Two underlying pillars of positive interactions in early childhood psychosocial development

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Abstract
This theoretical perspective based writing denotes the magnitude of quality interactions between caregivers and their children. Attachment theory and mediated learning experience (MLE) theory are two decisive foundations in order to rationalize this article. Firstly, the author describes the basic concepts of both theories. Afterward, the constructive discussion of theories is highlighted through critical comparison. There is no doubt about the contribution of attachment theory in terms of understanding the caregivers-children's responsive interaction that enhances their relationship quality and psycho-social aspects of children's development. In the same way, the theory of MLE is focused on its humanistic way of interaction process through which stimuli, mediator, and mediatee are connected in flexible, adaptive, and diversify manner. Moreover, the universal interaction criteria are essential for successful MLE as well. To connect with the topic of this article, both theories have implications in order to understand relationship and development at home, school, and daycare center that enrich the practice of inclusive and special needs education by using various innovation models.

Keywords: Caregiver-children, Positive interaction, Attachment, Mediated learning experience (MLE), Psycho-social development

Introduction
Interactions in between caregivers and children are one of the central aspects of children's psychosocial development. This view will shade light throughout the article in respect to discuss the related theories. To precisely understand the background of this article, it is essential to explain the different concepts so that the necessities of such topic can be revealed. The term 'positive interaction' put on view the quality of making bonding, mutual communications, as well as mediation. All these aspects make an effort to establish the positive interactions between an infant and caregivers. In relation to this, the recent studies also authenticate about children's inborn capacity to communicate and experience their caregivers and surrounded others where children act as active agents to produce own care through such innate qualities (Trevarthen, 1998, 2001; Hundeide, 2010). Furthermore, it is also indispensable to clarify another term 'early childhood psychosocial development'. What does psychosocial condition mean and how it is

influenced by positive interactions are vital to explore this concept. The concept 'psychosocial' is already entailed in its term that refers mainly emotional and social experiences of human being. These social and emotional experiences are complementary and reciprocally influencing each other. Consequently, the 'psychosocial' states an understanding of emotions as dynamically organized by an individual in relation to the social environment through which children's social and cultural context can be developed and learned. For instance, an infant is learned about psychosocial aspect through the quality of personal attachment or bonding and daily social interactions; incorporate these learning within own that indicates when, what, how to feel, and how to use these feelings in various situations. An infant's family is the central place for the learning of socialization process of emotional experiences and behavior. As a result, children's psychosocial behavior is rooted in the history of family relationships. At the early years of child's development, it is of great consequence to emphasis on psychosocial development through establishing enough support to families in need of help, for example: providing help to improve the quality of interaction in families through training and educating caregivers. Whether psychosocial conditions uphold the child's development or pull downward, it depends on two issues. One of them is how much the child's basic needs for relationship with others and stable self perception is met; the other one is to what extent the caregivers can able to identify and meet their children's needs in accordance with their individuality. As an example, the caregivers need to consider their children as unique individuals with needs, wishes, temperament, and personality rather than consider them as objects (Rye, 2001; 2005). When such priorities have shown to children, that move forwards them to establish an optimal

psychosocial development. To discuss this on hand theme, two underlying theories, Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) and Feuerstein's mediated learning experience theory (1979), are constructed this theory-based article. Both theories are strongly connected with the positive interactions that enhance caregiver-child attachment, relationship, and further learning experiences. Here, we are entirely enlightened on these two theories to decorate this article starting with narration, then critical analysis, reflection, and finally ending with concluding remarks.

Theoretical perspectives
This segment is put an effort to depict what the theories said about. As the topic is landed on interaction quality that prevent psychosocial difficulties of children, here will lay bare two mostly related theories focusing on its founder theorists:

1. The Attachment Theory:
Bowlby (1969) was leading the way to develop this theory in which the term 'attachment' was conceptualized as contact related condition between caregiver and child. It mentions about an innate communication capacities of infants to create attachment with caregiver who considers as a 'secure base' for their exploration and self-enhancement (Fonagy and Target, 2003; Trevarthen, 1998/2001). It also suggests the strong influence on children's development by the way they are treated by caregivers, especially mothers. The attachment making behavior can be grouped into two classes: signaling behavior which has effect to bring mother to the child through crying, smiling, babbling, calling in later period, and certain gestures and approaching behavior which has effect to bring child to mother through seeking-following, clinging, and nipple-grasping. With age such behaviors become incorporated into more complex, self-

correcting 'control systems' which is maintaining an acceptable proximity to the mother (Bowlby, 1969; Miller, 1993).

Bowlby proposed four phases explaining how an infant attaches to a particular caregiver. Firstly, an in-built bias of infant makes him or her giving signals and oriented toward others without any discrimination of figure. After that, infant is gradually given signals and showing orientation toward one or more distinguished figures by using exploration qualities. Thirdly, child is approaching to familiar discriminated person, especially to mother and maintain closeness. Finally, infant's behaviors to make attachment are boost up and weaken by the feedback from caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). Through these principles, the infant can gradually make attachment with general adults into specific caregiver. The infant and caregiver's behavior is gradually coordinated into an 'attachment behavior system' in which each person is expected that other one will respond in certain ways. Therefore, children's expectation is part of their 'internal working models' or mental schema that is actually storing the attachment-related knowledge and can generate expectations about the reactions of attachment figures in certain situations (Bowlby, 1973; Dykas and Cassidy, 2011). As children gain more cognitive capacities with age, their internal working models function more, that is, social information processing that makes an awareness about 'self' and gradually it influences individual to obtain, organize, and operate their attachment-related social information (Bowlby, 1980). Similarly, Mary Ainsworth was another pioneer who also worked on 'internal working models' of infants with the 'Strange Situation' research methodology and found that when infants are separated from caregivers for a while in strange situation, they will exhibit three patterns of behavior that classified as secure, anxious/avoidant, and anxious/resistant attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1987 in Van IJzendoorn, 2001). A fourth pattern, 'disorganized/disoriented' attachment, was developed later that constitutes four foremost categories of attachment with corresponding characteristics, associated behavior, and implications for later development (Fonagy and Target, 2003). A secure attachment is always resulted positive growth where insecure one is related developmental risks for children, for example: socio-emotional, behavioral difficulties that prevent to become a fully functioning person. These patterns are relatively persistent once it has developed, because parents are always treated child as the same way they were treated indicating an 'intergenerational transmission system' and also such patterns tend to be self-perpetuating (Bowlby, 1988; Snyder, Shapiro, and Treleaven, 2012).

To recapitulate, it can be said that this theory is based on an affectionate bonding that nourishes children's later development. As the topic is based on quality interactions that prop up psychosocial development, this theory provides essential research-based knowledge to develop early intervention program. This theory is importantly related with the topic because of its essence of caregiver-children's relationship and the functionality of early positive interaction through which build up a secure bonding for preventing later psychosocial problems.

2. The Theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE):

This theory has developed as the further advancement of cultural-historical tradition by Feuerstein (1979). To understand this theory, it is considerable to define what 'mediated learning experience' (MLE) is. MLE is defined as "a quality of interaction between the organism and its environment. This quality is ensured by the interposition of an initiated intentional human being who mediates the stimuli impinging on the

organism" (Feuerstein, Klein, and Tannenbaum, 1991:7). This definition clearly states the connection among stimuli (S), mediator (H), mediatee (O) and responses (R) that formulates the process of S-H-O-H-R in figure-1 (Feuerstein et al., 1980; Feuerstein, Klein, and Tannenbaum, 1991).
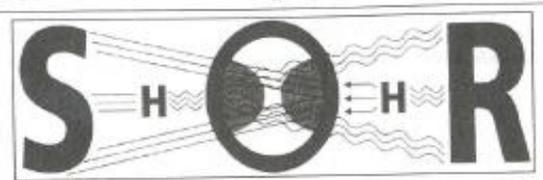

Fig. 1: Model of Mediated Learning Experience.
(Source: Feuerstein, Feuerstein, and Falik (2010). Beyond Smarter: Mediated Learning and The Brain's Capacity for Change. P.28.)

How can we measure MLE in order to satisfy the main theme of this article? Feuerstein has developed twelve parameters dividing into two conditions to narrate MLE theory through which our topic is also carried out. This is because of these parameters are mainly concerned about the interaction quality between caregivers and children that ultimately responsible for better relationship and promote psychosocial development. Among these twelve parameters, the first three are salient conditions for MLE interactions' modifiability that are universal for all individuals. The rest of nine are reinforcing conditions for MLE interactions' diversity that are task dependent and strongly related to individual's culture which are also called 'situational' or 'phase specific' conditions (Feuerstein, Klein, and Tannenbaum, 1991; Feuerstein, Feuerstein, and Falik, 2010). These are briefly mentioned under the two key conditions along with the connection of the article's topic.

a. The Salient Conditions:
The main criteria of MLE interaction is rested on intentionality and reciprocity,

transcendence, and mediation of meaning. By considering an example of 'learning about ball', these salient conditions are explained. In *intentionality and reciprocity*, the mother's intention is to mediate focusing the child's attention to 'ball' and the child's respond to that ball by looking into it is showing reciprocity for mother's mediation. *Transcendence* is working when the mother goes beyond the immediate interaction and improves the present experience of child by describing the situation more elaborately in where child's elder sibling plays with ball that helps child to develop overall knowledge about the 'ball'. In relation to transcendence, the mother also expresses verbal (oh my child! I love your way to look into the ball) or non-verbal (clapping) appreciation that shows the feelings and meaning to that 'ball'. This *mediation of meaning* makes child distinctive and understandable about the meaning of 'ball'. Moreover, this kind of mediated interaction helps child to become more confident about his or her surroundings which prevent later socio-emotional problems. Consequently, these parameters are assistive for special and inclusive teaching to plan and implement program for students.

b. The Situational (Reinforcing) Conditions:
This part is included other nine important reinforcing characteristics of MLE interaction. In *mediation of feelings of competence*, the child achieves a sense of mastery, awareness about own capacity, and become curious about the environment following the feelings of competence when caregiver expresses satisfaction for child's particular behavior and explains why it is satisfactory. Similarly, child can monitor own behavior for attaining particular goal in the parameter of *mediation of regulation and control of behavior*. Through caregiver's mediation, child becomes aware about the planning of activities before doing it. The

other situational parameter that varies child's developmental process is *mediation of sharing behavior* in which child's readiness and ability to go beyond self and considering others through gaining insight and support from one another as well as to create a harmony between own experiences and others. In contrast to sharing behavior, the *mediation of individual and psychological differentiation* has also importance for development of child's entity that is preceded and accompanied by sharing behavior and emotional involvement along with three salient criteria of mediated interaction. In the same manner, the criterion of *mediation of goal seeking, goal setting, and goal achieving* plays a pivotal role through which child's mental repertoire is ready for thinking, enlarging own spheres of experiences, choose and set goal with adequate tools, and moving step by step to achieve goal. Additionally, caregivers can mediate child by avoiding overprotection in non-dangerous situation that helps child to respond positively in the complex state in which the *mediation of search for challenge, novelty, and complexity* parameter is required for MLE interaction. Furthermore, caregiver needs to actively work on child's awareness level that can make child a modifiable entity through the *mediation of the awareness of being a modifiable entity* which increases the possibility to adapt in complex situation and preserve own identity. The *mediation of optimistic alternatives* is another criterion that helps child to be more adaptive and stronger to tackle threatens when they can choose the optimistic alternatives among various options. Finally, the *mediation of a sense of belonging* creates a sense within child about own rights and being a part of broader entity. All of these reinforcing conditions are also significant for the ground of this article. As these are culture varied criteria, special and inclusive educators need to understand and conceptualize these for handling children with diverse needs. Because, educators are also considered as caregivers who need to interact with children qualitatively so that they can identify and meet children's necessary requirements and prepare them as more psychosocially advanced persons.

To put in a nutshell, it can be expressed that both conditions in concern with topic of this paper are essential for creating MLE interaction. These are further grouped into five basic elements without losing their qualities as focusing, expanding, mediation of meaning, rewarding, and regulation of behavior (Klein, 1996; 2001). From the above description, it is obvious that all these are shaped the quality interaction that makes child capable to develop cognitive and affective conditions. Overall, it is immensely contributed to the field of Special Needs Education so that professionals can enhance interaction quality by using this theory as a 'professional tool'.

Discussion
As the theoretical perspectives are corresponded to 'description' of article, the discussion part is going to critically analyze two theories by comparing strengths-weaknesses, similarities-differences, and reflecting in connection with the main theme of this article.

Comparing Strengths and Weaknesses: By evaluating of both theories, the strong and weak points can be encountered. It is clearly identified from the theoretical illustration that Bowlby was the earliest one who introduced the breakthrough idea of attachment theory which itself considers as strong point to describe the parents-children relationship. This theory is attempted to use objective observation in natural setting, rigorous in data collection, and well documented facts from various disciplines that is one of the powerful strengths of it (Berghaus, 2011; Miller, 1993). As psychoanalysis influences, this theory is replaced some Freudian assumptions, that is,

'drive-reduction theory' into 'control systems' which states more rational ideas behind infant's behavior and proximity of infant to primary caregiver as well as the notion of 'children's dependency' switched on children's 'competency and interest' in environment. In that way, Bowlby is preserved some of Freud's insights about relationship by considering them in a more scientifically defensible framework (Fonagy and Target, 2003). Moreover, the incorporation with information-processing theory provides strengthens by using 'selective attention' and 'selective forgetting' principles that can explain why children frequently trigger and eventually halt attachment behavior (Miller, 1993). Additionally, the caregiver-children both are satisfied and enjoying in relationship as Bowlby; likely Ainsworth considers attachment figure as 'secure base' and formulates certain patterns that changing parenting roles is another force of this theory (Berghaus, 2011).

In similar way, one of the strengths of MLE theory is facilitated the development of various cognitive functions, learning sets, mental operation, strategies, and need systems through the adequate MLE interactions that child gradually internalizes and able to learn from direct exposure to formal and informal learning situations (Feuerstein et al., 1979; Isman and Tzuriel, 2008). The criteria of this theory are comprehensive that cover the developmental aspects of caregiver-child interactions, assessment and intervention process, as well as the cultural-historical transmission aspects of learning process and value systems which is another forte of MLE theory (Lebeer, 1995; Isman and Tzuriel, 2008; Tzuriel, 1999). In relation to this, it has both universal and culture dependent criteria that makes this theory more powerful through which it can explain differences in cognitive development across cultures and individuals (Feuerstein, Klein, and

Tannenbaum, 1991; Lebeer, 1995). Furthermore, in the light of MLE's principles and guidance the mediator interact the child with a high level of flexibility that refers to the individual differences in learning styles and needs as well as helps child to generalize to new situation which enrich this theory with humanistic and optimistic attitude (Isman and Tzuriel, 2008; Lebeer, 1995). The emphasizing on educational way to bring change rather than biological deficiency is fabricated this theory to become more practical and strengthen (Lebeer, 1995; Tzuriel, 1999).

At the opposite end, the attachment theory has faced various controversies that point out several weaknesses of it. Though Bowlby is not denied about multiple attachments, he believes in 'monotropy' especially with mother which is one of the sources of debates. Critics are argued about other family members can also have the same attachment like mother and able to form multiple attachment figures, e.g., fathers, siblings, peers, and even inanimate objects (Rutter, 1978; Schaffar and Emerson, 1964 in McLeod, 2007). In relation to this, Harris is expressed the influence of peers rather than parents to shape children's personality on later period (Harris, 1998 in Lee, 2003). Additionally, Rutter is also argued for Bowlby's term 'maternal deprivation' that is not clearly distinguished from the term 'privation'. Bowlby is used the term 'deprivation' that refers separation from, loss of an attached figure and failure to develop an attachment to any figure whereas Rutter said that when a child fails to develop an emotional bond- that is 'privation' and 'deprivation' refers to the loss of or damage to an attachment (Rutter, 1981 in McLeod, 2007). The following statements of Bowlby are the sources of further important limitations that assert in Field's work: "when removed from mother by strangers young children respond usually with great intensity; and after reunion with her they show

commonly either a heightened degree of separation anxiety or else an unusual detachment" (Bowlby, 1969:3). This notion is criticized by stating that attachment behavior should understand in natural, non-stressful situation rather than stressful situation. In addition, Bowlby lists only attachment behaviors that are limited to occur with mother whereas other attachment figures are not necessarily characterized by those same behaviors. Here, the only concentration is for the behaviors not for physiological changes that may occur during separation and reunions which are also limited this theory (Field, 1996 in Lee, 2003). Furthermore, this theory is mentioned about 'critical period' for forming attachment whereas research shows that there may be 'sensitive period' for attachment; after that period it is also possible to form attachment. In that way, the more emphasis is for infancy and early childhood attachment rather than adolescence and later period that is another weakness of Bowlby's theory (Field, 1996 in Lee, 2003). His theory is also criticized by behaviorists who believe that attachment is learnt behavior through the use of reinforcement rather than inherent characteristics (Miller, 1993). As like behaviorism, psychoanalysis has also pointed out the weaknesses of this theory in where it only prioritized on relationship rather than instinctual drives and bodily processes (Fonagy and Target, 2003). There is also raised question about the methodology, that is, measuring internal working model of attachment through 'Strange Situation' does not represent individual differences in attachment patterns. Correspondingly, it is important to pinpoint the aspects of MLE theory to make it functional which are also considered as its limitations. The direct exposure to stimuli and MLE are two components that both can effectively influence on individual's development. If parents only work as

mediator (MLE) without having content (direct exposure) that they want to teach children, then it will be fruitless for children. Beyond this, it is also necessary to consider the proximity of stimuli-mediator-mediatee in order to execute the MLE. The process of MLE is not registered until the association is taken place among stimuli, mediator, and mediatee. Another constraint of this theory is its subjectivity that also can consider its strongpoint. This is because of there is no fixed curriculum for describing MLE through which one can apply it constantly to all individuals. As MLE corresponds to the quality of interaction that indicates the process or 'how' aspect, it is depended on 'who' mediates 'whom' and on the 'what' of the certain content of meditational intervention (Feuerstein and Feuerstein in Feuerstein, Klein, and Tannenbaum, 1991). In relating this, MLE is also depended on the mediator's motivation (Lebeer, 1995). If mediator is not motivated in the optimal level, then it is difficult to continue the process that is one more drawback of the theory. From such discussion also reminds that no theory is beyond its evaluation with combination of advantages and disadvantages. In closing, it can be said that the strengths and weaknesses are coincided each other which is crystal clear in above discussion.

Comparing Similarities and Differences: The above evaluating discourse about strengths and weaknesses of both theories is possible to make a comparative discussion through figuring out the similarities and differences between them. Attachment theory is an interdisciplinary study with combination of psychoanalysis, ethology, cybernetics, and cognitive theory while MLE is influenced by structural cognitive modifiability and cultural-historical tradition. Both theories are emphasized on child's needs to enhance caregivers-children interaction, relationship, and overall development issues based on which

introducing early intervention programs, e.g., More Intelligent Sensitive Child (MISC) and International Child Development Program (ICDP). To illustrate the main concepts of theories, both have some basic parameters and principles. In one hand, attachment theory has given importance on child's innate characteristics to form attachment with others; in another hand, MLE has prioritized on mediators who can interpose as connectors between environment and individual. In terms of dealing period, Bowlby is highlighted in infancy and early period to form attachment (Field, 1996 in Lee, 2003) while MLE can process for all ages individuals, like mother-child, and mother-teacher as mentioned in early intervention program (Rye, 2001). The way infants make attachment is universal whereas the MLE process has both universal and culture oriented elements that have no fixed curriculum to apply it uniformly to all individuals. Mother is the central body who is primarily attached with children in terms of Bowlby. Similarly, mediator is the vital person to function the MLE process though mother, father, siblings, peers, teachers (more knowledgeable adult) can be as mediator in terms of Feuerstein. Though children are the initiators to make attachment, they also need the responses from caregivers to continue it. In the same manner, mediator also needs the reply from children. This is indication of reciprocity that needs in both theories. Furthermore, the 'internal working model' or a set of cognitive mechanism is operational for storing attachment-related knowledge in children (Dykas and Cassidy, 2011). The process of 'internalization' that making bridge between interpersonal and intrapersonal level is functional for learning through MLE (Isman and Tzuriel, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, attachment theory explains about the intergenerational transmission that is the same in case of interaction pattern of MLE. Attachment

patterns are persistent once it has developed; similarly, once MLE has taken place then children can use it later through generalization.

By mirroring the whole discussion, it is vividly understood that both theories are precisely related to the topic of this article and have an impact on psychosocial conditions with its strengths, weaknesses, and comparative way of how attachment and MLE consider children needs to prevent difficulties and enhance relationship and development. The main interesting point that learns from these theories is their undermining knowledge that concerns about children's necessities and implements as early intervention to prevent psychosocial difficulties.

Conclusion

In wrapping up, the contribution of both theories to prevent psychosocial difficulties are well established by several research findings. Despite of such contribution, one question can be raised whether both theories are equally important for preventing psychosocial difficulties or one theory is dominating the other one. It may vary according to the child's individuality, extent of difficulties, and the way of intervention. However, it is undeniable the core of both theories based on positive interaction to prevent psychosocial difficulties.

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