A STUDY OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG THE STUDENTS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

*Tallat Rashid,
**Dr. Tahira Afridi,
***Dr. Kiran Anwar

Abstract

The study explored the developed social skills among students at elementary level. A total of 772 Students were selected using multi stage cluster sampling in the district of Sialkot. 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) as well. Five factors were identified through exploratory factor analysis using principal component matrix measuring students' level of social skills studying at elementary level. Results found students possessing the social skill of tolerance of individual difference being highest among all other types. Significant differences of social skills based on students' gender were also observed. The study presents implications for policy makers and school authorities.

Keywords: Social skills, secondary Level; Social Studies Curriculum; Accepting Criticism; Tolerance of Individual Differences.

Introduction

In order to lead a successful life in a society people would need to be competent in basic skills encompassing reading, writing and simple computation. These basic skills are practiced independently involving others. For the effective development of these skills to the growing generations, educational institutions are established. Institutes develop their own programs taking content of these skills from history and field of social sciences.   Early years of life is the most relevant period to be focused in institutions to develop such skills. Therefore all institutes throughout the world develop mechanisms for the effective upbringing of students. It is also evident through the thick description of societies that the nations working on the positive development of their children have more peaceful, crime free societies.

Among these variety of skills, social are the most critical and noteworthy as one has to interact with others following acceptable ways of dealing (Dowd & Tierney, 1995; Masty & Schwab, 2006). It is because that these interactions work as the foundation for normal activities in various contexts (Smith, 2001; Crummer & Smith, 2005; Haager & Vaughn, 1995; Kilic, Var, & Kumandas, 2015; Sugai & Lewis, 1996). Social skills are also defined as competencies needed to initiate and maintain positive relationships with family, peers, teachers and members outside the school and home (Tösten, Han, & Anik, 2017). Its scope ranges from interpersonal effectiveness (Goleman, 1995), establish and maintenance of relations (Miller, 1997), and resolution of conflicts (Bellack, 1999) with others.

Socialization requires the involvement of various psychological systems developed in childhood. All of our social exchanges gets effected as a result of any malfunction in these systems. Social skills including cooperation, compromise and mutual respect are considered as the most worthwhile.

*University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
**University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
***University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan

Social skills are categorized as among the five broad dimensions comprising peer relations, self-management, academic, compliance and assertion skills (Caldarella & Merrell, 1977). They allow us to communicate, relate and socialize with others (Christensen, 2007). Social skills vary from culture to culture including verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. Although the person having good social skills would listen well however the situations where two way communication occurs would demonstrate advanced level of social skills.

Individuals who adapt social skills can communicate effectively, easily read and handle various situations, interpret the body language, improve their own body language, and learn to handle a situation in a positive and constructive way (Memon, 2006). Securely attached children appear to be more socially skillful, curious and persistent in approaching new tasks, and are shown to be more mature (Bee, 2000). According to Haag (2005), having good social skills is important for doing well in adulthood. Children appeared to be more developed in social skills are competent in domains requiring emotional stability, resolving conflicts and tendency to socialize easily to get acceptance by the peers. They make friendships easily and maintain the relationships. In addition to these characteristics, they are proved as good problem solvers and can perform better in school as well (Hair, Jager & Garret, 2002).

Children having low level of social skills can be identified at early age which might help to expect certain issues that may arise in future (Strain and Odom as cited in Center for Innovations in Education, 2005). Consequently this deficiency would lead to loneliness and stress. In addition to these issues, people may move to negative emotions, uncertainty and low self-esteem (Murphy, 2005). This deficiency can lead children to have less involvement in a variety of learning experiences (Bremer & Smith, 2004). Children who do not mix up socially during childhood are more inclined to face more problems in later life, (Gresham, as cited in Center for Innovations in Education, 2005).

Family's role is of great importance in the upbringing of children's social skills because of the provision of the opportunity to acquire cultural norms, traditions and values. The process of learning these skills becomes automatic as children learn through observation and modeling (Sharma & Sharma, 2002). Learning of appropriate social skills is important to lead a normal and successful life where parent's role is significant. They serve as the socialization agents who teach their kids through modeling and controlling different aspects of children's social lives. Peers, also play a distinct role in social development. They are important agents of socialization who reinforce both desirable and undesirable behaviors for others. A child's physical attractiveness, level of motor skills, social skills and emotional regulation develop his/her peer relation. In general, popular children engage in pro social behaviors, are aware of the mechanics of entering in peer groups smoothly, and can maintain their effectively maintain social relations (Bukatko, and Daehler 2001).

The major influence school exerts on children lies in fostering academic achievement and shaping self-esteem. Some alternative educational practices, such as the open classroom, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning have been found to produce especially positive effects on student's social and personal development. Children who have good peer relations are more likely to adjust well to school in the first place (Bukatko, Daehler, 2001). In order to develop a constructive school environment, schools authorities must ensure the development of students as valued and respected members of a learning community (Curtis, 2003). It is specifically true in the current era that social skills are a major requirement for the smooth operation of school environment while decreasing the rate of violence faced by schools (National Association of school psychologists' center, 2002).

In Pakistan, our national curriculum of social studies identifies few social skills for class V1 and V111 (Ministery of Education, 2002). Among which the few being major 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. Unfortunately, studies found that students at higher level lack in the social skills necessary to lead a good professional life (Gondal, Mushtaq,Shahzad, Zaidi, Moin and Gilani, 2011; Rawles, 2016).

Unfortunately with the advancement in technology, excessive use of digital devices has weakened the role that could be played by the family regarding the growth of appropriate level of social skills especially for children. Therefore, school is the major element to teach social skills among children. It is a place where children learn to interact to a larger group of people including the teacher, the custodian staff, the classmates and school leaders. They have to show a variety of social skills in order to move to the higher grades without being punished or getting explanations from the school authorities. Failure to show these social skills would lead to inappropriate consequences.

It is also difficult for parents to get their kids prepared for today's world which requires strong character and profound learning in core subjects (Eleby, 2009; Lynch & Simpson, 2010). In view of Entrepreneurs, successful people in workplace are required to have soft skills along with academic ones as they need to build relationships with people that makes a task successfully executed (Skills: Why Your Students Need Them, 2015-19). Consequently an important target is the development of positive self-concept among students that will help in making them successful individuals (Manning, 2007).

However, the route to this destination is school. Therefore, present study leading to the identification of social skills among school going children was planned while focusing elementary level. Following research questions were posed to explore the nature of issue.
1. Which social skills were incorporated in the national Curriculum of Social Studies?
2. Which level of social skills is developed among children at elementary level?
3. Do students possess different level of social skills based on their grade of study?
4. Is there variation of social skills developed among children in the various sub groups (gender, location (urban and rural)?

Method of the study
Descriptive survey methodology was adopted to carry out the study.

Sample
A sample of 772 (434 male and 338 female) students was selected using multi stage proportionate cluster random sampling. Sampling was done in three stages.

At the first stage, 16 schools, (09 elementary and 07 high) schools of public sector from the district Sialkot (a district situated in the province Punjab- Pakistan) were selected randomly through balloting.

At the second stage, separate samples from high and elementary schools were selected. Both high and elementary schools were classified into four strata (male urban, male rural, female urban and female rural). Four percent sample of schools was selected from each stratum; however where there were less than 25 schools in a stratum, one school was included in the sample. In this way a total of 16 schools were selected. High schools were also included in the sample along with elementary schools because in Pakistan, administrative structure is such that class 6th and 8th are part of both elementary and high schools.

At the third stage, students enrolled in grade 6 and 8 were selected. Grade 6 is the initial stage of elementary level, whereas the grade 8 is the final stage of elementary level. Therefore the students of grade 7 were excluded from the study. In case of those schools where there was only one section of 6th and 8th classes, all the students were included in the sample. In case of schools where there were more than one sections of grade 6 and 8, one section from each grade was randomly selected.

Instrument

On the basis of review of the literature and discussion with the university teachers, classmates and teachers of teaching the subject of social studies, indicators for all five social skills were identified and three point rating scale was prepared to respond. On the basis of these indicators, the questionnaire was presented to six experts for content validity of the instrument.

The questionnaire comprised of 105 statements related to social skills. During review of the instrument by the experts' 32 items were excluded having low content validity. The application of SPSS & Conquest excluded 04 items. Conquest provided the estimates of fitness of the items. Therefore the final instrument consisted of 69 items was divided into five sub-scales focusing on a separate social skill (accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights and responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences). The number of questions in each subscale varied ranging between 12 to 15.

The sample constituted of elementary level students having an age limit of 11 to 13, so it was considered better not to use five point rating scale in order to avoid any ambiguity on the part of the respondent. It was decided to use a three point response categories asking frequency of the behavior i.e. never, sometimes and always.

Before administering the instrument in the field, it was checked for the validity and 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=0.75 that is considered as appropriate to use the instrument in the field. The detail of the reliability values is given as under

Table 1
Names of the factors, Items and Reliability Values

Factors	Items	Reliability
Accepting Criticism	13	0.46
Showing Respect	10	0.377
Solving Problems	17	0.503
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	11	0.402
Tolerance Of Individual Differences	18	0.410
Total	69	0.75

Further, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal component factor revealed five factors (subscales) with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. According to Stevens (1992), the significance of the factor loading depends on the sample size and produced a table of critical values against which the loadings can be compared. For a sample size greater than 200, he recommends a loading greater than .30 as appropriate, which was used in this study.
The instrument was prepared in Urdu (the language used in Pakistan).

Procedure of the Study

The National Curriculum of Social Studies for VI &VIII grades was analyzed. The desired social skills were identified. The five most important social skills were selected on the basis of expert's opinion. An instrument was developed for the evaluation of selected social skills among students, as discussed above. After the finalization of instrument, the required numbers of copies were prepared. Before administering the scale in the field, permission was obtained from Director Public Instruction Schools Punjab Lahore. Concerned principals were visited and requested to cooperate for data collection from the students of their schools. Purpose of the study was explained to principals, class teachers and the students as well. They were also assured about the anonymity of the data and their identity. The instrument was administered to the students in the classroom situation with the help of research assistant and concerned teachers of the respective schools.

The subjects of the study (students) were informed regarding the objective of the study while guiding them how to response to the items of scale. After scoring data, five descriptors of level were determined labeled as Very Poor, Poor, Satisfactory, Good and Excellent in order to measure the level of social skills developed among children at elementary level. The percentage of students in each level for each subscale was calculated. Collected data were analyzed through descriptive as well as inferential statistics.

Analyses and Results

The data were subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Inferential statistics t-test, for equality of means and percentage were applied to compare male & female, elementary & high schools, rural & urban and 6th & 8th grades.

Table 2

Level-wise Percentage of Students Regarding Development of Social Skills

		Very Poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Total
	Accepting Criticism		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		100

According to the values shown in the table 2, it was found that accepting criticism was the mostly developed social skill among students at elementary level. Although the level satisfactory show the high percentage for all of the social skills however the cumulative percentage including satisfactory, good and excellent are higher for accepting criticism.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test for the Comparison of Ratings of Social Skills by students based on of Gender

Factors	Gender	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Accepting criticism	Male	434	1.2956	.30062	7.647	.000*
	Female	338	1.1375	.27249		
Showing Respect	Male	434	1.0924	.27958	.800	.424
	Female	338	1.1095	.31183		
Solving Problems	Male	434	1.0859	.22843	.642	.521
	Female	338	1.0752	.23385		
Accepting Rights &	Male	434	1.0645	.23427	1.023	.306
Responsibilities	Female	338	1.0828	.26201		
Tolerance of Individual	Male	434	.9931	.19549	3.090	.002*
Differences	Female	338	1.0344	.17474		

*p<0.05

According to values expressed in table 3, it was interpreted that there was a statistically significant difference between students based on their gender for the subscale of accepting criticism. It showed that the male students have shown higher growth for the development of social skills as compared to their female counterparts. The t value for the subscale (t=7.647, p=0.000) was significant at the alpha level which was 0.05. Similarly, significant difference was observed for the subscale "Tolerance of Individual Differences" where female students were found being higher as compared to their male counterparts. The t value for the subscale (t = 3.090, p =0.002) was found significant at alpha level of 0.05. The study found no significant difference for all other types of social skills (Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights & Responsibilities) based on students' gender.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-test for the Comparison of Ratings of Social Skills by Students Based on their Grade

Factors	Grade	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Accepting criticism	6th	389	1.2041	.28872	2.093	.037*
	8th	383	1.2490	.30773		
Showing Respect	6th	389	1.0982	.28243	.159	.874

Solving Problems	8th	383	1.1016	.30579		
	6th	389	1.0817	.22951	.052	.958
	8th	383	1.0808	.23226		
Accepting Rights &	6th	389	1.0753	.23988	.308	.759
Responsibilities	8th	383	1.0698	.25393		
Tolerance of Individual	6th	389	1.0103	.17772	.130	.897
Differences	8th	383	1.0120	.19753		

*p<0.05

According to the values shown in table 3, it was interpreted that there was a statistically significant difference of social skills between students of grade 6 and grade 8 for the subscale Accepting Criticism. Overall students of grade 8 were higher in the development of social skills compared to students from grade 6. The t value produced for the subscale (t = 2.093, p=0.037) was significant at alpha level 0.05. No statistically significant difference was observed for all of the social skills based on grade of the students (Showing Respect, Solving Problems, Accepting Rights & Responsibilities and Tolerance of Individual Differences).

Table 5

Independent Samples t-test for the Comparison of Rating of Social Skills by Students Based on the Level of School

Factors	Level of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Accepting Criticism	Elementary	434	1.1597	.28038	7.192	.000*
	Secondary	338	1.3120	.30065		
Showing Respect	Elementary	434	1.0611	.28533	4.200	.000*
	Secondary	338	1.1497	.29799		
Solving Problems	Elementary	434	1.0530	.23582	3.887	.000*
	Secondary	338	1.1175	.21909		
Accepting Rights &	Elementary	434	1.0536	.25358	2.421	.016*
Responsibilities	Secondary	338	1.0968	.23597		
Tolerance of Individual	Elementary	434	1.0229	.18584	1.976	.048*
Differences	Secondary	338	.9961	.18924		

*p<0.05

Considering the values reported in table 5, it was concluded that a significant difference existed between schools based on their level for the subscales Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights & Responsibilities. Overall, students studying

in the high schools were found to have more social skills as compared to the students studying at in middle schools having elementary level students in school premises. The t values were significant for these subscales at alpha level of 0.05.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of research data, following conclusions were drawn; Students provided their response for the level of development of social skills by selecting the best option showing their tendency to behave in a certain situation requiring the expression of particular social skills. The results showed that the highest response of the students was found for the option 'sometimes' on the scale measuring social skills which shows the less often use for a particular social skill. The results revealed that the social skill "tolerance of individual difference" was developed in most of the students at satisfactory level. According to the findings of the study, it was revealed that majority of the students achieved satisfactory level of development for all of the five social skills with the exception of social skill "accepting criticism" that was found being mostly developed among students. Therefore, it can be concluded that students in their adolescence are capable of handling situations challenging them through acceptance of criticism. It is quite logical considering the school environment of Pakistan where students are taught to obey and control their urge to have argue with the adults.

Significant differences were observed for the social skills based on grade of the students. Students classified as 6th graders and 8th graders also showed significant difference on the subscale accepting criticism. It was found that students from grade 8 were higher in their mean score for the social skill compared to students from grade 6. It showed that maturity effects the development of social skills that is quite expected from teenagers.

Significant differences were observed for the demographic variables gender. It was observed that male students were higher in the development of social skills than female students particularly for the subscale "accepting criticism". In contrast to the finding obtained for male students, female students were higher in the development of social skills encompassing "showing respect", "solving problems", "accepting rights and responsibilities" and "tolerance of individual differences" significantly. These results reveals the social culture of Pakistan which trains a male person to face challenging situations including acceptance of criticism. While the girls are prepared for social skills as to accept responsibility and have more tolerance.

Significant differences were observed for demographic variable level of school where students studying in the high schools were significantly higher for the development of social skills as compared to students being part of the elementary schools. Elementary and high school students varied significantly on the subscales accepting criticism,, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights & responsibilities and tolerance of individual difference. The nature of results depicts the influence of school as high school include classes of grade 9 and 10 which brings an extended exposure for students at elementary level as well. Consequently, they learn to obey and develop social skills more quickly compared to children studying in elementary schools.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the social skills developed among students at elementary level. The study revealed that majority of the students had developed the social skills at satisfactory level whereas rest of the students were found dispersed in the categories of "Very Poor", "Poor", "Good" and "Excellent" for all of the social skills. Results of the study are aligned to the findings revealed by Meredith and Robb (2002) showing that students lacked the social skill particularly requiring problem solving.

Differences were found for the demographic variables (gender, localities, schools and grade) for which results indicated that the male students being higher for the accepting criticism whereas female students were higher for the social skill requiring tolerance of individual differences. The results are quite up to the social scenario of Pakistani society where male members have greater exposure to social dynamics in the society. Therefore, they have natural tendency to face situations including requiring acceptance of criticism. Seemingly, girls are happened to remain in a male dominant society where tolerance is a major characteristic to be inculcated naturally. The results are aligned to the findings obtained by Tösten, Han, and Anik, (2017) who found that in contrast to the teacher ratings, parent ratings distinguished between male and female students for the subscale of rated externalizing behaviors. The finding is quite logical as much of the research in this area repeatedly shows boys to be more aggressive than girls. Despite the significantly higher ratings for problem behaviors given by parents to their sons, the parents perceived the boys to have comparable or slightly more strength in social skills. The finding of the present study is consistent because the male students have developed more social skills than female students on the subscale of accepting criticism.

In contrast to the finding of present study, Cartledge et al., (1998) compared parents and teachers' assessment of the social behaviors of Inner-City African American elementary school students. The findings of the study showed that teachers and parents of these students mostly agreed in their evaluations of the social skills of boys but disagreed significantly with regard to that of girls. On the contrary Gresham and Elliott (1990) found that the teachers consistently perceived the young female students to have more social skills than their male students. The reasons behind such difference of results would be attributed to the nature and context of region where boys and girls are equally treated.

There was statistically significant difference between schools working as elementary and secondary level for the subscale accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights and responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences. It was found that the students of high schools have developed more social skills than students of elementary schools except for the social skill tolerance of individual differences where students of elementary schools were higher than the students studying in high schools. Again the result shows the impact of maturity on the development of social skills. It is evident that children at their early period of adolescence are not mature enough to consider variation among them and act accordingly whereas during teen age years kids are more prone to observe and respond to individual differences.

Significant difference between the students of 6th and 8th class for the subscale of accepting criticism the students of 6th and 8th grade were similar in the development of social skills except for the social skill accepting criticism. The study found that 8th grade students were higher in their mean scores for this social skill. The finding would be due to the maturity level of 8th graders that could help in developing the skill requiring acceptance of criticism in life. The finding of the present study is consistent to the one revealed by Kimmel and Sharry (2002). Their study explored the development of social skills of six cognitively gifted fourth and fifth grade students. The study focused the development of social skills in the areas of responsibility, empathy, self-control, assertion, externalizing problems, reaching out to peers and controlling impulsive behaviors. They found that improvement was noted in almost each area except for empathy. It shows the impact of training on the development of social skills which is evident in the present study as well.

No statistically significant difference was found between locality of school for the subscales of accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights and responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of findings, following recommendations are made:

It was found that the highest mean percentage for the level of social skills is the satisfactory level development which shows that need of concern to the development of social skills among school going children. There is a need to explore the forces working behind such situations. Therefore, future studies must consider the role of teachers, school administration and particularly the curriculum for the development of social skills among children.

Another area to be researched is the teaching methodologies employed to teach social skills to children in schools. Research shows that training through consequences teaches appropriate ways to behave in any situation. Thus, it will be quite helpful to identify the gap between present and required strategies to develop social skills among students. All these aspects of Social Studies curriculum should be practiced through experimentation, applied and monitored constantly.

It was also found that there was significant difference between male and female students in the development of social skills at elementary level. Such difference might be due to the roles of male and female kids in Pakistani society.

A criterion should be developed to measure the social skills in the students at elementary level and a certificate should be issued in this regard that may provide empirical evidence that the students have achieved the required level of social skills at elementary level.

Statistically significant difference was found in the development of social skills between the students of 6th and 8th classes. A study is therefore, needed in this regard to find out suitable social skill activities that should be included in the social studies curriculum for 6th and 8th class students to achieve high level of social skill development at elementary level.

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