Development of Social Skills among Children at Elementary Level

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Abstract

The purpose of research was to explore the development of social skills among children at elementary level. A sample of 1127 children of 22 elementary and high schools was drawn from 6th and 8th classes of district Sargodha Pakistan. The five most frequently focused social skills i.e. accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights & responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences were selected from the social studies curriculum. An instrument consisting of 64 items was developed to measure social skills. The results indicated that the social skills have not developed among children to the extent expected. However, students have learned to show respect towards others more than other social skills tolerance of individual differences. It was found that background variables like gender, locale and grade were source of difference in social skill development.

Keywords: *Social skills, Elementary Level, Social Studies Curriculum, Accepting Criticism, Tolerance of Individual Differences.*

Introduction

Man is a social being influencing the conduct of others and being influenced by their behavior, in his turn. Social relationships depend upon the mutual adjustment between such behaviors. Every society has some norms and standards regarding social development. A child who accepts and obeys the traditions, customs and adjusts with the social norms is said to be sociable.

Education is the most prominent means to socialization. Namka (1997) observed that socialization is the child's ability to relate positively to people in society in a manner appropriate to his or her age. Elementary education is the fundamental right of all people, men and women, of all types of areas and places, irrespective of gender, sect, religion or any other denomination. Everyone has the "right to education" states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Therefore, one of the purposes of elementary education is also to develop social skills among children because social skills are just as important as academics. Social skills are most often thought of as a set of skills that allow us to communicate, relate and socialize with others.

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Coleman and Lindsay (1992) found social skills as the cognitive functions and specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors that an individual engages in when interacting with others, including both verbal and nonverbal skills.

Caldarella and Merrell (1977) derived taxonomy from their review that included five broad dimensions of social skills: (a) peer relations skills (b) self- managements skills (c) academic skills (d) compliance skills, and (e) assertion skills. Namka (1997) talked about importance of social skills that these are positive abilities that help the child to interact with others in different situations in ways that are valued. Social skills are those actions, which are acceptable by society and are beneficial both to the person and to others. National Association of School Psychologists Center (2002) noted that good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations.

Murphy (2005) found that underdeveloped social skills could lead to isolation, loneliness, and frustration. Failure to develop adequate social skills can lead to negative feelings, self-doubt, and low self-esteem. While James (2002) contended that Social Skills are the foundation for getting along with others. A lack of Social Skills can lead to behavioral difficulties in school, delinquency, inattentiveness, peer rejection, emotional difficulties, bullying, difficulty in making friends, aggressiveness, problems in interpersonal relationships, poor self-concept, academic failures, concentration difficulties, isolation from peers, and depression.

The job of teaching social skills is the responsibility of the parents, community and school. Parents play a vital role in ensuring that their children develop healthy social skills. But presently the family structure has broken; therefore, social skills are not being taught properly to their children. Community is also the competent way of imparting social skills to young children at community level. But transfer of population, technology and media has weakened this function of community. The responsibility, therefore, to teach social skills is on the shoulders of school. When children begin to go to school, they have to learn to develop their social skills even further. They now have to learn how to interact with other children as well as other adults.

Social skills also support the positive development of healthy adult relationship with peers. Hair, Jager, and Garret (2002) observed that adolescents who have strong social skills, particularly in the areas of conflict, emotional intimacy and the use of pro-social behaviors are more likely to be accepted by peers, develop friendships, maintain strong relationship with parents and peers, are considered effective problem solvers, cultivate greater interest in school and perform better academically.

Gresham (as cited in CIE, 2005) stated that social skills develop through incidental learning and maturation. Unfortunately, some students,

with disabilities and without, fail to develop appropriate social behavior. Some students may not know what constitutes appropriate social behavior, or, alternatively, may have the knowledge but lack practice opportunities. Some emotional responses may inhibit the performance of appropriate social behavior.

Mclntyre (2001) observed that deficits or excesses in social behavior interfere with learning, teaching, and the classroom's orchestration and climate. Many youngsters never learned appropriate behavior for social settings (situations in which they must interact/cope with others). Perhaps they did not receive this guidance in the home (either because of lack of training by elders or another system of values and behaviors being taught). Perhaps they did have good role models in the home and neighborhood who promoted appropriate behavior, but didn't pick it up as well as most kids.

Under National Curriculum of Social Studies, Govt. of Pakistan (2002), desired social skills have been identified in the social studies curriculum, but are not explained directly, however, few social skills are problem solving, rights and responsibilities as a member of society, cooperation in activates, individual differences, showing appreciation, accepting criticism, participating in group discussion, sharing tasks, and showing respect and so on. The Education Policy makers have also themselves admitted that our educational system does not fulfill the requirements of imparting such knowledge which is necessary for development of social skills among children in schools.

It appears that due attention has not been paid to develop social skills among students at   elementary level. Social behaviors, emotional stability, manners etc. in our students are minimal and in this democratic society our children will not be able to cope with the rapid changing world. This study was an effort to find out whether social skills in the social studies curriculum have been developed or not among children at elementary level. The issue was pursued by focusing on following questions;   (a) which social skills were included in the national curriculum of social studies? (b) what was the level of social skills developed among children at elementary stage? (c) what was the difference of social skills developed among children in the various sub groups of male and female, urban and rural and 6th and 8th class students?

Method

This section of the paper describes sample design, development of instrument and procedure of data collection.

Sample

The sampling was carried out in two stages. At first stage, 22 schools were selected from district Sarghoda randomly. Type of schools i.e.

elementary and high schools was used as strata. The sample included 14 elementary schools and 08 high schools having elementary classes. From all selected schools, one intact classes of grade 6 and 8 each was included in the sample. In this manner, 1127 (653 male and 474 female students) became part of the sample.

Instrument

A questionnaire consisting of 69 items divided into five sub-scales (accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights &responsibilities, tolerance of individual differences) was developed. The number of questions in each subscale varied between 12 and 15. Keeping in view the age group of the respondents three point scale was used i.e. never, sometimes and always. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire was 0.75. The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert opinion on the correspondence between curricular content and questions included in the instrument.

Procedure of the Study

The questionnaire was responded by students of grade 6 and 8. The researcher along with a team of research assistants collected data by personally visiting the schools. A prior consent and permission was managed before visiting each school. The students were briefed about the purpose of the questionnaire and told the method to respond to each question. It was ensured that every student has filled the background information correctly.

Analyses and Results

The data collected is mostly in quantitative form. Thus, analysis was performed at two levels. The descriptive of the data were calculated to describe the data and give an idea of averages and dispersion. This was followed by inferential analysis of the data owing to the research questions described earlier.

A descriptive summary of the data showed that most of the students were not sure about the extent to which they have developed the required skills in them. The majority of the respondents selected 'sometimes' which shows uncertainty. A very little percentage of students have reported absence of such skills or consistent actions whenever the situation appears.

Figure 1 shows that students are a very few students think that they have not developed the social skills examined in the questionnaire. Among the focused skills, accepting rights and responsibilities is the least developed skills (4.3%) reported by the respondents. Similarly, there were very few students who reported consistency inn their practice of social skills. The maximum percentage i.e. 6.3% respondents reported to have shown tolerance for individual differences. Majority reported to have developed the

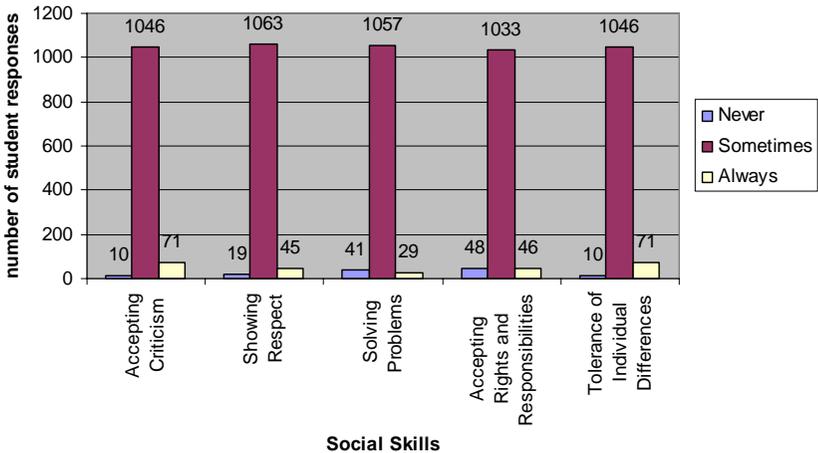social skills to a certain extent and practice these inconsistently.

Figure 1: Frequency of student responses on five social skills

Showing Respect social skill was more developed as compared to tolerance of individual differences. There was significant difference between Showing Respect social skill and Tolerance of Individual Differences social skill, but there was no significant difference between Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights and Responsibilities because some part of Confidence Interval overlapped each other.

Table 1
Difference in Social Skills of the by gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Accepting criticism	Male	653	1.1589	.24037	8.263	.000*
	Female	474	1.0529	.18994		
Showing Respect	Male	653	1.0767	.25950	0.372	.710
	Female	474	1.0709	.26123		
Solving Problems	Male	653	1.0605	.21677	1.287	.198
	Female	474	1.0441	.20554		
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	Male	653	1.0615	.24893	2.248	.025*
	Female	474	1.0292	.22383		
Tolerance of Individual Differences	Male	653	.9729	.23513	4.273	.000*
	Female	474	1.0270	.18931		

*p< .05

Table 1 shows that there is statistically significant difference between genders on the subscales of Accepting Criticism and Accepting Rights and Responsibilities, the male students have developed more social

skills than female students. The result on the subscales t = 8.263, p =0.000 and t= 2.248, p= 0.025 respectively is significant at 0.05 level. While significant difference was also found between genders on the subscales Tolerance of Individual Differences, shows that female students have developed more social skills than male students. The result on the subscale t = 4.273, p =0.000 is significant at 0.05 level. No statistically significant difference between male and female students was found for the subscales of Showing Respect and Solving Problems.

Table 2
Difference in social skills of the students by locality

Variables	Locality	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Accepting criticism	Urban	199	1.1886	.23496	5.155	.000*
	Rural	928	1.0984	.22168		
Showing respect	Urban	199	1.1487	.20765	5.277	.000*
	Rural	928	1.0583	.26747		
Solving problems	Urban	199	1.1174	.19683	4.714	.000*
	Rural	928	1.0399	.21296		
Accepting rights & responsibilities	Urban	199	1.0594	.23106	0.746	.456
	Rural	928	1.0455	.24087		
Tolerance of individual differences	Urban	199	1.0899	.17626	7.920	.000*
	Rural	928	.9754	.22155		

*p< .05

Table 2 shows that statistically significant difference was found between students of urban and rural localities for the subscales of Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Tolerance of Individual Differences, shows that students of urban localities have developed more social skills than rural localities. The result on the subscales t = 5.155, p =0.000, t = 5.277, p = 0.000, t = 4.714 p = 0.000 and t = 7.920, p =0.000 is significant at 0.05 level. Statistically no significant difference was found between students of urban and rural localities for the subscale Accepting Rights and Responsibilities.

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between classes for the subscale Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights & Responsibilities, shows that 6th classes have developed more social skills than 8th classes. The result on the subscales t = 2.054, p=0.040, t = 2.678, P = 0.007, t = 2.751, p = 0.008 and t = 2.542 p = 0.011 is significant at 0.05 level. No statistically significant difference between 6th and 8th classes was found for the subscale Tolerance of Individual Differences.

Table 3
Difference in social skills of the students of by Class

Variables	Class	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Accepting criticism	6th	575	1.1279	.23309	2.054	.040*
	8th	552	1.1002	.21896		
Showing Respect	6th	575	1.0946	.27476	2.687	.007*
	8th	552	1.0531	.24240		
Solving Problems	6th	575	1.0706	.22034	2.751	.008*
	8th	552	1.0359	.20203		
Accepting Rights & Responsibilities	6th	575	1.0656	.25151	2.542	.011*
	8th	552	1.0295	.22426		
Tolerance of Individual Differences	6th	575	.9922	.22321	0.539	.590
	8th	552	.9992	.21382		

*$p < .05$

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to study whether social skills have developed among children or not at the elementary level. The results indicated that the social skills have not developed in the children. As far as level of the social skills is concerned, Showing Respect social skill was more developed as compared to Tolerance of Individual Differences. There was significant difference between Showing Respect social skill and Tolerance of Individual Differences social skill, but there was no significant difference between Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights and Responsibilities social skills.

Another outcome revealed that there was statistically significant difference between male and female students on the subscales of Accepting Criticism and Accepting Rights and Responsibilities, the male students have developed more social skills than female students. While significant difference was also found between genders on the subscales Tolerance of Individual Differences, female students have developed more social skills than male students.

In the above Para, researcher's later finding is consistent with the research of Gresham & Elliott (1990) in which the teachers consistently perceived that the young female students have more social skills than the male students. Dickerson (1995) found that the girls are more social than boys, which again tallies with the findings of the researcher. In another study conducted by Staples and Boulin Johnson (as cited in Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson 1998) found that African American girls are more socialized than boys, the finding is again same as that of the researcher.

Teachers and parents assume major responsibility in shaping children social behaviors. To determine their relative perspectives, Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson (1998) conducted a research in which teachers and parents rated the social skills of inner city Black Elementary

School students. They found that teachers viewed girls as more socially appropriate than boys. The researcher finding is consistent with the research of Cartledge, Adedapo & Johnson that the girls have more Tolerance of Individual Differences social skill than the boys. On the other hand, in the same study parents perceived the boys to have comparable or slightly more strength in social skills. The researcher's finding is also consistent as the male students have developed more social skills than female students on the subscale of Accepting Criticism.

The findings of present study show that the students of urban schools have developed more social skills than the rural schools for the subscales Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Tolerance of Individual Differences.

6th classes recorded higher mean social skills for subscales Accepting Criticism, Showing Respect, Solving Problems and Accepting Rights and Responsibilities than 8th classes. Meredith, & Robb (2002) conducted a study and their findings were consistent to the study of the researcher. In their study the social skill of Solving Problem has not been developed among the students.

Direct instruction is needed for developing social skills so that the students engaged in overt behaviors and teachers lead the students through the process in a similar way that academic facts, skills and concepts are taught. Kimmel and Sherry (2002) conducted research to explore the development of social skills of six cognitively gifted fourth and fifth grade students. The students were taught social skills in the areas of responsibility, empathy, self-control, assertion, externalizing problems, reaching out to peers and controlling impulsive behaviors. All areas with the exception of empathy showed improvement. These findings might be beneficial in our culture for further improvement of social skills through direct instruction.

In the final analysis of this present study, it was concluded that the parents did not play their role effectively to develop social skills in their children. The teachers did not teach the children social skills directly or indirectly. The schools did not realize their responsibility to give importance to the social skills. The community did not contribute to develop social skills among children. In this area several suggestions may prove helpful. Social skills should be integrated into the academic curriculum. This study only assesses the development of social skills at elementary level. Future researches are needed to evaluate the development of social skills among children at other levels of education. Researches are also needed to determine the role of school, teachers, parents and community to develop healthy social skills among their children.

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