

A Literature Review of Teacher-Child Interactions During Shared Reading in Chinese Kindergartens

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews shared book reading practices in Chinese kindergartens from an interactive perspective. Shared reading is widely recognized as a vital approach to support young children's language, cognitive, and social development. In recent years, the focus on the quality of teacher-child interaction has grown, as it plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of shared reading. Drawing upon theoretical foundations and empirical studies, this review explores the evaluation methods and the current state of teacher-child interactions during shared book reading in Chinese early childhood settings. The findings reveal that shared reading is a triadic process involving adults, children, and picture books, with preschool teachers playing a pivotal role in guiding the interaction. However, Chinese preschool teachers were found to perform weakest in the domain of instructional support, as measured by established assessment tools. The study concludes that enhancing teachers' instructional support capacities is essential for improving the quality of shared reading interactions and, ultimately, early literacy outcomes. This review provides valuable insights for future research and teacher professional development in early childhood education.

Keywords: Teacher-child interaction; shared book reading; picture book; Preschool teachers; Chinese kindergarten.

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, reading skills are essential for accessing educational content, social development, 21st-century technology, and most job and lifelong learning opportunities (Dessemontet et al., 2021). Early reading plays a pivotal crucial role in the development of an individual's reading interest and literacy competencies. In kindergartens, early reading for children takes on many different forms. Among the more significant aspects is teacher-child shared book reading. Teacher-child shared book reading serves as a fundamental component in the developmental ecology of young children, creating a pleasant interactive setting for both children and adults (Bronfenbrenner 2007; Clemens 2020). Research over the last number of decades suggests that early shared reading experiences benefit child development (Wade & Moore, 1998; Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Niklas, Cohrsen & Tayler, 2016).

The Chinese government places significant emphasis on promoting reading among children aged 0 to 6 years. As early as 2001, the Ministry of Education of China promulgated as well as enforced the "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial)." In the language section, it clearly put forward the goal of "children like to listen to stories and read books." It required kindergartens to "cultivate children's interest in common signs and text symbols in life" and "use books, paintings, and other methods to arouse children's interest in books, reading, and writing, and cultivate reading and writing skills." In October 2012, the Ministry of Education of China declared

the “Guidelines for Learning and Development of 3-6 Years Old” (hereafter referred to as the “Guidelines”), which put forward the goal of “children like to listen to stories and read books” in the “Reading and Writing Preparation” in the language field and refined the goals for each age group from 3 to 6 years old. At the same time, the guidelines propose creating an optimal reading environment for children, frequently engaging with them in reading activities and storytelling, and offering a diverse range of children's literature across various genres so that children can choose and read independently.

Picture books represent an essential form of reading material for children. On September 7, 2020, the Ministry of Education of China released the “Draft of the Preschool Education Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft for Comments).” Article 33 (Curriculum Resources) of the draft stipulates that “kindergartens should be equipped with toys, teaching aids and children’s picture books that meet national and local standards, and textbooks should not be used.” Curriculum teaching resources used in kindergartens should be reviewed and approved in compliance with legal standards as well as the education administrative department of the State Council shall formulate specific measures. This sentence means that children’s picture books will become statutory preschool education curriculum resources. In 2021, the Ministry of Education of China released a list of picture books for children aged 3-6 for the first time, proposing to support kindergarten reading activities with high-quality picture books.

Therefore, how to read picture books with high quality has always been an important issue in Chinese kindergartens. In Chinese kindergartens, picture book reading takes many forms, the most important of which is group-shared reading. In recent years, the level of interactivity has attracted much attention as a key indicator of the quality of teacher-child reading sessions (Wang, Yin & Zhang 2022). However, many Chinese preschool teachers do not attach much importance to the interaction between teachers and children throughout shared reading, as well as the educational practice of teacher-child reading often fails to achieve the ideal interactive effect.

In view of the above background, the purpose of this paper is to review the research findings on early reading from the perspective of interaction in China from 2000 to 2023, provide a thorough and clear explanation.

METHODS

This study systematically organized and analysed the current research on teacher-child interaction during shared reading in Chinese kindergartens. It aims to uncover the basic theories, core issues, methodological characteristics, existing problems, and potential future research directions in this field. The literature search of the study was mainly completed through the following databases: CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure): It contains Chinese academic achievements and is an important source for obtaining research in the preschool education field in China; Scopus: A global multidisciplinary authoritative database used to obtain relevant research on China’s preschool education on an international scale; Web of Science: A high-quality academic database used to obtain high-level literature published internationally.

The researchers have formulated a clear search strategy. The study uses Boolean logic (AND, OR) to combine keywords to establish comprehensiveness and search accuracy. The search time frame is established from January 2010 to December 2023. The types of literature include academic research literature such as conference papers, dissertations, as well as journal articles.

The literature assessment consists of two stages. In the first stage, search keywords are "Chinese kindergarten," "early reading," AND "picture book reading," and a total of 614 research papers related to early reading (mainly picture book reading) in Chinese kindergartens were obtained. In the second stage, the literature that was initially screened was screened again with "teacher-child interaction" as the keyword. Studies that focused only on

shared reading or picture book reading but not on teacher-child interaction were eliminated. Finally, 67 research papers focusing on teacher-child interaction in shared reading were selected as the papers for the literature review of this study.

The literature analysis mainly includes the following aspects: theoretical basis analysis, evaluation method and tool analysis, research topic classification, and the current state of the quality of teacher-child interactions.

FINDINGS

Related theories of teachers-child interaction during shared book reading

The theory that significantly influences the interaction between teachers and students during reading is the theory of dialogue. “Dialogue” is one of the most basic ways of communication for human beings. Socrates in ancient Greece advocated the use of dialogue to bring out the true thoughts hidden in the depths of the soul; Confucius in ancient China proposed to encourage students to speak boldly and advocate equal dialogue between teachers and students; in today’s world, from interpersonal communication to international politics, from business cooperation to social services, all fields emphasize “dialogue” and advocate reaching consensus, exchanging opinions and forming ideas through “dialogue.” In picture book reading, dialogue is also crucial because the meaning of picture books is not the unilateral output of fixed content by the author to the reader or adults to children but is jointly generated by multiple subjects through dialogue with each other. This process of meaning construction is also a process of continuous exploration, discovery, and self-improvement of the dialogue subject.

Besides, picture books use pictures and words to narrate a complete story. They are an art form of storytelling that combines pictures and text. This combination of pictures and text is a deep, multi-level, and multi-form combination, which produces a much richer narrative effect than pure text or general illustrated readings (Du & Zheng 2021). Children's reading of picture books is different from that of adults. Adult reading is a process of interaction between adults and books. But most children aged 0-6 do not have the ability to read text. Therefore, when they read picture books, they need adults to read to them (Zhu 2021).

Children’s picture book reading becomes an interaction process between adults, children, and books. The teacher-children interaction in reading involves the interaction between teachers, children, and books (Grolig L 2020). The picture book reading interaction comprises three components: adults, children, and picture book (van Kleeck 2003). Each component interacts with others to facilitate social interaction (Pel legrini & Galda 2003). Therefore, most of the related studies have examined the factors influencing the quality of teacher-child reading interactions from three aspects: teachers, children, and books, as shown in Figure 1.

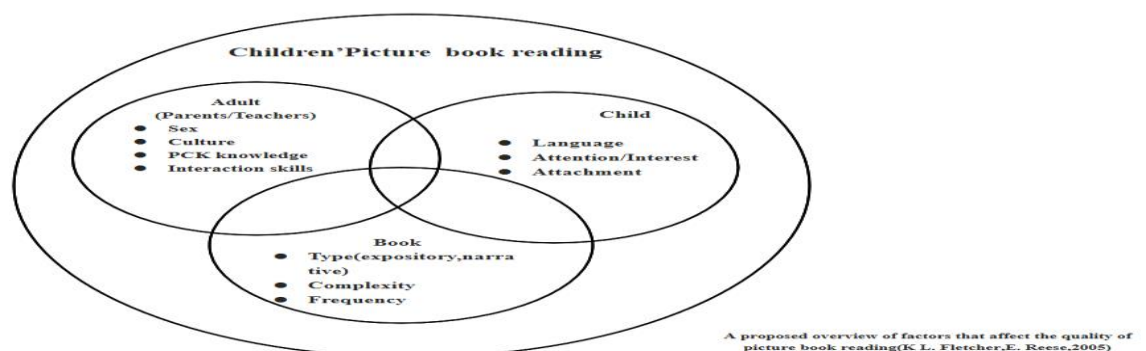


Figure 1: A proposed overview of factors that affect the quality of picture book reading (K L. Fletcher, E. Reese, 2005).

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating high-quality interactions between teachers and children during shared book reading sessions. After comparing teacher-led and child-initiated reading situations, Leon and Player (Leon L & Payler J 2021) found that reading activities with teacher participation were more conducive to improving children's participation. Among the influencing factors related to teachers, researchers focused on two categories: teachers' professional experience and skills, and educational background. Among them, teachers' experience and skills significantly influence children's reading interests and reading abilities. Schick found that teachers with richer language skills are better at organizing interactions and guiding children to participate in co-construction (Schick A 2015); Sun et al. found that the longer the teacher's teaching experience and the richer the professional experience accumulated, the higher the level of interaction strategy use (Sun et al.2020). The impact of objective factors such as teachers' educational background characteristics on the quality of reading interaction is not consistent. Some studies have found that teachers' educational background is related to the interaction methods they usually use (Huang & Tian 2012; Hu J et al. 2019). On the other hand, other studies have indicated no significant relationship between the two (Thomas & La 2009; Dawdall N et al. 2020).

In Aidan Chamber's book, "The Reading Environment," he introduced the remarkable "reading cycle" theory. One of the core concepts is an adult with the ability to help. He said, Readers are maybe by readers. Suppose a reliable adult can provide various assistance to and share his reading experience with young readers. In that case, the children will be able to overcome all difficulties in reading, as shown in Figure 2.

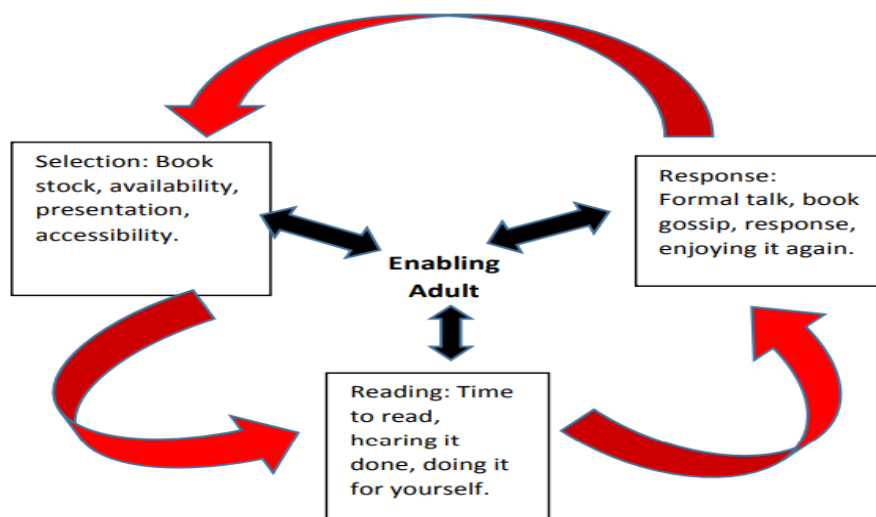


Figure 2: Redrawing of Aidan Chambers 'The Reading Cycle' (Chamber, 1991).

The characteristics of children will also affect the quality of interactions between teachers and children, including individual as well as group characteristics of children. The former includes children's age and developmental stage, while the latter includes the number of people reading together. In addition, when reading various kinds of books, the mode of interaction between teacher and child varies to some extent. Books with richer information will prompt teachers to use more advanced strategies, increasing the frequency of teacher-child interaction (Sénécha M 1995).

Although most existing studies have independently explored the three factors of children, teachers, and books, Lea proposed a triad model of shared reading from an integrated perspective. This model believes that the quality of interaction between teacher and child also depends on the interaction between the three subjects (Christenson, L 2016). The frequency of teachers' interactive behaviors is affected by the children's age. In the older children group, teachers show more conversational language interaction behaviors (Honig A S & Shin M, 2001). At the same time, when facing children with lower cognitive levels, teachers will become the leaders of the shared

reading activities. They will also encourage children with higher cognitive levels to participate in understanding and construction. The degree of familiarity with books will also affect the participation of teachers and children. The interactivity of shared reading activities will increase with the increase in the number of shared readings.

Evaluation methodology of teachers-child interaction during shared book reading

At present, the evaluation of the standard of the reading interaction between teacher and child mainly includes the interactive environment evaluation as well as interactive behavior evaluation. The interactive environment is the evaluation of teacher-child interaction quality through the lens of “the creation and use of the interactive environment” (Li & Fan 2018). The standardized evaluation scale commonly used for evaluation from the environmental perspective is the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3) (Harms T, 1998), in which the indicators of teacher-child interaction involve the frequency of teacher responses/engagement, the nature of the teacher-child interaction, as well as the effectiveness of support provided by teachers. This scale also has a Chinese version revised by Chinese scholars, the Chinese Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (trial) (CECERS) (li K et al. 2014), in which the subscale “guidance and interaction” serves as a tool for assessing the quality of teacher-child reading relationships.

The evaluation of interactive behavior is that researchers evaluate teacher-child interaction quality by comprehensively and carefully examining the interaction scenarios between teachers and children during the reading process. The analysis process from the behavioral perspective generally includes two steps: natural observation or video recording of the teacher-child reading process and quantitative coding analysis of the interactive behavior (Aarts R et al.2016). The coding stage requires a clear definition of the interactive behavior being studied, which is the most important part of the evaluation research. Based on the differences in coding systems, the evaluation research from the behavioral perspective can be further divided into verbal behavior evaluation and strategic behavior evaluation. Language interaction is one of the main characteristics of reading interaction between teacher and child. Therefore, several researchers encode the process of interaction from the verbal behavior (utterance) level and use verbal interaction analysis tools to assess the teacher-child reading interaction quality. The most commonly used tool is the standardized Flanders Interaction Analysis System (FIAS) (Flanders N A 1963). FIAS is a structured, quantitative analysis technique for verbal interaction behavior. The coding system is divided into three categories: teacher speech, student speech, and ineffective speech. Subsequent studies have also refined the types of speech used by teachers and children during reading interactions, making the improved FIAS more suitable for shared reading interaction scenarios (Wang 2015). The teacher-child shared reading interaction quality can also be studied by the quality and frequency of strategies adopted by teachers (Chen & de 2014). The emotional support subscales, management of the class, as well as educational assistance in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-PreK (CLASS-PreK) (Mashburn A J 2008) can analyze the teacher-child interaction behavioral quality through the shared reading activities (Li 2010).

In the teacher-child shared reading interaction evaluation research, researchers have developed various observation and coding systems, which provide operational tools for capturing the interaction between teachers and children (Harris Y R & Almutairi S A 2016) and accumulate materials for current status analysis and improvement research. However, the current evaluation methods all have certain limitations. For example, the time and labor costs of using environmental observation tools are relatively high (Abreu & Leal 2013).

Teacher-child Interaction Quality during Shared Book Reading in China

Positive teacher-child interaction not only helps children effectively explore and master learning tasks in picture book teaching and develop language expression skills but also supports children in establishing harmonious, equal, and mutually trusting interpersonal relationships and provides support for cultivating children's active and

healthy social interaction methods. However, the interaction between teacher and child throughout the shared book reading sessions still faces more challenges in China.

Zheng (2020) used the CLASS classroom evaluation system to assess as well as analyse the level of interaction between teacher and child during the shared reading sessions of Fuzhou A Garden K2. The findings indicate that the overall level of interaction between teacher and child throughout shared book reading session is at a medium level (3-5) and has not reached a high level. Gao (2020) took N Kindergarten in H City as an example and used 12 randomly selected picture book teaching activities in large classes as research samples. The research samples used the form of recording and adopted non-participatory observation methods. Then the samples were observed and scored through the CLASS classroom evaluation and scoring system to count the quality of teacher-child interaction scores in the picture book teaching activities of large classes. The data were processed and analyzed using SPSS 22.0. The study's results revealed that, in the picture book teaching sessions of the large class at N Kindergarten in H City, the teacher-child interaction quality was at a medium level (3-5). Emotional support had the highest quality of interaction (5.39), while instructional support had the lowest (4.73).

Wu (2021) used the Class scoring system to investigate the early reading situation of two kindergarten classes in Beijing. The results show that the score of teachers in the field of instructional support is only 2.91. Instructional support includes three measures: quality of feedback (QF), language modeling (LM), and concept development (CD). Pan (2022) found that the mean score for instructional support was only 3.28. Besides, regard for student perspectives (RSP) scored the lowest (3.88) in the emotional support dimension. Instructional learning formats

(If) , which belongs to classroom organization dimension, scored 3.65. The highest score for each dimension is 7 points.

Chang (2023) selected 58 kindergarten teachers from 8 districts in Beijing as research subjects and used the CLASS evaluation system to investigate the quality of interaction between teacher and child during shared reading. The research revealed that the mean scores of the teacher-child interaction quality during reading education activities of 58 kindergarten teachers were between 3 and 6 points in the three-level 1 dimensions, with a total average mark of 4.44, indicating a medium-level performance. Among them, “emotional support” scored the highest, 5.33 points, but did not reach the advanced level (6-7 points); “classroom organization” scored second, 4.35 points, which was at a medium level; “instructional support” scored the lowest, 3.64 points, which was at a lower-middle level. The standard deviations of the three dimensions are all less than 1, with low dispersion, small fluctuations, and good consistency, indicating that the overall teacher-child interaction quality during kindergarten reading education sessions is at a medium level.

Besides using Class to assess the teacher-child interaction quality during shared reading, some researchers have also used ECERS-3 to assess the quality of these interactions in reading. At present, the assessment of the teacher-child reading interaction quality mainly includes the evaluation of the interactive environment as well as the assessment of interactive behavior. The evaluation of the interactive environment is the evaluation of the teacher-child interaction quality through the lens of (Li & Fan 2018). The standardized evaluation scale commonly used for evaluation from the environmental lens is the ECERS-3 (Harms T 1998), in which the indicators of the interaction between teacher and child consist of the atmosphere of the relationship between teacher and child, the effectiveness of teacher support, as well as the teacher response/engagement's frequency. Huang (2019) suggested that the interaction between teacher and child during teaching activities, including picture book reading, in Chinese kindergartens primarily consists of dialogue, with the majority being collective dialogue interactions initiated by the teacher. In the interaction, most of the teachers' questions are open-ended questions. However, the responses are mostly low-challenge questions that lack reasoning and critical thinking, which hinders children's comprehension of the picture book content and the development of their related skills.

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In fact, the teacher always forgot to care about the children's ideas and interests throughout shared book reading. For instance, when the teacher and young children were reading the picture book (Tuan Yuan), one boy asked why the village in the picture was different from his hometown village. The teacher told him this question was not what we were currently telling a story about and that she could discuss this detail with him after class. But She often forgot after class. One girl was excited to see the story of the new year's performance, and she was going to have a good time with her body. But the teacher told her that she couldn't move her position, so she sat down and paid attention to the story. Paying attention to students' perspectives is one dimension of emotional support.

Different from the other two dimensions, Chinese kindergartens have always attached great importance to classroom organizations, so the score of classroom organizations is relatively high. Numerous researchers employed the CLASS assessment scale to examine the teacher-child interactions quality throughout shared book reading in Chinese preschool classrooms. The classroom organization score was the highest score among the three areas. However, the instructional learning formats did not score high (Gao 2022; Liang 2022; Pan 2022). The form of instruction considers how teachers optimize children's engagement, participation, as well as competencies in teaching and activities. Suppose there is an effective form of instruction in the class. The teacher will use many different forms of instruction, such as eye contact, verbal, movement, etc., looking for opportunities to involve children in activities actively, and also in group lessons, area activities, etc. Or let children learn in one-on-one time. Preschool teachers did not provide rich and interesting reading materials, nor did they provide active and effective promotion strategies, so children's enthusiasm for participating in shared reading was not high.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, as the Chinese government and kindergartens have attached increasing importance to picture book reading, the studies on picture books have progressively grown. The research content mainly includes three aspects: first, picture books as well as the development of children's reading skills; second, the cross-cultural communication of picture books; and third, the informative application of illustrated books. That is, the utilization of picture books as resources in various fields. Although many studies have been on picture books, relatively few have focused on teacher-student interaction, especially empirical research on improving kindergarten teachers' concepts, knowledge, and skills of interaction between teacher and child.

In studies related to teacher-child interaction quality during kindergarten picture book reading, most researchers first outlined the present status of teacher-child interaction, identified relevant issues, and then analyzed the causes while suggesting corresponding improvement strategies. The research methods are mostly based on

practical observations and interviews. Meanwhile, 32% of the studies used CLASS tools to assess the teacher-child interaction quality in kindergarten picture book reading. Here, 7% of these studies focused on the teacher-child interaction quality in the book corner of the classroom, and the others were all about the teacher-child interaction quality during whole-group shared book reading. Regarding sample size, most studies only focused on individual age groups, one kindergarten, or only a few classes. In other words, Chinese researchers and preschool teachers do not pay enough attention to teacher-child interaction in shared book reading, the research methods are not sufficiently studied, and the sample size is relatively small.

Existing research has found that the Chinese preschool teachers' instructional support scored the lowest in reading is consistent with the findings of other international researchers. This may be because many Chinese teachers pay more attention to vocabulary recognition and knowledge instillation in shared reading, and ignore the cognitive processes behind the story, such as reasoning, explanation, and open-ended questions. In addition, Chinese teachers often use closed questions (such as "What is this?" "Who is crying?"), which lack reasoning and hypothetical questions. Not only that, in the traditional teacher-child relationship in China, teachers are authoritative, and children are mostly in a passive position, lacking equal dialogue. The teaching support dimension of assessment tools such as CLASS emphasizes child-centeredness, and teachers need to guide children to engage in complex thinking and language expression.

Extensive research has revealed that preschool teachers worldwide generally exhibit very low-quality instructional support (Pianta et al. 2014; Leyva et al. 2015; Hu, Fan et al. 2016; Early et al. 2017). For instance, Von Suchodoletz et al. (2014) observed that German preschool teachers demonstrated moderate levels of Emotional Support ($M = 5.32$) and Classroom Organization ($M = 4.82$), whereas their IS quality was relatively low ($M = 2.47$). Similar patterns were found in the United States, where teachers also struggled with instructional quality ($M = 2.04-2.73$) (Burchinal et al., 2008; Early et al., 2017; Pianta et al., 2014). Findings in China ($M = 2.12$) (Hu, Fan et al., 2016) and Chile ($M = 1.75$) (Leyva et al., 2015) revealed even lower IS quality among preschool teachers in developing countries. These consistent findings highlight that, preschool teachers are unable to provide sufficiently effective instructional support to support children's learning and development adequately.

CONCLUSION

The current study reviewed 67 research articles on the theoretical basis, evaluation tools, quality, and challenges in interactions between teachers and students throughout picture book reading in Chinese kindergartens and draws the following conclusions. Children's picture book reading is an interaction process between adults, children, and picture books. The main theories supporting kindergarten teacher-child co-reading include reading cycle theory, dialogue theory, etc. The teacher-child interaction skills of kindergarten teachers during picture book co-reading have a direct impact on the growth of children's reading interests as well as reading abilities.

Furthermore, interactive environment evaluation and interactive behavior evaluation are the main ways to assess the teacher-child co-reading interaction quality. Each has standardized observation tools, and the latter can also construct a flexible coding system based on the research purpose, such as the focus of teacher strategies and the specific way of interaction presentation. Applying the CLASS evaluation system to assess the teacher-child interaction quality during picture book reading in Chinese kindergartens revealed that the interaction quality was relatively low, particularly in the dimension of teacher support.

Finally, there are relatively few studies on the teacher-child reading quality in Chinese kindergartens from an interactive perspective. Approximately 70% of existing studies examine the teacher-child interaction quality during picture book reading in kindergartens and identify relevant issues. However, there is a lack of

efficient professional development programme to improve the teacher-child interaction quality during shared book reading.

Future research suggestions

Future research can integrate multidisciplinary perspectives such as ecosystem theory and sociocultural theory based on existing reading cycle theory and dialogue theory and deeply explore the complex interaction process and influence mechanism in teacher-child reading.

In addition, current research focuses more on urban kindergartens. Future research can examine the criteria for the interaction between teachers and children during picture book reading in kindergartens in different regions and urban-rural differences in China. At the same time, drawing on international experience, we can compare our research in the global context and explore the impact of cultural differences on teacher-child interaction.

In terms of evaluation, future research will also combine China's educational environment and cultural characteristics to develop interactive evaluation tools suitable for localization needs, especially flexible coding systems for teacher-child interaction behaviors.

On the basis of existing standardized observation tools, detailed indicators for interaction depth and quality are added. Artificial intelligence (such as natural language processing technology) and big data analysis methods can also be used to quantify the language and non-verbal behaviors in teacher-child interactions, enhancing the objectivity and accuracy of interactive evaluation.

In addition, future research needs to actively carry out teacher training programs based on empirical research, focus on the all-round improvement of teachers' concepts, knowledge, and skills related to teacher-child interaction during shared picture book reading, and build an effective training system, especially the improvement of preschool teachers' instructional support capabilities. For example, we can try to use the MMCI curriculum professional development program to improve the quality of teacher-child interaction in shared reading among Chinese teachers. Simultaneously, longitudinal studies are conducted to monitor the long-term effects of different teacher-child interaction professional programme model on preschool teachers' professional development and children's reading skills as well as overall development.

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