

INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL SKILLS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL BOARDING STUDENTS ION OGUN STATE

By

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Abstract

Successful learning requires students to interact closely with teachers and peers. In addition to their general importance for daily interaction, social skills can have a big impact on a child's ability to succeed in an academic setting. The classroom, therefore, becomes both a training ground for development of social skills and an arena in which those skills are put to use. The study explores the teachers' perception of social skills of Junior Secondary School boarding students in relation to their academic achievement. The participants comprise 120 JS 2 boarding students selected from 6 schools across Ogun State using cluster sampling. Twelve homeroom teachers (2 from each school), who teach the students were also selected to assess their social skills. A 42-item questionnaire fashioned in line with Merrell's School Social Behaviour Scales SSBS-2 was used to assess students' social skills while their academic achievement was measured by a multiple choice achievement test in English and Mathematics. The adapted SSBS-2 has high reliability coefficients, achieving internal consistency coefficients of 0.89 and 0.91 for the prosocial and the antisocial behaviour scales respectively. The achievement test has a 4-week test-re-test reliability coefficient of 0.83. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic and Independent t-test technique. The results show that prosocial behaviour has a significant positive correlation with students' academic

achievement ($r = 0.748$, $N = 120$, $p < 0.05$) and that girls have more prosocial behaviour (mean = 67.27) than boys (mean = 63.06). The study recommends among others that teachers should provide instruction and modeling of appropriate behaviours and responses to help children who have social skills deficits.

Keywords: Social skills, Prosocial behaviour, Homeroom teachers, School Social Behaviour Scales, Academic achievement test.

Introduction

Successful learning requires students to interact closely with teachers and peers. In addition to their general importance for daily interaction, social skills can have a big impact on a child's ability to succeed in an academic setting. The extent to which children and adolescents possess good social skills can influence not only their academic performance, but also their behaviour, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school's environment and safety. The classroom, therefore, becomes both a training ground for development of social skills and an arena in which those skills are put to use.

Social skills are personal skills needed for successful social communication and interaction. They are also described as ways of dealing with others that create healthy and positive interactions. Children who have social skills can communicate clearly, calmly and respectfully. Development of good social skills becomes more important particularly in a boarding school where children and adolescents learn how to live and deal with other people. They are challenged to develop their interpersonal skills. Boarding school is a transformative experience in acquisition of social skills as

students learn to communicate and relate with others. It offers more opportunity for students to foster intense connections with their teachers and classmates than day students.

In educational context when investigating relations among peers and between students and adults/teachers, social skills are a more commonly used term than social competence. Social skills include different behaviours which help individuals enter and interact in interpersonal relations more or less successfully. On the other hand, these skills are also learnt through the very same experience – in different relationships individuals learn different social skills, gain and model them. The relationship between social skills and interpersonal relations is reciprocal. In other word, social skills affect the quality of one's relations, and vice versa.

Children's social skills are important for early school success and later adjustment, particularly in a boarding school where boarding students interact more closely with one another than day students who go back home after school hours. Research has documented that children without adequate social skills are at risk of difficulties including peer rejection, behaviour problems, and poor

academic achievement. Moreover, recent research shows disturbing rates of expulsion in preschool and kindergarten, which has fueled efforts to promote these skills (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). In general, social skills describe how children navigate social and learning contexts and can be conceptualised as including interpersonal skills and learning-related skills. Interpersonal skills refer to the ability to perform competently in social situations, including interacting positively with others, cooperating, sharing and respecting peers. Researches show that interpersonal skills are important for peer acceptance and social adjustment throughout childhood and adolescence (Masten, A.S, Roisman, G.I, Long, J.D., Burt, K.B., Obradovic, J. & Riley, J.R, 2005).

In contrast to interpersonal skills, learning-related skills are important for learning and achievement in childhood and adolescence. These skills include self-regulation and social competence (e.g cooperation, independence and responsibility) on classroom tasks and in learning situations. There is strong evidence that learning-related skills predict academic achievement in kindergarten and throughout elementary school (McClelland, Acock & Morrison, 2006). Aspects of learning-related skills are also important for achievement in adolescence (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Although interpersonal skills and learning-related skills fall under the broad social skills construct, they are separate but related construct with differing relations to outcomes in childhood and

adolescence. Whereas interpersonal skills have been mostly linked to children's social development, learning-related skills have been related to doing well in classroom settings and to academic success.

A large body of evidence supports the role that children's social skills (including interpersonal skills and learning-related skills) play in social and academic success. In general, children's interpersonal skills have been linked to social outcomes whereas learning-related skills have predicted academic success. Interpersonal skills are especially important for social adjustment in childhood and adolescence. For example, one study finds that poor interpersonal skills (e.g externalising problems) in childhood, predicted academic problems in adolescence, which in turn led to internalising problems in adulthood (Masten et al., 2005).

There is also strong evidence that learning-related skills predict early academic achievement (McClelland et al., 2006). For example, one study discovers that pre-schoolers who had difficulties using learning-related skills to complete goal-directed activities scored lower on a standardized cognitive achievement measure. Another study found that the gains in learning-related skills, specifically self-regulation, predicted gains made in early literacy, vocabulary and Mathematics skills over the pre-kindergarten year in a diverse sample of children across two cities in the United States (McClelland M.M, Cameron, C.E., Conor, C.M., Farris, C.L. Jewkes, A.M & Morrison, F.J, 2007).

Other researches in elementary schools have demonstrated that kindergarten learning-related skill significantly predicted Reading and Mathematics achievement between kindergarten and sixth grade and growth in Literacy and Mathematics from kindergarten to second grade (McClelland et al., 2006). Finally, in one recent study, aspects of learning-related skills, such as self-discipline, were stronger predictors of academic performance than intelligence test scores in adolescents (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

A number of studies also support relations between interpersonal skills and learning-related skills for children's school adjustment. For example, research has shown that children's self-regulation positively relates to social competence and that strong self-regulation can buffer otherwise negative outcomes (Lengua, 2002). Taken together, research suggests that promoting interpersonal skills and learning-related skills in young children and adolescents is one way to ensure strong social and academic skills.

When investigating relations between academic and social variables, authors often emphasize the study of educational goals in comparison with social goals. For example, Wentzel (1998) points out that different social goals (for example being accepted by peers in a social environment forming friendship and responsible behaviour) have a lot in common with educational goals. It has been shown that social competence is a factor of student's peer acceptance and popularity, student's emotional well-being, and is even seen as a protective factor in

one's development (Chen, X., Liu, M., Li, D., Li, Z. & Li, B., 2000). Also prosocial behaviours, like willingness to help others or comply with them, are positively related to students' academic achievement (Wentzel, 1998). Ray and Elliott (2006) proposed a model where students' social skills and self-concept influence academic achievement through their effect on academic competence. A research on a Slovene sample of students also confirm that socially desirable behaviour is directly and significantly related to primary and secondary school students' academic achievement in mother tongue and Mathematics (Pekljaj, C., Kalin, J., Pecjak, S., Puklek, L., Valencic, Z. & Ajdissek, N., 2008).

Gender differences in social skills have been examined in the context of different studies. A number of studies have found that social skills deficits have been more often documented in boys than girls. Compared with girls, boys are more likely to be suspended and expelled at every grade level, drop out of school, exhibit behaviour problems, and have lower education levels (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Research also indicates that girls have stronger aspects of learning-related skills and more adaptive classroom behaviour than boys. A recent study found that girls had significantly stronger levels of self-regulation in kindergarten than boys, and there were greater number of boys scoring the lowest levels on self-regulation over the school year compared to girls (Matthews, Ponitz & Morrison, 2009). There are a lot of studies which address gender differences in aggression (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Social skills (interpersonal skills and learning-related skills) are important for academic success and social well-being from early childhood through adolescence. Children without adequate social skills are at risk of peer rejection, behaviour problems and poor academic achievement. The study is an attempt to establish the relationship between social skills and academic achievement of boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State. In addition, the study seeks to examine whether or not gender differences exist in the social skills exhibited by the students.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. These are:

1. There is no significant relationship between perceived social skills and academic achievement of boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State.
2. There is no significant difference in the perceived social skills exhibited by male and female boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State.

Method

The research design is descriptive survey. The population comprised all Junior Secondary School boarding students in Ogun State. Six schools with boarding facilities were used for the study. Twenty JS 2 students were randomly selected from each school to make a total of 120 students. In addition, two homeroom teachers were selected from each school to assess students' social skills. The homeroom teachers also taught

subjects that enabled them to meet their students at least twice a week. Therefore, it is assumed that they know the students they evaluated well.

A questionnaire fashioned in line with *Merrell's School Social Behaviour Scales – SSBS-2 (2002)* were used to assess students' social skills and homeroom teachers filled in the questionnaire for each participating student. The questionnaire comprised 36 items which were divided into 6 subscales, of which the first three refer to adaptive prosocial behaviour in school situations (students' social competence scale). For example, it offers help to other students when needed. Other three subscales describe socially incompetent behaviour which is directed against others and leads to socially negative outcomes (antisocial behaviour scale). This can be seen in anti-social behaviours such as cheating during examinations or in school games.

Homeroom teachers evaluated students' social skills on a 5-point Likert scale depending on how often certain behaviour was observed in a student (1-never, 5- frequently). Higher scores on the first three subscales indicate socially more competent behaviours, whereas higher scores on the last three subscales indicate socially incompetent behaviours. The adapted SSBS-2 has high reliability co-efficient, achieving internal consistency co-efficient of 0.83 and 0.87 for the prosocial and the antisocial behaviour scales respectively. It also enjoyed test-retest reliability coefficients of 0.81 for prosocial scale and 0.84 for antisocial scale.

Students' academic achievement was measured using a 40-item multiple choice achievement test containing 20 English and 20 Mathematics test items. Each item correctly answered attracts 1 point and the aggregate score of the two subjects was used as a measure of student's academic achievement. The achievement test had a 4-week test-re-test reliability coefficient of 0.82.

After the retrieval of the instruments, data obtained were analyzed

using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic and Independent t-test technique. Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between perceived social skills and academic achievement of boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State.

Table 1(a): Relationship between Prosocial Behaviour and Academic Achievement of Students

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	R	Sig (P)
Prosocial Behaviour	120	65.38	9.77	118	0.748	0.000
Academic Achievement	120	28.15	4.48			

Table 1(b): Relationship between Antisocial Behaviour and Academic Achievement of Students

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	R	Sig (P)
Prosocial Behaviour	120	34.28	5.40	118	-0.412	0.000
Academic Achievement	120	28.15	4.48			

As shown in table 1(a), the results of teachers' perceptions of the relationship between prosocial behaviour and academic achievement show that there is a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.748$, $N = 120$, $p < 0.05$). It is a fairly strong correlation and 55.9% of the variance is explained. In addition, table 1(b) indicates a negatively significant relationship between antisocial

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the perceived social skills exhibited by male and female boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State.

behaviour and students' academic achievement ($r = -0.412$, $N = 120$, $p < 0.05$). The percentage of variance explained is 17.0%. The above results led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between perceived social skills and academic achievement of boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State.

Table 2(a): Independent t-test Technique of Gender Difference in Prosocial Behaviour

Students' Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	T	Sig (P)
Male	54	63.06	9.55	118	2.399	0.000
Female	66	67.27	9.60			

Table 2(b): Independent t-test Technique of Gender Difference in Antisocial Behaviour

Students' Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	T	Sig (P)
Male	54	37.70	5.07	118	7.659	0.000
Female	66	31.47	3.84			

The results of analysis in tables 2(a) and (b) reveal that there is a significant difference in the perceived social skills exhibited by male and female boarding students in upper basic level of education in Ogun State. Hence, hypothesis 2 was rejected. Female students have more prosocial behaviour (mean = 67.27) than their male counterparts (mean = 63.06) (table 2a). The mean difference between the two groups is 4.22 and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated population mean difference is between -7.70 and -7.36. The effect size is medium ($d = 0.44$). An independent t-test shows that the difference between the two groups is significant ($t = 2.399$, $df = 118$, $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, table 2(b) reveals that male students display antisocial behaviours more frequently (mean = 37.70) than their female counterparts (mean = 31.47). The mean difference between them is 6.23 and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated population mean difference is between 4.57 and 7.89. The effect size is large ($d = 1.40$). An independent t-test showed that

the difference between the two groups is significant ($t = 7.454$, $df = 118$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

Homeroom teachers tended to assess all students (regardless of their gender) as socially relatively competent. On positive subscales, the mean score was 65.38 and on socially negative subscales the mean was 34.28. It could, therefore, be assumed that teachers either had a very positive perception of students' social behaviour or they were mild evaluators of their behaviour. It is plausible that homeroom teachers gave somewhat more positive or less negative appraisals of students' social skills because homeroom teacher's educational function is emphasized in the development of socially more competent behaviour. Homeroom teachers and their students discuss potentially undesired behaviour, the manner of interpersonal interactions, and the like in class meetings. Those responsibilities are connected with greater benevolence to their students.

On the account of significant positive correlation between prosocial

behaviour and academic achievement and significant negative correlation between antisocial behaviour and academic achievement, it is logical to reason that good peer relations (student cooperating with peers in various situations, offering help when needed, accepting peers, making compromises etc), and productive academic behaviour (following teacher's instructions, finishing school tasks in time, working independently) may result in better academic achievement. On the contrary, all forms of undesired behaviours (irritable, disruptive, aggressive) were associated with poor academic achievement. These results are in line with other empirical studies, in which authors established positive correlations between students' persistency at tasks, their activity, effort investment and completion of school tasks, cooperation with others, prosocial behaviour and academic achievement (Wentzel, 1998). Also different studies confirmed negative correlations between avoidance, effort withdrawal, using self-handicapping strategies, students' irresponsible behaviour and academic achievement (Lau & Nie, 2008; Wentzel, 1998).

As regard the perception that girls are socially more skilled than boys, the findings are in agreement with other empirical studies. Merrell (2002) discovers statistically significant gender differences at all grade levels on the SSBS. Elliott, Diperna, Mrock and Lang (2004) also observe that female students tend to receive higher ratings than male students on teachers' reports of academic enablers. Coie, Dodge and Coppoteli (1982)

discover that boys were more likely to be classified as rejected than girls, which also indicate that boys are less socially competent.

A possible explanation for this finding is that gender related stereotypes are at work when teachers are asked to assess students' social skills. Girls are usually seen as better students, more prosocial and caring, whereas typical behaviour for boys is characterised by higher rate of misconduct, more aggression and competitiveness and the like. The traditional male gender-role for boys is being independent, autonomous and mastery-oriented, whereas feminine gender role is characterised by being nurturing, compliant and more prosocial.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to promote social skills development in students.

One protective factor of children's social skills development is parenting. Research has shown that parents who are warm and sensitive and who set appropriate limits for children are more likely to have children with strong interpersonal and learning-related skills. Efforts should, therefore, be made by school authorities and education boards to educate parents in forum such as PTA on the importance of good parenting in the development of children's social skills.

To effectively help children who have social skills deficits, teachers can provide instruction and modeling of appropriate behaviours and responses. In young children, teachers can also create opportunities for children to practice and generalize social skills through classroom

interactions. As children practice social skills, teachers should provide positive feedback to promote appropriate behaviours and redirect inappropriate behaviours.

Since it has been proven that social competence and academic competence are related, teachers, school psychologists and administrators should consider social skills as potential intervention targets when trying to promote social and academic competence. It is, therefore, important that teachers become aware of the fact that by the use of certain learning methods (e.g. group work), they stimulate the development of students' learning, as well as, social competencies, because in such learning environment students have to make adjustments and negotiate in order to finish learning task.

Conclusion

The study has established that desired behaviours explained a significant part of variability in students' academic achievement for boys and girls. Likewise, the study has also shown that all forms of antisocial behaviours such as defiant and disruptive behaviours had significant negative correlation with students' academic achievement regardless of gender. In addition, the study revealed that girls were socially more competent than boys as they were perceived as having more positive peer relations, being more cooperative and compliant with school rules and regulations etc. On the contrary, the study established that male students displayed antisocial behaviours more frequently than their female counterparts as they were perceived as demonstrating more irritating and annoying behaviours,

being more aggressive and violating school rules more often, more demanding of teachers' and students' attention and more disruptive.

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