

Family–Preschool Partnership as A Factor in The Development of Social Competence Among Children Aged 5–7: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual study examines family–preschool partnership as a multidimensional relational factor in the development of social competence among children aged 5–7. Drawing on recent research in early childhood education, developmental psychology, family engagement, and teacher–child relationships, the study integrates five interconnected components: family involvement, parent–teacher partnership, preschool relational environment, teacher–child relationship, and child social competence. The proposed framework assumes that family involvement may contribute to children’s social competence through direct and relational pathways, particularly through communication, trust, reciprocity, coordinated expectations, and supportive interactions. Parent–teacher partnership is positioned as a relational mechanism, while the preschool relational environment and teacher–child relationship represent increasingly proximal contexts for children’s social learning. The framework also recognizes reciprocal and moderating processes associated with child temperament, family characteristics, and patterns of parental involvement. Seven propositions (P1–P7) are formulated to guide future empirical testing using longitudinal, structural equation, multilevel, and multi-informant approaches.

Keywords: Family involvement; parent–teacher partnership; preschool; social competence; teacher–child relationship; relational environment; early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

The development of social competence during early childhood is a fundamental component of children’s successful adaptation to educational environments and their subsequent academic and social development. Social competence encompasses children’s abilities to communicate effectively, establish and maintain positive relationships, regulate emotions and behaviour, cooperate with peers and adults, resolve interpersonal difficulties, and participate constructively in group activities. The preschool period is particularly important because children aged 5–7 increasingly move beyond the immediate family context and become involved in more complex social interactions with teachers and peers. Consequently, the

quality of children’s relationships across home and preschool environments may play a substantial role in shaping their social and socio-emotional development.

Family involvement in early childhood education is increasingly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct rather than as parents’ participation in isolated preschool activities. A recent systematic review identified three major dimensions of family involvement in early childhood education: home-based engagement, school-based engagement, and home–school communication [1]. This multidimensional perspective is particularly important because children’s social development is influenced not only by what parents do at home but also by

the extent to which parents and early childhood educators communicate, exchange information, and establish consistent approaches to supporting children.

Empirical evidence supports an association between family involvement and children's social functioning. For example, research among Chinese preschool children demonstrated that home-based family educational involvement and home-school conferencing were positively associated with children's social skills, while the quality of the parent-child relationship moderated these associations [3]. Similarly, studies of family engagement in early childhood education have demonstrated relationships between parental involvement and children's social-emotional outcomes [7,8,13]. These findings suggest that family participation may contribute to social competence through several interconnected relational mechanisms rather than through parental involvement alone.

The relationship between families and preschool teachers represents another important component of this process. Positive parent-teacher relationships can facilitate the exchange of information about children, increase consistency between home and preschool practices, and create a shared understanding of children's developmental needs. Conversely, difficulties in communication and partnership may restrict opportunities for coordinated support. Research conducted in different cultural and educational contexts has documented the importance of parent-teacher relationships and identified communication, trust, and institutional conditions as important components of successful family-preschool partnerships [15,26,27,28].

The teacher-child relationship provides a further mechanism through which the preschool environment may influence children's social competence. Preschool children who experience supportive and emotionally responsive interactions with teachers have greater opportunities to develop communication, emotional regulation, cooperation, and interpersonal skills. Acar et al. [22], for example, demonstrated that teacher-child relationships were associated with social competence and antisocial behaviour among Turkish preschool children. Similarly, Saral and Acar [11] found that teacher-child closeness was positively associated with preschool children's social competence, whereas conflictual relationships were associated with less favourable outcomes. Other studies have linked teacher-child relationships with social skills,

peer experiences, self-regulation, and broader social-emotional development [5,9,16,17,18,19].

METHOD

At the same time, recent research suggests that the relationship between family involvement and children's development cannot be considered independently from teacher-child interactions. Family engagement may influence the quality of relationships established within preschool, while teachers' perceptions and relationships with families may in turn affect their interactions with children. For example, recent evidence from Early Head Start programs indicates that integrated relationships among families, teachers, and children are associated with children's social-emotional competence [2]. Likewise, research on parent-teacher trust has highlighted the teacher-child-parent relationship as an important relational pathway linking family-preschool partnership processes to children's experiences [33].

The preschool educational environment itself should therefore be considered as an important contextual component. Children's social-emotional development is shaped not only by individual characteristics and family relationships but also by the quality of interactions and environmental conditions within early childhood education settings. Systematic evidence indicates that characteristics of early childhood education environments are associated with children's social and emotional development [39]. In addition, research on preschool quality has demonstrated associations between educational quality and children's social-emotional development extending into the early elementary school years [45].

1. Despite the growing body of research on family engagement, parent-teacher relationships, and teacher-child relationships, these components are frequently examined separately. Family involvement is often investigated as a predictor of school readiness or language development, while teacher-child relationships are examined in relation to social competence and classroom outcomes. Comparatively fewer conceptual approaches integrate these factors into a single relational framework focused specifically on children in the transition period between preschool and school. This fragmentation creates a need for an integrated perspective in which the family, preschool educators, relational environment, and child are considered as interconnected elements of the same developmental system.

The present conceptual framework addresses this gap by examining family–preschool partnership as a potential multidimensional factor in the development of social competence among children aged 5–7. The framework proposes that family involvement may contribute to children’s social competence both directly and indirectly through the quality of parent–teacher partnership, the relational preschool environment, and teacher–child relationships. This approach is consistent with contemporary evidence showing that family engagement, adult relationships, and children’s social-emotional functioning are interconnected [1,2,3,5,7,11].

On this basis, the central research question of this conceptual study is: How does the quality and form of family–preschool partnership contribute to the development of social competence among children aged 5–7?

Methodological approach to the conceptual synthesis. This article is a conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review or an empirical study. The literature was organized thematically around five constructs central to the proposed model: family involvement, parent–teacher partnership, preschool relational environment, teacher–child relationship, and child social competence. Empirical studies, longitudinal findings, reviews, and intervention research were considered together to identify recurring associations and plausible relational mechanisms. Particular attention was given to studies involving preschool-aged children, family engagement, adult relationship quality, and social-emotional development. The synthesis was then used to formulate the sequential pathway and propositions P1–P7. Because the present study does not report newly collected data, the proposed relationships are intended as theoretically grounded propositions for future empirical testing rather than as established causal effects.

Based on the reviewed literature, the study proposes the following conceptual pathway:

Family involvement → Parent–teacher partnership → Preschool relational environment/teacher–child relationship → Children’s social competence.

The proposed framework provides a basis for integrating findings from early childhood education, developmental psychology, and family–school partnership research and may be particularly relevant for designing educational

interventions aimed at strengthening social competence during the final preschool years.

2. Family Involvement and Parent–Teacher Partnership

Family involvement in early childhood education is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct rather than as a single form of parental participation. It may include parents’ engagement in learning activities at home, communication with teachers, participation in preschool activities, decision-making, and collaborative support for children’s development. A recent systematic review demonstrated substantial variability in how family involvement is conceptualized and measured in early childhood education, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between different forms and levels of involvement [1]. This distinction is particularly relevant when examining children’s social competence because the developmental effects of family involvement may depend not only on the amount of participation but also on the quality and relational characteristics of that participation.

Evidence from preschool populations indicates that family involvement is associated with children’s social and emotional development. Liu et al. [3], examining a large sample of Chinese preschool children, found associations between family educational involvement and children’s social skills, while the parent–child relationship moderated these associations. These findings suggest that parental participation does not operate independently of the quality of relationships within the family. Similarly, research on Early Head Start programs has identified different family engagement profiles and demonstrated associations between patterns of engagement, parenting skills, and child outcomes [7]. Thus, family involvement should be regarded as a relational and context-dependent process rather than simply a frequency of parental participation.

The distinction between different forms of involvement is also important. Cohen and Anders [8] showed that family involvement in early childhood education and care can be related to children’s social-emotional and language development. Barnett et al. [47] further demonstrated that parent engagement across early childhood education centers and the home is associated with kindergarten school readiness. These findings support the assumption that children benefit when developmental experiences at home and in educational settings are mutually reinforcing.

However, family involvement alone does not necessarily constitute a partnership. Partnership implies reciprocal communication, shared understanding, trust, and collaboration between parents and teachers. Gross et al. [48] demonstrated that perceptions of parent engagement may differ depending on whether parents or teachers are asked to define and evaluate the construct. Ogg et al. [49] similarly emphasized the importance of examining agreement between parents' and teachers' perceptions of family engagement. Such differences are theoretically important because the same observable activity may be interpreted differently by families and educators.

Parent-teacher relationships therefore represent a critical intermediate mechanism between family involvement and children's developmental outcomes. Research conducted in different cultural contexts indicates that communication difficulties, differences in expectations, and contextual barriers can interfere with the establishment of productive partnerships. For example, Korean early childhood teachers reported challenges in developing parent-teacher partnerships that could not be explained solely by individual characteristics [26]. Wolf [27], examining parent and teacher perceptions in Ghana, likewise identified differences in how early childhood education and parent-teacher relationships were understood by the two groups. In inclusive education settings, both parents and teachers have also reported barriers to positive partnerships [29].

The quality of communication appears to be particularly important. Research involving Head Start children indicates that the relationship between family-teacher communication quality and children's classroom engagement is complex and may depend on child and family characteristics [32]. This finding suggests that communication should not be evaluated only according to its frequency. The content, reciprocity, responsiveness, and perceived usefulness of communication may be more relevant to developmental outcomes.

Related evidence also indicates that work-to-family conflict may be connected with preschool children's social behavior problems through family and parent-child relationship processes, highlighting the broader family conditions within which parent-teacher partnership operates [41].

Trust represents another important component of partnership. Recent research has conceptualized parent-

teacher trust as a relational pathway connecting teachers, parents, and the child, particularly during the transition to preschool [33]. From this perspective, partnership is not merely an organizational mechanism for exchanging information about children. Rather, it creates a relational context in which parents and teachers jointly construct expectations, coordinate support, and develop a shared understanding of the child.

The importance of parent-teacher relationships becomes even clearer when considering children's social behavior. Liu et al. [4] reported associations between teacher-parent relationships and preschool children's social behavior problems, with work-family conflict and parenting self-efficacy contributing to the proposed mediating process. This indicates that the quality of relationships between adults surrounding the child may influence children indirectly through family functioning and parenting processes.

Family engagement may also vary considerably between families. Jeon et al. [7] identified distinct profiles of family engagement in home- and center-based Early Head Start settings, demonstrating that families do not participate in early childhood education in identical ways. More recent evidence from China similarly identified distinct patterns of parental involvement and their associations with preschoolers' social adjustment [54]. Consequently, an effective partnership model should accommodate differences in family resources, preferences, communication practices, and opportunities for participation rather than assume a universal form of parental engagement.

Evidence from virtual home visits during the COVID-19 period also illustrates how preschool-home collaboration can be maintained when conventional face-to-face contact is disrupted [30]. Research from Colombia similarly shows that family engagement may occur across both home and early childhood education settings, reinforcing the value of considering engagement as a context-spanning process [31].

The international literature therefore supports a transition from a simple "family involvement" perspective toward a broader partnership model. In such a model, family involvement represents an important input, while parent-teacher partnership functions as a relational mechanism through which information, expectations, and developmental support are coordinated. The resulting

quality of the preschool relational environment may then contribute to children's social competence.

This conceptualization is consistent with evidence showing that children's developmental outcomes are associated with multiple interconnected relationships. Saral and Acar [11] demonstrated the relevance of parent-child, parent-parent, and teacher-child relationships for preschool children's social competence. Jeon et al. [2] further emphasized the importance of integrated relationships in Early Head Start programs and their associations with children's social-emotional competence. Together, these findings provide a basis for considering family-preschool partnership as part of a broader relational system rather than as an isolated educational practice.

On this basis, the present conceptual framework proposes that the developmental influence of family involvement is partly transmitted through the quality of parent-teacher partnership. A strong partnership can facilitate continuity between home and preschool, improve communication about children's needs, support consistent expectations, and strengthen the relational environment in which children learn social and emotional behaviors. This proposition provides the basis for examining the next component of the framework: the role of the preschool relational environment and teacher-child relationships in the development of social competence.

3. The Preschool Relational Environment and Teacher-Child Relationships

The preschool environment represents an important context in which children develop and practice social and emotional competencies. Although the physical characteristics of early childhood settings are relevant, contemporary research increasingly emphasizes the relational and process dimensions of the educational environment. These include teacher emotional support, classroom social organization, teacher-child interactions, opportunities for engagement, and the quality of relationships among participants. Consequently, children's social competence should be considered not only as an individual characteristic but also as an outcome that develops within a specific relational environment.

Research has consistently demonstrated an association between teacher-child relationships and children's developmental outcomes. Paes et al. [5] found that the quality of teacher-child relationships in preschool was

associated with children's subsequent outcomes in kindergarten. This longitudinal perspective is particularly important because it indicates that relational experiences during preschool may have implications extending beyond the immediate educational setting. Similarly, Nguyen et al. [10] demonstrated that the classroom relational environment was associated with children's early development, emphasizing the role of relationship quality as an important component of preschool experiences.

Teacher emotional support is another central dimension of the relational environment. Pakarinen et al. [19] examined teacher emotional support in relation to social competence in preschool classrooms and highlighted the relevance of supportive teacher-child interactions for children's social development. Emotional support may provide children with opportunities to observe and practice appropriate interpersonal behaviors, regulate emotions, communicate needs, and resolve social difficulties in a supportive context.

The quality of teacher-child relationships is, however, multidimensional. It commonly includes dimensions such as closeness, conflict, responsiveness, and the teacher's perception of the child. Research by Partee et al. [17] demonstrated that children's observed interactions with teachers provide important information for understanding teacher-child relationships. Embacher et al. [18] further showed that closeness and conflict in teacher-child relationships may vary according to child personality characteristics. These findings suggest that relationship quality is dynamic and may be shaped by characteristics of both the child and the teacher.

At the same time, teacher-child relationships should not be interpreted exclusively as teacher-driven processes. Evidence from longitudinal research indicates that children themselves may contribute to the development of teacher-child relationship quality. Yildirim et al. [16] provided further evidence for child-driven effects in teacher-child relationship perceptions. This reciprocal perspective is important for the present conceptual framework because it suggests that children's social characteristics and the relational environment may influence each other over time.

The relationship between teacher-child interactions and social competence is also reflected in research examining children's social-emotional outcomes. Acar et al. [22] demonstrated the importance of child temperament and teacher-child relationships for predicting social

competence and antisocial behavior among Turkish children. Wang et al. [9] similarly reported that the teacher–child relationship moderated the association between preschool children’s negative affect and social skills. Thus, supportive relationships may function as a protective or facilitating context, particularly for children experiencing greater emotional or behavioral challenges.

The preschool classroom environment may also influence children through its social management processes. Chen et al. [20] showed that teacher–child relationships and classroom social management were related to children’s perceived peer social experiences during the early school years. This finding indicates that teacher relationships are connected not only with direct teacher–child interactions but also with children’s experiences within the wider peer environment.

The importance of the classroom process is supported by multilevel evidence. Hu et al. [53] examined associations among preschool teachers’ self-efficacy, classroom process quality, and children’s social skills, identifying a multilevel mediation pathway. Such findings reinforce the idea that teachers’ characteristics can influence children’s social development through the quality of classroom processes rather than through direct instruction alone.

At the broader environmental level, systematic and scoping reviews indicate that both physical and sensory characteristics of early childhood education environments may contribute to children’s social and emotional development [39]. At the same time, preschool quality has been associated with children’s social-emotional development over an extended developmental period, including outcomes observed through the second grade of elementary school [45]. Therefore, the preschool environment should be conceptualized as a combination of structural conditions and relational processes.

Children’s engagement provides another link between the educational environment and developmental outcomes. Ritoša et al. [40], in a scoping review of research on children’s engagement in early childhood education and care settings, highlighted the complexity of measuring engagement across different contexts. Engagement can be understood as an observable manifestation of children’s participation in learning and social activities. A relationally supportive environment may facilitate greater engagement by providing children with emotional security, predictable interactions, and opportunities for meaningful

participation.

The relationship between family–preschool partnership and the relational environment is particularly important. Communication and cooperation between parents and teachers may provide teachers with additional information about children’s emotional characteristics, family experiences, interests, and needs. Conversely, teachers can provide families with information about children’s behavior and social functioning in the preschool context. Such reciprocal information exchange can help create greater continuity between home and preschool environments.

This proposition is supported by evidence that family and teacher perspectives may jointly contribute to understanding children’s social-emotional competence. Martinsone et al. [12] examined preschool children’s social-emotional competence and related outcomes using both parent and teacher evaluations. The use of multiple informants is important because children’s social-emotional behavior may differ across home and educational settings. A partnership model that facilitates communication between these contexts may therefore improve the consistency of developmental support.

The integrated nature of these relationships is emphasized by recent evidence from Early Head Start programs. Jeon et al. [2] demonstrated that integrated relationships involving adults in children’s early educational environments were associated with children’s social-emotional competence. This supports the conceptual assumption that children’s development is influenced by a network of interconnected relationships rather than by isolated interactions.

Overall, the evidence points to the view that the preschool relational environment constitutes a key mechanism linking adult relationships and children’s social competence. Family involvement can contribute information and support from the home context; parent–teacher partnership can coordinate these resources; and the teacher–child relationship provides the immediate relational context in which children experience emotional support, social guidance, and opportunities to practice interpersonal skills.

Therefore, the proposed framework positions the preschool relational environment as a mediating or partially mediating component between family–preschool

partnership and children's social competence. The model does not assume that family involvement automatically produces positive child outcomes. Instead, it proposes that the developmental effect is strengthened when information, expectations, and support are effectively coordinated across home and preschool and translated into a supportive relational environment.

For children aged 5–7, this mechanism may be particularly significant because this developmental period involves increasing demands for self-regulation, cooperation, communication, conflict resolution, perspective-taking, and adaptation to school-related expectations. The quality of relationships surrounding the child can therefore provide an important context for practicing and consolidating these competencies.

The conceptual model can consequently be represented as a sequential relational pathway:

Family involvement → Parent–teacher partnership → Preschool relational environment/teacher–child relationship → Child social competence.

This pathway integrates findings from research on family engagement, parent–teacher relationships, classroom quality, teacher–child relationships, and children's social-emotional development. It also provides a theoretical basis for identifying potential mediating mechanisms and for developing future empirical studies specifically focused on children aged 5–7.

4. Conceptual Framework and Proposed Relationships

The literature reviewed above indicates that children's social competence is influenced by a system of interconnected relationships extending across the family and preschool contexts. Rather than treating family involvement, parent–teacher partnership, and the preschool environment as independent factors, the present study conceptualizes them as sequentially connected components of a common developmental system.

The proposed conceptual framework is based on the assumption that family involvement provides an initial source of developmental support, while the quality of parent–teacher partnership determines how effectively this support is coordinated with preschool practices. The resulting coordination may influence the relational quality of the preschool environment, particularly teacher–child

interactions, which in turn may contribute to children's social competence.

4.1. Family involvement as the starting component

The first component of the model is family involvement. Based on recent conceptual and empirical literature, family involvement includes several interconnected forms: home-based educational activities, communication with teachers, participation in preschool activities, and cooperation concerning children's developmental needs [1], [7], [47].

The available evidence suggests that the relationship between family involvement and children's social competence is not necessarily direct. For example, family educational involvement has been associated with preschool children's social skills, but the strength of this association depends on the quality of the parent–child relationship [3]. Similarly, different patterns of parental involvement have been associated with differences in children's social adjustment [54].

Therefore, the model proposes that the quality and form of family involvement are more important than the simple frequency of parental participation.

4.2. Parent–teacher partnership as a relational mechanism

The second component is parent–teacher partnership. This component reflects the degree to which parents and teachers communicate, exchange information, establish mutual trust, coordinate expectations, and jointly respond to children's developmental needs.

Existing research indicates that parents and teachers may perceive family engagement differently [48,49]. Differences in expectations and communication practices may create barriers to effective cooperation [26,27,29]. Conversely, high-quality communication and trust can provide a stronger foundation for collaborative relationships [32,33].

On this basis, the proposed model considers parent–teacher partnership as a mediating relational mechanism between family involvement and the preschool environment.

The underlying assumption is:

Family involvement → improved parent–teacher communication and cooperation → greater continuity

between home and preschool.

This mechanism may be particularly important during the transition from preschool to formal schooling, when parents and teachers need to coordinate expectations concerning children's independence, communication, emotional regulation, and social behavior [33].

4.3. Preschool relational environment as a mediating context

The third component of the framework is the preschool relational environment. It includes teacher emotional support, teacher-child relationship quality, classroom social organization, opportunities for engagement, and the general quality of interpersonal interactions within the educational setting [10,19,20,40].

Teacher-child relationships have repeatedly been associated with children's developmental outcomes.

Preschool teacher-child relationship quality has been linked to subsequent kindergarten outcomes [5], while emotional support provided by teachers has been associated with children's social competence [19].

At the same time, the relational environment may operate as a mechanism through which adult collaboration becomes relevant to children. When parents and teachers communicate effectively, teachers may obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the child's characteristics and needs. At the same time, parents may better understand the child's behavior and relationships within the preschool setting. This reciprocal exchange can facilitate more consistent approaches across contexts.

The model therefore proposes:

Parent-teacher partnership → improved preschool relational environment → stronger opportunities for social learning.

Table 1. Components and proposed roles in the conceptual framework.

Framework component	Proposed role	Developmental relevance
Family involvement	Starting component	Provides home-based learning, information and support
Parent-teacher partnership	Relational mechanism	Coordinates expectations, communication and support
Preschool relational environment	Mediating context	Creates conditions for engagement and social learning
Teacher-child relationship	Proximal interpersonal pathway	Provides emotional support, guidance and practice opportunities
Child social competence	Developmental outcome	Communication, cooperation, emotion regulation, empathy and prosocial behavior

4.4. Teacher-child relationship and children's social competence

The fourth component is the teacher-child relationship, while child social competence represents the fifth and final component of the framework. In the present framework, social competence refers broadly to children's ability to interact effectively with others, communicate, cooperate, regulate emotions and behavior, respond appropriately to social situations, and establish positive relationships with peers and adults.

Recent work using a serial mediation model likewise places teacher-child relationship alongside children's social skills and related developmental outcomes, supporting the view that these constructs should be examined as connected rather than isolated processes [37].

The literature supports a substantial relationship between teacher-child relationship quality and children's social functioning. Studies have demonstrated associations between teacher-child relationships and social competence [11,22], social skills [9], social-emotional outcomes [12], and later developmental outcomes [5].

At the same time, the relationship is likely reciprocal. Children's characteristics and behaviors can influence teachers' perceptions and interactions with them [16,18]. Therefore, the proposed model should not be interpreted as a simple one-directional causal chain. Instead, it represents

a developmental pathway in which adult relationships and child characteristics continuously interact.

4.5. The integrated conceptual pathway

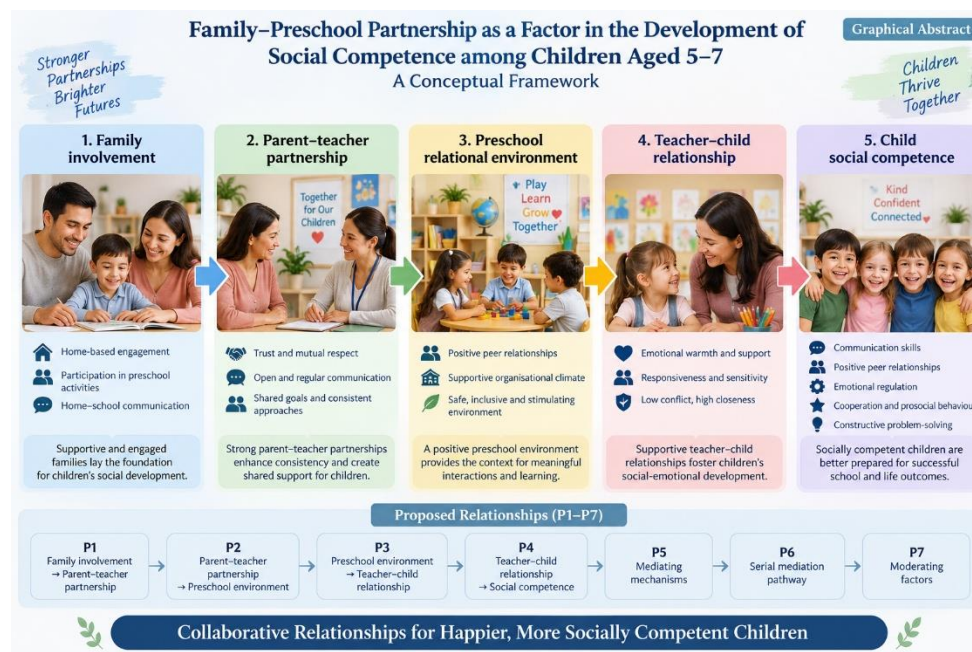


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking family involvement, parent-teacher partnership, preschool relational environment, teacher-child relationship, and child social competence.

Based on the reviewed literature, the central conceptual pathway can be formulated as follows:

Family involvement → Parent-teacher partnership → Preschool relational environment → Teacher-child relationship → Child social competence

The first arrow represents the proposition that meaningful family involvement creates opportunities for communication and cooperation with educators. The second represents the proposition that effective parent-teacher partnership can strengthen continuity and coordination within the preschool environment. The third represents the proposition that a supportive relational environment promotes positive teacher-child interactions. The final relationship reflects the substantial literature connecting teacher-child relationship quality with children's social and emotional functioning [5,9,11,19,22].

Recent research on integrated relationships provides additional support for this systems-oriented perspective.

Jeon et al. [2] demonstrated that interconnected relationships within Early Head Start settings were associated with children's social-emotional competence. This finding is consistent with the central proposition of the present framework: children's social competence develops within a network of relationships rather than through isolated parental or educational influences.

4.6. Proposed propositions

The conceptual framework generates the following propositions for future empirical testing:

P1. Higher-quality family involvement is positively associated with the quality of parent-teacher partnership.

P2. Higher-quality parent-teacher partnership is positively associated with the quality of the preschool relational environment.

P3. A more supportive preschool relational environment is positively associated with teacher-child relationship

quality.

P4. Positive teacher–child relationships are positively associated with children’s social competence.

P5. The relationship between family involvement and children’s social competence is expected to be partially mediated by parent–teacher partnership.

P6. The relationship between parent–teacher partnership and children’s social competence is expected to be partially mediated by the preschool relational environment and teacher–child relationship quality.

P7. The strength of these relationships may vary according to child and family characteristics, including children’s temperament, family context, and patterns of parental involvement [3,22,54].

These propositions provide a basis for transforming the conceptual framework into an empirically testable model. Future research could examine the proposed relationships using structural equation modeling, path analysis, longitudinal designs, or multilevel modeling, depending on the structure of the available data.

4.7. Theoretical contribution of the framework

The principal contribution of the proposed framework is the integration of several research strands that are often examined separately. Previous studies have investigated family involvement [1,3,7], parent–teacher relationships [26,29,33], teacher–child relationships [5,16,17,19], preschool quality [45], and children’s social competence [11,22]. The present model connects these components within a single developmental pathway.

This integration also helps explain why family involvement may produce different outcomes across preschool settings. If parental participation is not accompanied by effective communication and collaboration with teachers, its potential influence on children’s educational experiences may remain limited. Conversely, when family knowledge and preschool expertise are coordinated through a trusting partnership, children may experience greater consistency in expectations, emotional support, and social learning opportunities.

The framework therefore shifts the analytical focus from

the question “How involved are parents?” to the broader question “How effectively do families and preschool professionals work together to support the child’s social development?”

This distinction represents an important conceptual step because it places relationship quality, reciprocity, and coordination at the center of family–preschool partnership.

5. Social Competence in Early Childhood: Structure and Developmental Mechanisms:

Social competence in early childhood represents a multidimensional developmental construct that includes children’s capacity to communicate effectively, establish and maintain relationships, cooperate with peers and adults, regulate emotions and behavior, demonstrate empathy and prosocial behavior, and respond constructively to interpersonal conflicts. Rather than being an isolated individual characteristic, social competence develops through repeated interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and other significant adults. Consequently, the quality of children’s relational environments is an important condition for the emergence and consolidation of socially competent behavior [11, 12, 23].

A substantial body of research indicates that family relationships constitute one of the earliest contexts in which children acquire social and emotional competencies. The quality of the parent–child relationship is associated with preschool children’s social skills, while different patterns of family educational involvement may create different developmental opportunities [3, 21]. In particular, parental involvement should not be understood solely in terms of frequency or quantity. Different forms of involvement may have different associations with children’s developmental outcomes, and the relational quality underlying these practices appears to be particularly important [1, 7, 47, 54]. Research on parental involvement subtypes similarly suggests that the developmental consequences of family engagement depend on the specific form through which parents participate in children’s education and everyday learning [21].

The parent–child relationship also provides an important mechanism through which family involvement may influence social competence. Children who experience responsive communication, emotional availability, and supportive interactions with parents have greater

opportunities to develop emotional understanding, interpersonal communication, and behavioral regulation. Empirical evidence from Chinese preschool samples demonstrates an association between family educational involvement and children's social skills, with the parent-child relationship influencing the strength of this association [3]. Related evidence indicates that different configurations of parent-child relationships are associated with differences in preschoolers' social competence [34]. Research examining both mother-child and father-child attachment further emphasizes that relationships with both parents can contribute to children's emerging social competence [50]. These findings support a relational rather than purely individual interpretation of social development.

Communication represents another important mechanism. The ability to express needs, understand others, negotiate meaning, and respond appropriately to social cues develops through interaction with significant adults. Studies focusing specifically on preschool children have identified associations between children's social competence and their communication with mothers [23]. Similarly, research on paternal involvement indicates that father-child relationships and children's empathy can form part of a developmental pathway connecting parental involvement with social competence [38]. Thus, family involvement may affect children not simply through exposure to educational activities, but through the quality of interpersonal experiences embedded in those activities.

Emotion regulation constitutes a closely related component of social competence. Children must increasingly control emotional reactions, delay immediate responses, understand emotional states, and adapt behavior to social expectations. Family-level socio contextual factors have been associated with the development of emergent emotion regulation, which in turn has implications for early social competence [51]. Self-regulation may also function as an important mechanism linking broader family characteristics with children's preschool readiness [44]. These findings suggest that social competence should be considered as a developmental system in which emotional regulation, behavioral control, communication, and interpersonal functioning are mutually connected.

The preschool environment provides a second major context for the development of social competence. Once children enter organized early childhood education, teachers and peers become increasingly important sources

of social learning. The classroom relational environment includes teacher responsiveness, emotional support, classroom organization, and the quality of interactions occurring between teachers and children. Research indicates that the relational characteristics of preschool classrooms are associated with children's developmental outcomes [10, 19, 20, 45]. Physical and sensory characteristics of early childhood environments may also contribute to children's social and emotional development, indicating that social competence is influenced by both interpersonal and broader environmental conditions [39].

Teacher-child relationships are particularly important because teachers regulate many of the social opportunities available to preschool children. Warmth, closeness, responsiveness, and emotional support can provide children with a secure interpersonal context in which they can practice communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution [5, 9, 19, 22]. Conversely, conflictual or less supportive relationships may restrict children's opportunities for positive social participation. Longitudinal evidence indicates that teacher-child relationships in preschool are associated with children's subsequent outcomes in kindergarten [5], while other research demonstrates associations between teacher emotional support and preschoolers' social competence [19].

At the same time, teacher-child relationships should not be conceptualized exclusively as teacher-driven. Recent research provides evidence for child-driven effects, suggesting that children's characteristics and behavior may also shape teachers' perceptions and interactions with them [16]. Child personality and temperament can influence patterns of closeness and conflict within teacher-child relationships [18, 22]. This reciprocal perspective is particularly relevant for a conceptual model of family-preschool partnership because the same relational environment may not affect all children in an identical way.

Teachers' perceptions of children and their families may further influence the relational environment. Research has shown that teacher perceptions of families can be associated with children's socio-emotional and behavioral functioning [6]. In addition, congruence between parents' and teachers' perspectives may have implications for children's social and emotional development [14]. These findings highlight the importance of considering parents and teachers not as independent observers but as

participants in a shared relational system surrounding the child.

The relationship between family engagement and children's social-emotional functioning is also variable across families. Studies have identified different family engagement profiles and patterns of involvement, suggesting that families do not participate in early childhood education in a uniform manner [7, 24, 54]. Parents and teachers may also differ in how they understand and evaluate the same engagement practices [25, 48, 49]. Such differences are theoretically important because disagreement between adults may affect communication, expectations, and the consistency of support provided to the child.

The quality of parent-teacher communication may therefore represent an intermediate mechanism between family involvement and children's developmental outcomes. Effective communication can facilitate information exchange concerning children's behavior, emotional needs, learning progress, and social relationships. Evidence from Head Start settings indicates that the association between family-teacher communication quality and classroom engagement is complex and may depend on child and family characteristics [32]. Trust represents another potentially important mechanism. Parent-teacher trust may facilitate relationship-building around the child and support continuity between home and preschool contexts [33]. Conversely, barriers identified by parents and teachers can weaken the possibility of establishing productive partnerships [26, 27, 29].

The potential importance of coordinated adult relationships is reinforced by research examining integrated relational systems. Parent-child, parent-parent, and teacher-child relationships have jointly been associated with preschool children's social competence [11]. Similarly, integrated relationships within Early Head Start programs have been linked to children's social-emotional competence [2]. These findings provide empirical support for moving beyond isolated analyses of individual relationships toward a systemic understanding of children's social development.

A systematic review of intergenerational programming further indicates that social and emotional learning can be supported through coordinated relationships and activities across generations [42].

CONCLUSION

The development of social competence during early childhood is best understood as a relational and context-dependent process rather than as an isolated characteristic of the child. The evidence reviewed in this study indicates that children's communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, prosocial behavior, and ability to establish positive relationships are influenced by the quality of interactions across family and preschool contexts [11, 12, 23, 34].

Family involvement constitutes an important starting point in this developmental process. However, the available evidence suggests that the developmental value of family involvement cannot be adequately evaluated through participation frequency alone. Different forms and patterns of parental involvement may be associated with different child outcomes [1, 7, 21, 47, 54]. The quality of parent-child relationships, communication, emotional support, and opportunities for social learning are therefore critical dimensions of family involvement [3, 23, 34, 38, 50, 51].

The analysis further indicates that parent-teacher partnership represents a potentially important relational mechanism connecting family involvement with children's experiences in preschool. Communication quality, trust, reciprocal exchange of information, and shared understanding of children's needs may determine whether family participation becomes effectively coordinated with preschool practices [32, 33, 48, 49]. At the same time, differences in parents' and teachers' perceptions and the barriers experienced by both groups may weaken partnership quality [6, 14, 25, 26, 27, 29].

The preschool relational environment constitutes a further level of this developmental pathway. Supportive classroom interactions, effective social management, emotional support, and overall preschool quality create conditions in which children can practice and consolidate social-emotional skills [10, 19, 20, 45]. The physical and sensory characteristics of the educational environment may also contribute to children's social-emotional experiences [39].

Within this environment, the teacher-child relationship represents one of the most proximal interpersonal mechanisms through which children experience support, guidance, emotional responsiveness, and opportunities for social learning [5, 9, 17, 19, 22]. Importantly, this relationship is reciprocal: children's temperament,

personality, and behavioral characteristics may influence the nature of teacher–child interactions [16, 18, 22]. Thus, the development of social competence should not be interpreted as a simple consequence of adult behavior but as an ongoing interaction between children and the relational environments surrounding them.

On the basis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes an integrated conceptual pathway:

Family involvement → Parent–teacher partnership → Preschool relational environment → Teacher–child relationship → Child social competence

The principal conceptual contribution of this framework is the integration of these five components into a single developmental model. Existing research provides substantial evidence concerning individual links among these variables, but fewer studies have considered how they may operate together as an interconnected relational system, particularly during the developmental period of 5–7 years [2, 5, 11, 19, 22].

The framework also recognizes that these relationships may vary according to family characteristics, patterns of involvement, and child characteristics. Child temperament and personality may influence teacher–child relationships [16, 18, 22], while differences in family engagement profiles may affect the quality of parent–teacher interactions [7, 24, 54]. Consequently, the proposed model should be interpreted as a flexible developmental framework in which direct, indirect, reciprocal, and moderating relationships may coexist.

The practical implication is that early childhood institutions should move from a narrow concept of parental participation toward a broader concept of relational partnership. Effective family engagement should involve reciprocal communication, trust, shared expectations, and coordinated support for children across home and preschool environments [1, 32, 33, 48, 49]. Teacher professional development should consequently include competencies related to family communication, relationship-building, emotional support, and classroom social-emotional processes [19, 20, 53].

Future empirical research should test the proposed framework using longitudinal and multilevel designs. Structural equation modeling may be particularly useful for examining the proposed direct and mediated pathways,

while multi-informant and observational approaches can reduce the limitations associated with relying on a single source of information [12, 17]. Such studies could determine whether parent–teacher partnership and the preschool relational environment mediate the association between family involvement and children’s social competence and whether these pathways differ according to child and family characteristics.

In conclusion, children’s social competence develops most effectively when the adults and environments surrounding the child operate as a coordinated relational system. Family involvement provides an important foundation, but its developmental influence may be strengthened when it is translated into meaningful parent–teacher partnership, supportive preschool environments, and positive teacher–child relationships. The proposed framework therefore offers a basis for future empirical investigation of how coordinated family–preschool relationships contribute to the social development of children aged 5–7.

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