

## Study of social skills level of school students

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### Abstract

Social skills of a person affect everything from work performance to romantic life. It is very important to note various signs that may indicate that a child is experiencing social skills deficit. Adolescence stage is very important as it is the period of transition between childhood to adulthood that involves biological, cognitive and socio-emotional changes. It is always better to know beforehand about the positive and negative aspects of personality of school students. In the present study, social skill assessment of school students was carried out using Hindi adapted version of MESSY scale. Out of the sample taken, nearly 35 % school students were found to have very low level of social skills. Female school students were found better as compared to male school students on the social skills scale.

**Keywords:** social skills, mean, average

### 1. Introduction

Social skills are behaviours that help people communicate emotions and needs accurately and achieve interpersonal goals. It is commonly agreed that social skills is the ability to interact with other people in a way that is both appropriate and effective (Segrin 1992; Segrin 2000; Spitzberg 1985) <sup>[9, 10]</sup>. To achieve appropriateness, the actor's behavior needs to conform to social norms, values, or expectations and not be viewed negatively by others (Segrin 2003). To achieve effectiveness, the actors' behavior needs to attain their intended goal(s) (Segrin 2003) or maximization of reinforcement in that specific interaction. The deficit or disruption in the process may affect the outcome of "social skill" or social competence, which may lead to anxiety, frustration, and isolation of the individual.

Evidence confirms that the optimal use of social skills is necessary for maintaining social, psychological, and in many cases, occupational well-being (Segrin 2003). Socially, some evidence suggests that people with poor social skills are less popular among their peers than those with better social skills (Hartup 1967) <sup>[2]</sup> and those with poor social skills are also less satisfied and less successful with their romantic relationships or marriages than those who have better social skills (Burlison 1995). Psychologically, literature reveals that people with poor social skills are at risk for some clinical problems such as depression (Segrin 2000) <sup>[10]</sup>, social anxiety (Leary 1995) <sup>[4]</sup>, loneliness (Jones *et al.* 1982) <sup>[3]</sup> and alcoholism (Miller and Eisler 1977) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Basic Social skills include

- Eye Contact: Being able to maintain eye contact with other person
- Facial Expression: smiling, showing interests.
- Social distance: knowing where to stand relative to others
- Quality of voice: volume, pitch, clarity of content
- Greeting others: initiating contact or responding to greetings etc.
- Making conversations: expressing your feelings, asking questions, showing interests

- Playing with others: complying with rules, sharing, helping, talking, complementing
- Coping with conflict: controlling aggression, accepting criticism, dealing with anger
- Gaining attention and/or asking for help
- Grooming and hygiene

The above list represent a fairly amalgam of non-verbal and verbal skills which all appear crucial for successful social interaction. Having the appropriate social skills an individual also needs not to have other behavioral characteristics which prevent easy acceptance by others, e.g: high levels of irritating behavior (interrupting, poking, shouting etc.) impulsive and unpredictable reactions; temper tantrums; abusive language. In some these undesirable behavior may need to be eliminated by behaviour modification or cognitive behavior modification process.

It is very important to note various signs that may indicate that a child is experiencing social skills deficit. Recall, however, that both behaviour and performance are not the exact and purist science that some would like to believe. Moreover, bear in mind that a well calculated scale or firmly entrenched benchmark of infant and child behaviour and development, is elusive at best. With this in mind, determining that a child has social skills deficits entails understanding what a child can and cannot do. Perhaps then, it should be said that there are signs that may indicate the presence of Social Skills Deficits. Some general signs might include behaviours such as defiance, disturbing other children, inadequate independent work habits, aggression, frequent bragging, shyness, bossiness, peer relation difficulties, high verbal ability, and temper tantrums. These indicators can be categorized as acquisition deficits, performance deficits, fluency deficits, and adaptive deficits.

### 2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were as under:

1. To study the level of social skills of school students.
2. To identify social skills deficient school students.

### 3. Materials and Methods

In the present study, survey method was used. This method is useful in finding out the facts of the present situations in a most precious way. In this study the investigator enquired about emotional intelligence, general well-being and academic achievement of social skill deficient and non-deficient school students.

### 4. Population of the Study

In the present study school students of 10<sup>th</sup>, 10+1 and 10+2 classes were selected. The students were selected from both private and government schools from Kurukshetra district.

### 5. The Sample

It is not possible to conduct a study if the size of population is very large. Therefore, the sample, representative of population has to be selected to include the entire population. The random sampling technique was used to select the sample from the population. The sample for the present study was collected from 8 different private and government schools from Kurukshetra district of Haryana state. Both rural and urban areas were included in the sample.

The sample included 320 school students (180 male, 120 female) from eight different schools in Kurukshetra district. Out of these eight schools, four were from rural area and other four were from urban areas. The selected students were enrolled in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (age group 15-18 years).

### 6. Tools Used

Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with youngsters (MESSY) is the one of the most frequently researched social skill scale (Matson 1983) <sup>[5]</sup>. The initial sample was tested in 1983 with 744 children between 4 and 18 years of age. They were tested in private and public schools in Midwest USA (Matson, Rotatori & Helsel, 1983) <sup>[5]</sup>. The final scale was reduced to 62 items for self-report form and 64 items for teacher report form. Original tests of reliability and validity indicated strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability and adequate convergent validity. The scale precisely covers a wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviours which is an essential criterion for a social skills checklist.

The parent and teacher report forms yield two factors: Inappropriate Assertiveness/Impulsiveness scale and Appropriate Social Skills scale. Subscale scores are obtained by summing the Likert-type rating for each item in the scale. The self-report form of MESSY scale was originally factor analyzed and six distinct factors were obtained. They were labelled Factor 1: 'Appropriate social Skills', Factor 2: 'Inappropriate Assertiveness', Factor 3: 'Impulsive Recalcitrant', Factor 4: 'Overconfident', Factor 5: 'Jealousy/Withdrawal' and Factor 6: 'Miscellaneous items' (rest of the items difficult to classify). The MESSY has been evaluated and adapted for other countries and translated in nine other languages and researched internationally.

The followings are the noteworthy features of MESSY:

1. The items in MESSY refers to observable behavior. The

items on the MESSY are very carefully worded to refer to discrete, observable behavior rather than personality traits. This makes it easier for children and teachers to understand the items, and this also makes it easier for users to interpret ratings.

2. The MESSY provides scales for both appropriate and inappropriate social skills. The examples of appropriate social skills are "Help a friend who is hurt" and "walks up to people and starts a conversation". Examples of inappropriate skills are "gives other children dirty looks" and "wants to get even with someone who hurts him/her". By assessing both appropriate and inappropriate skills, the MESSY use is not focusing solely on the negative features of student's behavior.
3. All MESSY items refer to social skills. The MESSY was designed to measure one concept (social skills) and to measure it well. All items measure social skills. There are no items to measure intelligence, adaptive behavior, or mental illness.

#### 6.1 Reliability of English Version of MESSY

The self-rated version of MESSY is reported to have good internal consistency, and split-half reliabilities. The inter-item coefficient alpha was 0.80 and Guttman split-half was 0.78 for the self-rating form of MESSY. The MESSY was correlated highly with popularity and social skills ranking, a structured interview and a school behavior check list.

#### 6.2 Hindi Adaption of MESSY

The MESSY scale was translated by Prof. Sushma Sharma, Kurukshetra University, India (Sharma 2000, Sharma 2002) <sup>[12, 13]</sup> into Hindi with the help of professional translator and checked by a bilingual psychologist. Efforts were made to maintain the original meaning intended by the scale except for the two, one item, "I call people by their name" in the scale was modified to "I call children of my age by their names and elders with respect" and other. "I want to get even with someone who hurts me" was interpreted differently due to cultural differences and modified as "I don't take revenge even if someone hurts me". After factor analysis of Hindi adapted MESSY scale, 12 items were dropped and only 50 items retained (Sharma 2002) <sup>[12]</sup>.

### 7. Results & Discussion

The mean, standard deviation, kurtosis and skewness were used to measure the spread or dispersion in the distribution. Graphical representations of the distributions were also presented. An inspection of the distributions of the scores of different variables and their dimensions indicated that the variables were more or less normally distributed.

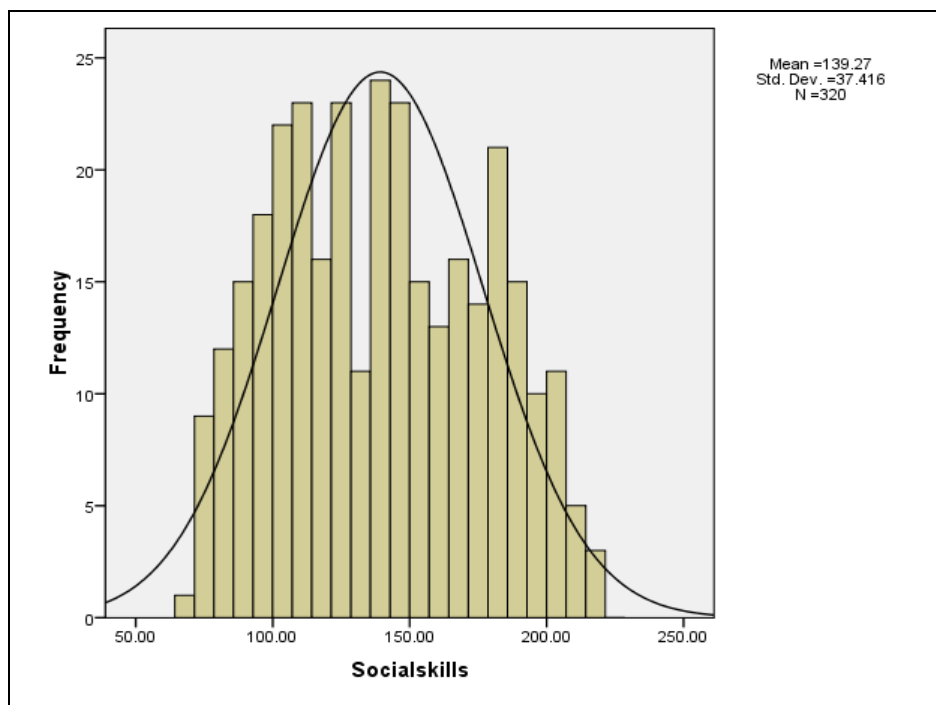
The statistics of the distribution of social skills data is presented in Table 1. The theoretical maximum and minimum score from social skills scale is 250 and 50 respectively and the average is 150. In the present study, the highest score secured was 220 and lowest was 69 with mean value of 139.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for Social skills data

Statistics	Net Result (N=320)	Gender (320)		Locality (320)		School Type (320)	
		Male (N=193)	Female (N=127)	Urban (N=172)	Rural (N=148)	Private (N=147)	Govt. (N=173)
Mean	139	137	142	133	146	127	149
Maximum	220	217	220	218	220	219	220
Minimum	69	69	73	69	73	69	73
Std. Deviation	37.41	37.58	37.07	35.11	38.82	34.78	36.65
Skewness	0.14	0.133	0.17	0.17	0.03	0.49	-0.142
Kurtosis	-1.0	-1.02	--1.01	-0.95	-1.14	-0.69	-0.91

The standard deviation of the data is 37.41. The population has negative excess kurtosis,  $-1.0 < 3$ , which is platykurtic. Since the skewness is 0.14, it is

slightly positively skewed right; the right tail of the distribution is longer than the left, showing that there is a bigger lower achieving group than the higher achieving group.



**Fig 1:** Histogram representing the distribution of social skills data

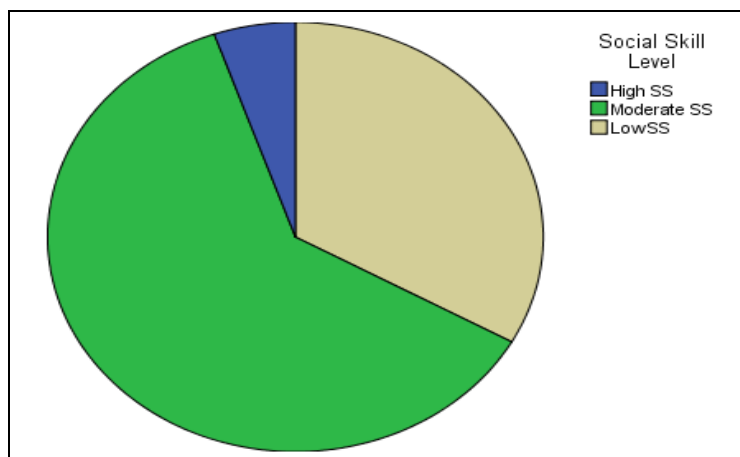
For the purpose of classification of level of social skills of school students, three different groups were formed based on their scores on social skills scale. The distribution is shown in Table 2. The students who scored less than 117 were kept in very low social skills (social skill deficient) category, who

scored between 118 - 185 were kept in moderate social skills category and who scored between 186 to 250 were placed in high social skill category. The number in parentheses shows the percentage of students belonging to that particular category.

**Table 2:** Distribution of social skills of whole sample

Social Skills Category	Score Range	Total (320)	Gender (320)		Locality (320)		School Type	
			Male (193)	Female (127)	Urban (172)	Rural (148)	Private (147)	Govt. (173)
High Social Skills	186-145	17 (5.3 %)	7 (3.6 %)	10 (7.9%)	9 (5.2%)	8 (5.4%)	10 (6.8%)	7 (4%)
Moderate Social Skills	118-185	190 (59.2 %)	126 (65.3 %)	64 (50.4%)	104 (60.5%)	86 (58.1%)	84 (57.1%)	106 (61.3%)
Very low Social Skills	50-117	113 (35.2 %)	60 (31.1%)	53 (41.7%)	59 (34.3%)	54 (36.5%)	53 (36.1%)	60 (34.7%)

The distribution of percentage of students in different social skills group is represented in the form of a pi-chart in Figure 2.



**Fig 2:** Distribution of social skills of the whole sample (pi-chart)

The results obtained from the present study are summarized as follow

1. Nearly 35 % students are found to have very low level of social skills.
2. Male school students are found to have low level of social skills as compared to female school students
3. Rural school students are found to have better social skills as compared to urban school students.
4. Students studying in govt. school have shown higher social skills as compared to the students studying in private schools.

Based on these results it may be further concluded that there is a strong need to provide social skills to all categories of students irrespective of their background factors.

### 7.1 Recommendations

The educational institutions should undertake special efforts to see that school students should not suffer from social skills deficits. A two prolonged strategy may be adopted so that those who are new arrivals in the institutions and should be prevented from being falling a pray to these tendencies. This could be done by designing their institutional experiences in such a way that these children get a chance of utilizing their potential in whatever field they possess. Whatever be the nature of such activities the emphasis has to be on providing them an outlet to their potential energies and a chance to succeed. Various co-curricular activities like physical education, yoga, music, dance along with curricular activities having social skills component are to be selected and implemented keeping in view the nature of difficulties these children face.

The findings of the present study can be beneficial for students, teachers, administrators, parents, counsellors, social workers, educational policy makers and other professionals working with education sector. The usefulness of the study lies in:

1. Early identification of social skill deficits by the parents, teachers and other professional so that remediation could be planned at the earliest and these deficits do not become handicap in future for the child.
2. Enabling the teacher training institutions/apex level organizations as National Council of Education Research

and Training (NCERT), National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) to redesign the teacher training curricula. The textbooks must have the social skills as an important component in them.

3. Teachers play critical role in making students become aware of what makes a skilful person. Teacher observes almost all activities of students and so they come to know about such deficiency before any other person. Teacher can motivate deficient students; inform the parents about lack of social skills in their children. He/she can engage students in activities which improves their social skills.
4. Providing social skill deficient students a platforms to get along with others in an effective way in school and to help them in better socialization and motivate them to work so that they become a better human resource and contributing member of the society. The students can make conscious decision about their social involvement and activities for having a happy and satisfactory life.
5. Parents have a great role in the education and development of a child. Parental acceptance and healthy attitude towards the child are bound to reflect the effect on the child. Parental awareness is, therefore, an essential aspect of the future of social skill deficient children. Parents can investigate the reasons for low level of social skills and encourage the children to engage in various activities which help the kids to improve the level of their social skills. Parents should encourage them to participate in activities like sports and other social activities to provide them suitable exposure of social requirements of the society and life.

### 8. Conclusion

The level of social skills of school students was studied in the schools of kurukshetra district. The study was conducted on 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> school students. Out of the total sample of 320 students, 113 (35.2%) students were found to have very low level of social skills. Considering the importance of social skills in the overall growth and professional achievement of a person, there is a strong need to take corrective measure for improving the social skills of students. Some of the corrective measures have been suggested as educational implications of the study.

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