



THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL PRESENCE ON DAYCARE LEARNERS' PEER INTERACTIONS

Delfin, Janna Theresse P., Quema, Myrna Johanna Jeanne P.

Janna Theresse P. Delfin, delfin.jannatheresse.pantalunan@gmail.com, 09674556535, College of Education, Quezon City University San Bartolome Campus, Quirino Hwy, Quezon City, Metro Manila

Myrna Johanna Jeanne P. Quema, quema.myrnajohannaJeanne.pasion@gmail.com, 09382488313, College of Education, Quezon City University San Bartolome Campus, Quirino Hwy, Quezon City, Metro Manila

KeyWords

parental presence, peer interactions, daycare learners, early childhood education, naturalistic observation, social development, daycare classroom, childcare center

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the physical presence of parents inside daycare classrooms may influence the peer interactions of children aged 3 to 5 years old. Anchored on the question of whether children interact differently with peers when parents are present compared to when they are absent, the research utilized a quantitative–descriptive design. A total of fifteen daycare learners from Litex Child Development Center in Quezon City were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected through naturalistic observations using a validated peer-interaction checklist during routine classroom and play activities conducted over five days. Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression were used to examine the relationship between parental presence and both the frequency and quality of peer interactions. The findings aim to provide evidence that can assist early childhood educators and childcare institutions in establishing balanced parent-involvement practices that nurture children's independence and social competence.

Introduction

Peer interaction is widely recognized as an essential component of early childhood development, as it contributes to the formation of communication abilities, socioemotional skills, and a child's developing sense of belonging. Previous studies have emphasized that children's social functioning is shaped not only within the classroom but also through experiences in the home environment. For example, parenting behaviors such as warmth, consistency, and psychological control have been associated with children's capacity to initiate and sustain peer relationships (Chen et al., 2024). In addition, strong family–teacher partnerships have been found to support children's engagement in early learning settings by promoting consistency in expectations and emotional support (Lewis et al., 2023). Classroom-related factors, particularly the quality of teacher–child interactions, have also been linked to differences in children's peer engagement (Taylor, 2023).

Despite these established findings, limited attention has been given to situations in which parents are physically present within the classroom during daily activities. Much of the existing literature focuses on home-based involvement or communication between parents and teachers (El Nokali et al., 2010; Pilarz, 2024), rather than examining how children's real-time interactions with peers may shift when a parent is nearby. For young learners who are still developing independence, the presence of a parent within the learning environment may influence their confidence, attention, and willingness to interact with others.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how parental presence during daycare sessions compares with their absence in shaping the frequency and quality of peer interactions. By documenting children's spontaneous social behaviors through naturalistic observation, the study aims to provide insights that can inform policies and practices on parent involvement in early childhood settings.

Literature Review

The Influence of Parental Presence on Children's Peer Interactions

Research on parent involvement in early childhood consistently highlights its importance in shaping children's social and emotional outcomes. However, most studies have approached this topic by examining parenting styles or the quality of relationships between families and schools, rather than the immediate effects of a parent's physical presence during classroom activities. For instance, Chen et al. (2024) found that higher levels of parental psychological control were associated with lower levels of social initiative among children, suggesting that parenting approaches can influence how children engage with peers. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2023) emphasized that positive family–teacher relationships contribute to children's participation in early education settings, although their work focused more on collaboration rather than direct parental presence.

In classroom contexts, factors such as teacher–child interaction quality and the overall learning environment have been shown to affect how children interact with one another (Taylor, 2023). While these findings provide valuable insights, they do not fully explain how the presence of a familiar adult—particularly a parent—within the same space may alter children's behavior during peer interactions. Reviews of parent involvement, such as El Nokali et al. (2010), generally report positive outcomes for children's development but offer limited discussion on how children behave moment-to-moment when parents are physically present.

Given that preschool-aged children are still in the process of developing autonomy, the presence of a parent may influence their social behavior in different ways. Some emerging perspectives suggest that a nearby parent can serve as a source of support that encourages engagement, while in other cases, it may reduce opportunities for independent interaction by redirecting the child's attention (Pansacala et al., 2024). Despite these considerations, there remains a need for observational studies that capture how children's peer interactions change in real classroom situations when parents are present versus absent. This study addresses this gap by examining parental presence as a specific and observable factor within the daycare setting.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study: The Influence of Parental Presence on Peer Interactions

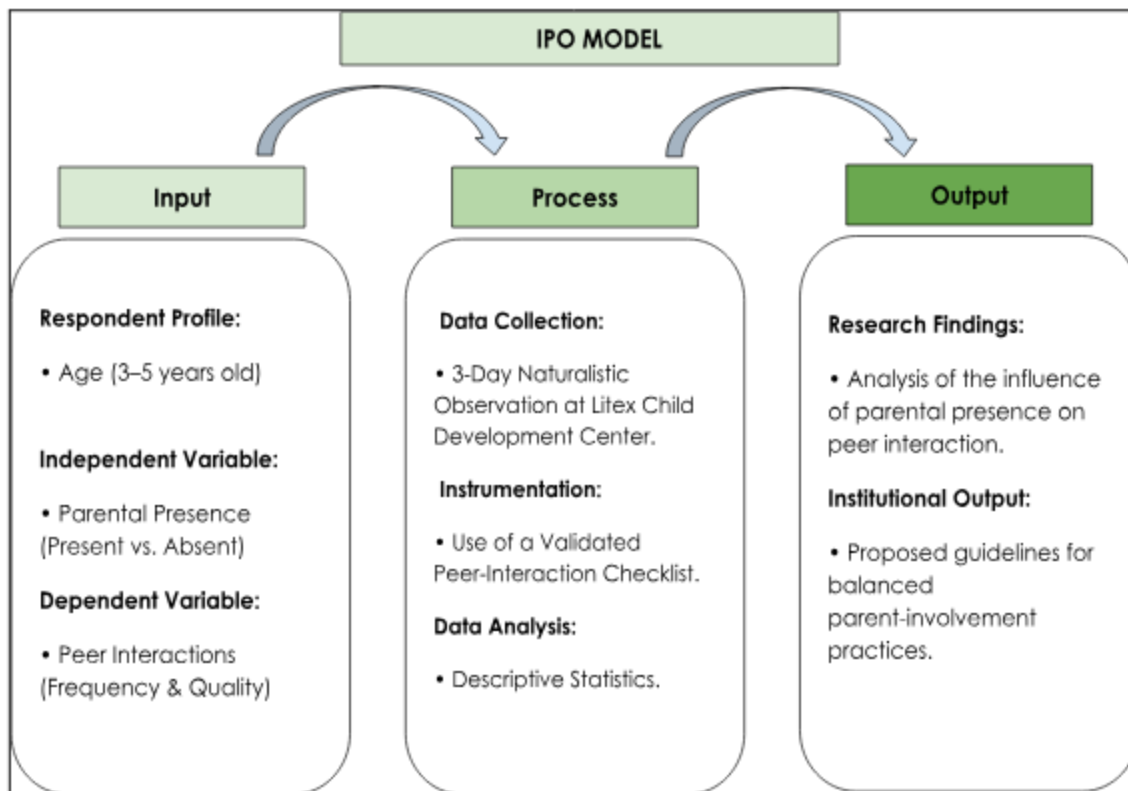
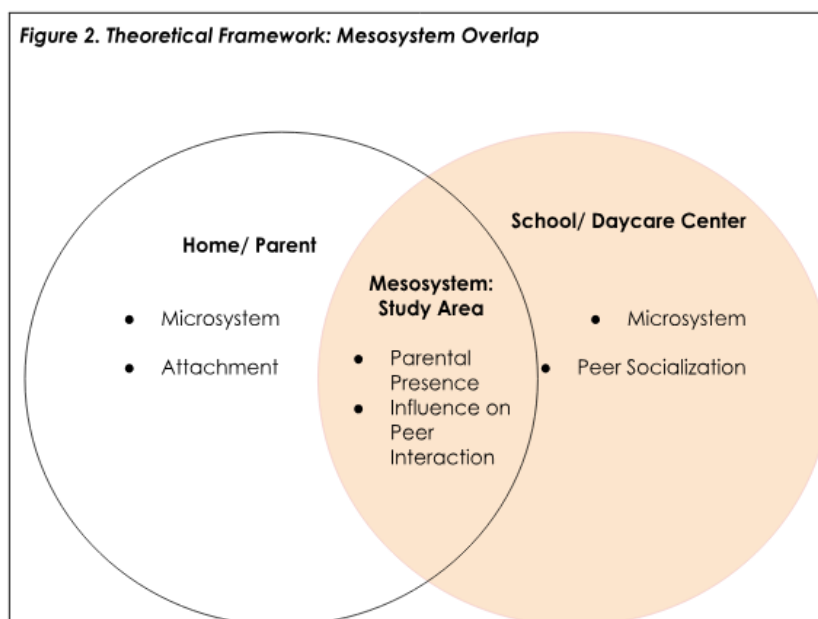


Figure 1. illustrates the conceptual flow of the study using the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model. The Input consists of the learners' profile and the study's variables. The Process details the 3-day observation and data analysis methods. Finally, the Output reflects the study's goal: determining the influence of parental presence and recommending best practices for early childhood educators.

Theoretical Framework



This study is grounded in two key theories in developmental psychology: Ecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory. These frameworks help explain how children's social behaviors are influenced by the interaction between their home and school environments, particularly when these contexts overlap.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) explains that a child's development is shaped by multiple environmental systems that interact with one another. In this study, particular attention is given to the mesosystem, which refers to the connections between different settings in which the child actively participates. When a parent is physically present in the daycare classroom, the child's home environment and school environment temporarily merge, creating a unique social context. This overlap may influence how children behave, especially in terms of how they engage with peers. As highlighted by Lewis et al. (2023), consistency and support across home and school settings contribute to children's overall engagement. In this situation, the presence of a parent may either support smoother social interactions or shift the child's attention away from peers.

Complementing this perspective is John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), particularly the concept of the "secure base." Bowlby proposed that children rely on their primary caregivers as a source of emotional security, which allows them to explore their environment and interact with others more confidently. Within the daycare setting, the presence of a parent may provide reassurance that encourages children to participate in peer interactions. However, this same presence may also lead children to frequently seek approval or reassurance from the parent instead of engaging independently. This behavior is consistent with the idea of social referencing, where children look to familiar adults for cues on how to respond in social situations. As noted by Pansacala et al. (2024), parental presence can either support or unintentionally limit children's social engagement depending on how it influences their focus and independence.

By combining these two theoretical perspectives, the study examines whether parental presence in the classroom serves as a supportive factor that promotes peer interaction or as a variable that alters children's natural patterns of social behavior. These frameworks provide a basis for interpreting how children balance emotional security and independence in a shared home-school environment.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how the physical presence of parents within the classroom environment affects the social dynamics of young learners. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following central question using the PICOT framework:

Among daycare learners, how does parental presence during daycare sessions, compared to when parents are absent, influence the frequency and quality of their peer interactions over a 3-day observation period?

To provide a comprehensive answer to this problem, the study will also address the following sub-questions:

1. What is the profile of the daycare learners in terms of:
 - o 1.1 Age; and
 - o 1.2 Sex?
2. What is the level of peer interaction among the learners during sessions when parents are absent?
3. What is the level of peer interaction among the learners during sessions when parents are physically present?
4. Is there a significant difference in the social engagement patterns of the learners between the two conditions?

Significance of the Study

This study on the influence of parental presence on daycare learners' peer interactions is significant as it provides empirical data on early childhood socialization. The findings of this research will be beneficial to the following:

Daycare Learners. The primary beneficiaries of this study are the children. By understanding how parental presence affects their social behavior, educators can create an environment that maximizes their comfort while encouraging independent peer socialization and confidence.

Parents and Guardians. This study will provide parents with insights into how their physical proximity influences their child's social development. It will help them understand when to provide a "secure base" and when to step back to allow their child to develop autonomy and peer-relationship skills.

Early Childhood Educators. The results will offer teachers evidence-based observations to help them manage classroom dynamics. It can guide them in deciding when to involve parents in classroom activities and how to facilitate interactions that do not make children overly dependent on their caregivers.

Daycare Center Administrators. The findings can serve as a basis for reviewing and improving school policies regarding parent-involvement programs. It can help in designing "balanced involvement" schedules that support the school's goal of fostering social competence.

Future Researchers. This study will contribute to the limited literature on micro-level classroom observations in the Philippine context. It can serve as a reference or a baseline for future studies exploring other variables related to parental presence and socio-emotional development.

Materials and Methods

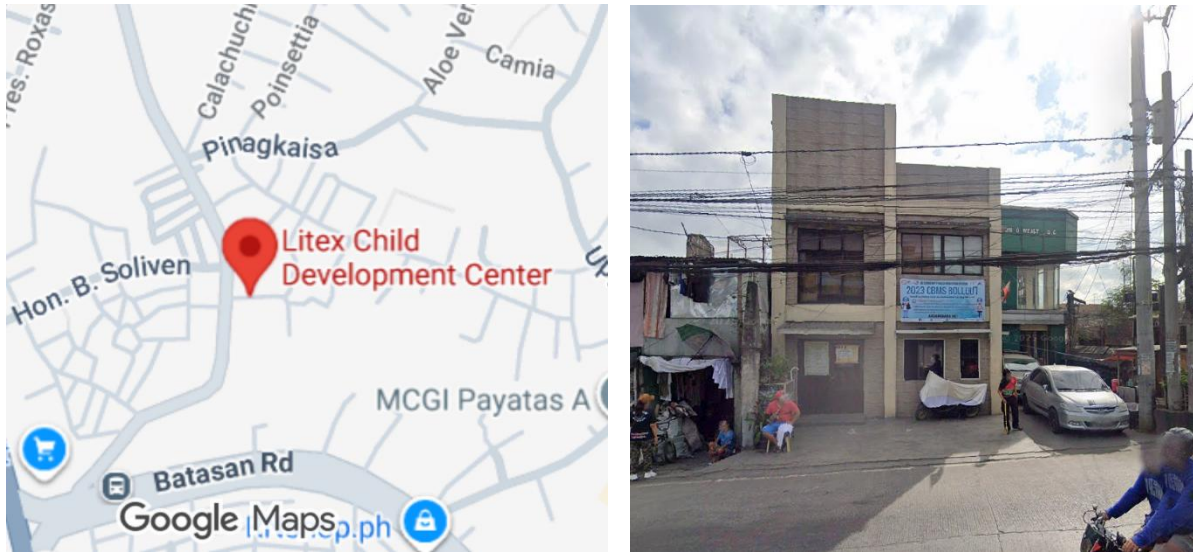


Figure 3. Map of the Litex Child Development Center

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Litex Child Development Center in Brgy. Commonwealth, Quezon City. The center operates regular daycare sessions that include play, routines, and teacher-guided activities, providing a natural context for observing children's spontaneous peer interactions. Observations were scheduled during the first semester of Academic Year 2025–2026.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of fifteen (15) daycare learners aged 3 to 5 years old enrolled at Litex Child Development Center in Brgy. Commonwealth, Quezon City. This age group was selected because early childhood is a critical period for the development of social competence and peer interaction skills.

Sampling Design

The study employed simple random sampling to ensure that each learner had an equal chance of being selected (Taherdoost, 2016). A total of fifteen participants were included in the study. This sampling method helped minimize bias and ensured fair representation of the learners within the daycare setting. This specific age group was selected because early childhood is a critical developmental stage for the rapid acquisition of social and peer-interaction skills. To ensure the statistical reliability of this sample size for a descriptive study, the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was employed, considering the population size, margin of error, and confidence level (Raosoft, Inc., 2004).

Research Design and Instrument

This study utilized a quantitative–descriptive research design to objectively measure and systematically document the relationship between parental presence and peer interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design is appropriate as it provides numerical evidence to analyze social behaviors within a daycare setting (Apuke, 2017). The primary tool was a naturalistic observation checklist, which allowed researchers to record spontaneous social exchanges—such as cooperation and communication, without interrupting the children's natural dynamics (Booren, Downer, & Vitiello, 2012). Content validity was established through evaluation by three Early Childhood Education experts from Quezon City University, while reliability was ensured through expert judgment and consistency checks to produce dependable results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a five-day period. On the first day, permission was secured from the daycare administration and parents to ensure ethical compliance, including informed consent and confidentiality (Wilfond, 2007). On the second day, fifteen participants were selected through simple random sampling. The third to fourth days were allotted for naturalistic observation during regular classroom and play activities. Observations were carried out discreetly to minimize the observer effect and allow children to behave naturally, following the approach suggested by Baumrind (1968). On the fifth day, the collected data were organized, coded, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics and simple linear regression were applied to examine the relationship between parental presence and peer interaction behaviors.

Results

This section presents the findings derived from the observation of fifteen daycare learners using the researcher-made observation checklist. The results focus on two main variables: parental presence within the classroom vicinity and learners' peer interaction behaviors.

PART A: Parental Presence Indicators (Max = 28)

Student	Parental Presence Score	Interpretation
S1	20	High parental presence
S2	18	Moderate
S3	22	High
S4	15	Moderate
S5	24	Very High
S6	19	Moderate
S7	21	High
S8	17	Moderate
S9	23	Very High
S10	16	Moderate
S11	14	Low-Moderate
S12	20	High
S13	18	Moderate
S14	22	High
S15	19	Moderate

The observation results indicate that parental presence among the participants ranged from moderate to very high. Out of the 15 learners, 10 were associated with moderate to high parental presence, while 5 showed high to very high parental presence. Most parents were observed staying either inside the classroom or just outside the learning area, remaining close enough for the child to see. Parents occasionally provided instructions or guidance but generally limited their involvement to observation.

Several children were observed frequently checking for their parent’s presence, especially during the initial part of the activity. However, direct parental intervention in peer interactions was minimal, suggesting that parents were aware of allowing their children to engage independently with peers.

PART B: Peer Interaction Behaviors (Max = 64)

Student	Social Engagement (16)	Communication (16)	Cooperation (16)	Emotional Responses (16)	TOTAL (64)	Level
S1	12	11	13	12	48	High
S2	10	9	11	11	41	High
S3	13	12	14	13	52	Very High
S4	9	8	10	10	37	Moderate
S5	14	13	15	14	56	Very High
S6	11	10	12	11	44	High
S7	13	12	13	13	51	High
S8	9	9	10	9	37	Moderate
S9	14	13	14	14	55	Very High
S10	10	9	11	10	40	High
S11	8	7	9	9	33	Moderate
S12	12	11	12	12	47	High
S13	11	10	11	11	43	High
S14	13	12	14	13	52	Very High
S15	11	10	12	11	44	High

The total peer interaction scores revealed that the majority of learners demonstrated positive peer interaction behaviors. Based on the interpretation guide, 11 learners fell under the High to Very High level of peer interaction, while 4 learners were classified under the Moderate level. No learners were categorized as having low or very low peer interaction.

In terms of social engagement, most learners were able to initiate play, respond positively when invited, and participate in group activities. Many children maintained interactions for more than one minute, indicating sustained engagement with peers.

For communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal communication were frequently observed. Learners commonly used gestures, facial expressions, and simple verbal exchanges when interacting with peers. Most learners responded appropriately to peer communication, although fewer were observed initiating conversations independently.

Regarding cooperative behaviors, sharing of toys and materials, turn-taking, and following activity rules were evident across most participants. Helping behaviors were observed occasionally, particularly during group play and structured activities.

In the area of emotional responses, the majority of learners displayed positive affect, such as smiling and laughing, during interactions. Behaviors related to shyness, frustration, or seeking comfort from parents were observed but occurred infrequently and were more common at the beginning of the observation period.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that parental presence within the classroom, when maintained at a non-intrusive level, can support children's peer interactions in a positive way. Many of the learners demonstrated confidence in engaging with their peers while still being aware that a parent was nearby. This suggests that the presence of a familiar adult may provide a sense of emotional security that allows children to explore social interactions more comfortably.

At the same time, the results highlight the importance of limiting direct parental involvement during activities. Children who were not frequently guided by their parents were more likely to initiate interactions, participate in group play, and practice communication skills independently. This supports the idea that while parental presence can be reassuring, excessive involvement may reduce opportunities for children to develop autonomy.

It is also notable that most learners displayed positive emotional responses during peer interactions, such as smiling and cooperative behavior, with only minimal instances of frustration or withdrawal. These observations suggest that children were generally well-adjusted within the classroom environment, even when parents were present. The findings align with the concept of a "secure base," where children feel supported but are still encouraged to interact and explore independently.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored how parental presence within the daycare classroom environment influences the peer interactions of young learners. The findings show that when parents maintain a supportive yet non-intrusive role, their presence can contribute positively to children's social development. Most of the learners demonstrated high to very high levels of peer interaction, particularly in areas such as social engagement, communication, and cooperation. These behaviors suggest that children were able to interact meaningfully with their peers while still being aware of their parent's presence.

Although some learners initially showed signs of hesitation or reliance on their parents, these behaviors decreased as the observation period progressed. This indicates that children gradually adapted to the classroom setting and became more comfortable engaging independently. The presence of a parent appeared to provide a sense of emotional reassurance, allowing children to participate in peer interactions with greater confidence. At the same time, the limited involvement of parents created opportunities for learners to practice essential social skills on their own.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that parental presence in daycare settings can be beneficial when it is balanced and does not interfere with children's interactions. A supportive but observant role allows children to feel secure while still encouraging independence, social competence, and emotional regulation.

In light of these results, several recommendations are proposed. Daycare teachers and administrators may establish clear guidelines on parental presence in the classroom, encouraging parents to remain nearby as a source of support while minimizing direct intervention in children's activities. Structured group activities may also be implemented to further promote peer interaction and cooperation among learners. Parents and guardians are encouraged to adopt an observant approach during classroom participation, allowing children to explore social situations independently. Orientation programs may also be conducted to help parents understand the importance of fostering independence in early childhood.

For future research, similar studies may be conducted over a longer period or across different daycare settings to provide a broader understanding of the topic. Additional variables, such as children's temperament, classroom structure, and teacher strategies, may also be explored to gain deeper insights into factors that influence peer interaction. Daycare centers may also use the findings of this study as a reference in reviewing and improving their policies on parent involvement, ensuring a balanced approach that supports both family engagement and children's autonomy.

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