

Effect of Emotionally Positive Classroom Atmosphere on Student Social-Emotional Competence

Ibrahim Ahmed^a, Aswati Binti Hamzah^b, Melissa Ng Lee Yen Binti Abdullah^c, ^{a,b,c}School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia,
Email: ^adalibiibrahimahmed@gmail.com, ^baswati@usm.my,
^cmelissa@usm.my

Purpose: This study intends to examine the effect of an emotionally positive classroom atmosphere in improving student Social-emotional competence among junior secondary school students. **Methodology:** A quasi-experimental pre-test post-test non-equivalent design was conducted with 207 Junior Secondary School students enrolled in form III. The students were divided into two groups: an experimental and a control group. The experimental group was exposed to the use of Emotional Positive Classroom atmosphere as an environment of learning for enhancing student social-emotional competence while the control group used the conventional classroom practice. **Findings:** A comparison of the pre-test and post-test results determined that the students performed remarkably better in the latter, hence an emotionally positive classroom atmosphere could be considered as an important interactional context that contributes to increased student social-emotional competence and function as a learning community of practice for reticent students who have little awareness of how to interact with colleagues in a learning environment. **Significance:** An emotionally positive classroom atmosphere prepares students to be more active, affable and confident when working with others. This development does not only shape their behavioural outcomes but also yields positive results in their social and emotional capability.

Key words: *Emotionally positive classroom, social-emotional competence, collaborative learning, low self-confidence.*

Introduction

Emotionally positive classroom atmosphere plays a major role in student social-emotional competence attainment, especially in this technological era (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, &



Brackett 2016; Rudasill, Gallagher, & White 2010). There is an obvious tendency for classroom activities that are tailored in providing sense of belonging and protection, words of encouragement, respect for individual differences and choice and admiration for each other's contribution, to positively affect student ability to display competence in terms of social and emotional skills as well as behaviour (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rives, & Salovey 2013). For instance, when students are encouraged to be assertive with their teachers and colleagues, they are more likely to freely make various contributions that keep the class lively, friendly and educative as everyone believes he or she is considered a part and parcel of the classroom activities and fear of bullying or discrimination is removed (Durlak, Weisberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Students that are made to understand that they are important in the classroom activities and their contributions are always welcome, are most likely to be friendly and to develop sense of self, self-confidence, respect for others and surrender themselves to classroom activities and give their whole attention to learning. These attributes, appear to develop their social-emotional competence leading to demonstration of socially accepted behaviours in the classroom environment and beyond.

On the other hand, in an unsupportive classroom atmosphere, students are prone to lack self-concept, good behaviour and overall sense of well-being (Hagesskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey 2013; Moos, 1979). Classroom atmosphere that lacks motivation and support leads to withdrawal, bashfulness and discomfort among students and they consequently become academically and socially backward, tending to exhibit negative behaviors among themselves by being aggressive and troublesome, and showing a nonchalant attitude towards learning (Durlak et al., 2011). In the same vein, Rudasill, Gallagher, and White (2010) opined that a classroom that does not have positive atmosphere can be problematic, disorganized and uncontrollable and students will lack interest in learning.

Therefore, it is essential for teachers to know how to inculcate in students the spirit of teamwork, consideration and compassion and to have the ability to make good decisions concerning their lives and tackle tough situations that may arise from time to time. An emotionally positive classroom atmosphere is designed to enable smooth classroom learning and to create amiable relationship among the students (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett 2016). Among other climates, a supportive atmosphere in the classroom can be a valuable resource and an integral part in enhancing student social-emotional competence (Durlak et al. 2011) particularly in secondary schools. Rudasill, Gallagher, and White (2010) believe emotionally positive classrooms do not allow much room for misbehaviour and encourage hitch free proceedings from one stage of learning to another. These classrooms allow students to speak their minds without hesitation or fear in mutual interaction that leads to problem solving, work zeal and persistence, teamwork and respect for individual differences as well as attending to the needs of students.



With respect to educational studies, many researchers have embarked on investigation in order to determine the benefit of a positive classroom atmosphere (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Rudasill, Gallagher, & White, 2010; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013) and how it brings about desirable change to student social-emotional competence, academic achievement and social interaction (Brackett, & Rivers, 2014; Rudasill, Gallagher, & White, 2010), as well as sustaining student attention through the application of appropriate classroom atmosphere (Dotterer, & Lowe, 2011; Jennings, & Greenberg, 2009). Use of emotionally positive classroom atmosphere for enhancing social-emotional competence among secondary school students has been a source of concern for many researchers especially when it is intended to be utilized by the students in the social context.

Unlike other studies which focused on the impact of classroom environment on teachers and students in the context of learning, the influence of teacher-student relationship on academic achievement (Bashir, 2013), has received negligible research with regard to how emotionally positive atmosphere in the classroom can enhance social-emotional competence among students (Cheng, 2011). The literature available on emotionally positive classroom atmosphere has not ascertained whether there is any way it really helps the students to develop social-emotional competence in both the classroom and outside. Some researchers (Weisberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015; Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2015) believe emotionally positive atmosphere in the classroom was initially thought to be a one-sided issue that concerned the teachers and how they manage to deliver their lessons. Where there is no mutual understanding in the classroom, the students become emotionally exhausted, lose interest in not only the lessons taught but also the entire schooling environment, can become hot-tempered and intolerant and may lose focus and resort to reactive and punitive responses that do not enhance their competence. To improve social-emotional competence, it is of paramount importance to create a harmonious classroom where students get the support and encouragement they may need to be part of a socially and emotionally conducive environment for learning.

This study, focused attention to ways of developing social and emotional skills among junior secondary school students because their competency in taking responsibility, decision making, self-awareness and interpersonal relationship are all attached to the social-emotional skills they acquire in the classroom (Bashir, 2013). Students that are short on these competencies may find it difficult to effectively recognize and manage their own emotions and that of others in the classroom. Hence, the need for an emotionally positive classroom atmosphere (Weisberg, Durlak, Domitrovich & Gullotta, 2015). When competence is lacking during the days of junior secondary school, students are vulnerable to reporting low social and emotional abilities. This is because at this stage, the rapport between the teachers and the students is most needed as the greater percentage of learning relies on cognitive development such as reading comprehension and analysis of abstract subject matter (Weisberg, Durlak,

Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). It has been discovered that those students of junior secondary schools that have been introduced to socio-emotional skills as early as possible, adhere to these skills and are more likely to excel when it comes to furthering their education while those that remain with the conservative approach to classroom environment are likely to lag behind in the advanced learning arena (CASEL, 2015; O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

Social-emotional competence is considered as being able to interact with others, express oneself and understand others' emotions and reactions, to be in full control of one's emotions and attitudes, derive enthusiasm when striving to attain certain goals or rectify problems, and to always be a very good communicator. Many researchers, educationists and policymakers began to take note of this competence as it equips students with chances to improve their learning ability, self-esteem and control and triggers empathy as well as other skills needed to be socially, emotionally and morally accepted (Weisberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015; Cheng, 2011). Students with these sound qualities are certainly socially and emotionally stable and they will succeed in academic pursuit and withstand any social and emotional pressure of the classroom and school. The available evidence related to social and emotional development proves that students with social and emotional competence are rarely persuaded into social vices such as thuggery, hooliganism and vandalism when exposed to adversity and violence in Gombe state, Nigeria (Bashir, 2013).

Further to the positive impacts of social-emotional competence on social and emotional adjustment, it is also observed that having the required level of competence enhances confidence and persistence to achieve any set goal and allows one to know their abilities and shortcomings (Ee, Zhou, & Wong, 2014). Therefore, for a volatile and a *Boko haram* insurgency state, such as exists in Nigeria and Gombe State, there is serious need to inculcate social-emotional competence in the minds of students considering that its inhabitants are from different cultural and religious background and minor problems can easily trigger violence. The competence needed by these students should be geared towards making them conscious of what they can do and what goes beyond their present ability, have respect for others' opinions even when contradicting theirs, display the spirit of teamwork and rational thinking in ways to solve problems and make serious decisions that will affect their lives (Bashir, 2013; Ee, Zhou, & Wong, 2014). With competence in social interaction and emotion control, students can fight against social unrest that occurs in society and the riots that are ignited in schools (Ee, Zhou, & Wong, 2014; CASEL, 2015; Dotterer, & Lowe, 2011).

In Nigeria, the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2015) has discovered that many junior secondary school students do not show respect to rules and that discipline is steadily declining in schools. They have less interest in learning generally and this is not unconnected to the fact that such students have insufficient skills to appreciate their sense of self and

diversity, as well as manage the relationships involved in schooling (Bashir, 2013; MOE, 2015). Evidently, there is paucity of competence among the students who are the participants of this research and this has significantly affected their ability to attain much socially, emotionally and academically, with no clear solution to reverse the problem as they fail to realize their strengths and weakness and maintain cordial relationship with their colleagues with whom they may interact. During the interactive session with these students, the researcher came to understand that because there is poor socio-emotional skill among them, they hardly know how to recognize and control their emotions, reign in their actions and realize their abilities and shortcomings and they have deficiency in self-expression.

Absence of the necessary socio-emotional skills also brings about hesitance in developing confidence and withdrawal among junior secondary school students (CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011). Studies have long confirmed the effectiveness of appropriate classroom management and of student-teacher relationship in terms of learner interaction and learning (O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015) and the issue of promoting social-emotional competence in the classroom has received the least consideration. Hence, there is serious need to intensively study this unique area. This study intends to examine whether exposing students of junior secondary school to an emotionally positive classroom atmosphere can help significantly in improving their social-emotional competence in the classroom and school learning environment.

Emotionally Positive Classroom Atmosphere as an Enabler for student Social-emotional Competence

Classroom atmosphere refers to the general approach and attitude of students towards one another in the classroom including respect, admiration, sympathy and comradeship (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Albertson, & Salovey, 2011). This encapsulates their willingness to listen, to care for and help each other, work selflessly in the classroom and establish good rapport with their teachers. The classroom atmosphere is determined by how the teachers present themselves to their young and inquisitive students. This includes establishing good relationship with the students by showing concern for student problems, respecting their personality, encouraging them to cultivate the spirit of working collectively and readiness to help one another anywhere, be it on the school premises or outside in the larger community.

It is however worth noting that classroom atmosphere does not extend to changing student cultural and religious background, school facilities, and the well-grounded structures in school organization. Frisby and Martin (2010) state that emotionally positive classroom atmosphere is nothing but the ability of the teachers to create mutual relationship between themselves and the students and likewise among the students themselves that culminates in trust and compassion for one another. Good teacher-student and student-student relationships



is an important key to unlocking student social-emotional competence and related qualities such as understanding their prowess and shortcomings, ability to control their feelings and respect for others through enhanced ability to appreciate diversified opinions from peers.

Student rapport refers to the close and harmonious relationship in which the students or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well as one integral society. Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, (2014) discovered that having mutual rapport among students is a sign of excellent emotional and social competence. By and large, classroom atmosphere is all about rapport (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010) and is most positive where the teachers and students go into the classroom fully aware that a good relationship exists among them (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014). Students are intrinsically motivated when they feel welcome and comfortable with their teachers. This reinforces student participation in classroom activities (Frisby and Martin, 2010). Additional to that, treating students with dignity in the classroom is an essential tool in ensuring they display desired behaviour. Therefore, there is always the need to simultaneously establish good rapport and maintain emotionally positive classroom atmosphere to have socially and emotionally competent students, both in the school environment and in larger society (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012).

Researchers have discovered that establishing good rapport among students goes a long way in helping them take interest in the classroom learning activities and this can easily be done when teachers show concern to the conditions of the students, reinforce them positively, welcome them with an open face, cherish them and engage them in small talk before or after the lesson so as to share both positive and negative experiences and to encourage them to support and seek assistance from their peers (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2011; Wang, & Holcombe, 2010). For instance, Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh (2010) found 54% of student opinions of their teachers and colleagues changed for the better at the end of a semester due to the teacher's effort to create good rapport with and among students and to encourage teamwork in which everyone is carried along (Richmond, Berglund, Epelbaum, & Kelin, 2015). It was also found that those teachers that encouraged their students to be active in the classroom activities have very high opinion of their students. Such teachers believe in providing an atmosphere that motivates students to have the willpower and persistence in achieving their goals and to communicate and interact with others efficiently and confidently. Such teachers follow their students' social and emotional developments with keen interest and build student belief in their ability to make great discoveries and achievements both in the academic circle and in the outside world (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012). Collaborative behaviors are among the communicative methods that establish lasting rapport and it is essential that teachers ensure students realize and acknowledge the value of these behaviors as important personality traits (Ellis, 2000). Accordingly, teachers can successfully establish emotionally positive classroom atmosphere by showing appreciation for student

effort in the class in terms of their answers to questions, feedback to written assignments, and acknowledging their contribution in teamwork. Teachers can create such positive atmosphere through out-of-lecture discussion with the students, using self-inclusive and participatory words of 'we' or 'our' when referring to the students and their activities, and seeking to know the opinion of the students regarding an assignment or test (Ellis, 2000, 2004). The teachers that can position themselves appropriately in the affairs and concerns of students will pose academic challenge and instill sense of compassion and emotional competence in the minds of the students, all at the same time.

On the other hand, a classroom interaction that engages 'non-collaborative behaviors' among students may likely not achieve the desired objective in that classroom. It was also found that teachers who fail to establish good rapport because of not attaching importance to the wellbeing of students, for example don't know names of their students or change rules without concrete or obvious reasons, discourage student effort to attend to questions or express opinions in the classroom (Webb & Barrett, 2014). Most certainly, these attitudes breed negative social-emotional competence among the students. For instance, students do not have respect for teachers when the school environment is morally polluted with frequent use of abusive language and another unbecoming behaviors. When students display these negative attitudes in the classroom, the expected rapport, sense of comradeship and compassion (Frisby & Martin, 2010) are compromised resulting in a classroom environment where students exhibit bad behaviors and avoid taking responsibility and diligence in their studies. Respect for both teachers and peers is low and even worse, these inappropriate manners to what they observe happening within the school premises (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010) are replicated in the wider school and societal environments.

A classroom designed to provide a morally conducive atmosphere helps students shun misbehaving both academically and interpersonally (Webb & Barrett, 2014). Such classrooms can be credited for empowering students to face their studies (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010) and to be involved in class activities (Frisby & Martin, 2010). By so doing, the essence of teamwork and how that facilitates schoolwork will dawn on the students (Webb & Barrett, 2014). Moreover, the students realize how they can get support and useful advice from their colleagues when decision making without relying heavily on a single teacher perspective on any issue (Richmond, Berglund, Epelbaum, & Kelin, 2015). Learning is greatly enhanced when there is very good rapport among the students and this is especially evident in topics that deal with the affective domain where the students place value on the lesson taught and the teachers (Webb & Barrett, 2014) comprising: cognitive domain that entails student ability to remember new behavior taught to them in a lesson (Richmond, Berglund, Epelbaum, & Kelin, 2015) and ability to use appropriate strategies to set goals for their learning (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Demonstrating satisfactory behaviors in the classroom enables students to establish cordial relationship among themselves,



encourages punctuality, dedicates appropriate time to personal and group studies and enables students to derive pleasure when they are on the school premises, and this results in strong social-emotional competence (Webb & Barrett, 2014).

On the contrary, Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, and McMullent (2011) discovered that exhibiting behaviors such as treating one another with contempt and indifference will result in lost opportunities for rapport among students within the school environment. From the teacher perspective, nonchalant attitudes, mocking remarks about students or their effort and unnecessarily harsh responses do nothing but scare students partaking in the lesson activities (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Albertson, & Salovey, 2011). Student participation in lessons depends largely on how the students regard their individual teacher and teachers collectively. Therefore, teachers that are considered by their students to be bossy, boring, pushy, hot-tempered and distant, report low attendance in their classes and students participation (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). In short, when students get nothing from their classes except harsh orders and language from their teachers or peers, they are likely to avoid going to class or getting themselves involved in the activities taking place in the classroom (Webb & Barrett, 2014), or to interact appropriately with teachers and fellow students and such withdrawal can sometimes spread to society at large (Goodboy, Myers, & Bolkan, 2010).

Methodology

Design

A quasi-experimental design was used for the study where pre-test and post-test of non-equivalent groups was employed to collect data on junior secondary school student social and emotional competence in Gombe state, Nigeria. The purpose of this design is to determine whether the difference between the first score and the final score in the experimental group is caused by treatment, in a controlled situation which further increases the external validity of the design (Pallant, 2011; Creswell, 2012). Two groups of intact classes from two different Junior Secondary schools in Nigeria were exposed to two different classroom settings. One group was exposed to an emotionally positive classroom climate (experimental) and the other group was exposed to the conventional classroom atmosphere (control). Social-emotional competence was tested before and after the intervention to determine the influence of the intervention on the experimental and control group.

Population and Sample

The research was conducted within ten weeks with Grade Nine (form 3) students in the second term of 2018/2019 academic calendar. English language was the subject used during the experiment. The study involved 207 students from two intact classes in 2 junior



secondary schools, comprising 117 students (experimental group) and 90 students (control group). As it was unlikely to secure access for total random selection of the students, the sample was an intact class of the JSS III students that registered for that academic year (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The student age ranged from 15-16 years, and they were all in their second term of study.

Procedure

The study employed a pre-test post-test non-equivalent group design in which data were collected in two different instances. In the first instance, students were informed about the nature of the study, and they were also assured that their results on both pre-test and post-test would not be revealed to anyone and would only be accessed by the researcher. For this study, only those students in the intact classes who also consented to participate were included. After seeking consent from the Head of School Services, Ministry of Education, a pre-test was administered before the study to both groups, and after ten weeks of intervention, the post-test was administered to the same groups. Students in the treatment group were introduced to the emotionally positive classroom atmosphere. The units of instruction used in this study were limited to nine topics and one hour every period of the English syllabus. The students were given opportunities to present a practical activity to prove their mastery of the skills. The same units and time were for used for the control group. A traditional classroom setting was used in teaching students in the control group.

Instrument

The study employed a social and emotional learning questionnaire (SELQ) developed by Zhou & Ee (2012). The instrument was employed to measure student social-emotional competence. It was adopted because of its applicability throughout various language and settings and accordingly, students were requested to respond to 25 items gauged on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument contained five subscales with five items for each component: self-awareness; social awareness; self-management; relationship management and responsible decision-making. The instrument was administered using a scale from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (very true of me) so that better understanding of self and others could be obtained. The sample of the items comprises; I can read people's faces when they are angry, I understand why people react the way they do, I can stay calm in stressful situations, I will always apologise when I hurt my friend unintentionally, and When making decisions, I consider the consequences of my actions.

The scale is valid and highly reliable (Zhou, & Ee, 2012). The scale scores were determined by summing the items and taking an average. The result of the reliability test showed that the scale was confirmed for its high internal reliability (alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.88$). In other

words, the measurements of the study variables were confirmed for their reliability and validity. Measuring students with regards to these aspects helps in identifying student social-emotional strengths and weaknesses, which facilitates the delivery of appropriate curricula to promote their social-emotional competence (Coryn et al., 2009). By consolidating social-emotional educational opportunities, we increase child and adolescent ability to learn, give them the tools to achieve personal and learning successes and enable them to experience personal satisfaction.

Data Analysis

In terms of the quantitative method, data were analysed in SPSS software for calculating the mean scores, standard deviation, and analysis of covariance ANCOVA. Social-emotional competence scale pre-test and post-test data were analysed in SPSS software (version 25). Since the distribution of pre-test post-test was normal, and $n > 30$, the parametric test was utilised (Pallant, (2011). Analysis of covariance ANCOVA was run to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the variables after controlling the covariate (pre-test).

Findings

Before performing the ANCOVA test, the assumption of normality was conducted using Shapiro-Wilk, and the results illustrated that the data was normally distributed. As ANCOVA is a fussy test, that is also sensitive, other preliminary assumptions were tested to ensure that they were not violated. Descriptive statistics analysis was performed to obtain the mean and standard deviation values of the variables. Results of the findings are summarised in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Normality test for Social-Emotional Competence

Source	Mean	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
SEC Post	3.5428	0.42848	-0.09	-0.119	0.200

Table 1 indicates that the Skewness value for Post-test score of SEC was recorded -0.09 while the Kurtosis value for the post-test score of SEC valued as -0.119, which indicates the values are within the recommended range, that is, the data is normally distributed (Pallant, 2013).

Figure 1. Scatterplot for social-emotional competence

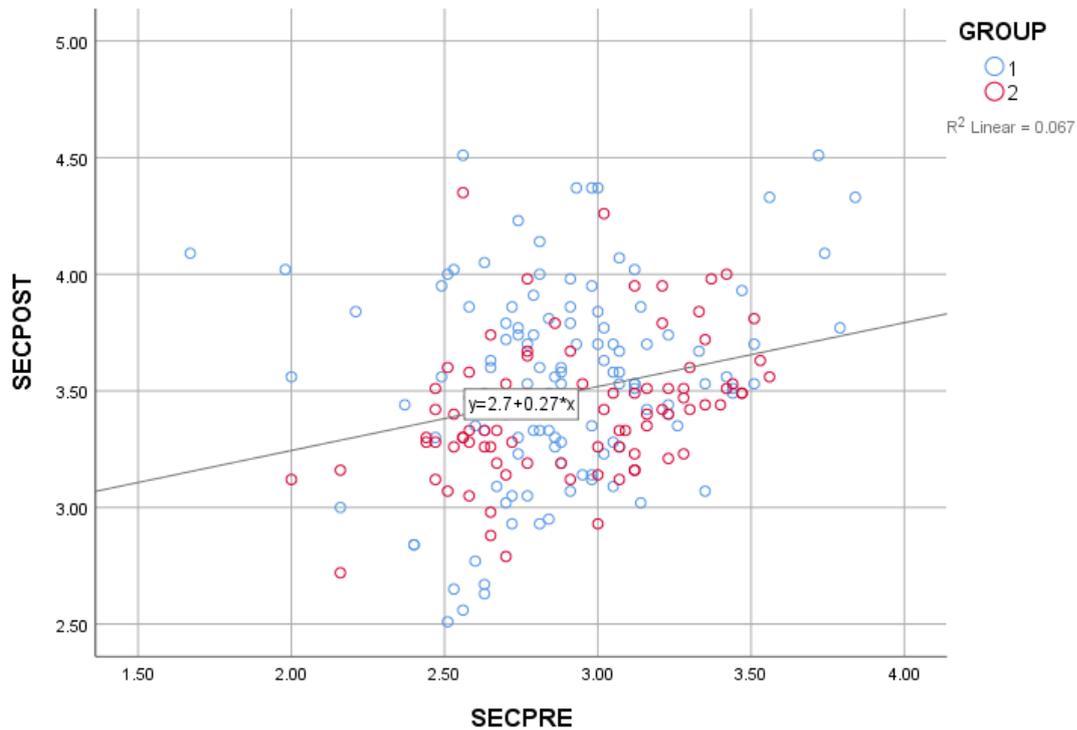


Figure 1 above indicates the linearity of the dependent variable with covariate determines the linear relationship between the post-test score (DV) and pre-test score (covariate). In the study, the general distribution of scores for SEC pre-test and post-test appear to be linear.

Table 2: Independence Observation

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.024 ^a	1	0.024	0.185	0.667
Intercept	1705.618	1	1705.618	13356.370	0.000
GROUP	0.024	1	0.024	0.185	0.667
Error	26.179	205	0.128		
Total	1759.656	207			
Corrected Total	26.202	206			

Table 2 above indicates that there is no relationship between the observations in each group or between the groups with the value of 0.667, which is higher than the α . This indicates that there are no differences in pre-test and post-test score of social emotional competence between the experimental and control groups.

Table 3: Homogeneity of Variance

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.910	1	205	0.169

Table 3 above shows the test results for equality of error variance; the test establishes that the error variance for the DV is equal across the group with Levene's test value of 0.169 which is higher than the α . The result obtained indicates that there was equality of variance.

Table 4: Homogeneity of Regression Slopes

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2.826 ^a	3	0.942	7.152	0.000
Intercept	21.336	1	21.336	161.990	0.000
GROUP	0.047	1	0.047	0.358	0.550
SECPRE	2.045	1	2.045	15.527	0.000
GROUP * SECPRE	0.011	1	0.011	0.085	0.771
Error	26.737	203	0.132		
Total	2549.867	207			
Corrected Total	29.563	206			

Table 4 above shows that there is no significant relationship between the (DV) group (experimental and control) and (Covariate) SECPRE. The result is that a probability value of = 0.771 was obtained for SEC, which is > than the α . This means that there is no statistically significant interaction between the covariate and the dependent variable. This indicates that the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption is not violated.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation for Experimental and control group on Social Emotional Competence

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	3.543	0.428	117
Control	3.420	0.290	90
Total	3.489	0.379	207

Table 5 above shows the descriptive statistics for the analysis. Respondents with high levels of social-emotional competence recorded the highest mean value in the group (experimental and control). The results are that; SEC in the experimental group recorded the mean of 3.543 and a standard deviation of 0.428 while the control group had a mean score and standard deviation of 3.420 and 0.290, respectively. This implies that experimental group recorded a

higher mean SEC score than the control group. Due to this observed difference in mean scores, hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level to determine if the observed difference was significant.

Table 6: Analysis of Covariate (ANCOVA) Result for students social-emotional competence

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2.815 ^a	2	1.407	10.734	0.000
Intercept	21.963	1	21.963	167.508	0.000
SECPRE	2.045	1	2.045	15.593	0.000
GROUP	0.847	1	0.847	6.457	0.012
Error	26.748	204	0.131		
Total	2549.867	207			
Corrected Total	29.563	206			

Table 6 above shows the ANCOVA results. It indicates that there is a significant difference in the post-test scores between the experimental and control group on social-emotional competence with an F value of = 6.457; p-value = 0.012 < α). Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result demonstrates the strongest and statistically significant contribution of the independent variable (Emotionally positive classroom atmosphere) in promoting the dependent variable (social-emotional competence).

Discussion and Conclusion

Collaboration and interactions between teachers and students and among students themselves in the classrooms that were designed to render emotional support, has culminated in a community or association of learners where everyone was their brother's keeper and supporter. This has tremendously boosted social-emotional competence and confidence among the students in the "*Experimental Group*" where they were able and ready to share ideas, emotional experiences, communicate freely and respect others' opinions. This classroom, which paid more attention to building sound interactional skills and sense of brotherhood among the students, has afforded many students, especially the diffident and withdrawn ones, the opportunity to explore their self-esteem, feel the warmth of togetherness and comradeship; the ability to collaborate with others to work in small or large groups in order to achieve their desired objectives and established competence in learning and interaction without fear or psychological trauma. This is achieved because of words and actions of support, motivation and building confidence (Wang & Fredrick's, 2014; MOE, 2015; Durlak, Weisberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Ee, Zhou, & Wong, 2014). The findings have also reasonably validated that cordiality between teachers and students has positive impact on student ability to tolerate, persevere, learn and interact in general (O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

In other words, with the aid of emotionally positive classroom atmosphere students have an opportunity to negotiate with one another, develop courage to make important decisions concerning their lives, establish the sense of emotional regulation and are conscious of accepted societal manners (Bashir, 2013; Ee, Zhou, & Wong, 2014). There is resemblance between this finding and those reviewed by the likes of Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, (2010), Richmond, Berglund, Epeilbaum, & Kelin, (2015) in that when teachers establish an emotionally positive classroom atmosphere, students can easily communicate effectively, partner with others and exchange experiences and ideas with their peers concerning learning and life. This is evidently better than for those students who were placed in the conservatively traditional atmosphere of the control group (Frisby, & McMullen, 2012).

In addition to that, the findings suggested that the competency in establishing mutual relationship between teachers and students and that among the students could determine the improvement of the individual student affective domain (Webb & Barrett, 2014), setting learning goals and possible phases to achieve the desired learning objectives (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). With all this in place, students develop social-emotional competence such as: knowing oneself, cordial relationships with others, understanding their own potential and shortcomings, control of emotion, becoming a good partner in communal work, and deriving satisfaction in school activities and achievement. The findings further indicate that based on socio-ecological theory, the environment in which students are placed can influence their behavior, mindset, performance, self-esteem and their condition (Moos, 1979). Therefore, negative classroom atmosphere can seriously affect student competence. Further, having social-emotional competence helps in successful adjustment to social and emotional pressure in the classroom, school and beyond in this, the 21st century. That is to say, with effective competence in social and emotional control, students can stand above common social vices that trigger violence in the classroom, school and Nigeria such as thuggery, tribal and religious unrest, hate speeches and all sorts of destructive behaviors.

Implications and Further Suggestions

Many teachers and researchers have been proponents of inculcating emotionally positive classroom atmosphere and it is considered an essential source of promoting social-emotional competence among students to demonstrate academic excellence and develop behavioral stability. Consequently child education systems should wholesomely imbibe social and emotional competence (Weisberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015; Durlak et al. 2011). These study findings emphasize that emotionally supportive classrooms improve student social-emotional competence in classroom setting, strengthening teacher-student and student-student relationships especially in Nigerian societies that comprise diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the relevant authorities such as the Ministries of Education, Junior Secondary school teachers and students need to be aware of these competences and their

usefulness in recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing and regulating their emotions, developing empathy and establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.

Socio-emotional competence is pertinent to students in development of sense of self and relationship management, critical decision making and for shunning prejudice and other social bigotry and partiality (Durlak et al., 2011). It is when teachers train the students on the relevance of socio-emotional competence that they will be able to identify some preoccupied emotions within themselves, rationalize other people's actions or inactions and devise ways to effectively, amicably and practically solve lingering problems in an intellectual way. These study results will be beneficial for policymakers who are yearning for lasting solutions to existing social vices as ways to prevent ongoing similar occurrences in the secondary schools and society. Integrating emotionally positive classroom atmosphere practices, into the Nigerian curriculum, will provide a practical guideline on ways to enhance positive behaviors not only in the classroom and on school premises but also in the society at large.

The study has also introduced teachers with techniques on how to make a classroom conducive to creating an emotionally positive atmosphere which the students need to adapt in the classroom and take with them outside to the school environment. This is a great opportunity for English teachers in Nigeria to blend into their teaching techniques, ways to create social and emotional friendly learning environment that promote student social-emotional competence. The findings will be a great source of reference for researchers in issues related to social and emotional development, such as social workers, especially when their goal is to improve emotionally supportive classrooms and social-emotional competence. These study results are these a typical example of promoting emotionally positive classroom atmosphere and social-emotional competence in the Nigerian context. The study has also added to the literature concerned with social and emotional competence both at large and specifically in Nigeria.

Despite all efforts made by the researcher, the fact remains that there is no final word in any investigative phenomenon. Therefore, there are still areas to be investigated in terms of the relationship of social-emotional competence to the classroom atmosphere. The limitations include that the study was solely carried out in one state in Nigeria and therefore, future researchers may replicate a similar study in a different state of Nigeria to confirm the findings for generalization. Secondly, this study was exclusively carried out for only ten weeks, therefore, the complex nature of the change of pattern in the social-emotional attributes of students cannot be thoroughly understood. Future studies could replicate this study over one year or more to gain in-depth knowledge pertinent to the dynamic nature of social-emotional competence and its correlation with student cognitive competence. Finally, the current study emphasised the effect of emotionally positive classroom atmosphere on student social-emotional competence using a quantitative research method, and social, emotional



competence questionnaire as a source of data collection tools. Future studies are recommended to carry out longitudinal mixed-method studies in which interviews can be integrated to find in-depth outcomes regarding student social-emotional competence that support the quantitative findings.



REFERENCES

- Bashir, M.U., (2013). An Assessment of The Activities of Kalare In Political Violence In Gombe State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 2(5), pp.181–200.
- Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Rivers, S. E., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2011). Classroom emotional climate, teacher affiliation, and student conduct. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 46(1), 27–36.
- Brackett, M. A., & Rivers, S. E. (2014). Transforming students' lives with social and emotional learning. *International Handbook of Emotions in Education*
- Cheng, C. K. (2011). The role of self-regulated learning in enhancing learning performance, *International Journal of Research and Review*, 6(1), 1–16.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2015). *CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs: Secondary school edition*. Chicago, IL: Author.
- Coryn, C., Spybrook, J., Evergreen, S., & Blinkiewicz, M. (2009). Development and evaluation of the social-emotional learning scale. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 27, 283-295.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Dotterer, A. M., & Lowe, K. (2011). Classroom context, school engagement, and academic achievement in early adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(12), 1649–1660.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Ee, J., Zhou, M., & Wong, I. (2014). Teachers' infusion of social emotional learning. *Journal of Teaching and Teacher education*, 2(01).
- Ellis, K. (2000). Perceived teacher confirmation: The development and validation of an instrument and two studies of the relationship to cognitive and affective learning. *Human Communication Research*, 26(2), 264–291.



- Ellis, K. (2004). The impact of perceived teacher confirmation on receiver apprehension, motivation, and learning. *Communication Education*, 53(1), 1–20.
- Frisby, B. N., & Martin, M. M. (2010). Instructor-student and student-student rapport in the classroom. *Communication Education*, 59(2), 146–164.
- Frisby, B. N., Berger, E., Burchett, M., Herovic, E., & Strawser, M. G. (2014). Participation apprehensive students: The influence of face support and instructor-student rapport on classroom participation. *Communication Education*, 63(2), 105–123.
- Gay, L. R., & Airasian, P. (2000). Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application. *Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall*.
- Hagelskamp, C., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2013). Improving classroom quality with the ruler approach to social and emotional learning: Proximal and distal outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(3-4), 530-543.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of educational research*, 79(1), 491-525.
- Jones, S. M., Bouffard, S. M., & Weissbourd, R. (2013). Educators' social and emotional skills vital to learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94(8), 62-65.
- Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American journal of public health*, 105(11), 2283-2290.
- Ministry of Education. (2015). *The Statistic pack for Gombe state schools*. Gombe: Guidance Branch.
- Moos, R. H. (1979). *Evaluating educational environments*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Nathanson, L., Rivers, S. E., Flynn, L. M., & Brackett, M. A. (2016). Creating emotionally intelligent schools with RULER. *Emotion Review*, 8(4), 305-310.
- O'Connell, M. E., Boat, T., & Warner, K. E. (Eds.). (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.



- Orthner, D. K., Jones-Sanpei, H., Akos, P., & Rose, R. A. (2013). Improving middle school student engagement through career-relevant instruction in the core curriculum. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 106(1).
- Osher, D., Bear, G. G., Sprague, J. R., & Doyle, W. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1).
- Pallant, J. (2011). *SPSS Survival Manual. A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS (14 ed)*. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin. Retrieved from www.allenandunwin.com.spss
- Reyes, M. R., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., White, M., & Salovey, P. (2012). Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(3)
- Richmond, A. S., Berglund, M. B., Epelbaum, V. B., & Kelin, E. M. (2015). a + (b1) professor-student rapport + (b2) humor = (b3) student engagement = (Y) student ratings of instructors. *Teaching of Psychology*, 42(2), 119–125.
- Rudasill, K. M., Gallagher, K. C., & White, J. M. (2010). Temperamental attention and activity, classroom emotional support, and academic achievement in third grade. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48(2), 113-134.
- Sidelinger, R. J., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (2010). Co-constructing student involvement: An examination of teacher confirmation and student-to-student connectedness in the college classroom. *Communication Education*, 59(2), 165–184.
- Sidelinger, R. J., Bolen, D. M., Frisby, B. N., & McMullen, A. L. (2011). When instructors misbehave: An examination of student-to-student connectedness as a mediator in the college classroom. *Communication Education*, 60(3), 340–361.
- Sidelinger, R. J., Bolen, D. M., Frisby, B. N., & McMullen, A. L. (2012). Instructor compliance to student requests: An examination of student-to-student connectedness as power in the classroom. *Communication Education*, 61(3), 290–308.
- Wang, M. T., & Holcombe, R. (2010). Adolescents' perceptions of school environment, engagement, and academic achievement in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(3), 633–662



- Webb, N. G., & Barrett, L. O. (2014). Student views of instructor-student rapport in the college classroom. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 14(2), 15–28.
- Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Wilson, J. H., Ryan, R. G., & Pugh, J. L. (2010). Professor-student rapport scale predicts student outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology*, 37, 246–251.