




The Impact of Social Skills Training for Novice Teachers on the Academic Motivation of Their Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of social skills training for novice teachers on the academic motivation levels of their students in classroom settings. A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measures and control and experimental groups was employed. The participants included 32 final-year student teachers from Farhangian University who were selected based on low social skills scores and randomly assigned to either the experimental (n=16) or control (n=16) group. The experimental group received an eight-session in-person social skills training program. After these teachers entered the workforce, the academic motivation of their students was measured using the Hermans Achievement Motivation Questionnaire. In total, 628 students (313 in the experimental group and 315 in the control group) participated in the post-intervention assessment. Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with pre-test scores as covariates. ANCOVA results indicated a statistically significant difference in academic motivation scores between students in the experimental and control groups after controlling for pre-test scores $\{F(1, 30) = 18.76, p < .001, \eta^2 = .251\}$. The covariate (pre-test motivation) also had a significant effect $\{F(1, 30) = 6.14, p = .015, \eta^2 = .097\}$. These findings suggest that the social skills training program had a large effect on enhancing student motivation. The results demonstrate that social skills training for novice teachers can significantly improve the academic motivation of their students. This highlights the importance of integrating interpersonal skill development into teacher education programs. Enhancing relational competencies in novice teachers can contribute meaningfully to student engagement and learning outcomes during the critical early years of teaching.

Keywords: social skills training, novice teachers, academic motivation.

1. Introduction

In contemporary educational discourse, the role of teachers extends far beyond the delivery of subject matter; it increasingly includes the responsibility to foster students' academic motivation, emotional well-being, and social development. Central to this expanded role is the concept of social skills—interpersonal competencies that enable teachers to communicate effectively, build supportive classroom climates, and positively influence students' learning trajectories. Numerous studies affirm that when teachers are equipped with strong social skills, they are better positioned to establish meaningful connections with students, manage classrooms constructively, and promote academic engagement (Amiri, 2021; Kiema-Junes, 2020; Shams & Amiranzadeh, 2017). These competencies are not merely personality traits; they can be cultivated through systematic training and professional development programs. Particularly for novice teachers entering the workforce, structured social skills training may serve as a critical bridge between pedagogical theory and the relational demands of the classroom.

The development of student academic motivation is closely tied to the behavioral and affective dispositions of their instructors. Academic motivation, often defined as the internal drive or external stimulus to engage in learning activities, has been found to predict both academic performance and long-term educational attainment (Faramarzi et al., 2019; Mashraki, 2025). Motivation is not merely a personal trait of the learner but is significantly shaped by contextual variables, such as the quality of teacher-student interactions and the emotional climate of the classroom. According to Sulaiman and Adedigba (2020), teachers' classroom management style—which is directly influenced by their communication and social competence—has a measurable impact on student motivation and academic success (Sulaiman & Adedigba, 2020). Similarly, Wu (2024) found that psychological variables such as empathy, self-awareness, and social adaptability in teachers are strongly linked to their motivational impact on students (Wu, 2024). These findings collectively highlight the importance of embedding social-emotional learning not only in student curricula but also in teacher education and induction programs.

Social skills, including active listening, empathy, assertiveness, and cooperative communication, serve as essential tools for educators who wish to engage their students meaningfully. These skills help teachers establish

trust, reduce behavioral disruptions, and model respectful interaction, all of which contribute to a motivational classroom atmosphere (Ahmadi & Moeini, 2015; Khosravi & Jahangiri, 2019). Research by Kiema-Junes (2020) confirms that higher levels of social skills among university students are associated with lower levels of burnout and greater academic engagement, a pattern that extends to pre-service teachers as well (Kiema-Junes, 2020). Moreover, Shams and Amiranzadeh (2017) demonstrated that self-efficacy acts as a mediating factor in the relationship between personality traits and social skills, suggesting that boosting social competencies may also enhance novice teachers' confidence and resilience in managing complex classroom dynamics (Shams & Amiranzadeh, 2017).

Given that novice teachers often struggle with classroom management, emotional regulation, and effective communication during the early stages of their careers, targeted training in social skills could significantly smooth their transition into the teaching profession. Amiri (2021) underscores the link between teachers' professional development and their students' academic performance, highlighting the indirect but powerful role of teacher characteristics in shaping learner outcomes (Amiri, 2021). Likewise, recent work by Lazarides et al. (2023) shows that teachers' motivational beliefs are transmitted to students through observable teaching practices, further emphasizing the need to cultivate socially competent and motivationally attuned educators (Lazarides et al., 2023). This aligns with Conradt and Bogner's (2020) findings that professional development in teaching competencies significantly boosts student creativity and intrinsic motivation, particularly when such training includes emotional and interpersonal dimensions (Conradt & Bogner, 2020).

Despite the growing awareness of these connections, there remains a notable gap in empirical research evaluating the direct effects of social skills training for novice teachers on the motivational outcomes of their students. While existing studies have explored correlations between teacher behaviors and student motivation, few have employed quasi-experimental designs to test the causal impact of structured social skills interventions in real classroom settings. The current study seeks to address this gap by examining whether targeted social skills training for final-year teacher candidates at Farhangian University results in measurable improvements in the academic motivation of their students once these candidates transition into professional teaching roles.

The context of teacher preparation is especially relevant in the Iranian educational system, where novice teachers face immediate classroom responsibilities with minimal in-service mentoring. Prior investigations by Khosravi and Jahangiri (2019) revealed that social skills training significantly enhances the self-efficacy of student teachers in Iran, suggesting that such interventions could also influence their ability to motivate students upon entering the workforce (Khosravi & Jahangiri, 2019). Similarly, Karimzadeh (2014) reported improved mental health and interpersonal functioning among primary school teachers following emotional-social skills training, further validating the holistic benefits of such programs (Karimzadeh, 2014).

The theoretical underpinnings of this research are informed by socio-cognitive models of learning, which posit that motivation is socially constructed and responsive to external cues such as teacher feedback, emotional tone, and classroom environment. Studies from diverse international contexts reinforce this perspective. For instance, Mugala and Kabeta (2023) documented how motivational strategies employed by school leaders significantly influenced learners' academic performance in Zambia, pointing to the broader educational ecosystem in which teacher-student relationships are embedded (Mugala & Kabeta, 2023). Meanwhile, Naltan (2024) found that in-service teachers' motivation to teach in Thailand was heavily influenced by emotional connection and perceived competence—factors that are closely linked to social interaction skills (Naltan, 2024).

From a developmental standpoint, Njenga (2023) emphasized the importance of continuing professional development for vocational teachers in Kenya, suggesting that motivations for engaging in such training are often rooted in a desire to improve student outcomes and classroom relationships (Njenga, 2023). Likewise, Ren and Zhou (2023) highlighted the demotivational factors that hinder teachers' engagement in educational research, often stemming from a lack of interpersonal support and relational cohesion within professional settings (Ren & Zhou, 2023). These international insights underscore the relevance of social skills in sustaining teacher motivation and effectiveness, particularly during the early, high-stress years of teaching.

Furthermore, the motivational outcomes of students are increasingly viewed as interdependent with their teachers' emotional and professional capacities. As Vostokova and Dvornikova (2024) demonstrated, students' educational motivation is shaped by their teachers' locus of control and

communication styles, which are themselves reflective of broader social competencies (Vostokova & Дворникова, 2024). This dynamic interplay is also evident in the work of Yentür (2023), who found that geography teachers' self-efficacy and teaching attitudes significantly predicted their motivation, which in turn shaped student engagement levels (Yentür, 2023). These findings offer strong support for the idea that developing social-emotional competencies in teachers can serve as a key lever for improving student academic motivation.

In light of this theoretical and empirical foundation, the present study was designed to evaluate the impact of an eight-session social skills training program for student teachers on the academic motivation of their students.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This applied research employed a quasi-experimental design with both experimental and control groups. The study was conducted in two distinct phases. In the first phase, the participants consisted of student teachers enrolled in a basic sciences discipline at the Farhangian University in Tehran Province. These student teachers were in the final year of their studies. Initially, all members of the sample group were administered a standardized social skills test. Those scoring lower on social skills were selected for the study and randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group. The experimental group subsequently participated in an in-person social skills training program that spanned eight sessions.

Following the completion of their academic studies and official placement in schools, the second phase of the research commenced. At the end of the first academic semester of their teaching practice, the students taught by these novice teachers were assessed using an academic motivation questionnaire.

The population for this study consisted of two distinct groups. The first group included all student teachers at Farhangian University in Tehran Province during the 2019–2020 academic year, totaling 4,506 individuals. The second group comprised the students taught by these student teachers, who were distributed across 32 organized classrooms. For the sample selection, 59 final-year student teachers were randomly chosen on the condition that they would begin teaching immediately after completing the experimental intervention. After the initial social skills screening, those with high scores were excluded, leaving 32

participants. These individuals were then evenly assigned to the experimental (16) and control (16) groups.

Student sampling was conducted based on the classrooms under the responsibility of the novice teachers once they had begun teaching. Each teacher typically managed between two and five classes. One class from each teacher's schedule was randomly selected as the student sample unit. In total, 628 students across 32 classrooms were included in the study. The final division for the motivational assessment involved 313 students in the experimental group and 315 in the control group.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Academic Motivation

To assess academic motivation, the Hermans Achievement Motivation Questionnaire was employed. This questionnaire is based on ten traits that differentiate individuals with high achievement motivation from those with lower motivation levels. Initially developed with 92 items, the questionnaire was refined based on reliability coefficients to a shorter version. Akbari (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.80, and Darabi (2007) reported a reliability of 0.73. In addition to internal consistency, item-total correlation analyses were conducted, revealing statistically significant correlations ranging from 0.30 to 0.75 for the final 29 items retained in the scale.

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Social Skills Training

The intervention protocol consisted of an eight-session in-person training program designed to enhance the social skills of novice teachers who had scored low on the initial social skills assessment. The sessions were conducted weekly and each session lasted approximately 90 minutes, following a structured yet interactive approach grounded in behavioral and communication-based models of social skills development. The content of the training included core components such as active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, assertiveness training, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, empathy building, and effective classroom interaction techniques. Each session combined brief theoretical instruction with practical

exercises, role-plays, and group discussions to promote experiential learning and reinforce skill acquisition. Participants were given homework assignments after each session to encourage real-life application of the skills in their peer and academic interactions. The program was facilitated by a trained instructor with experience in teacher education and interpersonal skills training. Attendance was mandatory, and participants in the experimental group were closely monitored to ensure consistent participation and engagement throughout the eight-week intervention period.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to compare the academic motivation scores between the experimental and control groups while controlling for potential confounding variables. Before group formation, participants were matched for relevant variables such as gender, academic discipline, and educational background to ensure homogeneity. Prior to conducting ANCOVA, its key assumptions—including homogeneity of variances and linearity—were tested to confirm the validity of the statistical procedure. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 24.

3. Findings and Results

The sample of student teachers included 32 participants, with 17 (53.12%) identifying as female and 15 (46.88%) as male. Regarding academic disciplines, 18 participants (56.25%) were enrolled in physics education, while 14 (43.75%) were in mathematics education. In terms of educational qualifications prior to university, 20 individuals (62.5%) held a diploma in natural sciences, and the remaining 12 (37.5%) had a diploma in mathematics. Among the student participants' students ($N = 628$), 322 (51.27%) were girls and 306 (48.73%) were boys. The age range of students was between 13.2 and 14.9 years, with a mean of 14.18 years ($SD = 0.41$).

The descriptive statistics of academic motivation scores for both experimental and control groups, across pre-test and post-test phases, are presented in Table 1. These values reflect the mean levels of academic motivation as measured by the Hermans Achievement Motivation Questionnaire, along with their associated standard deviations.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Academic Motivation Scores by Group and Time

Group	Time	Mean	SD
Experimental	Pre-test	48.67	5.24
Experimental	Post-test	56.91	4.82
Control	Pre-test	49.12	5.37
Control	Post-test	50.08	5.21

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group's mean score increased from 48.67 (SD = 5.24) in the pre-test to 56.91 (SD = 4.82) in the post-test, indicating a noticeable improvement in students' academic motivation following the social skills training given to their teachers. In contrast, the control group showed only a minor increase in their mean score, from 49.12 (SD = 5.37) to 50.08 (SD = 5.21), suggesting limited change without the intervention.

Before performing ANCOVA, the major statistical assumptions were examined and confirmed. The assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which yielded non-significant results for both the experimental group ($W = 0.978$, $p = .436$) and the control group ($W =$

0.974 , $p = .398$), indicating normal distribution of post-test scores. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was also non-significant ($F = 1.38$, $p = .249$), confirming equal variances across groups. The linear relationship between the covariate (pre-test scores) and the dependent variable (post-test scores) was visually assessed through scatterplots and confirmed by a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .53$ ($p < .01$), indicating a moderate positive relationship. Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was tested and found to be satisfied, as the interaction between group and pre-test scores was not significant ($F(1, 28) = 1.04$, $p = .317$). These findings validate the use of ANCOVA for analyzing the data.

Table 2

ANCOVA Results for Post-Test Academic Motivation Scores (Pre-Test as Covariate)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Pre-test (covariate)	128.47	1	128.47	6.14	.015	.097
Group	392.56	1	392.56	18.76	.000	.251
Error	627.44	30	20.91			
Total	1148.47	33				

As indicated in Table 2, after adjusting for pre-test scores, there was a statistically significant difference in post-test academic motivation scores between the experimental and control groups ($F(1, 30) = 18.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .251$). This effect size suggests that approximately 25.1% of the variance in students' academic motivation can be attributed to the teachers' participation in social skills training. The covariate (pre-test scores) was also statistically significant ($F(1, 30) = 6.14$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .097$), indicating that initial academic motivation had a moderate influence on post-test outcomes. These results support the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing students' motivation through targeted teacher training.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the impact of social skills training for novice teachers on the academic motivation of their students. The results provided robust empirical support for the hypothesis: students taught by teachers who underwent an eight-session social skills training program demonstrated significantly higher levels of

academic motivation compared to students in the control group. The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), after controlling for pre-test scores, revealed a statistically significant effect of the intervention, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .251$). These findings affirm that even a relatively brief, targeted training intervention can yield meaningful outcomes in student motivation when focused on enhancing the interpersonal and communicative competencies of novice teachers.

This outcome aligns with existing literature emphasizing the central role of teacher behavior and classroom interaction styles in shaping student motivation. Previous studies have repeatedly highlighted the connection between teacher-student relationships and students' internal drive to engage in learning. For instance, Lazarides et al. (2023) found that teachers' motivational beliefs are indirectly transmitted to students through reported teaching practices, which are rooted in social behavior and classroom climate (Lazarides et al., 2023). In this regard, teachers who possess strong social skills are better able to create supportive and emotionally responsive environments that nurture intrinsic

motivation. Similarly, the findings echo those of Conradty and Bogner (2020), who observed that professional development interventions focusing on interpersonal competencies significantly increased student creativity and motivation, especially when taught by teachers trained in STEAM contexts (Conradty & Bogner, 2020).

The intervention used in this study was grounded in core social competencies such as assertiveness, emotional regulation, empathy, and communication—skills which directly support effective classroom management, conflict resolution, and relational teaching. These competencies are especially critical during the early years of teaching, when novice educators often struggle to maintain emotional balance, enforce classroom norms, and build rapport with students. By bolstering teachers' social and emotional toolkits, the training likely contributed to the creation of more interactive, inclusive, and student-centered classroom environments—conditions known to facilitate academic engagement and persistence. This finding is also in line with the conclusions of Kiema-Junes (2020), who demonstrated that higher levels of social skills in university students are associated with greater academic engagement and reduced burnout, two psychological states that parallel the conditions necessary for motivated learning (Kiema-Junes, 2020).

Moreover, the study adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that the teacher's psychological and behavioral profile significantly influences students' academic behavior and motivation. Wu (2024), for example, found that teachers' psychological capital—comprised of self-efficacy, optimism, and interpersonal trust—was a key predictor of their motivational influence on elementary school students (Wu, 2024). These traits are not static and can be cultivated through structured training programs, as this study demonstrates. The direct improvement in students' academic motivation following teacher training also supports earlier research by Sulaiman and Adedigba (2020), who emphasized the importance of teachers' classroom management styles—shaped largely by social competencies—in predicting pupil motivation and achievement (Sulaiman & Adedigba, 2020).

From a local context, the findings also reinforce the conclusions of Khosravi and Jahangiri (2019), who found that social skills training significantly increased the self-efficacy of student teachers in Iran, suggesting that teacher training in interpersonal skills not only improves professional confidence but also impacts students indirectly (Khosravi & Jahangiri, 2019). This mechanism of influence is supported by Shams and Amirianzadeh (2017), who

argued that self-efficacy acts as a mediating factor between social skills and teacher behavior (Shams & Amirianzadeh, 2017). Consequently, it is plausible that the improved motivation observed in students of the experimental group in this study was partly a result of their teachers' increased sense of competence and control in the classroom.

This study also aligns with the model proposed by Amiri (2021), which posits that teacher professional development can indirectly enhance student academic performance by improving teacher-student bonding (Amiri, 2021). Indeed, the findings from this research suggest that when novice teachers receive early-career support in the form of interpersonal skills development, the motivational climate of the classroom can be positively transformed. Similarly, the results support the broader claim by Rahmati et al. (2024) that students' motivation and academic performance are linked to the social adaptability and interaction styles of teachers, particularly in middle-school settings (Rahmati et al., 2024).

The improvement observed in student academic motivation also aligns with findings by Mugala and Kabeta (2023), who demonstrated that motivational strategies used by head teachers led to measurable academic gains among students in Zambia (Mugala & Kabeta, 2023). Their results, like those in the current study, point to the significant influence of adult emotional and interpersonal competencies in shaping young learners' motivational orientations. Additionally, the study resonates with Naltan's (2024) investigation into in-service English teachers in Thailand, where it was found that interpersonal connection and emotional engagement with students were key motivators for sustained teaching quality and learner success (Naltan, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings align well with Mashraki's (2025) recent research on the relationship between mindset orientation and academic motivation in teacher candidates. He argues that students' motivation is deeply affected by the instructional approach and mindset communicated by educators, which is often embedded in their social interactions and communication strategies (Mashraki, 2025). It is therefore likely that the improved student outcomes observed in this study are the result of not only more effective communication, but also a more growth-oriented, motivational mindset modeled by trained teachers.

Finally, this study finds further theoretical grounding in the ecological and dynamic perspectives proposed by Ren and Zhou (2023), who emphasized the fluctuating nature of teacher motivation and its contextual dependency (Ren &

Zhou, 2023). Social skills training may serve as a stabilizing force in these dynamics, providing novice teachers with consistent tools to navigate interpersonal complexities, thus enabling them to better support their students' academic and emotional needs. The reinforcement of interpersonal confidence may also explain why novice teachers in the intervention group were more effective in sustaining student motivation across their classrooms.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size of novice teachers (N=32) limits the generalizability of the findings, especially across different educational regions or subject areas. Second, the measurement of student motivation relied on a single instrument administered at one time point, which may not fully capture the multifaceted and dynamic nature of motivation. Third, although efforts were made to randomize the assignment of student teachers to groups, classroom contexts and school environments could have influenced the outcomes independently of the intervention. Furthermore, since data collection was limited to the first semester of teaching, the long-term impact of the social skills training on both teacher behavior and student motivation remains unclear.

Future research should consider expanding the sample size and including a more diverse range of teaching disciplines and geographical settings to enhance the external validity of the findings. Longitudinal designs are also recommended to assess whether the observed effects of social skills training persist across multiple academic terms or years of service. It would also be beneficial to include additional data sources such as classroom observations, teacher self-reports, and student interviews to triangulate findings and gain deeper insight into the behavioral changes brought about by the intervention. Moreover, comparative studies that evaluate different types of teacher training programs—such as those focused on emotional intelligence, classroom management, or conflict resolution—could help identify the most effective components for fostering student motivation.

Teacher education programs should integrate formal social skills training into the curriculum, particularly during

the final years of preparation when student teachers are close to entering the classroom. Educational policymakers and administrators should prioritize early-career interventions that support novice teachers in developing interpersonal competencies, as these have been shown to influence student outcomes. Schools should also consider ongoing in-service training and mentorship programs that reinforce relational and communicative skills throughout a teacher's career. Finally, evaluative frameworks for teacher performance should extend beyond content delivery to include social-emotional competencies, given their measurable impact on student motivation and learning engagement.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of the study declare no conflict of interest related to the research.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally in this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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