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# Classroom Management and Student Behavior After the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives from Five Elementary General Music Teachers

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary general music teachers' experiences and perspectives with classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants consisted of five practicing elementary general music teachers in Southern California who participated in three individual interviews, one focus group, and two classroom observations during the fall of 2022. I analyzed data through axial coding (Creswell, 2012) yielding four themes: positive classroom management, social and emotional learning, support from classroom teachers and administrators, and challenges. The findings of this study highlighted participants' positive perceptions of classroom management, the importance of building relationships, students' social and emotional struggles, and unique challenges the participants faced in their role as elementary general music teachers.

## Keywords

classroom management, COVID-19 pandemic, elementary general music

## INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is an essential component of effective teaching and learning. In the context of music education, where teachers often instruct large numbers of students, effective classroom management is crucial for leading a class of engaged learners (e.g., Gardner, 2010; Haack, 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges, with educators transitioning to online instruction and facing disruptions in student behavior and motivation (e.g., Gülmez &

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Ordu, 2022). Teachers had to adapt their classroom management approaches to support students in the new remote learning environment. Both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, music educators experienced difficulties with classroom management and student engagement, highlighting the impact of disruptions on the field of music education (e.g., Shaw & Mayo, 2021). The following section summarizes the literature related to this topic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars often consider classroom management an integral piece of effective teaching and learning in the classroom, providing balance for engaged and attentive learners while teachers support and involve students in the learning process (Freiberg et al., 2020). Emmer and Sabornie (2015) defined classroom management as “establishing and maintaining order in a group-based educational system whose goals include student learning as well as social and emotional growth” (p. 8). Researchers posited that classroom management involves creating rules where educators present acceptable and unacceptable classroom behaviors (Alter et al., 2017), provide structure (Maag, 2004), and prevent challenging student behaviors (Bicard, 2000). These components form part of an educator’s toolkit for effective classroom management (Freeman et al., 2014; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Studies (Gage et al., 2018; Schiefele, 2017) attribute effective classroom management to teachers who successfully engage and motivate their students. Furthermore, ensuring students’ academic success, especially in early childhood or primary classrooms, relies heavily on effective classroom management (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2017).

### Classroom Management and Social Emotional Learning

Classroom management extends beyond establishing classroom rules and expectations; it encompasses students’ social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL entails acquiring and effectively applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills essential for recognizing and managing emotions; developing care and concern for others; making responsible choices; fostering positive relationships; and navigating challenging situations (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2021). SEL holds significant importance in every classroom (Freiberg et al., 2020) and can impact educators’ classroom management (Edgar, 2017).

In the context of the arts, the Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning Framework (ArtsEdSEL) has been “designed to illuminate the intersection between arts education and social-emotional learning to allow for the intentional application of appropriate teaching and learning strategies” (2022, p. 1). Arts educators incorporating SEL in their daily instruction might emphasize self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (ArtsEdSEL, 2022). The integration of SEL into classroom management practices, particularly for arts teachers, has shown potential for enhancing students’ emotional well-being, interpersonal skills, and cultivating a positive and effective learning environment.

## **Classroom Management and Music Education**

Effective classroom management is of paramount importance for music teachers, just as it is in any other classroom setting. As elementary general music teachers often teach the entire school population (Byo & Sims, 2015; Gardner, 2010) and secondary music teachers contend with larger class sizes, their classroom management skills play a critical role in their classrooms (Haack, 2003). In an examination of nine elementary general music teachers' decision-making processes, Johnson and Matthews (2017) reported that all participants mentioned the importance of classroom management, specifically in planning for transitions between activities, as well as providing clear expectations to their students. In secondary music classrooms, scholars have found that classroom management is an area of concern, while those teachers also acknowledged its value in their instrumental music classrooms (Miksza et al., 2010; Millican, 2009). Classroom management appears vital to any music teachers' success in leading a class of engaged and motivated learners.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for our educational system. The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators to swiftly shift from in-person to online instruction, requiring parents and guardians to adapt to increased involvement in their children's learning (Garbe et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic also had notable effects on student learning (Gülmez & Ordu, 2022), as well as students' behavior and teachers' classroom management (Manea & Gări-Neguț, 2021). Teachers also expressed concern for their students (Kim & Asbury, 2020), experienced difficulties with student engagement and motivation (Francom et al., 2021; Poulain et al., 2021; Sari & Nayir, 2020), and shared their frustration with absenteeism (Gupta et al., 2021).

#### **Classroom Management**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators encountered various challenges in managing their classrooms. Lohmann et al. (2021) found that the shift to online teaching presented difficulties for teachers and students alike, leading them to recommend the adoption of effective practices like setting clear expectations, demonstrating appropriate behavior, and providing explicit feedback to better support students. From an international perspective, Apak et al. (2021) assessed Malaysian teachers' nurturing behavior and readiness for classroom management during the pandemic, revealing a high level of preparedness among teachers. However, those with more teaching experience exhibited greater levels of the ability to nurture their students. Similarly, a study involving sixteen Turkish teachers reported changes in student behavior including difficulties in learning and comprehension, low motivation, socialization challenges, problems related to classroom expectations/rules, and undesirable behaviors during in-person instruction (Gülmez & Ordu, 2022).

### **Music Education**

The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted classroom management in the field of music education. Scholars found that music educators revealed concerns about student engagement, participation, and student-teacher relationships (Daugvilaite, 2021; de Bruin, 2021; Shaw & Mayo, 2021). Music educators often reframed their approaches to classroom management during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to provide more flexibility for their students (Knapp, 2022). Gül (2021) reported that secondary music educators encountered challenges with classroom management and student motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. These disruptions in pedagogical and behavioral aspects of music education demonstrated the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both students and teachers in music classrooms.

Given the existing literature on the behavioral and classroom management challenges faced by secondary music teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, I discovered a gap in research addressing struggles faced by elementary general music teachers. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine elementary general music teachers' experiences and perspectives with classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do elementary general music teachers perceive classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do elementary general music teachers perceive students' behavior within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are elementary general music teachers' needs in terms of classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **METHODOLOGY**

I conducted this collective case study (Stake, 2000) to explore the experiences and perspectives of elementary general music teachers regarding classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this study, I engaged with five elementary general music teachers who took part in three individual interviews, one focus group, and two classroom observations. I bound cases by the participants' teaching location (e.g., Southern California) and the timeline of the Fall 2022 semester.

### **Participants**

The Institutional Review Board at my university granted me permission to conduct this investigation. I utilized convenience sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to recruit participants based on teaching setting (elementary), content area (general music), and location (Southern California). To initiate the recruitment process, I contacted ten potential participants via email, providing them with the study's purpose and an informed consent document. Six participants expressed interest and received detailed study information along with consent forms. However, after one month into the study, one participant withdrew for medical reasons.

Five participants agreed to take part in this study, to whom I assigned pseudonyms. The participant group included Hannah, an elementary general music teacher

with 16 years of teaching experience, who worked at one school site. Hannah's school served children in preschool to sixth grade located in a school district near the U.S.-Mexico border. Eric, an elementary general music teacher in his tenth year of teaching, taught at one school site within a suburban school district. His school served children from transitional kindergarten to fifth grade. According to the California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (2023), transitional kindergarten (TK) is a two-year kindergarten program using a modified kindergarten curriculum suitable for the age and developmental needs of students.

The next three participants worked as itinerant music educators. Jon, a second-year elementary music teacher, instructed students at nine school sites and taught fourth- and fifth-grade general music in an urban school district. His students consisted of those from TK to fifth grade. Jessie, in their second year of teaching elementary general music and elementary choir, taught at eight school sites within the same school district as Jon. These school sites also served students from TK to fifth grade. Lastly, Rachel, in her second year of teaching elementary general music, taught at seven school sites in an urban school district. Rachel instructed students in both elementary general music and elementary choir, ranging from TK to sixth grade. Throughout the study, all participants delivered in-person instruction and engaged with a weekly population ranging from 370 to 800 students. The participants represented five schools spanning three school districts, located in diverse socioeconomic and geographic areas across Southern California.

## Procedure

Upon receiving participants' consent to join this study, I emailed them a Google Form demographic questionnaire in August 2022. The questionnaire encompassed inquiries about their interview format preferences (e.g., in-person, *Zoom*) and availability, which played a crucial role in organizing three individual interviews, one focus group session, and two classroom observations. After a two-week interval, I sent each participant a *Doodle Poll* to schedule our meetings for this study.

I collected data through three interviews, one focus group session, two classroom observations, and an end-of-study reflection Google Form. For the interviews and focus group session, I designed the questions based on the existing literature and my personal experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To structure the interviews and focus group discussions, I followed the "open-the-locks" model (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 144), which involved using both thematic and dynamic questions. I conducted the individual interviews via *Zoom*, and they spanned 45 minutes to one hour each, while the focus group session took approximately one hour.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as they allowed me to adapt to the participants' perspectives, emerging ideas, and the specific context of each interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the Fall 2022 semester, I facilitated three individual interviews to capture participants' perspectives on classroom management at different points within the Fall 2022 semester. In each interview, I posed four to five questions



developed from the literature and my personal experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the first interview, some of the prompts included: *How do you personally define classroom management*, and *how would you describe your students' behavior after the return to in-person instruction?* In the second interview, I asked questions such as: *How do you personally define classroom management*, and *what are your post-pandemic needs in terms of classroom management?* In the third interview, I explored topics such as: *How do you personally define classroom management*, and *do you feel supported in your school(s) regarding behavior and classroom management in the post-pandemic period?*

I opted to include a focus group in this study because it was the most suitable method for obtaining additional data that directly addressed my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus group protocol consisted of several questions, which I developed based on the literature and my personal experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions included: *From your perspective, what are the current, post-pandemic needs of elementary general music teachers regarding student behavior and classroom management; how did your undergraduate music teacher preparation program equip you to handle behavior; and is there anything else you would like to share?*

I conducted two in-person observations (ranging 30-45 minutes) at each participant's school site or selected school. I included classroom observations as they allowed me to gain knowledge about the context and supplied specific incidents and behaviors that could serve as reference points for subsequent interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During these observations, I focused on observing and documenting the physical setting of the classroom, the participants' approaches to classroom management, students' behavior during the class period, and interactions between the participants and their students. For consistency, I observed the same music class (e.g., same grade level, class time) for both observations.

Lastly, I sent the participants an end-of-study reflection, via Google Forms, in December 2022. The form included three prompts: *Do you think there is a connection between one's approach to student behavior, classroom management, and the COVID-19 pandemic; do you think there is a connection between how many schools in which you teach and your approach to student behavior/classroom management; and is there anything else you would like to share?*

## **Analysis**

I transcribed the individual interviews and focus group session, assigning each a distinctive identifier that safeguarded participants' identities, incorporating their initials and years of teaching experience (e.g., HS-16). For the purpose of unraveling the essence of participants' statements, I employed open coding to identify "who, what, when, and where" behind the participants' statements (Gibbs, 2007). In subsequent readings, I utilized axial coding to draw connections between codes and organized them into themes (Creswell, 2012). For the classroom observations, I compiled descriptive field notes to support or refute information from the interviews and focus group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## Trustworthiness

In order to assess trustworthiness, I engaged an expert panel to evaluate the purpose statement, research aims, and interview protocols. This distinguished panel comprised three tenure-track music education faculty members, possessing extensive expertise in qualitative research. Following their thorough review of the study materials, these faculty members provided valuable insights and recommended subtle modifications to certain interview questions, aiming to enhance clarity.

Employing a robust approach, I triangulated data by integrating various sources including interviews, a focus group, analytic notes, and classroom observations. In a conscious effort to mitigate potential threats to the study's validity, I implemented participant validation as recommended by Maxwell (2013). Upon completion of the individual interviews, focus group session, classroom observations, and end-of-study reflection, I sent each participant a summary of our discussions, serving as a mechanism for member checking (Merriam, 2016). I invited participants to thoroughly review these summaries and to provide feedback and/or clarification. All participants provided their approval.

## FINDINGS

In this study, I examined how elementary general music teachers perceived and approached classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. My analysis of the data revealed four themes: positive classroom management, social and emotional learning, support from colleagues and administrators, and challenges. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to the participants, referring to them as Eric, Hannah, Jessie, Jon, and Rachel. Throughout the presentation of the findings, I reference the data sources in the format of one of three individual interviews (e.g., INT1, INT2, INT3), the focus group (FG), or the end-of-study reflection (EOSR).

### Positive Classroom Management

#### Personal Definitions

During their individual interviews and focus group session, participants provided their personal perspectives on classroom management. Rachel defined classroom management as her ability to establish and maintain a positive classroom environment by setting and maintaining clear expectations. She emphasized the importance of feeling confident and having control over the classroom atmosphere (INT1). Hannah described classroom management as an “agreement between the teacher and the students.” She recognized that her classes are unique, and they collaboratively developed and adjusted these agreements throughout the school year as necessary (INT1). Eric viewed classroom management as keeping students engaged, focused, and on-task (INT1). Similarly, Jon’s definition of classroom management encompassed a “constant focus” on behavior while also considering pedagogical aspects such as student engagement, movement, and incorporating games. He emphasized the importance of keeping students actively involved in learning activities, on which he elaborated:



[E]ven if they're getting rowdy, like, they sort of, like, invest in what we're doing. So, if I'm trying to get their attention and they'll be, like, a gazillion [sic] other kids being, like, 'I want to play the game.' But there are some classes that have more of a negative social dynamic with each other because they have so many things going on outside of my class. I like to keep it positive.... It just varies so much (INT1).

### **Proactive Approaches**

Several of the participants noted the importance of being proactive in their approach to student behavior and classroom management. Eric aimed to set up students for success by recognizing their achievements (INT2), while Rachel emphasized the effectiveness of positive reinforcement, particularly for students facing challenges in their home lives. She recognized that yelling at such students would be counterproductive and instead employed de-escalation techniques and restorative justice practices. Rachel found these approaches to be highly beneficial (INT2). Furthermore, Rachel observed that following the transition to in-person instruction, she has developed a proactive mindset, ensuring that she addresses all aspects of classroom management in her classrooms:

I feel like that's something with COVID. These kids don't know how to go to school. They don't know how to make a circle. They don't know how to sit quietly, so I feel like I'm doing everything beforehand. Not just like, 'Okay, let's see if we can make a circle right now' and then fixing it. It's like, 'Okay, on the count of three, I would like us to hold hands' you know? (INT3)

Hannah shared that redirection and reinforcement have been the most effective:

At the beginning of each lesson, we remind each other the way these things have to go. We don't necessarily have to go over these with every class. But, when something like that [off-task] happens, we then go over those agreements that are made at the beginning of the school year... You know, some of them haven't been to school at all until first grade, and that was not necessarily because of COVID, either (INT2).

### **Welcoming Environment**

Participants also recognized the value in cultivating a welcoming and safe classroom environment. Jessie acknowledged how a teacher approaches the atmosphere that you build with your students:

You want the classroom to feel like a welcoming space. So, part of your classroom management strategies is, like, to build that sort of sense of welcome, and that everybody feels like it's safe to take risks, and it's okay to raise their hand and ask a question... That's the sort of [atmosphere] I'm trying to build in my classroom, and I would hope that a lot of teachers would also be trying to build. And, so, classroom management is like the specific things to go into helping to make that happen (INT1).

Eric mentioned the significance of providing a classroom environment where his students are validated and comfortable, while Jessie expressed the importance of speaking to students as people and emphasized that some students "aren't used to being talked to like a human being with feelings (INT2)."

### **Student Engagement**

Additionally, the participants recognized the necessity for student engagement within their classrooms, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jon described the importance of ensuring students are mentally present and engaged (INT3). Hannah discussed how her students have continued to be “on board with the agreements in the classroom,” and further explained, “[w]e understand that, as a class, we make those agreements together, and if there’s a disturbance in those agreements, then we stop and talk about it (INT3).” When teaching online; however, Hannah described that classroom management differed vastly in terms of engagement: “[V]ery few students decided to participate in class, and during the time of online learning, the [music] classes were not considered mandatory. So, the student had a choice of whether or not to attend the class (INT3).”

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

#### **Emotional Stability**

All participants recognized the impact of the COVID-pandemic on students’ social and emotional growth. Eric shared his observation that certain students, especially those who had never experienced in-person instruction before, exhibited behaviors such as running out of the classroom (FG). He noted a discernable decrease in emotional stability among his students, indicating the challenges they faced in managing their emotions.

Jon shared similar experiences in that “students just need to be heard and validated in the [classroom] environment” and he strived to value every student’s voice by giving them room, space, and understanding (INT1). Jessie expressed concern for their students’ behavior:

I noticed it a lot more last year than I have noticed it so far this year, because last year was like the first year back from the [COVID-19] pandemic, and I noticed a lot of, like, students were having, like, social and like interpersonal difficulties, with like engaging with their peers in a healthy way, and, like, being open to collaborating and like working together in the classroom (INT2).

#### **Emotional Well-Being**

Hannah noted that her students’ behavior has been “excellent” this year. She shared that, from the beginning of the school year, she supported their social and emotional well-being, while they “g[ot] to know each other, which [wa]s a really important part of building rapport with the students (FG).” However, some challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic concerned students’ social anxiety related to masking and later being asked to remove their masks in music class, according to Jon:

They haven’t had to socially interact and deal with those sort[s] of physical anxieties. So yeah, more than one of my students, like, didn’t want to take their mask off, not because of safety reasons, but just because of, like, wanting to physically cover their faces (INT1).

## **Classroom Teachers and Administrators**

### **Relationships with Classroom Teachers**

During the interviews and the focus group session, the participants emphasized the significance of support from both classroom teachers and administrators. For example, Eric recalled a challenging situation involving a kindergarten student and highlighted the value of communicating with the student's classroom teacher. He also expressed that he maintained positive relationships with many of the classroom teachers (INT2). Jon described the impact of classroom teachers' attitudes and their willingness, or lack thereof, to work with him in terms of classroom management and behavior:

I have mostly wonderful classroom teachers who are really supportive, who understand the fact that I'm, like, 'Hey, you know it's not a prep time class. So, I do ask you to be there. I'm taking the reins, I understand. Like, it's totally fine if you're on your laptop in the corner working on stuff, but I do ask that you, like, also have a second set of eyes for, like, behavior management, or you know, if I ask a kid to sit by you.' You know that sort of thing (INT2).

### **Differing Management Styles**

Jessie shared similar experiences with trying to be aware of classroom teachers' management styles and how that affected their teaching and approach to student behavior:

[I]t comes down to the classroom teacher, the one who's seeing them every day, and being consistent about it. I can build structure and give them some sense of consistency. But it's just not the same when you only see them once a week (FG).

Jessie also discussed how they have shown more sympathy and empathy for teachers who are struggling to form a welcoming atmosphere, and described having more forgiveness for themselves, as students have not always responded in the same way or some approaches to behavior did not work as intended. They expressed that their shift in perspective has gone from solely focusing on reactive strategies to the relationship-building aspect of classroom management (INT3).

### **Administrators**

Furthermore, participants expressed their need for support from their administration. They underscored the challenges faced by those teaching at multiple sites, where handling students' behavior could be more difficult due to the way in which their administrators have not valued them as credentialed educators. Jon shared that while some principals had been supportive in terms of communication, others did not respond to emails nor saw the importance of the music program (INT2). Jessie echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the desire for more administrative support, particularly in ensuring a classroom teacher's presence in the music room as required, which often did not occur (INT2). Rachel identified her biggest need has been support from administrators in terms of providing supplies:

It's hard to keep their [students'] attention when we're in music, and when there's no instruments, I use videos. I have them moving. We have scarves, and I have things that I personally own, but, like you know, having Boomwhackers having, you know,

just anything, would be super helpful. I put in all my orders, and my schools are just, like, not doing anything at this point. So, I feel like, from a classroom management perspective, I would be really, really hopeful to like, break up a little bit of my curriculum. I think that would help draw in my students, and maybe help with some of those behaviors, and as far as the classroom teachers (INT2).

Eric shared a preference for personally addressing student concerns rather than involving administration (INT2). In contrast, Hannah, who received behavioral support from her current administration, shared gratitude for that assistance as well as the importance placed on arts education in her school (FG).

## Challenges

### Difficult Student Behavior

Jon acknowledged that he faced greater challenges with classroom management at certain school sites, primarily due to more difficult behavioral issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. He found it demanding to constantly adjust to the diverse needs of several hundred students (INT2). Rachel shared one of her most significant challenges pertained to the variation in students' behavior depending on the school site and the classroom teacher's management approach (INT):

I have certain classes that the kids come in, [and] they know exactly what to do. They know how to work with different adults. I have some teachers [who] have an excellent control of their kids when they're in the room, you know, and they're overlooking everything. But the second they leave the room, the kids go crazy, you know? (INT3)

Rachel recounted an incident involving a student who displayed aggressive and violent behavior in music class, including using inappropriate language towards other second graders. In response, she employed restorative justice techniques and maintained a calm demeanor, despite not having all of the necessary background information about the student or the underlying triggers for such behavior (EOSR). On the other hand, Hannah discussed her satisfaction with her current situation but highlighted the ongoing need for support in handling physical violence among students, which she attributed to the pandemic. She shared her concerns about handling older students and her limitations in intervening physically, relying instead on her voice and contacting the front office for assistance. Hannah also mentioned the desire for additional behavioral support and professional development when confronted with situations where students attempt to harm one another (FG).

### Student Engagement and Motivation

Jon observed that, since the return to in-person instruction, students in his music classes tended to be hyperactive, leading to distractions for other students. To address this issue, he has incorporated movement experiences and focused on creating a highly positive learning environment (INT1). Eric discussed the challenge of student behavior, particularly with regard to those who struggled to maintain focus and frequently dis-

rupted the class. He mentioned that a certain student improved by learning and implementing self-regulation skills, although Eric recognized the need for continued social-emotional growth for that student (INT2).

### **Itinerant Issues**

Participants with itinerant positions shared challenges they faced due to teaching at multiple school sites. Jon observed that “students [were] less likely to see the class as a ‘break’ or a fluke if there [was] more consistency across multiple years, a larger swath of the student body, etc. The students t[ook] the class more seriously the more they s[aw] us (INT3).” Rachel agreed, emphasizing the need to put in extra effort in order to build meaningful relationships with students she only saw once per week or even less frequently (INT2).” Eric expressed his perspective:

My current position is at one site which facilitates communication with classroom teachers. I also get to know the parents well because of this, and this helps with communication when they have met me and seen me around campus. In addition, these effects compound together; when a teacher is at many sites, that job is less desirable and is often the only position available to newer teachers. This was the case with my first four years of teaching. The job is not good, so experienced teachers leave, which then opens it up to other inexperienced teachers. The site, which may have had more challenges to begin with, then only has experiences with new teachers. It’s a vicious cycle which often fails to create the community bonds, consistent teaching and expectations which help students thrive (FG).

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study shed light on the participants’ optimistic views on classroom management, the value in fostering relationships with students, the social and emotional difficulties experienced by students, and the diverse challenges encountered by these elementary general music teachers. Through their reflections, the participants provided insights into their experiences with student behavior and classroom management within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that the findings of this study may not be applicable to all elementary general music teachers, given the limited number of participants and their specific demographics.

All participants articulated a student-centered perspective of classroom management, emphasizing the importance of establishing a positive classroom environment and employing proactive approaches (e.g., Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). They also recognized the significance of promoting student engagement (Freiberg et al., 2020; Gage et al., 2018; Schiefele, 2017) and supporting students’ social and emotional growth (Edgar, 2017; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015) as essential components of effective classroom management (Freiberg et al.). The participants seemed particularly focused on these aspects as a result of the challenging experiences of online learning and the transition back to in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A future study could examine personal descriptions of classroom management among K-12 music educators to explore the potential similarities differences among grade level and content areas.



Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants observed social and emotional struggles among their students, influencing their approaches to classroom management. Their approaches aligned with the findings of Apak et al. (2021) who emphasized the care teachers provided to their students. Gülmez and Ordu (2022) suggested that teachers should prioritize supporting students' social and emotional well-being in the "post-pandemic period" (p. 261). The challenges students faced with social and emotional issues could impact student-teacher relationships, a sentiment consistent with the participants in this study, who emphasized the importance of building rapport and interacting with students after the transition to in-person instruction. To support future educators, supplementary instruction focused on SEL, particularly in the context of music instruction, may prove beneficial. It may be worthwhile for a future investigation to explore the potential connection between classroom management in elementary general music and the ArtsEdSEL (2022) framework to examine the relationship between music education and the development of social awareness, self-management, and relationship skills.

Similar to previous studies (e.g., de Bruin, 2021; Gül, 2021; Gülmez & Ordu, 2022; Sari & Nayir, 2020; Shaw & Mayo, 2021), the participants encountered difficulties with student engagement and motivation within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, they discovered ways to proactively approach their students' behavior. Based on their experiences, perhaps those in higher education could model as many positive classroom management approaches as possible, while also providing future music educators with multiple and varied peer teaching opportunities to practice those skills. A future study could examine what current elementary general music teachers believe are necessary skills for future music educators, specifically through the lens of student behavior and classroom management in post-pandemic music classrooms.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent return to in-person instruction, the participants engaged in discussions about the various challenges they encountered with student behavior and classroom management. One specific challenge that emerged pertained to the impact of teaching across multiple school sites, underscoring the differing priorities placed on music education. Similar to the concerns shared in this study, Gardner (2010) found that music teachers have been more likely to teach across multiple school sites as compared to other teachers, while also reporting to several administrators. As in most of the United States, elementary general music often morphed into study hall or other non-musical classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially devaluing the subject and creating challenges for those teaching elementary general music when they returned to in-person instruction. A potential future study could investigate the perspectives of elementary administrators regarding the roles of itinerant elementary general music teachers in their schools.

## CONCLUSION

Classroom management has often been misconstrued as ensuring compliance and maintaining order among students; however, it goes far beyond obedience. Effective classroom management involves creating a positive and engaging learning environment where students feel respected, supported, and motivated to actively participate in their education, while building meaningful relationships, understanding their individual needs, and employing various teaching strategies to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. By nurturing a culture of mutual respect and open communication, music educators can cultivate a vibrant and dynamic classroom community that propels students towards academic success and personal growth, rather than merely seeking compliance.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges that deeply affected both students and teachers. Throughout this study, the participants demonstrated resilience as they navigated the social and emotional struggles faced by their students while striving to maintain a commitment to music education. As music educators collectively move forward from the pandemic, it becomes increasingly important to incorporate these experiences into classroom management practices. To effectively equip future music educators, it is crucial to offer ample field experiences that expose them to diverse classrooms and student populations. These practical experiences could yield firsthand exposure to the unique challenges and dynamics of different educational settings, allowing future teachers to develop adaptable and effective approaches to classroom management.

Additionally, inviting experienced elementary general music teachers to share their experiences with classroom management during and after the COVID-19 pandemic could be beneficial. These insights might provide guidance and serve as a source of inspiration for future educators, fostering a sense of connection and support within the profession. Creating a safe and supportive environment for discussions is another aspect of preparing future music educators. By engaging students in open conversations about potential classroom management scenarios, teacher educators can encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and the development of proactive approaches. These discussions could provide opportunities for students to share their concerns, ask questions, and learn from one another's experiences, enhancing their readiness for real-world classroom situations. By incorporating these approaches into higher education programs, we can ensure that future music educators are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of classroom management in a post-pandemic world.

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