

A Thematic Review of the Role of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in English Classroom Management Success

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Abstract

Effective English classroom management has long been a crucial component of successful teaching and learning. Relational techniques have been increasingly emphasized in teaching research over the past few decades. Positive relationships between teachers and students are essential for creating classrooms that are well-run and productive. This thematic synthesis draws on 50 peer-reviewed articles from 2010 to 2024 to demonstrate how professional learning, communication, empathy, emotional connection, and an inclusive approach can collectively have a positive impact on classroom management across various educational settings. To identify recurring themes and patterns in the emotional, cultural, communicative, and instructional contexts of teacher-student relationships, a qualitative thematic analysis was employed. According to research, relational communication, cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, and respect for one another significantly enhance academic performance and student engagement, while also reducing behavioral issues. Furthermore, it has been found that organized teacher training in relational and emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in advancing sustainable management techniques. Effective classroom environments are built on a basis of positive, compassionate, and inclusive teacher-student relationships, according to the review's findings. It follows that to create emotionally secure and engaging learning environments for all students, teachers and policymakers should integrate relational capacities into professional development and support.

Keywords: *English Classroom management, Emotional intelligence, Inclusive practices, Student engagement, Teacher-student relationships*

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that good teaching and learning are influenced by effective classroom management; for example, a teacher who can manage the class properly tends to achieve better outcomes. It directly impacts the learning environment, academic achievement, and student engagement. Nevertheless, rather than relying solely on strict discipline, professional teachers today are gaining recognition for their ability to develop emotional connections, mutual respect, and settings that foster empathy and trust (Martin & Collie, 2019; Akhtar et al., 2019, 2022). Students are more likely to be engaged in class, control their actions, and be more involved in their education when they have an emotional bond with their teachers (Allen et al., 2013; Abidin, 2024). A friendly and engaging learning environment is likely to be established in the classroom by teachers who are effective communicators and build trust with their students (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Braun et al., 2019). According to these studies, the development of these kinds of connections is affected by teachers' emotional intelligence (EI), empathy, and communication abilities. Student misbehavior and emotional skills such as self-awareness, emotion management, and empathic involvement are directly correlated with better classroom conditions (Agbaria, 2020; Aldrup et al., 2022).

Additionally, relationship management strategies such as culturally responsive pedagogy, inclusive pedagogy, and restorative practices are gaining popularity as effective strategies for promoting equality and addressing diversity in the classroom (Gregory et al., 2014; Garrote et al., 2020). All of these findings suggest that effective classroom management may depend more on positive teacher-student interactions. Despite the increasing amount of literature, there are still gaps in the consistent analysis and synthesis of these relational aspects in relation to effective classroom management. A large portion of the research currently in publication addresses inclusivity, communication, or emotional intelligence independently, without examining how these components interact in various educational contexts. Furthermore, there is little thematic linking of findings across time, despite individual studies highlighting the advantages of good teacher-student relationships. To identify new patterns, recurrent themes, and practical implications, a comprehensive thematic review that integrates multiple research streams is necessary.

Therefore, the primary goal of this review is to examine how effective teacher-student relationships can support efficient classroom management. It summarizes research on key relational constructs like emotional connection, empathy, communication, trust, cultural sensitivity, class organization, and professional training from 2010 to 2024. The review aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relational processes that characterize effective classroom environments, focusing on these themes, which will then inform policy reforms and teacher preparation programs. The following two research questions serve as the basis for the review:

- 1) In what ways do successful classroom management practices in diverse educational settings come from positive teacher-student relationships?
- 2) Which relationship elements are most frequently linked to effective English classroom management?

2. Research Methods

This review, which incorporates 50 peer-reviewed studies on the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on classroom management efficiency, employs thematic analysis. To locate relevant research, a systematic search strategy was employed using popular academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR. The search aimed to identify studies that provided insight into the relationship aspects of classroom management within the broader educational

context. The terms “teacher-student relationship,” “classroom management,” “emotional intelligence,” “student engagement,” “teacher communication,” “fairness in education,” and “teacher training” were used both alone and in combination. Findings were based on publications from 2010 to 2024 to ensure the study accurately represented current policy realities and educational methods.

Specific requirements for inclusion and exclusion were used to select the articles based on quality and relevance. Articles that (1) reviewed the link between classroom management and teacher-student interactions, (2) provided strong arguments based on theory or strong evidence, (3) were printed in scholarly publications that received peer review, and (4) contents in English. These inclusion criteria ensured that the review was consistent with educational theory and evidence-based practice (Martin & Collie, 2019; Allen et al., 2013; Agbaria, 2020). However, the following categories of works were not included: focusing on adult or post-secondary education contexts; (2) editorials, opinion pieces, or book reviews that lack theoretical or scientific support; (3) addressing only administrative or policy-based aspects of classroom management without giving a high priority to teacher-student relationships; or (4) not being offered in full-text format. The selection process provided a thorough and logical source of material that was particularly well-suited to the study's objectives.

The six-step process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the foundation for thematic analysis. These consist of: (1) getting familiar with the data; (2) generating initial rules; (3) looking for themes; (4) evaluating themes; (5) identifying and labelling themes; and (6) creating the report. To identify trends, meanings, and important insights regarding classroom management and teacher-student relationships, all 50 selected studies were carefully read and annotated. First, the study's manifest content and latent implications were traced through the method of inductive coding. After that, those codes were grouped into more general thematic groups. Themes were refined to provide clarity and contrast while covering the rich dynamic of relational classroom management. Five general themes came to light: (1) teacher well-being and emotional intelligence; (2) feedback and communication; (3) classroom management and instructional techniques; (4) justice and fairness; and (5) professional development and teacher preparation.

Considering the methodological strength of this review, several limitations are identified. First, the review may have overlooked important data from educational contexts where relationships differ due to systemic or cultural factors, as it only considered English-language publications. Second, publication bias is a possibility that should be considered, as studies with significant or positive results are more likely to be published than those with neutral or negative results. Third, although based on a large number of studies in various educational systems, the review is not a systematic review and lacks statistical meta-analysis, which restricts its ability to generalize and quantify findings. Finally, although the thematic analysis process is methodical, biases may still be introduced due to subjective interpretation.

3. Thematic Review

For many years, effective teaching and learning have been based on good classroom management. Newer pedagogical research continues to emphasize the relational nature of teaching, particularly the role of caring teacher-student relationships, whereas older models tended to emphasize rules, structure, and discipline. This thematic review describes how it has been revealed that in a variety of teaching contexts, teachers and students can improve classroom management success through positive interactions, emotional relationships, empathy, mutual respect, and caring communication. One different theme emerges from the research data from 2010 to 2024: classrooms that are safe, interesting, and well-run are the result of caring relationships.

3.1 Positive Teacher-Student Relationships for English Classroom Management in Diverse Contexts

3.1.1 Emotional Bond and Student Engagement

Numerous studies have demonstrated that an emotional bond between educators and students enhances student engagement and reduces behavioral issues. According to Martin and Collie (2019), the foundation of effective classroom management lies in relationships rather than discipline. Students are also more likely to be engaged, pay attention to the rules, and be held responsible for their actions if they feel valued and understood. Similarly, Abidin (2024) clarifies the value of integrating learning resources and flexible settings that foster rapport and trust, two essential elements in creating a meaningful teacher-student relationship. According to Akhtar et al. (2019), who demonstrated the link between emotional bonding and student motivation, students perform better both emotionally and academically when teachers make an effort to create supportive, caring relationships. Their research demonstrates that by providing students with a sense of safety and control, these kinds of interactions dramatically raise student engagement. Similar to this, Allen et al. (2013) emphasize that students' motivation, uniqueness, and responsiveness to behavioral and educational requirements all increase when they feel appreciated and involved in their classroom communities. Students are more likely to act appropriately in class and follow the rules when they feel respected and emotionally safe (Akhtar et al., 2019). Effective classroom management and a decrease in disciplinary problems are made easier by this sense of security (Allen et al., 2013).

3.1.2 Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Classroom

Cultural sensitivity and inclusive pedagogy are essential for fostering positive teacher-student relationships, especially in diverse classrooms. Gregory et al. (2014) stated that to reduce racial disciplinary differences, restorative practices (RP) are most effective as they foster mutual respect and understanding. By emphasizing empathy, communication, and shared accountability, these strategies enable teachers to foster strong relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, Garrote et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of socially inclusive classroom management, particularly for students with special education needs. Their results demonstrate that behavioral issues decrease and academic success increases when children feel included and welcomed in the community. Teachers must modify their methods to accommodate different student characteristics and create genuine connections that help learners feel appreciated and respected, according to Ibrahim and Zaatari (2019).

Restorative practices (RP), according to Gregory et al. (2014), generate empathy and communication to bridge the divide between racial punishment and mutual respect. The techniques are most effective in multicultural classrooms when rapport-building can be facilitated by cultural awareness. Socially inclusive management is efficacious in improving behavioral outcomes for children with special education needs (Garrote et al., 2020). Building teaching strategies that consider students' cultural and personal backgrounds enhances connections and creates more peaceful learning environments, according to Ibrahim and Zaatari (2019).

3.2 Common relationship Elements Linked to Effective English Classroom Management

3.2.1 Empathy, Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Self-Efficacy

The quality of the relationship between a teacher and a student is directly proportional to the success of classroom management. Agbaria (2020), Valente et al. (2018), and Wu et al. (2019) demonstrated that effective behavior management techniques and a healthy classroom atmosphere

are significantly influenced by emotional intelligence (EI), which is the ability to identify, understand, and regulate emotions. Aldrup et al. (2022) argue that empathy is both a social good deed and a teaching instrument. Because they can read and understand their students' needs, empathic teachers build trust and lessen conflict. Furthermore, instructors with emotional intelligence and mindfulness are better equipped to manage stress and foster positive connections, which in turn reduce behavioral problems, according to Braun et al. (2019).

Moreover, numerous studies found that teacher self-efficacy, the confident feeling of effectively managing the classroom, also enhances the standard of instruction and student motivation (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Dicke et al., 2014; Poulou et al., 2018). Improved classroom management and more productive teacher-student interactions are directly related to instructors who are more self-sufficient, as they are more likely to feel secure in their ability to set boundaries, resolve conflicts, and nurture students' growth. By controlling their own emotions while setting an example of positive behavior, teachers who possess emotional competence reduce conflict in the classroom, according to Wu et al. (2019). Understanding students requires empathy, in particular. According to Aldrup et al. (2022), empathy can function as both a moral obligation and a pedagogical requirement to lower misbehavior. According to Braun et al. (2019), improved stress management and relationship management are associated with self-awareness and mindfulness. Furthermore, teacher self-efficacy, or confidence in classroom management, enables teachers to maintain positive interactions while upholding expectations (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Dicke et al., 2014; Poulou et al., 2018).

3.2.2 Communication, Trust, and Mutual Respect

Clear, respectful, and sympathetic communication is usually the backbone of a positive classroom environment. According to Özgenel and Bozkurt (2019), fairness in communication, also known as social justice, builds trust and improves student involvement. According to Sökmen (2019) and Xie & Derakhshan (2021), students are more engaged and less likely to rebel against classroom rules when there is open communication and constructive feedback. High-achieving teachers regularly build rapport with their students by being fair and approachable, which directly affects the reduction of disruptions in the classroom (Stronge et al., 2011). The result of positive teacher-student relationships on student achievement and teacher satisfaction has been addressed by Spilt et al. (2012). Teachers who nurture relationships based on respect and empathy experience less emotional exhaustion and are more satisfied with their jobs, which benefits both parties through enhanced autonomy in the process (Sarkar & Hasan, 2024).

Communication fairness, also known as social justice, creates an environment in the classroom where students feel appreciated and respected (Özgenel & Bozkurt, 2019). The urge of learners to follow classroom rules is supported by open communication and feedback, which build trust (Sökmen, 2019; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). High-achieving teachers frequently act fairly and amiably, which is directly related to fewer classroom disruptions, according to Stronge et al. (2011). Additionally, Spilt et al. (2012) demonstrate that respect for one another not only improves learning outcomes but also reduces teacher burnout, maintaining a positive classroom environment.

3.2.3 Structure, Support, and Collaborative Environments

For classroom management, structure and support are just as important as relational strategies. According to AERO (2023) and Havik and Westergård (2020), students find a balance when they receive emotional support and clear expectations, which makes them feel both safe and accountable. Students will learn to control themselves and participate in positive interactions in the classroom when compassion and consistency are combined. By emphasizing emotional support,

instructional quality, and classroom organization, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta et al., 2012) provides a theoretical framework for assessing and improving teacher-student relationships. The CLASS-based MyTeachingPartner intervention demonstrates how teachers can enhance their relational skills through coaching and guided feedback, resulting in improved student achievement and more effective classroom management. A professionally rich classroom is also enhanced by collaborative techniques such as group learning and student-centered learning.

Given their importance, relationships serve as a foundation for behavioral consistency. According to AERO (2023) and Havik and Westergård (2020), the most effective classrooms combine precise regulations with adequate warmth, as this approach enables students to feel both safe and accountable. Pianta et al. (2012) mentioned that the CLASS model uses three criteria to evaluate the teacher-student relationship: organization, teaching transparency, and emotional support. When appropriately present, these elements lead to higher levels of engagement in the classroom and fewer behavioural issues. Furthermore, interactive tactics such as student-directed learning foster stronger peer relationships and raise the bar for learning (Dornyei & Muir, 2019).

3.2.4 Professional Development and Teacher Training

Exaggerating the benefits of teacher training is unlikely. Teachers must undergo professional development to equip themselves with the skills necessary to establish strong relationships with their students. As part of classroom management training, several studies support teacher training programs that include relationship skills (e.g., Allen, 2010; Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015; Aydın & Karabay, 2019). To equip teachers with the necessary tools to create classroom environments that are both welcoming and engaging, this training may cover topics such as restorative circles, effective feedback communication, emotional intelligence, and inclusive education. Relationship-focused teacher training prepares teachers with the comfort and empathy they need to handle challenging situations in the classroom. Teachers who receive training in emotional intelligence and an inclusive approach are better at managing the classroom, according to studies by Allen (2010), Akalin and Sucuoglu (2015), and Aydın and Karabay (2019). According to Chen et al. (2021), instructors who placed a high priority on relationships believed that they were essential for behaviour control and academic success. Thi and Nguyen (2021) and Hasan et al. (2025) suggest that the most effective method for blending control with compassion is through a formal, honest, and structured approach.

In addition, as stated by Aydın and Karabay (2019), organized preschool teacher training programs that emphasize effective classroom management facilitate the creation of a calm and productive learning environment. These training programs may ultimately enhance student performance and classroom discipline, as they not only equip teachers with practical skills but also boost their self-esteem and teaching proficiency (Silfani et al., 2025). Poulou et al. (2018) argue that teachers' perceptions of themselves are crucial factors in determining their classroom behavior and that they encourage professional development initiatives that help instructors align their own beliefs and teaching methods.

4. Discussion

This thematic review highlights the shift in modern classroom management from discipline-based approaches to supportive, relationship-oriented models. Martin and Collie (2019), Akhtar et al. (2019), and Gregory et al. (2014) state that effective classrooms are based on empathy, emotional intelligence, mutual respect, and respectful communication, and are the result of best

behavior and accomplishments. The previously mentioned study consistently emphasizes the close relationship between emotional safety and student participation. When students feel emotionally safe and appreciated, they are more likely to participate, manage their emotions effectively, and perform well (Allen et al., 2013; Martin & Collie, 2019). This aligns with the educational movement that emphasizes social-emotional learning (SEL) as a crucial aspect of both behavioral and academic success. According to research by Abidin (2024) and Akhtar et al. (2019), attachment is a significant factor in student motivation, rather than a reaction to punishment, and is the foundation of effective leadership.

Especially in multicultural classrooms, the impact of inclusive and culturally sensitive practices on developing positive relationships is a repeated research topic. Gregory et al. (2014) claim that restorative practices (RP) based on mutual understanding reduce racial and ethnic discipline gaps. In a similar vein, Garrote et al. (2020) argue that inclusive classroom practices improve the behavior and academic performance of students with special needs. This aligns with broader discussions on educational equity, which suggest that targeted and culturally sensitive approaches are necessary to meet the needs of students (Ibrahim & Zaatari, 2019). There is a gap here, though, because although there is much research on racial and special needs inclusion, there are not as many studies that focus on relational approaches to linguistically different learners, which is a topic that needs more study.

The relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and emotional intelligence is among the most significant thematic connections. Teachers with greater interpersonal skills tend to create stronger and more trusting relationships, according to several studies (Agbaria, 2020; Valente et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2019). This is also achieved by teacher self-efficacy, since confident teachers are more skilled at relational classroom management techniques than those who are strict (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Dicke et al., 2014). According to Aldrup et al. (2022), empathy is both a moral requirement and a pedagogical necessity to decrease misbehavior. However, considering the importance of emotional skills, Braun et al. (2019) and Frenzel et al. (2021) warn that teachers themselves are vulnerable to burnout if they do not receive enough emotional support and mindfulness training.

Furthermore, the study found trust, fairness, and communication as the three main relational factors. According to studies, students respond with cooperation and respect when teachers practice social justice and fair, open communication in their interactions with one another (Özgenel & Bozkurt, 2019; Sökmen, 2019; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). This fits in with broader debates in education about student voice and involvement in governance. Positive relationships between teachers and students not only increase student achievement but also shield teachers from emotional burnout, according to Stronge et al. (2011) and Spilt et al. (2012). Future research should more thoroughly examine the positive and negative emotional impacts of teacher-student relationships, as this is a significant yet overlooked relationship between relationship quality and teacher well-being that warrants attention.

According to the review, teamwork, structure, and support are just as important as emotional factors. Students grow in environments where there are clear behavioral expectations combined with emotional warmth, according to AERO (2023) and Havik and Westergård (2020). This is similar to more general education models, such as the CLASS model (Pianta et al., 2012), which measures how classroom organization, instructional quality, and emotional support interact (Hasan et al., 2024a, 2024b). This is supported by Dornyei and Muir (2019), who suggest that collaborative learning environments can strengthen the bonds between students and teachers. Research on how

teachers actually accomplish this balancing act is lacking, particularly in large or limited-resource classrooms.

Lastly, it has been discovered that teacher preparation and professional development are essential to the longevity of relationally based management techniques. Research strongly supports training that generates relational, emotional, and inclusive knowledge (Allen, 2010; Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015; Aydın & Karabay, 2019). Teachers who receive training in culturally responsive teaching, emotional intelligence, and restorative practices gain self-assurance and improve classroom management. According to Thi and Nguyen (2021), the most effective approach is one that combines both warmth and rule-based elements, with high support and high expectations. This has important policy results: relational skill development must be given top priority in school systems' pre-service and in-service teacher education programs (Poulou et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021). However, there is a big gap: there are not several long-term studies examining the effects of relational training on student outcomes.

The findings of this study align with some of the most well-established linguistic theories that highlight the engaging, social, and affective aspects of language learning. The focus on positive classroom interactions, emotional safety, and teacher-student relationships aligns with Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that language learners learn language most effectively when they are motivated, at ease, and not nervous. As a whole, the reviewed studies (e.g., Allen et al., 2013; Akhtar et al., 2019; Martin & Collie, 2019; Hasan et al., 2020) prove that emotional support from teacher behavior reduces stress and boosts motivation, resulting in the low-anxiety environments Krashen identifies as best for second language acquisition. Additionally, it puts a major priority on professional growth, and teacher education discusses the pedagogical grammar of conversation in the classroom. Teachers who are relationally and communicatively orientated are better equipped to manage linguistic diversity, provide organized guidance, and establish inclusive discourse communities, all of which are the core values of communicative language teaching (CLT).

Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations are proposed to further establish the identified research gaps. To evaluate the long-term impact of relational teacher education on student outcomes and classroom environment over time, educational researchers must first carry out additional long-term research (Frenzel et al., 2021; Poulou et al., 2018). The studies mentioned above provide more convincing evidence of how emotional intelligence and compassionate teaching methods shape and influence students' long-term behavioral and academic growth. In addition, linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms should be the focus of future research, particularly in multilingual environments where communication problems may damage the bonds between teachers and students. Research on relational strategies that support English language learners or minority language speakers would lead to more inclusive and equal practices (Ibrahim & Zaatari, 2019; Gregory et al., 2014). Lastly, policies and teacher education programs need to provide complete support for teachers' emotional health, including regular access to counselling, peer support, and meditation classes (Braun et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

It is clear from this thematic review that good teacher-student relationships are essential to efficient classroom management in a range of learning environments. To investigate how effective classroom management in various educational contexts is influenced by positive teacher-student relationships, this thematic review encompasses a broad range of research from 2010 to 2024. Effective classroom management is centred on teacher-student relationships that are

communicative, respectful, and emotionally caring, as the research consistently suggests. The more recent research emphasizes relationally based practice, which emphasizes empathy, emotional intelligence, and cultural responsiveness, rather than merely rule- or discipline-based approaches.

Returning to the original research question, which explores how successful classroom management practices in various educational contexts stem from positive teacher-student relationships, the review highlights that emotional connections significantly enhance student engagement and reduce disruptive behavior. The students are more driven, accountable, and engaged in the classroom when they feel emotionally safe and valued. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that inclusive and culturally sensitive methods, such as restorative practices, promote a sense of community and reduce disparities in behavioral control, especially for students from underprivileged or special education backgrounds. In addition to the second question, relationship elements that are frequently linked to effective classroom management, four elements are linked: (1) teacher self-efficacy, empathy and emotional intelligence; (2) communication, respect and trust; (3) structure, support and collaborative environment; and (4) professional development and teacher training.

Despite the positive results, the review highlights several research gaps that suggest promising avenues for future investigation. The long-term effects of relational teaching practices on student achievement and teachers' mental health require ongoing study. Furthermore, more research is required on relational strategies targeted at linguistically diverse learners, a group that is frequently neglected in current research publications. Research on how educators in low-resource classrooms strike a balance between relational tactics and structural demands would also be very helpful in the real world. Lastly, to sustain relational practice without burnout, future research should examine the emotional demands of teaching and the institutional support available.

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