that both kindergarten teachers and parents reported noticeable improvements in the teachers' knowledge and skillset.

To support effective classroom interactions, teachers should be trained to show empathy, set boundaries, and regulate complex emotions that arise when dealing with behavioral problems, and to impart in them a repertoire of practices and tools, that help them communicate with the children and to respond correctly to classroom situations. Support in this field can be provided to the kindergarten staff in Israel by the Psychological Counseling Service in the Ministry of Education, and by the school counselors and other educational experts. Finally, the CLASS tool proved valuable in assessing and guiding improvements in interaction quality, especially in enhancing emotional support and epistemic practices in early education.

## References

- Ainsworth, M. S. (1979). Infant–mother attachment. *American psychologist*, 34(10), 932.
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. (1963). *Social learning and personality development*. New York: Holt.
- Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, Codes and Control* (Volume 1). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1998). Children’s interpersonal behaviors and the teacher–child relationship. *Developmental psychology*, 34(5), 934.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss v. 3 (Vol. 1). *Random House*. Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (2009). *Methods and measures: The network of relationships inventory: Behavioral systems version*. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 33, 470-478.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Volume II: Separation, anxiety and anger. In *Attachment and Loss: Volume II: Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (pp. 1-429). London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental psychology*, 28(5), 759.
- Coleman, James S. 1988. “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital”. *The American Journal of Sociology* 94:S95.
- Evans, G. W., & Kim, P. (2013). Childhood poverty, chronic stress, self-regulation, and coping. *Child Development Perspectives*, 7(1), 43–48.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher–child relationships and the trajectory of children’s school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child development*, 72(2), 625-638.
- Howes, C., & Hamilton, C. E. (1992). Children’s relationships with child care teachers: Stability and concordance with parental attachments. *Child development*, 63(4), 867-878.
- Littlejohn, S. (2002). *Theories of Human Communication*. Albuquerque: Wadsworth.



- Lynch, M., & Cicchetti, D. (1992). Maltreated children's reports of relatedness to their teachers. *New directions for child and adolescent development*, 1992(57), 81- 107.
- MacBlain, S. (2022). *Learning Theories for Early Years Practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Sage Publications, London.
- Piaget, J. (1929). *The child's conception of the world*. London: Routledge.
- Piaget, J. (1950). *The psychology of intelligence*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Pianta, R. C., Nimetz, S. L., & Bennett, E. (1997). Mother-child relationships, teacher-child relationships, and school outcomes in preschool and kindergarten. *Early childhood research quarterly*, 12(3), 263-280.
- Spivak, A. & Howes, C. (2011). Social and relational factors in early education and prosocial actions of children of diverse ethnocultural communities. *Merrill- Palmer Quarterly*, 57(1), 1-25
- Vygotsky, L. S., Hanfmann, E., Vakar, G., & Kozulin, A. (2012). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. (Revised edition).
- Vygotsky, L. S., In Rieber, R. W., In Carton, A. S., Bruner, J. S., Minick, N., Knox, J. E., & Stevens, C. B. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky*. New York : Plenum Press,
- Zimmerman, B.J. (1983). Social Learning Theory: A Contextualist Account of Cognitive Functioning. In: Brainerd, C.J. (eds) *Recent Advances in Cognitive-Developmental Theory*. Springer Series in Cognitive Development. Springer, New York, NY.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-9490-7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-9490-7_1)