

# Hand Signal: Aid in Classroom Management

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## ABSTRACT

Disruptive behavior among junior high school students poses a challenge to effective instruction and classroom management. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a hand signal system in minimizing such behaviors during Social Studies classes. Using a descriptive research method, data were gathered from 160 students through a Google Forms survey. Results showed that most students correctly identified the hand signals, and agreed that the system effectively reduced classroom disruptions and enhanced communication. Some students, however, struggled to recall or differentiate the signals. It is recommended to reinforce the system through visible infographics and regular reminders to support consistent use.

**Keywords:** hand signal, aid, classroom management, non-verbal communication, disruptive behavior

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most prevalent issues of teachers in the classroom that affect the class is students' disruptive behaviors. These disruptive behaviors can be in the form of students suddenly asking questions that interfere with the teacher's discussion, talking with their seatmates, and going out of the classroom to use the restroom or go to the clinic. Disruptive behavior is considered one of the most crucial problems in education (Atmojo & Surakarta, 2020). The Junior High School Department follows the dynamic learning program, which requires teachers to limit their discussion to a maximum of 30 minutes, or 40 minutes if possible. With this, teachers only have limited time to discuss the lesson of the day before proceeding to a new lesson or activity. Teachers are challenged to finish discussing the lesson, which also contributes to them not being able to follow what they have planned for the day. It has been observed that some students in the junior high school department do not know how to properly behave in the classroom, especially during a classroom discussion.

The ideal situation is that students should behave properly in a classroom not only during the discussion but throughout the session. This helps the teacher to follow what they had planned for the day and to ensure that students understand the lesson provided by the teacher. With this, teachers should promote effective classroom management because this encourages students to thrive, dedicate themselves to their studies, and behave properly (Spencer, 2018).

The possible reasons for the discrepancy between the ideal and actual scenarios are: 1) no clear rules set in the classroom. Setting clear rules is an important process, as it sets the tone and behavior of the students. This guides students on what is expected of them and what the possible consequences are if these rules are not followed; and 2) no feedback from the teachers regarding their disruptive behavior. Students will most likely behave the same way if their disruptive behaviors are not corrected. Teachers are expected to correct students' behavior in a way that makes them aware of whether their behavior is acceptable or not.

Despite the interventions of teachers regarding students' disruptive behavior in the classroom, there are still some students who do not behave properly. As a result, this research looked for more ways to address these behaviors by implementing the hand signal. A hand signal is a movement of a person's hands that means something (Merriam-Webster, 2024). The hand signal was used during Social Studies class time. Each finger was assigned a corresponding action: one (👉) for question, two (👌) to answer the question, three (✌️) to use the restroom, four (👏) for clinic use, and zero (👋) for quiet. Moreover, this research sought to answer the following questions: If the hand signal implemented has corresponding actions, will it be easy for the students

to remember what those actions are? And, if the hand signal is implemented during Social Studies time, will it help students lessen their disruptive behavior during class?

Having hand signals in the classroom could not only help students who are less likely to use verbal communication become more active, but could also offer another avenue of expression, and serve as a feedback mechanism for teachers to enhance instruction (Niehaus, 2022). This aligns with findings that show how nonverbal strategies can reduce noise, enhance coordination, and maintain classroom flow—further supporting their role in effective classroom management (Reading Rockets, 2022).

The goals of this action research are the following:

1. determine whether the students know the different hand signals;
2. determine whether the newly implemented hand signal rule helps reduce disruptive behavior in the classroom;
3. determine student's evaluation of the effectiveness of the hand signal; and
4. gather suggestions from the students on how to improve the implementation of the hand signal.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing hand signals as a non-verbal classroom management strategy among junior high school students. Descriptive research is suitable for systematically describing a situation or area of interest without manipulating variables, making it appropriate for assessing students' responses to the hand signal implementation (Cambaya & Paglinawan, 2024).

### Participants and Sampling

The study targeted students from Grades 7, 8, and 10. A convenience sampling method was utilized, selecting participants who were readily accessible through their official Google Classroom platforms. A total of 160 students voluntarily participated in the survey.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a Google Forms-based questionnaire, which allowed for efficient distribution and collection of responses. Google Forms is recognized for its user-friendly interface and effectiveness in educational settings, facilitating quick data collection and analysis (Radhaswati & Santosa, 2022). An orientation session was conducted on August 9, 2024, to introduce students to the hand signal system. The hand signals were defined as follows:

- 🖐️ (One finger) – Ask a question
- ✌️ (Two fingers) – Answer a question
- 🖐️ (Three fingers) – Use the restroom
- 🖐️ (Four fingers) – Go to the clinic
- 🤞 (Closed fist) – Be quiet

The implementation phase spanned from August to September 2024, during which the hand signals were integrated into Social Studies classes. Non-verbal communication methods, such as hand signals, have been shown to support classroom management by minimizing disruptions and improving clarity of interaction

(Munir et al., 2023). The survey phase was conducted on September 26–27, 2024, after several weeks of implementation. The survey instrument consisted of three parts:

- Part I: Preliminaries – Collected basic information such as student email (optional), grade level, and section.
- Part II: Hand Signal Identification – Included multiple-choice questions requiring students to match each hand signal (numbered 0–4) to its corresponding classroom action, assessing their understanding of the hand signals.
- Part III: Student Feedback – Comprised open-ended questions designed to gather qualitative insights on how the hand signals helped them in the classroom, their perceived effectiveness, and suggestions for improvement.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data from Part II were analyzed using descriptive statistics to measure the frequency and percentage of correct responses. Qualitative responses in Part III were subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes in students' comments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive understanding of both the outcomes and student perspectives.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Participation was voluntary, and student responses were kept anonymous and confidential.

## RESULTS

Table I: Total Number of Percentage of Participants from Grades 7, 8 and 10 students

Grade Level	Section	Percentage of Participants (%)
7	Joy	9.4
7	Love	8.2
7	Peace	8.2
7	Wisdom	8.8
8	Faith	11.3
8	Kindness	10.1
8	Obedience	12.5
8	Patience	9.3
10	Generosity	8.1
10	Honesty	6.8
10	Humility	6.2
10	Loyalty	1.9

Based on the survey conducted using Google Forms, a total of one hundred sixty (160) students from Grades 7, 8, and 10 participated in this action research. The distribution of respondents by grade level and section is

summarized in Table 1. Among the participants, 9.4% were from Grade 7-Joy, 8.8% from Grade 7-Wisdom, and 8.2% each from Grade 7-Love and Grade 7-Peace. From Grade 8, 12.5% were from Obedience, 11.3% from Faith, 10.1% from Kindness, and 9.3% from Patience. For Grade 10, 8.1% were from Generosity, 6.8% from Honesty, 6.2% from Humility, and 1.9% from Loyalty. This data reflects a well-distributed representation across the three grade levels, with the highest participation coming from Grade 8 sections, particularly Grade 8-Obedience.

Research Goal 1: determine whether the students know the different hand signals

Table II: Hand Signal Identification result

Action	Hand Signal 1 (%)	Hand Signal 2 (%)	Hand Signal 3 (%)	Hand Signal 4 (%)	Hand Signal 0 (%)
Go to the clinic	5.7	3.4	9.2	74.4	8.8
Ask question/s	62.6	24.4	5	6.5	0.8
Be quiet	9.2	0.0	1.9	4.2	84.4
Answer the question/s given	19.5	65.3	5.3	6.1	3.8
Go to the restroom	3.1	6.5	78.6	8.8	2.3

Table II shows the results that the majority of respondents were familiar with the meaning of the five hand signals, with recognition rates ranging from 65.7% to 86.3%. Notably, Hand Signal Zero (👏), which means “be quiet,” had the highest correct identification rate at 86.3%, suggesting it is the most easily recognized and understood among the set. This is followed closely by Hand Signal Three (🚻) for “go to the restroom” at 78.9% and Hand Signal Four for “go to the clinic” at 77.1%, both of which also showed high levels of respondent familiarity. Hand Signal Two (🙋), which signifies “answer the given question/s,” was correctly identified by 69.1% of respondents, while Hand Signal One (🙋) for “ask question/s” had the lowest but still majority recognition at 65.7%. These findings reflect a generally strong awareness and understanding of the hand signal system among the respondents, which complements the identification accuracy results shown in Table II. When paired with the system’s effectiveness in correctly associating signals with their corresponding actions—such as the 84.4% recognition of Hand Signal Zero for “be quiet” and the 78.6% for Hand Signal Three to “go to the restroom”—it is evident that both recognition and usage are aligned.

Research Goal 2: determine whether the newly implemented hand signal rule helps reduce disruptive behavior in the classroom

Table III: Themes and Core Ideas on how hand signals help students in Grade 7, 8, and 9 in the classroom

Themes	Core Ideas
Reduced classroom disturbance	Allow students to communicate needs without speaking, reducing noise and disruption during class
Ease and Clarity of Communication	Each hand signal has a specific meaning in which teachers can respond more efficiently and understand what the student needs
Non-verbal nature of the system	Students, especially those who are shy or soft-spoken, are able to express themselves silently

One dominant theme that emerged is the idea of reduced classroom disturbance. Students frequently noted that using hand signals allowed them to communicate their needs—such as going to the restroom or asking questions—without verbally interrupting the lesson. A Grade 7 student mentioned, “So that I could not disturb the class by going near the teacher and ask, instead I just raise my three finger to go to the bathroom.” Similarly, a Grade 8 student shared, “This hand signal helps me in the classroom because I don't have to say anything, I just need to do a specific hand signal.” These responses reflect a shift from verbal, potentially disruptive behavior to silent, structured communication.

Another theme observed is the ease and clarity of communication. Students found the system helpful in expressing their intentions more efficiently. A Grade 10 student described it as “a quick and easy way of communication that is fast and easily understood,” while another noted that it made communication “less awkward.” These responses suggest that the hand signal rule not only reduces disruptions but also enhances the comfort and confidence of students in expressing their needs.

Furthermore, students highlighted the non-verbal nature of the system as a key benefit. One Grade 8 response emphasized that the system allows “a non-verbal way of immediate communication,” which supports a smoother classroom flow without verbal interruptions. The consistent feedback across all grade levels shows that the rule is both understood and valued by students, with many appreciating that it allows them to participate or seek assistance without drawing attention or breaking the classroom focus.

Research Goal 3: determine student’s evaluation of the effectiveness of the hand signal

Table IV: Themes and Core Ideas on the effectiveness of the use of hand signals

Themes	Core Ideas
Minimizing Disruptions	Hand signals reduce noise and interruptions during class discussions
System’s Ability to Support Quiet and Orderly Communication	Hand signals provide a clear, quick, and silent way to communicate needs (e.g., asking to go to the restroom, wanting to speak), and teachers can continue teaching without pausing to address verbal interruptions.
System’s role in encouraging better classroom behavior	Students become more aware of their actions and needs

A recurring theme was minimizing disruptions. Many students acknowledged that the hand signals allowed them to express their needs—such as using the restroom, asking questions, or requesting silence—without interrupting the lesson or distracting others. For instance, one Grade 9 student noted that the strategy is effective because “there’s less disturbance in class,” while a Grade 7 respondent shared that using hand signals helped make discussions more efficient and uninterrupted, thereby potentially enhancing learning outcomes.

Another notable theme was the system’s ability to support quiet and orderly communication. Students from all levels appreciated that hand signals offer a way to communicate non-verbally, helping them avoid speaking out loud or drawing unnecessary attention. A Grade 8 student mentioned that they could raise a specific signal without disrupting the class, while a Grade 10 student described the system as “non-verbal but effective,” highlighting its practical use in real classroom situations.

The hand signal system was also seen as a tool that improves understanding between students and teachers. Students shared that the clear, structured signals helped teachers quickly interpret their needs, whether they were asking a question or indicating a request. This shared understanding contributed to a more organized and responsive classroom environment.

In addition, students noted the system’s role in encouraging better classroom behavior. A few Grade 7 students emphasized that it made students more cooperative and less likely to act out in class, while others expressed that it helped maintain the teacher’s authority and the flow of lessons.



Research Goal 4: gather suggestions from the students on how to improve the implementation of the hand signal

Table V: Themes and Core Ideas on suggestions from the students regarding the use of hand signals in the classroom

Themes	Core Ideas
Visual Reinforcements	Students need visual references like posters or infographics to help remember hand signals
Practice and Routine	Consistent practice and using hand signals across subjects can help build habits and discipline
Expansion and Innovation	Introducing new or additional hand signals can improve understanding and make the system more effective

One prominent theme is the need for visual reinforcements. Students emphasized that having posters or infographics displayed in the classroom could help them recall the meaning of each hand signal, especially for those who tend to forget. A Grade 7 student mentioned, “Put up a poster about the different hand signals so people won’t forget... it’ll certainly help those who are attentive and forgot.” Similarly, a Grade 10 student suggested, “Kindly print out a small infographic containing the hand signals and its meanings and please stick it to the whiteboard, if possible :)”. These responses highlight how visual cues could serve as constant, accessible reminders for all students.

Another recurring theme is the importance of practice and routine. Students believe that hand signals would become more effective if they are used consistently across different subjects and integrated into daily classroom activities. One Grade 7 student noted, “Apply this hand signals to other subjects so it’s easier to memorize if we do it regularly,” emphasizing the value of repetition. A Grade 8 student echoed this idea, saying, “Really practice the students to get used to this so that they can be more disciplined.” These comments reflect a shared understanding that regular practice will lead to better retention and more disciplined use of the system.

Finally, the theme of expansion and innovation also emerged. Some students proposed introducing new or additional hand signals to improve clarity or adapt the system to different needs. A Grade 8 student suggested, “Add a fifth hand signal like this 🖐,” while a Grade 10 student recommended, “Make something to help the students remember the hand signals.” These ideas show that students are not only thinking about how to maintain the current system but are also looking for ways to enhance it further.

## DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to determine students’ familiarity with, perceived usefulness and effectiveness of, and suggestions regarding the use of hand signals in the classroom. Findings indicate that students across various grade levels generally perceive hand signals as a beneficial non-verbal communication tool that facilitates smoother classroom interactions. Aside from that, the system minimizes disruptions, supports respectful behavior, and allows for clearer communication between teachers and students. These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the significance of non-verbal communication in educational settings. For instance, Kesevan, Madzlan, and Hashim (2020) highlighted that teachers’ use of non-verbal cues, such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, plays a fundamental role in shaping classroom interactions and enhancing students’ understanding of lesson content. Their study concluded that non-verbal behaviors are essential in achieving teaching and learning goals, as they provide additional context and clarity to verbal instructions. This supports the current study’s findings that students value hand signals as tools that aid comprehension and classroom management. Additionally, a study by Šerić (2021) examined the relationship between teacher non-verbal communication and student behavior across different cultural contexts. The

research found that effective use of non-verbal cues, including hand gestures, significantly influences student engagement and behavior, reinforcing the importance of such strategies in diverse classroom settings. Additionally, Rasul, et al., (2021) explored the use of non-verbal communication in pedagogic practices at public high schools in Lahore. Their findings emphasized that gestures and other non-verbal signals enhance the clarity of instructional content, making it more comprehensible for students. This aligns with the current study's observation that students find hand signals helpful in understanding and following classroom instructions.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is believed that the hand signal used in the classroom specifically during Social Studies discussion is an effective non-verbal communication tool that significantly reduces disruptive behavior. The majority of students correctly identified and used the hand signals, with the highest percentage for the “be quiet” signal (👏), which had an accuracy rate of 86.3%. The students also expressed that the use of the hand signal improved the flow of class discussions by reducing noise, speeding up teacher coordination, and minimizing distractions, particularly during tests or focusing on activities provided. The use of the signals led to a more quiet classroom and smooth classroom management. However, some students, as revealed in the results, were having difficulty remembering or differentiating the signals, which resulted in them going back to the traditional methods of communication.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the followings recommendations were made:

- (i) Post an infographic/poster about the hand signal to address confusion to some students and allow students to recall the signals more easily.
- (ii) Frequent reminders from the teachers to the students about the hand signal until it becomes a habit, and reduces the chances of students forgetting or mixing the signals.
- (iii) Adding a new hand signal to address other classroom needs not included in the implemented hand signal.
- (iv) Incorporate hand signal in the other subjects for students to easily remember the signals.

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