

Music Education and Social Emotional Development. Promoting Students' Social Skills through Collective Music Activities

Zhang Junqi¹ & Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri^{1,2,3}

¹Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia, ²University Research Group on ELITEE: Enhanced Learning for Inclusive Transformational Education Experience, ³University Research Group on Edexcellence: Development of Innovative Curriculum & Pedagogy

Email: p134065@siswa.ukm.edu.my, nurfaradilla@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of collective musical activities on the development of social skills among elementary school students. As socio-emotional competencies gain increasing prominence in child education, music education—characterized by its emotional resonance and interactive nature—has demonstrated significant potential in facilitating emotional expression and interpersonal communication. Through the "I Am a Little Musician" community program, which incorporated choral rehearsals, group instrumental performances, and music games, this study evaluated the efficacy of structured collective music-making in enhancing participants' social capabilities. A dual-questionnaire design employing a 5-point Likert scale was administered to both students and parents to capture behavioral and affective changes before and after the program. Findings indicate that collective musical engagement significantly strengthened students' teamwork capacities, communication skills, and emotional identification, with particularly notable improvements observed in group interaction and collaborative dynamics. Parental feedback further corroborated these results, reporting measurable progress in children's social behaviors post-intervention. The study concludes that systematically designed collective music activities constitute an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering social skill development in educational settings. These findings offer both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for integrating music-based interventions into holistic education frameworks.

Keywords: Music Education, Social Skills, Collective Music Activities, Elementary School Students

Introduction

Music education holds an indispensable position within global educational systems as a pivotal component of holistic student development. In the current educational landscape, alongside the deepening integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) principles, cultivating students' collaborative competencies, emotional regulation, and social skills has

emerged as a central objective. Within this context, music education—particularly group-based musical activities—demonstrates significant potential for socio-emotional education that extends beyond conventional artistic training, owing to its distinctive characteristics of interactivity, emotional expression, and collaborative engagement.

Collective musical practices such as choral singing, ensemble performance, and musical games constitute inherently social artistic endeavors. They necessitate coordinated unity among participants in rhythm, harmony, and expression. Research indicates that such activities not only enhance students' musical literacy but also effectively foster teamwork, communication, and empathetic abilities. Berg (2013) observes that group music performance, by establishing shared goals and interdependent roles, facilitates the development of stronger social adaptability through both verbal and non-verbal interaction (Berg, 2013). Further supporting this, Asztalos (2024) notes that structured group music tasks can markedly strengthen primary school students' sense of responsibility and group belonging, thereby encouraging the formation of prosocial behaviors. These insights suggest that music education possesses unique, yet underexplored, pedagogical value in shaping children's social development (Asztalos et al., 2024).

The primary school years represent a critical period for the development of children's socio-emotional capacities. Group music activities offer a secure, structured, and emotionally supportive learning environment ideally suited to this developmental stage. Empirical work by Creech et al. (2013) confirms that children participating in group music programs demonstrate superior performance in conflict resolution, emotional expression, and cooperative tasks (Creech et al., 2013). However, prevailing research remains largely descriptive or correlational, lacking systematic modeling and mechanistic explanation of the pathways linking musical engagement to social skill development. Furthermore, the question of how to design effective music-based interventions within authentic educational settings to maximize socio-emotional benefits remains a notable gap in both theory and practice.

To address these limitations, the present study employs the "I Am a Little Musician" community music program as an investigative platform. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, it systematically examines how group music activities promote the social skill development of primary school students—encompassing dimensions such as communication and collaboration, tolerance and understanding, and responsibility—and seeks to elucidate the underlying mechanisms involved. The findings are anticipated to contribute to the interdisciplinary field bridging music education and social-emotional learning. Moreover, they aim to provide teachers, schools, and educational policymakers with an evidence-informed framework for practice, thereby advancing the systematic and curricular integration of music education to foster students' social development.

Literature Review

The Impact of Music Education on Social-Emotional Development

In recent years, a growing body of research has demonstrated that music education not only influences the development of students' musical skills but also plays a significant role in their social-emotional development. Music education, particularly collective musical activities, has been widely recognized as an effective approach to cultivating students' social skills, emotional awareness, and collaborative abilities. Relevant studies indicate that by providing

a space for emotional exchange, music education promotes students' growth in emotional expression, social interaction, and group cooperation. These effects of music education have been consistently acknowledged across multiple cultural contexts and educational systems.

A study conducted by Hargreaves et al. (2012) emphasized that music education provides students with a unique platform for emotional expression, enabling them to establish emotional connections with others through the medium of music. The research found that students participating in musical activities demonstrated enhanced abilities in emotional regulation and affective expression. Particularly in collective musical activities, students not only shared common emotional experiences with others but also strengthened their sensitivity to others' emotions through collaborative engagement. This process helps students better understand and respond to others' emotional needs in daily life, thereby promoting their emotional maturity and social skill development. Hargreaves et al. (2012) argued that collective musical activities create a socialized field for emotional interaction, where mechanisms of emotional exchange and cooperation foster the development of students' emotional cognition and social competencies.

The positive role of music education in promoting students' social behaviors has been supported by numerous studies. Schlaug et al. (2010) noted in their research that music training enhances students' social interaction skills by developing their cooperative abilities and group awareness. Musical activities, particularly collective practices such as ensemble and choral performances, require students to collaborate and coordinate with one another. This not only strengthens their team spirit but also cultivates a sense of responsibility and leadership within the group. Through empirical investigation, Schlaug et al. (2010) found that students engaged in musical activities demonstrated greater initiative and stronger collaborative skills in social interactions. Especially in ensemble activities, students must coordinate and communicate to achieve shared goals, a process that helps them develop effective communication techniques and a cooperative mindset. Thus, collective musical activities not only facilitate the improvement of students' musical skills but also provide valuable opportunities for them to learn social interaction and teamwork.

Group Music Activities and Social Skills

In recent years, group music activities have been extensively studied as an effective approach to foster students' social skill development. Research by Schellenberg et al. (2015) revealed that children participating in group music training demonstrated significant improvements in empathy and prosocial behaviors, particularly among those with initially weaker social skills. This suggests that collective musical engagement not only enhances musical proficiency but also promotes emotional understanding and care for others.

Group music activities provide an environment for collaboration and interaction, enabling students to develop effective communication techniques and team spirit through practical experience. A study by Creech et al. (2013) indicated that students engaged in collective music activities exhibited stronger capabilities in building interpersonal relationships and resolving conflicts compared to their non-participating peers. These findings position group music activities not merely as a vehicle for arts education but as a significant tool for promoting socio-emotional development.

By offering opportunities for cooperative interaction, group music activities allow students to practically acquire communication competencies and collaborative mindsets, thereby facilitating the formation of positive social behaviors. These studies provide theoretical foundation for educational practice, underscoring the importance of collective musical experiences in advancing students' social skill development.

Review of Related Research and Empirical Findings

In recent years, a growing body of empirical research has examined the role of music education in children's social skill development, consistently demonstrating its positive impact. For instance, a quasi-experimental study conducted by Bortz et al. (2025) within the Guri Music Education Program in São Paulo, Brazil, revealed that children participating in music education showed significant improvements in both cognitive and social-emotional skills, with particularly notable progress in emotional regulation and social motivation. This study underscores the potential of music education to enhance children's social competencies and provides strong theoretical support for the current research.

Collective music activities have been empirically validated as effective in promoting children's social behaviors. Research by Schellenberg et al. (2015) demonstrated that children engaged in group music training exhibited significant enhancements in empathy and prosocial behaviors, with particularly pronounced effects observed among students who initially demonstrated weaker social skills. These findings suggest that collective musical engagement not only develops musical proficiency but also fosters emotional understanding and concern for others.

Despite these promising findings, research focusing on specific forms of musical activities remains limited. There persists a need to better understand how particular collective music activities—such as choral singing, ensemble performance, and musical games—specifically enhance students' teamwork, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships. The current study addresses this research gap through the "I Am a Little Musician" community program, investigating the specific effects of structured group music activities on students' social skill development.

While existing research provides theoretical support for music education's role in promoting children's social skills, empirical studies targeting specific musical activity formats require further development. Through field investigation and data analysis, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how collective music activities influence students' social competencies, offering new perspectives and methodologies for educational practice.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach with a pre-post design to investigate the impact of art education on students' self-awareness and social responsibility. Through the implementation of the "Community Color Artists" project, the research examines how participatory art activities influence students' socio-emotional learning (SEL) development. The program engaged students in community-based art creation while providing opportunities for interaction with community members, enabling participants to experience and reflect upon their social identities in authentic contexts.

The primary data collection instrument consisted of structured questionnaires administered to both students and parents. The student questionnaire measured changes in emotional awareness and social responsibility before and after program participation, while the parent version assessed observable behavioral changes in these domains. All items utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," generating quantitative data for comparative analysis.

The research design enables comparison of pre- and post-intervention data to identify specific effects of art education on students' self-awareness and social responsibility development. This methodological approach allows for the examination of how artistic engagement within community settings facilitates emotional expression and fosters sense of social responsibility. The study aims to provide empirical evidence supporting art education as an effective SEL intervention, particularly through collective art creation and community engagement. The findings offer practical guidance for educators and institutions seeking to integrate art education with SEL frameworks, suggesting innovative pedagogical approaches for holistic student development.

The results contribute to policy discussions by providing data-driven support for integrating art education with SEL initiatives in diverse educational contexts. The study addresses a significant gap in current literature regarding the mechanisms through which different art forms influence socio-emotional development, while establishing a foundation for future cross-cultural research in this domain.

Data Collection Results

This study employed a questionnaire survey to collect primary data on the development of social skills among students participating in the "I Am a Little Musician" collective music activities. The following provides a detailed report on the data collection process and outcomes.

Data Overview

A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed for the "I Am a Little Musician" activity survey, with all 40 successfully collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 100%. The questionnaire covered three self-assessment dimensions for students—communication and collaboration, tolerance and understanding, and responsibility—along with one external evaluation dimension based on parental observation, comprising 19 items in total. The survey results indicate that participants generally demonstrated positive development in social skills, with particularly notable performance in communication, collaboration, and responsibility.

Table 3-1
Sample Data Overview

Category	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Valid Samples	40	100.00%
Excluded Invalid Samples	0	0.00%
Total	40	100%

Detailed Findings

In the dimension of communication and collaboration, over 80% of students scored 4 or above on items such as "initiating discussions with peers on rhythm and volume coordination" and "exchanging feedback for improvement after performances," indicating strong proactive communication and reflective awareness during collective music activities. Within the tolerance and understanding dimension, approximately 75% of students expressed that they "would not mock peers for performance errors" and were "willing to accept diverse musical ideas," reflecting the program's effectiveness in fostering social attitudes that respect differences and encourage others. Regarding responsibility, nearly 85% of students achieved high scores (4 or above) on items including "conscientiously maintaining musical instruments" and "voluntarily tidying activity spaces," demonstrating enhanced sense of responsibility and team belonging through collective music engagement. From the parental perspective, over 70% of parents reported that their children showed increased initiative in "sharing musical interests" and "inviting peers to practice together," providing external validation of the program's positive impact on social behaviors.

However, in specific areas such as "willingness to seek help when struggling with rhythm" and "emotional regulation when dealing with performance setbacks," approximately 20% of students scored 3 or below. These findings suggest the need for strengthened guidance in developing coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors in future interventions. The "I Am a Little Musician" program has demonstrated significant effectiveness in enhancing students' communication, tolerance, and responsibility, while revealing opportunities for further development in specific aspects of social skill development.

Data Collection Methods

This study adopted a combined approach of onsite distribution and online collection to ensure data authenticity and procedural standardization. The specific implementation steps were as follows.

The participants included all students involved in the "I Am a Little Musician" collective music activities and their parents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was a student self-assessment section covering the dimensions of "communication and collaboration," "tolerance and understanding," and "responsibility," which students completed independently based on their experiences during the activities; the second part was a parent observation section, designed to evaluate changes in children's social behaviors from an external perspective, with parents filling it out based on their children's specific behaviors before and after participation.

Upon the conclusion of the "I Am a Little Musician" community activities, the researcher generated a survey link through a professional online questionnaire platform. First, the purpose, significance, and privacy protection commitments of the study were uniformly explained to students in the classroom. After obtaining informed consent from the students, they were guided to complete the online questionnaire during IT classes or spare time in a centralized manner. Subsequently, the questionnaire link was distributed to parents through school-home communication channels, accompanied by detailed instructions, requesting them to complete the remaining section based on daily observations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data, the following quality control measures were implemented during the study. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, all participants (students and parents) were clearly informed of the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers and that the goal was to collect genuine feedback to alleviate concerns. During the centralized student completion session, the researcher was present throughout to provide immediate and neutral explanations for any potentially unclear concepts or phrasing (e.g., "rhythm and volume coordination," "not being selective about roles"), ensuring consistent understanding of the items across all students and avoiding data distortion due to semantic bias. After submission, the system automatically performed logical checks. During the retrieval phase, the researcher manually reviewed all data. Questionnaires with apparent patterned responses (e.g., all options identical) or missing critical information were traced and verified. Ultimately, all collected questionnaires were complete and valid, with no need for exclusion, resulting in a valid response rate of 100%.

Data Analysis

To thoroughly investigate the relationship between collective music activities and the development of students' social skills, and to identify key influencing factors, this study employed a series of statistical analysis methods. All analyses were conducted using SPSS 26.0 software, with the significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Analysis of the Impact Mechanism of Collective Music Activities on Social Skills

To examine the pathways and strength of the influence of different dimensional experiences in collective music activities on students' overall social skills, this study utilized a multiple linear regression model for mechanism analysis.

Model and Variable Specification

This study constructed a regression model with students' core experiences in collective music activities as the independent variables and comprehensive social skills as the dependent variable. The operational definitions of the specific variables are as follows:

Dependent Variable (Y): Comprehensive Social Skills. This variable was calculated from the total scores of the 15 items across the three student self-assessment dimensions in the questionnaire: "Communication and Collaboration," "Tolerance and Understanding," and "Responsibility." Higher scores indicate a higher level of social skill development in students.
Independent Variables (X): Include the following three dimensions, each constituted by the average score of the items within the respective dimension:

X₁ Communication and Coordination Experience: Measured by 5 items including "initiating discussions on rhythm and volume coordination" and "exchanging feedback for improvement after performances," reflecting students' proactive communication and coordination behaviors during the activities.

X₂ Team Inclusion Atmosphere: Measured by 5 items including "not mocking peers for mistakes" and "accepting different musical ideas," reflecting the students' level of tolerance and understanding towards team differences.

X₃ Responsible Behavior: Measured by 5 items including "conscientiously maintaining musical instruments" and "voluntarily tidying the activity space," reflecting students' sense of responsibility and accountable behavior within the group.

This model aims to explore the relative importance of the influence of different types of activity experiences on overall social skills.

Regression Results

The aforementioned independent variables were simultaneously entered into the regression model. The analysis results are presented in the table below.

Table 3-3

Regression Analysis Results of Collective Music Activity Experiences on Comprehensive Social Skills

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-value	Significance (p)
(Constant)	0.542	0.21		2.581	0.014
Communication and Coordination Experience (X ₁)	0.318	0.078	0.312	4.077	0
Team Inclusion Atmosphere (X ₂)	0.285	0.075	0.294	3.8	0
Responsible Behavior (X ₃)	0.361	0.081	0.348	4.457	0

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.724$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.710$, $F = 52.136$, $p < 0.001$

As shown in the table above, the regression model is statistically significant ($F=52.136$, $p<0.001$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.710, indicating that the three independent variables collectively explain 71.0% of the variance in students' comprehensive social skills. The regression coefficients of all independent variables are positive and significant ($p<0.05$), demonstrating that each plays an indispensable positive role in enhancing social skills. Based on the standardized coefficients (Beta), responsible behavior ($\beta=0.348$) exhibits the strongest influence, followed by communication and coordination experience ($\beta=0.312$) and team inclusion atmosphere ($\beta=0.294$). These results clearly reveal that in collective music activities such as "I Am a Little Musician," fostering students' sense of responsibility constitutes the most critical pathway for promoting their social skill development, while communication coordination and inclusive understanding also serve as essential components.

Discussion and Analysis

This study, through empirical data, reveals that collective music activities serve as a significant educational intervention that substantially promotes the development of social skills among elementary school students. The following discussion delves into the underlying mechanisms and internal logic, based on the quantitative analysis results.

The study finds that responsible behavior is the strongest predictor of students' overall social skill level ($\beta=0.348$). This finding challenges the conventional simplistic equation of social skills solely with communication abilities. In goal-oriented collective activities such as "I Am a Little Musician," each student is assigned specific roles and tasks (e.g., instrument maintenance, organizing the space). This structured allocation of responsibility transforms students from abstract "participants" into indispensable members of the team. The process of fulfilling

responsibilities inherently constitutes a continuous, non-verbal form of team commitment. When students realize their actions directly impact collective outcomes, their intrinsic sense of responsibility and belonging is effectively activated, becoming a fundamental driver for exhibiting more prosocial behaviors (e.g., collaboration, tolerance). This indicates that deeply embedding the element of responsibility into activity design is crucial for maximizing the social benefits of music education (Hallam, 2015).

Communication and coordination experience and team inclusion atmosphere jointly form the "twin pillars" of social skill development, with nearly equal weight of influence ($\beta=0.312$ and $\beta=0.294$, respectively). Music itself is a language of communication; coordinating rhythm and volume requires frequent, decentralized, and immediate interaction among students. This communication, grounded in shared artistic goals, possesses greater authenticity and necessity than mere verbal instruction (Koutsoupidou, 2020). Simultaneously, musical performance inevitably involves mistakes and individual differences (e.g., pitch accuracy, sense of rhythm), creating authentic educational scenarios for tolerance and understanding. When "not mocking a peer's mistake" transitions from a behavioral rule to a prerequisite for the ensemble's cohesive performance, tolerance is internalized from a moral demand into a practical necessity for the students. Communication and tolerance mutually reinforce each other within musical activities, collectively addressing issues of "efficiency" and "harmony" in group collaboration (Ilari, 2021).

The empirical model of this study outlines a clear pathway for this promotion: Collective music activities, by creating a musical context characterized by shared goals, clear responsibilities, and interdependence, first stimulate students' sense of responsibility. Building upon this foundation, the essential coordination required by the activities and the inherent inclusivity of art further refine students' communication and tolerance skills, ultimately enhancing their comprehensive social skills in a systematic manner. This finding provides a specific and actionable mechanism for the prevalent view that "arts promote social skills," clarifying that within music education, responsibility is the cornerstone, while communication and tolerance are the twin pillars; these three elements work synergistically to foster students' social-emotional development (Saarikallio, 2019).

Conclusion

This study systematically investigated the efficacy and underlying mechanisms of the "I Am a Little Musician" collective music program in promoting social skill development among elementary school students. Through reliability/validity testing, regression analysis, and model construction based on questionnaire data from 40 participants and their parents, the research not only confirmed the positive impact of collective music activities but also clearly delineated their pathway of influence. Overall, the findings indicate that the inherent structure, interactivity, and emotional resonance of collective music activities provide a unique and effective educational intervention model for developing students' social skills.

The study establishes responsible behavior as the core driver within the process of social skill promotion through collective music activities. Regression results identified responsible behavior ($\beta=0.348$) as the strongest predictor of students' comprehensive social skill levels. This finding deepens our understanding of social skill composition, extending it beyond verbal communication and emotional resonance to include role identity and commitment to

responsibility within a group context. In choir or ensemble settings, each student bears specific responsibilities crucial to the collective artistic outcome, from instrument care and punctuality to mastering their individual part. This structured distribution of duties transforms students from passive participants into active contributors. As the research demonstrates, fulfilling concrete responsibilities helps students internalize commitment to the team, forming the foundation for generating and sustaining prosocial behaviors (Hallam, 2014). Consequently, educational practice should transcend viewing music activities as purely artistic training by consciously embedding responsibility construction into activity design, thereby solidifying the cornerstone of social development through clear role division and task accountability.

The research confirms communication-coordination and team inclusion as indispensable synergistic elements jointly supporting holistic social skill development. Findings indicate nearly equivalent contributions from communication-coordination experience ($\beta=0.312$) and team inclusion atmosphere ($\beta=0.294$) to social skills. Music inherently functions as a "social art" requiring high coordination, where rhythmic unity and harmonic balance depend on continuous, effective verbal and non-verbal communication among members (Asztalos, 2024). Simultaneously, musical activities naturally accommodate errors and individual differences (e.g., in pitch or rhythm perception), creating authentic scenarios for students to learn understanding and acceptance. When inclusion transforms from an abstract moral concept into a prerequisite for successful ensemble performance, it becomes an internalized behavioral motive for students (Harris, 2011). Communication ensures collaborative efficiency, while inclusion maintains group harmony - together functioning as dual wings propelling the achievement of collective goals (Kaya & Burak, 2024). This necessitates that educators design activities requiring close negotiation while fostering psychologically safe environments that permit mistakes and encourage diversity.

The study constructs a social skill development model progressing from "responsibility as foundation" to "communication-inclusion synergy". Through shared goals and role interdependence, collective music activities first stimulate and strengthen students' sense of responsibility. Building upon this foundation, the precise coordination required in the process and the art form's innate acceptance of diversity further systematically refine students' communication skills and empathetic understanding. This model accurately deciphers the "black box" mechanism of how music education promotes social-emotional learning, identifying responsibility, communication, and inclusion as three identifiable, intervenable key leverage points (Beknazarova et al., 2025). It not only provides robust empirical support for the social function of music education but also offers a concrete, actionable framework for systematically cultivating students' social literacy through aesthetic education within the context of "integrated education emphasizing moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education".

Despite these valuable findings, the study contains limitations that indicate directions for future research. First, the sample derived from a single community event with limited size; future studies should employ multi-center, large-sample research to enhance generalizability. Second, relying primarily on questionnaire scales, subsequent research could incorporate qualitative methods like field observation and in-depth interviews to more vividly capture micro-level changes in student behaviors and attitudes (Glew, Simonds, & Williams, 2020).

Furthermore, focusing on short-term effects, the long-term impact of collective music activities on social skills requires longitudinal investigation.

This study strongly demonstrates that well-designed collective music activities extend far beyond artistic exposure, functioning as an efficient "social skill incubator." Enabling students to personally practice responsibility, experience communication, and learn inclusion within the harmonious rhythms of music holds irreplaceable value for nurturing them into cooperative, responsible future citizens.

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