

## Article

### Enhancing Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Education Settings

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**Abstract:** This study examines the development of social-emotional skills in early childhood education settings and their relationship to academic performance. The constructs assessed include emotional awareness and expression, self-regulation, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior. Results indicate that children demonstrate a strong ability to identify emotions, regulate their behavior, interact socially, and maintain positive relationships with adults. Despite these well-developed social-emotional skills, statistical analysis found no significant correlations between these constructs and academic performance in literacy and numeracy, as indicated by non-significant r-values and p-values. The findings highlight the importance of fostering social-emotional development in early childhood but suggest that its direct influence on academic outcomes requires further research. These results contribute to understanding the role of social-emotional learning in early childhood education and its potential long-term effects on children's holistic development.

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

## Introduction

The early childhood stage is widely regarded as a critical period for the development of foundational social-emotional skills, which play a pivotal role in shaping children's ability to navigate academic and life challenges (Mares & McMahon, 2020). Social-emotional development, encompassing areas such as emotional awareness, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior, is linked to various life outcomes, including academic performance and psychological well-being (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2021). Recent studies highlight the growing importance of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into early childhood education (ECE) settings to foster holistic development and long-term success (CASEL, 2022).

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Emotional awareness and expression, one of the key components of SEL, are fundamental for children to recognize, understand, and manage their feelings effectively. According to Denham et al. (2020), children who develop strong emotional awareness are better equipped to regulate their emotions, which in turn improves their social interactions and academic engagement. However, while the value of emotional competence is recognized globally, research in specific local contexts, remains limited, highlighting a need for more localized studies on how these skills are fostered and their impact on learners' overall development (Bailey et al., 2021).

Social skills, defined as the ability to interact effectively with others, are another critical aspect of social-emotional development (Harris et al., 2022). These skills enable children to form meaningful relationships with peers and adults, cooperate in group settings, and navigate social situations with ease (Wentzel & Muenks, 2021). However, gaps in teacher training and resource allocation in some schools, particularly in under-resourced areas, present challenges to fostering these skills effectively (Bierman, Domitrovich, & Hamre, 2022). Thus, it is essential to evaluate how well learners at Talisay City Central Elementary School are developing their social skills within the existing educational framework.

The ability to establish positive relationships with adults, including teachers and caregivers, is another vital socio-emotional competency (Nakamichi et al., 2022). Research shows that secure and supportive adult-child relationships contribute significantly to children's emotional regulation, self-confidence, and academic achievement (Li & Julian, 2020). However, many educators in the Philippines, particularly in public school settings, often face large class sizes and limited resources, making it challenging to provide individualized attention and foster these relationships (UNICEF, 2021). This study seeks to explore how well children at Talisay City Central Elementary School build relationships with adults in their learning environment and how these relationships affect their socio-emotional and academic development.

Pro-social behavior, including acts of kindness, sharing, and cooperation, is closely tied to emotional regulation and empathy (Orti-Riomalo et al., 2021). Children who exhibit strong pro-social behaviors are better positioned to succeed in collaborative tasks and develop friendships (Caprara et al., 2019). However, despite the recognized importance of pro-social behavior, there remains a lack of research focusing on the pro-social development of early childhood learners in specific local contexts such as Talisay City. This research aims to address this gap by examining the pro-social behaviors of learners in Talisay and their relationship to academic outcomes.

Moreover, understanding the link between social-emotional development and academic performance is essential for creating well-rounded educational approaches. Numerous studies have

demonstrated that children with higher levels of social-emotional competence tend to perform better academically due to improved focus, self-regulation, and engagement in learning activities (McKown, 2021). Yet, in the Philippines, research specifically assessing how these competencies correlate with academic performance, particularly in early childhood education, is sparse, leaving an essential gap that this study aims to fill.

This study assesses the socio-emotional development of early childhood learners at Talisay City Central Elementary School across four domains: emotional awareness and expression, social skills, relationships with adults, and pro-social behavior. Furthermore, it seeks to determine the relationship between these competencies and learners' academic performance, addressing existing research gaps and contributing valuable insights to local educational policies and practices.

## 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 included 180 respondents, comprising 150 learners from Kindergarten and Grade 1 and 30 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.	3.83	A
Children understand that other people have emotions and can show empathy.	3.63	A
Children are able to express their feelings in appropriate ways.	3.80	A
Children recognize the difference between positive and negative emotions in themselves and others.	3.87	A
Children can accurately describe the reasons behind their emotions.	3.93	A
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 1 assessed the emotional awareness and expression of the learners. The highest average score, 3.93, was observed in the ability of children to accurately describe the reasons behind their emotions, suggesting a strong capacity for introspection and understanding of emotional causality. This was closely followed by the ability to recognize the difference between positive and negative emotions in themselves and others, with a mean score of 3.87. These high scores pointed to a nuanced grasp of emotional distinctions and self-awareness among the children. Learners also exhibited a strong capability in identifying and naming their own emotions and expressing their feelings appropriately, with scores of 3.83 and 3.80, respectively. These competencies are fundamental for effective emotional communication and regulation. Slightly lower, yet still high, was the score for understanding that others have emotions and demonstrating empathy, at 3.63. Overall, the data reflected strong capabilities in social interactions and personal growth, with a slightly lower, yet significant, aptitude in empathetic understanding compared to other emotional skills. Given the high scores in emotional awareness and expression, Foster & McCloughen (2020) suggested that educational programs should continue to foster and expand these abilities.

Table 2. Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation	Mean	VD
Children can manage their own emotions and behaviors in various situations.	3.73	A
Children can calm themselves down when upset or excited	3.47	A
Children demonstrate patience while waiting for their turn or for delayed gratification.	3.70	A
Children can adjust their behavior according to the rules or expectations of different settings (e.g., classroom, playground).	3.90	A
Children use verbal communication to express needs, desires, or frustrations instead of acting out	3.90	A
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>A</b>

The data revealed a generally high level of self-regulation among the children, with a grand mean of 3.74, indicating a robust ability to navigate emotional and behavioral challenges. Notably, children excelled in adjusting their behavior to different settings such as the classroom or playground, and in using verbal communication to express their needs or frustrations, both receiving an impressive mean score of 3.90. These skills were crucial for successful social interactions and academic performance. The ability to manage one's emotions effectively, as evidenced by the score of 3.73 for managing emotions and behaviors in various situations, underscored the children's competence in emotional self-regulation. However, the relatively lower score of 3.47 for calming themselves when upset or excited suggested some variability in the ability to self-soothe, which may require specific attention in educational or therapeutic settings. The score of 3.70 for demonstrating patience indicated a strong, though not perfect, capacity for delayed gratification and turn-taking, which are important components of social development. According to Dawson & Guare (2018), monitoring these skills through regular assessments could help in providing timely interventions, ensuring that all children develop the critical self-regulation abilities needed for their academic success.

Table 3. Social Skills

Social Skills	Mean	VD
Children demonstrate the ability to make friends and play cooperatively with others.	3.83	A
Children show understanding and respect for rules and norms in social settings.	3.73	A
Children can negotiate and resolve conflicts with peers in constructive ways.	3.70	A
Children initiate interactions and play with peers without adult prompting.	3.87	A
Children participate in group activities and contribute to achieving common goals.	3.73	A
Grand Mean	3.77	A

Table 3 presented data on the social skills of learners, highlighting their capabilities in various interpersonal interactions. The grand mean of 3.77 indicated a generally high proficiency among children in navigating social settings. Children demonstrated particular strength in initiating interactions and playing with peers independently, as reflected by the high score of 3.87. This skill was essential for social development and suggested a confident approach to peer relationships. Similarly, the ability to make friends and play cooperatively also scored highly at 3.83, illustrating strong cooperative skills and the ability to form positive relationships. While children showed good understanding and respect for social rules and norms, and participated

effectively in group activities, both with scores of 3.73, there was a slightly lower score of 3.70 in their ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts. This area, though still rated positively, indicated room for enhancement in conflict resolution skills. Overall, the data suggested that while children were adept at engaging in social interactions and adhering to social norms, there could be further emphasis on developing more sophisticated conflict resolution strategies to elevate their social competence fully. Jaggy et al. (2023) stated that regular social skills workshops and peer interaction sessions could also be beneficial, providing children with regular practice and feedback on their social interactions. Addressing these areas, we could help children not only maintain their strengths in social engagement but also become more adept at navigating conflicts, ultimately leading to more resilient and effective interpersonal relationships.

Table 4. Relationship with Adults

Relationship with Adults	Mean	VD
Children respond positively to adult guidance and instruction	3.87	A
Children feel comfortable seeking help from adults when needed.	3.77	A
Children demonstrate the ability to follow directions and routines established by adults.	3.87	A
Children demonstrate respect towards adults through their words and actions.	3.93	A
Children exhibit confidence in their interactions with adults, speaking up and expressing themselves freely.	3.73	A
Grand Mean	3.83	

Table 4 presented the data in terms of relationships with adults. Data showed that learners demonstrated the strongest performance in showing respect towards adults through their words and actions, with the highest mean of 3.93. Equally high scores of 3.87 in both responding positively to adult guidance and following directions and routines established by adults indicated that the children were receptive to leadership and structure provided by adults. This receptiveness was essential for effective learning and adaptation in both educational settings and social structures. The learners also felt relatively comfortable seeking help from adults, scoring 3.77, which pointed to a trusting environment where children felt safe and supported in expressing their needs and vulnerabilities. The lower mean score of 3.73 for exhibiting confidence in interactions with adults, while still respectable, suggested that while learners generally felt comfortable and respected, they might sometimes hesitate to fully express themselves or speak up. Encouraging more open and confident verbal interactions could further empower these children, enhancing their communication skills and self-assurance. Overall, the data indicated that the children had a robust and positive relationship with adults, marked by respect, responsiveness, and good communication, with some potential for further growth in self-expression and confidence. According to Liu et al. (2020), to enhance



areas where children showed slightly less confidence in interacting with adults, educational programs and parenting strategies could incorporate activities that promote self-expression and assertiveness, helping children to develop greater confidence and communication skills in adult interactions.

Table 5. Pro-social Behavior

	Mean	VD
Children often engage in acts of kindness and helpfulness without being prompted	3.80	A
Children show appreciation and gratitude towards others.	3.77	A
Intervention programs successfully encourage children to share and cooperate.	3.83	A
Children demonstrate an understanding of fairness and take actions to ensure fair treatment for all.	3.83	A
Children express concern for the well-being of others and show willingness to assist those in need	3.73	A
Grand Mean	3.79	A

Table 5 provided an overview of children's pro-social behaviors, with a grand mean of 3.79 indicating a generally high level of positive social engagement among children. The children excelled particularly in sharing and cooperating, as well as demonstrating fairness, both scoring an impressive 3.83. These results reflected successful intervention programs and an inherent understanding of equity, suggesting that current educational and social initiatives were effective in fostering these values. The data also showed strong tendencies in engaging in acts of kindness and helpfulness without prompt, scoring 3.80, and expressing appreciation and gratitude towards others, with a score of 3.77. These behaviors were crucial for building healthy interpersonal relationships and community bonding. However, the relatively lower score of 3.73 for expressing concern for the well-being of others indicated a slightly lesser engagement in empathetic actions, which could benefit from targeted enhancements to encourage more empathetic and supportive interactions among children. Overall, the results suggested a solid foundation in pro-social behavior, with potential for even further improvement in nurturing empathy. Frydenberg et al. (2019) emphasized that by integrating more empathetic communication and group support exercises into curriculums, educators and parents could help children not only maintain their current pro-social strengths but also develop deeper compassion and responsiveness to the needs of others.

Table 6. Learners Performance

Subject	Grade	VD
Literacy	84	Satisfactory
Numeracy	84	Satisfactory

Table 6 presented the academic performance of learners in literacy and numeracy. Both subjects had an identical grade of 84, classified under

the variance descriptor 'Satisfactory'. This uniform grading indicated that the learners were achieving at a commendable level in both essential academic areas. The 'Satisfactory' rating suggested that while the learners were meeting expected standards, there was room for improvement towards higher proficiency levels. This performance could be seen as a solid foundation, with opportunities for educators to further enhance the skills in both literacy and numeracy.

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

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness and Expression	0.0677	0.359	0.7220.722	Not Significant	Do not reject
Self-Regulation	-0.218	-1.183	0.247	Not significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	-0.130	-0.692	0.495	Not significant	Do not reject
Relationship with Adults	-0.0870	-0.462	0.648	Not significant	Do not reject
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.176	-0.945	0.353	Not significant	Do not reject

Table 7 provided an analysis of the relationship between various aspects of social-emotional development and literacy performance among learners. The r-values were relatively low across all categories, ranging from -0.218 to 0.0677, suggesting very weak correlations between the levels of social-emotional development and literacy skills. For instance, Emotional Awareness and Expression had an r-value of 0.0677, indicating an almost negligible positive correlation. In contrast, Self-Regulation showed a slightly stronger, though still weak and negative, correlation with an r-value of -0.218. The p-values in all cases were well above the typical alpha level of 0.05, which further supported the conclusion that these correlations were not statistically significant. For example, the p-value for Emotional Awareness and Expression was 0.722, and for Self-Regulation, it was 0.247. These high p-values led to the decision to "Do not reject" the null hypothesis for each construct, affirming that there was no significant evidence linking these aspects of social-emotional development with literacy performance. The overall implication was that, within this dataset, social-emotional competencies did not seem to directly influence literacy outcomes.

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

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Emotional Awareness and Expression	-0.0870	-0.462	0.648	Not Significant	Do not reject
Self-Regulation	-0.295	-1.636	0.113	Not significant	Do not reject
Social Skills	-0.207	-1.117	0.273	Not significant	Do not reject
Relationship with Adults	-0.166	-0.891	0.381	significant	Do not reject
Pro-Social Behavior	-0.320	-1.787	0.085	Not significant	Do not reject



Table 8 examined the relationship between different aspects of social-emotional development and numeracy performance among learners. The  $r$ -values suggested weak to moderate negative correlations for most constructs, but the strongest negative correlations were observed with Self-Regulation and Pro-Social Behavior, having  $r$ -values of  $-0.295$  and  $-0.320$ , respectively. These values indicated a weak negative relationship, suggesting that as these aspects of social-emotional development increased, numeracy performance slightly decreased, although not to a statistically significant extent. Despite the stronger negative correlations in some constructs compared to the literacy analysis, the  $p$ -values remained above the conventional significance threshold of  $0.05$ , leading to a consistent decision across the board to "Do not reject" the null hypothesis. For example, Pro-Social Behavior, which showed a relatively stronger negative relationship, still had a  $p$ -value of  $0.085$ , indicating that the correlation was not statistically significant. It was interesting to note a typo in the 'Remarks' column for the Relationship with Adults, where it was marked as "significant" despite a  $p$ -value of  $0.381$ , which should instead have read "Not significant." This inconsistency highlighted the importance of closely reviewing data outputs for accuracy in research reporting. Overall, this table suggested that while there may have been some indications of negative correlations between social-emotional skills and numeracy, none of these relationships were strong or significant enough to conclude that social-emotional development influences numeracy performance in any meaningful way. This again underscored that factors affecting numeracy skills are likely complex and not solely dependent on social-emotional development.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that children in early childhood education settings exhibit a strong ability to develop social-emotional skills, including emotional awareness, self-regulation, social skills, and relationships with adults. These suggest that children can effectively identify and express emotions, manage their behaviors, engage in cooperative social interactions, and build positive relationships with adults. However, the statistical analysis reveals no significant correlations between these constructs and literacy or numeracy performance, as indicated by the non-significant  $r$ -values and  $p$ -values above  $0.05$ . Therefore, while the children's social-emotional skills are well-developed, these skills do not appear to have a statistically significant impact on academic performance in literacy and numeracy within this study. Overall, the results emphasize the importance of fostering social-emotional development, though its direct relationship to academic outcomes may require further investigation.

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