Enhancing Communication Skills, Self-Efficacy, and Early Academic Achievement in Preschool Children With Learning Disabilities Through the 'QASEH' Instructional Material: A Qualitative Case Study

Ahmad Fuad Mohamad Amin

Kolej PERMATA Insan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100330

Received: 21 January 2026; Accepted: 26 January 2026; Published: 05 February 2026

ABSTRACT

Good communication skills are important for the overall growth of preschoolers, especially those with learning disabilities who have trouble with language, socialising, and figuring out who they are. Communication difficulties in early infancy may impede academic engagement and diminish self-esteem, thereby influencing long-term educational outcomes. This qualitative case study investigates the effectiveness of the QASEH teaching material, a structured educational tool designed to enhance communication skills, elevate self-concept, and encourage early academic achievement in preschool children experiencing learning challenges. The study involved seven preschool students enrolled in a Special Education Integration Program in Melaka, Malaysia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with educators, parents, and support staff, as well as document analysis of pre- and post-intervention academic records over a four-month period. The results show significant improvements in both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as higher levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy. There are also positive trends in early academic success. The findings underscore the educational importance of structured instructional resources in fostering inclusive and developmentally suitable early childhood education.

Keywords: communicative skills; self-image; educational tools; learning disabilities; preschool education

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential developmental domain in early childhood education, facilitating social interaction, emotional regulation, and academic achievement. Preschoolers with learning disabilities often demonstrate impairments in both expressive and receptive communication, leading to reduced classroom participation, diminished peer interaction, and constrained academic involvement (Bishop et al., 2020; Norbury et al., 2022). Without thorough and age-appropriate intervention, early communication difficulties may persist and worsen developmental weaknesses over time.

In special education environments, the effectiveness of teaching and learning is intrinsically linked to the quality of interactions between educators and students. Instructional communication goes beyond just passing on information; it includes active processes of making meaning, interpreting, and giving feedback (Berlo, 1977; Decker, 2006). Numerous preschoolers experiencing learning difficulties find it challenging to comprehend spoken instructions in isolation, necessitating pedagogical approaches that incorporate visual, tactile, and contextual supports. Experiential and constructivist learning theories consistently demonstrate that young learners, particularly those facing cognitive and linguistic challenges, gain the most from instructional experiences that progress from concrete representations to abstract concepts (Dale, 1969; Flewitt et al., 2021).

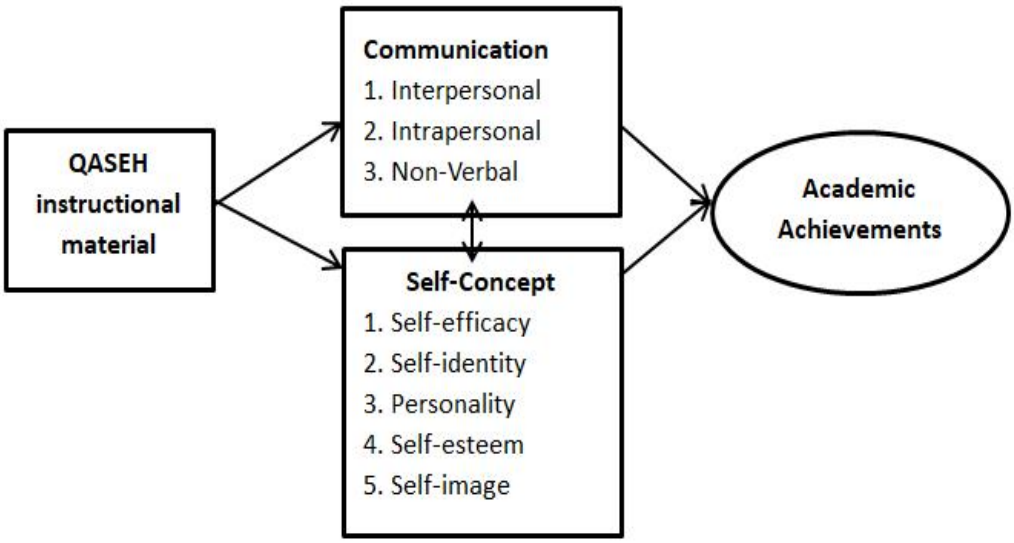

Figure 1.0 Conceptual framework adapted from Decker's (2006) Communication Theory and Kash and Borisch's (1978) Self-Concept Theory

Figure 1 shows an integrated conceptual framework that shows how communication, self-concept, QASEH instructional materials, and academic achievement are all related to each other. This is based on Decker's (2006) Communication Theory and Kash and Borisch's (1978) Self-Concept Theory. The framework says that communication is a basic psychosocial process that shapes how learners see themselves, which then affects their academic performance. Communication is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising interpersonal, intrapersonal, and non-verbal domains. Interpersonal communication helps teachers and students share meaning, which leads to clarification, feedback, and social support. All of these things have been shown to improve learning engagement and academic performance (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). According to Zimmerman (2013) and Efklides (2021), intrapersonal communication, which includes internal dialogue and metacognitive self-talk, controls motivation and learning strategies, allowing students to make sense of their academic experiences in flexible ways. Nonverbal communication also affects cognitive and emotional processes by showing immediacy, confidence, and emotional climate in educational settings. This makes it easier to understand and stay on task (Mottet et al., 2016; Mehrabian, 2017).

In this context, self-concept is seen as a psychological construct that includes self-efficacy, self-identity, personality, self-esteem, and self-image. Based on Kash and Borisch's Self-Concept Theory, the model says that learners' ideas about their skills and worth as people are always changing because of the way they talk to each other. Modern research backs up this idea by showing that learning environments that are rich in communication greatly boost academic self-efficacy and self-esteem, which in turn predict persistence, effort regulation, and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Bong et al., 2021; Marsh & Craven, 2023). Self-identity and personality traits help keep motivational orientations stable by connecting schoolwork with personal values and long-term goals, which keeps people interested (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Oyserman et al., 2022). So, self-concept is like a psychological filter that helps people understand and remember what they learn.

The framework also includes QASEH instructional material as a structured way to teach that is meant to make communication processes work in learning situations. QASEH materials are not just tools for delivering content; they also encourage conversation, reflection, and making sense of things. Instructional materials that incorporate guided interaction, reflective prompts, and visual-symbolic cues have been shown to enhance cognitive processing and self-regulatory skills (Mayer, 2020; Fiorella & Mayer, 2022). QASEH materials improve both interpersonal communication (like teacher-student conversations) and intrapersonal processing (like self-reflection) by including communicative elements in their design. This makes them more effective at helping people form their self-concept.

Ultimately, academic achievement is conceptualized as the distal outcome of this dynamic system. The model says that better communication and a stronger sense of self can both help students do better in school by

helping them understand things better, stay motivated, and bounce back from learning challenges (Richardson et al., 2012; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Research shows that students who have a strong sense of self-efficacy and a positive academic self-concept do better than students with the same cognitive ability but weaker self-beliefs (Marsh et al., 2019; Usher et al., 2019). Hence, the framework underscores that academic achievement is not solely a function of instructional exposure but is mediated through psychological meaning-making processes activated by communication and instructional design.

In short, Figure 1 shows that learning is a communicative-psychological system in which communication processes shape self-concept, instructional materials structure communicative experiences, and academic success comes from these interactions. This integrative view builds on existing theory by making self-concept the main link between teaching and performance, and by stressing that instructional materials are not just passive content carriers but active communicative agents.

Instructional materials are very important for encouraging communication, keeping students interested, and improving understanding. Empirical evidence indicates that well-designed teaching aids can enhance attention, motivation, and social-emotional development, while also improving access to curricular knowledge (Justice et al., 2023). Despite this, studies consistently show that there are differences in how well preschool special education teachers use instructional materials. This is often because the teachers weren't well-prepared, the lessons weren't well-planned, or there weren't enough resources that were appropriate for the situation (Lindsay et al., 2021).

Table 1: The QASEH Instructional materials (Element of Communcation)

'QASEH' Instructional Materials	
NO.	**ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION**
	COMMUNICATION: ENGLISH LANGUAGE
	BI 1.0 LISTENING AND SPEAKING
1	BI 1.2.1 Understand the meaning of "Yes" and "No"
2	BI 1.2.2 Respond with "Yes" and "No"
3	BI 1.2.3 Respond with single word answer
4	BI 1.3.1 Listen and respond to one-word instructions
5	BI 1.3.2 Listen and repeat the nama of objects
	BI 1.3.3 Use polite expression:
6	(i) hello
7	(ii) goodbye
8	(iii) thank you
9	(iv) welcome
10	(v) please
11	BI 1.3.4 Listen and respond to simple instruction
12	BI 1.3.5 Name three objects in the environment
13	BI 1.4.2 Listen to and enjoy simple stories

One goal of the QASEH Instructional material is to help preschoolers with learning problems improve their early communication skills by focusing on listening and speaking abilities in a methodical way. It underscores essential receptive and expressive language capabilities, including comprehension and response to "Yes" and "No," generating single-word replies, adhering to straightforward and one-word directives, and identifying items within the surroundings. The content incorporates repetition of item names, exposure to short narratives, and the use of courteous social phrases such as “hello,” “thank you,” and “please,” thereby enhancing both verbal and pragmatic communication skills. QASEH enhances children's communicative confidence and establishes a foundation for early academic success by organising learning experiences that progressively transition from comprehension to verbal expression and social language application.

So, in preschool special education classes, these problems are made worse by the fact that the kids with learning disabilities have very different backgrounds. Many available instructional tools are not specifically designed to address the interconnected domains of communication development and psychological aspects such as self-concept. Consequently, children may experience ongoing verbal failures, leading to diminished confidence, social isolation, and hindered academic progress (Gibson et al., 2022). To address these shortcomings, the QASEH teaching material was developed as a structured educational tool aimed at enhancing communication skills while simultaneously fostering a positive self-concept and facilitating early academic achievement. This study assesses the effectiveness of the QASEH teaching material in addressing the interconnected developmental domains in preschool children experiencing learning difficulties.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing emphasis on inclusive education, a significant number of preschool children with learning disabilities continue to encounter substantial communication challenges that negatively affect social engagement, self-concept formation, and academic readiness. In educational contexts, children with limited communication abilities are often perceived as passive or unengaged; however, these behaviours more accurately reflect difficulties in expressing needs, understanding directives, and participating in reciprocal interactions.

Modern preschool special education teaching methods often rely heavily on verbal instruction, with inadequate modifications to meet the communicative and psychosocial needs of students. A lot of the time, instructional materials are too general and don't do a good job of connecting with specific communication goals or ways to improve self-concept. As a result, children may struggle to engage meaningfully with educational activities, leading to frustration, diminished confidence, and reduced academic involvement (Dockrell & Marshall, 2021).

Additionally, educators often encounter structural and professional constraints when selecting and implementing appropriate instructional materials, including insufficient training opportunities, time limitations, and a scarcity of empirically validated teaching resources specifically tailored for preschool children with learning disabilities. These constraints result in disparities in instructional quality and restrict opportunities for early intervention that could mitigate long-term developmental risks.

While there is research on how teaching materials affect learning outcomes, there aren't many qualitative studies that look at communication skills, self-concept, and academic performance at the same time in preschool special education settings, especially in Southeast Asian countries. It is important to fix this problem so that evidence-based teaching methods can help children with learning problems grow in all areas.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative research methodology, employing a case study design to conduct an in-depth analysis of developmental changes in preschool children with learning difficulties following the implementation of the QASEH teaching material. The qualitative design enabled the investigation of participants' experiences, perceptions, and discernible behavioural changes in an authentic educational context.

Research Location and Participants

The study was conducted in a Special Education Integration Preschool Program in Melaka, Malaysia. The group included seven preschool kids who had trouble learning, one preschool special education teacher, one teaching assistant, and four parents. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the study objectives.

Ways to Collect Data

Three different ways were used to collect data: structured classroom observations using a communication-oriented checklist, semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and support staff, and document analysis of academic records before and after the intervention.

Analysing the Data

Data triangulation was employed to enhance credibility and reliability. We did a thematic analysis on notes from observations, transcripts of interviews, and documentary data. Cohen's Kappa was used to find out how reliable the observational data was between raters.

FINDINGS AND EXAMINATION

The findings demonstrate that the utilisation of the QASEH educational material was associated with notable improvements in the communication abilities of preschool children experiencing learning challenges. Observations in the classroom showed that students were better at speaking, making their demands clearer, taking turns, and using non-verbal cues like eye contact and gestures more consistently. The results show that structured teaching materials that include visual, tactile, and contextual elements can help young students with language-processing problems improve their communication skills (Flewitt et al., 2021; Dockrell et al., 2020).

The results indicate a substantial increase in children's communication confidence, alongside linguistic advancements. Teachers and parents often noticed that kids were more ready to start conversations, answer questions, and join in on group activities after spending a lot of time with the QASEH material. This pattern corroborates contemporary theories of self-determination and self-efficacy, which posit that perceived competence is derived from recurrent mastery experiences within supportive learning environments (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Klassen et al., 2022).

The enhancement of self-concept emerged as a crucial mediating factor linking communication skills and academic engagement. Kids were more confident and less afraid of talking to others, which made them more persistent in their learning activities and more open to getting instructions. Teachers said that students were more focused during lessons and finished more tasks, especially language-based ones. These results support theoretical perspectives that regard self-concept as a dynamic construct shaped by daily classroom interactions rather than a fixed individual characteristic.

Document analysis indicated gradual yet substantial improvements in early academic performance following the intervention. The academic improvements were significant, even though they were small, given the students' initial problems. Improvements were most noticeable in vocabulary use, understanding, and basic reading and writing skills. These results demonstrate that communication competence and self-concept are critical enablers of academic learning, supporting developmental frameworks that emphasise the integration of cognitive, communicative, and socio-emotional domains in early childhood education (Justice et al., 2023; Norbury et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of structured teaching materials, specifically the QASEH instructional material, as a viable pedagogical strategy in preschool special education settings. The findings demonstrate that communication skills, self-concept, and early academic achievement are significantly interconnected developmental domains, particularly for children experiencing learning challenges. The QASEH material dealt with communication problems by providing structured and interesting instructional support. This led to noticeable changes in behaviour and a big improvement in mental health.

The results show how important it is to intervene early and on purpose, taking into account cognitive, linguistic, and emotional aspects of learning. Improvements in communication that go beyond just using functional language, leading to more confidence, self-efficacy, and active participation in the classroom. These findings highlight the substantial influence of instructional design on the formation of children's learning identities during early childhood.

This study underscores the imperative for educators to move beyond conventional instructional methods and employ teaching materials tailored to the complex developmental profiles of learners with special educational needs. When teachers have well-organised, theory-based teaching materials, they can better create learning environments that are open to everyone and help both academic and mental growth. Future research should build on this study by employing longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to examine the durability and generalisability of the findings.

REFERENCES

1. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.
2. Berlo, D. K. (1977). Communication is a process. Annals of the International Communication Association, 1(1), 11–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1977.11923614
3. Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., & Greenhalgh, T. (2020). CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development. Phase 2. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 61(4), 451–463. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13141
4. Bong, M., Cho, C., Ahn, H. S., & Kim, H. J. (2021). Comparison of self-beliefs for predicting student motivation and achievement. Educational Psychologist, 56(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1854008
5. Dale, E. (1969). Using audiovisual tools in the classroom. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
6. Decker, B. (2006). Skills for communicating as a leader. McGraw-Hill.
7. Dockrell, J. E., & Marshall, C. R. (2021). Difficulties in measuring linguistic proficiency. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 37(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659020979596
8. Dockrell, J. E., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S., & Law, J. (2020). Profiles of language development in children with language disorders. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 61(10), 1096–1107. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13284
9. Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2020). From expectancy–value theory to situated expectancy–value theory. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61, 101859. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101859
10. Efklides, A. (2021). Metacognition and affect: What can metacognitive experiences tell us about the learning process? Educational Research Review, 34, 100401. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100401
11. Fiorella, L., & Mayer, R. E. (2022). Learning as a generative activity. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108876079
12. Flewitt, R., Messer, D., & Kucirkova, N. (2021). Early literacy in the digital age. Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 21(3), 398–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798420911430
13. Gibson, J. L., Cornell, M., & Gill, T. (2022). Play's effects on development. School Mental Health, 14(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-021-09471-9
14. Hattie, J., & Zierer, K. (2018). Visible learning insights. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690854

15. Justice, L. M., Jiang, H., & Purtell, K. M. (2023). Language and literacy development. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 62, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.08.002
16. Klassen, R. M., Usher, E. L., & Bong, M. (2022). How well do teachers do their jobs? Educational Psychology Review, 34, 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09635-1
17. Lindsay, G., Dockrell, J., & Strand, S. (2021). Patterns of special educational needs service provision. British Educational Research Journal, 47(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3662
18. Marsh, H. W., & Craven, R. G. (2023). Academic self-concept: Beyond a single dimension. Educational Psychologist, 58(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2022.2154541
19. Marsh, H. W., Martin, A. J., & Chien, C. L. (2019). Self-concept and achievement: Revisited. Journal of Educational Psychology, 111(3), 436–459. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000283
20. Mayer, R. E. (2020). Multimedia learning (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108893472
21. Mercer, S., & Dörnyei, Z. (2020). Engaging language learners in contemporary classrooms. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024563
22. Mottet, T. P., Frymier, A. B., & Beebe, S. A. (2016). Theorizing instructional communication. Communication Education, 65(3), 338–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1147026
23. Norbury, C. F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., & Pickles, A. (2022). Talking about language disorders. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 63(5), 574–584. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13485
24. OECD. (2021). Starting strong VI: Supporting meaningful interactions in early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a7cc6-en
25. Oyserman, D., Elmore, K., & Smith, G. (2022). Self, identity, and motivation. Annual Review of Psychology, 73, 355–381. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-032420-035028
26. Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance. Psychological Bulletin, 138(2), 353–387. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026838
27. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61, 101860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860
28. Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2020). Motivation and social cognitive theory. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 60, 101832. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.101832
29. UNESCO. (2020). Inclusion in education: Everyone must be able to take part. UNESCO.
30. Usher, E. L., Li, C. R., Butz, A. R., & Rojas, J. P. (2019). Sources of self-efficacy in mathematics. Journal of Educational Psychology, 111(5), 933–954. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000301