

Effect of a Social Skills Intervention Programme on the Emotional Intelligence of Children with Limited Social Skills: An Experimental Study

RAHUL GANDHI¹, MANMOHAN KAUR²

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The present study investigated the effect of a social skills intervention programme on the emotional intelligence of children with limited social skills. While many intervention programmes have been studied for the development of social skills and emotional intelligence, most of them were conducted in foreign countries. However, the present study was conducted due to the limited availability of such programmes in India.

Aim: The aim of this study was to develop an intervention programme on social skills for children with limited social skills and to determine the effect of the programme on intra and interpersonal awareness and management of these children.

Materials and Methods: An experimental study was conducted at the Department of Education, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India. The study lasted for six weeks, from December 2013 to January 2014. A total of 40 ninth-grade students, aged between 13-15 years, selected from two schools in Kurukshetra, Haryana (Arya Public School and Mata Rukmini Rai School). The experimental group (n=20) received the intervention programme related to social skills, while the control group (n=20) received no intervention. The students were pre-tested and post-tested using a scale on social skills and the 'Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory' 2005 (MEII) emotional intelligence inventory. Statistical analysis "t-test" was

applied for to measuring significance of the difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups.

Results: The present study showed a significant change in intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness and management of children with limited social skills after the implementation of the intervention programme designed by the researcher. The calculated t-ratio for the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups (0.19) was not significant at the prescribed levels of significance (0.05 and 0.01). This suggests that no significant difference was found between the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups in terms of emotional intelligence. The mean score of the experimental group students (85.65) was higher than the mean score of the control group students (59.40).

Conclusion: The social skills intervention programme proved to be effective in influencing the emotional intelligence of students with limited social skills. Students should be encouraged to develop social skills such as conversation skills, friendship skills, leadership skills, honesty, and teamwork, as these contribute to emotional intelligence and overall success. Co-curricular activities should be considered as important as the curriculum. Students should be observed for peer relations, lack of interest, friendship skills, and cooperative skills, as schools can be considered a miniature society where children with limited social skills can be identified early on.

Keywords: Conversation skills, Development of skills, Intelligence quotient, Team work

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence has been described as the capacity to effectively perceive, express, understand, and manage emotions in a professional and effective manner. Emotional intelligence includes knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others, and developing friendly relationships. A child may not be strong in solving mathematical problems (higher Intelligence Quotient or IQ), though they may be gifted in language arts, have better communication skills, and better intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, making them emotionally intelligent. Emotional intelligence can be deliberately acquired with practice. Daniel Goleman D reported that children with higher emotional intelligence are more confident and better learners. They have higher self-esteem and fewer behavioural problems, are more optimistic and happier [1]. People with higher emotional intelligence find it easier to form and maintain interpersonal relationships, can manage stress effectively, are less likely to suffer from depression, navigate the complexities of the workplace, motivate others, and excel in their careers. Emotional intelligence can be built by learning social skills.

Social skills refer to dimensions like friendliness, helpfulness, ability to share, and self-control. These skills are essential for every social being. Social skills are discrete, observable, and teachable. They

encompass verbal or nonverbal behaviours by which children affect the response of other individuals in the interpersonal context. People use social skills hundreds of times a day, and most of them are proficient in them. Social skills are more than just good manners. They involve treating others with respect and appreciation and include daily interaction skills like sharing, taking turns, and allowing others to talk without interrupting. The development of social skills is as important as the development of physical and mental aspects. Studies indicate that individuals identified during childhood as socially isolated or with limited social skills are more likely to have difficulties in later life, such as substance abuse, divorce, and feelings of frustration, rejection, and low self-worth, according to a study by Gresham FM et al., [2]. Students with limited social skills have devastating long-term and short-term effects on their development. They experience hours of loneliness, incidents of painful rejection, and are at risk of mental health issues as they grow into adulthood. Social skills include conversational skills, communication with others, friendship skills, cooperative skills (not being selfish), social relationship skills, and leadership skills.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and diffuse conflicts. It is concerned with developing strong social skills and, by

doing so, building better relationships in society. It includes intrapersonal awareness (own emotions): self-awareness, self-expression, and the ability to recognise, understand, and express emotions.

Interpersonal awareness (others' emotions): social awareness, ability to understand how others feel towards them. Intrapersonal management (own emotions): ability to manage change, adapt, and solve problems; emotional management, ability to manage and control emotions. Interpersonal management (others' emotions). Social skills refer to the acquisition of necessary knowledge, skills, and disposition by a person that makes them an acceptable member of society. It develops group loyalty and encourages mutual dependence, cooperation, and cohesiveness, which lead to the social development of a child.

Emotional intelligence can be a key to success in life. Those with strong social skills can be a sign of high emotional intelligence. These individuals can manage disputes, are excellent communicators, and excel in building and managing relationships. Working on and enhancing social skills could be the most important aspect of personality development. Hence, a social skills intervention programme that focuses on improving cooperative skills, conversation skills, friendship skills, good manners, participation skills, and leadership skills can have a significant effect on all-round development. Social skills help learners to be successful in school, work, and relationships. As a consequence, individuals are more likely to have robust self-esteem and be better equipped to cope with disappointments and setbacks. Studies conducted by Betlow MB, Parker JG and Asher SR, Bar-on R and Parker J, Purohit A and Ajawani JC, and Bierman KL et al., have found a relationship between social skills and emotional intelligence [3-7]. The rapid structural changes in how children are being raised within society today provide fewer opportunities for children to learn how to interact with others. Many children experience a sense of isolation and social avoidance stemming from their inappropriate social schema. These problems are reportedly related to an increase in the number of emotional problems documented among school-age children and young adults, as highlighted by Elias MJ et al., [8]. The researcher realised that a proper intervention programme for developing social skills could be helpful so that children can move forward smoothly in their future lives. In an effort to ultimately improve peer interactions, interrupt negative patterns, and promote greater social competence, social training has been geared towards the promotion of what the authors now acknowledge as, as noted by Beelman A et al., [9]. With the above-mentioned details in mind, the investigator decided to undertake the present study to examine the effect of a social skills intervention programme on the emotional intelligence of children with limited social skills.

Hence, the present study aimed to develop an intervention programme on social skills for children with limited social skills and determine the effect of the programme on intra and interpersonal awareness and management of these children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An experimental study was conducted in the Department of Education at Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India. The duration of the study was six weeks, December 2013 to January 2014. The study was conducted with permission from the university and under the supervision of a Department Guide. A total of 40 students from two schools, Arya Public School and Mata Rukmani Rai Senior Secondary School of Shahabad (Markanda) Kurukshetra, Haryana, in 9th grade (aged 13-15 years), were included. Both groups were comparable in terms of age and gender.

Inclusion criteria: Students referred by teachers, who have been identified by them as isolated, peer-rejected, or in some way socially deficient. After applying the social skills scale developed by Chopra R and Sahu P, students who scored less than 50% marks were included in the study [10].

Exclusion criteria: Students who did not report any behavioural or adjustment problems and scored more than 50% marks on the social skills scale developed by Chopra R and Sahu P.

Sample size calculation: Out of 185 students from both schools, the investigator identified 74 students who had deficits in social skills. All these students were administered the "scale on social skills" developed and standardised by Chopra R and Sahu P [10]. A total of 40 students who scored less than 50% marks were identified and selected as participants for the present study. These students were equally divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. Both groups were comparable in terms of age and gender.

Ethical considerations: The study was conducted with permission from the university and under the supervision of a Department Guide.

Study Procedure

Phase 1 (1 week): To conduct the present study, the researcher randomly selected two schools in Shahabad. The investigator arrived at the chosen institution a little before the scheduled time and met with the relevant teachers. The teachers shared their opinions to help the investigator in selecting children with limited social skills and made necessary arrangements for the administration of the tool. Through the teachers' opinions and the application of the "Scale on Social Skills" by Chopra R and Sahu P [10], the investigator selected 40 students with limited social skills.

Phase 2 (1 week): The investigator administered the MEII 2005 to assess the students' social skills [11]. This assessment consists of 100 items, with 25 items in each of the four areas, to be answered "yes" or "no". Participation was strictly voluntary. The students carefully read each item in the local language and handed their responses to the researcher. All information obtained was kept confidential, and scores were recorded.

Phase 3 (3 weeks): The investigator randomly divided the 40 students into two groups: an experimental group of 20 students and a control group of the remaining 20 students. The students in the experimental group underwent the intervention programme as designed by the investigator. This programme had 10 sessions conducted over three weeks.

Phase 4 (1 week): After the intervention programme for the experimental group, the researcher revisited the school to collect the required data from the selected sample using the same MEII. The same test was administered to both the experimental group and the control group, to whom no intervention programme was given. The students in the post-test once again responded to all the items by reading each item carefully and handing their responses to the researcher. A pre-test and post-test control group design was used for the present study to observe the effect of the social skills intervention programme (independent variable) on the emotional intelligence (dependent variable) of children with limited social skills, as shown in [Table/Fig-1].

Sessions of the intervention program: Intervention programme is a crucial aspect of the experimental study. The main purpose of the present study was to observe the effect of a social skills intervention programme, on the emotional intelligence of children with limited social skills. For this, the researcher provided a three-week intervention programme based on social skills. The programme included components such as cooperative skills, conversation skills, social relationship skills, participating skills, honesty and good manners, friendship skills, leadership skills, and joining skills. Each session of the intervention programme focused on one specific component of social skills that had been identified as markers for poor social adjustment in adolescents. Each session lasted for 6-8 hours/day.

removing a stick from the pile without disturbing the remaining ones. It is the responsibility of each participant to be honest while playing.

• Session 9

Skill: Joining

Activity: Game "Ring Toss"

During this session, the students engaged in a game called "Ring Toss." The objective of the game is to toss rings onto a target. This activity aimed to improve the students' joining skills and encourage them to participate actively in the game.

Students enhance their social skills by participating in ring toss, a game where rings are tossed around a peg. It is commonly seen at carnivals. A variant of the game, known as "ring-a-bottle," replaces the pegs with bottles, and the thrower gets to keep the bottle and its contents if successful. In this session, a group of three students were directed to begin playing ring toss, and the fourth participant was told to join the game after a short while. After each game, the roles were changed so that each participant had the opportunity to practice joining an ongoing game. Joining, or integrating oneself into a group, can be a challenging task for students with poor social skills.

• Session 10

Skill: Development of leadership skills

Activity: Organising co-curricular activities

The investigator formed four groups with five members in each group. The students in each group were tasked with Organise co-curricular activities in which maximum students could participate. This session included indoor and outdoor games such as chess, "Kho-Kho," and "Badminton." At the end of the session, the researcher motivated the students and asked various questions, such as:

- What qualities should a good leader have?
- How can you organise various activities in the school?
- What will you do if you have to give a message of encouragement to your team members?
- What will you do if children start fighting with one another?
- How will you manage the class as a monitor?

An ending ceremony was held on the last day of the social skills intervention program, which involved a review of all the previously taught skills. The facilitator wanted the children to recall these skills and reflect on how they had used them outside the group. At the end of the program, the students were asked about their experiences during the intervention program and refreshments were offered. The students shared that they enjoyed and learned a lot during the intervention program, and they also promised to implement all the skills in their lives.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The statistical techniques used for testing the hypotheses were descriptive statistics, including the mean and Standard Deviation (SD). For inferential statistics, the critical ratio "t-test" was used to measure the significance of the difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups. The tools used for data collection were a social skills scale by Chopra R and Sahu P (2010), the Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory MEII (2005), and a social skills intervention programme prepared by the researchers themselves.

RESULTS

In order to determine the significance of the difference between the experimental and control groups, a t-test was used. The calculated t-value for the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups were 0.19, which was not significant at the prescribed levels of 0.05 and 0.01 [Table/Fig-2]. This suggests that there was no significant difference in the pre-test scores of emotional intelligence between the experimental and control groups. Before the treatment, both groups had similar levels of emotional intelligence.

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	56.85	8.73	38	0.19
Experimental	20	56.3			

[Table/Fig-2]: Significance of difference between the mean pre-test scores of control and experimental group on emotional intelligence.
t-value at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

To assess the significant difference between the mean post-test scores of the experimental and control groups for emotional intelligence, t-tests were conducted for different dimensions of emotional intelligence [Table/Fig-3-7].

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	15.25	3.90	38	7.62
Experimental	20	24.65			

[Table/Fig-3]: Significance of difference between the mean post-test scores of control and experimental groups on intrapersonal awareness.
at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	13.85	2.93	38	8.07
Experimental	20	21.35			

[Table/Fig-4]: Significance of difference between the mean post-test scores of on interpersonal awareness.
at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	16.0	4.068	38	2.99
Experimental	20	19.85			

[Table/Fig-5]: Significance of difference between the mean post-test scores of control and experimental groups on intrapersonal management.
at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	14.3	3.19	38	6.28
Experimental	20	20.65			

[Table/Fig-6]: Significance of difference between the mean post-test scores of control and experimental groups on interpersonal management.
at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

Groups	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Control	20	59.4	8.112	38	10.23
Experimental	20	85.65			

[Table/Fig-7]: Significance of difference between the mean post-test scores of experimental and control groups on emotional intelligence.
at 0.05 level=2.02, at 0.01 level=2.71

For the dimension of intrapersonal awareness, the calculated t-value for the post-test scores showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels. The mean score of the experimental group (24.65) was higher than that of the control group (15.25) [Table/Fig-3]. This indicates that the social skills intervention programme was effective in influencing intrapersonal awareness of emotional intelligence in the experimental group.

For the dimension of interpersonal management, the calculated t-value for the post-test scores also showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels. The mean score of the experimental group (21.35) was higher than that of the control group (13.85) [Table/Fig-4]. This suggests that the social skills intervention programme was effective in influencing interpersonal management of emotional intelligence in the experimental group.

The calculated t-ratio for the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups was 2.99, significant at the prescribed levels of 0.05 and 0.01. This indicates a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in intrapersonal

management awareness of emotional intelligence. The mean score of the experimental group (19.85) was higher than that of the control group (16.0) [Table/Fig-5]. Therefore, it can be concluded that the social skill intervention programme was effective in influencing the intrapersonal management dimension of emotional intelligence in the experimental group.

The calculated t-value for the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups was 6.28, significant at the prescribed levels of 0.05 and 0.01. This indicates a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in the interpersonal management of emotional intelligence. The mean score of the experimental group (20.65) was higher than that of the control group (14.3) [Table/Fig-6]. Thus, it can be concluded that the social skills intervention programme was effective in influencing the interpersonal management dimension of emotional intelligence in the experimental group.

The calculated t-value for the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups was 10.23, significant at the prescribed levels of 0.05 and 0.01. This indicates a significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in emotional intelligence. The mean score of the experimental group (85.65) was higher than that of the control group (59.40) [Table/Fig-7]. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the social skills intervention programme was effective in influencing the emotional intelligence of the students in the experimental group.

DISCUSSION

At the end of the experimental process, it was observed that the mean scores of the experimental group, who received the social skill intervention program, were higher than those of the control group. This indicates that the intervention programme was effective in enhancing the social skills of children with limited social skills. There was a significant improvement in intrapersonal awareness, as participants started recognising their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. They also developed self-confidence. The students in the experimental group showed significant differences in understanding the emotions, needs, and concerns of their peers, picking up on emotional cues, feeling socially comfortable, and recognise the power dynamics in a group. There was also a significant difference in interpersonal awareness and management, indicating that the social skills intervention programme was effective in influencing these skills. Participants learned how to control impulsive behaviour and feelings, manage their emotions in a healthy way, take initiative, and adapt to changing circumstances. The sequential presentation of various activities in the programme had a significant and positive effects on the development of children with limited social skills. The students were encouraged through activities such as role-playing, gaming, conversations, and inspirational lectures. In the present study, it was observed that initially, students with limited social skills were not properly motivated to participate in such activities and were not provided with such opportunities in their schools. Teachers often do not show interest in co-curricular activities due to the pressure of covering the syllabus in a limited time. Even parents may ignore their child's participation in co-curricular activities, considering it a waste of time and energy. The support extended by school authorities, principals, teachers, and parents to children for participating in the programme may also be an important factor in finding a positive effect of the social skills intervention programme on the social skills of children with limited social skills.

Goleman D et al., identified four main dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. They concluded that developing competencies across these four areas is essential for success in life and the workplace [12]. The findings of the present study are supported by the findings of Betlow MB [3]. In their study, both the experimental and control

groups were assessed pre- and post-intervention using the Bar-on emotional quotient. Statistically significant differences were found between children enrolled in a social skills training group compared to an await-list control group. These findings are consistent with the findings of Lefler K et al., who stated that social skills groups may provide a forum for modeling positive social behaviour and interactions [13]. Bar-on R and Parker J also concluded that a child's level of intelligence and maturity significantly contribute to social and emotional competency [5]. The findings of the present study are also supported by the findings of Purohit A and Ajawani JC, who concluded that the training group genuinely improved more in comparison to the non-training group in terms of their peer relationships [6]. Bierman KL et al., also found similar results, stating that intervention programmes help enhance the social and emotional development of children [7]. Celine P was also in agreement with the present study and confirmed that the PATHS intervention programme is a promising practice for improving children's social and emotional competence [14].

Considering the findings of the present study along with the earlier studies, it can be inferred that the intervention programme proved to have significant and positive effect on the holistic development of children with limited social skills. It has become apparent over the years that Intelligence Test Scores (IQ) are not the sole determining factor for success. Researchers have now proven that how a person handles their emotions, known as emotional intelligence, also contributes to their success, which can be acquired by learning social skills. The rapid changes in society have limited opportunities for children to learn how to interact with others. Factors such as decreased parental interaction, the rise of computers and video games, excessive use of mobile devices replacing real peer interaction and imaginative play, and breakdowns in the family system have resulted in many children having fewer emotional cues to learn from. Consequently, many children go through a significant portion of their childhood without learning the essential lessons and implicit rules of real peer interactions. This can lead to feelings of isolation and social avoidance, as well as an increase in emotional problems like anxiety and depression.

The intervention programmes discussed in the present study aim to teach children the basic abilities that make up social and emotional competence. It is important to note that there have been no studies conducted on children with limited social skills to enhance their emotional intelligence, particularly in India. The parents of these children are often less educated or illiterate and do not spend quality time with their children. The researcher recognised the need for a proper intervention programme to develop social skills in children with limited social skills so that they can navigate their future lives more smoothly [15-17].

Limitation(s)

The study include a small sample size from only one city, Kurukshetra. If more students with limited social skills were identified, screened, and intervened at an early age, their emotional intelligence and social skills could be improved with better results. The study did not include a follow-up with the students subsequently. A child psychologist or paediatric neurologist was not part of the research team, and the parents were not involved during intervention sessions nor contacted for follow-ups.

CONCLUSION(S)

The social skills intervention programme proved to be effective in influencing the emotional intelligence of students with limited social skills. Teachers need to play a significant role in working with these students. They should understand the behaviour of each child in the class and motivate them to actively participate in various co-curricular activities. Teachers should also work on enhancing any deficient skills and regularly assess the students

for all-round development. Co-curricular activities such as sports, debates, picnics, educational excursions, expert lectures, medical camps, and music and dance competitions should be organised to provide a well-rounded experience for students, as schools can be considered miniature societies.

This research has implications for teachers, policy planners, curriculum framers, and parents. Teachers should make every effort to help children become socially well-adjusted individuals. Students should be regularly assessed and provided with guidance and a supportive environment. The state government should appoint efficient teachers and provide them with incentives and other facilities. The study also has implications for parents. If a larger sample of students with limited social skills is identified, screened, and intervened with at an early age, their emotional intelligence and skills can be improved in a timely manner, leading to better results.

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PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:

1. Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics, Adesh Medical College and Hospital, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India.
2. Coordinator, Department of Academics, Vishwas Public School, Shahbad, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India.

NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Rahul Gandhi,
1280, Huda Colony, Sector 1, Shahabad Markanda,
Kurukshetra-136135, Haryana, India.
E-mail: rahulpaeds@gmail.com

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