



Journal Website

Article history:

Received 05 March 2025

Revised 28 May 2025

Accepted 04 June 2025

Published online 02 October 2025

International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences

Volume 6, Issue 4, pp 1-9



E-ISSN: 3041-8828

The Effect of Anger Management Skills on School Adjustment Mediated by Emotional Self-Awareness in Children with Conduct Disorder

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Aghaziarati, A. (2025). The Effect of Anger Management Skills on School Adjustment Mediated by Emotional Self-Awareness in Children with Conduct Disorder. *International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences*, 6(4), 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijecs.6.4.8>



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the effect of anger management skills on school adjustment, with emotional self-awareness serving as a mediating variable, in children diagnosed with conduct disorder.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a descriptive correlational design involving 378 children with conduct disorder, aged 10 to 12, selected from elementary schools in Tehran using stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments were used to measure anger management skills, emotional self-awareness, and school adjustment. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients, and AMOS-21 for structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine direct and indirect paths. Assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested and met.

Findings: The results demonstrated that anger management skills had a significant positive effect on school adjustment ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) and on emotional self-awareness ($\beta = .49, p < .001$). Emotional self-awareness also significantly predicted school adjustment ($\beta = .45, p < .001$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of anger management on school adjustment through emotional self-awareness was significant ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), confirming partial mediation. Model fit indices indicated a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.92$, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.048), supporting the validity of the hypothesized model.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the critical role of anger management and emotional self-awareness in promoting school adjustment among children with conduct disorder. Interventions that strengthen both emotion regulation and self-awareness can enhance adaptive functioning in educational settings, suggesting important implications for educators, clinicians, and school psychologists.

Keywords: Anger Management Skills; Emotional Self-Awareness; School Adjustment; Conduct Disorder.

1. Introduction

Children with conduct disorder often face significant challenges in educational settings, not only due to their disruptive behaviors but also because of deeper emotional and cognitive dysfunctions that impair adaptive functioning. School adjustment, defined as the ability to meet academic, social, and behavioral expectations within the school environment, is notably compromised in these children. Numerous studies have indicated that deficits in emotional regulation, particularly poor anger management skills and low emotional self-awareness, play critical roles in shaping these difficulties (Javdan & Morovati, 2020; Lazarus & Costa, 2020). Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing targeted interventions that enhance children's capacity for successful adaptation in school contexts.

School adjustment is a multifaceted construct involving academic performance, peer relationships, and behavioral regulation within classroom dynamics (Echeverría et al., 2025). For children with conduct disorder, adjustment problems often stem from difficulties in managing internal emotional states such as frustration, impulsivity, and aggressive responses to perceived threats or criticisms. Research indicates that children exhibiting high levels of emotional dysregulation are more likely to be rejected by peers, disciplined by teachers, and underperform academically (Ciobanu & БИЧЕВКО, 2024; Samson et al., 2020). The school environment can thus become a setting of recurring failure and negative reinforcement, exacerbating both externalizing behaviors and psychological distress.

Anger management skills—defined as the cognitive-behavioral strategies used to recognize, interpret, and modulate anger responses—have shown promise in helping children regulate aggressive tendencies and reduce conflict-based interactions (Ercan et al., 2025; Lino et al., 2021). Anger in itself is not pathological; rather, it is the maladaptive expression of anger that results in functional impairment. Children with conduct disorder often lack constructive outlets for their emotions, and without appropriate regulation strategies, they may resort to rule-breaking or hostile behavior (Sulaksono et al., 2020). Multiple intervention programs have therefore focused on developing these skills to prevent school failure and antisocial trajectories. For instance, Lazarus and Costa (2020) emphasize teaching emotional self-regulation strategies, including anger control, to foster more adaptive behavior in educational settings (Lazarus & Costa, 2020).

Emotional self-awareness, often referred to as the foundational component of emotional intelligence, involves the ability to perceive and understand one's own emotions. It plays a pivotal mediating role in the relationship between behavioral control and social competence (Huggins et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2024). Self-awareness allows children to identify triggers, monitor internal arousal, and initiate regulatory responses before emotional escalation occurs. In the absence of such insight, negative emotions are more likely to manifest in impulsive and aggressive actions, especially in high-stress social environments like school (Mitsea et al., 2020). Studies also confirm that children who possess higher emotional self-awareness tend to have better academic motivation, fewer behavioral referrals, and more positive peer interactions (Wal et al., 2020).

Empirical research has shown that children with conduct disorder typically score lower on measures of emotional awareness and regulation compared to their typically developing peers (Huggins et al., 2020). This gap in emotional competence often reflects both neurodevelopmental vulnerabilities and environmental factors, such as inconsistent parenting or exposure to chronic stressors (My-Hanh et al., 2022; Nejatifar et al., 2021). For example, My-Hanh et al. (2022) found that Vietnamese children from incomplete families reported elevated emotional dysregulation and higher behavioral problems in school settings (My-Hanh et al., 2022). Similarly, Nejatifar et al. (2021) noted that wisdom-related constructs and emotional insight contribute significantly to psychological well-being and academic vitality, particularly in vulnerable populations like gifted students or those with special educational needs (Nejatifar et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the mediating role of emotional self-awareness in behavioral interventions has received growing scholarly attention. For instance, Oresti and Elengoe (2025) examined how emotional self-awareness predicted social competence in children with chronic illnesses and found that improving self-awareness was significantly associated with better peer relationships and classroom conduct (Oresti & Elengoe, 2025). In a related study, Chung et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotionally focused robotic interventions could enhance emotional recognition and self-awareness in children with autism, leading to improved school behavior and engagement (Chung et al., 2024). Such evidence suggests that emotional self-awareness is not merely a trait but a trainable skill that can serve as a protective factor in developmental psychopathology.

In the Iranian context, scholars have also underscored the importance of culturally adapted emotional training programs. Aghaziarati et al. (2022) developed and validated a parenting intervention designed to reduce conflict and foster emotional peace within families of children with hearing loss, showing cross-applicability of emotional skill-building even in diverse clinical populations (Aghaziarati et al., 2022). Similarly, Dewi et al. (2024) reported positive outcomes from early detection and intervention programs targeting behavioral and emotional disorders in elementary school students, reinforcing the critical role of school-based mental health services (Dewi et al., 2024). These findings support the need for emotional literacy as a public health priority within educational systems.

Recent scholarship further supports the implementation of socio-emotional learning (SEL) interventions, especially for children at risk. Echeverría et al. (2025) conducted a longitudinal study on a psychoeducational program in Spain and found consistent improvement in children's social-emotional development, regardless of gender or socio-economic status (Echeverría et al., 2025). Likewise, Thanh et al. (2021) emphasized the need for early emotional education for children with autism spectrum disorder, citing that emotional knowledge acquisition was strongly linked to reductions in disruptive behavior and increases in classroom cooperation (Thanh et al., 2021).

An important aspect of promoting school adjustment lies in reducing maladaptive emotional tendencies through educational reform and psychological services. Shulzhenko (2024) highlighted that training special education professionals in emotional pedagogy can significantly enhance their effectiveness in guiding emotionally dysregulated students (Shulzhenko, 2024). Moreover, intervention studies that use emotion-centered curricula have shown benefits beyond academic outcomes, improving life satisfaction and social integration among children with a range of developmental and behavioral disorders (Iqbal, 2022).

Taken together, the literature reveals a coherent model: anger management skills reduce behavioral difficulties, emotional self-awareness enables internal regulation, and both serve as pathways toward improved school adjustment. The triadic relationship among these variables is particularly relevant in children with conduct disorder, who experience pervasive emotional-behavioral challenges that interfere with normative development. As such, this study aims to examine the direct effect of anger management skills on

school adjustment and the mediating role of emotional self-awareness in this relationship.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the effect of anger management skills on school adjustment, mediated by emotional self-awareness, in children diagnosed with conduct disorder. A total of 378 children aged between 10 and 12 years were selected using stratified random sampling from elementary schools in Tehran. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie table (1970), ensuring adequate statistical power for correlation and structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses. All participants met the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder as confirmed by school counselors and clinical psychologists. Inclusion criteria included: diagnosis of conduct disorder, age between 10 and 12, and informed parental consent. Exclusion criteria involved comorbid neurological disorders or cognitive impairments that could interfere with test participation.

2.2. Measures

To assess school adjustment in children with conduct disorder, the School Adjustment Subscale of the California Test of Personality (CTP), originally developed by Thorpe, Clark, and Tiegs (1953), was used. This subscale evaluates how well a student adapts to the academic and social environment of the school and includes items addressing peer relationships, attitudes toward teachers, classroom behavior, and general comfort in school settings. The subscale comprises 20 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale (Yes, ?, No), with higher scores indicating better school adjustment. Validity and reliability of the CTP and its subscales have been confirmed in various populations, including in Iran. For example, research by Jalilvand and colleagues (2016) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80 for this subscale, indicating high internal consistency and cultural appropriateness for Iranian students.

Anger management skills were measured using the Anger Control subscales from the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2), developed by Spielberger (1999). This well-established tool assesses how individuals manage and regulate anger, particularly through the Anger Control-In and Anger Control-Out subscales, which together include

16 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 4 (Almost Always). These subscales reflect the individual's efforts to control the experience and expression of anger in adaptive ways. The STAXI-2 has been translated and validated in Iran by Khodayari Fard and colleagues (2010), showing excellent psychometric properties including test-retest reliability ($r = 0.81$) and internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.85$).

Emotional self-awareness was evaluated using the Emotional Self-Awareness subscale of the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), developed by Schutte et al. (1998). This subscale assesses the individual's ability to recognize and understand their own emotional states and includes 8 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The EIS and its subscales have been widely used across different cultures and have demonstrated strong psychometric properties. In Iran, the EIS was adapted and validated by Samouei and colleagues (2011), who reported satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) and construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis, making it a reliable tool for assessing emotional competencies in Iranian children.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were calculated for demographic

variables and key study constructs. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to assess the bivariate relationships between anger management skills, emotional self-awareness, and school adjustment. Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypothesized mediating model, using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS. Model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square/df ratio were examined to assess the adequacy of the proposed model.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 378 participants, 191 (50.5%) were boys and 187 (49.5%) were girls. In terms of parental education, 142 mothers (37.6%) and 129 fathers (34.1%) had completed a bachelor's degree, while 106 mothers (28.0%) and 119 fathers (31.4%) held a high school diploma. Additionally, 62 mothers (16.4%) and 73 fathers (19.3%) had obtained postgraduate degrees, and the remaining parents had lower levels of education. Regarding family income, 139 participants (36.8%) reported a monthly household income below 80 million IRR, 173 (45.8%) reported 80–150 million IRR, and 66 (17.5%) reported over 150 million IRR. This demographic distribution suggests adequate heterogeneity for generalizing the findings within the urban context of Tehran.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Research Variables (N = 378)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
School Adjustment	72.34	8.41
Anger Management Skills	64.27	7.96
Emotional Self-Awareness	28.53	5.62

The descriptive analysis presented in Table 1 shows that the mean score for school adjustment was 72.34 ($SD = 8.41$), suggesting a moderately high level of school adaptation among the participants. Anger management skills had a mean of 64.27 ($SD = 7.96$), indicating an above-average tendency to regulate anger effectively. Emotional self-awareness scored an average of 28.53 ($SD = 5.62$), reflecting moderate self-awareness capacities among the children with conduct disorder.

Before conducting the main analyses, assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were examined. Skewness and kurtosis values for all

variables ranged between -1.07 and $+0.94$, indicating acceptable levels of univariate normality. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was non-significant for most variables ($p > .05$), supporting normal distribution. Pearson scatterplots confirmed linear relationships among the key variables. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were all below 2.1, and Tolerance values exceeded 0.48, indicating no concerns for multicollinearity. Homoscedasticity was confirmed through visual inspection of standardized residual plots. These findings ensured the suitability of the data for correlation and SEM analyses.

Table 2*Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Main Variables (N = 378)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. School Adjustment	—		
2. Anger Management Skills	.58** (p < .001)	—	
3. Emotional Self-Awareness	.63** (p < .001)	.49** (p < .001)	—

As shown in Table 2, school adjustment was positively and significantly correlated with both anger management skills ($r = .58, p < .001$) and emotional self-awareness ($r = .63, p < .001$). Additionally, there was a significant positive

correlation between anger management skills and emotional self-awareness ($r = .49, p < .001$). These results support the hypothesized relationships among the variables and justify the use of structural equation modeling.

Table 3*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
Chi-square (χ^2)	138.24	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	72	—
χ^2/df	1.92	< 3.00
GFI	0.94	> 0.90
AGFI	0.91	> 0.90
CFI	0.96	> 0.95
RMSEA	0.048	< 0.06
TLI	0.95	> 0.95

The model fit indices in Table 3 indicate that the proposed structural model fits the data well. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 138.24, df = 72$) with a ratio of $\chi^2/df = 1.92$ falls within the acceptable range. Other indices such as GFI (0.94), AGFI (0.91), CFI (0.96), and TLI (0.95) all meet or exceed

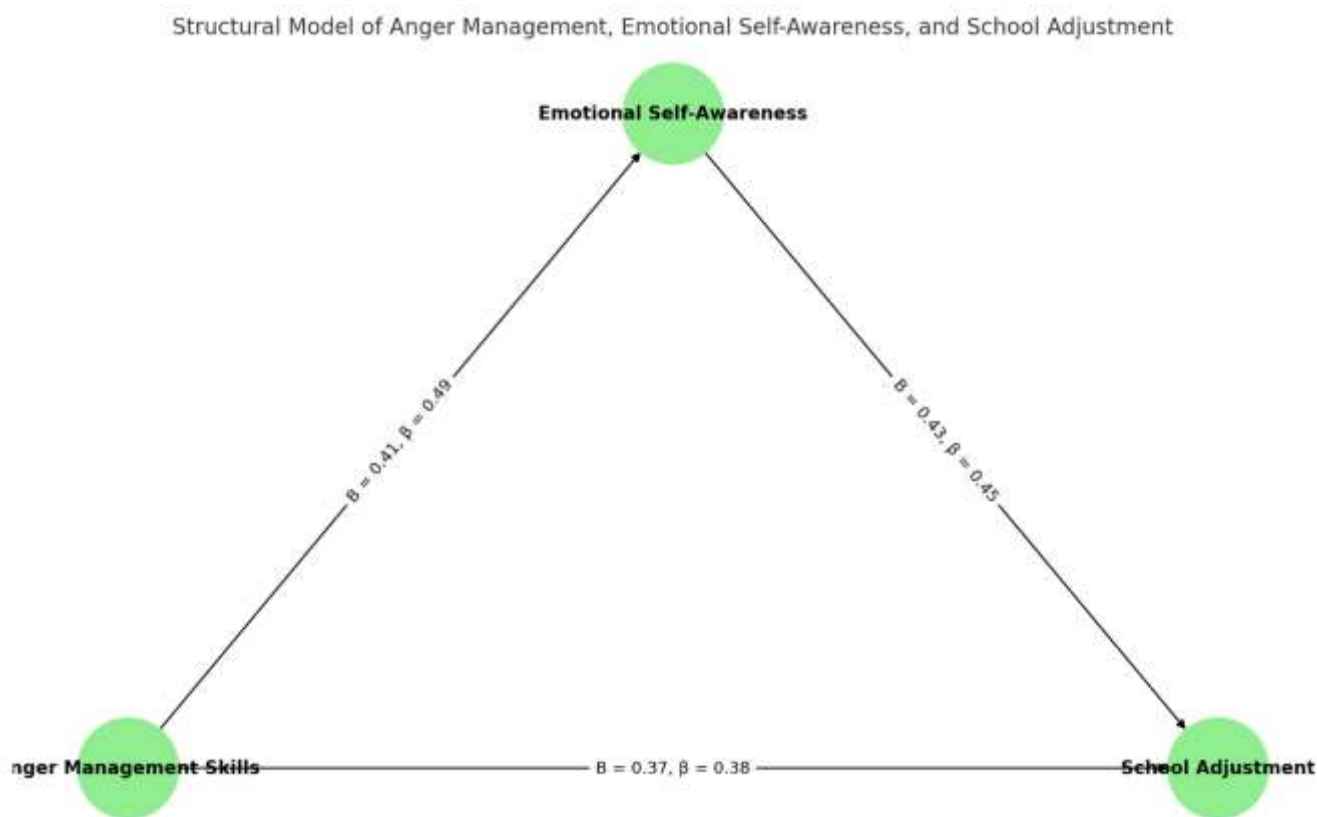
conventional cutoffs. The RMSEA value of 0.048 also suggests a good model fit, indicating that the model is appropriate for explaining the relationships among the study variables.

Table 4*Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model*

Path	B	S.E	β	p
Anger Management → School Adjustment	0.37	0.06	.38	< .001
Anger Management → Self-Awareness	0.41	0.05	.49	< .001
Self-Awareness → School Adjustment	0.43	0.07	.45	< .001
Anger Management → School Adjustment (Indirect via Self-Awareness)	0.18	0.04	.22	< .001
Total Effect: Anger Management → School Adjustment	0.55	—	.60	< .001

The structural path coefficients presented in Table 4 support the hypothesized relationships among the variables. The direct path from anger management skills to school adjustment was significant ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), indicating a substantial predictive relationship. Anger management also significantly predicted emotional self-awareness ($\beta = .49, p < .001$), which in turn significantly predicted school

adjustment ($\beta = .45, p < .001$). The indirect effect of anger management on school adjustment through emotional self-awareness was also statistically significant ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), confirming partial mediation. The total effect of anger management skills on school adjustment (direct + indirect) was strong ($\beta = .60, p < .001$), indicating that both direct influence and mediation pathways play critical roles.

Figure 1*Final Model*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study confirmed the hypothesized structural model in which anger management skills significantly predicted school adjustment in children with conduct disorder, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of emotional self-awareness. The direct path from anger management skills to school adjustment was statistically significant, indicating that children who possess higher levels of anger regulation skills are more likely to adapt successfully in academic and social school contexts. Additionally, the indirect effect through emotional self-awareness was also significant, highlighting its partial mediating role. This suggests that while anger management independently contributes to school adjustment, its effectiveness is enhanced when accompanied by a strong capacity for recognizing and understanding one's own emotions.

These results align with existing literature emphasizing the pivotal role of emotional competencies in promoting adaptive functioning in educational settings. For instance,

Lazarus and Costa (2020) emphasized the value of teaching emotional self-regulation strategies, such as anger control and mindfulness, in enhancing social and academic outcomes for children with behavioral disorders (Lazarus & Costa, 2020). Our findings further support the view that anger management is not merely a behavioral intervention but a developmental skill that, when integrated with emotional awareness, significantly improves overall school functioning.

The mediating role of emotional self-awareness found in our study corroborates the findings of Huggins et al. (2020), who conducted a meta-analysis showing that children with lower emotional self-awareness—especially those with neurodevelopmental or behavioral disorders—exhibit greater difficulties in social adjustment and learning environments (Huggins et al., 2020). Similarly, Ismail et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotional self-awareness among children, even those raised by single parents in vulnerable regions, was a strong predictor of social competence and behavioral compliance in school environments (Ismail et al., 2024). In our study, the strength of emotional self-awareness

as a mediator suggests that emotion-based interventions can increase the effectiveness of behavioral programs aimed at conduct-disordered youth.

This relationship is further supported by findings from studies focused on special populations. Chung et al. (2024) found that robotic-assisted emotional training for children with autism improved their emotion recognition skills and translated into more positive classroom behavior and peer engagement (Chung et al., 2024). Our results echo this, reinforcing that internal emotional competencies directly impact external behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Thanh et al. (2021) showed that emotional knowledge training in children with autism significantly reduced classroom behavioral issues and enhanced peer communication skills (Thanh et al., 2021). Emotional self-awareness thus appears to serve as a cross-diagnostic protective factor for school functioning.

In the specific case of children with conduct disorder—whose characteristic symptoms include aggression, defiance, and emotional impulsivity—the importance of emotional self-awareness becomes even more salient. Samson et al. (2020) argued that emotional competence, including emotional recognition and labeling, acts as a buffer against the development of internalizing and externalizing symptoms across various developmental disorders (Samson et al., 2020). The fact that this pattern emerged in our structural model supports the theoretical framework that views emotion regulation as a central developmental skill and not a peripheral behavioral tool.

Interestingly, our findings also complement the culturally specific work of Aghaziarati et al. (2022), who emphasized the value of peaceful parenting strategies in enhancing children's emotional competencies in Iran (Aghaziarati et al., 2022). Their model, while targeting hearing-impaired children, reinforced the value of emotional awareness in the family context as a precursor to school adjustment. Likewise, the early screening and school-based programs documented by Dewi et al. (2024) found that early intervention in emotion-related behaviors was significantly associated with improved classroom adaptation in elementary schools (Dewi et al., 2024). Our findings add to this body of knowledge by showing that emotional awareness is not only a target for early intervention but also a key mechanism explaining how anger control skills translate into broader academic and behavioral success.

The study also contributes to the emerging literature on the role of emotion-focused interventions across diverse educational settings. Echeverría et al. (2025) found that

psychoeducational programs promoting social-emotional development were equally effective across gender and socioeconomic groups in Spain, pointing to the universality of emotional self-awareness as a developmental asset (Echeverría et al., 2025). Moreover, Ciobanu (2024) emphasized that emotional development in children with speech or communication difficulties could be significantly enhanced through targeted psychological assistance (Ciobanu & БИЧЕНКО, 2024), a finding that aligns with our results on the positive role of emotional awareness in diverse learner populations.

In addition to individual-level benefits, the findings have implications at the institutional level. Shulzhenko (2024) highlighted that the emotional competency of teachers and special educators is integral to managing emotionally dysregulated students, especially those with special educational needs (Shulzhenko, 2024). Accordingly, schools that invest in the emotional development of both staff and students are more likely to see improvements in classroom management, peer relations, and academic motivation. Our results support this notion and suggest that school-wide policies that foster emotional literacy could be particularly effective for conduct-disordered students.

The interplay of anger management and emotional awareness also finds support in more specific studies. Ercan et al. (2025), while studying gaming addiction among gifted youth, identified emotional competence as a key protective factor against maladaptive behaviors (Ercan et al., 2025). Similarly, Iqbal (2022) demonstrated that bodily awareness and emotional perception (interoception) in children with autism was significantly correlated with reduced maladaptive behavior (Iqbal, 2022). These findings collectively reinforce the role of emotion-focused awareness as a mechanism for behavioral modulation.

Moreover, emotional dysregulation and poor school adjustment in conduct-disordered children can also be linked to broader social and psychological contexts. Lino et al. (2021) reported that emotional instability in children during the COVID-19 pandemic led to heightened behavioral problems, which were moderated by emotional literacy and family support structures (Lino et al., 2021). Similarly, My-Hanh et al. (2022) documented how children from incomplete families exhibited increased behavioral disorders due to a lack of emotional scaffolding at home (My-Hanh et al., 2022). The present study adds to this discourse by highlighting emotional self-awareness as a critical developmental mechanism that bridges emotion regulation

and school success, particularly for children from high-risk environments.

Finally, the findings of this study support the integration of emotional self-awareness training into school-based behavioral interventions. As Mitsea et al. (2020) argue, innovative technologies such as mindfulness robots and metacognitive tools can be utilized in teaching emotional literacy to children with developmental disorders (Mitsea et al., 2020). Additionally, Wal et al. (2020) found that self-focused emotional reflection significantly improved emotional recognition in adolescents with eating disorders, indicating that emotional awareness training can generalize across psychological conditions (Wal et al., 2020). Together, these findings suggest that emotion-centered approaches are scalable and versatile in addressing emotional and behavioral dysregulation in school-aged children.

Despite its important contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between anger management skills, emotional self-awareness, and school adjustment. Although structural equation modeling offers insight into the relationships among variables, longitudinal data would provide stronger evidence of temporal precedence. Second, the study relies on self-report and teacher-report instruments, which may be subject to bias, particularly in populations with behavioral disorders who may struggle with self-perception or honesty. Third, while the sample size was statistically adequate, participants were drawn from urban schools in Tehran, limiting generalizability to rural or culturally different populations.

Future studies should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal links and assess the long-term impact of anger management and emotional awareness training on school outcomes. Researchers could also investigate the role of contextual moderators such as family dynamics, teacher-student relationships, or socioeconomic status. Moreover, future research should expand to include qualitative data such as interviews or classroom observations to gain deeper insights into how emotional competencies are enacted in daily school life. Comparative studies across different cultural or educational systems could further illuminate universal versus context-specific patterns.

Practitioners, including school counselors, psychologists, and educators, should prioritize integrated emotional literacy programs that simultaneously target anger management and emotional self-awareness. Training workshops for teachers on how to recognize and support emotional development in

behaviorally challenged children could be highly beneficial. Schools should consider incorporating regular emotional skills assessments as part of mental health screening and intervention planning. Additionally, involving parents in the emotional development process through family-based workshops may reinforce gains made in school settings and create a more holistic support system for children with conduct disorder.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We hereby thank all individuals for participating and cooperating us in this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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