

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
 Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 359-378, January 2025
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.1.18>
 Received Nov 24, 2024; Revised Jan 17, 2025; Accepted Jan 28, 2025

Shaping Young Minds: How Teachers Foster Social Interaction, Psychological Security and Motivational Support in the Primary Language Classroom

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Abstract. This study examined how teachers can create conducive learning environments that promote positive social interactions, psychological security and motivational support to develop young learners' skill acquisition and development in the early language classroom. To this end, a purposeful sample of 93 teachers from schools in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), Al-Ahsa (Saudi Arabia) and Zarqa (Jordan) was drawn for semi-structured interviews to gauge their perspectives on these matters. Using a grounded theory approach, the findings revealed several critical factors that catalyze skill acquisition and development in supportive learning environments. The findings revealed the significance of engaging in enriching social interactions, which allows learners opportunities for practice and active language use in

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real-world contexts. The findings also underscored the significance of teacher-student relationships in building a nurturing learning environment which promotes engagement, self-confidence and improved language learning outcomes. Consistent motivational support was also found to be instrumental in enhancing students' drive, which improved both their participation and language proficiency. The findings further emphasized the need for creating a psychologically safe classroom environment for the learners to take risks and learn from their mistakes without fear. Furthermore, encouraging creative thinking was found to positively affect both language development and cognitive growth.

Keywords: conducive learning environments; early language learning; skills acquisition and development; social and emotional support

1. Introduction

Creating socially and emotionally supportive learning environments is widely recognized as crucial for promoting young learners' language development. In early childhood education, nurturing language skills is rudimentary, as they constitute a cornerstone in the child's ability to acquire knowledge and grasp concepts throughout their schooling (Lipscomb et al., 2019; Mahr and Edwards, 2018) and beyond. Early language development is a catalyst for shaping children's interactions and social, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing while also playing a vital role in fueling their acquisition of diverse skill sets (Altman et al., 2020; Alvermann and Phelps, 2005; Muela et al., 2024; Bani Irshid et al., 2023; Lipscomb et al., 2019; Mahr and Edwards, 2018).

Early childhood teachers are instrumental in creating conducive language learning environments that promote children's skill acquisition and development. This involves creating a vocabulary-rich environment that not only aligns with the emotional and social development of children but also empowers them to express themselves with both fluency and confidence.

A plethora of empirical evidence supports the significance of socially and emotionally supportive learning environments in early language development. For example, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory posits that learning occurs most effectively when children engage in meaningful social exchanges within supportive contexts, emphasizing how rudimentary social interaction is in early cognitive development. More recent findings, such as those of Al-Hassan et al. (2022) and Bani Irshid et al. (2023), further reveal that children raised in emotionally and socially supportive environments show more significant gains in language development than those raised in linguistically impoverished environments. Along the same lines, research, such as that of Huynh et al. (2019), Isnawan (2020), and AlAli and Al-Barakat (2024a), reports that children's engagement in group discussions potentially enhances vocabulary acquisition and encourages effective communication in- and outside the classroom.

Storytelling has been reported to create nurturing learning environments which not only prioritize young learners' emotional and social wellbeing but also facilitate effective communication (Alexander and Jarman, 2015; Fraihat et al., 2022; Muela et al., 2024; Okyay and Kandir, 2017). Through storytelling, teachers

may incorporate engaging techniques to encourage young learners to express themselves both ideationally and emotionally, as interactive storytelling potentially boosts young learners' language development through motivating them to share stories and incorporate vocabulary into their communication (Okyay and Kandir, 2017).

To catalyze language learning environments in the early years, it is imperative that reading matter be age-appropriate both to expand young learners' vocabulary and provide them with phrases that aid their communication in real-life social contexts (e.g., Al-Barakat et al., 2023). Moreover, teachers' attentive listening is key to young learners' social and emotional development, as authentic teacher-child interaction in a civil, unthreatening learning environment potentially both promotes young learners' language and social abilities and helps them express themselves with both clarity and confidence (Noble et al., 2024).

Furthermore, interactive activities, such as games and role-plays, potentially encourage young learners' skill acquisition and development through contextualized, life-like situations (AlAli and Al-Barakat, 2022; White et al., 2020). Hence, interactive instructional tools, such as illustrations and flashcards, empower young learners to acquire language and thought faster which, in turn, catalyzes their confidence and ability to communicate both emotionally and socially (e.g., Barnes and Puccioni, 2017).

Additionally, parental involvement and home-school collaboration is key to language teachers' success in supporting early language development. Informed parents' engagement allows young learners opportunities to work at home toward language skill acquisition and development. Workshops for parents, for example, may raise their awareness of effective strategies, such as reading together and engaging in conversations with children, which have been reported as catalysts for language acquisition and development (AlAli and Al-Barakat, 2023; Alcock et al., 2020; Barnes and Puccioni, 2017; Khasawneh et al., 2023). Al-Hassan et al. (2012) reported that teacher support leads to significant improvement in young learners' self-expression which, in turn, promotes their linguistic and emotional development.

Research suggests that an interaction-rich environment significantly contributes to young learners' language development which, in turn, improves their ability to use language for interaction in real-life social situations (Alcock et al., 2020; Barnes and Puccioni, 2017; Fraihat et al., 2022). Teachers should monitor young learners' progress and provide personalized support (Weadman et al., 2023) either themselves or in collaboration with speech and language specialists (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Weadman et al., 2022).

Research findings (e.g., Finders et al., 2023; Wicaksono and Saraswati, 2024) suggest that teachers' emotional and social support is key to developing young learners' communication skills and overall language development, not to mention enhancing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, emotional

management, social skills and decision-making. Research (e.g., Phillips et al., 2018) also suggests that social and emotional support potentially improves young learners' emotional and academic outcomes which, in turn, promotes motivation to learn, self-assurance, peer relationships, and, ultimately, improved academic performance.

The literature (Alcock et al., 2020; Barnes and Puccioni, 2017; Khasawneh et al., 2022) also suggests that creating a positive and inclusive learning environment is key to young learners' language and social development. When learners feel respected and emotionally secure in their classroom, they willingly engage in activities and contribute to discussions. Research (Bani Irshid et al., 2023; Khasawneh et al., 2022; Pelatti et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2018) also shows that social and emotional support strengthens social relationships among learners, reduces learner anxiety, promotes collaboration, and encourages respect for cultural and personal differences (Fraihat et al., 2022; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022). In a learning environment that nurtures emotional and social wellbeing, learners are better able to develop their language skills through positive interactions with peers and better exchange of ideas.

To reiterate, providing socially and emotionally conducive environments is key to promoting young learners' language development. These environments potentially nurture young learners' interaction and self-expression, which further emphasizes the teachers' role in young learners' language development. However, even though there is extensive attention in theoretical literature to the effect of socially and emotionally supportive environments on language skills development, a distinct research gap exists in gauging this effect in diverse cultural contexts, especially in the Arab region. This underscores an urgent need for research exploring the relationship between social and emotional support and language development in countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia, where studies in this area are relatively scarce.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to explore the effect of conducive learning environments on language development in early childhood education within these contexts. The significance of the current research extends beyond just that, spanning understanding how to incorporate strategy-based instruction such as interactive learning and technology integration to catalyze teaching and learning in the early language classroom. Such research may contribute significantly to instructional strategies, thereby promoting the effectiveness of language learning in various learning contexts.

2. Problem of the Study

Early language and literacy skills are key to children's academic, social and emotional growth. Creating supportive early language learning environments is imperative for young learners' language skill development. Despite the recognition of the significance of conducive environments in early language development, little research exists on how they can be promoted in the preschool learning context. This gap in research highlights the need to explore how activities that support social and emotional growth potentially affect language development in early childhood education.

This study aims to integrate assessments of language environments into research and practice, with the goal of continuously improving educational standards. Learning environments that include interactive language activities and provide social-emotional support are catalysts for language development. However, the principal focus of current empirical research is academic aspects such as pronunciation and vocabulary, often overlooking the significance of learning environments that nurture social and emotional growth.

The principal objective of this study is to identify the English language teachers' role in promoting social interactions, providing psychological security and offering motivational support to support early learners' language development. To achieve this objective, the study seeks to answer the research question, *How does the role of English language teachers in stimulating social interactions, providing psychological security, and offering motivational support contribute to advancing children's language acquisition?*

3. Methods and Procedures

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive analytical design was chosen because it provides insights into the participants' views and experiences, allowing for the investigation of social and emotional factors that affect learning- factors difficult to measure accurately using mere quantitative measures. By using a qualitative research approach, one can discover how factors, such as teacher psychological support, motivation and the promotion of social interactions among learners potentially affect language development. This approach offers valuable insights that help shape policies and assist teachers in creating learning environments that provide psychological security and support social interaction, potentially improving young learners' language development.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The subjects of the study consisted of 93 teachers who were purposefully chosen based on specific criteria set in the study. This purposeful selection was to ensure targeting participants who were willing, cooperating and most likely to provide valuable insights that would aid in answering the question of the research. This type of selection was essential given that the success of the interviews depended on the participants' ability and readiness to engage profoundly with the research process.

The participants ($n = 93$) were equally distributed across three countries: Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), Al-Ahsa (Saudi Arabia), and Zarqa (Jordan). In terms of gender, the sample was predominantly female ($n = 55, 59\%$) relative to males ($n = 38, 41\%$). As for social and cultural considerations, the participants belonged to three distinct educational and cultural environments. The three regions were purposefully selected because they constitute a significantly diverse linguistic and cultural contexts within the Middle East, which helped provide diverse and comprehensive dataset on the topic under study, offering clearer perspectives and deeper understanding of the educational and cultural contexts that affect language learning in the three learning contexts.

3.3 Semi-structured Interview

This semi-structured interview schedule is aimed at identifying how English language teachers can establish supportive learning environments to support young learners' social and emotional wellbeing and, inevitably, promote their language development. The semi-structured interview was selected as the data collection instrument because it is specifically designed to provide a balance between structure and flexibility. The interviewer guides the conversation yet allows the respondents the freedom to clearly express their views. This combination makes the semi-structured interview particularly effective in getting the participants to discuss their views and explore the topic more openly and yet ensure that the key points are addressed.

3.3.1 Validity and Reliability of the Semi-Structured Interview

After finalizing the five-question first draft of the interview schedule, a panel of eleven experts in language education, psychology and childhood studies reviewed it and provided feedback to ensure its content validity. The reviewers made several suggestions for modifications, such as rephrasing a question and eliminating two from the set, bringing the number of questions down to three. The final draft of the interview schedule comprised the following questions:

1. How can English language teachers create socially and emotionally supportive learning environments to aid young learners' language development?
2. What classroom practices provide social and emotional support to aid young learners' language development?
3. How can teachers achieve emotional and social support to promote young learners' language development?

Follow-up questions were used to gain deeper insights into the participants' perceptions, which helped collect data about the role of social and emotional environments in promoting young learners' language development.

To ensure the reliability of the interview schedule, six participants, who were excluded from the main sample, were interviewed twice each, with a 17-day interval between the two interviews. Following the pilot interviews, two raters assessed the data. The reliability of their assessment was done, using Cohen's Kappa, a statistical metric for determining the level of agreement between two or more raters. Cohen's Kappa coefficient ranges between -1 (complete disagreement) and +1 (complete agreement), with a value of 0 indicating no agreement beyond chance. In the current research, Cohen's Kappa coefficient amounted to 0.94, indicating a high level of raters' agreement about the classification of the data and, thus, the reliability of the instrument.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted following a precise protocol to ensure comprehensive and reliable documentation of the data. The data collection proceeded as follows:

1. A diverse group of early-grade teachers was purposefully selected from three geographical regions to achieve the purpose of the study. Once the

participants were identified, the researchers reached out to explain the purpose and significance of the interviews. It was made clear how their involvement would enhance knowledge on the subject being studied. The participants were briefed about the significance of their involvement in the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their freedom to withdraw at any time, and how their data would be used, assuring their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Before the interviews, the participants' written consent was obtained for recording the sessions, following assurance that the recordings would only be used for research purposes.

2. After obtaining the participants' consent, interviews were scheduled according to their availability and convenience. Each interview lasted 40 to 50 minutes in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. The first researcher held interviews with participants in Saudi Arabia, the second researcher conducted interviews in Jordan, and the third researcher conducted interviews in the UAE.
3. Before each interview, which aims to collect realistic in-depth data about EFL teachers' role in creating socially and emotionally supportive learning environments to promote young learners' language development, a relationship of trust and respect was built between the interviewer and participants to ensure that the participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions. Codes were used to ensure the participants' anonymity, encouraging them to provide honest responses without fear or apprehension. Each participant was allowed sufficient time to respond freely. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, recorded for accuracy, and then translated into English prior to data analysis.
4. After the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were shown to the participants to confirm that the responses are true to source. This process was crucial for maintaining the credibility and trustworthiness of the data and, by extension, the credibility of the findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

Grounded theory, a widely favored qualitative data analysis approach, was used for a detailed examination of the data. In this approach, theories and/or concepts are created directly from the data using a coding process that involves three stages of coding (*viz.*, open, axial, and selective), comparing data, codes, and emerging categories to confirm that the results are completely grounded in the data rather than existing theories, and ensuring that the findings are accurate, realistic, and reflective of the phenomena under study. In the current research, several procedures were followed to analyze the data:

1. **Initial Reading:** Following the transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were examined to glean common themes and concepts from the participants' responses to gain insights into the data and pinpoint recurring trends across the participants' narratives.

2. **Inductive Analysis:** Inductive analysis involved extracting categories and themes from the data themselves. No prior theoretical framework was used, and the concepts and categories emerged based on the frequency and significance of themes in the interviews.
3. **Coding:** During the previous two stages, the transcripts were divided into smaller units (e.g., words, phrases, sentences). Codes were used to classify these units, making it easier to perform a detailed analysis to identify the meanings behind the data.
4. **Category Development (Themes):** Following the coding process, similar codes were grouped into major categories representing central and sub-ideas. Five major themes emerged from the data: *stimulating social interactions, positive relationships and effective communication, motivational support based on positive feedback, providing psychological security and enhancing creative thinking through supporting ideas*. Upon the identification of the emerging themes, the frequency of responses was calculated by converting descriptive statements into quantitative values using percentages and frequencies.
5. **Writing the Descriptive Summary:** Following the data analysis, a concise, albeit comprehensive, descriptive summary of the major themes that emerged from the analysis was written.
6. **Ensuring Accuracy and Reliability:** To ensure the reliability of the data analysis, the first researcher conducted the initial analysis of the data, and the third researcher conducted another analysis of the same data. An agreement rate of 94 percent was calculated using Cooper's formula ($\text{Reliability} = (\text{Number of agreements} / (\text{Number of agreements} + \text{Number of disagreements})) \times 100\%$). This procedure was meant to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, minimize bias and ensure the accuracy of the findings drawn from the data.

4. Results

This study aimed to examine language teachers' role in creating socially and emotionally supportive learning environments to promote young learners' language development. To achieve this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 93 teachers from three countries. The data analysis revealed five major themes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of the Major Themes of the Analysis

No.	Theme	n	%
1	Stimulating social interactions	88	94.62
2	Positive relationships and effective communication	81	87.09
3	Motivational support based on positive feedback	86	86.02
4	Providing psychological security	88	94.62

5	Enhancing creative thinking through supporting ideas	75	80.64
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Table 1 shows that the most recurrent themes are *stimulating social interactions* and *providing psychological security* whereas the least recurrent is *enhancing creative thinking through supporting ideas*. The five themes are presented below.

4.1 First Theme: Stimulating Social Interactions

The analysis indicated that *stimulating social interactions* factors heavily in the type of social and emotional support provided to young learners. A vast majority of 88 respondents (95%) emphasized the importance of creating language learning environments that encourage social interaction among young learners, as illustrated in the following excerpts from the participants' interviews:

"Well, I believe that an environment that encourages social interaction goes beyond offering opportunities to speak. It also gives children the chance to exchange ideas and listen to different perspectives, which enhances their understanding of language and its use in diverse contexts."

"Umm Supporting children socially and emotionally makes them feel safe enough to be more open in using the language, helping them to overcome their fear of mistakes or criticism."

"Social interaction among children encourages them to utilize everyday social situations to use the language in real contexts, which contributes to strengthening their communicative learning."

"Activities that stimulate social interaction naturally develop children's language abilities, as they learn the language through engaging and real-life situations, enhancing their ability to use it in their daily lives."

"Stimulating social interactions among students makes language learning a lively and enjoyable experience, where children can learn new vocabulary and express themselves more fluently."

"hmmm... Social interaction among children in a supportive educational environment enhances language learning, as students can learn from each other and exchange information in an informal manner."

These excerpts underscore the importance of social interactions in building environments that promote learners' social and emotional development, nurturing a sense of social and emotional support. This theme further revealed several sub-themes that reflect the positive effect of social interactions in enhancing the quality of language learning environments, as outlined below:

4.1.1 Verbal Communication with Learners

Eighty-nine respondents (96%) emphasized the importance of social interactions as a driver for verbal communication with learners, with special emphasis on open communication. The participants almost unanimously affirmed that verbal communication catalyzes social interactions in language learning environments, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Stimulating classroom interaction is a valuable learning source within the classroom, helping children open up and engage in conversations with others, creating a learning environment rich in opportunities to develop language skills."

4.1.2 Promoting Cooperation Among Learners

The analysis revealed that 83 respondents (89%) believe that social interactions among learners promote cooperation rather than competition, which potentially improves language skills through active participation and group discussions. The excerpt below is indicative:

"A successful teacher is one who encourages cooperative social interaction, helping students exchange knowledge and ideas, thereby enhancing linguistic interaction skills... Cooperation among students promotes shared understanding and increases the ability to benefit from the intellectual diversity that can enrich the learning process."

4.1.3 Constructive Interaction Between Teachers and Learners

Eighty-five respondents (91%) highlighted the importance of maintaining constructive social interactions with learners, as exemplified in the excerpts below:

"When students are encouraged to engage in social interaction during interactive language activities, they become active participants in acquiring and applying linguistic skills."

"Yes... this interaction enhances linguistic comprehension and contributes to improving students' ability to use the language in real-life situations."

In general, it can be said that effective teaching requires the teacher to be an inspiring leader capable of positively influencing language learning environments. A teacher-leader who strikes a balance between developing linguistic knowledge and providing a supportive learning environment potentially enhances the effectiveness of language learning, leading to marked improvement in learners' language proficiency.

4.2 Second Theme: Positive Relationships and Effective Communication

The analysis showed that 81 respondents (87%) considered positive communication and building healthy relationships between teachers and learners as key factors in encouraging learners' active participation and free expression. The teacher-learner relationship is singled out as a catalyst for learner motivation, creative thinking and communication skills. The participants highlighted how learners who feel appreciated and cared for by their teachers are more likely to actively engage in the language classroom which, in turn, boosts their speaking and writing skills.

To illustrate, the following excerpts from the participants' interviews are provided:

"The truth is that positive relationships with my students have enhanced their ability to express themselves linguistically, which has helped improve their language skills in both writing and speaking."

"My observations of my students make me feel that when I establish positive relationships that support their emotional growth, the students do not hesitate to express themselves linguistically."

"When students feel valued by their teachers, they are more able to use the language in diverse situations."

"The linguistic support students receive in learning environments is grounded in positive, healthy relationships. This enhances their understanding of linguistic concepts more deeply, as this environment contributes to the development of language skills through their ongoing interaction with their teacher."

"When a teacher shows genuine interest in students' language learning progress and encourages them to use the language in real-life situations, it increases students' self-confidence and helps them achieve better results in language tasks."

"Students who have positive communication and relationships with their teachers are able to use the language more freely and fluently. Building good relationships with teachers motivates students to actively participate in classroom activities, which positively impacts the development of their linguistic skills."

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that supportive relationships potentially boost learners' self-confidence which, in turn, encouraged authentic language use more in real-life situations. This nurturing environment is reported to catalyze not only understanding linguistic concepts but also critical thinking, which ultimately improves overall academic performance.

4.3 Third Theme: Motivational Support Based on Positive Feedback

The data analysis revealed that 80 respondents, representing 86 percent of the sample, identified positive feedback and motivational comments as drivers for advancing learners' self-confidence and creative idea generation. Constructive teacher feedback is seen as key to effective language development, as learners realize that their effort, however small, is appreciated. Feeling appreciated encourages learners to take risks as they start to embrace their mistakes as opportunities for further learning, which not only helps them adopt a growth mindset but also encourages them to actively engage in the language classroom, as evident in the following excerpts:

"Positive feedback is a powerful motivator for students, as they feel their efforts are recognized and appreciated, which strengthens their desire to progress."

"Students who receive motivational feedback are more willing to learn from their mistakes and develop their ideas."

"Positive feedback encourages learners to actively participate in language lessons, as they feel valued and respected for their efforts in learning a new language. This recognition boosts their confidence and motivates them to use new vocabulary and express their ideas freely, contributing to the creation of a supportive and interaction-rich learning environment."

"When students receive motivational feedback in language learning environments, they perceive that their linguistic attempts are acknowledged and appreciated by the teacher, which encourages them to think creatively to express their ideas, thus, improving their speaking and writing abilities."

"Positive evaluation contributes to building a safe and supportive learning environment, where students understand that making mistakes is part of the language learning process. This understanding encourages them to attempt without fear of failure, boosting their ability to learn new vocabulary and develop their language skills with confidence and continuity."

To reiterate, the analysis reveals that supportive feedback contributes to creating a safe and respectful learning environment, where learners, who consider errors

more an inevitable part of the language learning process than a matter dreadful weakness, feel confident to communicate. This mindset not only hones their grasp of listening, reading, speaking and writing skills but also creates a classroom culture of respect and affection between teachers and learners.

4.4 Fourth Theme: Providing Psychological Security

The finding revealed that 88 respondents (95%) emphasized the importance of emotional support in the learners' psychological security, which, in turn, encouraged their participation in classroom activities. Providing a psychologically safe environment is seen as key to reducing anxiety and fear of criticism, hence bolstering students' confidence in their abilities.

The analysis further revealed several sub-categories, underscoring the teacher's contribution to instilling psychological security in the early-grade language classroom. *Boosting language confidence, reducing anxiety, encouraging active participation and boosting social interaction and communication* were major sub-themes revealed by the analysis, as outlined below.

4.4.1 Boosting Language Confidence

Seventy-seven respondents (83%) emphasized the importance of the teacher's role in providing psychological security, enabling students to engage in language tasks without the fear of making mistakes, as evident in the excerpts below.

"Psychological security removes the fear of making language mistakes and encourages students to use the language freely and naturally."

"Having a psychologically supportive learning environment can significantly impact students' confidence in presenting new ideas and actively participating."

4.4.2 Reducing Anxiety

Eighty-six respondents (92%) reported that emotional and psychological support alleviates feelings of anxiety and tension learners may experience in the foreign language classroom. Reduced anxiety and tension has been identified as a driver for facilitated, effective language learning. The following excerpts are indicative:

"... Simply, emotional support reduces anxiety levels related to language learning, enabling students to participate with greater confidence."

"In a psychologically safe learning environment, the child feels more capable of expressing and discussing their ideas in the language without fear or anxiety about negative feedback."

4.4.3 Encouraging Active Participation

Eighty-eight respondents (95%) emphasized that psychological security potentially encourages learners to engage in classroom discussions, hence, enriching their language learning experience, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

"I make every effort to provide psychological security... It is the confidence that allows the students to speak in their own language or the language they are learning without hesitation... This increases their motivation to interact with teachers and peers, leading to greater participation in language discussions, which contributes to improving their linguistic skills."

"... When students feel that their ideas and voices are heard, this encourages them to use the language more effectively to express their thoughts and opinions."

4.4.4 Boosting Social Interaction and Communication

Eighty-four respondents (90%) reported that psychological security contributes to developing young learners' social communication skills, helping them interact effectively with their peers and teachers, as illustrated in the excerpts below.

"Psychological security increases the child's motivation to interact with teachers and peers, increasing his/her participation in language discussions."

"Psychological security gives the child the confidence to communicate freely without hesitation, which supports the development of his/her language skills."

These four sub-themes underscore the positive effect of psychological security on the various aspects of language learning, providing a comprehensive view of the improvements ensuing in both language performance and classroom interaction.

4.5 Fifth Theme: Creative Thinking through Supporting Ideas

The findings revealed that 75 respondents, about 81 percent of the sample, reported that encouraging learners to present new ideas contributes to the development of their creative thinking skills. The analysis highlighted the vital role of socially and emotionally supportive environments in promoting creative thinking, participation, and engagement in the language classroom. These findings are gleaned from participant input, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

"Students need classrooms that make them feel important and that their ideas are worth the attention. This type of support creates a safe space for developing creative thinking skills."

"Social and emotional support provides learners with the opportunity to express themselves in a creative and unrestricted manner. When students feel emotionally supported, they become more willing to explore new aspects of language, such as using complex vocabulary or participating in group discussions, which contributes to the development of their language skills."

"Emotional support helps the child feel psychologically comfortable, making him/her more willing to experiment with new vocabulary and linguistic structures in learning contexts, which contributes to increasing their language proficiency and improving their expressive abilities."

These findings underpin the significance of providing social and emotional support that makes learners feel valued for their ideas. The findings also highlight the necessity of creating a learning environment that encourages self-expression and understanding of concepts which, in turn, potentially develops their creative thinking abilities. The analysis further reveals that receiving emotional support potentially encourages learners to experiment with unfamiliar words and creative language patterns across different instructional contexts, which ultimately develops their language skills and communication abilities. The analysis further relates learners' feelings of emotional support to their confidence in exploring new language aspects and engaging in

conversations and language competitions through action and imaginative storytelling.

In a nutshell, the data analysis provides substantial evidence that the provision of a socially and emotionally supportive learning environment not only promotes creative thinking abilities but also contributes to improving academic language performance and effective interaction in the language classroom, ultimately leading to improvements in thinking and problem-solving skills.

5. Discussion

The findings underpin the critical role of a supportive and engaging language learning environment in developing young learners' language and creative abilities. Each dimension of the study highlights a distinct aspect of the learning environment that contributes to language development, culminating in an aggregate and interconnected effect of social interactions, positive relationships, feedback, psychological security and emotional support.

To begin with, the findings emphasize the importance of stimulating social interactions in advancing young learners' language competence. Social interactions are reported to create a dynamic language-rich environment where children can explore language in meaningful authentic contexts. These findings are in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory which both identify social interaction as a catalyst for learners' overall development, of which language development is an aspect (AlAli and Al-Barakat, 2024b; Al-Hassan et al., 2022). A socially supportive environment potentially makes young learners feel more open to engaging with the learning process, allowing them to use language more naturally and effectively which, in turn, boosts self-confidence and risk-taking, both essential for language growth.

The findings further highlight the marked contribution of positive relationships and effective communication in the language classroom. Positive teacher-student relationships are reportedly key to creating supportive learning environments that encourage learners' engagement and uninhibited self-expression. When learners feel respected and their input valued, they are more likely to participate and interact with peers, which also supports their language development. These findings are consistent with those of previous research (e.g., Al-Barakat and AlAli, 2024; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Pelatti et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2018; Weadman et al., 2023) which report that learners who have positive relationships with their teachers tend to exhibit higher levels of language proficiency and confidence, signaling positive interpersonal relationships as a cornerstone of effective language learning.

Motivational support, through constructive feedback, has emerged as a key factor in young learners' language development. Constructive feedback is reported to both motivate learners and promote their engagement in a conducive learning environment where they feel safe to take risks and experiment with new vocabulary and ideas. These findings are consistent with

those of previous research (Al-Barakat and Bataineh, 2011; Bani Irshid et al., 2023; Huynh et al., 2019; Isnawan, 2020, Khasawneh et al., 2022) that highlight the significance of creating emotionally engaging learning environments which promote critical and creative thinking. Constructive feedback, thus, serves as a catalyst for language development, creating a cycle of motivation and exploration that improves both academic and social outcomes.

Psychological security has also emerged as key in young learners' language development. When young learners feel safe and supported, they are more likely to participate in discussions, taking risks, making mistakes, and learning from them, all pivotal for language development. This aligns with established psychological theories (Alexander and Jarman, 2015; Altman et al., 2020; Alvermann and Phelps, 2005; Muela et al., 2024; AlAli et al., 2024), especially Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which considers security fundamental to learning and personal development.

The findings further reveal emotional support as a significant contributor to building learners' confidence and explorative risk-taking in the language classroom. Feeling emotionally secure, young learners are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving and language use. These findings, too, align with the constructivist paradigm (Alexander and Jarman, 2015; Altman et al., 2020; Al-Barakat and Al-Hassan, 2009; Pelatti et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2018; White et al., 2020) which asserts that learning is facilitated in socially and emotionally supportive learning environments. These environments catalyze not only language development but also critical and creative thinking skills, all requisites for holistic language development (Alexander and Jarman, 2015; Altman et al., 2020; AlAli and Al-Barakat, 2024c; Al-Hassan et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that social interaction, positive relationships, motivational feedback, psychological security and emotional support are far from isolated. Instead, they work in tandem to create a comprehensive language learning environment that nurtures both linguistic competence and creative thinking. Through conscious awareness, teachers can better support language development and overall academic performance, as the findings constitute a call for teachers to deliberately create inclusive emotionally supportive classrooms where learners thrive both verbally and intellectually as confident communicators, capable of creative and effective language use in diverse contexts.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The current findings suggest that a socially and emotionally supportive learning environment is crucial for young learners' language development. Emotional support potentially boosts self-confidence for learners to interact in various social contexts, which signals the significance of creating integrated learning environments that combine emotional support with social interaction.

The findings also emphasize the vital role of teachers in creating nurturing learning environments, which boosts confidence, self-assurance, critical and

creative thinking, and uninhibited communication and catalyze language development and overall academic success. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to establish positive relationships with young learners to encourage curiosity, risk-taking, exploration, and engagement while eliminating the apprehension of making mistakes.

Psychological security within the classroom has also emerged as vital for effective learning. When learners feel psychologically secure, their anxiety and fear decrease, allowing them to engage in classroom tasks with confidence and a sense of safety which potentially increase their motivation to learn, support their language development, and improve their overall academic performance.

7. Recommendations, Limitations and Future Research Directions

It is essential that learners feel comfortable expressing themselves in class to develop their language skills, so teachers should prioritize creating supportive learning environments by adopting instructional practices that offer emotional support. They should strive to create learning environments that support young learners' social and emotional development while promoting language and social growth. For example, sustainable provision of constructive feedback is indispensable for encouraging creative and imaginative thinking, which can help young learners feel secure, valued, and appreciated.

Furthermore, the provision of constructive feedback potentially stimulates critical and creative thinking. Teachers, along with other stakeholders, should take proactive measures to ascertain conducive learning environments in which young learners feel appreciated and inspired to express themselves freely. Educational institutions should also build environments that support such practices, ensuring that teachers are empowered with the necessary resources and training. This approach will not only increase young learners' language skills but also spark their motivation and interest in learning to actively engage in the learning and, inevitably, increase chances of academic success.

Educators should also prioritize teacher training that promotes social interaction, psychological security and motivational support. Teachers are encouraged to implement interactive practices (e.g., role-playing, storytelling), and schools should involve parents through collaborative activities to support language development. Policies promoting emotional and social support, culturally responsive instruction and the provision of appropriate resources are all catalysts for learning effectiveness.

The generalizability of the findings are limited by the sample size and distribution, which may not fully capture the diversity of instructional practices by larger samples from other contexts. The reliance on qualitative data represented by those collected by the semi-structured interviews, albeit insightful, may also limit the generalizability of findings, as it excludes the advantage of other data collection instruments (e.g., classroom observations, student feedback). Triangulation of other data collection instruments (e.g.,

surveys, observations, focus groups) may be imperative to delve deeper into the dynamics of socially and emotionally learning environments.

Future research should explore the role of socially and emotionally supportive environments in language development across diverse cultural contexts. Longitudinal research may prove invaluable to understand long-term effects. Furthermore, quantitative measures could complement these findings, especially if learner perspectives are examined.

The effect of technology integration in language learning environments constitutes a fertile area for future research, as instructional technologies potentially improve teacher-student interaction, leading to a more supportive learning environment. The challenges teachers and learners face and how these challenges affect language development in socially and emotionally supportive environments is another area to research.

Future research could also examine gender parity to better understand potential differences in academic performance between male and female learners in socially and emotionally supportive environments. It would also be worthwhile to conduct research on young learners' views of their learning environments to better understand their interaction with these environments and its potential effect on academic development.

8. Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Faisal University for financially supporting this research. Thanks are also extended to the participants in this study for their time and valuable contributions.

9. Funding

This research received funding from the Deanship of Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [grant number KFU250107].

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