NEED ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM FOR SPECIAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study was conducted with the objective of assessing the need of special students regarding social skills, to compare the social skills of special students on the basis of gender and to develop a social skill training program for special students. The Theoretical framework of the study was based on the Social Skills Parameters by Aderson. (2013) consisted of three main components (social play, emotional regulation and communication skills). The researcher used a quantitative approach and descriptive design for the study. The population consisted of 1177 special students for the 2024 session. Proportionate sampling technique was used for research as the population was divided into male and female both. The sample size of the study was (n=40) special students. The researcher adapted a Social Skills Observation Sheet (SSOS) for recording data in the light of Anderson (2013). The researchers visited the schools and observed the students from one month continually. The data was analyzed by applying Mean and t-test. The results emphasized that there was a need for specialized social skills programs that can enhance peer interactions, communication, emotional control, and adaptive abilities such as understanding emotional flexibility, verbal and non-verbal conversational skills especially. It was also revealed that there was statistically significant difference found between male and female students. It was recommended to guarantee consistent skill development and real-world application across educational contexts, it was suggested to put in place a standardized, personalized social skills training program with interactive exercises catered to each student's needs and follow-up sessions.

Key Words: *Social skills, social skills training, Special students*

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Introduction

Social skills are the most important element in the development of human personality. Home environment and school both play a vital role in the development of such skills that helps the child to adjust in society. Such skills becomes more important when it is concerned with children with special needs. Special students generally face issues related to adjustment in society. Communication, emotional control, and problem-solving are common challenges for special students, which include those with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and hearing or speech impairments. Programs for social skills training can offer organized assistance to enhance these areas, increasing students' social independence and self-assurance (Gresham, Lane, & Lambros, 2001). Teachers can provide focused interventions and pinpoint development areas with observations, interviews, and standardized tests (Davis & Johnson, 2020).

A treatment strategy called social skills training aims to improve pupils' capacity for constructive social interaction. These programs give children the chance to practice and improve their social skills through role-playing and other methods by teaching them how to initiate conversations, recognize non-verbal signs, and express empathy (Gresham, Lane, & Lambros, 2001). Students with special needs benefit most from this kind of instruction since it enables them to form deep connections and become more successfully integrated into their communities (Davis & Johnson, 2020).

To address the particular requirements of students with disabilities, special education programs such as those governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act offer individualized teaching. A tailored education plan including certain objectives and adjustments was frequently included in these programs (Applied Behavior Analysis Programs, 2023) . Training in social skills was essential for assisting students in reaching these objectives, especially in developing emotional regulation and communication (Davis & Johnson, 2020). Students can enhance their general quality of life and acquire critical skills for social success through focused interventions (Gresham, Lane, & Lambros, 2001).

Rationale of the Study

Students' overall development depends heavily on their social interactions, but special education students frequently encounter particular difficulties because of disorders including autism, ADHD, and speech or hearing impairments. These difficulties affect their capacity to

communicate with peers and the community effectively, highlighting the necessity of focused social skills training initiatives. According to Gresham, Lane, and Lambros (2001), social skill inadequacies can harm the quality of life, emotional health, and academic performance, necessitating the use of organized treatments. Even though these problems are becoming more widely acknowledged, thorough needs evaluations are still required to pinpoint the precise social skills deficiencies and strengths of special education students. This was a crucial first step in creating training programs that work.

This study tries to address a key gap in the present body of literature by emphasizing the necessity of tailored methods for social skills training for special education students. According to González and Pérez (2023), programs intended to match the particular needs of individual students are considerably more effective than one-size-fits-all treatments. However, a lot of current research ignores important cognitive elements like memory consolidation and problem-solving skills that have a big impact on the development of social skills. Although Kurdziel, Duclos, and Spencer (2013) and Harrison and Horne (2012) also emphasized the importance of these cognitive processes in social behavior acquisition, there hasn't been much incorporation of these processes into training programs. Through a thorough needs analysis, this study will pinpoint particular social skill deficiencies and strengths, enabling the development of cultural interventions that are sensitive, customized, and respect each student's unique circumstances and talents while empowering them.

Statement of the Problem

The study was designed to identify the social skills that special education students require to enhance their interactions and communication, as well as to compare the social skills of male and female special students. The researchers were interested in knowing the programs that are customized to meet their requirements. The study also intended to develop a social skills training program tailored to special education children based on these findings. This program would help them overcome their obstacles, improve their social skills, and encourage inclusivity. There is a need to promote their personal growth and enable them to actively engage in school and communal contexts by concentrating on their particular needs.

Literature Review

Human connections are based on social skills, which enable people to

engage, communicate, and negotiate the intricacies of interpersonal interactions and social systems. Due to cognitive, emotional, or behavioral issues that impacted their innate learning processes, special education children frequently struggled to acquire these abilities. It was challenging for students with poor social skills to express themselves, make friends, and comprehend social rules. Their general quality of life and emotional health suffered as a result of these difficulties. Consequently, the development of specialized and structured social skills training programs became a crucial part of special education (Alpha School, 2024).

Social skills training (SST) programs must effectively assist each student's growth by addressing their unique obstacles. From fundamental play behaviors like sharing to more complex talents like problem-solving and nonverbal cue interpretation, SST covered a broad spectrum of skills. These programs were created by educators to improve students' sense of independence, self-worth, and community. While taking into account each student's distinct skills and histories, thorough needs evaluations assisted in identifying specific social skill gaps. Students were better prepared for both personal and professional interactions thanks to this focused approach, which also decreased anxiety in new situations and promoted meaningful relationships. In addition to enhancing students' classroom experiences, SST helped them become more socially adept in the future (Wang & Zhang, 2016).

The capacity of social skills training programs to foster inclusivity and productive engagement made them crucial for special education students. These programs were reinforced by systematic needs evaluations that addressed the basic, sophisticated, and successful social skills required for meaningful connections. The study emphasized how crucial it was to provide educators with the tools and know-how to deal with the particular social difficulties that these students encounter to better prepare them for success in the community and throughout their lives (Alpha School, 2024; Wang & Zhang, 2016).

The special difficulties that special education students such as those with autism, ADHD, hearing impairments, and muteness face are addressed by effective social skills training (SST) programs. These courses support the growth of adaptive interaction, emotional control, and social communication abilities. The design and execution of SST programs have been guided by theories such as the Theory of Mind (ToM), Ecological Systems Theory, Socially Assistive Robotics (SAR), and Virtual Reality (VR) models. People can better comprehend and analyze the feelings, intentions, and thoughts of others by using the Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM-based SST training helped autistic students become

more adept at expressing their feelings and identifying nonverbal clues. Group talks and role-playing were frequently employed to foster empathy and teach social signs. These programs promoted a feeling of community and lessened social isolation (PubMed Central, n.d.).

Robotic tutors were developed using the SAR idea to teach social and emotional skills. These robots offered an interactive environment for skill development by identifying emotional states and giving real-time feedback. SAR programs, for instance, assisted students with ADHD by providing stimulating, distraction-free learning environments and allowed silent students to practice nonverbal communication. SAR improved emotional regulation and decreased social anxiety (ArXiv, n.d.).

Theoretical Framework

For developing a theoretical framework for this study Social skills Parameters by Anderson. (2013) were selected. The following diagram explains the direction of the research.

Fig. 1 Theoretical framework Social Skills Parameters by Anderson (2013)
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Figure 1

Social skills parameters by Andeerson. (2013)
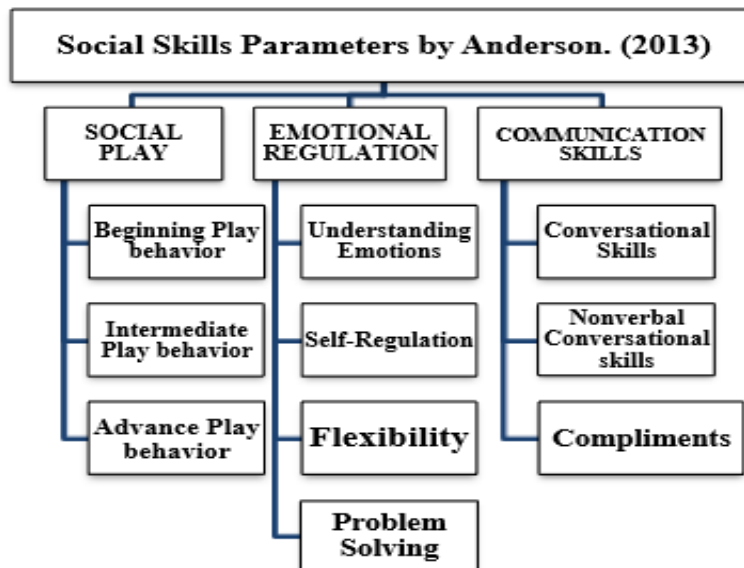
Significance of Study

The urgent need for focused social skills training programs for special education students who frequently struggle with social interactions, communication, and emotional regulation because of disorders like autism, ADHD, and speech or hearing impairments makes this study extremely important. Through a thorough needs assessment, the research pinpoints particular social skill deficiencies and strengths, laying the groundwork for the creation of training plans that are tailored to each person's requirements. These kinds of treatments increase students' general quality of life, emotional health, and academic achievement in addition to their capacity to participate meaningfully in social settings.

The study would be beneficial to therapists because it gives them the information, they need to create individualized intervention plans that address each client's cognitive and emotional needs of special education students. These personalized approaches ensure that treatment efforts are matched with each student's individual needs and goals.

Research objective
1. To analyze the need for social skills programs for special students
2. To compare the social skills of special students on the basis of gender
3. To develop a social skill training program for special students

Research Question
1. What is the level of social skills among special students?
2. What was the need for social skills programs for special students?
3. How to develop an effective social skill training programs for special students?

Null Hypothesis
Ho 1   There is statically no significant difference in the social skills of special students on the basis of gender

Methodology
Research Approach

The researcher applied a quantitative approach, producing numerical data and analyzing it using the proper statistical methods. Because the study was quantitative, data was gathered quantitatively by using a closed ended structured checklist.

Research Design

The social skills of special students are evaluated by using descriptive study.

Population

The 1177 special students studding at two primary schools (Year/Session= 2023-2024) in Rawalpindi were considered as the population of the study. 677 of whom were male and 500 of whom were female. The schools were as follows:

1.   Sir Syed School,
2.   College of Special Education
3.   Global Special School.

Table 1
Population of the study

School name Session(2024)	Sir Syed School, College of Special Education	Global Special School.	Total
No. of student	530	647	1177

Table No. 1 shows that 1177 students enrolled at Sir Syed School, College of Special Education, and Global Special School together. Of these students, 677 were male and 500 were female special students.

Sampling Technique

This study used proportionate sampling to ensure equitable representation of 1,177 special needs students in Rawalpindi, including 677 male and 500 female students. This method was used to maintain the representation from both groups (Male and Female) in the population. It also reduced selection bias and provided a balanced sample, improving the reliability of the study findings.

Sample Size

The research population included two primary types of special needs students: male and female. An adequate proportion of each group was included in the study to provide fair representation, enabling balanced insights into the distinct requirements and traits of both male and female students.

Table 2
Sample size of the study(n=47)

	Male	Female	Total
Population	677	500	1177
Sample	19	21	40

In Table 2, a sample of 19 male and 21 female students was selected from population of 677 male and 500 female students for the purpose of observation.

Data Collection Tool

Table 3
Cronbach Alpha Reliability of Special Students' Social Skills Observation Sheet

Variable	Sub-Section	Sub to Sub Sections	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha Reliability
Special Students' Social Skills Observation Sheet			66	0.98
	Social play behavior	Beginning Play Behaviors	6	.60
		Intermediate Play behaviors	8	.67
		Advanced Play Behavior	6	.68
	Emotional regulation	Understanding Emotions	10	.62
		Self-Regulation	11	.60
		Flexibility	5	.60
		Problem-Solving	4	.79
	Communication skills	Conversational Skills	8	.63
		Nonverbal Conversation Skills	4	.79
		Compliments	4	.67

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for each segment is displayed in the above Table. The "Problem-Solving"(.079) and non-verbal conversational skills (.79) had the highest Cronbach's Alpha reliability while all other sections were also having good level of reliability (above .60). The overall reliability of the Social Skills Observation Sheet was found 0.98.

Table 4
Item-total correlation of Special Students' Social Skills Observation Sheet

Item/Codes	r	Item/Codes	r
Q1/BPB	.859**	Q4/BPB	.858**
Q2/BPB	.715**	Q5/BPB	.837**
Q3/PBP	.760**	Q6/BPB	.851**
Q1/IPB	.757**	Q5/IPB	.816**
Q2/IPB	.652**	Q6/IPB	.714**
Q3/IPB	.851**	Q7/IPB	.847**
Q4/IPB	.739**	Q8/IPB	.893**
Q1/APB	.490**	Q4/APB	.580**
Q2/APB	.854**	Q5/APB	.852**
Q3/APB	.657**	Q6/APB	.825**
Q1/UE	.666**	Q6/UE	.113
Q2/UE	.697**	Q7/UE	.647**
Q3/UE	.333*	Q8/UE	.521**
Q4/UE	.589**	Q9/UE	.641**
Q5/UE	.507**	Q10/UE	.503**
Q1/SR	.574**	Q5/SR	.618**
Q2/SR	.566**	Q6/SR	.733**
Q3/SR	.581**	Q7/SR	.565**
Q4/SR	.535**	Q8/SR	.522**
Q9/SR	.481**	Q9/SR	.481**
Q10/SR	.576**	Q11/SR	.588**
Q1/FB	.594**	Q4/FB	.576**
Q2/FB	.864**	Q5/FB	.561**
Q3/FB	.809**	Q1/PS	.728**

Q3/PS	.549**	Q2/PS	.663**
Q4/PS	.662**	Q1/CS	.895**
Q2/CS	.849**	Q5/CS	.896**
Q3/CS	.850**	Q6/CS	.839**
Q4/CS	.882**	Q7/CS	.906**
Q1/NCS	.812**	Q3/NCS	.795**
Q2/NCS	.866**	Q4/NSC	.762**
Q1/C	.735**	Q4/C	.726**
Q2/C	.665**	Q5/C	.855**

*. The correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)"
**. The correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 explains the total correlation between the items of special students and social skills check list. This test was used to check the strength of the tool used in the research, so that the researcher gets the confidence that the data collected through this tool would be reliable and if there is any need for improvement, it can be improved for future research. The highest correlation was of the item Q7/CS (0.906**) while item Q6/UE was having lowest correlation (0.113) that was revised for future research.

Data Analysis

Table. 5
Data Analysis Alignment

Sr. No	Research Objective	Statistical Test
1.	To analyze the need for social skills programs for special students	Mean
2.	To compare the social skills of special students on the basis of gender	t test
3.	To develop a social skill training program for special students	Researcher Developed Plan

Table. No 5 shows that the researcher used mean and t test for the purpose of statistical analysis mainly.

Tables and Results
Table 6
Sample distribution on the basis of gender(n=40)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	19	47.5%
Female	21	52.5%
Total	40	100%

Table 6 shows that the sample size was consisted of 40 special students, the sample distribution reveals that 19 of participants were male and 21 were female.

Table 7
Need for social skills (n=40)

Variable	Section	Sub-section	Mean	Status
Social skills	Social play behavior	Beginning Play Behaviors	2.4	Sometimes
		Intermediate Play behaviors	2.3	Sometimes
		Advanced Play Behavior	2.1	Sometimes
	Emotional regulation	Understanding Emotions	1.4	Always Never
		Self-Regulation	2.1	Sometimes
		Flexibility	1.2	Always Never
		Problem-Solving	1.11	Always Never
	Communication skills	Conversational Skills	1.2	Always Never
		Nonverbal Conversation Skills	1.4	Always Never
		Compliments	2.3	Sometimes

Table 7 shows that all the selected social skills were found in need of developing among special students. However, skills related to Understanding emotions, Flexibility, Problem solving, Conversational

skills and non-verbal conversational skills were needed to be developed on priority basis.

Table 8
Comparison of social skills on the basis of gender

Variable	Group	N	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Special students' Social Skills	Male	19	1.11	1.99	38	0.04
	Female	21	1.09			

Table 8 explains that there was statistically significant (p=0.04) difference between male and female special students' social skills. The male students were significantly better than female special students.

Table 9
Comparison of Social Play Behavior on the basis of gender

Variable	Group	N	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Social Play Behavior	Male	19	1.49	2.10	38	0.03
	Female	21	1.19			

Table 9 explains that there was statistically significant (p=0.03) difference between male and female special students' social play behavior. The male students were significantly better than female special students.

Table 10
Comparison of Emotional Regulation on the basis of gender

Variable	Group	N	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Emotional Regulation	Male	19	1.09	1.98	38	0.05
	Female	21	1.05			

Table 10 explains that there was statistically significant (p=0.05) difference between male and female special students' emotional regulation. Here also the male students were significantly better than female special students.

Table 11
Comparison of Communication Skills on the basis of gender

Variable	Group	N	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Communication Skills	Male	19	1.14	2.00	38	0.03
	Female	21	1.10			

Table 11 explains that there was statistically significant (p=0.03) difference between male and female special students' communication skills. The male students were significantly better than female special students.

Delimitation

The study was delimited to
1. Specific Disabilities: Mute, hearing-impaired, selective autism, and some ADHD.
2. Geographical scope: Conducted at Sir Syed School, College of Special Education Rawalpindi, and Global Special School Rawalpindi.
3. Age range between 5 to 10

Discussion

The growth of exceptional pupils in school and beyond depends on the specified social skills, which include problem-solving, emotional control, and conflict resolution. Harbor School's research (2024) emphasizes the significance of customizing programs to match students' specific needs, which was consistent with the emphasis on individualized training. Both sources stress the need to develop emotional regulation and communication skills, with Harbor School also emphasizing the development of an inclusive learning environment for the real-world application of these abilities.

The survey's findings show that social skills programs for special education students are somewhat recognized, albeit there may be regional variations in their application. The necessity for customized programming was emphasized by the divisive comments, especially in Section 4. This was consistent with studies from Harbor School (2024), which emphasize the value of specialized treatments to address the various needs of special education students. Adaptable programs were more successful than a one-size-fits-all strategy, according to both sources.

The workshop, *"Empowering Connections: Social Skills Training for Special Students,"* addresses the diverse needs of mute, hearing-disabled, ADHD, and selective autism students in Pakistan. By focusing on communication, emotional regulation, peer relationships, and adaptive social skills, the program fosters inclusion and independence. Hands-on activities like role-playing and sign language practice ensure practical learning. Feedback mechanisms further support program improvement,

aligning with research that emphasizes tailored programs for special needs students.

Findings

1. Results shows that all the selected social skills were found in need of developing among special students. However, skills related to Understanding emotions, Flexibility, Problem solving, Conversational skills and non-verbal conversational skills were needed to be developed on priority basis.
2. Data also explains that there was statistically significant ($p=0.04$) difference between male and female special students' social skills. The male students were significantly better than female special students.
3. Data also explains that there was statistically significant difference between male and female special students' social play behavior. The male students were significantly better than female special students.
4. Study revealed that there was statistically significant difference between male and female special students' emotional regulation. Here also the male students were significantly better than female special students.
5. It was found that there was statistically significant difference between male and female special students' communication skills. Again the male students were significantly better than female special students.

Conclusion

It was concluded from the findings of the study that special students were found in need of social skills development specially related to the understanding emotions, flexibility, problem solving, verbal and non-verbal conversational skills. While it is also concluded that male students were somewhat found better in social skills in comparison to female students, so female students were more in need of social skills development.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that customized social skills training programs may be arranged based on the specific needs and developmental stage of every student.
2. Promotion of peer connection may be helpful for female students specially, including simple play and problem-solving exercises into regular classroom routines.

3. Short, personalized narratives describing specific social situations need to be provided for male and female students both to improve the communication skills.
4. Create individualized, adaptable social skills training curricula that take into account each student's unique requirements and difficulties especially the female students.
5. To improve skill retention and practical application, keep utilizing interactive, hands-on activities like role-playing and sign language practice.
6. To guarantee continued social skill development and reinforcement beyond the first workshop, extend the curriculum to include follow-up sessions.
7. It is recommended to Use fun, structured group tasks to encourage emotional regulation especially among female students.

"Empowering Connections: Social Skills Training for Special Students"
Description
The training is intended to help special students identified with lack of social skills specially the understanding emotions, flexibility, problem solving, verbal and non-verbal conversational skills. The training focuses specifically on development of skills related to confident interaction both verbally and non-verbally in various social settings. The training is designed as a balanced blend of theory, and practice in form of theoretical knowledge and hands on activities.

Objectives
The training will focus on:
1. Development of basic communication skills.
2. Developing emotional regulation and social control.
3. Practicing peer relationship development.
4. Enhancing Adaptive Social Skills in Everyday Situations.

Procedures

Duration	2 Days	6 hours per day)
Mode	Face to face	
Time	9:00 AM - 3:00 PM	
Number of participants	20-25 students	
Target population	Inclusive Education Centers, Special Schools, or Community	

Training centers in Pakistan

Areas to be covered

Unit 1: Basic Communication Skills
Duration: 1.5 Hours
Focus on nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, eye contact) and simple sign language for mute and hearing-disabled students.

Unit 2: Emotional Regulation and Self-Control
Duration: 1.5 Hours
Techniques to manage anxiety, impulsivity (ADHD), and social stress for autism and other challenges.

Unit 3: Developing Peer Relationships
Duration: 1.5 Hours
Teaching cooperative play, sharing, conflict resolution, and initiating interactions.

Unit 4: Adaptive Social Skills in Everyday Situations
Duration: 1.5 Hours
Role-playing real-life scenarios such as school interactions, public settings, and group activities.

Hands-on Activities
List of Activities:
- Emotion Identification Game: Use flashcards or visual aids to recognize and express emotions.
- Group Storytelling: Encourage students to contribute simple ideas using gestures, pictures, or words.
- Role-Play Scenarios: Practice polite greetings, sharing items, and asking for help in different social settings.
- Sign Language Practice: Teach basic words and phrases for nonverbal communication.
- Problem-Solving Circle: Discuss group problems and brainstorm solutions with visual cues and support.

Feedback
- Collect verbal or visual feedback (using smiley faces or emojis) from students at the end of each session.
- feedback forms for teachers, caregivers, and trainers to evaluate program effectiveness and areas for improvement.

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