

## Article

# Advancing Social- Emotional Competencies in Primary Grade Environments

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between social-emotional development and academic performance among primary grade learners at Talisay City Central Elementary School for the school year 2023-2024. The study assessed five socio-emotional constructs: emotional awareness and expression, self-regulation, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior. Academic performance in English, Mathematics, and Araling Panlipunan (AP) was evaluated. Results revealed a significant relationship between social skills and academic performance in English and AP, while no significant relationships were found between other socio-emotional constructs and academic outcomes across the three subjects. The findings underscore the complex interaction between socio-emotional competencies and academic achievement, suggesting the need for targeted interventions that promote balanced socio-emotional and academic development in early childhood education. The study offers insights for educators and policymakers in enhancing holistic learning approaches.

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**Keywords:** Social-emotional skills, early childhood education, emotional awareness, pro-social behavior, relationships with adults

## Introduction

The focus on socio-emotional development in early childhood education arises from a comprehensive understanding of children's developmental trajectories (Speyer et al., 2022). This approach recognizes the interconnected nature of academic, social, and emotional growth, where robust socio-emotional abilities serve as a foundation for all aspects of development (Jones & Kahn, 2019). Early cultivation of interpersonal skills, such as relationship-building and emotion regulation, fosters resilience, adaptability, and mental well-being

(Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). These skills help children thrive across various life domains (Denham et al., 2021). For instance, children with strong emotional regulation skills can better concentrate on academic tasks, persist through challenges, and manage their behavior in social settings (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2019).

In addition, socio-emotional competencies like problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and self-control are honed through responsible judgment, enabling children to navigate complex situations and contribute positively to society (Greenberg et al., 2017). Research consistently reveals a strong link between socio-emotional skills and academic success, as these abilities promote higher engagement with learning materials and perseverance in academic challenges (Weissberg et al., 2020).

Globally, the discourse surrounding child development increasingly emphasizes socio-emotional learning (SEL) as a critical part of education, particularly from early childhood. Studies, such as those conducted by Rivera et al. (2022), indicate that socio-emotional skills are vital predictors of a variety of life outcomes, establishing a clear connection between early SEL and later achievements in academics, mental health, and social behavior. This growing recognition supports a global shift towards holistic educational models that address all aspects of child development, aligning with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education (UNESCO, 2020).

In the Philippines, efforts to integrate holistic development into national education policies align with these global trends but face unique challenges due to socio-economic factors affecting educational quality and access (Maligalig et al., 2021). Although policies exist to address these issues, there remains a need for comprehensive local research on how effectively these frameworks are being implemented. The Philippine education system continues to struggle with limited resources, gaps in teacher training, and the need for culturally relevant SEL curricula that resonate with community values (Bernardo, 2020). Focusing on the Talisay City Division, this study examined the socio-emotional development of early childhood learners and its relationship to academic performance during the 2023-2024 school year at Talisay City Central Elementary School. The region faced distinct socio-economic challenges that hindered the quality and accessibility of early childhood education, highlighting the importance of focused research and policy interventions (Rivera et al., 2022). This study sought to provide insights into the state of SEL in early childhood education at the local level, evaluating teacher and learner characteristics, as well as educators' perceptions of learners' socio-emotional development (Talisay City Division Report, 2023).

Given the broad benefits of SEL, it is imperative for educators, policymakers, and researchers in Cebu and beyond to prioritize socio-

emotional learning in early childhood education. By doing so, they invest not only in the future of individual children but also in the formation of a more empathetic, resilient, and educated society (Weissberg et al., 2020). This research advocates for a progressive shift towards holistic educational models that recognize the full spectrum of child development, with SEL as a central component for fostering both personal growth and societal well-being (Greenberg et al., 2017).

## Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive correlational research design to explore the relationship between socio-emotional development and academic performance among early childhood learners at Talisay City Central Elementary School. The participants comprising 119 learners from kindergarten and 29 teachers. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire designed to assess four key areas of socio-emotional development: emotional awareness and expression, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior. The academic performance data were retrieved from school records to correlate with socio-emotional competencies. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to rate responses, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scoring procedure followed a predefined rating scale: 5 (Strongly Agree): Indicates a high level of socio-emotional competency, consistently exhibited and 1 (Strongly Disagree): Implies a clear absence of the socio-emotional skill. Each respondent's scores were averaged for each of the four domains, and the results were analyzed using statistical techniques, including Pearson's correlation, to determine the relationship between socio-emotional skills and academic performance. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the study. This methodology enabled a systematic, objective examination of socio-emotional competencies' impact on academic outcomes, providing empirical insights for educational policy and practice.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1. Emotional Awareness and Expression

Emotional Awareness and Expression	Mean	VD
Children can identify and name their own emotions.	4.69	SA
Children understand that other people have emotions and can show empathy.	4.27	SA
Children are able to express their feelings in appropriate ways.	4.07	A
Children recognize the difference between positive and negative emotions in themselves and others.	4.15	A
Children can accurately describe the reasons behind their emotions.	4.13	A
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>4.26</b>	<b>SA</b>

Table 1 provided an insightful overview of the emotional awareness and expression skills of children, revealing a relatively high level of emotional competence across various aspects. The grand mean of 4.26, indicating "strongly agree," provided a strong overall capacity among children to understand and manage their emotions. Notably, learners excelled in identifying and naming their own emotions, scoring the highest with a mean of 4.69. This skill is crucial for self-awareness and emotional regulation. Additionally, the children demonstrated a good ability to empathize with others, as shown by a score of 4.27. While they were also capable of expressing their feelings appropriately and distinguishing between positive and negative emotions, with scores of 4.07 and 4.15 respectively, these areas, although strong, suggested slight room for enhancement compared to their skill in self-identification of emotions. The ability to describe the reasons behind their emotions, scoring 4.13, further indicated a mature understanding of emotional causality, essential for interpersonal communication and self-reflection. This data emphasized the importance of continued support and education in emotional literacy to foster even more refined emotional skills in children. According to Lang et al. (2020), by focusing on enhancing areas such as the appropriate expression of feelings and understanding the emotional states of others, educational programs could further equip children with the skills necessary for effective communication and emotional resilience in diverse situations.

Table 2. Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation	Mean	VD
Children can manage their own emotions and behaviors in various situations.	3.19	MA
Children can calm themselves down when upset or excited	3.86	A
Children demonstrate patience while waiting for their turn or for delayed gratification.	4.14	A
Children can adjust their behavior according to the rules or expectations of different settings (e.g., classroom, playground).	4.52	SA
Children use verbal communication to express needs, desires, or frustrations instead of acting out	3.72	A
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 2 illustrated the self-regulation of the learners across several dimensions, with an overall grand mean of 3.89, classified as "agree." The data indicated a particularly strong ability in adjusting behaviors to different settings, scoring a remarkable 4.52 and falling into the 'Strongly Agree' category. Furthermore, learners demonstrated excellent patience, as indicated by a score of 4.14, which is vital for their ability to handle delay and manage impulses effectively. The ability to calm themselves when upset or excited also scored well at 3.86, suggesting proficient emotional skills. However, the lowest score, though still moderate, was in managing emotions and behaviors in

various situations, at 3.19, which might indicate inconsistencies in emotional control across different contexts. Lastly, the use of verbal communication to express needs and frustrations scored 3.72, pointing to a generally good but improvable capacity for articulating emotions constructively. Enhancing curriculum and support systems to focus on developing consistent self-regulation strategies could help children achieve more balanced emotional responses and better adaptability in varying contexts, ultimately fostering their overall emotional resilience and social competence. These insights suggested strengths in specific areas of self-regulation and opportunities for targeted enhancements in others, as discussed by Murray et al. (2019).

Table 3. Social Skills

Social Skills	Mean	VD
Children demonstrate the ability to make friends and play cooperatively with others.	4.55	SA
Children show understanding and respect for rules and norms in social settings.	4.31	SA
Children can negotiate and resolve conflicts with peers in constructive ways.	3.14	MA
Children initiate interactions and play with peers without adult prompting.	4.24	SA
Children participate in group activities and contribute to achieving common goals.	4.14	A
Grand Mean	4.08	A

Table 3 provided insights into the social skills of learners, revealing strengths and areas for development within their ability to interact effectively with peers. The data indicated several strong aspects of social engagement among the children, with the highest score, a 4.55 rated as "Strongly Agree," showcasing their capability to make friends and play cooperatively. This suggested that the children excelled in forming relationships and engaging in social play, which are crucial for their social development. Similarly, learners' understanding and respect for rules and norms in social settings, and their ability to initiate interactions and play with peers without adult prompting, scored highly with means of 4.31 and 4.24.

These skills are essential for navigating social environments autonomously and adhering to social expectations. Learners' participation in group activities and their contribution to achieving common goals also received a positive evaluation, with a score of 4.14. This indicated that they were generally good at working within a team and contributing to group dynamics. However, the area of conflict resolution was noted as a relative weakness, with a mean score of 3.14. This suggested that while the children generally displayed strong social skills, they might struggle with negotiating and resolving conflicts constructively. The data from Table 10 emphasized the necessity for focused training and activities aimed at enhancing conflict resolution skills among learners, given its lower score relative to other social competencies. LaRusso & Selman (2011) stated that implementing structured conflict management programs and peer mediation training

could help children develop more effective strategies for negotiating and resolving disputes, thereby strengthening their overall social interactions and relationships.

Table 4. Relationship with Adults

Relationship with Adults	Mean	VD
Children respond positively to adult guidance and instruction	4.66	SA
Children feel comfortable seeking help from adults when needed.	3.86	A
Children demonstrate the ability to follow directions and routines established by adults.	3.79	A
Children demonstrate respect towards adults through their words and actions.	3.79	A
Children exhibit confidence in their interactions with adults, speaking up and expressing themselves freely.	3.51	A
Grand Mean	3.92	A

Table 4 assessed the quality of relationships that children had with adults, covering various aspects of interaction and respect. The data revealed a strong foundation in some areas while identifying potential points for further enhancement in others. The most prominent strength among the children was their response to adult guidance and instruction, with a high mean score of 4.66, classified under as "strongly agree."

This indicated that children were generally very receptive to learning and taking advice from adults, which is critical for their development and education. Other aspects rated as "agree" included children's comfort in seeking help from adults, their ability to follow directions and routines established by adults, and their demonstration of respect towards adults through words and actions, with scores of 3.86, 3.79, and 3.79, respectively. These mean scores suggested that while children were quite adept at interacting positively with adults, there was room for growth in these areas to enhance their reliance on and respect for adult figures further. A slightly lower score was observed in children's confidence in their interactions with adults, particularly in speaking up and expressing themselves freely, which was scored at 3.51. This indicated a need for fostering greater self-assurance in children when engaging with adults, potentially encouraging more open and confident communication. The Grand Mean of 3.92, falling into the "Agree" category, overall reflected those children maintained a positive and respectful relationship with adults but highlighted specific areas, especially in confidence-building, where there was room for improvement to support even healthier and more productive interactions with adult figures.

The data implied that strengthening children's confidence in their interactions with adults could lead to more effective communication and richer learning experiences, enhancing overall educational outcomes. Additionally, Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018) suggested that efforts to further develop comfort and respect in child-adult interactions could foster a more supportive and empowering

environment, essential for nurturing children's social and emotional growth.

Table 5. Pro-social Behavior

	Mean	VD
Children often engage in acts of kindness and helpfulness without being prompted	3.67	A
Children show appreciation and gratitude towards others.	4.0	A
Intervention programs successfully encourage children to share and cooperate.	3.82	A
Children demonstrate an understanding of fairness and take actions to ensure fair treatment for all.	3.93	A
Children express concern for the well-being of others and show willingness to assist those in need	3.69	A
Grand Mean	3.82	SA

Table 5 presented children's pro-social behavior. The data showed that children often engaged in acts of kindness and helpfulness without prompting, with a mean score of 3.67, suggesting a natural inclination towards altruistic behaviors. Additionally, children demonstrated a strong sense of appreciation and gratitude towards others, as evidenced by a higher mean score of 4.0. The impact of intervention programs was also notable, with a mean score of 3.82, indicating that such programs effectively promoted sharing and cooperation among children. Fairness was well understood and actively practiced by children, with a mean score of 3.93, pointing towards their cognitive and moral development in recognizing and ensuring fair treatment. The children's concern for the well-being of others and their willingness to assist was similarly positive, with a mean score of 3.69. The Grand Mean of 3.82, classified under "Strongly Agree," consolidated these observations, reflecting a strong pro-social disposition among the children, highlighting both the success of nurturing environments and the natural empathetic tendencies of the children. The findings implied that fostering environments that support and encourage pro-social behaviors could significantly enhance children's natural tendencies toward empathy and cooperation. Thummler et al. (2022) emphasized that by continuing to implement and refine intervention programs that promote these values, educators and caregivers could further develop children's abilities to act kindly and fairly, which are essential for their social development and future interpersonal relationships.

Table 6. Learners Performance

Subject	Grade	VD
English	86.43	Very Satisfactory
Mathematics	86.63	Very Satisfactory
AP	86.30	Very Satisfactory

Table 6 showcased the academic performance of learners across three core subjects: English, Mathematics, and AP, with all subjects reflecting

high achievement levels. Specifically, the grades in English averaged at 86.43, in Mathematics at 86.63, and in AP at 86.30, with each subject receiving a verbal descriptor of "Very Satisfactory." This uniformity in performance suggested a consistent level of academic proficiency across different domains of study. The slight variance in grades, with Mathematics being marginally higher, could indicate a slightly stronger grasp in numerical and analytical skills among the learners.

Table 7. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Social Emotional Development to English

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness and Expression	0.0193	0.1005	0.921	Not Significant	Do not reject
Self-Regulation	-0.2180	-1.1607	0.256	Not Significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	-0.4315	-2.4857	0.0194	Significant	Reject
Relationship with Adults	-0.0194	-0.1008	0.920	Not Significant	Do not reject
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.0194	-0.1010	0.920	Not Significant	Do not reject

Table 7 explored the relationship between different constructs of social-emotional development and science performance among learners. The data revealed that only the construct of Social Skills showed a statistically significant negative correlation with science performance, with an r-value of -0.4315, t-value of -2.4857, and a p-value of 0.0194. This suggested that higher social skills scores were associated with lower science performance, which was a surprising outcome indicating a potential inverse relationship.

This finding may suggest that while social skills are vital for overall development, they might, in some contexts, divert attention or focus away from academic pursuits like science, or reflect different types of intelligence or focus in the student population. For the other constructs—Emotional Awareness and Expression, Self-Regulation, Relationship with Adults, and Pro-Social Behavior—all demonstrated non-significant relationships with science performance.

Their respective p-values (0.921, 0.256, 0.920, 0.920) were well above the typical threshold of 0.05, indicating no strong evidence that these aspects of social-emotional development are directly correlated with how well children perform in science. This lack of significant correlation suggested that these dimensions of emotional and social growth do not necessarily predict or influence science performance directly, according to the data collected. In summary, except for Social Skills which showed an unexpected inverse relationship, the other social-emotional skills seemed to have little to no direct bearing on science achievement among the learners evaluated. This analysis could help educators understand that while social-emotional skills are crucial for holistic development, their impact on academic performance in science may not be straightforward and warrants further investigation.

The data presented in Table 8 explored the relationship between the

level of social-emotional development and various mathematics constructs, measured by correlation coefficients (r-values) and tested for statistical significance.

Table 8. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Social-Emotional Development to Mathematics

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness and Expression	0.0488	0.2539	0.801	Not Significant	Do not reject
Self-Regulation	-0.0706	-0.3676	0.716	Not significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	-0.3291	-1.8107	0.0813	Not significant	Do not reject
Relationship with Adults	0.0765	0.3986	0.693	Not significant	Do not reject
Pro-Social Behavior	0.0043	0.0222	0.982	Not significant	Do not reject

The findings indicated that there was no statistically significant correlation between the constructs tested and mathematics proficiency, as reflected by high p- values. Specifically, Emotional Awareness and Expression showed a very weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.0488$ ) with mathematics, but the p-value of 0.801 suggested no significant relationship. Similarly, Self-Regulation had a small negative correlation ( $r = -0.0706$ ), with a p-value of 0.716, again indicating no significant link. Social Skills also showed a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -0.3291$ ), which might suggest potential relevance, but the p-value of 0.0813, while closer to significance, still did not meet the conventional threshold for statistical significance (usually  $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, the Relationship with Adults had a slight positive correlation ( $r = 0.0765$ ), but like the others, the p-value of 0.693 did not support a significant relationship. Finally, Pro-Social Behavior displayed an almost negligible correlation with mathematics ( $r = 0.0043$ ) and a very high p-value of 0.982, confirming the lack of a significant connection. Overall, the results across all constructs suggested that there was no significant relationship between these specific aspects of social-emotional development and mathematics skills, leading to the decision to not reject the null hypothesis.

Table 9. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Social-Emotional Development to AP

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness and Expression	0.0481	0.2501	0.804	Not Significant	Do not reject
Self-Regulation	-0.1520	-0.7992	0.431	Not significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	-0.3834	-2.1567	0.0401	Significant	Do not reject
Relationship with Adults	-0.0224	-0.1166	0.908	significant	reject
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.0579	-0.3014	0.765	Not significant	Do not reject

Table 9 examined the relationship between social-emotional development and academic performance (AP). The overall findings suggested a mostly non-significant relationship between the constructs of social-emotional development and AP, with one notable exception. Starting with Emotional Awareness and Expression, there was a very weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.0481$ ) with AP, but with a p-value of 0.804, it indicated no statistically significant relationship. Similarly, Self-Regulation showed a small negative correlation ( $r = -0.1520$ ), and the p-value of 0.431 further suggested no significant influence on AP. Interestingly, Social Skills presented a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -0.3834$ ), and the p-value of 0.0401 was below the conventional threshold for statistical significance (usually  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting a significant negative relationship with AP. Despite this finding, the decision was to not reject the null hypothesis, which seemed contradictory and may need further examination or justification. The construct of Relationship with Adults showed an almost negligible negative correlation ( $r = -0.0224$ ) and a very high p-value of 0.908, typically indicating no significant relationship. However, the remarks incorrectly labeled it as significant, and the decision to reject the null hypothesis contradicted the statistical evidence, likely indicating an error in either the labeling or decision-making. Finally, Pro-Social Behavior showed a slight negative correlation ( $r = -0.0579$ ) with AP, and with a p-value of 0.765, it also confirmed no significant relationship. In summary, except for the significant negative correlation found with Social Skills, the other constructs of social-emotional development did not significantly correlate with academic performance.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between social skills and the academic performance of learners in both English and Araling Panlipunan (AP), while other socio-emotional constructs such as emotional awareness and expression, self-regulation, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior did not demonstrate significant correlations with academic performance in English, Mathematics, or AP. Specifically, social skills showed a significant negative correlation with academic performance in English and AP, suggesting that higher social skills may be linked with lower academic outcomes in these subjects. Meanwhile, other constructs did not yield significant relationships with academic performance across the subjects. These results highlight the complex interplay between socio-emotional development and academic achievement, emphasizing the importance of further investigating the nuances of how specific socio-emotional competencies impact different areas of learning. While social-emotional competencies are generally seen as beneficial for overall development, their role in academic performance may vary,

pointing to the need for targeted interventions that balance socio-emotional growth with academic progress.

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