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The Silent Capital of the Past: Reflections of Teachers' Positive Childhood Experiences on Informal Communication: A Correlational Study of Evidence from Teachers in Turkey

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Abstract

The way individuals communicate with others often bears the imprint of the relational experiences shaped during childhood. Trust, supportive interactions, and intimacy constitute important foundations of communication patterns in adulthood. This study aimed to examine the relationship between teachers' positive childhood experiences and their levels of informal communication. Specifically, the study investigated whether teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels differed according to demographic variables, including gender, professional seniority, place of childhood residence, and family type. It also examined the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels and investigated whether positive childhood experiences predicted teachers' informal communication levels. A quantitative approach and correlational survey design were employed. The study population consisted of teachers working in the field of child development in Istanbul during the 2025–2026 academic year. The sample comprised 261 teachers working in public and private schools in Istanbul. Data were collected using a Personal Information Form (PIF), the Informal Communication Scale (ICS), and the Positive Childhood Experiences Scale (PCES). The findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' positive childhood experiences and their levels of informal communication. Furthermore, positive childhood experiences significantly predicted teachers' informal communication levels, explaining 26% of the variance ($R^2 = .26$, $\beta = .51$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that teachers' communication practices are not solely determined by professional competencies but are also influenced by their early life experiences, which may shape their patterns of interaction within educational settings. By quantitatively examining the association between positive childhood experiences and informal communication in an educational context, this study contributes to addressing an underexplored area in the literature. The findings highlight the importance of integrating socio-emotional development and childhood experiences into teacher education programs and emphasizing empathy, reflective practice, and relational communication in professional development activities. School administrators may also consider creating structured opportunities for informal peer interaction, such as collaborative planning time and staff social activities, to strengthen relational and supportive communication among teachers.

Keywords: Child development, teacher, positive childhood, informal communication, early childhood education

Introduction

Early childhood constitutes a critical developmental stage where cognitive, social, and emotional foundations are rapidly formed. The relationships children establish during this period profoundly influence their behavioral patterns and communication styles in adulthood [15, 38 ,39]. Teachers in early childhood education directly shape children's developmental trajectories through the pedagogical environment and emotional climate they provide; their communication practices thus serve as both instructional tools and developmental regulators. Shonkoff and Phillips [39] define this period as a sensitive stage of maximal brain plasticity. Piaget's cognitive development theory characterizes the preschool period as the pre-operational stage, emphasizing that children make

sense of their environment primarily through social cues and emotional feedback from adults [31].

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory further underscores that a child's cognitive development progresses through social interaction and adult guidance, with the zone of proximal development suggesting that a child's learning potential can be expanded through supportive communication from the teacher [45]. This framework demonstrates that the teacher's communication style, emotional attitude, and classroom language fundamentally determine the quality of the child's learning process. At this juncture, teachers' informal communication practices gain particular significance: occurring outside the classroom, in daily interactions and spontaneous reactions, such communication becomes a fundamental channel for secure attachment, emotional acceptance, and social learning [20]. These forms of communication, however, are believed to be closely related to teachers' personal backgrounds and socio-emotional patterns carried from their childhood experiences, rather than being solely attributable to professional training. Noddings [27] care ethics approach similarly emphasizes that a teacher's relational sensitivity is nourished by their individual life experiences, making positive childhood experiences a "silent capital" of the informal communication practices they exhibit in their professional lives.

The relationship between childhood experiences and adult communication can be further understood through complementary theoretical frameworks. Attachment-based perspectives emphasize that early interactions with caregivers shape internal working models of trust, emotional security, and relational expectations [8, 9, 37], which may later manifest in individuals' communication styles and professional relationship-building. Social learning theory posits that communication behaviors are acquired through observation and modeling [7], suggesting that childhood communication patterns may be internalized and reproduced in later professional interactions. Additionally, ecological systems theory highlights that development occurs within the interaction of multiple environmental systems family, school, and social context all of which contribute to socio-emotional competencies and communication skills [10]. Together, these frameworks suggest that teachers' communication practices are not solely determined by professional training but are also influenced by developmental backgrounds and lifelong psychosocial accumulations.

In the teaching profession specifically, positive childhood experiences may contribute to a more sincere, supportive, and collaborative style in informal classroom and school communication, enabling teachers to build stronger relationships with both students and colleagues [20]. Informal communication defined as a non-official form of communication affecting collaboration, belonging, empathy, and organizational efficiency [1, 42] plays a critical role in teachers' interactions. This communication includes not only structured classroom conversations but also natural, spontaneous, and sincere interactions [18, 32, 33]. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to examine the impact of positive childhood experiences on teachers' informal communication skills in their professional lives.

Despite the theoretical importance of early childhood experiences in shaping adult communication, a critical examination of the existing literature reveals several research gaps. The theoretical gap lies in the limited understanding of how positive childhood experiences specifically influence informal communication behaviors; the empirical gap is evident in the scarcity of studies that directly examine the relationship between these two constructs; the methodological gap stems from previous research focusing primarily on organizational or communication outcomes rather than developmental antecedents using correlational approaches; and the contextual gap is highlighted by the lack of evidence from child development teachers in the Turkish educational setting. This study addresses these gaps by investigating how positive childhood experiences predict informal communication among teachers, thereby contributing both theoretically and empirically to the field. In line with the theoretical framework and literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels differ significantly according to demographic variables.

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between teachers' positive childhood experiences and their informal communication levels.

H3: Teachers' positive childhood experiences significantly predict their informal communication levels.

Building on the theoretical integration outlined above, the present study proposes a conceptual model in which positive childhood experiences serve

as the primary predictor of teachers' informal communication levels. Attachment theory provides the foundational mechanism: early secure attachment fosters internal working models of trust and relational safety, which in turn facilitate spontaneous, authentic, and empathetic communication. Social learning theory complements this by explaining how observed communication behaviors in childhood are internalized and reproduced in professional settings. Socio-cultural theory emphasizes the mediating role of social context and collaborative interaction, while cognitive development theory accounts for the individual's capacity for perspective-taking and reflective communication. The proposed model links these theoretical perspectives to the study variables and guides the analytical framework employed in the present research.

Literature review

Research on informal communication has evolved significantly over the past decade, yet critical synthesis reveals both conceptual advances and persistent gaps. While early studies treated informal communication primarily as a complement to formal channels [1, 42], recent work has reconceptualized it as a driver of social cohesion, trust, and organizational belonging [13]. However, a notable tension exists in the literature: although informal communication has been consistently linked to cooperation and emotional bonding at the organizational level, the mechanisms through which it emerges in specific professional contexts remain undertheorized. For instance, M. Üstün [44] and Hoşgörür [19] emphasized the increasing centrality of informal dynamics in social settings, yet their analyses remained largely descriptive, offering limited insight into the developmental antecedents that may shape such communication patterns. Critically, the shift from formal to informal communication paradigms in the literature has outpaced empirical investigation; while scholars agree on the social benefits of informal communication, the extent to which these behaviors are rooted in early developmental experiences remains underexplored, revealing a significant gap in linking developmental antecedents to communication outcomes.

Within educational settings, the literature presents a similarly fragmented picture. On one hand, studies consistently demonstrate that natural and spontaneous teacher/student interactions strengthen classroom climate and support socio-emotional development [13, 18, 20, 32, 34], and that informal peer communication among teachers enhances professional collaboration and organizational commitment [5, 44]. On the other hand, the existing research overwhelmingly focuses on the outcomes of informal communication such as student engagement or teacher motivation while largely neglecting its developmental origins. Korthagen [23] and Schonert-Reichl [36] argued that positive childhood experiences influence the quality of social relationships and communication skills in adulthood [17], yet no study has directly tested this proposition among teachers using correlational methods. This discrepancy between theoretical claims and empirical evidence represents a critical gap. Moreover, the reliance on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures across the literature [4, 5, 50] limits causal inference, and few studies have employed multivariate models that control for confounding variables such as organizational climate or teacher self-efficacy. Notably, while studies by Karalı [21] and Yavuz [49] examined positive childhood experiences in Turkish samples [30,43,48], they did not link these experiences to professional communication behaviors. Similarly, research on teachers' informal communication [4, 50] has not considered the developmental antecedents of such behaviors. This mutual neglect between two research streams developmental antecedents and professional communication constitutes the primary gap this study addresses. Addressing these methodological limitations and integrating these disparate literatures will strengthen the evidence base linking developmental experiences to professional communication behaviors.

Methods

Research model

This research was conducted to examine the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels of child development teachers, and a correlational survey model was used within the scope of a quantitative research approach. The correlational survey model is a research design that aims to reveal the existence, direction, and level of the relationship between two or more variables [22]. In this model, the aim is to understand the covariation characteristics of the variables and to statistically determine the relationships between them.

Study group

The study group of the research consists of teachers working in the field of child development in Istanbul during the 2025-2026 academic year. In determining the study group, convenience and snowball sampling techniques from non-probability sampling methods were preferred. With these methods, teachers who were accessible and participated voluntarily were included in the research [41]. Convenience sampling was chosen due to the accessibility of teachers in Istanbul and time constraints, while snowball sampling allowed the inclusion of participants who might otherwise be difficult to reach through formal channels. Although these non-probability methods limit generalizability, they are appropriate for exploratory correlational research in under-studied populations [41]. In this context, the data collection process was carried out face-to-face and online (via Google Forms) with a total of 261 teachers. Before the data collection process, the educational institutions where the scales would be administered were determined, and the necessary official permissions were obtained in writing from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the İstanbul Gelişim University Ethics Committee (Approval No: 2024-19-78, Date: 29/11/2024).

Data collection tools

The research used three part forms answered by the teachers. The first part of the form is a "Personal Information Form" designed to reveal the demographic characteristics of the teachers. The second part uses the "Informal Communication Scale" to measure teachers' perceptions of the level of informal communication in the schools where they work; and the third part uses the "Positive Childhood Experiences Scale" to determine the teachers' levels of positive childhood experiences.

Personal information form

A ten-item personal information form was developed (adopted) by the researcher to obtain information about the demographic characteristics of the teachers and to determine whether the relationships examined in the research differed according to demographic variables.

Informal Communication Scale

Developed by Uğurlu [42] and adapted for use in this study to reveal the levels of informal communication among teachers in schools and to identify the areas where these levels are concentrated. The scale consists of 24 items in total, 23 of which are positive and 1 (item 8) is negative, and this item is designed to be reverse scored. The scale consists of four sub dimensions: Friendship (items 1–8), Enjoyment (items 9–13), Influence (items 14–17), and Information (items 18–24). Sample items include: "I share my personal feelings with my colleagues at school" (Friendship), "I have fun with my colleagues during breaks" (Enjoyment), "My opinions are valued by my colleagues" (Influence), and "I learn about school events through informal conversations" (Information). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .89, and the construct validity of the scale was examined with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests. As a result of the analyses, the Bartlett Sphericity Test was found to be significant at the level of 2683.398 ($p<0.05$), and the KMO value was .86.

Positive Childhood Experiences Scale

Developed by Doğan and Aydın [14] to measure positive childhood experiences, the scale consists of 22 items and a single dimension. The scale, which does not contain any reverse coded items, asked participants to answer the items considering their experiences before the age of 11. Sample items include: "*I felt safe and protected at home during my childhood*" and "*There was at least one adult who made me feel important and valued.*" The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.96. To determine the suitability of the data for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests were applied. The results of these tests showed a KMO value of 0.971 and a Bartlett's value of 11186.523; $p<0.000$.

Data analysis

In this study, data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program. First, frequency and percentage values of teachers' personal information were calculated. Parametric analysis methods were preferred in line with the research objectives. In this context, teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels were examined according to demographic variables; independent groups t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied to determine the normal distribution of the data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication level; and simple linear regression analysis was used to examine the effect of positive childhood experiences on informal communication level. Before conducting parametric analyses, statistical assumptions were examined. Normality was assessed through skewness

and kurtosis values, with all variables falling within acceptable ranges (skewness < 2, kurtosis < 7) [12]. Multicollinearity was evaluated via variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values; all VIF values were below 10 and tolerance values exceeded .20, indicating no multicollinearity concern [40]. The assumption of homoscedasticity was verified through visual inspection of standardized residual plots, and the Durbin-Watson statistic confirmed the absence of autocorrelation. These results justified the use of parametric tests.

Results

This section presents the results of the analysis of data obtained from the personal information form, positive childhood experiences scale, and informal communication scale administered to the teachers participating in the study. The proportional and numerical distributions of the demographic information of the teachers participating in the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage analysis results according to the demographic information of the teachers*

Variable	Group	f	%
Gender	Female	196	75.1
	Male	65	24.9
Teaching Experience	5 years or less	200	76.6
	6–10 years	45	17.2
	11–15 years	16	6.1
Place Where Childhood Was Spent	Town	4	1.5
	Village	28	10.7
	District	41	15.7
	City	63	24.1
	Metropolitan city	125	47.9
Family Type in Childhood	Nuclear family	186	71.3
	Extended family	*75*	*28.7*
Total		*261*	*100*

According to Table 1, when the distribution of teachers according to their demographic characteristics is examined, it is seen that the study group consists mainly of female teachers (75.1%), teachers with 5 years or less of seniority (76.6%), teachers who grew up in a metropolitan area (47.9%), and teachers who grew up in a nuclear family (71.3%).

An independent groups t-test was used to determine the difference in positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels of teachers according to gender, and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Independent groups t-test results of teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels according to gender*

Scale	N	M	SD	Shx	t	df	p
Positive Childhood Experiences	196	3.95	.60	.043	2.67	259	.008
	65	3.70	.75	.093			
Informal Communication	196	3.96	.46	.033	3.23	259	.001
	65	3.73	.58	.072			

Female-196, Male-65, SD: standard deviation; Shx: standard error; df: degrees of freedom; p: significance level; d: Cohen's d effect size. Note: All p-values reported to three decimal places where p < .001; otherwise two decimal places. Cohen's d effect sizes: Positive Childhood Experiences (d = 0.39), Informal Communication (d = 0.47).

According to Table 2, when teachers' scores were compared by gender, female teachers' scores were found to be significantly higher than male teachers' scores in both positive childhood experiences and informal communication [Positive Childhood Experiences (Total): (t259=2.67; p = .008); Informal Communication (Total): (t259=3.23; p = .001)]. To examine whether teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels differed according to the type of family they lived in during childhood, an independent groups t-test was applied, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Independent groups t-test results of teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels according to family type*

Scale	Family Type	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Positive Childhood Experiences	Nuclear family	186	3.96	.62	2.61	259	.010
	Extended family	75	3.65	.70			
Informal Communication	Nuclear family	186	3.95	.49	1.042	259	.299
	Extended family	75	3.73	.56			

According to Table 3, when teachers' scores were compared according to family types, a significant difference was found in positive childhood experiences in favor of nuclear family, while no significant difference was found in informal communication levels. [Positive Childhood Experiences (Total): (t259=2.61; p = .010); Informal Communication (Total): (t259=1.042; p = .299)]. A

one way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels differed according to their total seniority at the school where they worked. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *ANOVA results of teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels according to seniority*

Scale	Experience	N	M	SD	F	p	η^2
Positive Childhood Experiences	5 and under	200	3.86	.66	1.235	.292	.010
	6/10 years	45	3.89	.59			
	11/15 years	16	3.75	.79			
Informal Communication	5 and under	200	3.91	.50	2.218	.111	.017
	6/10 years	45	3.88	.52			
	11/15 years	16	3.88	.50			

According to Table 4, the differences between groups in the total score of positive childhood experiences were not statistically significant [F(2,258)=1.235, p > .005]. Similarly, there was no significant difference between groups in the total score of informal communication [F(2,258)=2.218, p > .005]. These findings reveal that there is no significant change in the levels of positive childhood experiences and informal communication depending on the seniority of the teachers. A one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine the differences in the levels of positive childhood experiences and informal communication of the teachers according to the place where they lived in childhood, and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *ANOVA results of teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels according to the place where they lived in childhood*

Scale	Place	N	M	SD	F	p	η^2
Positive Childhood Experiences	Town/Village	32	3.54	.78	1.94	.103	.030
	District	41	3.75	.60			
	City	63	3.89	.65			
	Metropolitan	125	4.01	.58			
Informal Communication	Town/Village	32	3.72	.56	1.70	.150	.026
	District	41	3.81	.49			
	City	63	3.93	.49			
	Metropolitan	125	4.01	.46			

Table 5 shows the results of this analysis. Accordingly, when comparing the total scores of teachers' positive childhood experiences according to their place of residence, no significant difference was found [F(4,256)=1.94, p > .005]. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the total scores of informal communication according to the place of childhood [F(4,256)=1.70, p > .05]. The main objective of the research was to examine the relationship between teachers' positive childhood experiences and their informal communication. The relationship between positive childhood experiences and the level of informal communication was examined using Pearson correlation analysis, while the effect of positive childhood experiences on the level of informal communication was examined using simple linear regression analysis. The findings are given below.

Table 6. *Results of Pearson correlation analysis according to the relationship between teachers' positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. PCES**	1				
2.Friendship	.51**	1			
3.Enjoyment	.44**	.68**	1		
4. Influence	.49**	.59**	.56**	1	
5.Information	.45**	.54**	.51**	.60**	1
Mean	3.87	3.95	4.05	3.82	3.91
SD	.66	.60	.56	.62	.51

*** p < .01; PCES: Positive Childhood Experiences Scale*

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication levels. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 6. Accordingly, a positive and significant relationship was found between teachers' positive childhood experiences and their level of informal communication. A significant relationship was found between the total score and the total informal communication score [r(261)=.51, p < .01]. In addition, the total scores of positive childhood experiences are positively and significantly related to the sub dimensions of informal communication: friendship [r(261)=.40, p < .01], enjoyment [r(261)=.40, p < .01], influence [r(261)=.39, p < .01], and information [r(261)=.46, p < .01]. Simple regression analysis was applied to examine the effect of teachers' positive childhood experiences on their informal communication levels, and the results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *Results of simple regression analysis according to the effect of teachers' positive childhood experiences on their informal communication levels*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Dimensions	(β)	t	p	R	R_2	F	p
Positive Childhood Experiences	Informal Communication	Friendship	-.085	-.350	.726	.51	.26	18.14	.000
		Fun	-.097	-.498	.619				
		Influence	-.046	-.269	.788				
		Information	-.032	-.112	.911				

B: unstandardized coefficient; SE: standard error; β: standardized coefficient; R^2: coefficient of determination; F: F statistic; p: significance level; PCES: Positive Childhood Experiences Scale

According to Table 7, the regression model established regarding the prediction of informal communication levels by positive childhood experiences is statistically significant ($F = 18.14$, $p < .001$). The explanatory power of the model is moderate, and it is seen that positive childhood experiences explain 26% of the total variance in informal communication ($R^2 = .26$). However, when the sub dimensions of informal communication are examined, it was determined that none of the dimensions of friendship, enjoyment, influence, and information were significant predictors on their own ($p > .05$). This finding reveals that positive childhood experiences affect informal communication at a holistic level, but do not show a distinctive effect on the basis of sub dimensions.

Discussion

This study reveals a fundamental insight: teachers' communication practices in professional settings are not merely products of pedagogical training but are deeply rooted in the relational and emotional experiences of their own childhoods. The finding that positive childhood experiences significantly predict informal communication levels ($R^2 = .26$, $\beta = .51$) carries both theoretical and practical implications that extend beyond the statistical association. Below, the findings are interpreted through the lenses of attachment theory, social learning theory, and ecological systems theory, with critical attention to mechanisms, alternative explanations, and the broader implications for educational practice and policy. Regarding the underlying mechanism, attachment theory posits that early caregiving experiences create internal working models cognitive-affective schemas containing expectations about self-worth and others' availability that guide relational behavior across the lifespan [9]. Teachers who experienced responsive caregiving in childhood are likely to have developed secure internal models, fostering trust, openness, and comfort with emotional closeness qualities that naturally facilitate informal communication. Conversely, social learning theory suggests that communication behaviors are learned through observation and reinforcement; children who observe and participate in positive, open communication patterns within the family are more likely to internalize and reproduce similar patterns in their professional interactions [7]. Ecological systems theory further contributes by highlighting that these mechanisms operate within nested contextual layers, from the microsystem of family interactions to the exosystem of organizational climate, each shaping the expression of developmental antecedents in professional settings [10].

The absence of significant differences in informal communication based on years of experience warrants careful interpretation. Rather than viewing seniority as a determinant of communication behavior, this finding suggests that informal communication patterns may be more dispositional than developmental in the professional sense rooted in relational templates formed early in life rather than shaped by accumulated professional experience. This aligns with attachment theory's premise that internal working models, once established in childhood, tend to remain stable across contexts and time [9]. The parallel findings of Arslan [4] and Yıldırım [50], who also found no seniority effect on informal communication, lend further support to this interpretation. An alternative explanation, however, is that workplace culture and organizational norms may standardize communication patterns regardless of experience level, thereby attenuating individual differences. This suggests a potential ceiling effect: institutional communication norms may suppress the expression of individually varying communication tendencies, a possibility that warrants investigation through multi-level modeling in future research.

The finding that the geographical location of childhood does not significantly differentiate either positive childhood experiences or informal communication levels challenges the intuitive assumption that urban versus rural environments produce different developmental outcomes. LaCharite et al. [24] demonstrated that the quality of environmental factors neighborhood safety, school support, and social ties matters more than physical location per se. From an ecological systems perspective [10], microsystemic factors such as family dynamics and caregiver warmth may override exosystemic factors such as rural versus urban setting in shaping relational dispositions. Similarly, the absence of significant differences based on family type (nuclear vs. extended) suggests that the quality of intra-family relationships, rather than structural configuration, determines developmental outcomes. Xia [47] demonstrated that emotional support in diverse family structures predicts adolescent positive functioning, supporting the primacy of relational quality over family form. However, Karalı [21] and Özcan [28]; also see Özcan et al. [29] found that individuals with both parents present reported higher positive childhood experiences, introducing a

nuance: family structure may exert indirect effects mediated through parental presence and stability. Guvuriro and Booysen [16, 26] further showed that extended family structures strengthen intergenerational communication, suggesting that the transfer of familial communication patterns to professional settings may be moderated by contextual factors such as organizational climate and professional identity.

The significant gender difference in informal communication, with female teachers scoring higher, invites multiple interpretive lenses. From a social learning perspective, women may have been socialized toward more relational and empathetic communication patterns during childhood, reinforcing the internalization of collaborative interaction styles [6, 7]. Reigstad [35] found that female employees adopt more open, supportive, and empathetic communication styles, while Aküzüm and Gültekin [3] reported that female teachers perceived their classroom communication skills as higher. However, the absence of a gender difference in positive childhood experiences suggests that the developmental antecedents are similar across genders, but their manifestation in professional communication differs potentially due to gendered socialization processes rather than differential childhood experiences per se. This dissociation between the predictor (childhood experiences, gender-neutral) and the outcome (informal communication, gender-differentiated) implies that mediating mechanisms such as social role internalization, workplace gender norms, or differential self-efficacy beliefs may operate between childhood experiences and professional communication. This finding underscores the need for moderated mediation models in future research to disentangle these pathways.

The significant positive correlations between positive childhood experiences and all four sub dimensions of informal communication friendship, enjoyment, influence, and information suggest that the developmental impact of early experiences permeates multiple facets of professional interaction. The friendship dimension showed the strongest sub-dimension correlation, consistent with Willis et al. [46], who found that individuals with secure and supportive childhood relationships established stronger friendships in adulthood. This pattern can be interpreted through attachment theory: early secure attachment fosters internal working models characterized by trust and relational safety, which naturally facilitate the formation of close collegial bonds. The information-sharing dimension's positive association aligns with Lee and Schafer [25], who linked positive early experiences to enhanced cognitive and social engagement in later life. Notably, while the overall model was significant (R^2 = .26), none of the individual sub dimensions emerged as significant predictors in the regression analysis. This suggests that positive childhood experiences exert a holistic rather than domain-specific influence on informal communication operating through general socio-emotional resources (e.g., emotional regulation, self-efficacy, resilience) rather than through distinct pathways for each communication domain. An alternative explanation is that the shared variance among sub dimensions (intercorrelations ranging from .44 to .67) may have suppressed individual predictive effects, a multicollinearity issue that structural equation modeling could address in future studies. This holistic influence is theoretically consistent with the notion that positive childhood experiences build a generalized socio-emotional resource pool encompassing trust, emotional regulation, and relational confidence that pervasively facilitates communication across contexts rather than being channeled into specific communicative domains. In practical terms, a teacher who experienced consistent caregiver warmth and supportive peer relationships in childhood is likely to approach all forms of informal interaction whether sharing information, building friendships, exerting influence, or engaging in playful exchanges with greater ease and authenticity, reflecting the transfer of early relational security to professional social competence.

Conclusions

This study provides quantitative evidence that positive childhood experiences constitute a meaningful predictor of teachers' informal communication, accounting for 26% of the variance. This finding advances attachment and social learning frameworks by demonstrating that early relational experiences not only shape general socio-emotional functioning but also specifically predict professional communication behaviors in educational contexts. Theoretically, the results suggest that internal working models formed through early caregiving experiences operate as latent relational schemas that manifest in the spontaneous, authentic interactions characterizing informal communication. The gender differentiated finding in informal communication (but not in childhood experiences) points to socialization processes as potential moderators, warranting further investigation. For teacher education, these results underscore the importance of integrating compulsory modules on childhood

development, socio-emotional learning, and reflective communication practice into pre-service programs, enabling future teachers to critically examine how their own developmental histories influence their professional interactions. For school administrators, creating trust-based school climates with structured opportunities for informal peer interaction such as collaborative planning time and staff social events can amplify the positive effects of teachers' developmental foundations. For policymakers, these findings call for evidence based policies that promote teachers' social-emotional well-being, including mandatory professional development on empathy and communication, and institutional support structures such as mentoring programs and peer collaboration time. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed methods designs, examine additional predictors (e.g., emotional intelligence, attachment style, organizational climate), and test moderated mediation models across diverse educational and cultural contexts. It is important to contextualize the R^2 of .26: while 26% of the variance in informal communication is explained by positive childhood experiences, the remaining 74% is likely attributable to other factors such as organizational climate, professional training, attachment style, emotional intelligence, cultural norms regarding communication, and workplace structural conditions. This proportion of explained variance is nonetheless meaningful in the social sciences, where effect sizes of this magnitude are considered substantial [11], and underscores the theoretical significance of developmental antecedents in predicting professional behaviors, while also highlighting the multifactorial nature of communication competence.

Limitations

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, as the data reflect associations measured at a single point in time; longitudinal designs are needed to establish temporal precedence and directional effects. Secondly, reliance on self-report measures introduces potential biases, including social desirability bias where participants may over report positive childhood experiences and communication behaviors and recall bias, which may be particularly salient given that participants retrospectively reported experiences from before age 11. Thirdly, as both independent and dependent variables were collected from the same participants using the same method, the study is susceptible to common method bias, which may artificially inflate correlations between constructs. Fourthly, the use of non-probability sampling methods, specifically convenience and snowball sampling, limits the representativeness of the sample and introduces potential self-selection bias; teachers who chose to participate may differ systematically from those who did not, particularly in their interest in or awareness of childhood development topics. Therefore, the findings should be generalized with caution beyond this specific sample. Fifthly, the sample size of 261, while adequate for the simple regression analysis, limits statistical power for detecting small effects and precludes more complex multivariate or structural equation models. Sixthly, the Positive Childhood Experiences Scale measures only experiences before age 11 and does not capture later developmental stages of childhood, potentially missing influential adolescent experiences. Seventhly, the restriction of the sample to child development graduates working in education limits generalizability to other professional groups or subject-area teachers. Eighthly, data collection in Istanbul between 2025 and 2026 constitutes a geographical and temporal limitation. Finally, the exclusive reliance on quantitative instruments without qualitative data collection such as interviews or observations limits the depth of analysis regarding the mechanisms through which childhood experiences shape professional communication behaviors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be offered for future research. (1) Longitudinal or prospective designs should be employed to capture the developmental trajectory of the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication over time. (2) Mixed-methods research combining quantitative measures with qualitative interviews or observations would provide deeper insight into the mechanisms through which childhood experiences shape professional communication. (3) Additional explanatory variables such as emotional intelligence, teacher well-being, psychological resilience, organizational climate, teacher self-efficacy, and attachment style should be incorporated into multivariate models. (4) Replication studies in different educational systems, cultural contexts, and with teachers from various disciplines would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between positive childhood experiences and informal communication, similar studies could be conducted on teacher samples with different demographic characteristics, regions, and

disciplines. Furthermore, using longitudinal research designs to reveal the course of this relationship over time and possible causal structures could make significant contributions to the literature. Future research should address environmental variables such as family structure, parental attitudes, caregiver relationships, and social environment in more detail, allowing for a more holistic assessment of the impact of positive childhood experiences on social and professional communication skills in adulthood. In addition, comparative studies conducted with different professional groups could increase the generalizability of the findings. (5) Structural equation modeling (SEM) should be employed in future studies to test the hypothesized relationships between positive childhood experiences and informal communication dimensions while accounting for measurement error and simultaneously evaluating both direct and indirect effects particularly through potential mediators such as attachment security, emotional intelligence, and teacher self-efficacy. Such modeling would address the multicollinearity issues identified in the present study and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking developmental experiences to professional communication behaviors.

When evaluated from the perspective of educational administrators and teachers, the research findings highlight the importance of practices aimed at strengthening teachers' social and emotional experiences. Accordingly, it is recommended that professional development programs be planned and implemented to support teachers' empathy, collaboration, and positive communication skills. Creating a supportive, trust based, and collaborative communication climate in school settings can strengthen teachers' informal communication skills. Specifically, teacher education curricula should integrate compulsory modules on childhood development, socio-emotional learning, and reflective communication practice. School principals should foster structured opportunities for informal peer interaction (e.g., collaborative planning time, staff social events) to capitalize on teachers' positive developmental foundations. Professional development institutions should incorporate workshops on emotional competence, relational communication, and resilience into in-service training programs. Furthermore, increasing activities that encourage teamwork and social interaction can improve the quality of intra school communication by supporting teachers' professional and social relationships.

Based on the research findings, some implications can also be made for policymakers. Structuring education policies to include programs and practices that support teachers' social and emotional skills can strengthen the impact of positive childhood experiences on communication skills in adulthood. Encouraging practices that center on positive communication, empathy, and collaboration in schools can improve teachers' informal communication levels, contributing to more functional educational environments. Additionally, developing policies that facilitate teachers' access to professional development programs can support the improvement of communication quality at both individual and institutional levels. Specifically, policymakers should consider mandating social-emotional competence standards in teacher accreditation frameworks. Funding should be allocated for evidence-based interventions that promote teachers' well-being and positive workplace communication. Early childhood education institutions should be supported in developing policies that prioritize teacher–teacher and teacher–student relational quality as a core institutional outcome.

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Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines established in the Helsinki Declaration. Approval was obtained from the İstanbul Gelişim University Ethics Committee (Decision No:2024-19-78). No personally identifiable information was collected from the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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