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Development of Social Skills: A Study Comparing Male and Female Students' Social Skills in Public Schools of Lahore

Abstract

The study explored the developed social skills between male and female students at the elementary level. A total of 550 Students were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling in the district of Lahore. Explored social skills included accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights & responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences. A scale consisting of sixty-nine items was developed and standardized through factor analysis. The instrument was checked and ensured for reliability measures using Cronbach's Alpha ($r = .75, p < .05$). Five factors were identified through exploratory factor analysis using the principal component matrix measuring students' level of social skills at the elementary level. Results of the study showed statistically significant difference based on the gender of the student for the subscale "accepting criticism", revealing male students being more developed in social skill compared to their female counterparts, whereas female students were found more mature for the social skill requiring tolerance of individual differences as compared to male students. The study has implications for future researchers and school authorities.

Key Words: Social Skills, Elementary Level, Social Studies, Showing Respect, Accepting Rights and Responsibilities

Introduction

The development of social skills is one of the most important endeavor of human life in a society as it is linked to the mental health of the individuals ([Teodoro, Kappler, Rodrigues, Freitas and Haase \(2005\)](#)). A bunch of excellent social skills practiced makes a person liked in a group and at large in society, following of which would make him/her be successful in the world. Although to avoid any chaos, one must be competent in the use of mathematical and verbal skills; however, without proper learning of social skills, these skills would not help to a great extent. Based on the phenomena of human interaction, humans spend their lives in groups encompassing family, school and the society at large. Along with the functions performed by the family, schools are established where students have to learn basic skills of verbal and mathematics and the appropriate pattern of their interaction with the peer, teachers and other members of society. Religion and fields of history, social sciences provide the information necessary to be inculcated in the young minds of individuals.

Social skills work as an interaction tool with other members following the most appropriate ways of dealing ([Dowd & Tierney, 1995](#); [Masty & Schwab, 2006](#)) that is necessary for smooth human activities in all various contexts ([Smith, 2001](#); [Crummer & Smith, 2005](#); [Haager & Vaughn, 1995](#); [Kilic, Var, & Kumandas, 2015](#); [Sugai & Lewis, 1996](#)). These are the competencies developed in order to have better relationships with different groups in the society, including family, friends, job and society at large ([Tösten, Han, & Anik, 2017](#)). These are not only required to interact but also to develop healthy relations and avoid any expected conflicts in the group ([Goleman, 1995](#); [Miller, 1997](#); [Bellack, 1999](#)).

Childhood is the period when the majority of these skills are developed involving psychological systems under the supervision of adults. Therefore, any malfunctioning in these years would lead to a profound deficiency in the coming years leading to ineffective life consequences. Although all types of social skills have their own merits, hence cooperation, compromise and respect share the major part considering the worth.

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Social skills are one of the major dimensions of human activities encompassing peer relations, self-management, academic, compliance and assertion skills (Caldarella & Merrell, 1977). These work as the bridge to have proper communication in the social groups (Christensen, 2007) whose nature would vary considering the culture of a society. The development of these would help an individual to be a good listener and would be expected to show a higher level of communication, having a profound effect on the group. It is because of the reason that persons with better social skills have improved communication, are able to handle conflict situations, use better body language and would control critical situations more effectively (Memon, 2006).

Children found to spend most of the time in supervised attention appear to be more socially skilful, are more curious and show a higher level of consistency in approaching new tasks (Bee, 2000). These kids are also more competent in their adulthood. They are more emotionally stable, handle conflicting situations and get acceptance from the peer (Haag (2005), solve problems and show higher performance in school and the outer world (Hair, Jager & Garret, 2002). The signs of underdeveloped children regarding the social skills are identified at early age groups expected to face challenges in future (Strain and Odom as cited in [Center for Innovations in Education, 2005](#)), leading to a life of loneliness. Furthermore, they lead to having issues of negative emotions and low self-esteem (Murphy, 2005; Center for Innovations in Education, 2005). Hence, such children are observed to have less participation in a variety of experiences that could profit them (Bremer & Smith, 2004).

Different forums in society are responsible for the development of these social skills among children, among which family is one of the major contributors. The first signs of social skills a child learns from home while observing and imitating the adults (Sharma & Sharma, 2002; Kol, 2016). How a child gets developed in the acquisition of these skills depends on the nature of the environment where he lives. These skills are the agents through which a child interacts with the humans around him. Peers are also an important element in the development of these social skills as they teach through their behavior what would be acceptable or not while being in the group. It is observed that children who happened to be more famous are good at showing socialization, have better communication skills and are aware of how to make their place in a group (Bukatko and Daehler 2001).

School as a major element in the life of an individual also plays a significant role in the development of a sound personality. Its scope does not limit the learning of academic stuff but also enhance the level of self-esteem among students where they are exposed to a variety of skills such as cooperative learning, teamwork and collaboration in order to have positive effects on their personalities (Bukatko, Daehler, 2001). Seemingly, schools put an effort to have a conducive environment to develop better individuals expected to have excellent citizenship characteristics (Curtis, 2003). Therefore, in the present era, schools are not only judged by their academic excellence but also the level of multifaceted skills developed in their students that would also be helpful in smooth functioning of the school having fewer chances of violence ([National Association of school psychologists' center, 2002](#)).

In the national curriculum of Pakistan, emphasis is laid down on the development of social skills through including content related to the acquisition of these skills, particularly in elementary classes (Ministry of Education, 2002). The social skills expected to be developed among students at the elementary level include problem-solving, understanding rights and responsibilities, showing cooperation when needed, accepting individual differences, showing appreciation, accepting criticism, participating in group discussion, sharing tasks, and showing respect etc. Studies explored that in order to be a successful person in life, one has to be competent in the use of appropriate social skills life (Gondal, Mushtaq, Shahzad, Zaidi, Moin and Gilani, 2011; Rawles, 2016).

School is the major entity of teaching social skills to children as here; the students learn to interact with a variety of roles encompassing peer, teachers, helpers and school authorities as well. In order to have a system of smooth processes, students are expected to show a variety of social skills so they can be a part of the system for a specified period without any hurdle in the form of explanations to parents, punishments or forced to leave the school.

The development of a productive and good citizen ready to play their part in the society would require a strong character shown by the individuals (Eleby, 2009; Lynch & Simpson, 2010). In view of entrepreneurs, the workforce is needed to be equipped with soft skills, not only academic excellence based on the fact of having healthy interactions in the organization to complete the tasks successfully

(Skills: Why Your Students Need Them, 2015-19). Consequently, an important target is the development of a positive self-concept among students that will help in making them successful individuals (Manning, 2007). However, the route to this destination is school. A retrospective study by [Jones, Greenberg and Crowley \(2015\)](#) revealed that students who appeared to have more social skills in their early years were more successful in their later life academically and financially, whereas those found to be lacking in social skills showed a tendency to drop out of the school in later years. The researchers recommended carrying out studies to explore students' social skills in different areas, including cooperation, interpersonal skills, responsibility, independence, self-control, and problem-solving ([Cimen and Kocygıt, 2010](#)). Therefore, the present study is aimed to explore the social skills developed among students at the elementary level in the Pakistani context.

Objectives of the Study

Following were the major objectives of the present work

- To explore the social skills developed among students at the elementary level
- To compare the social skills of students at the elementary level based on their gender
- To discover the difference in social skills of students at the elementary level based on their grade
- To investigate the variation of social skills of students at the elementary level based on the level of school (elementary or high)

Research Questions of the Study

In order to execute this study, the following research questions were posed.

1. What is the level of social skills developed among students at the elementary level?
2. Do students vary with respect to the development of social skills based on their gender?
3. Are there any differences in social skills developed in students based on demographic variables (i.e. grade and level of school)?

Methods and Materials

In order to carry out this study, a descriptive survey methodology was adopted.

Sample and Sampling

Students of grade 6 to 8 studying in public elementary and high schools of Lahore district constituted the population of the study. A total of 550 (250 male and 300 female) students participated in the study. The sample was selected through multi-stage proportionate cluster random sampling. The sampling was done in three different stages. Initially, schools as clusters were randomly selected through balloting. Therefore, a total of 11 schools (5 elementary and 06 high) working in the public sector from the district Lahore was chosen.

At the second stage, schools from elementary and secondary level were chosen separately, having a further division of sample in the strata based on gender as in Pakistan, the public schools are divided into schools for boys and girls separately. From each stratum (boys' school or girls' school), a total of four percent of schools were selected. However, in the case of stratum having less than 25 schools, one school were selected as a unit in the sample. Consequently, 11 schools were selected using the random sampling technique. The inclusion of high schools as part of the sample was based on the administrative structure in Pakistani schools where elementary classes are as well taught in high schools. At the third and final stage, students enrolled in grade 6 and 8 were selected as the sample of the study, where 6th is the initial class at the elementary level and 8th being the final grade. The students of grade 7 being in the middle of elementary classes were excluded from the study as the study focused on measuring the social skills in the start and final grade of elementary level. In a school, in case of having only one section, all of the students in that section participated in the study, whereas, in the case of having multiple sections, random selection was used to select one section from the available sections.

Instrumentation

Based on the context of study being carried out in Pakistani schools and the language being Urdu used as an official language in the country, it was decided to develop a scale that is more context-specific and provided in the language easily understood by the students at this age (11 to 13). Therefore, a self-developed instrument was used to explore the social skills of students at the elementary level. In order to develop the scale for the measurement of social skills, researchers reviewed the relevant literature exploring the social skills and their possible indicators, had interviews with the teachers teaching the subjects of social studies in schools and studied the national curriculum to identify which social skills are expected to be developed among students at this stage. All these efforts helped in the development of statements corresponding to social skills. Considering the age and tendency of the respondents being young, only a three-point rating scale was used to respond. The scale went through a validity check by examining the content of the statement and its relevance to the variable under investigation. A total of six experts in the field of teaching were consulted to review the statements and provide their suggestions. The first draft of the instrument consisted of 105 statements related to social skills. During the review process, 35 items were removed due to a lack of relevance to the variable. Furthermore, four items were excluded through the application of SPSS and Conquest. Conquest provided the estimates of the fitness of the items. Hence, the final draft of the scale consisted of 69 items broadly divided into five subscales. Each subscale consisted of items related to one social skill (accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights and responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences).

The response scale was based on frequency measurement of behavior, i.e. never, sometimes and always.

Reliability of the Instrument

Before administering the instrument in the field, it was checked for reliability measures. Cronbach alpha and factor analysis were utilized to ensure the reliability of the scale. The overall reliability of the scale was found, showing $r=0.8$ that is considered as appropriate to use the instrument in the field. The reliability values observed were a) accepting criticism @ 0.46, b) showing respect @ 0.4, c) solving problems @0.5, d) accepting rights and responsibilities @0.4 and finally e) tolerance of individual differences @ 0.4. The overall reliability alpha was obtained as 0.8 for the whole scale.

The no of items for a) accepting criticism was 13, b) showing respect 10, c) solving problems 17, d) accepting rights and responsibilities 11 and finally e) tolerance of individual differences 18. The scale was validated through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal component factor as it was not adopted but developed in the Pakistani context. It revealed a total of five factors (subscales) with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Based on the reference of [Stevens \(1992\)](#), that the significance of the factor loading is dependent on the sample size and the critical values obtained against which the loadings can be compared. In his view, for a sample of more than 200 respondents, the value of factor loading, if greater than .3, should be considered appropriate. Therefore, the same criterion was used for the selection of best items for the measurement of social skills among students at the elementary level.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the administration of the instrument in the field, formal permission was obtained from the Director of Public Instruction Schools Punjab Lahore. It was followed by contacting the school principals of the schools selected for the study. As the study involved students at the elementary level, therefore, a briefing related to the purpose of the study, nature of the study and all sorts of questions asked by them were explained. Further, the school personnel, including teachers, principals and students as well were explained regarding the confidentiality of the data and their identities. Students filled out survey forms in their classrooms in the presence of their respective teachers and the researcher. Students were briefed about how to fill the survey form. Collected data was coded and added to the computer for the purpose of analysis. For the purpose of exploring the level of development of social skills among students, researchers developed a rubric based on the level of social skills development. This included the descriptions starting from very poor to excellent

categories. Students were further calculated for their presence in a level responding to each social skill and converted into percentages. SPSS was used to analyze the data of the study.

Analyses and Results

Obtained data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The percentage was used to classify the percent of students into different levels of the social skills being measured. Inferential statistics were applied to compare the students for the development of social skills based on their gender, level of school and grade.

Table 1. Distribution of Students Based on their Social Skills' Development into Different Levels

social skills	Very poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Total
Accepting Criticism	0	5.3	47.2	31.7	15.8	100
Showing Respect	.8	18.7	53.0	22.7	4.9	100
Solving Problems	.9	7.8	64.9	24.6	1.8	100
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	.4	9.5	65.7	21.0	3.5	100
Tolerance of Individual Differences	.1	13.3	69.6	17.0	0	100

According to the values shown in table 1, it was found that accepting criticism was the social skill mostly developed among students at the elementary level. Although the high percentage was shown under the option “satisfactory” however, the cumulative percentage, including satisfactory, good and excellent, were higher for accepting criticism.

Table 2. Independent Sample T-Test for the Comparison of Social Skills Based on Gender of the Students

Variables	Gender	n	Mean	S. D	t	p
Accepting criticism	Male	250	1.09	.232	4.231	.000*
	Female	300	1.01	.216		
Showing Respect	Male	250	1.02	.247	.389	.698
	Female	300	1.03	.270		
Solving Problems	Male	250	1.01	.182	.106	.916
	Female	300	1.00	.227		
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	Male	250	1.03	.238	1.578	.115
	Female	300	1.00	.235		
Tolerance of Individual Differences	Male	250	0.93	.157	2.379	.018*
	Female	300	0.97	.185		

* $p < 0.05$

According to Table 2, it was discovered that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students for the subscale “accepting criticism”. The result on the subscales $t = 4.231$ $p = .000$ is significant at 0.05 level. On the other hand, a statistically significant difference was found for the subscale “tolerance of individual differences”, where female students were higher compared to their male counterparts. The result on the subscale showed the t value as $t = 2.379$ $p = .018$. No statistically significant difference was found for other subscales based on the gender of students.

Table 3. Independent Sample T-Test for the Comparison of Social Skills Among Students Based on Level of School

Variables	School	n	Mean	S. D	t	p
Accepting Criticism	Elementary	250	1.00	.206	4.118	.000*
	High	300	1.08	.237		
Showing Respect	Elementary	250	0.98	.229	3.547	.000*
	High	300	1.06	.278		

Variables	School	n	Mean	S. D	t	p
Solving Problems	Elementary	250	1.00	.217	.817	.414
	High	300	1.01	.199		
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	Elementary	250	1.01	.223	.194	.847
	High	300	1.01	.248		
Tolerance of Individual Differences	Elementary	250	0.98	.197	3.013	.003*
	High	300	0.93	.175		

* $p < 0.05$

According to table 3, the social skills “accepting criticism”, “showing respect”, and “tolerance of individual differences” showed statistically significant difference for the comparison of elementary and high school students. The results on the subscales accepting criticism showed the value of $t = 4.118$ $p = .000$, showing respect as $t = 3.547$ $p = .000$. All of the values reported were significant at 0.05 level, respectively. On the other hand, students studying in school of elementary level were higher in their mean score for the social skill “tolerance of individual differences” The result on the subscale $t = 3.013$ $p = .003$ was significant at 0.05 level. No statistically significant difference was found between students based on level of schools for the subscales “solving problems” and “accepting rights and responsibilities”.

Table 4. Independent Sample T-Test for the Comparison of Social Skills Among Students Based on their Grade

Variables	Class	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Accepting criticism	6 th	274	1.04	.225	.487	.626
	8 th	276	1.05	.229		
Showing Respect	6 th	274	1.03	.256	.648	.517
	8 th	276	1.01	.264		
Solving Problems	6 th	274	1.02	.207	1.212	.226
	8 th	276	0.99	.207		
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	6 th	274	1.02	.243	1.083	.279
	8 th	276	1.00	.231		
Tolerance of Individual Differences	6 th	274	0.96	.183	1.158	.247
	8 th	276	0.94	.190		

According to table 4, it is obvious that non-significant differences are present for all of the social skills between students of grade 6 and grade 7. Therefore, no differences were found based on the grade of the students for any of the social skills measured.

Conclusions

The present study explored the social skills of students at the elementary level based on their gender. The social skills were explored mainly from the textbook of social studies that included a total of fifteen skill. For the purpose of exploration of the most important social skills, only five main social skills were taken and explored through the use of a self-developed survey form. According to the finding of the study, it was revealed that problem-solving skill is the one found developed among most of the students but not at an excellent point but at a satisfactory level.

The study also found that male students were higher for the social skill of accepting criticism as compared to female students. This would be due to their higher exposure to practical life, dealings with outer world interactions more frequently compared to female students.

On the other hand, female appeared to be higher for the social skill “tolerance of individual differences” significantly. The nature of this difference may also be attributed to the context of Pakistani society, where the role of a female is expected to be more sympathetic and considerate towards acceptance of individual differences in the society.

Discussion

The study was carried out with the purpose to investigate the development of social skills among students studying in Pakistani public schools at the elementary level. According to the findings of the study, most of the students happened to have social skills at a satisfactory level, as we observed a very little percentage against the categories of Very Poor, Poor, Good and Excellent levels. This shows that the process of development of soft skills such as requiring socialization, cooperation, solving problems and accepting criticism requires enough practice that students take while reaching their adulthood.

The major objective of the study was to compare the level of social skills based on the gender of the students. The study revealed that boys happened to have a higher level of social skill compared to girls for the subscale “accepting criticism” in the present study. The results of the study were found aligned to the findings obtained by Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson (1998). Their study compared parents and teachers’ assessment of social behaviors of school students. The participants of their study agreed that boys had more social skills compared to girls of school-going age.

The study found female students as higher compared to their male counterparts with regard to a tolerance of “individual differences”. Similar findings were reported by contrary [Gresham & Elliott \(1990\)](#), who found female as higher in their social skills compared to male counterparts. The study conducted by Dickerson (1995) found the same result with regard to girls having more social skills. Similarly, Staples and Boulin Johnson (as cited in Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson 1998) asserted that African American girls are more socialized than boys. Teachers and parents assume major responsibility in shaping children’s social behaviors. The study by [Zsolnai and Kasik \(2014\)](#) explored similar results for social skills based on the gender of the students. The study by Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson (1998) explored how teachers and parents rated the social skills of students of school-going age. According to the findings, girls were found more appropriate in the exhibition of social skills compared to boys. The study by [Larose et al. \(2020\)](#), confirmed the positive effect of the intervention on the development of social skills among girls. The finding of the present study was consistent with the previous researches confirming the claim of girls having more social skills compared to boys. Cartledge & Milburn (1996) found that in contrast to the teacher ratings, parent ratings distinguished between male and female students only on the subscale of rated externalizing behaviors. Most of the researches showed boys being more aggressive than girls, although they are higher in problem-solving dimensions. However, boys were also rated as having high strength in possession of social skills compared to girls. Scholars have argued that girls prove to be better in the higher acquisition of social skills compared to boys due to their early maturity, being more self-regulated and ability to adapt to the changing situations ([Westiling et al., 2012](#)).

Another objective of the study was to compare the difference in social skills among students based on their grade being 6th and 8th and level of school being elementary or high. The study found no significant variation in possession of social skills. The finding of the study was aligned to the work of [Sørli, Hagen, & Nordahl \(2020\)](#). The authors found a slight increase in possession of social skills of students with the increase in grade. The study also supported the claim that learned social skills remained consistent even with the change in time. The study discovered the positive impact of the level of school on the acquisition of social skills among students as students studying in high schools were higher in the social skills of accepting criticism and showing respect whereas elementary school students were higher for the social skill tolerance of individual differences. The finding is comparable to the results reported by Zutiao, Costa and Lessa (2018). They reported that students happened to spend time in an institution of having exposure to strangers and multiple exposures were better in controlling their aggressive emotions.

Recommendations

In the light of findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. The curriculum developers should give more importance to such content in which social skills may be developed in the students at the elementary level. The content selected should be part of the courses taught at the school level. In order to get more from it, teaching guidelines should

be accompanied in the exercises and activity books as well. Scholars have found that the use of proper activities for the subject of social studies is influential for the development of social skills even at preschool levels ([Çimena and Koçyiit, 2010](#)).

2. Classroom teaching practices at the elementary level may be altered to bring positive behavior among students. This would be done through the use of strategies known for the successful development of social skills among students. Social skills among students should be assessed at the end of each grade in order to identify any shortcomings that would be corrected in the preceding years.
3. Teaching social skills may be the part of every subject at the school level to make students remember the worth of socialization in a group and later at the level of society.
4. Parents should also be part of the teaching of social skills programs; therefore, schools should make an effort to arrange some programs for parents and make them aware of the activities leading to the development of positive social skills among children.
5. More research is needed to explore the phenomena at the primary and secondary level to identify any of the deficiencies persisting at the initial level or at the adolescent level.
6. Subsequent research might include other social skills which were not included in the present study.
7. Mixed method studies may be planned to measure the variable from various sources and identify any of the inconsistencies found in both forms.

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