

Evaluation, Maintenance and Enhancement of Teacher-Child Relationship

-- Based on the manager's perspective

Min Li¹, Wanzhen Feng²

¹Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

²Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

Abstract: This study investigates the current evaluation, maintenance, and enhancement of teacher-child relationships in Chinese kindergartens from managers' perspective. Through in-depth interviews conducted with 21 kindergarten managers from various provinces and followed by coding and analysis of the interview data. The research findings indicate that: (1) Kindergartens primarily evaluate teacher-child relationships through observations by managers (71.19%), parents' feedback (22.03%), and the use of teacher-child scales (7.69%). (2) Three key strategies were employed, effective management practices (53.45%), provision of professional development opportunities (33.62%), and the inclusion of stakeholders in activity-centered approaches (12.93%), to ensure the establishment of positive relationships between teachers and children. (3) Problem-oriented interventions (70.15%) and proactive positive education (29.85%) are identified as effective approaches to assist teachers in improving teacher-child relationships. Research recommendations include the utilization of a wider array of technologies and scales to comprehensively evaluate teacher-child relationships from diverse perspectives; the creation of conducive environments for teacher-child interaction and parent-teacher communication to safeguard teacher-child relationships; and the implementation of more positive education initiatives to aid teachers in enhancing teacher-child relationships.

Keywords: Teacher-Child Relationship, Evaluation, Maintenance, Enhancement.

1. Introduction

Teacher-child relationships constitute a foundational element of early childhood education, characterized by sustained interpersonal interactions that significantly influence children's academic and socio-emotional development [1,2]. Research indicates that positive teacher-child interactions are associated with enhanced cognitive and language skills in young learners, whereas conflictual relationships may correlate with behavioral challenges [3,4].

Current assessment methodologies encompass a range of instruments, including observational protocols, self-report scales, and child-centric measures such as narrative and projective techniques. Widely used tools like the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) and the Young Children's Appraisals of Teacher Support (Y-CATS) emphasize the teacher's perspective, while alternative approaches attempt to capture children's voices through age-appropriate methods.[5,6]

In China, growing scholarly and practical attention has been directed toward understanding and improving teacher-child dynamics. Efforts often focus on teacher training, ideological shifts in educational philosophy, and systemic support from educational authorities [7,8,9,11]. Internationally, evidence-based models such as Banking Time, My Teaching Partner (MTP), and Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI) offer structured approaches to professional development and relational enhancement [10,12].

Despite these advances, there remains a need to examine how kindergarten administrators-key agents in educational settings-perceive, implement, and refine strategies for supporting teacher-child relationships. This study aims to address this gap by exploring managerial perspectives on the

evaluation, safeguarding, and improvement of teacher-child interactions in Chinese kindergartens.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A purposive sample of 21 kindergarten administrators was recruited from seven provinces in China, ensuring diversity in geographic location, institutional type, and professional experience. Participants included 12 principals, 6 vice principals, and 3 directors of academic affairs. The sample comprised 19 females and 2 males, with professional experience ranging from 1 to over 21 years. Seventeen kindergartens were public and 4 were private; 13 were situated in urban areas, 2 in towns, and 6 in rural regions.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on a protocol designed around three core themes: (1) methods for observing and evaluating teacher-child relationships; (2) strategies for sustaining positive relationships; and (3) interventions for relational improvement. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo 11.

A thematic analysis approach was employed, involving open coding, axial coding, and thematic refinement. Coder reliability was established through independent dual coding and consensus discussions.

3. Results

3.1. Evaluation of Teacher-Child Relationships

3.1.1. Evaluating Agents

Evaluating agents consist of both internal and external

members of the kindergarten. Internal evaluators mainly include managers and teachers, while external evaluators are primarily parents. Here, the director of educational affairs and the teaching research leader serve as the primary evaluators. Teachers engage in self-assessment, reflecting on their own behaviors and practices. Additionally, parents participate in the evaluation process through periodic teaching assessments organized by the kindergarten. Surveys are distributed to and collected from parents, covering aspects such as parent-teacher and teacher-child relationships. Parents are

encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions through these questionnaires.

3.1.2. Evaluation Methods

Kindergartens currently employ three main methods to evaluate teacher-child relationships: Manager observation (71.19%), teacher-child scales (7.69%), and parent feedback (22.03%).

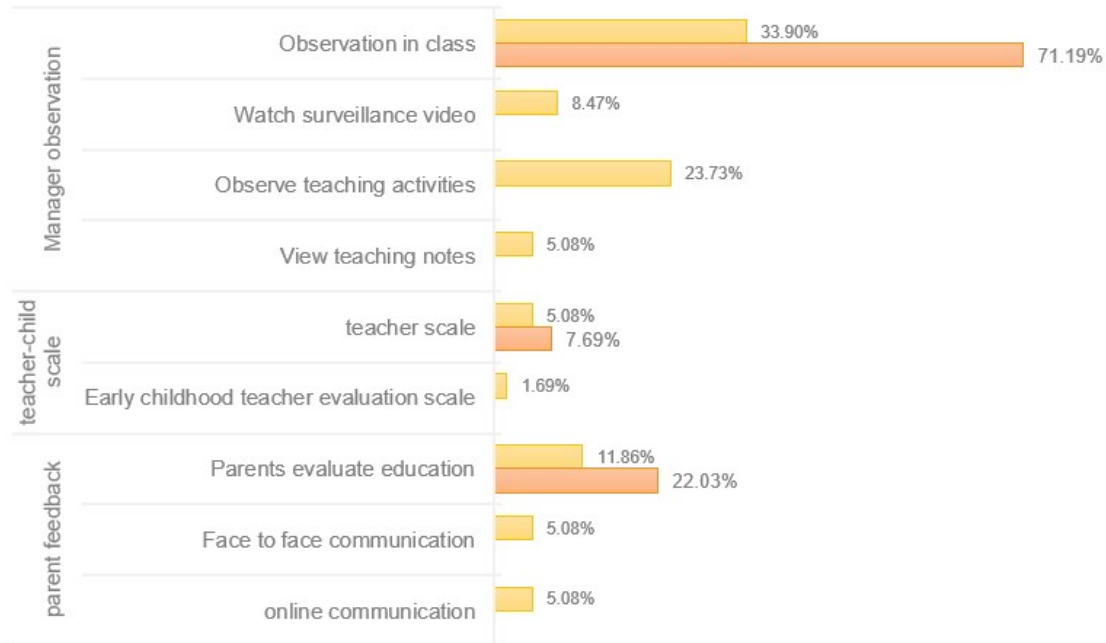


Figure 1. Evaluation method for teacher-child relationship in kindergarten

Manager observation (71.19%): All 21 directors mentioned classroom observation during interviews, making it the most frequently cited method. Classroom observation (33.90%) allows managers to directly assess the dynamics and interactions between teachers and children. Teaching activity observations (23.73%) were frequently mentioned as well, as they enable administrators to engage directly with teachers and children, facilitating holistic observation and analysis. Watching surveillance video (8.47%) was also regarded as a direct and convenient method, providing a comprehensive view of teacher-child communication. Observation notes (5.08%) refer to teachers' documentation of children's performance across various contexts, including descriptive accounts, analyses of behaviors, and targeted measures. Administrators review these records to understand children's play behaviors and teachers' responsiveness to children's needs.

Teacher-child scales (7.69%): Teacher-completed scales mainly involve self-assessment of teaching activities and behaviors, examining their impact on children. Administrators analyze these data to understand the current state of teacher-child relationships (5.08%). Only one administrator mentioned using child-completed scales (1.69%), wherein children responded to questionnaires with administrative assistance, expressing their attitudes toward

teacher-child relationships.

Parent feedback (22.03%): Parent evaluations of teaching (11.86%) serve as another method for assessing teacher-child relationships. Surveys distributed to parents gather feedback on teachers' daily attitudes, professionalism, and relationships with children. Furthermore, administrators communicate with parents about teacher-child relationships through face-to-face interactions (5.08%) during daily drop-off and pick-up times, inquiring about children's willingness to attend kindergarten and their comments about teachers at home. Online communication (5.08%) occurs through parent messages on official social media accounts or telephone interviews to assess satisfaction with teachers' work.

3.2. Evaluation Content of Teacher-Child Relationships in Kindergartens

The evaluation of teacher-child relationships encompasses four primary dimensions, represented by 11 coded nodes: children's performance (32.65%), teachers' performance (44.90%), the presentation of teacher-child relationships (12.24%), and parental feedback (10.20%). Among these, teachers' performance and children's behavior were the most frequently referenced categories.

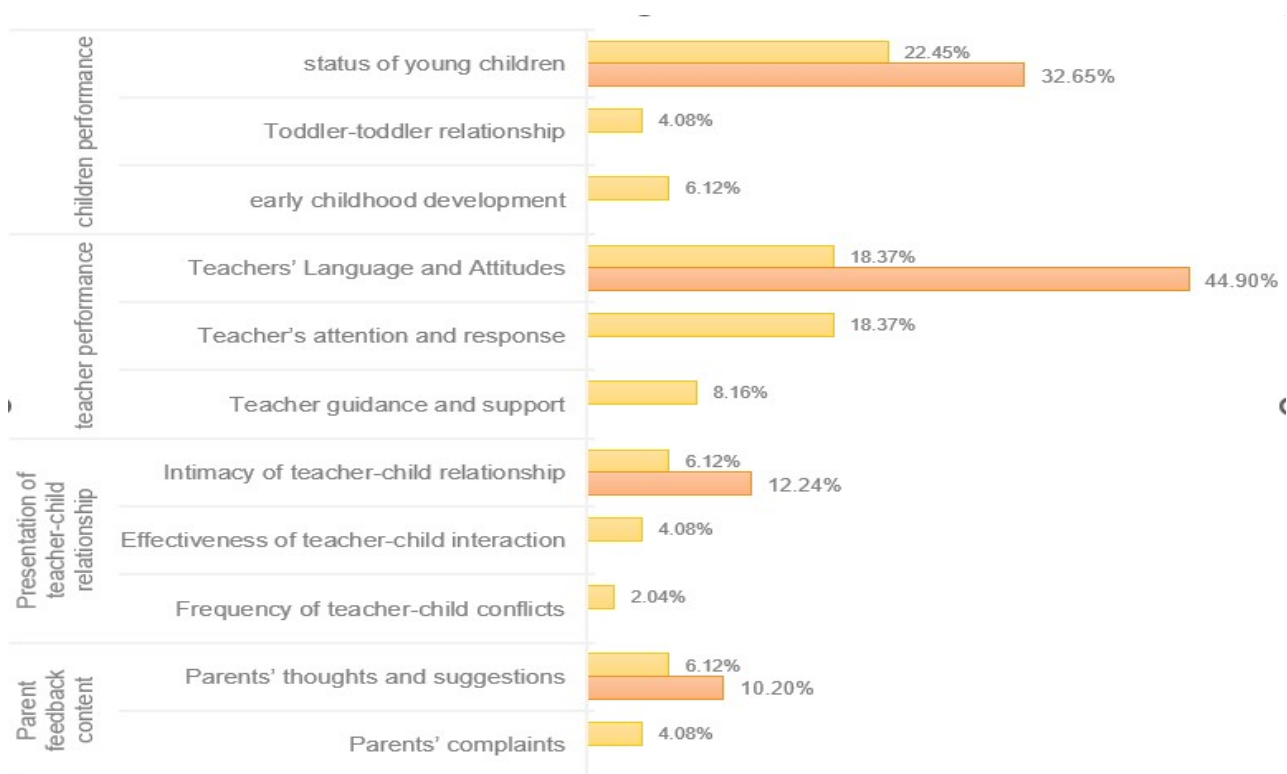


Figure 2. Kindergarten teacher-child relationship evaluation content

3.2.1. Children's Performance

Children's Status (22.45%): Evaluated through children's verbal and non-verbal expressions, such as language use, facial expressions, and overall attitude during activities. One administrator illustrated: "When I enter a classroom, I observe whether children remain focused on their tasks-some may briefly look up and continue, while others initiate conversation. These behaviors reflect a comfortable and supportive teacher-child relationship."

Peer Interactions (4.08%): Used as an indirect measure of the teacher-child dynamic. For instance, if children mimic negative comments about peers (e.g., "X is the most disliked in class"), it may indicate inadequate teacher guidance or a negative classroom atmosphere.

Developmental Progress (6.12%): Focuses on competencies acquired by children, such as problem-solving skills, critical judgment, and overall developmental gains resulting from teacher-child interactions.

3.2.2. Teachers' Performance

Language and Attitudes (18.37%): Centers on whether teachers communicate respectfully, acknowledge individual differences, and adapt their interactions to children's needs.

Attention and response (18.37%): Reflects teachers' ability to attentively monitor children, interpret their behaviors, and make informed decisions-for example, determining when and how to intervene in activities.

Guidance and Support (8.16%): Emphasizes the provision of developmentally appropriate assistance, such as designing stimulating learning environments and offering timely support during challenges.

3.2.3. Presentation of Teacher-Child Relationship

Intimacy (6.12%): Characterized by warmth, trust, and open communication [8]. Positive relationships are evident when children appear happy and interact with teachers freely and comfortably. [13]

Effectiveness of interaction (4.08%): Effective interactions-such as welcoming children with warmth and affirming their contributions-enhance self-esteem and engagement. In contrast, ineffective exchanges (e.g., excessive reprimands) may reduce children's confidence and interest.

Frequency of Conflicts (2.04%): Although rarely cited, conflict serves as a negative indicator. One administrator associated conflict with teachers' use of inappropriate language or gestures, noting that such incidents often signal deeper relational issues.

3.2.4. Parental Feedback

Thoughts and suggestions (6.12%): Assessed through surveys or interviews, often including items such as whether teachers provide sufficient attention and care.

Complaints (4.08%): Comprises both constructive feedback (e.g., encouraging more teacher-child interactions) and criticisms (e.g., concerns about responsiveness or communication).

3.3. Maintenance Strategies of Teacher-Child Relationships

These were categorized into three main approaches: effective administrative management (53.45%), support for teachers' professional development (33.62%), and activity-based involvement of stakeholders (12.93%).

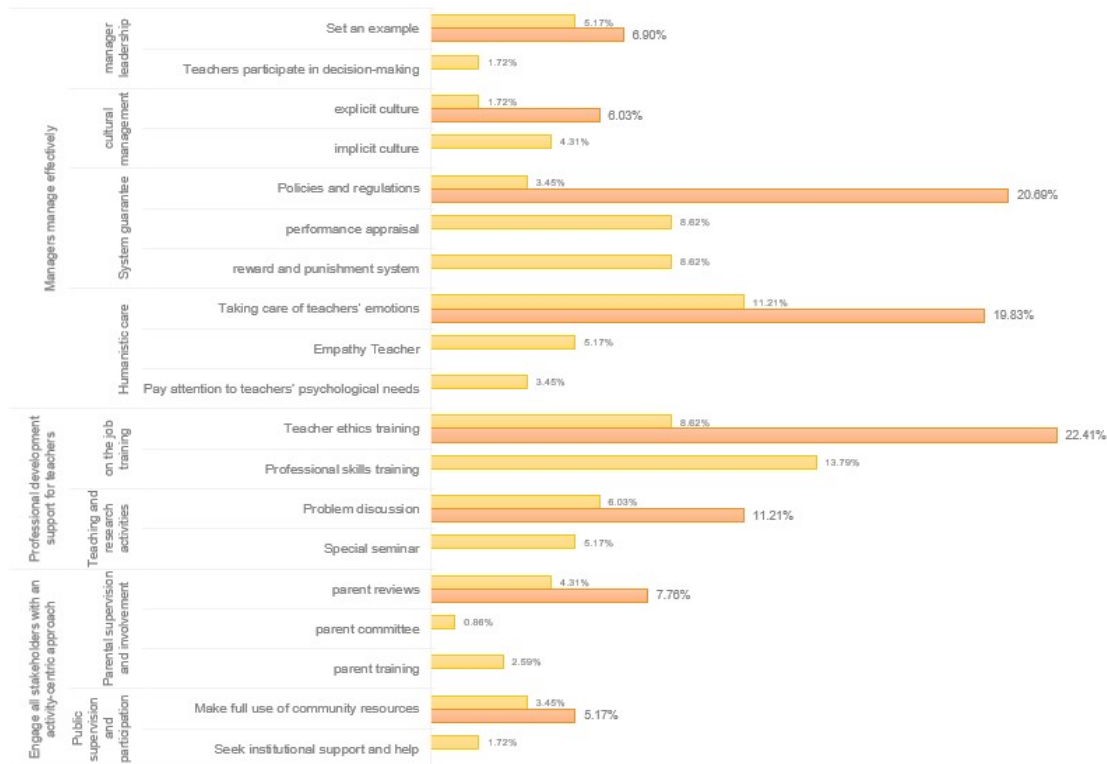


Figure 3. Kindergarten teacher-child relationship maintenance Strategies

3.3.1. Effective Administrative Management

Leadership (6.90%): Emphasized role modeling (5.17%), where administrators lead by example and commit to continuous self-improvement to positively influence teacher-child relationships. One director stated: “As a principal, I serve as a spiritual leader. Competence and personal integrity are crucial-teachers are happier and more motivated when working with capable and principled leaders.” Additionally, teachers were granted certain participatory rights in decision-making (1.72%).

Cultural Management (6.03%): Explicit cultural management (1.72%) involved improving physical conditions, such as providing better teaching and working environments. Implicit cultural management (4.31%) focused on fostering a positive organizational climate by recognizing teachers’ strengths, sharing success stories, and encouraging peer learning. Such an environment was reported to enhance teachers’ dedication and attentiveness to children.

System guarantee (20.69): Included policy compliance (3.45%), performance appraisal (8.62%), and reward-punishment systems (8.62%). Kindergartens adhered to national guidelines such as the “Early Learning and Development Guidelines” and the “Kindergarten Education Guide to regulate teacher practices”. Performance appraisal often incorporated teacher-child interaction quality, linking it to professional advancement and financial incentives. Reward-punishment systems were widely implemented. Teachers with positive relationships received material and professional incentives, while those employing inappropriate practices (e.g., corporal punishment) faced consequences such as professional ethics-based veto power in evaluations.

Humanistic Care (19.83%): Given that teacher-child interactions are dynamic and emotionally reciprocal, administrators emphasized safeguarding teachers’ emotional well-being (11.21%) through improved welfare, better working conditions, and emotional management training[14].

Empathetic management (5.17%) involved understanding individual teachers’ circumstances and adopting

differentiated strategies. Administrators acknowledged variations in teachers’ self-regulation abilities and personal challenges. Attention to psychological needs (3.45%) included regular mental health assessments, psychological counseling, and invited expert lectures. Team-building activities such as outings and film viewings were organized to alleviate stress and enhance cohesion.

3.3.2. Professional Development Support

On the job training (22.41%): Training focused on ethics (8.62%) and professional skills (13.79%). Teachers were encouraged to develop knowledge, interactive skills, and appropriate attitudes toward children. Training covered theoretical frameworks (e.g., national guidelines) and practical strategies for improving interactions in contexts such as instruction, transitions, and physical activities.

Teaching-Research Activities (11.21%): These activities were designed to enhance teachers’ professional knowledge, instructional competence, and reflective abilities. Two forms were identified, one is Problem-Based Discussions (6.03%), teachers collaboratively addressed common challenges through structured dialogue. The other one is thematic Seminars (5.17%): Focused topics (e.g., “improving interaction skills”) were explored through iterative reflection and planning, particularly in contexts with many novice teachers or children with special needs.

3.3.3. Activity-Based Involvement of Stakeholders

Parental Supervision and Participation (7.76%): Parents participated through reviews (4.31%), offering feedback on teaching and relational quality via surveys. Parent committees (0.86%) facilitated involvement in management, decision-making, and oversight, though only one administrator emphasized this mechanism[15]. Parent training (2.59%) helped families understand teachers’ roles and encouraged cooperative engagement.

Public supervision and participation (5.17%): Communities provided tangible (e.g., parks, museums) and intangible (e.g., cultural values) resources. Utilizing these

resources (3.45%) allowed kindergartens to create authentic learning experiences and strengthen teacher-child interactions through real-world activities[16]. External institutional support (1.72%) was sought for specialized needs-such as assistance for children with autism or ADHD-and for teacher-oriented services including mental health and legal training.

3.4. Approaches to Improving Teacher-Child Relationships

As illustrated in Figure 4, improvement strategies were categorized into two primary types: positive education (29.85%) and problem-specific intervention (70.15%).

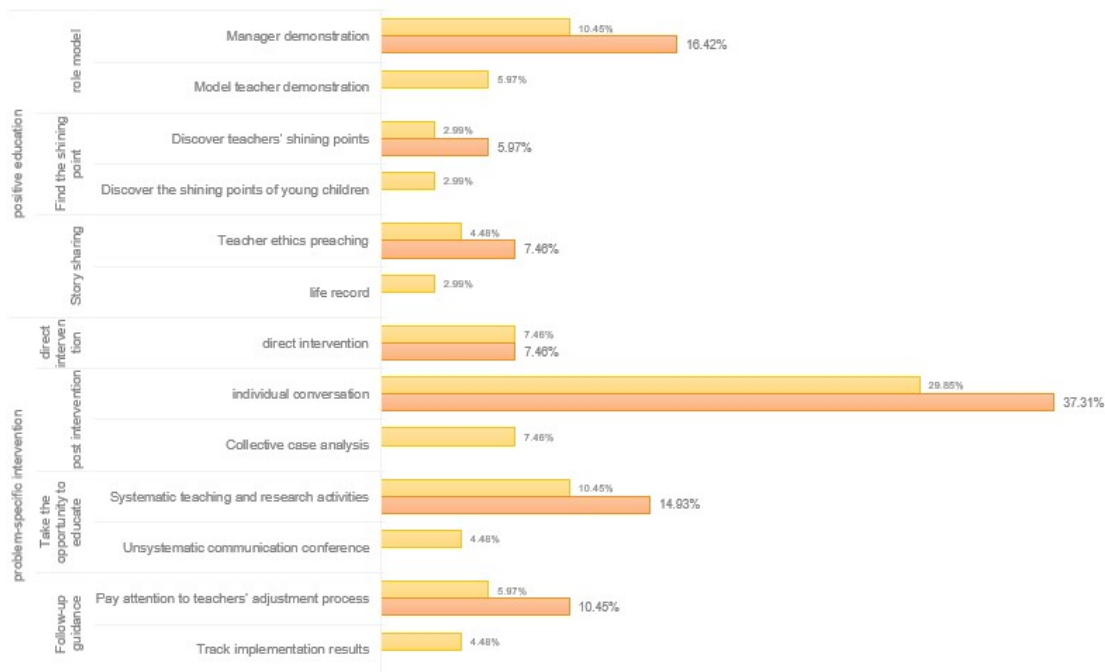


Figure 4. Kindergarten teacher-child relationship enhancement Strategies

3.4.1. Positive Education

Role modeling (16.42%): Considered essential for demonstrating effective interaction techniques. Administrators occasionally modeled appropriate communication and manager demonstration (10.45%) when poor relationships or disordered classrooms were observed. Teachers were also encouraged to learn from skilled peers through organized observations and model teacher demonstration (5.97%). Administrators regularly organize peer observations and allocate time for educators to share practical interaction strategies.

Find the shining point (5.97%): Helped deepen teachers' understanding of individual children and improve relationships through attentive observation and engaged interaction [17].

Story sharing (7.46%): Served as both reflective practice and moral encouragement [7]. Teachers recorded and shared positive ethics story (4.48%), while life record (2.99%) using photos and narratives captured children's growth and teacher-child interactions, emphasizing positive experiences.

3.4.2. Problem-specific Intervention

Direct intervention (7.46%): Administrators intervened based on severity of relational discord, using subtle demonstration or explicit verbal reminders in cases of obvious conflict.

Post-event intervention (37.31%): Involved one-on-one dialogues with teachers (29.85%) informed by video reviews and colleague consultations. Anonymous case studies were discussed collectively in teaching-research sessions (7.46%) to facilitate group reflection.

Take the opportunity to educate (14.93%): Combined structured teaching-research activities (10.45%) addressing

common challenges with informal exchange meetings (4.48%) where teachers shared successful practices.

Follow-up guidance (10.45%): Administrators monitored implementation of strategies (5.97%) and assessed their effectiveness over time (4.48%), creating an iterative improvement process.

4. Discussion and Implications

This study highlights the predominant role of administrative observation in evaluating teacher-child relationships in Chinese kindergartens, suggesting a need for more diversified and child-inclusive assessment tools. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on managerial leadership and institutional support reflects a top-down approach to quality assurance.

The findings advocate for the integration of multi-source feedback systems-incorporating child voices, parental perspectives, and teacher self-assessments-to achieve a holistic understanding of relational dynamics. Moreover, contextually adapted strategies are recommended, particularly for rural and underserved areas where resources and training may be limited.

Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of specific improvement strategies and examine the interplay between teacher well-being and relational quality.

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