Shyness and School Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Teacher-Child Relationships.

A Qualitative study from Norway

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II

Abstract of thesis

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ABSTRACT

Shy children are at increased risk for adjustment difficulties at school such as peer-relationship difficulties, academic problems and poor teacher-child relationships. The aim of the present study was to explore the moderating role of teacher-child relationships in the relation between shyness and school adjustment in the elementary schools of Norway. The main research question was addressed by answering the sub-questions that focused on exploring teacher's perception regarding school adjustment of shy children and teacher's perception regarding their relationships with shy children.

This study begins with a discussion of the theoretical contexts in which the term shyness is discussed from different perspectives. This section gives a brief review of the literature related to shyness and reviews literature regarding peer relationships, academic difficulties and school avoidance. Teacher-child relationships are discussed from attachment perspective and literature regarding teacher-child relationships is presented in the theoretical context of the study.

Qualitative research methods are used in this study. Data was collected from five teachers working in the elementary schools of Oslo. The participants were selected using combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings of the study suggested that the elementary school teachers in Norway perceived that shy children experience difficulties in their peer relationships through peer exclusion and peer rejection. Teachers reported that shy children have difficulties in forming large number of friendships. Teachers had mixed responses regarding academic performance of shy children, and they perceived that the verbal performance of shy children was lower than non-shy classmates. All of the teachers displayed awareness of the problems faced by shy children. Teachers used different strategies such as role playing, playdates, learning partners and graduated exposure to lure shy children out of his or her shell. Participants reported that shy children received less attention and teachers-initiated interaction. Finally, regarding the shy children's relationships with teachers, some of the teachers perceived that shy children form close and dependent relationships with teachers. Close teacher-child relationships may serve a protective role for shy children in terms of improving school-adjustment outcomes.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to

My husband Ijaz and my children Rania and Hashim for their emotional support. I give my deepest appreciation for their endless encouragement and the sacrifices made by them during my studies.

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I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Joshua Lawrence for his great contribution in terms of constructive feedback, suggestions and criticism. His positive feedback and confidence in my research inspired me and gave me confidence. His careful editing contributed to the production of this thesis.

I would like to thank my mother for her support and prayers during this journey and for allowing me to realize my own potential. A special thanks to my father who passed last year for teaching me to be curious, it brought me where I am today.

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Saima Ahmed
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LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

NSD-Norsk senter for forskningsdata (Norwegian Centre for Research Data)

STRS-Student-Teacher Relationship Scale

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

Researchers have long been interested in the links between children's socio-emotional functioning at school and their academic success. Some investigators have suggested that shy children go unnoticed or easily become invisible due to their presumably meek nature (Evans, 2001; Keogh, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). However, the results from recent research on preschool children show that shy children (79 kindergarteners) do not going unnoticed by teachers (Coplan & Prakash, 2003), and researchers have begun to examine the unique academic and social challenges faced at school by shy children (Thijs, Koomen & Van der Leij, 2006). However, at this time, not much is known about these issues in elementary schools in the Norwegian context.

Shyness is a temperamental trait characterised by wariness, uneasiness, fear and self-consciousness in the context of social novelty and perceived social evaluation (Crozier, 1995). School can be challenging for shy children as inclusion in a large group of peers, increased expectations and demands for verbal participation and focus on group work may exacerbate feelings of social fear and self-consciousness (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016). Shy children speak less frequently at school and in discussion, and this lack of verbal participation has negative implications for their academic success and school adjustment. Children displaying shy, reticent behaviour and anxious behaviours are perceived by their peers as unattractive playmates and are vulnerable to exclusion, loneliness and even victimisation (Avant, Gazelle & Faldowski, 2011; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). More knowledge of how teachers perceive shy children's reticent behaviour and lack of engagement and how shyness affects their adjustment at school is needed.

It is widely accepted that throughout childhood and adolescence, shy children are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, internalising problems (e.g. loneliness and depressive symptoms), peer relationship difficulties (e.g. peer rejection and peer victimisation), academic challenges (e.g. low academic achievement) and fewer positive teacher–child relationships (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Hughes & Coplan, 2010; Kalutskaya,

Archbell, Rudasill & Coplan, 2015). It is unclear, though, whether teachers and educators understand these problems as there is very little research on these topics.

Relationships are significant resources for young children. From the attachment perspective, teacher–child relationships reflect the quality of children's emotional connection with teachers. Researchers have agreed that the quality of young children's relationships with teachers predicts social and academic success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999). Positive teacher–child relationships serve as a protective factor for shy children, allowing them to develop and practice effective social skills. Positive teacher–child relationships provide social support systems that promote positive perceptions of school among children in general (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010). Negative teacher–child relationships characterised by high dependency and conflict appear to function as risk factor in children's school success. Children with negative teacher–child relationships are more likely to avoid school, report loneliness and display low levels of academic and social competence (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Greater knowledge of how teachers perceive these relationships and support shy children is needed.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to explore teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and school adjustment by shy children in elementary school. School adjustment was based on teachers' reflections on shy children's peer relationships, school avoidance attitudes and academic performance.

1.3 Research Questions

Going to school appears to be especially stressful for shy children. Shyness is associated with negative adjustment problems at school, including school avoidance, academic challenges and difficulties with peers. The current literature presents mixed findings on teachers' awareness of shyness in the classroom. Teachers can play an important role in shy children's social, emotional and academic development and can serve as a secure base from which children can explore the classroom and interact with peers (see, for example, Kalutskaya et al., 2015). However, little is known about teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children as very limited qualitative research has been conducted on this topic. Thus, the main research question is proposed:

What are teachers' perceptions of the moderating role of teacher–child relationships in the relation between shyness and school adjustment?

This research question was addressed by answering the following sub-questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of shy children's school adjustment (peer relationships, school avoidance and academic performance)?
2. How do teachers perceive their relationships with shy children?
3. What support do teachers feel that they provide to shy children?

1.4 Significance of the study

Creswell (2014) stresses the need to explain the usefulness and importance of the information to be gained from the project, how the findings might be applied to human services and or how they might produce direct insight into development of other research. This research on teachers' relationships with shy children and teachers' reflections on school adjustment by shy children is important for several reasons. Firstly, it can provide information on teachers' perceptions of shy children, which may be a vital contribution as the topic is under-researched in Norway. To date, qualitative research focusing on how teachers perceive shy children is lacking. This study found no qualitative research article on elementary-school teachers' perceptions of shy children and only a few qualitative theses (Bevan & Grødem, 2014) on shy children.

Secondly, this research can contribute to understanding how elementary-school teachers perceive their relationships with shy children and support them, which can aid their social and academic development. This study's focus provides information on elementary-school teachers' reflections on shy children in their classrooms and how teachers view them in the classroom context.

Thirdly, the results can help teachers better understand the nature of shy children and inform teachers' development of intervention strategies to assist the shy children in their classrooms. Lastly, the study can assist educators and policy makers in formulating educational programmes that provide better organisational resources to promote socio-emotional adjustment among shy children and in improving practices related to increasing awareness of shyness.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations narrow the scope of a study and define its boundaries (Creswell, 2003). In the current study, a delimitation was the criteria for the participants to be teachers with experience teaching shy children in elementary schools, limiting the interviews to only such teachers. Moreover, the geographical boundaries of the study limited it to schools in eastern Oslo.

1.6 Definitions of the Main Terms

Several terms need to be defined to avoid potential confusion in this study.

Shyness—a temperamental trait characterised by excessive wariness, unease, and self-consciousness in contexts of social novelty and perceived social evaluation (Crozier, 1995)

School adjustment—the degree to which children become comfortable, engaged and successful in the school environment (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1997)

Peer rejection—the extent to which individuals are disliked by their classroom peers, or the negative attitudes of a peer group towards an individual (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003, p. 347)

Peer victimisation—repeated forms of verbal and/or physical aggression or other forms of abuse, often involving a real or perceived imbalance in strength or power (Olweus, 1993)

Peer exclusion—a situation in which peers leave a child out of their activities, including direct refusal (e.g. 'You cannot play'), indirect actions (e.g. not choosing a child for a team) and ignoring a child's attempt to join into a group or an activity (Ladd, 2006)

Teacher–child relationship—the interpersonal relationship and emotional connection between a teacher and a specific child, encompassing the interactive behaviour between them and their feelings and thoughts about each other (Pianta, 1999)

Perceptions—teachers' interpretations and understandings of their relationships with children (Birch & Ladd, 1998)

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

After this introduction in Chapter 1, thesis is structured in four separate but interrelated chapters.

Chapter Two—Theoretical Context. This chapter presents the context of the study by describing different perspectives on shyness, including gender and cultural differences. This chapter gives a brief review of the literature related to shyness, covering the theoretical perspectives on peer relationships, academic difficulties, school avoidance and teacher–child relationships that form the basis for this investigation.

Chapter Three—Methodology. This chapter describes the methodological approaches employed in this study and discusses the rationale for using the selected qualitative methods, sampling procedures and data collection and analysis. This chapter also considers the ethical considerations, researcher's role, validity and triangulation related to this study.

Chapter Four—Findings and Discussion. This chapter presents the findings from the data and then discusses and analyses the findings in light of theoretical context to arrive at conclusions.

Chapter Five—Conclusion and Implications. In this chapter, the research questions are addressed explicitly and implicitly, and the implications of the findings are presented.

1.8 Summary

Shy children's meek nature may render them invisible in the classroom context. Going to school appears to be especially stressful for shy children due to group assignments, high demands for verbal participation and interaction with peers. Shyness is associated with negative adjustment at school, including school avoidance, academic challenges and problems with peers. The current literature provides mixed findings on teachers' awareness of shyness in the classroom, and little is known about teachers' perceptions of and relationships with shy children in the Norwegian context. This chapter has introduced some points related to shyness, defined important terms and reviewed the organisation of the thesis. The next chapter deals with the theoretical context of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORATICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised into six main subsections. After the introduction, the second section explores different perspectives on the definition of shyness and gives a brief review of the literature related to shyness, gender and cultural differences. The third section discusses the adjustment difficulties that shy children might face at school, including academic challenges, school avoidance and problems with peers. This chapter finally highlights teachers' perceptions of shy children and concludes with a summary.

2.2 Shyness

All people feel somewhat uncomfortable, wary or nervous at some point time in life, perhaps when meeting unfamiliar people or when at the centre of attention in a situation. Most people can cope successfully with these moments and move on, but some people feel awkward, worried or tense during social encounters, especially with unfamiliar people. In some children, shyness is so intense that it keeps them from interacting with others even when they want or need to, causing complications in relationships and daily-life activities.

Crozier (2002) investigates the links between shyness and behavioural inhibition and states that shy children and adults are more reticent than their peers in social circumstances. They are slower to start conversations with unfamiliar persons, take longer to break silence, give shorter utterances and avoid elaborating. They make less eye contact and touch their faces and bodies more frequently with their hands. Crozier (2001b) referenced in Crozier (2002) investigates the link between shyness and behavioral inhibition and states that shy persons are preoccupied with the impression what they say will create, and they think that it is better to say nothing than to risk others' disapproval. A participant in one of his study describes these concerns:

> I felt inadequate. I believed I was too young to say anything that would have been of the slightest interest to these people. I felt awkward as if out of place. (…) When anybody did ask me something, I would be so concerned about my reply that I could feel myself heating up and turning red. (Crozier, 2002, p. 461)

A persistent limitation in the study of shyness is the lack of consistent terminology (Coplan & Rubin, 2010). Shyness is especially complex to define as it involves emotions and behaviours that are not, in and of themselves, indicative of or unique to shyness. In the literature, different terms such as *behavioral inhibition* (Kagan, 1997), *anxious solitude* (Gazelle, 2006), *social withdrawal* (Normandeau & Guay, 1998) and *social reticence* are used interchangeably to describe shy children's adjustment at school (Rudasill & Kalutskaya, 2014; Coplan & Rudasill, 2016).

2.2.1 Shyness as a Temperamental Trait

This research project focused on shyness. While other terms describe similar feelings, they often differ slightly, as discussed. Crozier (1995) conducted a study with sample of 141 children (79 girls and 62 boys, age range: 9–12 years old) with the goal to determine the relationship between shyness and self-esteem. Rather than focusing on researchers' conceptualisations, shyness was measured with a new self-report questionnaire based on elicitation of children's conceptions of shyness. Crozier (1995) defines shyness as

> A temperamental trait characterized by excessive wariness, uneasiness, and self-consciousness in contexts of social novelty and perceived social evaluation. Self-conscious behaviour occurs in situations where there is a perceived level of social evaluation from peers and others.

In this definition of shyness, this temperamental trait refers to children's characteristic, individual style of responding to new or unfamiliar people, events and environments. A major focus of temperament research is children's emotional reactivity (e.g. how easily they become excited or upset) and emotional regulation (e.g. the difficulty they have calming down after becoming upset or excited). In the case of shyness, the two major emotions of initial interest are fear and anxiety as shy children are prone to both fear and anxiety frequently related to social encounters (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016).

Younger children manifest shyness primarily as fear and hesitancy when encountering new people. This temperamental trait is associated with reticence and *behavioral inhibition* in novel settings (Kagan, 1997), or showing wariness during exposure to new people, things and places.

Behavioral inhibition early in life does not always lead to shyness later in life. Some children become less shy, and others more shy. The nature of shyness, too, changes as children grow older. Children encounter different situations as they mature, and shyness takes on different forms for toddlers than school-age children.

2.2.2 Types of Shyness

Temperament researcher Buss (1986) suggests that two types of shyness exist. First, in fearful shyness, younger children show fear and wariness of strangers, similar to Kagan's (1997) concept of behavioural inhibition. The second type of shyness, self-conscious shyness, is more common in older children and refers to the tendency to experience feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment in situations of perceived social evaluation (Buss, 1986). Self-conscious shyness appears when children acquire a theory of mind, can reflect on their own behaviour from different perspectives and become conscious of themselves as social actors (Crozier, 2002).

2.2.3 Approach–Avoidance Conflict

From a motivational perspective, Asendorpf (1990) proposes that shy children experience approach–avoidance conflict. They wish to interact with their peers but also to avoid them due to fears of poor social performance and negative peer treatment, resulting in persistent solitary behaviour. Shyness indicates an underlying struggle between children's social approach and social avoidance motivations. This approach–avoidance conflict may be especially obvious in the school setting, which appears to be a stressful environment for shy children (Coplan, Parakash, O'Neil & Armer, 2004; Coplan, Arbeau & Armer, 2008).

Temperamental traits, including shyness, tend to be relatively stable across time, especially from the preschool years. Shy children appear to be at increased risk for a host of social, emotional and adjustment difficulties (Rubin et al., 2009). In a survey Zimbardo (1997), investigating whether a large sample of respondents viewed themselves as shy, more than 40% described themselves as shy. Most respondents characterised themselves as quiet, self-conscious and uneasy about negative evaluations in social situations.

Over the past two decades, it is has become apparent that there are long-term costs associated with childhood inhibition and shyness (Rubin, Coplan & Bowker, 2009). The results from many

studies demonstrate links between inhibition in early childhood and anxiety disorders in later childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Schwartz, Snidman & Kagan, 1999; Van Ameringen, Mancini & Oakman, 1998). In reports from the Australian Temperament Project, 42% of the children rated as shy in early childhood had anxiety problems in adolescence (Prior et al., 2000). The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (2014) reported that 15%–20% of 3–18-year-old children in Norway have internalising problems, such as anxiety and depression.

2.2.4 Gender Differences

Shyness in both boys and girls is associated with internalising problems and difficulties with peers and adjustment (Rubin et al., 2009). Measures of shyness using parent and teacher reports and peer ratings find no gender differences (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Rubin et al, 2006). However, in self-reports of shyness among older children, girls report higher level of shyness than boys. This discrepancy has several possible explanations. At this age, girls might be more prone to anxiety and depression, while boys underestimate their shyness due to societal pressure (Doey, Coplan & Kingsbury, 2014). Parents are more likely to acknowledge and reward shyness in girls but discourage it in in boys (Engfer, 1993). Moreover, shy boys in preschool display more behaviour problems and are more likely to be excluded by peers than are shy girls (Coplan et al., 2004). In a longitudinal study, Gazelle and Ladd (2003) assessed children's (N = 388; 50% female) anxious solitude, peer exclusion and emotional adjustment from kindergarten through fourth grade. Teachers' assessments were obtained using the Teacher Report Form and the Children Behavior Scale, and the children were observed and interviewed. The results showed that they anxiety and solitude have greater consequences for boys than girls as peers may view shyness as a violation of male gender roles (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

When considering relationships between teachers and shy children, studies on teachers' attitudes, responses and relationships have not shown any significant gender differences (Arbeau et al., 2010; Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Coplan et al., 2011). This result may be as teacher training and experiences override gender stereotypes regarding shyness.

2.2.5 Cultural Differences

Shyness has different meanings and perceptions in various cultures. In western cultures, shyness may be less socially acceptable for boys than girls as it violates gender norms related to male social assertiveness, expressiveness and competitiveness (Coplan et al., 2004; Engfer,

1993). In Northern European countries, shyness is associated with socio-emotional difficulties, including loneliness, low self-esteem and symptoms of anxiety and depression, for both boys and girls (Crozier & Hostettler, 2003; Muris, Van Brakel, Arntz & Schouten, 2011). In collectivistic cultures, such as China, Korea and South American countries, peers and teachers encourage and accept shyness, and it is positively associated with peer relationships, school competence, well-being and academic success (Chen, Rubin & Li, 1995; Hofmann, Asnaani & Hinton, 2010; Hong & Woody, 2007). As Chinese society rapidly changes both politically and economically, though, adaptive shy behaviour is declining in favour of assertive, social and competent behaviour. The results from recent research indicate that shyness in large urban areas in China is associated with peer rejection, depressive symptoms and lack of leadership at school (Chen, Cen, Li & He, 2005; Chen, Wang & Wang, 2009).

2.3 School Adjustment

School is considered to be the most important developmental system for children after the immediate family (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). School constitutes a social environment where students' participation, talkativeness and social interaction are viewed as important contributors to the attainment of learning purposes. Successful adjustment to school, therefore, is of great significance to the development of young children (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

School adjustment is defined as the degree to which children become comfortable, engaged and successful in the school environment. Ladd et al. (1997) assessed school adjustment in terms of school affect (loneliness and social dissatisfaction), school avoidance and academic performance. More broadly, school adjustment encompasses not only children's progress and achievement but also their attitudes towards school, anxieties, loneliness, social support and academic motivation (e.g. school engagement, avoidance and absences).

As of 2017, not much is known about the school adjustment of shy children and teachers' reflections on this topic in Norwegian schools. Empirical evidence suggests that children's abilities and strategies to cope with social environments at early ages are important factors in establishing trajectories of academic and behavioural performance (Bosacki et al., 2011; Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006; Hamre & Pianta 2001a;). Children who can successfully navigate early social surroundings in school get off to be a better start and continue to benefit from their social

knowledge and experiences (Hamre & Pianta 2001a; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). Children's school experiences vary partly due to individual temperamentally based differences, and the classroom environment may be especially stressful for shy students as school is considered to be a social institution and learning community. Shy children enter the school environment already prone to feelings of fear, self-consciousness and anxiety. The stresses of the classroom and possible negative experiences can aggravate these already-existing feelings (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016). When the demands of the environment do not meet the needs of children's temperament (e.g. lack of goodness of fit), adjustment difficulties may arise. For shy children already predisposed to negative affectivity, such as sadness, fear and physical discomfort, or recovering from distress, the school environment often appears to present a poor fit (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008).

The presence of a large peer group, high child–staff ratios and high expectations and demands for verbal participation are factors that may intensify shy children's feelings of social fear and self-consciousness. Shy children tend to speak less and withdraw from social interactions in school; consequently, their classroom behaviour and academic performance are different than their less shy peers. Increasing empirical evidence supports that the transition to school is especially problematic for shy or withdrawn children (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008; Evan, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005; Rubin et al., 2009). The results from a growing number of studies suggest that shy children from early ages through adolescence have increased concurrent and predictive risk for a host of adjustment difficulties, including difficulties with peer relationships (e.g. exclusion and rejection) and internalising problems (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Rubin et al., 2009; Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce & Burgess, 2006). Although previous research has indicated that shyness can have negative effects on children's school adjustment, very little is known about teachers' reflections on the peer relationships, academic performance and school-avoidance behaviour of shy children in Norwegian schools.

2.3.1 Peer Relationships

The classroom is children's major social context outside the home, and positive interactions with peers there provide a sense of confidence and influence children's social, cognitive and emotional development. Children who hesitate to interact with their peers may miss these benefits (Parker & Asher, 1987). Children who successfully interact with their peers can precisely understand their emotions and those of others. Children's social behaviour is

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reinforced over time as they learn the cues, reactions and attitudes that prompt approval from peers. Analysing a sample of young children, Ladd (1990) suggests that friendship and peer acceptance are strong predictors of academic readiness and changes in kindergartners' school perceptions, avoidance and performance. There are very few researches that focuses on peer relationships of shy children in elementary schools, so little is known about relationships of shy children with their peers.

Low peer-group acceptance may elicit feelings of marginalisation, failure and loneliness and lead to internalising problems (Crick & Ladd, 1993). Shy children show a greater tendency to withdraw from unfamiliar adults and peers and to display social reticence, which includes watching others playing but not joining in. When shy children do interact with peers, they appear to be less socially competent, take longer to initiate conversations and speak less frequently as compared to their age-mates (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Coplan et al., 2004; Coplan, Girardi, Findlay & Firohlick, 2007; Crozier & Perkins, 2002). The results from several other studies show that children's peers do not perceive reticent behaviours positively, and due to this atypical behaviour, shy children may become targets for peer rejection, peer exclusion and victimisation (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006; Buhs, Rudasill, Kalutskaya & Griese, 2015; Coplan et al., 2007; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). Peers reject shy children whose demeanour conflicts with age-specific norms and expectations for social interactions, relationships and group involvement.

Shy children might desire social contact with peers but experience an approach–avoidance conflict as they wish to interact with their peers but avoid them due to fears of poor social performance and negative peer treatment. These behaviours are hypothesised to be manifestations of an internal conflict between normative social–approach motivation and high social–avoidance motivation (Asendorpf, 1990). This approach–avoidance conflict is more prominent in school settings, where shy children place themselves in proximity to peers and watch them play but have difficulty in joining peer activities (Coplan et al., 1994).

2.3.1.1 Peer Rejection, Exclusion and Peer Victimisation

Peer rejection is defined as 'the extent to which individuals are disliked by classroom peers. It reflects the negative attitudes of peer group (Buhs et al., 2006) towards an individual' (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003, p. 347). Approximately 10% of schoolchildren are victimised by peers

and classmates, experiencing repeated and consistent physical and verbal abuse (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Rubin, Coplan & Bowker, 2009; Rubin et. al., 2006). Approximately 63,000 children and young people in Norway experience bullying 2-3 times a month or more. The strain associated with being bullied can significantly increase children's risk of developing mental health problems and disorders (Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2016).

Shyness limits interactions with peers in the classroom, hindering shy children's practice of social skills and suppressing their engagement in the classroom discourse. Consequently, they are more likely to experience peer neglect and rejection than their more social age-mates. Shy children are easy marks for peers, putting them at risk for being bullied and rejected (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Ladd, 2006; Rubin et al., 2006). Peer group rejection negatively influences children's engagement and achievement in the school environment (Rubin et al., 2006). Peers express the dislike they feel towards rejected children by treating them negatively, and once these negative behaviours are visible to the larger group, these children are further pushed to the margins of peers' classroom activities. Marginalisation occurs as peers become aware of the frequent targeting of certain children for maltreatment and then tend to not associate with or include these children in classroom activities. Consequently, rejected children disengage from classroom activities as a strategy to avoid further abuse (Olweus, 1993). Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996, p. 1196) explain that 'children's exposure to peer victimization preceded the development of negative school perceptions (i.e., school liking and expresses school avoidance) and feelings of loneliness in school'.

The literature reports mixed findings regarding the onset of peer rejection and victimisation. Some researchers have argued that shyness does not become associated with peer rejection until middle childhood as atypical behaviours become more salient to peer groups with increased age (Ladd, 2006; Younger, Gentile & Burgess, 1993). Consequently, shyness becomes associated with social anxiety and victimisation during later childhood and early adolescence. However, some researchers have reported negative association between shyness and teacher ratings of peer acceptance in kindergarteners (Hart et al., 2000; Phillipsen, Bridges, McLemore & Saponaro, 1999).

Bosacki, Coplan, Krasnor and Hughes (2011, p. 275) conducted a qualitative study to explore elementary-school teachers' perceptions of shy children in the classroom. Teachers from seven

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elementary schools (2nd–5th grade) participated in semi-structured interviews and were asked about shy children's socio-communicative abilities in classroom. Most teachers reported that shyness might negatively affect children's peer relations, including increased difficulty making friends and a tendency to be ignored, neglected, excluded and bullied by peers (Bosacki et al, 2011). Rejected and victimised children place blame for their negative interactions with peers on themselves rather than external or situational causes and think that they are not desirable or capable partners in the classroom and lack the skills for academic success (Burgess, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce & Burgess, 2006). Greater knowledge of the peer relationships of shy children is needed. Very few qualitative studies have focused on teachers' perceptions of shy children's peer relationships, so little is known about its consequences and determinants from teachers' point of view.

Peer victimisation generally is defined as repeated forms of verbal and physical aggression and other forms of abuse, often involving a real or perceived imbalance in strength or power (Camodeca, Goossens, Terwogt & Schuengel, 2002; Olweus, 1993). Victimised children experience repeated abuse from peers (Hoover, Oliver & Hazier, 1992; Olweus, 1993). Victimised children avoid their abusers and the context in which abuse occurs. Feelings of fear towards classmates may cause victimised children to withdraw from peer interactions and isolate themselves from social and academic activities in school (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Shy children's reserved and quiescent demeanour may prompt them to attempt to avoid social interactions, which might be expected to protect them from bullying. However, researchers (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Ladd, 2006; Rubin et al., 2006) have reported that this group is at high risk for victimisation. The timid, bashful and quiet nature of shy children may create social perceptions that they are easy targets. They may be vulnerable to victimisation as they present themselves as physically and emotionally weak and unlikely to retaliate (Liu et al., 2014; Rubin et al., 2006). Shy children use avoidance strategies to cope with peer victimisation, which, in turn, increase their withdrawal from society and subsequent victimisation.

Peer rejection contributes to the peer exclusion of shy children (Harrist, Zaia, Bates, Dodge & Pettit, 1997). *Peer exclusion* occurs when peers leave a child out of activities. Refusal can be direct refusal (e.g. 'You cannot play'), or peers may exclude a child through indirect actions (e.g. not choosing a child for team) or ignoring their attempts to join groups. Shy children, on

average, experience more peer exclusion than other children (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Ladd, 2006).

Gazelle and Ladd (2003) conducted a longitudinal study in United States on 388 children (girls 50%) to examine the relationship between individual anxious solitude and interpersonal risk factors. Researchers defined anxious solitude as an internal state of social anxiety, including shyness, verbal inhibition and playing alone while watching others. The study assessed children's social behaviour, peer exclusion and emotional adjustment from kindergarten through fourth grade primarily through teachers' reports. The study results indicated that peer exclusion starts as early as kindergarten and that children who exhibit anxious solitude are excluded by their peers. The difficulties experienced by excluded children intensify over time. In the presence of peer exclusion, children's anxious solitary behaviour continues or escalates to social avoidance. Peer mistreatment can confirm the social fears and low perceived self-efficacy of shy children, undermining their efforts for social engagement (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

2.3.1.2 Friendships of Shy Children

Relatively little is known about shy children's friendships with their age-mates and dyadic relationships with peers. Shy children have fewer contacts with age-mates and are less likely to have the peer experiences generally important for healthy development (Rubin et al., 2009). Shy children who withdraw from peers have negative self-perceptions of their social competence and relationships, experience loneliness and suffer depressive symptoms (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Rubin et al., 1995). Despite the problems faced in school, shy children generally have at least one mutual and stable best friend (Rubin et al., 2006).

Rubin et al. (2006) examined the mutual friendships of shy children (n=169) and non-withdrawn children (n=163) in fifth grade using various questionnaires, such as friendships nominations, the Teacher Rating Scale and the Revised Class Play. The study results showed that approximately 65% of shy children (10 years old) have mutual best friends, and approximately 70% of these best friendships are maintained across the academic year (Rubin et al., 2006). These friendship associations and their permanency and endurance are similar to those of non-shy children (Rubin et al., 2006). Thus, shy children can form friendships and have at least one mutual best friend (Bosacki et al., 2011). Friendships are considered to be important

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sources of social support and may play a protective role against negative effects (Ladd, 1990). Stable friendships reduce the chances of victimisation (Hodges et al., 1997).

The results of another study by Haselager, Hartup, Van Lieshout & Riksen-Walraven, (1998) showed that elementary-school children (n=192) tend to choose friends who possess similar attitudes, temperaments, abilities and difficulties. The children in the study were asked to list three classmates who are their friends and to write the names of no more than three classmates who best match three clusters of behavioural descriptions (e.g. prosocial, antisocial and shy behaviour). The children were also asked to write the names of no more than the three classmates whom they most like and least like. The study results indicated that shy children appear to be involved in friendships with other children facing similar psychosocial difficulties (Haselager et al., 1998). Shy children and friends might mutually socialise themselves toward increased shyness, but at the same time, their social interactions might also promote good adjustment by alleviating the loneliness that accompanies and increases the risks related to shyness. Thus, the best friends of extremely shy children are more likely to be socially withdrawn and victimised than the mutual best friends of non-shy children, but these relationships may also encourage adjustment (Haselager et al., 1998).

Shy children's friendships may differ from those of their non-shy peers in other dimensions, such as intimacy, conflict resolution and guidance. The friendships of shy children lack helpfulness, which could be due to their high social reticence and wariness and low social skills compared to their non-shy peers. Shyness may influence children's ability to successfully initiate friendships (Rubin et al., 2006). Little research has focused on the friendships of shy children, and more needs to be known about shy children's dyadic relationships with their peers and the quality of their friendships.

2.3.2 Academic Performance

Shy children speak less and are less likely to volunteer to participate in class than their age-mates. Shy children might not speak frequently much and might hesitate to contribute to conversations for different reasons (Hughes & Coplan, 2010). Learning often involves stepping out of one's comfort zone and asking for help, creating academic demands for verbal participation that might intensify children's feeling of social fear and self-consciousness. Crozier (1995) conducted a study to explore the relationship between shyness and self-esteem.

Shy elementary-school children (n=141) report lower self-esteem than their non-shy classmates. Shy children have less positive perceptions of their social and academic competence. Feelings of self-doubt, concerns about how others see them and a lack of confidence can further aggravate these existing negative tendencies. Shy children are less engaged in classroom activities, and this lack of participation hinders both academic and socio-emotional growth. Research findings have suggested that shy children experience greater academic difficulties than their non-shy peers (Crozier, 1995; Hughes & Coplan, 2010). Noticeably less research, however, has explored the associations between shyness and academic achievement of shy children.

Classroom engagement is a highly important contributor to children's academic achievement. Teachers might perceive lower classroom engagement as indicative of a lack of knowledge or understanding of the course material and consequently perceive shy children as less academically successful and less intelligent than non-shy children (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Coplan & Evans 2009; Hughes & Coplan, 2010). Studies conducted with elementary school children have shown that due to a lack of engagement, children's shyness is linked to teachers' perceptions of their academic achievement rather than children's actual ability or standardised assessments of their achievement (Coplan et al., 2011; Hughes & Coplan, 2010).

Shy children have also been found to have less developed language skills than their age-mates (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Evans, 1993). In this relatively new research area, empirical studies have produced mixed results regarding the language skills of shy children and their effects on academic performance. Evans (1993) reported that shy children might have less developed language skills due to a lack of participation and restricted engagement. Their fear and socio-evaluative concerns limit their opportunities to practice and develop language skills. In another study, Evans (1996) compared groups of talkative and quiet children in kindergarten and first grade using a number of standardised language tests. The study results showed that quiet group performed poorly on tests of expressive vocabulary compared to the talkative group (Evans, 1996). Shy children who had better expressive language could more effectively communicate with peers in classroom settings, whereas shy children who had lower communicative capabilities were less able to contribute orally (Evans, 1996). Children's ability to achieve social goals through language may give them the confidence to participate in these situations.

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Crozier and Perkins (2002) conducted a study exploring differences in the speech of shy and non-shy children in a structured task requiring children to generate narratives. A sample of elementary-school children (5–9 years old) was categorised by teachers as shy (n=20) or not shy (n=20) based on items from the teachers' version of the Buss–Plomin Temperament Scale. The children completed the short version of the British Picture Vocabulary Scale with the help of female researchers. The study results showed clear differences in the narratives of the two groups of children. Non-shy children's stories were longer and had more varied vocabulary than shy children's stories, which were shorter and had less varied utterances. Poorer vocabulary skills might reinforce the impression that shy children have academic problems and teachers' perceptions of these students as lacking knowledge. The study findings confirmed that shyness affects verbal behaviour in situations more structured than routine conversations and pointed to the importance of adopting more conversational styles than asking direct questions (Evans, 2001) when communicating with shy children.

The language skills of shy children also differ according to the testing circumstances. Crozier and Hostettler (2003) assessed the performance of shy children under different conditions of test administration, such as individual administration, written responses, oral responses and group administration. Shy children (n=240) from 240 elementary schools performed poorly in demanding testing environments, which might exacerbate the anxiety felt by these children and undermine their performance (Crozier & Hostettler, 2003). Shy children performed best in group conditions and worst in face-to-face testing. A sense of being the focus of attention can be distracting for shy children, who dislike social evaluation and being the centre of attention (Crozier, 1995; Crozier & Hostettler, 2003). More research is required to better understand how shy children might respond to different testing circumstances. Thus, regarding academic skills, shy children's academic performance might be affected by their performance anxiety (Coplan & Evans, 2009; Crozier, 1995; Crozier & Hostettler, 2003), communication style, poor language ability (Crozier & Perkins, 2002) and specific use of language (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993)

2.3.3 School Avoidance

In the early school years, children expand their sense of self and develop either a feeling of liking for school or a desire to avoid school. Not much empirical research has not been directed towards school-avoidance behaviour among shy children. Several studies have looked at the

associations of shyness with school liking and school avoidance among pre-schoolers (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008; Hughes & Coplan, 2010; Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000). Very few studies have been conducted on elementary-school children to explore the relationship between shyness and school avoidance as a construct of school adjustment. Researchers have suggested that shy children might like school less due to poor relationships with peers and teachers and discomfort in the classroom (Arbeau et al., 2010; Eggum-Wilkens, Valiente, Swanson & Lemery-Chalfant, 2013).

Eggum-Wilkens et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study with 291 kindergarteners exploring the relationships among children's shyness, school liking and internalising problems in the early school years. The study aim was to understand how shyness during first and second grade predicted popularity in peer groups and how children's shyness and popularity uniquely contributed to school liking or school avoidance. Parents and teachers completed questionnaires assessing children's shyness, popularity and school liking. The results showed that shyness is associated with low peer popularity, which, in turn, is related to lower school liking (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2013).

Another reason for school avoidance or lower school liking that research has highlighted is disconnected relationships with teachers. Poor relationships with teachers may result in low school liking or a desire to avoid school (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010). Close teacher–child relationships are characterised by warmth, support and care and are positively related to competence behaviours in the classroom and to positive work habits, such as academic performance and liking school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Conflictual relationships are positively related to child adjustment difficulties, including school avoidance and peer exclusion (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Children who have conflictual teacher–child relationships might not enjoy coming to school due to those relationships (Arbeau et al., 2010). Teacher–child relationships are discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.4 Teacher–Child Relationships

Teachers have a critically important role in nurturing many aspects of children's growth. Teachers are the primary adults in children's lives outside the home and have strong influence on not only children's academic development but also the development of the whole child. Teacher–child relationships are perceived as micro-systems with important implications for children's development (Buhs et al., 2015).

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In the absence of parents, teachers are the authority figures to whom children turn for help and guidance. Teachers can serve as a secure base from which children can explore the classroom and interact with their peers. Especially in early childhood, relationships with teachers play a critical role in children's social, emotional and academic development (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta 2001a; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). In the elementary grades, teacher–child relationships have the potential to provide children with social support and emotional security (Howes, Phillipsen & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000). It is evident that adult–child relationships influence school adjustment, and teacher–child relationships, in particular, are dynamic systems composed of multiple components, including the characteristics of the teacher, the child, classroom interactions, the broader classroom and the school environment in which these relationships occur (Pianta, 1999).

The elementary-school environment appears to be an especially stressful context for shy children (Evans, 2010; Lund, 2008) due to high child–staff ratios, increased demands for oral participation and difficulties with peers. These factors have been identified as intensifying shy children's feelings of fear and self-consciousness (Kalutskaya et al., 2015). Thus, positive relationships with teachers and peers (Coplan et al., 2016) are especially important for shy children as they are at risk for school adjustment difficulties (see section 2.3).

Different perspectives exist on shy children's relations with teachers. Teachers generally favour children who display cooperative, social and responsible behaviours over children who exhibit disruptive, aggressive or asocial behaviours (Wentzel, 1991). Some researchers have suggested that shy children might go unnoticed by teachers due to their meek nature and low likelihood of being disruptive during classroom activities. Teachers may encourage shy behaviours as reserved, quiescent, submissive behaviour helps maintain classroom order (Evans, 2001; Keogh, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). However, the results from recent studies with kindergarteners have suggested that shy children do not go unnoticed (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008; Coplan & Prakash, 2003). Increased curricular demands might make it difficult for elementary-school teachers to give attention to all students. It, therefore, is important to explore teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children. To date, relatively little is known about teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their relationships with shy children and their moderating role in Norwegian elementary schools.

Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufmann (2009) conducted a study on 819 first-grade children to examine the contributions of child temperament to the quality of teacher–child relationships both directly and through teacher–child classroom interactions. Child temperament was measured in the above-mentioned study using the Children's Behavior Questionnaire, and observational data were collected using the Student–Teacher Relationships Scale to assess the quality of teacher–child relationships. The results of the study showed that shyer children might be at risk for invisibility in the classroom (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2009). Shyer children are less likely than others to develop conflictual or close relationships with teachers or to initiate interactions with teachers, suggesting that they are less connected to their teachers. This failure to connect might pose risks for children's success in school. Interactions between teachers and students are considered to be the primary mechanism through which children gain opportunities to develop social skills and competencies relevant to their role as classmates and students in the school context (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Teachers' own shyness can also influence their attitudes and beliefs about shy students (Coplan et al., 2011). Teachers who perceive themselves as shy feel more empathy towards shy children and display better understanding and sensitivity towards shy children (Lao, Akseer, Bosacki & Coplan, 2013).

In another study, Stuhlman and Pianta (2001) conducted semi-structured interviews to elicit teachers' narratives concerning their relationships with children. The researchers studied the associations between teachers' perceptions of children's behaviour and teachers' ratings of teacher–child relationship quality (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2001). Fifty teachers from kindergarten (n=21) and first grade (n=29) were interviewed about their relationships with specific children, and their classrooms were observed for half a day. The researchers (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2001) found that the teachers are more likely to express negative feelings about their relationships with children who display negative behaviour (i.e. angry, harsh and hostile behaviour). Teachers' positive interactions with shy children and the obedient behaviour of these children might influence teachers' perceptions of positive relationships with them (Hartz, Williford & Koomen, 2017; Pianta, 1999).

2.4.1 Teacher as Attachment Figures

Attachment researchers have identified parent–child relationships as the primary context of children's development. Attachment is an affectional bond between child and primary caregiver

(Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Bowlby's (1969) ethological theory of mother–child relations attachment has been influential, guiding research in both socio-emotional and personality development through the lifetime (Thompson, 2000). The core hypothesis of this theory is that children's early relationship experiences with primary caregivers foster the development of more generalised beliefs about the self and others, and these beliefs influence how children interpret events and form expectations about relationships with others (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). These broader patterns of views and expectations are called internal working models and serve as a filter for a person's understanding of the surrounding social world. Within this theory, relationship quality is assumed to be coherent and consistent over time as internalised working models of relationships become less consciously accessible and more resistant to change with age. According to attachment theory, child–adult attachments may be secure or insecure. One type of insecure relationships called insecure-avoidant is characterised by anger and mistrust. Second, in insecure resistant relationships, the child feels unprotected in ambiguous situations (Ainsworth et. al., 1978). This type of insecure attachment is predictive of internalising problems, such as anxiety.

Shy children are more likely to develop insecure-resistant attachment relationships, and those who develop insecure attachment with their primary caregivers seem to be especially prone to later difficulties. Lewis-Morrarty et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study tracking infants into adolescence and found that consistent shyness across childhood is predictive of anxiety problems in adolescence among children who have insecure-resistant attachment relationships. Secure attachment relationships with parents serve to buffer shy children from later difficulties with anxiety. In the absence of parents, teachers are the authority figures from whom children seek help and guidance (Lewis-Morrarty et al., 2015).

Over the past two decades, the focus has been expanded from parent-child relationships to include other adult–child relationships in school such as teachers (Pianta et al., 1997; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Similar to parent parent–child relationships, teacher–student relationships appear to perform a regulatory function in children's social and emotional development and therefore have the potential to exert positive or negative influence on children's ability to succeed in school. Teachers' interactions with children encompass aspects of care-giving, especially for students in the early elementary grades (Baker, 1999; Howes & Hamilton, 1992). Thus, teacher–child relationships can become another attachment-type

relationship. Teachers are not replacements for parents but can provide a sense of support and safety (Pianta, 1999).

Most research (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Coplan et al., 2016; Pianta, 1999) on views of teacher–child relationships has utilised the Student–Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) which, investigates teachers' perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal relationship with a specific child, the child's interactive behaviour towards the teacher and their feelings and thoughts about each other (Pianta, 1999). STRS was originally developed for work on attachment theory and research on teacher–child relationships. It measures teachers' perceptions of their relationships with children through three dimensions: the levels of closeness, conflict and dependency within the relationships. This study focuses on teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children through these three dimensions. *Closeness* refers to the warmth and closeness in a relationship, *conflict* to how much negativity that the teacher perceives in the relationship, and *dependency* to the child's possessive and clingy behaviour (Pianta, 1999).

2.4.2 Closeness, Conflict and Dependency

A close teacher–child relationship is characterised by warmth and open communication, and a warm affective tie to a significant figure in the classroom may facilitate a variety of positive outcomes for children (Arbeau et al., 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). In this way, closeness may help facilitate children's learning and school performance. Research has shown that children who have positive relationships with their teachers perform better on achievement tests, have positive work habits and grades (Pianta, Nimetz & Bennett, 1997) and exhibit school liking and assertive social skills. Arbeau et al. (2010) explored the moderating role of teacher–child relationships and school adjustment among shy children. The shyness of 169 first graders was measured at the start of the school. After a few months, the first-grade teachers completed the Student–Teacher Relationship Scale, while at the end of the year, the children were individually interviewed by trained researchers, and the teachers also completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Arbeau et al., 2010). The study results showed that positive teacher–child relationships might serve as a protective factor for shy children, improving their school-adjustment outcomes (Arbeau et al., 2010). Teachers, therefore, can serve as a secure base from which children can explore the classroom (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Hamre & Pianta, 2001a; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Consequently, teachers play

a moderating role in the school adjustment of shy children. Close teacher–child relationships may help shy children feel secure and comfortable in the classroom and help them interact with their peers, possibly decreasing shy children's risks for both immediate and long-term adjustment problems. Children who exhibit high levels of behavioral problems in kindergarten but have close teacher–child relationships have fewer disciplinary difficulties and greater social and academic success in the future (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta & Hamre, 2001a). Very few studies, however, have focused on the association of shyness with teacher–child relationships and the protective role of teacher–child relationships, so much still needs to be known.

In contrast, teacher–child relationships characterised by conflict may lead to high levels of tension and hostility. Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks (2010) found that teacher–child conflict correlates positively with school avoidance and negatively with school liking and cooperation in the classroom. Relationships characterised by high conflict are associated with children's problem behaviours (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta & Hamre, 2001a) and increased perceptions of aggressive behaviour among peers. Children who experience high levels of conflict with their teachers limit the extent to which they rely on their teacher as a source of support (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Difficulties in this relationship may foster feelings of anxiety and loneliness, impair academic performance or achievement and promote negative school attitudes in young children.

Shy children also tend to form less close and conflictual and more dependent relationships with teachers. In a dependent teacher–child relationship, the child is overly clingy with the teacher (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Rudasill & Kalutskaya, 2014), prefers to be around the teacher and may refrain from exploring the classroom and interacting with peers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001a). However, so far, it is not known how early dependent teacher–child relationships affect shy children's later school experiences.

> Children who are perceived as more dependent on the teacher are less mature than their more independent classmates. Their relative immaturity may be reflected in, among other things, their performance on academic tasks. It is also plausible that children who are experiencing academic difficulties or delays may seek out the teacher more often, or feel less capable or working without the teachers help and guidance. (Birch & Ladd, 1997, p. 74)

Dependent teacher–child relationships are associated with child anxiety, academic difficulties, asocial behaviour and peer exclusion at school compared to children with less dependent teacher–child relationships (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). Thus, studies exploring the associations between shyness and teacher–child relationships have suggested that close teacher–child relationships may serve a protective function for shy children at school and can weaken the link between shyness and school adjustment.

2.5 Teacher Support

Shy children can easily become invisible in classroom activities and discourse due to their quiet nature. However, teachers can draw children into social interactions. Evans (2001) explored various strategies that teachers use to support shy children and reported that teachers attempt to reward shy children's speaking attempts and to support and encourage them by praising them. In interviews with first-grade teachers (n=5), Evans (2001) found that teachers try to establish one-on-one relationships with shy children when no one else is around.

Teachers help set the emotional climate of the classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2005), defined as the extent and the feeling of warmth and support between teachers and students. Avant et al. (2011) assessed the capacity of the classroom emotional climate to moderate anxious-solitary children's risk for peer exclusion in third to fifth grade. Children (n=688) completed peer nominations of anxious-solitude students, and observations of the classroom emotional climate were also conducted. In classrooms with unsupportive emotional environments, shy children experience stable or increased peer exclusion (Avant et al., 2011). In positive emotional environments, however, teachers are sensitive to the children's perspectives and responsive to their needs (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Shy children are more sensitive both to the benefits of an emotionally warm, supportive classroom climate and to the disadvantages of unsupportive, aversive climate (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016).

Beyond the traditional role of teaching academic skills, educators are responsible for regulating the activity level in the classroom. Supportive, warm teachers respond appropriately to children's cues (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016). Teachers' sensitive teaching styles may provide a supportive environment for shy children and mitigate the link between shyness and poor school adjustment (Buhs et al., 2015). The literature suggests that shy first graders (n=960) tend to be

rejected by their peers in classrooms with lower levels of emotional support and teacher sensitivity, whereas shy children in classrooms with highly sensitive teachers are more likely to participate in classroom activities (Buhs et al., 2015).

2.6 Summary

Shyness is associated with a host of negative adjustment outcomes, including academic challenges, school avoidance and difficulties with peers. In educational settings, shy children speak less and show reticence, and this tendency to withdraw from social interactions is associated with less social involvement with peers. Moreover, this lack of verbal participation appears to have negative implications for shy children's academic success and school adjustment. Poor-quality relationships with peers are a significant risk factor for numerous negative outcomes, such as peer victimisation and rejection. However, knowledge about shy children's friendships is lacking, and the literature reports mixed findings regarding the onset of peer victimisation and exclusion. Some researchers have suggested that shy children's meek nature allows them to easily go unnoticed by teachers.

Outside the home, teachers are the primary adults in children's lives and play critical roles in children's academic development and the development of the whole child. Not much, though, is known about teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children. Researchers have defined teacher–child relationships in terms of closeness, conflict and dependency. Empirical evidence suggests that shy children tend to form less close and more dependent relationships with teachers. Close teacher–child relationships may serve a protective role and play a moderating role in the school adjustment of shy children. Supportive teachers attempt to be sensitive to children's needs and establish a positive classroom environment. The next chapter presents the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative Methods

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods. Creswell (2014) suggests that researchers should choose methods that help them answer their research questions or support inquiry into their specific area of interest as justified. In this case, qualitative research was selected for two reasons. Firstly, it allows researcher to be part of the whole research process, helping the researcher interpret how people make sense of their experiences, which may be difficult using other methods (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). *S*econdly, qualitative research offers relatively more flexibility in many areas, particularly in reasoning and thinking processes, as it involves interactive processes (i.e. back–and–forth activities) at different phases of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). 'The qualitative approach adopted by the study is situated within the constructivism paradigm in which realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially and experimentally based, and dependent on the individuals or groups holding them' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109–111).

This study agrees with the idea that human experiences and interpreting these experiences to create meanings are integral parts of qualitative methods (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 11). Qualitative inquiry allows participants to describe experiences in depth and the researcher to gain an understanding of the meanings people assign to the social phenomena they experience. The nature of this research topic supported using an exploratory qualitative method, which is useful in studies dealing with little-known phenomena that have not been studied in depth. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and school adjustment among shy children in Norwegian elementary schools. Very little research has been conducted on this topic in Norway, and the current literature provides mixed findings on teachers' awareness of shyness in the classroom and teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children.

The possibility of bias in interpreting research findings is one of the main drawbacks of qualitative methods as they permit a high level of subjectivity on the part of the researcher and those conducting interviews. While conscious of these influences on the data collection and analysis, the researcher attempted tried to be unbiased during the research. Another drawback

is that the aim to unearth realities in natural settings can lead to complexities in research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

This chapter is organised into ten main subsections. The first subsection presents the rationale behind choosing qualitative methods, followed by a description of the sampling methods used to recruit respondents. Then the data and the materials used in this study, including the data sources and collection methods, are presented, and the data analysis methods are explained. Next, the study's validity and data triangulation are discussed, and the last three subsections deal with the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study, concluding with a chapter summary.

3.2 Sampling

This study used two *non-probability* sampling methods to select the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010): purposive or judgment sampling and snowball sampling or the chain-referral method (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013; Punch, 2009).

3.2.1 Purposive Sampling or Judgment Sampling

Purposive or judgment sampling was used for three reasons. Firstly, this technique is appropriate for selecting unique cases that are especially informative. Secondly, it is helpful for selecting members of difficult-to-reach specialised populations, and thirdly, it aids in identifying particular types of cases that require in-depth investigation (Neuman, 2000, p. 198).

In this study, elementary-school teachers who had at least one shy child in their classrooms or had experience working with shy children were deliberately selected to enable interviewing teachers with deep knowledge of the topic under study (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 156–157). In the first round of contact, 15 randomly selected schools from Oslo were contacted with an email briefly explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). No responses to the first wave of emails were received after two weeks, so 10 more schools were contacted and followed up with phone calls and visits. Only one school replied, declining to participate. Six additional schools were visited, and contact was made with gatekeepers who could help access potential participants and facilitate contact with participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). This approach resulted in finding three schools interested in participating. The potential participants identified by the gatekeepers were contacted via email and telephone to schedule initial appointments for

the interviews. Altogether, three teachers were recruited through school visits, and two through snowball sampling (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

The most difficult part of the project was recruitment of respondents. Although it was challenging to find potential participants, one teacher was excluded as she was from the same school as Teacher 1. Doing so served the aims of increasing the diversity of the respondents and mitigating the problems related to the homogeneity of the respondents (Cohen et al., 2013; Punch, 2009). The maximum number of teachers from one school was limited to two.

3.2.2 Snowball or Chain Sampling

Neuman (2000, p. 199) states that 'snowball sampling, also called chain referral, [is] suitable for identifying and sampling the cases in a network'. Snowball sampling works well for recruitment when the target population is difficult to access, perhaps as the research topic is sensitive. This technique also helps identify study participates with very specific characteristics who might be difficult to reach with other methods (Cohen et al., 2013). In this case, the first few interviewees recommended other potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria for the study, which is basically the case in a snowball sampling (King & Horrocks, 2010). Two teachers were recruited with the help of the other participants. The referred teachers were contacted via email to arrange a meeting time for the interview.

3.2.3 Sample Size

Interviews were conducted with five teachers, which was the predetermined number of participants. All the teachers worked at elementary schools in Oslo. A small sample size is common in qualitative studies as they focus on collecting data in depth (Cohen et al., 2013). All of the teachers were female, while four of the children identified by the teachers as shy were female, and only one child was a boy.

3.2.4 Introduction to the Study Participants

To maintain confidentiality with the study participants, their real names were not disclosed (King & Horrocks, 2010). To make it easier to follow a particular interview, the teachers' names were replaced with the labels Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4 and Teacher 5. The teachers were informed that they could not reveal identifying information about their students due to their duty of confidentiality, so they used pseudonyms for students during the interviews.

The teachers in this study were currently teaching classes ranging from first grade to fourth grade.

Teacher 1:

Teacher 1 had worked as a teacher for the past six years. She underwent practical teacher training and held a bachelor's degree from the University of Oslo. She was the class teacher for fourth grade and had taught at this grade level for the past four years. She identified one shy child in the class and had known this child since she was in first grade.

Teacher 2:

Teacher 2 worked as a substitute teacher at a school in the past and held a bachelor's degree in teacher education from the University of Oslo. This was her first year working as a class teacher in third grade. Overall, she had four years' teaching experience, along with experience working with shy children. She identified three shy students in her classroom.

Teacher 3:

Teacher 3 worked as a teacher for a year before becoming a substitute teacher. She held an associate's degree in teacher education from the University of Oslo and could teach students from first through seventh grade. She was the class teacher for first grade and identified one shy child in her classroom.

Teacher 4:

Teacher 4 had worked as a teacher since 1999 and had 19 years of teaching experience. She was a preschool teacher could can teach children from 6 to 10 years old. She held a degree in preschool education from a university in Oslo. She was then a class teacher for first grade, and in her long teaching experience, she had worked with many shy children. She identified one shy child in her class.

Teacher 5:

Teacher 5 had worked as a teacher since 1998 and at the same school for the past 20 years. She took teacher training at a university in Norway and then studied English in the United Kingdom for one year. She had a total of four years of teacher education. In her teaching experience, she

had taught many shy children and identified one very shy student in her current class. She was the class teacher for second grade.

3.3 Data and Materials

3.3.1 Data and Sources of Data

Both primary data from semi-structured interviews and secondary data from various published documents, such as research articles and books, were used in this study (Punch, 2009; Smith, 2012).

3.3.2 Data Collection Method

Kvale (1996, p. 125) describes 'research interviews as 'an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue'. Qualitative interviews were the main formal method employed in this study to gather primary data. A qualitative interview consists of a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee that has a structure and a purpose and goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views to become a careful questioning and listening session (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). Face-to-face qualitative interviews allow obtaining respondents' unique views and opinions (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). The objective of this qualitative study was to capture teachers' perceptions of the moderating role of teacher–child relationships in the relation between shyness and school adjustment.

3.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as they allow the researcher to ask pre-defined questions and gain information about the established themes. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews also allows changing the sequence and forms of questions to follow up the answers given by participants (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). A key requirement of qualitative interviews is the preparation of an interview guide outlining the main topics the researcher is investigating.

3.3.4 Interview Guide

Gall, Gall and Borg (2007, p. 250) explain that 'the interviewing process requires the preparation of the interview guide, which specifies the questions their order and makes guidelines for the interviewer how to start and end interview'). The interview guide developed

in this study contained open-ended questions and adopted a full question format instead of permitting writing short phrases and single words as reminders (King & Horrocks, 2010).

The interview guide was developed according to the research questions and study objectives, and the main questions of the interview guide were oriented towards the main themes/areas of the research, which were based on the theoretical framework of the study (Cohen et al., 2013; King & Horrocks, 2010; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 62). The interview guide had 20 open-ended questions and explored teachers' perceptions of shy children. The first five questions were introductory items focusing on the teachers' educational background and work experience. The remaining questions focused on teachers' perceptions regarding school adjustment of shy children and teacher-child relationships. The last question gave the participants the opportunity to add any desirable information. Open-ended questions allow interviewers to probe, encourage cooperation, obtain in-depth knowledge and establish rapport (Cohen et al., 2013). In this research, w*hat* and *why* questions were asked before *how* questions, and the wording of the questions was kept simple and clear. Indirect and direct questions were both asked as indirect questions reduce social desirability bias. The guide was pilot tested before the interviews were conducted. The interview guide is presented in Appendix B.

3.3.5 Interviews with the Key Participants

The place and time of the interviews were negotiated with the participants through email and telephone conversations. One of the most important parts of the interview was establishing rapport with the participants. The interviewer's ability to create trust and credibility is important for informants to open up (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 44; Mears, 2012, p. 172). As Kvale (1996, p. 128) explains, 'good contact is established by attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding, and respect for what the subject says, at the same time, the interviewer is at ease and clear about what he or she wants to know'. In this research, the participants were briefly told about the purpose, scope and duration of the interview. Participants were informed that they would be audio tape-recorded (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 66) using an OLMPUS VN voice recorder. They were asked if they had any questions before starting the interview. The interviews lasted an average of 40 minutes. Using a tape recorder in the interviews allowed greater eye contact with participants, helped the interviewer engage with the respondents and provided detailed notes at the end of the interview (King & Horrocks, 2010; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

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The interviews started with simple questions that focused on descriptive characteristics of the participants relevant to the research, such as their educational background and work experience. During the interviews, the interviewer listened carefully to the participants and avoided jumping in and suggesting expected responses or interrupting the interviewees. Follow-up questions were asked to gain clarification, and additional questions relevant to the topic or the respondent's discussion were also asked. Notes were taken to identify key points that required further probing, and probing questions were used to gather detailed information, clarify responses and keep the interviews on track. In addition, the participants were asked to give examples, which provided in-depth information and clarified ambiguities. Questions were rephrased and asked again for matters that seemed unclear or confusing (Cohen et al., 2013; King & Horrocks, 2010; Kvale, 1996; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

'Interview questions contributed thematically to knowledge and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction. It motivated participants to discuss their feelings, thoughts and experiences of working with shy children' (Kvale, 1996, p. 129). Thematically interview questions were related to the theoretical concept of this study, which contributed to knowledge production. The interviews were concluding by reviewing the main points of the interview. At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked if they wanted to share anything else they thought was important to understanding their reflections on shy children. They were also invited to ask any questions they had about the research project, and finally, they were thanked for their time and participation. At concluding each interview, the interviewer made notes on the main points of the interview, where and when it was conducted and the participant's non-verbal behaviours.

3.4 Data Collection, Place and Time

All the semi-structured interviews were conducted at the schools in Oslo where the teachers worked to serve their convenience (King & Horrocks, 2010). The interviews were conducted in separate rooms reserved by the teachers after their working hours. The interviewer and the interviewee sat at the corner of a desk, with the voice recorder in the middle of the desk. The interviews were conducted without any distractions, except for the interview with Teacher 4, which was interrupted twice. The interviews were conducted from March 14, 2017 to March 30, 2017.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining data, in short, making sense of data through participants' descriptions of the situation and noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. There is no single or correct way to analyse and present data in qualitative research, but it should follow the principle of *fitness for the purpose* (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 537). Thematic analysis was selected as the preferred method for data analysis in this qualitative study. 'Thematic analysis is essentially a method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data' (Braun & Clark, 2013, p. 120). Data analysis was done at the individual level.

3.5.1 Interview Transcription

All of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim to allow examining the teachers' personal experiences in depth immediately after the interviews, except for the last two interviews which were conducted the same day. The researcher transcribed all the interviews to become familiar with the data and detect questions that were asked differently and cues that were missed (King & Horrocks, 2010; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Four interviews were recorded in Norwegian as it was convenient for the participants. All of these interviews were transcribed in Norwegian first and then translated into English language. Fifth interview was recorded in English language and was transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the tapes for accuracy. The recordings had very good quality and were without any interruption except for one interview (Teacher 4). The transcription included pauses, some sounds such as *hmm* and the words in English (King & Horrocks, 2010). Short pauses were marked by *p*, and long pauses, including those longer than 3 s, were marked by [*pause*]. Italics were used to highlight the words related to the research questions and theoretical framework of the study. Spoken language is messier than written language, so repeated words were deleted for ease of reading. However, 'it is not the purpose of the transcription to produce a corrected version of what have said, but rather an accurate one' (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 148).

3.5.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected due to its flexibility and its function to identify patterns of meaning across interviews that answer the research questions asked. Thematic analysis can be

applied within a range of theoretical frameworks, including constructionism. Thematic analysis approach allows rich, detailed and complex description of data. Focusing on the themes that emerges from the data may reveal useful information from teachers' perspectives. The coding process started with *descriptive coding*. All the interviews were first analysed read and then re-read back and forth without attempting to code them to gain familiarity with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Notes taken during the interviews were kept readily available, along with the interview transcripts. The coding was done manually on transcription paper, and the coding process started with open coding (Cohen et al., 2013; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Neuman, 2000). First, anything in the transcript related to the participants' views, experiences and perceptions of teaching shy children was highlighted. Coloured highlighter pens were used to note the main points of interest relevant to the study, and comments were written in the margins next to the highlighted sections to define the *descriptive codes*. These codes were close to the data and were read repeatedly to see if they could be merged (King & Horrocks, 2006).

Second, *interpretive coding* focused on codes that went beyond describing the relevant characteristics of the participants and attempted to interpret meaning of codes according to the researcher's understanding. Descriptive codes that shared common meanings were grouped together, and an *interpretive code* was created, referring back to the interview data to clarify the researcher's thinking and ambiguities (King & Horrocks, 2006). After thoroughly examining the themes in depth and eliminating irrelevant ones, the researcher selected the themes that referred to patterns in the data that revealed points of interest to the research topic (King & Horrocks, 2010).

In the third stage, three main *overarching themes* relevant to the key concepts of the study were identified from the theoretical content of the study and subthemes were derived from the interview data. Inductive and deductive approaches were both used at this stage. The analysis employed predetermined themes based on theory, which was a deductive approach, while the subthemes were derived from the interview data, which served as an inductive approach.

3.6 The Researcher's Role

Considering the possible influences of the researcher's beliefs, interests and experiences is essential in qualitative research, which requires acknowledging biases, values and assumptions (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). The motivation for this research on shy children originated from the

researcher's personal interest developed during an internship and experiences working as a substitute teacher with shy children. This experience raised the researcher's awareness of shy children and the difficulties they face. Reserved children may become invisible to teachers who nonetheless can play a critical role in shaping these children's experiences in school.

These personal experiences may have influenced the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data. While conscious of these influences on the data collection and analysis, the research attempted tried to be unbiased and neutral during the different phases of the research. The researcher tried not to lead the participants during the interviews by setting aside (bracketing) personal experiences, knowledge and biases (Creswell, 2014) and focused, instead, on the participants' understanding and on allowing them to respond freely.

3.7 Validation Strategies and Triangulation

3.7.1 Validity

Validity refers to the match between a construct and the data, in short, to the extent to which the findings accurately measure the variables they claim to. Some researchers have suggested replacing *validity* with *authenticity or trustworthiness* in qualitative research, which is concerned more with the experiences of the people studied rather than the matching of abstract concepts to empirical data (King & Horrocks, 2010; Neuman, 2000). Qualitative research is intrinsically well placed to ensure high validity because it takes context seriously and grounds the development of concepts in close, detailed attention to the data (King & Horrocks, 2010). In qualitative research, validity can be ensured through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data captured, the characteristics of the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2013).

Internal validity refers to the extent to which findings faithfully represent and reflect the reality studied (Punch, 2009, p. 315). To ensure accuracy in this study, the interviews were audiotaped, notes were taken, and thick, rich descriptions were made for all the themes and subthemes in the findings section. The purpose of the study was related to the data analysis to establish a relationship between what was planned to be studied and what actually was studied. To further support validity, the pilot study was conducted to ensure that the interview guide covered relevant information. Further strategies to ensure internal validity included the presentation of researcher bias and triangulation of data sources. Use and examination of different data sources

helps to build a coherent justification for themes. Triangulation can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

External validity refers to the degree to which results can be generalised to wider population, settings, times or situations (i.e. the transferability of the findings) (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 186). To ensure the external validity of this study, in-depth, detailed descriptions of findings with direct quotations were provided. As Cohen et al. (2013) suggest the researcher's task is not to provide an index of the transferability of the findings but to supply rich data and leave it to the readers to determine whether transferability to other situations is possible. In this research, therefore, it was left it to the readers to determine the generalisability of the findings. Although qualitative threats to internal and external validity can never be eliminated completely, their effects can be diminished by giving attention to the fit of the different components of research, such as the questions, design and methods (Cohen et al., 2013; Punch, 2009).

3.7.2 Triangulation

Creswell (2003) defines triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection or data sources to study a particular phenomenon. In this study, along with the data collection described, research articles, books and reports were also consulted in the theoretical research to provide triangulation. Applying the theoretical framework, along with the other data collection method (i.e. interviews), helped establish the validity of the findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

King and Horrocks (2010, p. 123) state that 'the ethical practice of qualitative interviewing is a wide-ranging and often demanding enterprise'. Qualitative interviews raise numerous ethical issues demanding careful consideration, particularly in collecting data from and about people. Planning for qualitative interviews, therefore, must identify the ethical issues involved so the researcher can show respect for the participants and protect them from possible harm. (Punch, 2009).

3.8.1 Permission to Conduct the Study

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from NSD Norsk Senter for forskningsdata (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) as the research project involved interviews and dealt with sensitive personal data. NSD serves as the official data protection agency for research at

all Norwegian universities and colleges and requires that researchers obtain licenses before starting fieldwork. Guidelines suggested by the NSD were followed throughout the research project. The letter from the NSD is presented in Appendix C.

3.8.2 Informed Consent

All the study participants gave informed consent after being told about the purpose of the study, the main features of the study design and the possible risks and benefits of participation (Kvale, 1996). Consent was voluntary, and the participants had the right to withdraw from the study. Furthermore, the participants were told how the data would be used in the final report and gave permission to audio-tape the interviews. The informed consent form is presented in Appendix D.

3.8.3 Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentially in research requires that participants' private data not be disclosed in any way that might identify them or enable them to be traced (Cohen et al., 2013). In this research, pseudonymous were assigned to teachers and shy students, and information about schools was not provided to protect their identities. All the data gained from the interviews, such as audio-tapes and written notes, were kept on a password-protected personal computer.

3.9 Study Limitations

This research study had several weaknesses that should be noted. The potential weaknesses of a study are the limitations outside the researcher's control. One such limitation in this research was the homogeneity of the participants. Ideally, participants from different schools and no more than one teacher per school would have been selected, but the difficulties recruiting participants and time constraints made this impossible.

Another study limitation was the language used during the interviews. Four interviews were translated from Norwegian into English. The original transcript was made in Norwegian and then translated into the target language, checking for grammatical errors. Some words and phrases in one language do not have an exact equivalent in the other. Consequently, some words different from what the participants said were used in direct quotations. For example, some teachers used the Norwegian term *vennegrupper*, whose exact meaning is 'peer groups'.

However, in direct quotations, the word *playdates* was used as the teachers arranged play sessions for the children.

Interview studies primarily rely on truthful responses from participants to draw meaningful conclusions. Motivated by self-presentation concerns, respondents might under-report socially undesirable activities and over-report socially desirable activities. Social desirability bias might be the other limitation of the study (King & Bruner, 2000).

The final limitation of the study was the difficulty generalising the findings as data collection was limited to five teachers from Oslo. However, it is not typically the purpose of the qualitative research to generalise the results to other populations (Creswell, 2003).

3.10 Summary

Qualitative research was used in this study as it allowed the researcher to participate in the research process and is flexible in many areas, particularly the reasoning and thinking processes. A combination of two non-probability sampling methods (purposive sampling and snowball sampling) was used to select the participants. Five teachers from different schools in Oslo participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The internal validity of the research was discussed, and the external validity was left to the readers' judgment. Finally, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the research were raised. The next chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses the major findings in the light of the theoretical context of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and the school adjustment of shy children in Norwegian schools. The main research question was explored through three main sub-questions concerning, firstly, teachers' perceptions of shy children's school adjustment, secondly, teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and, lastly, the support that teachers believed they provide to shy children. The teachers' beliefs and perceptions were captured in semi-structured interviews.

Following the introduction, this chapter consists of three main subsections discussing the major findings that emerged from the data in line with the theoretical context. The subsections cover teachers' perceptions of shy children's school adjustment, academic performance and school avoidance (4.2) and teachers' views of teacher–child relationships (4.3) and teachers' support to shy children (4.4). These subsections present the major findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews. Examples of direct quotations from the data are given to help characterise the themes and subthemes that most strongly illustrate the research questions. These quotations are discussed and contextualised in relation to the literature reviewed in the theoretical section. Thus, the teachers' reflections on shy children are shared in quotations demonstrating the findings for the topics studied. Conclusions are presented at the end of the discussion of each main theme.

As Braun and Clarke (2006) state, writing is an integral element of the analytic process in thematic analysis, and it involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualizing it in relation to existing literature. In-depth, detailed descriptions of findings with direct quotations and presentation of themes in relation to the theoretical context of the study may provide the reader information on teachers' experience of working with shy children and the participants' perceptions on the school adjustment of shy children.

4.2 School Adjustment by Shy Children

Shyness is associated with a host of negative adjustment outcomes. In this study, the school adjustment of shy children was based on teachers' reflections of shy children's relationships with peers, academic performance and school avoidance.

4.2.1 Peer Relationships

Shyness often limits children's classroom interactions with peers, hindering their practice of social skills and suppressing their engagement in classroom discourse. Consequently, shy children typically spend less time interacting and playing with other children, making them more likely to be disliked, excluded and victimised by peers (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). Teachers' responses regarding peer relationships are discussed in detail.

4.2.1.1 Peer Rejection and Exclusion

When asked about the peer relationships of shy children, most of the teachers (3 of 5) responded that shy children have difficulty taking initiative and joining their classmates in play. The following quotations represent the teachers' responses.

> *It can be difficult for shy children to take initiative to join play or join playmates at recess time. (...) Shy children feel lonely when they are not included in play. (...) Being shy limits interactions in social settings. I am very afraid when the children choose groups as students who are left alone are often shy and do not take much initiative. (Teacher 2)*

> *He is very passive in play. He only stands and looks at others. (...) When he played football with others, he only ran only around the court. (...) He never came up to the ball. (...) I had to remind the other students that he was playing with them. (Teacher 4)*

> *Shy children behave differently in free time. They do not dare to ask others to play. (Teacher 5)*

As seen in these quotations, the teachers perceived shy children to feel difficulty joining peer activities. The teachers stated that shy children are not included in play and feel left out, ignored and lonely. Shy children may desire social contact with peers, but when it occurs, they take longer to initiate conversations. These teacher reports somewhat align with the research literature indicating that in early educational settings, shy children speak less, initiate fewer social interactions with peers and display poor social skills (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Buhs et al., 2015). Due to these withdrawn patterns of social interactions, shy children's behaviour appears atypical to peers, and consequently, shy children tend to become less preferred as playmates (i.e. rejected) within classroom groups (Bosacki et al., 2011; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

Research evidence suggests that reticent children are less appealing playmates than more sociable classmates, and their behaviour predicts peer rejection and other social difficulties over the course of the school year (Coplan et al., 2007). Most teachers reported that shyness negatively affects children's peer relations, creating more difficulty making friends and a tendency to be ignored by peers. The teachers also stated that despite atypical behaviours, shy children are not victimised by their peers.

As reported by teachers, shy children place themselves in proximity to peers and watch them play but have difficulty in joining peer activity. Asendorpf (1990) presents a model positing that shyness is a reflection of an underlying struggle between children's social approach and social avoidance motivation. They may desire social contact with peers but avoid them due to fear of poor social performance and negative peer treatment. Shy children experience an *approach–avoidance conflict*; that is, they want to play with others, but these inclinations are subdued by accompanying fears and anxieties (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016, p. 12). As mentioned by the participants, this internal struggle can be observed in playgrounds and other social settings, where shy children are interested in a group of children playing but hesitant to join them. These findings might explain why shy children in elementary schools are at increased risk for experiencing difficulties in peer relationships, including peer rejection, loneliness, and exclusion (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Hart et al., 2000; Rubin, Coplan & Bowker 2009).

4.2.1.2 Peer Victimisation

Only Teacher 3 reported that shy children can be bullied by peers. Some children who have stronger personalities or are boisterous do not let shy children decide the activities at playtime.

> *It often happens that she is vulnerable. I think it's exhausting to be shy. She sees that others are capable of including her in play, but it happens that she is left out because others are very bossy. They give her directions. She does not say what she wants. (Teacher 3)*

This quotation shows that shy children may be perceived as easy marks of bullying as they are less assertive and less likely to fight back. Children who have strong personalities and are more assertive may manipulate shy students into doing things against their wishes. These self-reports suggest that shy children have poor social skills compared to their age-mates. Shy children spend less time interacting with peers and, as a result, may lag behind in the attainment of successful social skills. These findings may advance understanding of the difficulties faced by shy children at playtime. Previous research has shown that children victimised by peers are less sociable, more socially withdrawn (Bosacki et al., 2011; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003) and more submissive. Shy children who have a submissive nature have less-developed social communicative skills and poor assertive skills, which might invite the attention of bullies.

4.2.1.3 Friendships

Some teachers said that shy children may also develop intimate, close relationships with one or two friends. They prefer friends who are quiet like them, which makes them feel comfortable.

> *She has always had friends and has been popular among her classmates since first grade. Socially, it goes really well. I have never seen her alone… It was never a problem for me to involve her socially. She has two best friends. (…) She likes to sit with someone who is quiet like her. (Teacher 1)*

> *I often find that shy children have one or few close friends that they have good relationships with. They are with them every time when they get the opportunity*

to choose. They are very close to good friends, and they might love quiet-type
activities with little, safer frames. They often make friends that are like them, a
little quiet. (Teacher 2)

They like to be with a child who is more like them. They like to be with people
who are more or less like them. It makes them comfortable. (Teacher 5)

These quotations indicate that shy children do make friendships, according to the teachers' perceptions. The teachers stated that some shy children are active socially and enjoy being friends with children like them. Shy children prefer safer activities and like to form friendships with children who have similar interests. The teachers' perceptions somewhat align with the previous empirical evidence suggesting that shy children do not differ from their peers in the stability of their mutual best friendships (Haselager et al., 1998; Rubin et al., 2006). Shy children tend to form friendships with one another. Behavioral similarity analyses have indicated significant behavioral similarities between shy children and their best friends. Shy children tend to form friendships with one or two children (Bosacki et al., 2011) like them, particularly those who are somewhat sensitive and not too extroverted. However, Teacher 1 had a different observation of shy children's friendships than the other teachers interviewed: she stated that the shy child in her classroom is popular among classmates, including non-shy children, and she has never seen her alone at recess time.

4.2.1.4 Conclusion

As seen in these findings, teachers had mixed perceptions of the peer relationships of shy children. Most of the participants agreed that shy children speak less and initiate fewer peer interactions than their age-mates in Norwegian elementary schools. Due to these withdrawn patterns of interactions, shy children's behaviour appears atypical to peers, and they tend to be less preferred as playmates. The teachers reported that shyness might negatively affect children's peer relations, including increased difficulty making friends and a tendency to be ignored or neglected by peers, but shy children generally do not experience physical or verbal abuse from their peers and classmates. Moreover, shy children may actually desire social contact with peers, but this social approach motivation is inhibited by their social fear and anxiety. This approach–avoidance conflict is observable on the playground at school. Regarding friendships of shy children, two of the five teachers suggested that shy children

might have difficulties forming large numbers of friendships but do tend to form friendships with one or two children who are like them, especially those who are sensitive and not extroverted. One teacher's view conflicted previous research findings as she stated that in her teaching experience, she has seen that shy children are popular playmates and do not face difficulties forming friendships.

4.2.2 Academic Performance

Teachers had mixed responses regarding the academic performance of shy children. One teacher expressed that shy children's academic performance on written work does not differ from that of non-shy students. No empirical suggests that shy and non-shy children differ in intelligence, but many studies indicate that shy children tend to do less well academically than their sociable peers (Crozier & Hostettler, 2003; Hughes & Coplan, 2010). Teachers' views of shy children's academic performance are discussed in detail.

4.2.2.1 Fear of Evaluation, Low Self-esteem and Lack of Engagement

Shy children may be highly likely to develop feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment in situations of perceived evaluation. The teachers stated that these negative feelings can have negative effects on their academic abilities. The following quotations represent the teachers' views.

> *I wish that she would have participated much more verbally in front of the entire class. She is afraid to answer incorrectly. She is afraid of negative evaluations as she is a quiet person. She has no academic problems. She is where she should be academically. (Teacher 1)*

> *Shy children feel very unsafe and think they are good for nothing. They cannot master things (…). She never raises her hand; maybe, I think that she thinks she does not have much to contribute. She has negative thoughts about herself. (Teacher 2)*

> *It is very challenging for shy children to speak in the classroom (…) He never talks to me in front of the whole class. He does not feel safe. If a child is academically weak and shy, the teacher has to work even harder. (Teacher 4)*

It is hard for shy children to say something in front of the whole class. (...) They feel they are not successful. If they hear a lot of negative comments from other peers, it can affect their self-confidence (...) If I am teaching in the classroom and not asking questions, they feel relaxed and make eye contact. They listen. (Teacher 5)

All of the participants stated that shy students have lower verbal performance than their more sociable classmates. The preceding quotations mention three negative costs of shyness on academic performance: first, *fear of evaluation*; second, *low self-esteem* and a *lack of confidence*; and, third, *teachers' perceptions of academic ability of shy children.* Firstly, the teachers stated that academic competence is dependent on oral expression; consequently, shy children might be at disadvantage as they communicate less frequently than their classmates. Shyness is the primary contributor to a lack of oral participation in the classroom (Evans, 2001). This pattern is consistent with the idea that being in front of a group makes shy children, who are concerned about *social evaluation*, feel uneasy. Shy children dislike social evaluation and being the *centre of attention* (Buss, 1996), which can hinder their ability to engage in academic experiences.

Secondly, teachers described feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence as negative costs of shyness. Feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence can lead shy children to feel poorly about themselves. According to the teachers, shy children report lower self-esteem regarding their scholastic competence and feel that they have not much to contribute academically. Consequently, they have lower self-worth (Crozier, 1995).

Most of the teachers perceived shy children to have a quiet style and to be reticent to actively participate in all the aspects of the classroom, as discussed. The teachers (4 of 5) did not perceive this lack of participation as a lack of knowledge or interest, except for Teacher 3, who stated that students learn the most from classroom engagement. She elaborates this view:

Students learn the most from participation, discussion and when they explain. Shy students are not as academically active as non-shy students. They give up very quickly. (...) They do not try. They rarely ask. How they will learn? (Teacher 3)

Thirdly, in this quotation, Teacher 3 perceived quiet children as less academically competent. She stated that shy children are less likely to volunteer to participate and have underdeveloped academic skills due to their lack of participation in classroom activities. When shy children fail to raise their hands to volunteer answers during class discussions, teachers can perceive this attitude as a lack of interest or preparation rather than a fear of being the centre of attention. Teacher 3 stated that shy children give up very easily and do not try.

Empirical evidence suggests that teachers may interpret a lack of engagement as a lack of understanding of the course material or knowledge of the correct answers. This suggests that children's shyness is linked to teachers' perceptions of their academic achievement but not to standardised assessments of their achievement. This is an important point as it suggests that shy children's academic achievement deficits may arise more from teachers' perceptions of their ability than their actual ability (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Coplan et al., 2011; Coplan & Rudasill, 2016; Hughes & Coplan, 2010).

4.2.2.2 Good Listeners and Well Behaved

Despite shy children's difficulties communicating, teachers do not always view shy behaviour negatively. Some teachers considered shyness to have a positive influence on academic competence. Shy children comply with teachers' instructions and classroom routines and might spend more time and effort on classroom activities. Shy children are not disruptive of teachers' instructions, and teachers may view them as well behaved.

> *She likes to do things properly, and she is very concentrated while doing non-verbal activities, like drawing, handwork and essay writing. (Teacher 1)*

> *I have a student who is very quiet, submissive, very well behaved and obedient. (…) He is a very caring and considerate boy, (…) does what he is told to do. (Teacher 2)*

> *The only response shy children receive from me is that they are good and do not disturb classmates. (Teacher 3)*

Shy students are obedient and good listeners. (Teacher 5)

Most of the teachers identified some potential advantages for shy children in the classroom, including being good listeners, obedient and well-behaved (Bosacki et al., 2011). The teachers perceived shy children as non-disruptive as they follow teachers' instructions and do not disturb classroom activities. Their quiet style makes teachers perceive them as good children who are unlikely to get into trouble (Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). The teachers stated that shy children are rarely aggressive or have problematic conduct.

4.2.2.3 Conclusion

Teachers perceived that shy children had difficulty engaging in classroom discussions. All of the teachers stated that shy children had lower verbal performance than non-shy children. Most of the participants found told that shy children's written work does not differ from that of their non-shy classmates. The teachers stated that shy children do not participate in classroom discussions as they experience feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment in situations of perceived social evaluation. They do not like being the *centre of attention*, and being in front of a group makes them uneasy. Self-doubt, low confidence, self-consciousness and concerns about how others see them can lead shy children to feel poorly about their academic abilities. Teacher 3 perceived this lack of engagement as a lack of knowledge and interpreted lower engagement as poorer academic achievement. She stated that shy children give up very easily and do not try. Overall, the teachers perceived shy students as good children, always obedient, good listeners, well behaved and unlikely to get into trouble or exhibit problematic conduct.

4.2.3 School Avoidance

Shyness is associated with lower levels of school liking and higher levels of school avoidance. The elementary-school teachers were asked about school avoidance among shy children. Most of the respondents (4 of 5) reported that shy children liked school and never avoided school.

She has never avoided school. (Teacher 1)

It is only by chance that she is not at school, but I think she has never avoided school. (Teacher 2)

I have never experienced school avoidance among shy children. (Teacher 4)

She was very quiet, hardly said anything. It was very difficult to reach her, but she was at school in the morning, and she stayed through the day. (…) She came to school, did her homework. (…) She grew up; she made it. (Teacher 5)

These statements by the teachers indicate that shy children do not necessarily avoid school. The teachers observed that despite the difficulties faced by shy children at school (e.g. loneliness, low self-esteem, self-consciousness and fear of being centre of attention), they do not exhibit low school liking or a desire to avoid school. Only one teacher reported witnessing school avoidance behaviour in a shy student. This student thinks that she is not capable of doing tasks and often asks to go home. It is difficult for her to remain in school.

She has negative thoughts about herself: I cannot do it, I am stupid. (…) She comes to me always wondering when she will returns home. I have experienced that some students ask to go home before school ends or will not be in the whole school day. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 stated that in her experiences of school avoidance among shy children, they may have negative thoughts about themselves and wish to go home. Two main points can be understood from Teacher 3's statement which may explain possible lower school liking among shy children. Firstly, the teacher perceived that the shy child who is submissive and less assertive experiences peer negative treatment (see 4.2.1.2) and consequently might display school avoidance (Wilkens et al., 2015). Secondly, Teacher 3 stated that this shy child has negative thoughts about herself and thinks that she is not competent. School can be an uncomfortable or distracting environment for shy children and can intensify their feelings of social fear and self-consciousness (Evans, 2001). Feelings of self-doubt and self-consciousness may lead to lower school liking, and consequently, children exhibit school avoidance.

4.2.3.1 Conclusion

From these findings, we can conclude that the elementary-school teachers perceived that shy children do not avoid school despite the problems they face, including peer exclusion, loneliness and fear of being the centre of attention. Only one teacher reported school avoidance

among shy children. The teachers perceived that self-consciousness, the high demands of the school environment and possible negative experiences with peers may aggravate shy children's tendencies to feel bad, leading to school avoidance and lower school liking.

4.3 Teacher–Child Relationships

The teachers were asked about their relationships with shy children. Most teachers (4 of 5) gave very positive descriptions and said that they share close, warm relationships with shy children. Some teachers communicated that shy children request extra help, even when it is not required. None of the teachers reported *conflictual relationships* with shy children.

> *I feel I have a good relationship with her. (…) I think I have become familiar with her over time, and she shows confidence in me. She knows what I expect, and I know her as a person. I share a close, warm relationship with her. She is not overly dependent on me. (Teacher 1)*

> *I have good relationships with shy children. (…) I have had conversations with these students. (…) To build relationships with shy children requires extra effort, so it may take little longer time. (…) They feel safer as we have better relationships, and they ask for help related to lessons and if something happens at playtime. They have never misbehaved in the classroom. (Teacher 2)*

> *I feel like I do not know shy students very well, but I am working and trying. I know approximately how many siblings they have but nothing more than that. (…) She feels very helpless. (Teacher 3)*

> *I have a good relationship with him. He has changed a bit if I look at him from the very first day. I think he feels safer raising his hand. (…) It takes a longer time for shy children to feel safe. When we are on field trips, he likes to hold my hand, and I try to talk with him and try to be close with him. Sometimes he asks for help when he really does not needs help. For example, if he throws a piece of paper in the garbage, he comes to me and stands beside me without saying anything. I have to guess what he wants. (Teacher 4)*

It is important for me to make good relationships with shy children (...) to make them relax. ... They know that I care for them. (...) I try to be warm and build close relationships with them. (...) It is very important for the shy child to know that my teacher likes me and loves me. (Teacher 5)

As seen in these quotations, four of the five teachers believed that they have good, affectionate, positive relationships with shy children and that with time and effort, they become familiar with these students. Shy students show confidence in their teachers, use them as a secure base and seek help when needed. Firstly, the participants narrated that shy children are slow to warm up but, with time and repeated exposure, become familiar with their teachers. When teachers are warm, accepting and friendly, shy children are less likely to be intimidated and are put at ease. Teachers perceived that the familiarity that comes with time and better understanding allows them to best meet their students' specific needs, which plays an important role in successful learning and relationship building. When the teachers get to know their students, they can better able help them. Empirical evidence suggests that close teacher–child relationships might help shy students take advantage of their strengths, make them feel connected to school and encourage them to work hard (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016). Positive relations between children and teachers provide security for children and diminish the negative consequences of shyness. Children who have positive experiences with teachers have a firm foundation and secure base that buffer them from negative outcomes in schools (Arbeau et al., 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Secondly, most of the teachers perceived shy children as obedient students who never disrupt classroom routine and activities. Most of the teachers used words such as *good listeners*, *obedient* and *well-behaved* (see section 4.2.2.2) to describe shy children. Teachers' perceptions of children's classroom behaviours likely affect the formation of teacher–child relationships. Teachers generally favour children who display cooperative and responsible behaviours as opposed to disruptive or aggressive behaviours. The teachers perceived shy children as cooperative and self-controlled compared to bolder children (Wentzel, 1991). The teachers' positive perceptions of shy children's behaviour might be a factor in their perceptions of close, warm relationships with shy children (Hartz et al., 2017; Pianta, 1999). Thus, the teachers' perceptions and experiences of relationships with students provide a window into classroom processes that correlate with important indicators of child success or failure (Pianta, 1999, p.

70). Positive teacher–child relationships may significantly facilitate children's adaptation to school, especially for students at high risk of failure (Pianta, 1999).

Teacher 3 reported that she is uncertain about her relationships with shy students and is trying to become familiar with them. Teachers with less positive and more negative emotional attitudes are not sensitive to children's needs. As Teacher 3 stated, 'I spoke very harsh before because of some demanding students, but now I am trying to speak very calmly, *and it helps a little*'. Strict teachers might unintentional send messages that reinforce shy students' fears. Consequently, these students are more likely to withdraw in nonresponsive and insensitive classroom environments as their fears and insecurities are not well understood.

Shy children are much more likely to be reserved, and in the classroom, this behaviour makes it difficult for their teachers to get to know them well and to understand the role of shyness in their school experiences. Teachers constantly manage multiple demands in their classrooms and might not always have the resources, time or competency to intervene effectively with children who are not disrupting the classroom environment. Some teachers may encourage shy behaviour as it helps maintain classroom discipline (Rubin, 1982).

Teacher 4 stated that that she has good relationship with the shy child in her classroom and that he feels safe now, but she perceive him as excessively clingy. She explained that shy children feel helpless and insecure, leading to clinginess and overly needy behaviour. Children overly dependent on teachers may refrain from exploring the classroom or interacting with peers because they are reluctant to leave the teacher. As Teacher 4 stated, '*I have to guess what he wants. (…) He likes to hold my hand when we are on field trips*'. Research suggests that shy children may tend to form dependent relationships with teachers, to follow teachers (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2009), ask excessive questions (Rudasill et al., 2006) and require extra attention. As one teacher stated, '*sometimes he asks for help when he really does not need help*'. Although teachers negatively perceive these dependent relationships as the children require much unnecessary attention, this negative relation can be protective as the teachers are interacting with shy children (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016). If teachers are supportive, they can lure shy children out of their shell (Lao et al., 2013).

4.3.1 Receive Less Attention

Teachers were not directly asked how they perceived their interactions with shy children but were asked about their perceptions of the differences between shy and non-shy children. Most of the teachers responded that shy children receive less attention and that teachers initiate most of their interactions with shy children due to their quiet style.

I had to take into account that she is not forgotten by me and that I see her. There are many students who take or seek more attention from me. (…) It is a challenge for a teacher to give equal focus to all students when you have some children who are very outspoken and can draw a lot more attention. (Teacher 1)

One can use most of the time with those students who are acting out in other ways or who are boisterous and demanding. They take up much space in the class. They make themselves readily visible to teachers. (…) Shy students may be overlooked, but I try my best to engage shy students. (…) It is a challenge for a teacher, and that is what a teacher works towards every day: creating security and safety in the classroom. (Teacher 2)

Other students take up more time. Those who shout get more attention. It is very difficult to fit in all the time. (…) I had a student who was very much demanding, and he took too much attention. He has moved to another school. I see now where the problem is, and I have become very aware that how incredibly dangerous and easy it is to forget the shy students who require absolutely nothing from me. (Teacher 3)

There are different students in the classroom, and sometimes it's a challenge for me to give equal attention to all the students, especially shy students. It is easy for shy children to vanish in the crowd. (Teacher 4)

In a group, there are different children, so often, it happens that there are some who take up much space. Then I think it is important for the teacher to make sure that they do not get too much attention. I try to interact as much as possible. (Teacher 5)

In these statements, the teachers explained that shy children who are not disruptive or demanding might receive less teacher attention than bolder students. The teachers stated that boisterous students make themselves easily readily apparent to teachers and initiate more interactions with them than shy children. Shy students do not participate much in classroom activities and are hesitant. The teachers saw that it is easy for teachers to ignore or forget shy children and that it a challenge and demanding for teachers to give equal attention to all students.

Most of the teachers displayed awareness of the problems that shy children tend to experience at school but stated that their reserved nature draws less attention than bolder students. More outspoken students are demanding, draw more attention, offer information willingly and, as a result, get more attention. Accordingly, Teacher 3 stated that that due to continuous pressure to meet daily demands, such as classroom management and instructional requirements, teachers do not necessarily have the time to help children who are not disturbing classroom activities (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Rudasill, 2011).

4.3.2 Teacher–Initiated Interactions

Regarding the interactions between teachers and shy students, the teachers said that shy children initiate fewer interactions with teachers than their non-shy peers but are less inclined to have negative interactions with peers and teachers.

> *The differences between shy and non-shy children are that non-shy children share a lot of things; for example, they come and tell what happened on the weekend. Many provide almost too much information, but when it comes to the shy child, she does not speak up much. I must ask her (…) and then she says it gladly. She is always smiling and gentle. She asks for help related to lessons and if something happens outside the class. (Teacher 1)*

> *It is not that they don't come to me when something happens, but I must take the initiative to talk with them. (…) Students who are not shy take more contact with the teacher. I need to take more contact with the shy students. They enjoy a lot*

being asked. They like when I ask them, but they will not talk in front of the entire class. (Teacher 2)

Other students tell a lot about themselves, but shy children do not tell me that much. They do not like to talk in front of the entire class. (Teacher 3)

Shy children are very uncommunicative, and they simply are there, and they are unseen and unheard by both teachers and other kids. (Teacher 4)

I feel very glad if a shy child comes to me and wants to tell me something. They feel comfortable sharing personal information with me, but sometimes I have to take the initiative myself. (Teacher 5)

These teachers' statements explain that shy children initiate fewer interactions with teachers as they are hesitant to make contact with teachers themselves. Consequently, shy children have fewer interactions with teachers than their non-shy peers and less regulated, bolder students (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Although teachers initiate these interactions, they perceived them as having good quality as children are comfortable to sharing information with them when no one is around. According to the teachers, shy children are more comfortable in one-to-one relationships.

Teachers 1, 2 and 5 reported their interactions with shy children are not one-sided; rather, these children are easy to talk to and engage in conversation, leading to productive and positive interactions. The teachers perceived the children as not too dependent on teachers and as displaying positive affect in response to the teachers' interactions. Teachers' perceived positive interactions with children may help establish a classroom environment that is secure and inviting for shy children. Teachers' positive interactions with shy children and the obedient behaviour of shy children might prompt teachers' perceptions of positive relationships with them (Hartz et al., 2017; Pianta, 1999). Teacher–student interactions (Hamre & Pianta, 2005) are conceptualised as the primary mechanism through which children experience opportunities to develop social skills and competencies relevant to their role as classmates and students in the school context. The teachers reported that shy children are less likely to receive teacher attention, as discussed, but are

also less likely to have negative or retaliatory interactions with teachers. Shy children's quiet style make them unlikely to get into trouble (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016), but they often struggle to regulate their anxiety and worry in situations of perceived social evaluation (Buss, 1986) and are more comfortable in one-on-one relationships.

4.3.3 Shy Teachers

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about shy students can be influenced by the teachers' own personalities and personal experiences. Shy teachers, in particular, are more empathetic towards shy children.

> *In parent–teacher meetings, I have tried to share that I was exactly like her when I was a child, perhaps even shyer. I think she liked that I told her about myself and that I understand how it is to be shy. (Teacher 1)*

> *All people are very different. Some love to talk; some are more shy. I can understand that myself as I actually like to be on my own and like reading and to be quiet or silent. I think I can easily understand a shy pupil. I am in a role that I have to speak to make a warm, inclusive fellowship. I think I can see the child who is shy as I know little about these feelings myself. (Teacher 5)*

Teachers 1 and 5 stated that their self-identified childhood shyness helps them better understand the problems of shy students and build positive relationships with those children. The participants' responses revealed that teachers' own shyness can influence their attitudes and beliefs about shy students (Coplan et al., 2011). Shy teachers appear to be more empathetic, better understand and have sensitive attitudes towards shy children. Teachers who are shy are more likely to encourage shy children and provide learning opportunities to lure shy children out of their shell by asking probing questions or encouraging them to speak up in class (Lao et al., 2013).

4.3.4 Conclusion

The teachers perceived shy children as slow to warm up, but with repeated exposure and efforts over time, the teachers become familiar with these students. The teachers thought that when they are warm, accepting and friendly, shy children are less likely to be

intimidated and can be put at ease eventually. Familiarity over time and better understanding allowed educators to best meet the specific needs of their students. Teachers 1, 2 and 5 stated that they have warm, affectionate, close relationships with shy children. Elementary-school teachers observed that shy children feel secure and comfortable with them and display positive affect in response to teachers' interactions. Although the teachers initiate most interactions, children ask teachers help in academic and social difficulties but are not overly dependent on teachers. All of the teachers perceived that shy children receive less attention and that the teachers initiate more interactions. Teacher 4 reported that she has a close relationship with a shy child, but the child is overly dependent on her. Shy children might feel insecure and became dependent on teachers. According to Teacher 4, children overly dependent on teachers might refrain from exploring the classroom and interacting with peers. Teacher 3 described herself as uncertain in her relationships with shy students and explained that she is trying to become familiar with them.

Most of the teachers stated that it is easy for shy children to go unnoticed as there are many outgoing children who draw more attention. Teachers with less positive attitude might be insensitive to children's needs, reinforcing their fears and insecurities. Teachers 1 and 5 self-identified shyness affects their perceptions of students' shy behaviour, making them more empathetic and sensitive towards shy children.

4.4 Teachers' Support

Despite the problems that teachers encounter in interactions with the shy children and the risk of giving less attention to shy children, the teachers reported that they use various strategies to engage shy children in the classroom. However, during interviews, all of the teachers stated that most of these activities are not planned and implemented specifically to support shy children but, rather, to facilitate all children's overall academic and social development. Most of the teachers perceived these strategies as beneficial and helpful in creating a comfortable, secure classroom atmosphere that provides a feeling of acceptance to shy children. Some teachers used direct strategies to support shy children, such as praise, encouragement, learning partners and one-on-one relationships.

Different perspectives exist on shy children's relations with teachers. Some teachers may encourage shy behaviour in the classroom to help maintain order (Rubin 1982). Some researchers have suggested that shy children go unnoticed by teachers (Keogh, 2003). However, during the interviews, most of the elementary-school teachers displayed awareness of the problems shy children may experience, consistent with recent studies suggesting that pre-school teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the potential problems shy children might face (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Bosacki et al., 2011). The strategies that teachers practice are discussed in detail.

4.4.1 Classroom Emotional Environment

Teachers stated that they try to be warm and positive while interacting with shy children. Physical contact makes these students feel comfortable.

I feel it's my responsibility to create a positive classroom environment. (Teacher 1)

As a teacher, it is important for me to work to create a safe classroom environment, learning environment for all children in the class where you accept that we are different. Some are shy, some are extroverted, some are tall, and some are short. (Teacher 2)

I think it is very important to tamp down some students in the class. It is important to work with the environment in class so that every answer is fine, and no one will laugh if someone says the wrong answer. (Teacher 4)

I think that it is my job to make shy students feel welcomed and comfortable. It is very important for me to make them feel at home, that they can relax. At the same time, I try to get them feel part of the fellowship in the classroom. (Teacher 5)

In these statements, the teachers stressed that they try to create an accepting, emotional classroom climate so that children accept and treat their peers fairly. The teachers stated that children learn more in a safe classroom environment. Shy children are sensitive to the benefits of an emotionally warm, supportive environment and to the disadvantages of an unsupportive environment. In supportive emotional classroom climates, teachers can improve the academic outcomes of children at risk (Hamre & Pianta, 2005), and shy children are considerably less

likely to experience peer difficulties (Avant et al., 2011). A positive classroom emotional climate involves a shared feeling of warmth and support between the teachers and the students. The participating teachers attempt to create positive emotional classroom climates signalling acceptance to shy children. The teachers want the classroom environment to allow shy children to fight their fear of social evaluation as teachers communicate the message that children are accepted as they are, regardless whether they fail or make mistakes (Avant et al., 2011).

4.4.2 Teachers' Sensitivity

Most of the teachers (4 of 5) said that they have a responsibility to make shy children feel comfortable in the classroom. The teachers try to be observant and to respond to children's verbal and nonverbal cues as much as possible. The following quotations represent the teachers' responses.

> *I am very observant at circle time. If she raises hand, I try to always let her respond. I have to be vigilant all the time. It is important for me to be aware of who she sits with. (Teacher 1)*

> *Shy students require extra attention from me, and it's my responsibility to make sure that they get to participate and they get help. (Teacher 2)*

> *I know that he is more vulnerable. He easily gets hurt. It is a little hard to know when he is not doing well compared to other students who are not shy. I must follow, hear and be observant. I feel like sometimes I am a little more protective. (Teacher 4)*

> *I should be very observant when I see that there is something that she/he needs to talk about. It is important for me to speak very closely, and I try to fix things or try to talk after the lesson is finished. (...) I have to be very careful as a teacher; I see every child and especially the shy child. I try to look, to watch and to think how a child feels now. (Teacher 5)*

In these statements, the teachers in this sample reported being sensitive to the needs of shy children and making efforts to help them. Shy children tend to warm up more quickly in classrooms where the teachers are kind and understanding. The teachers reported that they try

to be observant and to offer support and encouragement if shy children raise their hands. The teachers have difficulty knowing when shy children are not doing well as they are hesitant to share it. Empirical evidence suggests that teachers who show more sensitive teaching styles may provide a supportive classroom environment for shy children that can interrupt the link between shyness and poor school adjustment (Pianta, 1999). The teachers stated that they try to engage shy children in classroom activities, and shy children are more actively engaged in classrooms with highly sensitive teachers than less sensitive teachers (Buhs et al., 2015).

4.4.3 Promoting Positive Interactions

Overall, most of the teachers (4 of 5) mentioned that they use various strategies to try to encourage shy children's oral communication in classroom activities and discussion. Regarding strategies, most teachers reported that they try to interact with shy children in non-threating situations. The participants narrated the following:

One child has little contact with me. I regularly set aside time to talk to him and hear how it goes with him, if there is something he wants to tell me. (Teacher 2)

In the morning when school starts, shy students come in early as they are not comfortable running and shouting in the halls. Then I can talk with them, ask them what they did yesterday. (…) When we work in groups, shy students are comfortable talking to me. This is the only way to communicate with them. There is a student who has never participated, but today she raised her hand to answer. It goes forward in a way. (Teacher 3)

They should practice saying something or speaking. In circle time, for example, they practice raising their hands to answer only in harmless situations, such as answering questions that are very easy, for example, what did you have for dinner last night? Or, what do you like to play? In this way, you give children opportunities to practice speaking. It is a good experience for him to hear his own voice. He will not be the one who never speaks. (…) I have told him that he can raise his hand when he is absolutely sure about the answer. (Teacher 4)

They like one-on-one relationships. Shaking hands with children in the morning is a good start to make children feel welcome. (…) We are learning in groups doing different stations four days a week, two hours daily. I have divided them in group of five, and it is very easy for me to make a shy child active in a very small group as then it's easier to tell things, read aloud and answer questions. I think I love very small groups when I can make the shy child involved and active. Sometimes I say to a child, you can only nod with your head; you just to have a non-verbal communication. (Teacher 5)

The teachers stated that shy children are frequently reticent to speak aloud in front of the whole class, but in non-threatening situations, such as small group settings in *learning stations* (station rotation model), they can be encouraged to participate. In a station rotation model, students move to different learning stations at fixed points in time. The teacher leads one station with a small group and encourages shy students to participate in small group discussion. The teachers reported implementing *mini-goals* for shy students, such as asking them for questions that the teacher is sure they can give or requesting non-verbal responses or signs to question. The teachers in this sample stated that these mini-goals helps slowly build the confidence of shy children (Evans, 2001).

Graduated exposure is most commonly used in clinical psychology. In this technique, a desired goal is divided into a series of smaller, more attainable *mini-goals* (as mentioned by teachers in this study) that gradually become more challenging. These approaches are highly successful in helping shy children gradually face their fears (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016).

Two teachers stated that they regularly set aside time for one-on-one interactions with shy children and try to interact with them, for example, when they greet students at the classroom door every morning or ask students about their extracurricular activities. One-on-one interactions can be fruitful with shy children as they occur without other children in the room who can cause unnecessary tension or interruption for shy children (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016, Evans, 2001).

4.4.4 Learning Partners

Teacher 2 mentioned that she pairs shy children with their non-shy peers to encourage classroom participation. In pair-work, the students are placed in groups of two, and the shy child has the opportunity to discuss and share responses with a partner. After discussion, the students share their responses with the entire class. If shy students are hesitant to participate in class discussion, they can write their responses on paper, and the teacher can read aloud.

> *Students are divided into small groups. When pair-work is used, shy students who would otherwise never speak during discussions get a chance to use language in small groups. The person sitting next to the shy child in pair-work can tell what they are talking about. (...) If shy children are hesitant to talk in front of the class, they can write on a piece of paper, and I can read it. (Teacher 2)*

The teacher reported that pair-work gives shy children opportunities to participate in classroom activities and to discuss and share their views with their learning partners. The teacher stated that shy children are more comfortable participating in non-threatening situations, such as small groups. The activity described here also implements the practice of graduated exposure (see 5.2.3). Teacher 2 reported that in pair-work, students have time to think and can get feedback on their thoughts from their partner and other students. This approach allows shy children to meaningfully engage in classroom discussion in a non-threatening way (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016; Evans, 2001). As other important relationships do, peers provide shy children with support, intimacy and companionship.

4.4.5 Promoting Social Interactions with Peers

The presence of peers is stressful for shy children, and interacting with peers can be demanding for shy children. Some teachers reported that they use different strategies, such as role-play, reinforcement, encouragement, playdates, circle time and teddy-bear home visits, to decrease the stress of dealing with peers in classroom. Although most teachers stated that they use such strategies to promote social interaction among students, Teacher 3 stated:

> *I don't do much for the socialisation of students. It is not the purpose or object. I must admit that it is forgotten. I see that I talk with them every day, but I do not adapt enough to everyone's needs. (Teacher 3)*

Teacher 3 stated that she does not do much to promote social interaction among shy children. She tries to interact with shy children but does not pay particular attention to their involvement in peer conversations and activities. She stated that she has difficulty adapting her teaching strategies to students' needs. The strategies used by the other teachers are discussed in the following sections.

4.4.5.1 Posters and Role-Play Games

Teacher 2 started that she uses *role-play and* making *posters* on classroom rules and norms to promote social interaction and to reduce discipline problems in classroom.

> *We make posters and have role-play where we take on different cases. For example, if you come into a conflict or if you see that someone is standing alone at playtime, what should you want to do? Shy children often have good suggestions. The teacher can be a kind of model and can show what children can do. (Teacher 2)*

This statement suggests that the teacher uses role-playing games to develop students' social skills, to resolve conflicts and to handle disciplinary problems in classroom. She stated that role-playing promotes interpersonal skills, reduces uncertainty in peer situations and gives assertive coaching to shy children. Teachers play particular roles, and with their help, students make suggestions for solutions to various problems. At the end of the role-play, the students collaboratively make posters discussing key points from role-playing. These tips posters not only promote good classroom-management practices but are also especially beneficial for shy children (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016, Evans, 2001).

4.4.5.2 The Compliment Game

Another strategy that Teacher 2 mentioned was *the compliment game during circle time*, which supports social and emotional learning.

> *We also have another activity that we have started because of negative language usage in the classroom. It rarely comes from shy students, but it affects everyone, especially shy children. It is important to work in a group. We sit in a circle, and*

then one should say nice things to someone sitting next to you. For example, 'You are good to comfort others'. The person replies with 'Thank you', and we move on to the next student. (...) We do it every week, and I feel that they think it is a very nice thing to do. (Teacher 2)

The teacher stated that she started this activity due to disciplinary problems and use of negative language, which affected students, especially shy students. She further stated that she encourages children to talk more by initiating games in which they are required to take speaking turns. In this way, shy children have opportunities to speak and are not simply overwhelmed by more talkative children (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016; Evans, 2001).

4.4.5.3 Playdates

Two teachers stated that they have started playdates for students after school to promote socialisation. The teacher stated that playdates help shy children become familiar with other classmates and take part in organised activities after school. These activities improve the classroom environment and individual self-esteem.

We arrange playdates for students once a month. In this way, they get to know each other, and it has a positive effect on the classroom environment. (Teacher 1)

Another thing I like to tell that we have started is playdates, where students visit one friend from a group. Once a month, I think is fine for shy students. To take part in organised activities after school is good for them as they do not take much initiative to find things with others in the classroom themselves. (Teacher 2)

These quotations explain that the playdates are an activity planned by the teachers to decrease the stress of dealing with peers in classroom. Each group has four to five students, and the teachers attempt to pair shy children with peers who are somewhat sensitive and not too extroverted or talkative (Rudasill & Coplan, 2016). Playdates help prevent bullying and isolation among students. These types of organised activities may provide shy children opportunities to communicate with peers.

4.4.5.4 Verbal and Nonverbal Encouragement

Other strategies that teachers mentioned are positive encouragement and praise. The teachers try to encourage shy students when they take part in class discussion.

> *I often try to ask questions that I know she can answer. She must be highlighted if she does something good; for example, she is good at drawing. It is important to show off her in a positive way. When other say, 'You are so brilliant', others look up at her. It is important to show off others. She feels confident. There are some children who like to tell about themselves. (...) Shy children will never say it (...) She must be shown off as much as possible, or it is easy for her to vanish in the crowd. (Teacher 4)*

> *Sometimes I try to ask questions, and if they answer, for instance, with a very low voice, I try to say, 'Thank you' to confirm that they have answered my question even though I did not actually hear what they said. I say, 'it is very good that you tried to answer a question'. And sometimes I say, 'Could you please repeat this?', which makes the child more active in the classroom. (Teacher 5)*

> *Often shy children are sitting and looking down, and I walk around in the classroom and put a hand on their shoulder and try to tell them something nice and try to make the shy child feel relaxed. (...) It is important to compliment them and tell them positive things. (Teacher 5)*

In these statements, the participants praise and encourage shy children when they participate in classroom discussion. Encouragement has positive effects on self-confidence and self-esteem (Evans, 2001). Teachers reported using both verbal and nonverbal strategies for support, such as providing encouragement, praising students and using polite, respectful language in conversation. Teacher 4 indicated that she asks shy children questions they can easily answer to increase their confidence (Evans, 2001).

4.4.6 Conclusion

The teachers reported being observant and responsive to children's cues. The participants expressed that they aim to regulate shy children's activity level, communication and

contact with peers, using strategies (e.g. role-playing, learning partners, playdates, encouragement and graduated exposure) in the classroom to lure shy children out of their shell. Nevertheless, most of these activities are intended primarily to improve the overall classroom environment and facilitate the academic and social development of all students. Teacher 3, in particular, stated that she is not doing much for the socialisation of students and has difficulty adapting her teaching strategies to students' needs. Overall, the teachers displayed awareness of and responded to the students' academic and emotional needs.

For shy children, the participants implemented mini-goals, which is a highly successful approach for helping shy children gradually face their fears. Teacher 2 endorsed peer-focused strategies to increase social interactions. These approaches appear to be critically important for children's self-esteem, not only predicting children's success but also playing a protective role. Teachers are especially important for shy children as teachers help set the emotional climate of the classroom.

In this study, teachers were asked indirect questions to minimise the socially desirable bias. Interview studies mainly rely on truthful responses from participants to draw meaningful conclusions. Due to self-presentation concerns, it is possible that respondents might over-report socially desirable activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is organised into four sections. Following this introduction, the research questions are systematically addressed by first answering the sub-questions, building to the main research question. The third section concerns the implications of the study findings. Finally, the fourth subsection suggests issues that need further study.

5.2 Research Questions

Based on the findings and discussion so far, the next logical step is to answer the research questions introduced in the first chapter of the thesis. Overall results of the study showed that there are huge range of variety among shy children. It might be that the shy child in one class is less engaged and the shy child in another class is less capable socially and has difficulty in making friends. The teachers in this study are generalizing from experience with recent students. The main research question was *What are teachers' perceptions of the moderating role of teacher–child relationships in the relation between shyness and school adjustment?* Before turning to this question, it is important to address the sub-questions, which enables arriving at the final answer to the main question.

1. *What are teachers' perceptions of the school adjustment (peer relationships, school avoidance and academic performance) of shy children in Norwegian elementary schools?*

Norwegian elementary-school teachers had mixed perceptions of the peer relationships of shy children. Most of the participants agreed that shy children speak less and initiate fewer peer interactions than their age-mates. The participants stated that shy children are not included in play and feel left out, ignored and lonely. These teachers reports somewhat align with the research literature indicating that in early educational settings, shy children speak less and display poor social skills (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Buhs et al., 2015; Coplan et al., 2004). The teachers stated that shyness might negatively affect shy children's *peer relations,* increasing their difficulty making friends and their risk of being ignored by peers. However,

only one teacher reported that shy children might be perceived, as easy marks of bullying. Research evidence suggests that reticent children are less appealing playmates and their behaviour predicts peer rejection and social difficulties over the course of the school year (Bosacki et al., 2011; Coplan et al., 2006; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

The study participants reported that shy children are less assertive, are more submissive and they place themselves in proximity to peers and watch them play but have difficulty in joining peer activity. Previous research as shown that shy children tend to experience the approach–avoidance conflict; they wish to play and interact socially with their peers (high social approach motivation), but their fears and anxieties overwhelm these inclinations (Asendorpf, 1990). As mentioned by the participants, this internal struggle can be observed in playgrounds and other social settings, where shy children are interested in a group of children playing but hesitant to join them. The teachers stated that shy children may have difficulties forming large numbers of friendships but tend to form friendships with one or two children who are like them and not strongly extroverted. The teachers perceptions somewhat align with the previous empirical evidence suggesting that shy children do not differ from their peers in the stability of their mutual best friendships (Bosacki et al., 2011; Haselager et al., 1998; Rubin et al., 2006). One teachers view conflicted previous research findings as she stated that in her teaching experience, she has seen that shy children are popular playmates and do not face difficulties forming friendships.

Teachers had mixed responses to the *academic performance* of shy children. Teachers' perceived shy children's non-verbal academic performance to be lower than that of non-shy children. All the teachers perceived shyness as the primary contributor to these students' low oral participation in the classroom. This pattern is consistent with the idea that being in front of a group makes shy children feel uneasy. Shy children are concerned about social evaluation. They verbally communicate less frequently than their non-shy classmates do, due to dislike of being the centre of attention (Buss, 1986; Evans, 2001). The participants described feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence as negative costs of shyness. Feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence and concerns about how others perceive them might lead shy children to feel poorly about themselves (Crozier, 1995).

One teacher in this study perceived shy children's lack of engagement as reflecting a lack of understanding; therefore, shy children's academic achievement deficits might result more from perceptions of their ability rather than their actual ability (Hughes & Coplan, 2010). Teachers perceived shy children as non-disruptive due to their quiet style and as good students who are unlikely to get into trouble and are not disruptive to teacher's instructions. Most of the teachers identified some potential advantages for shy children in the classroom including good listeners and well-behaved (Bosacki et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). Some teachers might encourage shy behaviour as it helps maintain classroom discipline (Rubin, 1982).

Most of the teachers view conflicted previous research findings as they reported that despite the difficulties shy children face at school, they do not exhibit *low school liking or a desire to avoid school.* Of the five Norwegian elementary-school teachers interviewed, only one reported school avoidance behaviour in shy children. For shy children, self-consciousness, the high increased demands of the early school environment, disconnected relationships with teachers and possible negative experiences with peers (Wilkens et al., 2015) can aggravate already-existing tendencies of social fear and self-consciousness and can lead to school avoidance.

2. *How do teachers perceive their relationships with shy children?*

The teachers perceived shy children as *slow to warm up*, although with time, repeated exposure and effort, the teachers became familiar with the shy children. Teachers reported that when educators are *warm, accepting and friendly*, shy children are less likely to be intimidated and can be put at ease over time. Most teachers stated that shy children feel secure and comfortable with them and display positive affect in response to the teachers' interactions. The teachers pointed out that shy children receive less attention and that teachers initiate more interactions with them than with disruptive children (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). The teachers reported that it is easy for shy children to become invisible due to their quiet nature. The elementary-school teachers observed that shy children tend to form close, dependent relationships with teachers, and none of the teachers reported conflictual relationships with shy students (Arbeau et al., 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997). From the attachment perspective, close teacher–child relationships may help reducing adjustment problems for children at risk.

In these close relationships, the teachers experienced the teacher-initiated interactions as not one-sided and the students as easy to talk to and engaged in conversations. The teachers perceived these interactions as productive and positive (Pianta, 1999). Teachers' positive interactions with shy children may help predict teachers' perception of their relationships with students (Hartz et al., 2017; Pianta, 1999). Some teachers perceived shy children to display dependent, clingy and overly needy behaviour (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Arbeau et al., 2010). Dependency in relationships often limits children's interaction with peers in the classroom and hinders their practice of social skills.

Shy teachers were more empathetic and warm towards shy children's needs. Teachers' self-identified shyness helped them better understand the problems of shy students and build positive relations with these students. Shy teachers were more likely to encourage shy children and to try to provide learning opportunities to lure them out of their shell (Coplan et al., 2011; Lao et al., 2013). Thus, the teachers' perceptions and experiences of relationships with shy students provide a window into classroom processes that are important indicators of child success or failure (Pianta, 1999, p. 70).

3. *What support do teachers feel that they provide to shy children?*

All of the respondents displayed awareness of the problems faced by shy children. The teachers used different strategies to help shy children meet the various challenges they encounter in the typical classroom, such as novelty, difficulties in peer interaction and challenges in initiating conversations. Shy children are sensitive to the benefits of an emotionally warm, supportive environment and to the disadvantages of an unsupportive environment. In supportive classroom climates, teachers can improve the academic outcomes of children at risk (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Teachers reported that they try to construct a classroom emotional climate that is warm and responsive to children's needs.

The teachers used different strategies, such as role-playing, learning partners, playdates, encouragement and graduated exposure, to lure shy children out of their shell. The teachers stated that they set mini-goals for shy students and that these approaches are highly successful in helping shy children gradually face their fears. The teachers supported peer-focused approaches, which may increase opportunities for social interactions. Shy

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children are considerably less likely to experience peer difficulties in classrooms with supportive emotional environments (Avant et al., 2011). The teachers displayed awareness of and responded to the students' academic and emotional needs. Teacher 3 in particular, stated that she is not doing much for the socialization of shy students and has difficulty adapting her teaching strategies to student's needs.

Finally, the overall research question of this study: what are teachers' perceptions of moderating role of teacher–child relationships in the relation between shyness and school adjustment?

The primary goal of this research was to explore the moderating role of teacher–child relationships and the associations between shyness and adjustment among elementary-school children in Norway. Overall, the study findings suggest that most teachers in Norwegian schools appear to be paying attention to shy, quiet children, which conflicts with earlier studies indicating that shy children might go unnoticed by teachers (Keogh, 2003). The teachers reported shy children are not unnoticed but can easily become invisible in the classroom due to their quiet nature.

Teachers 1, 2 and 5 believed that they have warm, accepting, affectionate and *close relationships* with shy children. The teachers reported that shy children feel secure and comfortable with them and display positive responses to their interactions. The children ask the teachers for help in academic and social difficulties but are not overly dependent on them. Thus, from an attachment perspective, close teacher–child relationships allow students to use teachers as a secure base in the school environment. Positive teacher–child relationships might serve as a protective factor for shy children in improving school-adjustment outcomes (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Teachers explained that shy children are slow to warm up but with time and effort, the teachers became familiar with these students. Entering a new classroom with different teachers, peers, rules and expectations can intensify children's existing feelings of fear. The teachers with close child relationships provide a supportive emotional classroom climate and are responsive to the children's needs. The teachers endorse peer-focused strategies and are observant and sensitive to children's academic and emotional needs. Thus, in positive, supportive classroom

environments, shy children are less likely to experience peer difficulties, as reported by the teachers. Beyond the traditional role of teaching academic skills, the teachers are responsible for regulating children's activity level. Close teacher–child relationships are negatively associated with school avoidance and positively related to prosocial behaviour. The teachers reported that shy children tend to develop intimate, close relationships with one or two friends. Hence, positive relationships between teachers and students promote children's long-term social and academic success and are especially helpful for shy children's school adjustment (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016, p. 94).

Teacher 4 perceived shy children as *excessively clingy*. These students feel mostly helpless and insecure, resulting in clinginess and overly needy behaviour. Shy children are hesitant to leave their teachers, preventing them from exploring the classroom and causing them to miss out on opportunities to interact with peers. *Dependent teacher–child relationships* are associated with peer exclusion, loneliness and poor academic achievement as reported by teachers, but the teachers did not report school avoidance behaviour. Overdependence on teachers for support might inhibit shy children's development of coping strategies for dealing with social stressors. Teachers might perceive dependent teacher–child relationships negatively as shy children require much unnecessary attention and display clingy behaviour; however, if teachers are supportive, this negative relation might serve as a protective factor.

Teacher 3 was uncertain about her relationship with shy children. She reported that shy children are uncommunicative about their personal information and do not rely much on the teachers for help. The study findings suggest that shy children who do not have close relationships with teachers might experience peer exclusion and rejection and display school avoidance behaviour. Teacher 3 reported that peers bully shy children due to their submissive nature. Teacher self-reports suggested that teachers who perceive their relationships with shy children as negative might not be supportive of those children, and consequently, shy children might not enjoy coming to school. If teachers are insensitive to the needs of students and act cold in interactions with shy children, these students are more likely to withdraw.

Elementary-school classroom environments might be intimidating to shy children if teachers are not warm, accepting, supportive and friendly. Despite the problems that teachers perceived in their interactions with shy children, all the teachers, except Teacher 3, reported that they use

different strategies to engage shy children in the classroom. Additional findings indicate that shy teachers are more empathetic and warm towards shy children's needs. Teachers' self-identified shyness helps them better understand the problems of shy students and build positive relations with them (Coplan, 2011). Shy teachers are more likely to encourage shy children by providing learning opportunities for them (Lao et al., 2013).

In general, shy children tend to form close, dependent relationships with teachers and are unlikely to develop conflictual relationships with teachers, according to the teachers' perceptions. Close teacher–child relationships may serve as a protective factor for shy children, improving school-adjustment outcomes (Arbeau et al., 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Close teacher–child relationships may be are important moderators in shy children's school adjustment. Teachers have a highly important role in nurturing many aspects of children's growth. Teachers are the primary adults in children's lives outside the home and make critical contributions to children's academic development and, moreover, the development of the whole child (Buhs et al., 2015).

5.3 Implications

Despite the limitations, the results of the current study shed light on elementary-school teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and the relationship between shyness and school adjustment. Firstly, the findings show how teachers perceive their relationships with shy children and how to better prepare teachers to work with shy children. The results can help teachers to better understand the nature of shy children and can help in the development of educational strategies to assist shy children. This better understanding could improve their relationships with shy children, which may serve to protect shy children from the risk of long-term negative outcomes.

Secondly, the teachers suggested a number of educational strategies to assist shy children in the classroom. In particular, certain games may encourage oral communication in the classroom, which, in turn, promotes peer interactions. The findings may help educators and policy makers to develop programmes that aid the social and academic development of shy children. These activities may provide shy children with opportunities to express their thoughts, possibly fostering positive feelings such as self-esteem.

5.4 Further Studies

This study covers only a small portion of this under-researched area, and many aspects of it remain untouched, requiring further investigation. In this study, sample size was limited to five teachers. It would be valuable to conduct a study on a large scale covering different areas of Oslo (north, south, east and west) to see if these results hold in the country. It would be beneficial to use different data collection procedures along with interviews such as observation of teachers in educational settings to get information on teachers' perceptions of their relationships with shy children and school adjustment shy children.

This study discusses teacher–child relationships from teachers' perspectives. Conducting a study exploring teacher–child relationships from the perspectives of both students and teachers could help better understanding their relations. The teachers in this study reported that shy children form dependent relationship with teachers; however, it is not entirely clear how these dependent teacher–child relationships affect shy children's later school experiences. It, therefore, is important to study the effects of dependent teacher–child relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix- Request Letter for Participation

Shyness and School Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Teacher-Child Relationships

I am writing to request your permission to interview teachers at your institution who have or have had a shy child in their classroom. I am currently a master's student in Pedagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning at the University of Oslo and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. This project is entitled *"Shyness and school adjustment: The moderating role of teacher-child relationships"*.

Interested teachers will be interviewed about their thoughts and experiences with shy children (maximum 45 minutes). Interviews will be recorded and transcribed (with the teacher's consent). Personal identifiers and information relevant to school will not be revealed during the analysis or write up of my thesis.

My goal is to better understand teacher-child relationships and improve the opportunities shy children have in Norwegian schools. Your participation is crucial to my mission. Thank you for considering and sharing, this request.

Sincerely,
Saima Ahmed
saimaa@student.uv.uio.no
███████.
Pedagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning
University of Oslo

Appendix-B Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Research Title: "Shyness and School Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Teacher-Child Relationships"

Information about the Interview:

You are being asked to participate in a research exploring the role of teacher-child relationships and school adjustment among shy children. Shyness is a temperamental trait characterized by wariness, fear, and self-consciousness in social situations. Shy children display a greater tendency to withdraw from unfamiliar adults and peers and show social reticence. The aim of the present study is to explore the teacher's perceptions on moderating role of teacher-child relationships in the relation between shyness and adjustment.

Interview Procedure

1. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions.
2. The procedure will involve taping the interview, and the tape will be transcribed verbatim.
3. Your information will be confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

Informed Consent

Please sign the informed consent form indicating your readiness to participate.

Personal Information

1. How long have you been working as a teacher?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. In what grade do you teach now?
5. Do you have another position besides your teaching role?

Teacher-Child Relationships

I want to ask you some questions regarding teacher's perceptions about shy children and their perceptions on moderating role of teacher-child relationships.

1. In your teaching experience, have you ever had a shy child or children in your classroom? If yes, what thoughts do you have about these students.
2. What are the different challenges faced by these students in classroom?
   - Can you give several examples
3. Which factors do you think are important in building a good relationship with these students?
4. How would you describe your relationship with a shy child or children?
5. Which factors do you think are important in building a good relationship with these students?
6. How do you feel this relation differs from relationship with non-shy children?
   - Can you give some examples

School Adjustment of Shy Children

Shyness is associated with a host negative adjustment outcomes, including peer difficulties, poor school adjustment and academic difficulties. Shyness often limits children's interaction with peers in the classroom, hindering their social skills practice, and suppressing their engagement in classroom discourse. I would like to ask some questions regarding peer relationships, academic performance and school avoidance behavior of shy children.

Peer Relationships

7. What do you think about the relationships of shy children with their peers?
8. Which type of activities have you implemented in your classroom to support socialization among shy students?
   - Can you give some examples

Academic Performance

9. What do you think about the academic performance of shy children?
10. Do you think that academic performance of shy children differs from non-shy children? If yes, What is the difference?
    - Can you give some examples?

School Avoidance

11. Have shy children ever missed school or classroom activities that required social participation?

- Can you give some examples

12. What are the different reasons for lower school liking among shy children?

- Can you give some examples

Teachers Support

Teachers can implement various strategies that will support shy children, and help create an environment where each child feels accepted by other children and teachers. I would like to ask some question regarding involvement of shy children in classroom activities.

13. Do you think that it is difficult to engage shy children in classroom activities? What are the most difficult situations?

14. What strategies do you use to engage shy children in classroom activities?

- Can you give some more examples

15. Do you feel these strategies support shy children? If yes, which are the most effective strategies?

16. How do you provide support for shy children to work with peers or engage?

17. What else would you like to tell me about working with shy children that I haven't asked?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview.

Appendix-C Letter from NSD

NSD

Joshua Lawrence
Institutt for pedagogikk Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1092 Blindern 0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 07.03.2017   Vår ref: 52388 / 3 / HIT   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER
Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 21.01.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

52388	*Shyness and school adjustment: The moderating role of teacher- child relationships*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Joshua Lawrence*
Student	*Saima Ahmed*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema.

http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet. Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.06.2017, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen
Kjersti Haugstvedt
Hildur Thorarensen
Kontaktperson: Hildur Thorarensen tlf: 55 58 26 54 Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Saima Ahmed saimaa@student.uv.uio.no

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering – Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 52388

The sample will receive written information about the project, and give their consent to participate. The letter of information is somewhat incomplete, and we ask that the following is changed/added: - it must be specified that personal data (raw material) will be made anonymous by the end of the project - the expected end date of the project should be added.

You state in the notification form that you will register some information about third persons (students). Please note that teachers cannot reveal identifying information about their students, due to the confidentiality duty.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that the researcher follows internal routines of Universitetet i Oslo regarding data security. If personal data is to be stored on a private computer, the information should be adequately encrypted.

Estimated end date of the project is 01.06.2017. According to the notification form all collected data will be made anonymous by this date. Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognised. This is done by: - deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers) - deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such as residence/work place, age and gender).

Appendix-D Informed Consent Form

"Shyness and School Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Teacher-Child Relationships"

Researcher's Name: Saima Ahmed

Mobile Number: ████████

Supervisor: Joshua Lawrence

Contact Information: Associate Professor, University of Oslo

You are being asked to take part in a research study that intends to explore the moderating role of Teacher-Child Relationships and School Adjustment among shy children. The study is being conducted by Saima Ahmed, a master student at University of Oslo.

Purpose of the Study

Shyness is a temperamental trait characterised by wariness, fear and self-consciousness in social situations. Shy children speaks less, make fewer social initiations to peers and display poorer social skills. As a result, shyness is associated with negative adjustment outcomes including internalizing problems, peer difficulties and poor school adjustment. In the absence of parents, teachers are the authority figures children turn to for help. The project will explore teacher-child relationships as a potential moderating factor for shyness and how the teachers facilitates learning environment to support shy children. You are being asked to participate in this study because your experience is significant to this study.

What you will be asked to do

If you decided to be part in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a recorded interview lasting for maximum 45 minutes.
2. The questions will deal with the thoughts and experiences you have about shy students. For that survey will be anonymous, I want you to use fictitious name for your students, if you want to use students as examples in your answer.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with this research. There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You will not be paid for the study, and the only cost to you is the cost of your time for participating. However, the information you provide may prove beneficial to the understanding of challenges and opportunities faced by shy children. The researcher hope to learn more about how teachers build relationships with shy children and facilitates them.

Your answers to questions will be confidential

All personal information will be treated confidentially. Reports of the research will not name or otherwise identify individuals and schools. To maintain the confidentiality personal data will be anonymized so that the participant cannot be recognized in the statement.

Voluntary Participation

It is voluntary to participate in the study, and you can at any time withdraw your consent without specifying some reason. If you withdraw, all your information will be deleted.

Contact Information

If you have questions about the study, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the student researcher / supervisor at the information provided above.

I have read this consent form. The study has been explained to me. I understand what I will be asked to do. I freely agree to take part in it.

--- Sign. & date (Participant)

--- Sign. & date (Researcher)