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## **The Relationship Between Academic Language Design and Instructors' Social-Emotional Support in Learning English as a Second Language Among Kuwaiti Preschool Students**

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## Abstract

This correlational study examined the relationship between shared language awareness among peers and the development of prosocial behaviors and behavioral issues in multiple language learners (MLLs) from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The year-end outcomes of 250 Arabic-speaking children in 10 preschool classrooms, where English was the primary language of instruction, were analyzed using Pearson's correlation test. The results indicated that the prosocial behavior of Arabic-speaking MLLs at the end of the year was related to the classroom concentration of Arabic speakers. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between behavioral issues and instructor social-emotional support. Specifically, behavioral issues among Arabic-speaking children were positively associated with classrooms that had stronger instructor social-emotional support. Conversely, children who received less instructor social-emotional support exhibited more behavioral issues in classrooms with a majority of Arabic-speaking peers. Practical or policy significance: The findings of this study suggest that shared language peers play a crucial role in certain classroom contexts and that the composition of preschool classrooms has significant implications for MLL children.

**Keywords:** Preschool, Prosocial behavior, Behavioral issues, Instructors' social-emotional support



## Introduction

Creating connections and effectively engaging with others is a key objective of early childhood education to foster social-emotional development in children. Encouraging social-emotional development in the early stages provides significant benefits for preschool students, making it a critical goal for educators (Coccaro et al., 2017; D'Emidio-Caston, 2019; Kraft, 2019).

Furthermore, social-emotional skills have been highlighted as critical during adolescence. Training these skills in a school context has resulted in favorable outcomes (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Research-backed interventions have proven effective in building social-emotional abilities, leading to improved social and academic performance and reduced socio-emotional stress (Barrett et al., 2018; D'Emidio-Caston, 2019; West et al., 2018). Studies indicate that school-based interventions that detect and address children's psychological and social difficulties can enhance resilience and academic achievement (Gehlbach & Hough, 2018; Howard & Ferrari, 2021; Loeb, 2016; Sun et al., 2022). Research by Fettig et al. (2018) showed that gains in social-emotional abilities significantly correlated with reading proficiency and social interactions in schools. The social-emotional behavior of students has also been shown to have a long-term impact on their future outcomes.

Learning multiple languages while mastering their native language has distinct social implications for multiple language learners (MLLs). Students must negotiate social relationships in several languages and navigate different cultural expectations. Social-emotional development, similar to monolingual development, is a key predictor of MLLs' future social and academic success (Baggett et al., 2009; Song et al., 2022). Understanding the factors that influence the socio-emotional development of MLLs is necessary to develop educational and curricular strategies that



enhance social interactions and future academic achievements for these children.

Research suggests that MLLs are more likely to have limited or poor social interactions. For instance, some classmates may misinterpret MLLs' communicative pauses as hesitation or lack of interest, leading to their isolation (Dong et al., 2015). Almahasneh & Abdul-Hamid (2021) found that lower levels of English usage among peers were associated with a higher risk of MLLs being targets of hostile actions by their English-speaking classmates. Other studies have found that MLL children are less sought after by their monolingual peers for social interactions (Dong et al., 2015; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019; Song et al., 2022). This social exclusion can result in MLLs starting school already behind their peers both socially and emotionally (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019).

For a child to become an active, successful member of the community, they need to master various skills. This research focuses on two aspects of social-emotional development closely connected to peer interactions: prosocial behavior and behavioral issues. A child who is more successful at engaging with peers is likely to exhibit more prosocial behavior and fewer behavioral issues, indicating the importance of early childhood education in raising awareness and understanding of different behaviors.

Prosocial behavior involves engaging in activities that benefit others and are responsive, supportive, or helpful (Li & Shao, 2022). It enables children to form and maintain meaningful relationships. Because social learning occurs within the context of interactions with others (Li & Shao, 2022; Shoshani et al., 2022), it is critical to learn how to connect effectively with peers and build strong social bonds. Identifying and fostering prosocial behavior is essential for supporting the development and ongoing success of preschool children (Do et al., 2019; Sporzon & López, 2021).



Research on prosocial behavior among MLL children has produced mixed results. Some studies suggest that the prosocial competencies of MLLs are similar to those of their monolingual peers (Kulkarni & Sommer, 2015), while others indicate that multilingual preschoolers have superior prosocial abilities compared to monolinguals (Bakopoulou & Dockrell, 2016; Davis et al., 2018; Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Discrepancies in prosocial behaviors may be partially attributed to the levels of these behaviors upon school entry. Davis et al. (2018) found that the productive communication skills of non-English-speaking monolinguals and non-English-dominant bilinguals improved through primary school, although their initial levels were significantly lower than those of English monolinguals.

Behavioral issues, defined as actions that interfere with children's interactions, are often categorized as externalizing (e.g., aggressive and disruptive) and internalizing (e.g., emotionally anxious and withdrawn) behaviors (Leader et al., 2021). Addressing behavioral issues in early childhood is crucial, as they are linked to various negative outcomes. Multidisciplinary research has shown that preschool behavioral difficulties can persist into adolescence (Leader et al., 2020), and recurring delinquency is often associated with early behavioral problems (Copeland & Buch, 2020; Singh, 2020; Wilson et al., 2017). Behavioral issues in preschoolers are negatively correlated with school readiness (Bohns & Schlund, 2020; Leader et al., 2020; Singh, 2020; Wilson et al., 2017), academic achievement (Leader et al., 2021; Loke et al., 2021), and peer popularity. Goldfield et al. (2012) found that behavioral issues observed in preschoolers were linked to year-end behavioral adjustment problems and negative emotional outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of addressing behavioral issues in early childhood development.



## Instrument and Methods

The study employed a quantitative approach to collect data, aiming to create a comprehensive understanding of instructors' social-emotional support in learning English as a second language. Utilizing various data sources and analytical methodologies enhances the validity of the results. The study involved 80 instructors and 250 children whose families identified Arabic as their native language. Both the instructors and volunteers in the classrooms spoke exclusively English.

In the initial phase, students' learning abilities were assessed through prosocial behavior, behavioral issues, and instructors' social-emotional support. An assessment form was developed to evaluate children's behaviors in learning English as a second language. The discussion and analysis focused on the children's behavioral abilities in this context. Instructors were asked to complete the evaluation form after assessing the students' abilities. Additionally, teachers provided insights into the approaches necessary for enhancing learner understanding while learning English as a second language. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation to examine the relationships between variables.

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire emphasizing the skills children need to understand educational techniques effectively. Feedback forms were used to assess the children's abilities, and analysis was carried out using a specially designed questionnaire for teachers. This approach facilitated a detailed understanding of the learners' requirements. The children's performance was evaluated using an assessment form, which was analyzed based on their skills, revealing a lack of necessary teaching strategies. Teachers' responses to a questionnaire on the children's improvement were also collected. The results examined the children's learning abilities as assessed by the teachers.

## Results

A questionnaire was developed to study learning English as a second language among Kuwaiti preschool children. Teachers completed a total of 80 questionnaires. According to the demographic profile of the children selected for the research, the majority (60.0%) were females, while 40.0% were males. The age group of 3-4 years had the highest number of learners (82.2%). Table 1 below presents the participants' demographic profile.

**Table 1: Participant's Profile**

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	100	40.0%
	Female	150	60.0 %
Age	3	121	48.6%
	4	84	33.6%
	5	44	17.7%

Table 2 indicates the relationship between prosocial behavior (PB) and instructors' social-emotional support (ISES) in learning English as a second language among Kuwaiti children. The findings revealed a significant positive linear association between ISES and PB, with a correlation coefficient of 83%. In summary, the correlation results demonstrated a strong correlation between ISES and PB, indicating that instructors' social-emotional support has a major influence on Kuwaiti children.



**Table 2: The Correlation Between ISES and PB Among Kuwaiti Children in Preschool.**

Table 3 demonstrates the correlation between behavioral issues

**Correlations**

		Instructors' social emotional support	Prosocial behavior
Instructors' social emotional support	Pearson Correlation	1	.837**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Prosocial behavior	Pearson Correlation	.837**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(BI) and instructors' social-emotional support (ISES). The results indicated a strong positive linear correlation between BI and ISES, with a correlation coefficient of 86%. These findings confirm the significant impact of behavior issues and instructors' social-emotional support on Kuwaiti children. Despite a few exceptions, the majority of participants found ISES effective in helping them improve their learning of English as a second language.

**Table 3: The Correlation Between ISES and BI Among Kuwaiti Children in Preschool.**

**CORRELATIONS**

		INSTRUCTORS' SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	BEHAVIOR ISSUE
INSTRUCTORS' SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	PEARSON CORRELATION	1	.867**
	SIG. (2-TAILED)		.000
	N	80	80
BEHAVIOR ISSUE	PEARSON CORRELATION	.867**	1
	SIG. (2-TAILED)	.000	
	N	80	80

\*\* . CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE 0.01 LEVEL (2-TAILED).



## Discussion

The goal of this research was to examine the correlation between the percentage of classmates who speak the same mother language and children's prosocial and behavioral outcomes at the end of their first year of preschool, as well as to investigate how these correlations are influenced by instructor social-emotional support. This is the first study to explore the influence of learners' language composition on the social behavior of multiple language learners (MLLs) in Kuwait.

According to the predictions, the frequency of fellow Arabic speakers was significantly related to children's prosocial behavior. This finding is consistent with Baggett et al. (2009)'s claim that whether or not preschoolers interact with peers who speak their native language affects the quality of their positive relationships. MLL toddlers may engage in prosocial behaviors that do not require language, such as sharing material objects, hugging for comfort, or smiling to show positive affect, even in the absence of a shared home language with classmates. Instructors who do not share the children's home language can still observe and evaluate such behaviors.

The hypothesis that emphasizing Arabic speakers in the classroom should reduce children's behavioral issues was largely supported by this study. Various levels of Arabic-speaking peers positively impacted the development of MLLs' behavioral issues in classrooms with the lowest levels of instructor support. In fact, MLLs in classrooms with less instructor support and no shared language classmates exhibited higher levels of behavioral issues, which decreased as the number of peers sharing their home language increased. This suggests that in situations where English-speaking teachers may not fully support children's social-emotional experiences, having more Arabic-speaking peers can help reduce behavioral issues in Arabic-speaking children's interactions. It was hypothesized that a larger number of Arabic-speaking peers would benefit the social interactions of Arabic-speaking children in English-language classrooms with high levels of instructor support. However, as the number of peers with a common home language



increased, MLL children in such settings exhibited more behavioral issues.

It is perplexing to think that completely supportive instructors might contribute to the behavioral issues of their Arabic-speaking learners when there are more Arabic-speaking classmates in the classroom. Although this result contradicts the study's initial predictions, it is important to highlight it. This research confirms the hypothesis that instructor support and shared-language peer engagement interact, but the mechanism for this complex relationship remains unclear, necessitating further research.

Identifying this complex set of relationships will require theoretical and empirical research into additional potential latent variables. These might include, for instance, the amount of time students spend at home and their use of English during peer interactions. It could also be necessary to examine details concerning the instructor's language, such as the instructor's linguistic background, English-language proficiency, and the differential support provided for children who do and do not share the instructor's native language.

## **Conclusion**

This research, utilizing a nationally representative data set, provides fresh insights into the impacts of shared language peers and the significance of instructor social-emotional support on the social behavior of MLL preschoolers. Further studies on the combined effects of peer and instructor influences on these children's social-emotional outcomes in different learning contexts are needed. Such research will offer significant practical recommendations for optimizing preschool classroom practices and decision-making processes involving preschool environments. Given that more than 85% of preschool classrooms include some MLL children, and the prevalence of MLL children in preschool classrooms is rising (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019), the necessity for this effort is becoming increasingly critical.



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