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Teachers' Social Skills and Classroom Management Effectiveness: Evidence From Sjkc Primary Schools in Penang, Malaysia

Muhammad Azlan Ithninin[1], Ummu Sakinah Subri[2,*], Goh Rui Ning[2]

[1] Sektor Pembelajaran, Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Pulau Pinang, 11700 Penang, Malaysia
[2] School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Effective classroom management depends on teachers' interpersonal competencies as well as on pedagogical technique. Within emotional intelligence (EI), the relationship-management (social skills) domain covers how teachers communicate, negotiate, and manage conflict, which shapes whether a classroom stays orderly and engaging. Local studies have mostly treated EI as a single aggregate construct, so the specific contribution of social skills to classroom management in Malaysian primary schools is not well documented. This study examined the influence of teachers' social skills (relationship management) on classroom management effectiveness among teachers in Chinese national-type primary schools (SJKC). A quantitative survey design was used: data were collected with a 63-item questionnaire in three parts and analyzed with simple linear regression. The population comprised 90 SJKCs in Penang (2,941 teachers). The study focused on the Northeast district (36 SJKCs; N = 1,106 teachers) for reasons of size and representation, and respondents were selected by simple random sampling. Teachers' social skills explained approximately 22% of the variance in classroom management effectiveness. Continuing professional development (CPD) that targets communication, negotiation, conflict management, teamwork, and instructional leadership may therefore improve classroom management, and schools can build these competencies into coaching and professional learning community (PLC) routines to support transfer to practice.

1. Introduction

Classroom management is central to effective teaching and learning. It covers the arrangement of physical space, teacher–student communication and interaction, and behavioral control, so that learning proceeds smoothly [7]. Definitions in reference works stress organizing the layout, building effective communication, and managing the learning process as a whole, all of which bear on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and on student outcomes [6]. Syntheses of research on effective practice also point to interpersonal dimensions beyond pedagogical competence: high

* *Corresponding author*
E-mail address: ummusakinah@usm.my

expectations for students, contributions to academic and social outcomes, adaptive teaching, and collaboration. These are treated as components of a positive and inclusive classroom climate [14].

In 21st-century education, teachers are expected to combine holistic pedagogical skills with the ability to create a learning climate that keeps students motivated, and emotional intelligence (EI) supports this [4]. EI helps teachers manage stress and emotion and so stabilizes their reactions in class; emotionally stable teachers are better able to keep the learning atmosphere positive and orderly [17]. Because national policy aims to strengthen teacher competence and make teaching and learning (T&L) more effective, the affective and social side of classroom practice is receiving more emphasis [12].

In Goleman's EI framework, social skills (relationship management) are the competencies used to build and manage relationships: empathy in action, effective communication, negotiation, conflict management, teamwork, and positive influence [4]. These competencies support discipline and cooperation in the classroom and help create a safe, respectful, and collaborative learning climate, which is a precondition for effective classroom management [17].

Teachers' social skills, as part of their professional and affective competence, therefore offer a reasonable lens for examining how daily classroom interactions translate into effective classroom management and into more meaningful learning for students [6].

Classroom management is no longer limited to controlling discipline or delivering content. It also involves creating a supportive socio-emotional climate, two-way communication, and interactions that sustain student motivation and the smooth running of T&L [16]. In Malaysia, effective classroom management is linked to the six student aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013–2025, which casts teachers as managers of a classroom climate that keeps students engaged and well behaved [12]. Effective classroom management has also been associated with better learning outcomes and higher teaching efficacy [17].

Teachers' EI is therefore regarded as an important foundation for a stable and positive learning environment [4]. Within the EI framework, social skills (relationship management) refer to the ability to build and manage relationships through effective communication, negotiation, conflict management, teamwork, and positive influence [4]. These competencies allow teachers to align their emotions and behavior with the needs of students and colleagues, which supports discipline and collaboration in the classroom [17, 16].

Teachers now face more complex social-emotional demands and student behavior, and indicators such as job stress and emotional exhaustion point to a need for stronger interpersonal competencies in the classroom [15]. The role of EI in classroom management is recognized, but local empirical evidence, particularly at the primary level, is limited. Studies also tend to measure EI as an aggregate rather than examine social skills as a distinct dimension [16]. This raises the question of how far teachers' social skills (relationship management) predict classroom management effectiveness. The objective of this study was therefore to examine the influence of social skills (relationship management) on classroom management effectiveness among SJKC teachers.

2. Literature Review

This study draws on Goleman's [4] EI framework together with the Prosocial Classroom model, which explains how teachers' social-emotional competencies shape classroom climate, classroom management, and student outcomes [8]. In the competency version of the EI framework, social skills (relationship management) form the interpersonal domain. They include influence, inspirational leadership, developing others, conflict management, teamwork, and catalyzing change, each of which bears directly on teacher–student interaction and on collaboration with colleagues [4]. The

ability model of EI, which treats EI as reasoning with emotional information to guide thought and action [11], and syntheses of effective practice that stress the interpersonal side of daily work [14] point in the same direction.

Classroom management effectiveness. Classroom management effectiveness is the ability to create and maintain an organized, responsive, learning-focused environment through routines and expectations, behavior management, student engagement, teacher–student relationships, and spatial organization [7]. Hattie's [6] synthesis of meta-analyses associates effective classroom management with improved learning outcomes, and it has also been associated with positive teacher–student relationships [13]. In policy terms, this competency supports the PPPM 2013–2025 aim of a high-quality learning climate [12].

Social skills (relationship management). Social skills are the competencies used to manage relationships effectively, including communication, empathy in action, negotiation, conflict management, collaboration, and positive influence [4]. Teachers' EI and social skills have been associated with classroom management efficacy, emotional stability, and more organized pedagogical practice [17], and teacher–student relationships built on respect and responsiveness predict student engagement and achievement [13]. A review by Todmal et al. [16] likewise links teachers' EI to effective classroom management, and Valente et al. [17] report that sound classroom behavior management supports students' social-emotional development.

According to the Prosocial Classroom model [8], teachers' social skills improve the quality of interaction and emotion regulation and reduce conflict and misbehavior. This in turn strengthens structure, routine, and student engagement, the core components of effective classroom management [7]. There is therefore a theoretical and empirical basis for expecting teachers' social skills to have a positive influence on classroom management effectiveness [4, 17, 16].

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study used a quantitative survey design because its objective was to measure and analyze relationships between variables systematically and objectively. A survey allows data to be collected from a large sample in a short time and supports generalization to the study population [2]. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire and analyzed in SPSS version 26.0.

3.2 Population and Study Sample

The study population comprised 90 Chinese National Type Schools (SJKC) in Penang, with a total of 2,941 teachers. To ensure adequate representativeness, the study focused on the Northeast district of Penang, which has 36 SJKCs and an estimated 1,106 teachers. Sample size was determined with the Krejcie and Morgan [9] formula. Simple random sampling gave every teacher in the population an equal chance of selection, which minimizes selection bias and strengthens the inferences drawn from the results [3].

3.3 Study Instrument

The instrument was a 63-item questionnaire in three sections. Items in Sections B and C were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

i. Section A (4 items): Demographic information (gender, age, race, teaching experience).

ii. Section B (29 items): Emotional Intelligence (EI) based on the Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment adapted from Goleman's dimensional model (self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, social skills).
iii. Section C (30 items): Classroom Management Effectiveness adapted from the Scale for Classroom Management in Inclusive Schools [10].

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Three education experts, each with 20 to 25 years of experience in teaching, research, and educational leadership, reviewed and validated the instrument. They rated the relevance of each item on a 1–5 scale; ratings of 4–5 were coded as relevant (1) and ratings of 1–3 as not relevant (0). The Item-Content Validity Index (I-CVI) was 1.00, indicating very high content validity. A pilot study with 30 teachers assessed internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The 60 items yielded $\alpha = .95$, which is categorized as very high [5].

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire (Google Forms) distributed to SJKC teachers in the Northeast district through the official networks of schools and teachers' associations. The questionnaire included an introductory letter from the researchers, an explanation of the study's purpose, and a confidentiality statement. Respondents gave written consent digitally before answering.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 in two stages:
i. Descriptive analysis: mean, standard deviation, and demographic distribution of respondents.
ii. Inferential analysis: normality was checked through skewness and kurtosis before a simple linear regression tested the influence of social skills (IV) on classroom management effectiveness (DV). The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

3.7 Research Ethics Considerations

The study received ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous, and only the principal researcher had access to the raw data.

4. Data Analysis

Skewness and kurtosis for the main constructs were within the tolerance range (skewness < ±2; kurtosis < ±7) given by Hair et al. [5], so the regression analysis proceeded. Social skills had skewness = 0.77 and kurtosis = 1.74; classroom management effectiveness (DV) had skewness = 1.46 and kurtosis = 4.90, which remains acceptable for regression in a sample of this size.

A simple linear regression was then run with social skills as the predictor (IV) and classroom management effectiveness as the outcome (DV). The model gave $R = 0.468$, $R^2 = 0.219$ (≈ 0.22), adjusted $R^2 = 0.216$, and SEE = 0.31136, so social skills explained 22% of the variance in the DV.

The ANOVA test showed that the model was significant, $F(1, 293) = 82.153$, $p < .001$, indicating a linear relationship between social skills and classroom management effectiveness.

The unstandardized coefficient (B) for social skills was 0.361 (SE = 0.040), standardized $\beta = 0.468$, $t = 9.064$, $p < .001$. The intercept was B0 = 2.324 (SE = 0.120), $t = 19.403$, $p < .001$ [Goh, 2025—reference not supplied]. Each one-unit increase in the social skills score predicted a 0.36-unit increase in classroom management effectiveness. Teachers' social skills therefore had a positive and significant effect on classroom management effectiveness ($R^2 \approx 0.22$; $\beta \approx 0.47$), which supports professional development that prioritizes communication, negotiation, conflict management, and collaboration skills. Table 1 summarizes these results.

Table 1
Summary of Simple Linear Regression: Social Skills → Classroom Management Effectiveness

Statistics	Value
R	0.468
R^2	0.219 (≈0.22)
Adjusted R^2	0.216
SEE	0.31136
F(1,293)	82.153 (p < .001)
B0 (intercept)	2.324 (SE = 0.120), p < .001
B (Social skills)	0.361 (SE = 0.040)
Standardized β	0.468
t	9.064 (p < .001)

5. Findings And Discussion

Teachers' social skills had a significant positive effect on classroom management effectiveness ($\beta = 0.47$), a medium-to-large effect by Cohen's [1] benchmarks. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.22$) indicates that social skills explained about 22% of the variance in classroom management effectiveness among SJKC teachers. Teachers who communicate effectively, negotiate constructively, manage conflict, and build good relationships with students and colleagues therefore tend to report more orderly and engaging classrooms. Most of the variance lies with other factors, so social skills are one contributor among several; even so, the result places interpersonal and emotional competencies within classroom management rather than at its margins.

These results are consistent with Goleman's [4] EI framework, particularly the relationship-management domain, which concerns the capacity to influence, inspire, and manage relationships. Teachers with stronger social skills may be better able to regulate emotion, resolve classroom conflict constructively, and encourage cooperation among students, which helps create psychologically safe classrooms that support engagement, motivation, and mutual respect. The result also fits the Prosocial Classroom model [8], which proposes that teachers' social-emotional competencies improve classroom climate through better emotion regulation and less student misbehavior. In SJKC classrooms, where students and teachers may differ in home language and cultural background, relationship-management skills may matter further for overcoming communication barriers and encouraging inclusive participation, although this study did not test that possibility directly.

The findings also agree with earlier work on teacher–student relationships and classroom environments. In a mixed-methods study in Chinese art universities, He et al. [7] found that teachers' classroom behavior management strategies were associated with students' learning behavior.

Valente et al. [17] found that teachers' emotional intelligence predicted teaching efficacy and classroom management efficacy, and a review by Todmal et al. [16] reached a similar conclusion about EI and classroom management. Agreement with these studies, which come from different countries and educational levels, adds weight to the present results, although the present sample was drawn from a single district.

The findings have practical implications for teacher professional development and school improvement. Continuing professional development (CPD) could include explicit training in relationship management: communication, negotiation, empathy, conflict resolution, teamwork, and instructional leadership. Simulation-based workshops, peer-coaching cycles, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on applying EI are possible ways to carry these skills into daily teaching. Schools that develop these competencies among teachers may be better placed to sustain positive classroom climates and improve T&L quality, in line with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013–2025.

The study has limitations. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference, and self-reported data may be affected by social desirability bias. Longitudinal or mixed-methods designs could examine how emotional intelligence, teacher well-being, and classroom management effectiveness interact over time. Within these limits, the findings suggest that teachers' social skills are professional competencies that contribute to effective and equitable classrooms, not merely personal niceties.

6. Recommendation

Because teachers' social skills (relationship management) had a positive and significant effect on classroom management effectiveness, we recommend that CPD at school and district levels focus on effective communication, negotiation, conflict management, empathy in action, teamwork, and instructional leadership. This can be delivered through simulation-based workshops and micro-teaching built on discipline scenarios, followed by peer-coaching cycles (peer observation → structured feedback → re-practice) and a PLC cycle themed on relationship management, so that skills transfer to real classrooms. Schools can also set routines for teacher–student relationships (e.g., daily check-ins, jointly negotiated classroom rules, restorative practices) and protocols for communicating with parents and guardians to strengthen support within the SJKC community.

Administrators can add social-skills indicators to classroom practice assessments and school KPI targets (e.g., higher classroom management assessment scores, fewer disciplinary referrals, higher student engagement), together with support for teacher well-being (workload monitoring, access to counseling or mentoring) to reduce the work stress that affects classroom interaction. Validated instruments (e.g., EI scales and classroom management assessments) can be used for baseline and periodic monitoring, and training modules can be refined according to the skill gaps identified. Future research could use longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to evaluate social-skills interventions, test mediators (e.g., self-regulation, social awareness) and moderators (teaching experience, class size), and compare school types (SJKC, SK, SJKT) so that the evidence is more robust and generalizable.

7. Study Implications

The findings have theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, they add empirical support to Goleman's [4] EI framework by showing that the relationship-management domain is a meaningful predictor of classroom management effectiveness. They are also consistent with the

Prosocial Classroom model [8], which holds that teachers' social and emotional competence can improve classroom climate and student engagement.

In practice, the results indicate that social skills are a professional competence that can be trained and measured, not only a personal trait. Schools and teacher training institutions can use them to design training modules built on the interpersonal skills that support effective T&L. Coaching, mentoring, and PLC programs can be restructured to address affective and social aspects alongside cognitive pedagogy.

For policy, the findings give the Ministry of Education Malaysia a basis for strengthening teachers' soft-skills development in line with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013–2025. Including social-skills elements in teacher competency assessments and career pathways could support an education system that gives more weight to empathy and educator well-being.

8. Conclusion

Because social skills explained about 22% of the variance in classroom management effectiveness, professional development that addresses communication, negotiation, conflict management, teamwork, and instructional leadership deserves priority. Simulation-based training, discipline-focused micro-teaching, and peer coaching are expected to help transfer these skills to real classrooms [14]. In the medium term, schools can organize PLCs that focus on interpersonal strategies supporting classroom routines and student engagement.

Overall, the findings support the expectation that teachers' social skills (relationship management) positively influence classroom management effectiveness. This is consistent with EI theory, the Prosocial Classroom model, and earlier international evidence [4, 8, 17]. Strengthening teachers' social skills should therefore be a priority in continuing professional development.

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