

The Perceived Impact of Teacher Expectations on Social Withdrawal Behavior in Young Children: The Mediating Role of Resilience

Xinran Fu^{1,a,*}

¹IOE, University College London, London WC1H 0AL, United Kingdom

^admvxf5@ucl.ac.uk

*Corresponding author

Abstract: Growing attention has been paid to young children's mental health and social development. Social withdrawal in early childhood can hinder children's emotional well-being, learning, and peer relationships. While teacher expectations are known to influence academic outcomes through the Pygmalion effect, their role in shaping social behavior is less explored. This study investigated whether preschool children's perceived teacher expectations predict social withdrawal and whether resilience mediates this relationship. A sample of 258 children (ages 5–6) from three kindergartens in Hangzhou, China, was assessed using multi-informant reports. Higher perceived teacher expectations were linked to lower social withdrawal ($p < .001$) and greater resilience ($p < .01$). Mediation analysis showed that resilience partially explained this link, accounting for roughly one-third of the total effect. These findings highlight the importance of fostering positive teacher expectations and building resilience to reduce social withdrawal in early childhood.

Keywords: Preschool Children, Teacher Expectations, Social Withdrawal, Psychological Resilience

1. Introduction

Social development is a key aspect of young children's overall well-being. Positive peer interactions in early childhood promote cognitive and emotional growth, while social difficulties can have lasting negative effects. Social withdrawal, characterized by consistent avoidance of peer activities, represents an internalizing problem that may go unnoticed by adults. Longitudinal studies have linked early social withdrawal to later interpersonal difficulties and increased risk of depression [1]. Withdrawn children are also more prone to peer rejection, further exacerbating internalizing symptoms [2]. Thus, identifying factors that reduce social withdrawal early is crucial for promoting healthy development and preventing long-term maladjustment [3].

Among interpersonal factors, teacher expectations may significantly shape children's behavioral adjustment. The Pygmalion effect describes how teachers' beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies influencing student outcomes [4]. Meta-analyses confirm that teacher expectations have modest yet real effects [5]. Critically, research emphasizes that it is children's perception of teacher expectations, rather than teachers' actual beliefs, that most directly influences behavior [6]. When children sense that their teachers believe in them and expect success, they may gain confidence and motivation, conversely, perceiving low expectations may undermine self-worth and contribute to withdrawal. Despite substantial research on academic outcomes, less is known about how perceived teacher expectations relate to young children's social behaviors such as withdrawal.

Psychological resilience may serve as a key mechanism linking teacher expectations to child behavior. Resilience in early childhood refers to internal characteristics that support adaptation to stress and challenges [7,8]. A supportive classroom environment with high expectations acts as an external protective factor that nurtures resilience. According to resilience theory, children who receive consistent support and encouragement from adults—especially high-expecting adults—develop greater security, self-efficacy, and coping skills [8]. Resilient children are more confident and adaptive in social contexts, while those with low resilience may withdraw due to feelings of helplessness. Thus, teacher expectations may reduce social withdrawal by fostering resilience.

While previous research has focused on teacher expectations and academic performance, less is known about their impact on social behaviors, and few studies have tested the mediating role of

resilience. To address this gap, the present study examines whether preschool children's perceived teacher expectations are linked to social withdrawal and whether resilience mediates this relationship. We hypothesize that: (1) higher perceived teacher expectations predict lower social withdrawal, (2) higher perceived expectations predict greater resilience, and (3) resilience mediates the association between perceived teacher expectations and social withdrawal. By centering on children's perceptions and an internal protective factor, this study aims to deepen understanding of teacher–child dynamics in early social adjustment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Expectations and Child Development

Teacher expectations encompass the beliefs and assumptions educators hold regarding a student's potential and behavior. These expectations can be communicated through subtle cues in daily interactions, such as feedback tone, attention given, or opportunities provided. High expectations from teachers are generally associated with more supportive interactions and challenging learning opportunities for students, whereas low expectations can result in fewer opportunities and a less encouraging climate [5]. Over time, students may internalize their teachers' beliefs—high expectations can bolster a child's self-confidence and engagement, while low expectations may contribute to self-doubt or disengagement. Research on elementary and secondary students has documented that teacher expectations can influence not only academic performance but also student motivation and self-perception. However, young children (preschoolers) have limited cognitive capacity to interpret teacher behaviors, raising the question of how early these expectation effects begin to operate. In early childhood settings, positive teacher expectations often manifest as warmth, encouragement, and a focus on each child's strengths. These behaviors might be particularly critical for children's social development. It has been noted that there can be a discrepancy between teachers' actual expectations and what children perceive those expectations to be. Thus, understanding the child's perspective is key: children's perceived teacher expectations might be the direct driver of their behavioral responses.

2.2 Social Withdrawal in Early Childhood

Social withdrawal is a behavior pattern where a child consistently avoids interactions with peers or retreats from social situations. In preschool-age children (3–6 years old), social withdrawal might be observed as playing alone frequently, refusing to join group activities, or exhibiting shyness and reticence in peer contexts. It is considered an internalizing behavior problem, as the child's distress or fear leads to inward, avoidant behavior rather than outward aggression. Developmental studies underscore that moderate shyness or solitary play can be normative, but extreme or persistent withdrawal is a risk factor for later social and emotional difficulties [3]. Withdrawn young children may miss opportunities to develop social skills and can become targets of peer neglect or victimization over time [2]. If not addressed, early social withdrawal has been linked to low self-esteem, academic problems, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression in adolescence and adulthood [1]. Multiple factors contribute to social withdrawal, including child temperament (e.g., behavioral inhibition), family influences, and peer experiences. Teacher-related factors may also influence withdrawal: for instance, a teacher who is sensitive and actively facilitates a shy child's peer interactions may help reduce withdrawal, whereas a teacher who inadvertently reinforces isolation (by not engaging the child or by expressing frustration) might worsen it. The classroom environment and teacher practices are thus important considerations in the development or mitigation of social withdrawal behaviors in early childhood.

2.3 Resilience in Young Children

Psychological resilience refers to the capacity to withstand and rebound from challenges or adversity. In young children, resilience is reflected in behaviors like trying again after failure, coping with changes, regulating emotions, and seeking help when needed. Researchers view resilience not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process influenced by both individual characteristics (e.g., temperament, problem-solving skills) and environmental supports [7,9]. Protective factors that foster resilience in early childhood include strong attachments to caregivers, supportive relationships with teachers, opportunities for autonomy, and the experience of success in tasks. Resilient children are often more socially competent—they can navigate peer interactions better because they cope with setbacks (like

rejection or conflict) in adaptive ways. Conversely, children low in resilience might respond to social challenges by withdrawing or giving up, due to feelings of helplessness or low confidence. Tools such as the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) have been developed to evaluate preschoolers' resilience, encompassing domains like initiative, self-regulation, and attachment. High resilience in these domains has been associated with better behavioral adjustment and fewer internalizing problems. Importantly, resilience can be strengthened through interventions and supportive relationships. Early childhood educators who provide encouragement, model coping strategies, and build on children's strengths can increase children's resilience [8]. Thus, resilience may serve as a buffer against social withdrawal: a child with greater resilience might be less likely to retreat socially when faced with difficulties, instead using coping skills to continue engaging with peers.

2.4 Interrelationships among Teacher Expectations, Resilience, and Social Withdrawal

The influence of teacher expectations on children's behavior is a multifaceted process that can be understood through a developmental-ecological perspective. High teacher expectations are often translated into daily interactions that make children feel valued, respected, and competent—such as assigning responsibilities, praising effort, and providing necessary support. When children perceive these positive expectations, they experience the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, including competence, belongingness, and a sense of self-worth. Over time, this positive feedback loop fosters the development of psychological resilience, characterized by enhanced self-efficacy ("My teacher believes I can do it, so I can") and perseverance in the face of challenges.

According to the Dynamic Model of Resilience proposed by the California Educational Research Institute, external protective factors—such as warm interpersonal relationships, high expectations, and active participation—play a critical role in cultivating children's internal resilience by meeting their fundamental needs for love, respect, security, and a sense of achievement [9]. As resilience strengthens, children become better equipped to navigate social interactions and cope with adversity, thereby reducing tendencies toward social withdrawal. Within this framework, perceived teacher expectations may influence social withdrawal indirectly by enhancing resilience. Simultaneously, a direct pathway may also exist: teachers who consistently communicate high expectations actively encourage children's participation and model inclusive behaviors, thus directly mitigating withdrawal tendencies.

Emerging empirical evidence supports these interrelationships. Research has found that when children perceive strong teacher support and belief in their abilities, they experience higher peer acceptance and exhibit fewer socially withdrawn behaviors [10]. David's study further emphasized that resilient children—those who internalize positive expectations—demonstrate greater self-awareness, stronger initiative when facing challenges, and better adaptability in peer interactions [11]. Moreover, perceived high teacher expectations have been associated with enhanced peer interactions, which independently contribute to the reduction of withdrawal behaviors. Additional studies have shown that teacher support is positively correlated with higher levels of initiative and self-regulation in preschool children, both of which are critical components of resilience that promote social engagement [12]. Furthermore, meta-analytic findings suggest that children with lower resilience levels tend to exhibit more pronounced social withdrawal, highlighting resilience as a protective factor against withdrawal behaviors [13].

Despite these findings, prior research has rarely examined perceived teacher expectations, psychological resilience, and social withdrawal behavior within a single mediational framework. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate whether psychological resilience mediates the relationship between children's perceived teacher expectations and their social withdrawal behavior. Specifically, we propose a conceptual model in which children's perceived teacher expectations enhance psychological resilience, which in turn reduces tendencies toward social withdrawal, while also considering the potential direct effect of teacher expectations on withdrawal behavior. The following sections describe the methodology used to test this model and present the results obtained.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Participants were 258 preschool children (133 boys, 125 girls) aged 5–6 years old (upper preschool age). They were recruited from three first-tier kindergartens (high-quality preschools) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. The sample was obtained through random selection of children across

several classes in these schools, with parental consent secured for each child. The majority of children were of Han Chinese ethnicity and from urban middle-class families, reflecting the demographics of the kindergartens. No specific inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied aside from age (all children were in their final year of preschool, preparing to enter primary school). The sample size of 258 was determined to be adequate for detecting medium-sized effects in regression-based mediation analyses with power > .80.

3.2 Instruments

Perceived Teacher Expectations. Children's perception of their teacher's expectations was assessed via an interview-based questionnaire adapted from an existing student-perceived teacher expectation scale [14]. To suit 5–6-year-olds, the language was simplified, and responses were recorded on a 3-point Likert-type scale (1 = no, 2 = sometimes, 3 = yes). The 15-item scale measured expectations across behavior, ability, and emotional support. Sample items included “My teacher thinks I can do things well” and “My teacher expects me to help other children.” A trained researcher conducted the assessment one-on-one. Internal consistency in this study was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

Social Withdrawal Behavior. Teachers rated children's social withdrawal using the withdrawal subscale of the Preschool Social Behavior Questionnaire, adapted from Ye et al. [15]. The 12 items assessed three facets—reticent behavior, solitary-passive play, and solitary-active withdrawal—on a 4-point scale (0–3). Example items included “Prefers to play alone” and “Rarely initiates interaction.” Higher scores indicated stronger withdrawal tendencies. Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha \approx .80$), and teachers rated behaviors based on recent classroom observations.

Resilience. Parents completed the DECA-P2 (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers, Second Edition), a standardized 38-item measure assessing protective factors in preschoolers. This study focused on the three positive subscales: Initiative, Self-regulation, and Attachment/Relationships, rated on a 5-point frequency scale. Sample items included “Handles frustration well” and “Shows affection for familiar adults.” The overall resilience score was used, with higher scores reflecting stronger resilience. The Chinese version of DECA-P2 has demonstrated good validity and reliability, internal consistency in this sample was strong ($\alpha \approx .90$) [16].

3.3 Procedure

Data collection adhered to ethical guidelines approved by the university's research ethics committee and participating school leaders. Written informed consent was obtained from parents, and teachers provided verbal agreement to participate. Assessments were conducted during the spring semester. Trained graduate student researchers visited classrooms to interview children individually in a quiet and familiar setting. The perceived teacher expectations scale was administered verbally, using visual aids (e.g., faces or symbols) to support understanding of the three-point response format. Each interview lasted 10–15 minutes. Teachers completed the social withdrawal questionnaire for each participating child and returned forms anonymously in sealed envelopes. Parents received the DECA-P2 resilience scale either during drop-off/pick-up or through the school communication app and returned the completed forms within one week.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

Group	Number of Children	Percentage (%)
5.0-5.5 years	83	32.2%
5.5-6.0 years	132	51.2%
6.0-6.5 years	43	16.7%
Boys	133	51%
Girls	125	48.4%

The final sample comprised 258 preschool children (133 boys and 125 girls), aged between 5.0 and 6.5 years. As shown in Table 1, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with boys accounting for 51.6% of the sample and girls comprising 48.4%. Regarding age, 32.2% of children were between

5.0 and 5.5 years old, 51.2% were between 5.5 and 6.0 years old, and 16.7% were between 6.0 and 6.5 years old. The majority of participants (over half) were clustered in the 5.5 to 6.0 age range, which is typical for children in the final year of preschool in China.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Children in the sample generally perceived high teacher expectations ($M \approx 2.5$, $SD \approx 0.3$ on a 0–3 scale). The mean score for social withdrawal was moderate ($M \approx 1.0$, $SD \approx 0.5$). Approximately 26.7% of children exceeded the threshold score for significant social withdrawal tendencies (>20 points), while the majority (73.3%) remained below the threshold. Figure 1 visualizes the detection rate of social withdrawal:

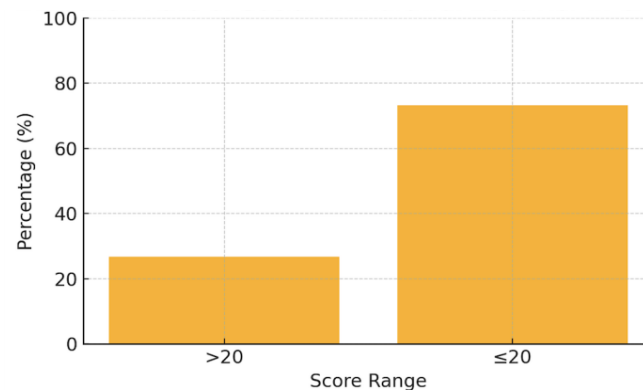


Figure 1: Detection Rate of Social Withdrawal Behavior in Children.

Regarding psychological resilience, most children demonstrated strong resilience capacities. As shown in Figure 2, 96.5% scored at the high resilience level (≥ 60 points), while only 3.5% fell into the moderate range (40–60 points), and none into the low range (<40 points).

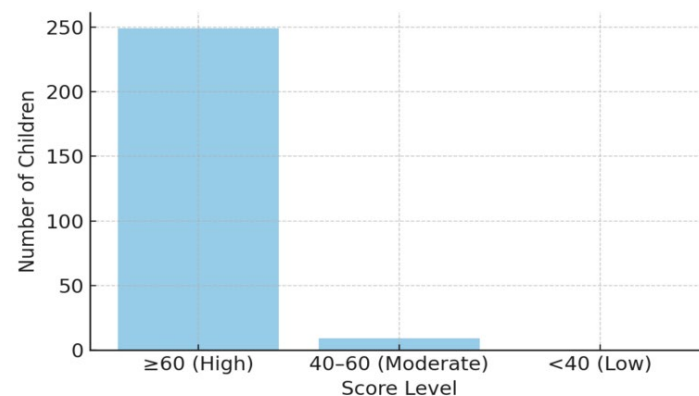


Figure 2: Distribution of Psychological Resilience Scores.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between the core variables:

- Perceived teacher expectations were negatively correlated with social withdrawal ($r = -0.37$, $p < .001$).
- Perceived teacher expectations were positively correlated with resilience ($r = +0.28$, $p < .01$).
- Resilience was negatively correlated with social withdrawal ($r = -0.30$, $p < .001$).

These results provide initial support for the hypothesized mediation model.

4.3 Predicting Social Withdrawal from Teacher Expectations and Resilience

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to further examine the predictors of social withdrawal.

In Step 1, perceived teacher expectations alone significantly predicted social withdrawal behavior,

explaining 4.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.044$, $F(1,256) = 11.37$, $p = .001$). Higher perceived teacher expectations were associated with lower levels of social withdrawal ($\beta = -0.374$, $p < .001$).

In Step 2, resilience was added as a second predictor. The model improved significantly ($R^2 = 0.107$, $F(2,255) = 15.24$, $p < .001$), explaining 10.7% of the variance.

Both predictors remained significant:

- Perceived teacher expectations: $\beta = -0.136$, $t = -2.21$, $p = .028$
- Resilience: $\beta = -0.262$, $t = -4.24$, $p < .001$

Figure 3 presents the standardized beta coefficients, illustrating that resilience was a stronger predictor of social withdrawal compared to teacher expectations.

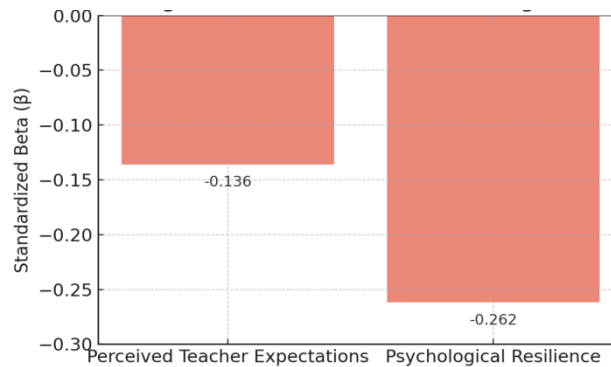


Figure 3: Standardized Regression Coefficients Predicting Social Withdrawal.

4.4 Mediation Analysis of Resilience

To formally test the mediating role of resilience, we conducted a mediation analysis with perceived teacher expectations as the independent variable (X), children's social withdrawal as the dependent variable (Y), and resilience as the mediator (M). As shown in Figure 4:

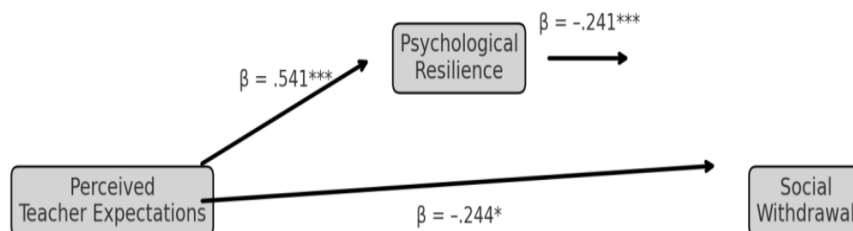


Figure 4: Mediation Model of Resilience.

The path coefficients were as follows:

- Path a: Perceived teacher expectations significantly predicted resilience ($B = 0.541$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$).
- Path b: Resilience significantly predicted lower social withdrawal ($B = -0.241$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$).
- Direct effect (c'): Perceived teacher expectations still significantly predicted lower social withdrawal after controlling for resilience ($B = -0.244$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .028$).

The indirect effect of perceived teacher expectations on social withdrawal through resilience was significant ($B_{\text{indirect}} = -0.13$, 95% CI $[-0.24, -0.05]$), confirming partial mediation.

- Approximately 34.8% of the total effect was explained by the mediation pathway via resilience.
- The remaining 65.2% was accounted for by the direct effect of teacher expectations on social withdrawal.

Additionally, exploratory analysis showed that among resilience subdimensions, self-regulation was

the most influential mediator, suggesting that children's emotional control and coping abilities are critical in mitigating social withdrawal under the influence of positive teacher expectations.

5. Discussion

5.1 *Perceived teacher expectations and social withdrawal*

Consistent with our first hypothesis, children who perceived higher expectations from their teacher were less likely to exhibit social withdrawal behaviors. This result aligns with the general notion of the Pygmalion effect [4], extending it to the social domain of preschool children. When a teacher is believed to hold high expectations, they likely convey more positive feedback and encouragement to the child. The child, in turn, feels valued and confident, which can motivate them to engage more with peers rather than retreat. Our finding is in line with previous research in older students showing that supportive teacher attitudes can reduce internalizing problems. For instance, one experimental study found that when teachers provided encouraging, strength-focused feedback to shy children, those children's socially withdrawn behaviors diminished over time [17]. Similarly, other researchers have observed that children's perception of teacher support and high expectations is linked to greater peer acceptance and social participation [10]. The present study adds to these findings by highlighting that even at ages 5–6, children's own perception of their teacher's belief in them is pivotal for their social behavior. It underscores the importance of teachers not only having high expectations, but also successfully communicating those expectations in ways young children can recognize and feel. If a teacher, for example, consistently overlooks a quiet child, that child may interpret it as low expectation or lack of interest, potentially reinforcing the child's withdrawal. On the other hand, a teacher who gently encourages a quiet child—showing that they expect the child can participate and succeed socially—may help the child come out of their shell. Our evidence of a direct effect (even after accounting for resilience) suggests that some aspects of teacher expectations influence withdrawal through immediate social processes, such as the teacher-child interaction quality or changes in peer perceptions facilitated by the teacher's treatment of the child.

Teacher expectations and resilience: In line with our second hypothesis, perceived teacher expectations were positively associated with children's resilience. This finding supports theoretical models which posit that high expectations from adults serve as external assets that foster a child's internal strengths. A teacher who expects the best of each child is likely to provide a nurturing yet challenging environment: they may give the child opportunities to solve problems independently (promoting initiative), help the child learn from mistakes (promoting self-regulation and coping), and express belief in the child's worth (promoting secure attachment and self-esteem). These experiences can directly enhance a child's resilience. Our results mirror those of previous studies that have found links between teacher support and resilience in children facing adversity [8]. They also dovetail with research on differential teacher treatment, which shows that children are keenly aware of how teachers may treat some students more favorably than others. If a child perceives that the teacher has lower expectations for them compared to classmates, it could be discouraging and erode the child's confidence. Conversely, when children feel trusted and supported equally, they are more likely to develop a robust sense of self-efficacy. In the context of our study, children with high perceived teacher expectations might interpret challenges as opportunities set by the teacher because “she knows I can do it,” thereby exercising and building resilience. It is noteworthy that the self-regulation aspect of resilience appeared particularly influenced by teacher expectations in our data. This suggests that teachers who believe in a child may help that child learn to manage emotions and behaviors better—perhaps by modeling calm problem-solving, encouraging persistence, and creating a secure environment where the child feels safe to try and fail. These are all critical components of resilience.

5.2 *Mediating role of resilience*

The mediation analysis confirmed our third hypothesis: resilience partly explains how perceived teacher expectations lead to reduced social withdrawal. About one-third of the total effect of teacher expectations on withdrawal was mediated by the child's resilience. This partial mediation indicates a meaningful pathway: high perceived expectations → higher resilience → lower withdrawal. Practically, this means that part of why children who sense high expectations from their teacher are less withdrawn is because those children have become more resilient (confident, regulated, socially connected) under the influence of their teacher's support. With greater resilience, they handle social challenges (like joining a group play or dealing with an argument) more proactively rather than retreating. This

mediated pathway resonates with developmental theories emphasizing indirect effects, teachers influence child outcomes not only by immediate behavior changes but also by shaping children's coping resources [7].

At the same time, the fact that a direct effect of teacher expectations on withdrawal remained significant suggests other factors are also at play. One possible factor is peer dynamics: A teacher who holds high expectations for a withdrawn child might actively integrate that child into group activities, improving the child's peer acceptance. Increased peer acceptance itself can reduce withdrawal independently of the child's internal resilience [18]. Another factor could be changes in the child's self-concept or social self-efficacy that are not fully captured by the resilience measure. Future research could explore additional mediators (e.g., the child's self-esteem or the teacher-child relationship quality) and moderators (e.g., child temperament or gender) to paint a more complete picture of this process.

5.3 Implications for practice

Our findings carry several important implications for early childhood education. First, they highlight the powerful role of teachers' beliefs and attitudes in shaping children's social adjustment. Early childhood teachers should be aware that even young children are perceptive to their expectations. Professional development programs could emphasize strategies for teachers to communicate positive expectations to all children, especially those who are shy or at risk of withdrawal. Such strategies might include giving each child leadership roles, explicitly praising effort and social participation, and checking any unintentional biases (for instance, ensuring that quiet children receive as much positive attention and opportunity as more outgoing children). By cultivating a classroom atmosphere of high expectations and support, teachers may prevent some children from "falling through the cracks" socially.

Second, the mediating role of resilience suggests that interventions aimed at boosting children's resilience could be effective in reducing social withdrawal. Early educators and school psychologists can implement social-emotional learning activities that build skills like emotion regulation, problem-solving, and confidence in peer interactions (for example, role-playing social scenarios, guided play that encourages teamwork, and coping skills stories). Strengthening these abilities gives children tools to handle social fears or setbacks instead of withdrawing. Our results imply that when such resilience-building efforts are coupled with positive teacher expectations, they reinforce each other. A child who gains coping skills will benefit more if their teacher also trusts them to use those skills, and vice versa.

5.4 Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research design was cross-sectional, which limits our ability to draw causal conclusions. While the mediation model is based on theoretical temporality (teacher expectation perceptions likely influence resilience and behavior, not the reverse), we cannot definitively say that teacher expectations caused changes in withdrawal or resilience. It is possible, for instance, that children who are less withdrawn elicit higher teacher expectations (teachers might naturally expect more from engaged children). Longitudinal studies or experimental designs (e.g., interventions that manipulate teacher expectation communication) are needed to confirm the causal directions of these effects.

Second, all data were collected within a single cultural context (urban Chinese kindergartens). Cultural values could shape both teacher expectation styles and children's responses, for example, Chinese teachers might emphasize group harmony and could have different expressions of expectation compared to teachers in other countries. Thus, generalizability to other cultural or educational settings should be made with caution. Future research could examine if these findings hold in different contexts or if cultural factors moderate the relationships.

Third, measuring perceived teacher expectations in 5–6-year-old children is challenging. We relied on a child interview and simplified questionnaire, but young children's responses might be influenced by their verbal abilities or desire to please the interviewer. We attempted to mitigate this through careful administration, yet some measurement error is likely. Including multiple indicators (such as observations of teacher behavior or asking teachers about how they think they convey expectations) could strengthen the assessment of the expectation climate. Fourth, while we used multiple informants for different variables (child, teacher, parent), the social withdrawal measure was teacher-reported,

which might introduce bias. A teacher who has particularly high or low expectations of a child might also perceive that child's behavior in a biased way. Ideally, observational measures of child behavior or peer reports could complement teacher ratings to avoid shared rater bias between teacher expectation (perceived via child report) and withdrawal (teacher report). Lastly, we focused on resilience as a single mediator. There are likely other mediating mechanisms (as discussed) and potentially moderating variables (e.g., perhaps the effect of teacher expectations is stronger for children who are initially very shy or for boys vs. girls). Future studies could explore a more complex model including these aspects.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the present study provides evidence that how young children perceive their teacher's expectations has significant implications for their social behavior. When children feel that their teachers believe in their capabilities and expect good outcomes for them, these children tend to be more resilient and less socially withdrawn. Moreover, children's resilience—reflecting their confidence, coping skills, and emotional security—emerges as an important mechanism linking positive teacher expectations to reduced withdrawal. These findings underscore that teacher-child interactions in early childhood education are not just about imparting academic knowledge or managing classroom behavior, they also shape the subtle dynamics of a child's social and emotional development. By maintaining high (and warm) expectations for every child and fostering protective factors like resilience, educators can help even the quiet and hesitant children to engage more fully with their peers and the learning environment. Reducing social withdrawal in the early years is likely to yield benefits that carry forward, including better peer relationships, greater learning engagement, and lower risk of later mental health difficulties. Ultimately, this research highlights the profound impact that supportive teacher beliefs and nurturing classroom environments can have on setting children on a positive developmental trajectory.

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