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Study on Teacher-Child Interactions During Activities: Focusing on The Quality of Feedback for Preschool Children's Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how teachers and children interact throughout class activities, paying special emphasis to the feedback given to preschoolers to assist in their learning. It explores how feedback can deepen children's comprehension and promote engagement (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), and it is based on the idea that learning occurs through collaborative interaction and conversation (Garcia-Carrion & Villardón-Gallego, 2016). A purposive sample of five-year-old children, and their teacher participated in three videotaped classroom observations on different days as part of a qualitative methodology. According to the study's findings, scaffolding, thought process prompting, encouraging, and acknowledging achievements were all incorporated in the teacher's feedback. Both verbal and nonverbal such as praising, accomplishments, encouragements, gestures like smiles or shoulder pat, were noted, even though the teacher mostly oversaw guided activities. While closed-ended inquiries were frequently used in interactions, there were also examples of positive reinforcement and modelling of materials. This study contributes to the understanding of how feedback might improve learning by providing a detailed account of a single classroom environment. The results highlight the potential occurrence of teacher-child interactions that go beyond question-and-answer format and offer guidance for more dialogic and responsive teaching methods in early childhood education.

Keywords: *Children, Teacher, Teacher-Child Interactions, Preschool, Activity*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) quality is consisting of two interconnected dimensions: process quality and structural quality (OECD, 2018; Cadima, Leal, & Burchinal, 2010). The term "structural quality" describes observable, quantifiable components including the physical learning environment, teacher's credentials, and teacher-child ratios. The "process quality" is the interactions and experiences children have within the ECEC setting, including interactions with peers, adults, materials, and the overall learning environment.

Among these, teacher and child interactions have been consistently identified as a critical driver of children's holistic development across cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). A key aspect of these interactions is the instructional support provided through feedback defined not merely as praise or correction, but as a mechanism that guides, scaffolds, and extends children's learning. Meaningful feedback can enhance children's engagement, promote higher-order thinking, and foster a sense of belonging and competence in the classroom.

Despite increasing recognition of feedback as a powerful tool within ECE pedagogy, there is a lack of empirical research examining how it is operationalized in Malaysian preschool settings. Most existing studies in the Malaysian context tend to emphasize broader communication patterns or general interactional quality, often overlooking the nuanced ways in which feedback is delivered, received, and adapted to individual learner needs.

This study addresses unresolved issue by investigating the nature and quality of feedback provided by preschool teachers during instructional interactions in private Malaysian early childhood centres. It seeks to understand how teachers respond to children's learning cues, the types of feedback strategies they employ, and how such interactions contribute to or hinder engagement and

understanding. By focusing on this specific element of process quality, the study contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of pedagogical responsiveness in Malaysian ECE, with implications for teacher training, classroom practice, and national quality standards.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to previous studies, one important sign of successful early childhood education programs is the quality of teacher-child interactions (Mashburn et al., 2008). However, there are still worries about an excessive focus on academic instruction in Malaysia's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) system. Majzub (2013) noted that early academic abilities such as reading, writing, and math are frequently given priority in Malaysian preschool education at the expense of more comprehensive and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. Qin and Nor's (2018) research, revealed that teacher-centred, passive learning strategies by rote learning, memorization, and "chalk and talk" tactics remain common in classroom instruction. Children's self-expression and active participation are often suppressed by these approaches, which reduces their opportunities for meaningful verbal and nonverbal communication.

One of the best indicators such as didactic teaching practices is the nature and quality of feedback provided by teachers. Feedback, as a component of instructional interaction, reflects the extent to which a teacher is attuned to children's ideas, responses, and developmental needs. In highly didactic classrooms, feedback is often limited to correction or praise, with little elaboration or scaffolding to extend children's thinking. Conversely, in more child-centred environments, feedback serves as a dialogic tool that builds on children's contributions, encourages exploration, and fosters critical thinking. Thus, feedback is not merely one part of classroom interaction through which the underlying pedagogical orientation can be observed and assessed.

To determine how feedback either supports or contradicts teacher-centred instructional norms, this study aims to investigate the feedback in Malaysian preschool classrooms of teacher-child interactions. By examining feedback as a core component of process quality, the study aims to uncover how interactive strategies can be improved to support more meaningful, responsive, and child-led learning experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview of Literature Review

Effective teacher and child interactions are widely recognized as a critical component of process quality in early childhood education and are strongly linked to promoting school readiness (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). High-quality interactions not only support children's development, well-being, and learning but also enhance the overall quality of teaching and pedagogy in early childhood settings (Koivula, Salminen, Rautamies, & Rutanen, 2022).

Process quality focuses on children lived experiences within the classroom, emphasizing the nature and quality of their interactions with teachers, peers, materials, and activities (Karlsen & Lode, 2021). These interactions shape children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, making them a vital area of focus for improving early childhood education outcomes

It is often acknowledged that fostering children's early language and cognitive development requires high-quality teacher-student interactions (Yang et al., 2021). These interactions serve as the conduit through which learning is mediated, not only facilitating the transmission of knowledge but also shaping how children engage with content, peers, and the learning environment. However, while existing research often affirms the positive correlation between interaction quality and developmental outcomes, less attention has been paid to how specific dimensions of interaction for example feedback, questioning, or emotional support differentially influence children’s learning trajectories. For instance, studies often treat “interaction” as a broad construct without disentangling its instructional, emotional, and organizational components, despite growing evidence that these dimensions function differently and may not always be equally present (Mashburn et al., 2008; Bertram et al., 2016).

Moreover, in contexts such as Malaysia, where didactic and academically driven pedagogies continue to shape early childhood classrooms (Mamat et al., 2020), the potential of interaction as a developmental tool may be constrained by dominant teaching norms. While educators may acknowledge the value of interaction, their practices may still reflect top-down, teacher-led instruction that limits

children's autonomy and reduces the depth of engagement. Sen (2021) highlights by pointing to the disconnect between policy-level aspirations for child-centred learning and the persistence of rigid classroom practices. This suggests a need to critically examine not just whether teacher–child interactions occur, but what kind of interactions are taking place, how responsive they are, and how they align with children's developmental and cultural contexts.

This study builds on these insights by investigating the quality of teacher–child interactions, with particular attention to instructional strategies employed during feedback. By focusing on how feedback functions within interaction, the study aims to move beyond general affirmations of interactional importance to explore its practical implications for improving process quality in Malaysian ECCE settings.

According to Rosse, Simon, and Soemer (2022), children's self-regulation skills, such as working memory, inhibitory control, and selective attention, are positively correlated with better teacher-student interactions. While these findings reinforce the widely held view that interaction quality extends beyond cognitive development to encompass self-regulatory and social-emotional competencies, they also raise important questions about the mechanisms underlying these associations.

Moreover, the generalizability of these findings to diverse educational settings, such as those in Malaysia, is uncertain. Most studies, including Grosse et al, (2022) are situated in Western contexts where classroom norms, teacher training models, and child expectations may differ significantly from those in Southeast Asia. In settings where teacher–child interactions are shaped by more hierarchical or academically driven norms, the developmental benefits of interaction may not materialize in the same ways or to the same extent. These concerns highlight the need for more contextually grounded research on how interaction quality and specific dimensions such as feedback related to children's developmental outcomes. This study responds to this gap by examining the Malaysian ECCE context, where teacher–child interactions are influenced by both cultural expectations and curriculum demands. It focuses specifically on the role of feedback as a mechanism for supporting not just cognitive learning, but also self-regulation and social engagement.

There is increasing awareness and a growing body of evidence highlighting the importance of high-quality teacher–child interactions in early childhood education as a critical factor for promoting positive developmental outcomes (Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016; Mashburn et al., 2008; Sammons et al., 2003). It is essential for teachers to actively stimulate children's thinking and guide their natural curiosity toward deeper understanding (García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2016). The interactional dialogue in early childhood settings is closely linked to quality teaching and meaningful learning experiences. Villardón-Gallego highlighted that by exploring children's knowledge and concepts, open-ended questions can promote higher-order thinking and increase interactions.

The concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the significance of social interaction in cognitive development. The gap between what a kid can accomplish on their own and what they can accomplish with the help of someone who is more experienced (Vygotsky, 1962). Within this zone, teacher–child interactions serve as a critical mechanism for learning, enabling educators to provide timely support that helps children progress beyond their current level of competence (Pianta, 2008). A central instructional strategy rooted in the ZPD is scaffolding, typically defined as the provision of temporary, adjustable support that is gradually withdrawn as children gain autonomy.

However, the concept of scaffolding is not uniformly defined across the literature. Some researchers conceptualize it narrowly as structured teacher prompts and questions during academic tasks (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), while others adopt a broader definition that includes affective support, non-verbal cues, and co-regulation of emotional states (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Shabani, Khatib, and Ebadi (2010), for instance, stress the importance of adapting scaffolding strategies to the learner's cultural and contextual realities, acknowledging that scaffolding is not a one-size-fits-all technique but rather a dynamic, responsive process.

In the Malaysian ECCE context, the application of scaffolding has yet to be fully explored, particularly in relation to how feedback is used as a form of instructional support. Given the persistence of teacher-centred practices (Qin & Nor, 2018; Majzub, 2013), it is essential to investigate whether scaffolding in Malaysian classrooms reflects a true collaborative process or whether it remains limited to corrective, directive feedback. This study adopts an interactional view of scaffolding that includes both verbal and non-verbal guidance provided in-the-moment to support children's emerging

understanding. In doing so, it aims at how feedback functions as a scaffold revealing both the pedagogical orientation of teachers and the responsiveness of their instructional strategies to children's developmental needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers work within a framework shaped by theoretical assumptions, established data collection traditions, and broadly framed research questions. The main goal of qualitative research is to describe and comprehend experiences in great detail (Lichtman, 2010)

Typically, qualitative research adopts an inductive approach, progressing from observation toward the development of concepts or theories, rather than beginning with hypotheses to be tested deductively. As noted by Aguis (2013), the researcher engages in a recursive process, moving back and forth between the raw data and the stages of conceptualization, making sense of the findings throughout the data collection period.

Research Design

A qualitative observational study using thematic analysis is used. The descriptive data through naturalistic observation of classroom activities. It focuses observing teacher-child interactions and analysing how different teaching strategies (like scaffolding or prompting) appear in practice. It is a thematic, based on patterns (themes) identified in field notes from observed activities conducted in real classroom settings.

Population and Sampling

This study focused on interactions between teachers and children within a private preschool classroom of five-year-old children and their class teacher, located in Selangor, Malaysia. The population targeted consisted of five-year-old children enrolled in privately owned preschools in the state, along with their respective teachers. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, which is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants based on their capacity to provide in-depth, relevant, and contextually rich data (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

The specific preschool and teacher were selected based on several criteria relevant to the research objectives. First, the teacher had over ten years of experience in early childhood education and had received formal training in child development and pedagogy, making the teacher a potentially rich source of insight into authentic, in-practice teacher and child interactions. Second, the preschool operates within a private setting and follows a curriculum that blends academic expectations with child-centred learning approaches, thereby offering a meaningful context in which to examine how feedback and interactional quality are negotiated in everyday classroom practice. Third, preliminary conversations with the school administrator and teacher revealed a strong willingness to participate an openness to classroom observation, which ensured research access and ethical transparency.

The participants comprised the same teacher and a group of eight five-year-old children, observed across three different classroom sessions. While this small, focused sample allows for deep, detailed analysis of interactions within a naturalistic setting, it does impose limitations on the transferability of findings. As the data reflect only one teacher’s practices in one private preschool context, they cannot be generalized to all early childhood education settings in Malaysia. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not statistical generalizability but rather analytical transferability, whereby richly described cases provide insights that readers can relate to other similar contexts (Yin, 2014). This limitation is acknowledged and addressed through thick description, contextual transparency, and triangulation of observations across multiple sessions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through video recordings, direct observations, and field notes to enable triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. The observation of teacher-child interactions, video recording was important as it allowed the researcher to review and analyze the data several times (Koyuncu, 2023). The participants consisted of the same class teacher and the same group of eight five-year-old children from a private preschool. Observations were conducted over three separate days during classroom activities or lessons. Each video recording lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes and took

place during the morning session. The activities observed varied according to the preschool's timetable, which was provided by the school administration.

Data were collected through three video-recorded classroom observations conducted on three separate days over a two-week period. The sessions involved a purposive sample of five-year-old children and their class teacher during regular classroom activities led by the teacher. Each observation ranged from 15 to 21 minutes, with a total recorded time of approximately 56 minutes. The observations were supplemented with notetaking by the researcher to capture contextual details, classroom dynamics, and non-verbal cues in the recordings.

The timing and nature of the observed sessions were carefully selected in consultation with the preschool management and the class teacher to ensure that they represented typical teaching and learning moments. The selected sessions took place during core instructional periods, involving planned, curriculum-based activities that were part of the teacher's regular practice. There were no special preparation, rehearsals, or modifications were made for the purpose of the study. By observing over three non-consecutive days, the study also captured interactional consistency across different moments.

Nonetheless, the limited duration of the observations is acknowledged as a constraint. While the goal of this qualitative study is not to generalize findings across all contexts, the relatively brief snapshot may not capture the full range of teacher–child interactions or contextual variability. This limitation is addressed by providing detailed, contextualized descriptions of each session, triangulating patterns across multiple observations, and interpreting findings within the boundaries of the study's scope. Future research with longer or more frequent observations would provide a more comprehensive account of interactional dynamics.

Naturalistic observation is particularly valuable for capturing these experiences and for understanding the contextual factors surrounding them (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2012). Liamputtong (2013) highlights cameras that can be used in a simple and unobtrusive way to document actions. This study employed photographs and video recordings to create a visual record of the teacher and children within their natural classroom environment, preserving authentic interactions as they occurred. The observed activities were as follows:

a. The first activity focused on differentiating between fruits and vegetables. It involved using picture cards depicting apple, grapes, mango, carrot, bell pepper, and bitter gourd. This activity was recorded for approximately fifteen minutes.

b. The second activity was a continuation of learning social etiquette, specifically the concept of patience. This took the form of a conversation during circle time and was recorded for about twenty-one minutes.

c. The third activity was a memory matching game centred on air transportation, using picture cards featuring an airplane, helicopter, rocket, and hot air balloon. The game involved matching pairs of identical cards and was recorded for approximately twenty minutes.

RESULTS

Braun and Clarke (2006) maintained that thematic analysis serves as a foundational method for qualitative research. They emphasized that it is often the first qualitative analysis technique researchers should learn, as it equips them with essential skills applicable to a wide range of other qualitative methods.

The data analysis followed three steps aligned with thematic analysis. The first step involved reviewing the field notes to develop an overall sense of teacher and child interactions. This included repeatedly reading the field notes, listening to the video recordings, and watching the videotapes many times to deepen familiarity with the data. First impressions and important points were documented. In order to create preliminary codes that were organized around emergent subjects, the second phase required a thorough analysis of the data. The final step focused on identifying overarching themes by carefully reviewing the preliminary codes multiple times to determine which codes reflected similar ideas or patterns (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2017).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to systematically organize and analyze complex data sets. It involves searching for themes that capture the narratives and patterns within the data through careful reading and re-reading of transcriptions (Dawadi, 2020; Maguire & Delahunt,

2017). This method includes identifying and coding emergent themes to provide meaningful insights (Merriam, 2009). Themes pertaining to the quality of feedback in this study included accomplishment, encouragement, scaffolding, and prompting thought processes.

Integration of Scaffolding in Data Collection and Analysis

Guided by Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development, this study specifically focused on identifying how the teacher provided support that was tailored to children's developmental levels during classroom activities. During video-recorded observations, attention was given to instances where the teacher checked for children's understanding, offered assistance, simplified language, used questioning techniques, provided clarification, or employed non-verbal cues such as gestures or wait-time strategies (Koyuncu, Kumpulainen & Kuusisto, 2023; Masters & Yelland, 2002). These scaffolding strategies were documented through detailed field notes and video analysis.

In the data analysis phase, thematic analysis was used to code and categorize examples of scaffolding within teacher-child interactions. This enabled identification of how scaffolding supported children's learning and participation throughout the activities. Scaffolding, as originally conceptualized by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), refers to the temporary and adaptive support provided by a teacher to help a learner accomplish a task they could not complete independently. A key element of scaffolding is the gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the child, achieved through a series of interactions that build competence. In this study, operationalize scaffolding as interactional support that not only guides the learner but also aims to progressively foster autonomy this includes modelling strategies followed by child participation, strategic questioning that builds on prior responses, and step-by-step guidance.

Prompting Thought Processes: This involves the teacher asking questions and allowing children time to reflect and evaluate their own thinking. It provides opportunities for children to explain their reasoning and deepen their understanding, often referred to as "explain your thinking" (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008). When children engage in problem-solving and investigation alongside peers and supportive adults, their thinking and learning become richer and more complex (Touhill, 2011). It is defined as teacher-initiated efforts to stimulate reflection, curiosity, or reasoning without necessarily scaffolding toward task mastery.

Encouragement and Accomplishment: This theme examines how teachers motivate children to persist through challenges. Teachers provide feedback—both verbal and non-verbal that acknowledges children's efforts, calls them by name, affirms their progress, and celebrates their achievements (Mohamed Shah & Hanafi, 2017). Specific encouragement and affirmation from teachers enhance children's understanding, engagement, effort, persistence, and willingness to try new strategies (Pianta et al., 2008).

Table 1: Observation Notes Categorized by Themes

Themes	Activities	Observation notes
Scaffolding	First activity	While the teacher recited the day, date, and month; the children followed reciting too. Teacher: "What is this?" (when introducing the bell pepper) She showed the bell pepper to the children and said, "This is a bell pepper." Then she requested children to follow her. Children: "Bell pepper." Teacher: "It is not a corn. (in a different intonation) Corn is like this, as she showed to the children. Then what is this? It is bitter gourd." The teacher requested the children to repeat after her, Okay, let's repeat saying after me; fruits are grapes, mango, and apple. Vegetables are carrot, bell pepper, and bitter gourd, as the teacher points at each of the words at the whiteboard.
	Second activity	The teacher models the gesture of the song. The teacher recalled last week's activity, "The number one etiquette is to have the intention. We help people because of God, and not because we want to be praised.

Themes	Activities	Observation notes
	Third activity	Teacher: “What is this, while showing an aeroplane picture card to the children?” Teacher: “Can an aeroplane carry many or few passengers?”
Prompting thoughts	First activity	Teacher: “Can it grow big while the teacher drew on the whiteboard seeds, then drew the sun and watering the seeds?” “Teacher, is it taking a long time to grow?” asked one of the children. Teacher: “Bell pepper has two colours, red and green.” Child: “Yellow colour?” Teacher: “Oh yes, yellow colour. There are three colours.”
	Second activity	Teacher: What does patience mean?
	Third activity	Teacher: “Which one is the same?” Teacher: “Where exactly is the rocket?” Teacher: “Where shall I put it?” The teacher called a child to guess what picture is that? Teacher: “That's right, have you ever been on a helicopter before?” Teacher: “Where do you put the aeroplane card?”
Encouragement and Accomplishment	First activity	Teacher: “Yes, it has a yellow colour.” Teacher: “Wow! How do you know?” Teacher: “Thank you.” Teacher: “Very good!”
	Second activity	Teacher: “Very good!” Teacher: “Yes, blue, red, white, and yellow of Malaysia’s flag.”
	Third activity	Teacher: “Thank you.” Teacher: “Ok, thank you child.” The teacher smiled and called a child. Teacher: “Later, we will do another activity while patting the child’s shoulder.” The teacher responded, “Thank you, children and clap one time, clap two times, clap three times, and then clap many times.”

Discussion on the Observations from the First Activity

The teacher began the activity by introducing the main theme, “I am responsible for my health,” followed by the sub-theme, fruits, and vegetables. Teacher-child interactions during the activity occurred through both verbal communication and non-verbal gestures, with the teacher clearly dominating the exchanges. In the verbal interactions, the teacher-initiated conversation, while the children primarily listened and responded to questions when called upon. The children raised their hands to answer the teacher’s questions.

The questions posed by the teacher were mostly closed-ended, including recall and process questions, some repeated with varied intonation to maintain engagement. Occasionally, the teacher offered hints, such as when introducing the vegetable bitter gourd. Throughout the activity, the teacher frequently held and showed the picture cards or materials to the children, guiding their focus. Although children became familiar with the concepts of fruits and vegetables through these interactions, they did not contribute their own ideas or suggestions. There was evidence of scaffolding, as the teacher encouraged children to repeat words like “bitter gourd” and “bell pepper” to reinforce vocabulary. The teacher also modelled gestures for an action song, which the children successfully imitated.

It demonstrates that the activity was teacher-dominated, with the teacher initiating and controlling most of the verbal interactions. While children responded appropriately to the teacher’s questions and imitated gestures, their role was mostly passive, with limited opportunities to initiate conversations, share ideas, or influence the direction of the learning.

The children responded well to visual and physical prompts, especially during the action song, which shows effective use of multimodal strategies to sustain engagement and support learning. However, these interactions were still teacher-controlled, rather than emerging from child-led exploration. Although the theme ("I am responsible for my health") had potential for rich, real-world

connections, there were few opportunities for children to contribute their own experiences or ideas (e.g., discussing fruits/vegetables they eat at home). This lack of shared thinking or discussion indicates that teachers exploring children's ideas were limited.

Discussion on the Observations from the Second Activity

During circle time, the children followed along and participated in the activity focused on the etiquette of patience. The teacher began by recapping the previous topic on etiquette, emphasizing the value of good intentions with the statement, “We help people because of God, not because we want to be praised.” The children responded to the teacher’s questions throughout the session. The teacher led a recitation accompanied by movements, and the children followed the gestures, such as moving their arms to the left and right. To illustrate the concept of patience, the teacher gave an example, such as helping a friend carry many things.

However, there was minimal evidence of prompting the children’s thought processes. For instance, when the teacher asked, “What does patience mean?” there was little follow-up to encourage deeper reflection or explanation from the children. The teacher did provide verbal acknowledgments such as “thank you” and “okay” to affirm children’s participation.

Gestures were modelled by the teacher during the action song, which the children were able to imitate successfully. Overall, it appeared that the children mainly listened and followed the teacher’s instructions, consistent with observations by Ali and Mahamod (2015).

A teacher-led activity centred on the concept of patience was introduced during circle time. The teacher skilfully reviewed previous lessons and presented moral principles in an understandable and developmentally appropriate way. The children demonstrated involvement and attentiveness by responding and participating by imitating the teacher's spoken directions and body language. The teacher led the class and most of the interactions were one-sided. Children were receptive, although their involvement was mainly restricted to making gestures or providing brief responses.

The teacher did ask some questions, but there was minimal effort to enhance knowledge on children's responses or stimulate deeper thinking. For example, when asking “What does patience mean?” The teacher did not prompt further discussion or clarification, which limited opportunities for critical thinking and expression. The overall interaction emphasized discipline, moral instruction, and participation but did not fully encourage independent thinking or expressive communication.

Discussion on the Observations from the Third Activity

During the memory matching game on air transportations, the children were enthusiastic and very involved as they responded to the teacher's questions. They engaged fully in the guessing or remembering game by recognizing and matching the right cards, answering questions, and placing correct picture cards.

The teacher asked questions like, “Which one is the same?” and provided scaffolding by helping the children remember the placement of matching cards through subtle hints. The teacher gave children opportunities to respond by calling on them individually. For example, the teacher called a child’s name and said, “Ok, we will do it later. Thank you,” while also encouraging patience with phrases like “be patient” and “smile.” The teacher encouraged the children to walk rather than to rush when taking books off the shelf. Additionally, nonverbal cues were seen such as finger movement to be quiet.

There was clear evidence of encouragement and accomplishment for both verbal praise and non-verbal gestures. Scaffolding was evident when the teacher asked guiding questions like, “Can a plane carry a lot of people or just a few?” Additionally, prompting thoughts were encouraged with questions for examples, “Which one is the same?” and “Where exactly is the rocket, and where shall I put it?”

The memory matching game created an engaging and interactive learning environment where children demonstrated enthusiasm and active participation. The teacher facilitated the activity by combining verbal instructions, scaffolding, and non-verbal cues, which helped maintain children's focus and encouraged appropriate behaviour. The teacher encouraged patience and social skills in supporting children's cognitive growth and memory abilities by posing insightful and leading questions. Children received individualized attention by being called on by name, which enhanced their confidence and involvement.

Verbal and non-verbal such as praises and gestures as forms of encouragement reinforced positive behaviour and motivated the children throughout the activity. While elements of child-centeredness emerged during the game-based in this activity such as increased child participation and moments of peer collaboration, the overall pattern across the three sessions reflected a predominantly teacher-led approach. The teacher showed control over the interactions by guiding children's responses through closed questions and behavioural directives. This suggests that interaction quality varied not only with the teacher's approach but also with the structure and intent of each activity. The findings highlight the importance of activity design in enhancing opportunities for responsive, and developmentally appropriate teacher and child interactions.

IMPLICATIONS

The study identified four key themes in teacher-child interactions: scaffolding, prompting thoughts, encouragement, and accomplishment. The findings revealed that teachers predominantly controlled the interactions during guided activities, with children primarily responding to teacher-posed questions. A common scaffolding strategy employed by teachers was the use of questions, which were mostly closed-ended, including recall and process-oriented questions. Throughout the activities, teachers frequently held and displayed materials without encouraging children to contribute their own ideas or suggestions. Verbal and non-verbal forms of accomplishment such as saying "thank you," "okay," "be patient," as well as gestures like pats on the shoulder and smiles were used to affirm and encourage the children's participation.

This study identified four key themes through an in-depth exploration of a single teacher's practices during approximately 60 minutes of classroom observation. While the findings are not intended to be generalizable, they offer a rich, contextualized description that may prompt reflection among early childhood educators. Rather than prescribing strategies for teachers broadly, this study serves as a starting point for dialogue and critical examination of how pedagogical approaches can be adapted in similar contexts.

The suggestion for promoting two-way dialogue between teachers and children will establish best practices in early childhood education. This principle is not presented as a novel, data-driven outcome of this study, but rather as a recommendation that is supported and illustrated by the observed interactions in this observation. Thus, the study contributes to ongoing conversations about teacher-child interaction by highlighting how such practices might manifest in everyday classroom settings.

The implications for teacher-child interaction research are substantial. Future studies should investigate how the quality and degree of these interactions evolve over time and across different learning contexts. Longitudinal research could explore how sustained high-quality interactions influence children's developmental trajectories, including language acquisition, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills. Moreover, future research might examine the factors that support or hinder teachers in maintaining consistent, high-quality interactions, such as teacher training, classroom environment, and policy frameworks.

Additionally, it would be valuable to explore children's active contributions during interactions and how teachers can provide more opportunities for children to ask questions, share ideas, and encourage involvement. Understanding the dynamic and reciprocal nature of teacher and child interactions could inform the development of professional development programs aimed at equipping teachers with the skills to foster more balanced and child-centred interactions. The study highlights a predominantly teacher-led interaction pattern.

A creative way forward would be to cultivate feedback as a two-way dialogue: children provide feedback about their learning experiences. This two-way interaction can enhance children's sense of autonomy in their learning and help develop their communication abilities. Teachers could incorporate reflective questioning that encourages children to think about how they arrived at an answer or decision, fostering early self-regulation and problem-solving skills. For example, instead of simply confirming a correct answer, teachers might ask, "How did you figure that out?" or "What could you try next time?"

Overall, these directions for future research have the potential to inform policy and practice, ultimately contributing to improved early childhood education quality and better learning outcomes for children.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors herein assert that the research undertaken was executed without the influence of any commercial or financial affiliations, which may be perceived as potential conflicts of interest

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