



Research Paper: The Effectiveness of Social Skills Training on Improving the Adjustment of Slow Learner Children



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Abstract

The aim of this research was to study the effectiveness of social skills training on the adaptive behavior of slow learner children. This research was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of data collection. The population of the research included all the students in the city of Bandar Anzali who studied in primary schools or whomever referred to counseling centers of the city in the academic year 2021-2022. For this purpose, 30 students diagnosed with slow learning problem based on the Wechsler intelligence test who obtained a low score in Adjustment inventory of school students (AISS) as well as clinical interviews with teachers, were selected and randomly divided into two experimental (15 individuals) and control (15 individuals) groups. Then social skills training was provided for 2 months with 12 two-hour training sessions for the participants of the experimental group; the control group did not receive any training. Afterwards, the adaptive behavior assessment was carried out again on both groups. The data were analyzed using the covariance statistical method. The findings indicated that social skills training improved the adaptive behavior of slow learner children ($F=0.389$ and $P<0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that school teachers, counselors, and parents can use social skills in schools, at home, and in counseling centers to improve the adjustment of slow learner children.

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1. Introduction

The distribution of intelligence in humans is based on the principle of individual differences in a normal way that most individuals (about 68%) are two standard deviations below and above the average in terms of intelligence quotient (IQ). Based on the psychological classification, about 14% of all individuals in the community are borderline intellectual functioning students, or from an educational point of view, they are slow learners whose intelligence is one to two standard deviations lower than the average (Beh-Pajooch et al., 2010).

One of the major goals of educating slow learner students is to fulfil the need for social adjustment as well as to establish useful and effective relationships with others and to accept social responsibility. Therefore, it is necessary to teach such children the social skills that they need. One of the characteristics of social skills is that they are acquired; currently, many researchers agree that it is more learnable than social behaviors because children who grow up in inappropriate environments have socially undesirable behaviors (Harji et al., 2018/1994). The low level of social adjustment and the ability to adjust in slow learner children who face problems in the field of social interactions causes them problems in communicating with others and they may face problems in terms of social relationships and have doubts in terms of social self-empowerment; this issue causes social, psychological and academic problems in students resulting in problems such as dropping out of school, quarreling with family, having depression and addiction, etc (Dashti et al., 2021).

Human is a social being, and for this reason, s/he lives in the community. From the moment of birth to the end of her/his life, humans constantly interacting with other

humans. S/He has realized that being in a group can solve her/his problems and for this reason, s/he always learns how to live in a group and satisfy her/his needs. The issue of children's social skills is a part of their socialization; socialization is a process in which the norms, skills, motivations and attitudes, as well as behavior of an individual is formed which is recognized as suitable and desirable to perform her/his current or future role in society. The crucial factors of socialization can be considered to be culture, family, and social institutions. Considering life skills, one can assume a situation in which some individuals cannot perform well because they have correctable-skill deficits in different areas of their lives. The presence of such defects can lead to mental health problems (Cartledge & Milburn, 1988/2007). According to Corsini (2010), social skills can be defined as skills necessary to adapt to social needs and maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships. Since social needs are variable and depend on their specific social context, it is necessary for individuals to create a flexible social response mechanism in themselves, so that they can change themselves according to situational needs. Based on Matheson et al. (1988/2005), the lack of social skills is a major obstacle to live independently and is related to intellectual disabilities and is a characteristic of individuals with developmental disabilities. Specifically, lack of social skills is really necessary for identifying individuals who are in the borderline range of intellectual disabilities. Since 1970s, measuring social skills and proceedings related to it has been one of the most favored topics of behavioral psychologists' research. Slow learner students have an IQ between 70 and 85. These individuals constitute approximately 14.1% of the population, which is larger than the group of children with learning

disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and autism. They have learned to walk and talk but with a delay and slower than other children, they have problems academically and fall behind every year. They seem more immature than their age, they prefer to play with younger children, they have difficulty controlling the main topic of the conversation, irrelevant things are frequently heard in their conversation, they think and act several years younger than their peers during adolescence, they have a short attention span, they study but do not retain what they learn, they have difficulty following multistage instructions, they work hard but can't keep up with their classmates, they lack self-esteem and are weak in reading and writing, they live in the present moment and do not have long-term goals (Du Plessis, 2021 as cited in [Shabafrooz & Rezayi, 2022](#)).

Many researches have been done in this field. In a study entitled the efficacy of cognitive rehabilitation based on executive functions (Beta) on the behavioral performance of slow learner students, [Gandomi et al. \(2021\)](#) indicate that the Beta cognitive rehabilitation intervention with an emphasis on executive functions (working memory, sustained attention, and inhibition) has a significant effect on the behavioral performance of slow learner students. The results of [Walker and Nabuzoka's research \(2007\)](#) show that students with learning disorders have more negative behavior; there is also a relationship between academic progress and social adjustment. [Harrell et al. \(2009\)](#) point to the effect of social skills training on social adjustment and increasing social skills.

However, slow learner children face problems in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers, family, and school staff due to underdeveloped interpersonal relationships and also have more problems

with complex social skills and social information processing compared to their peers ([Khanzadeh et al., 2015](#)). The definite role that social skills training plays in increasing academic and behavioral skills deserves more attention in school interventions, especially for slow learner students who have the most serious problems in the adjustment domain. Therefore, considering the importance of social rehabilitation, in improving the adjustment of students, and also considering the inadequacy in the social functions of slow learner children, it is obviously necessary to have educational plans. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of social skills training in improving the adjustment of slow learner students.

2. Method

This research was applied in terms of purpose and quasi-experimental in terms of data collection. First, the researcher selected 5 elementary schools from all schools in city of Bandar Anzali and 4 counseling centers using a simple random sampling method. After visiting the schools and counseling centers, Wechsler's test was run on children using the convenience sampling method. According to the report of the teachers and psychologists of the counseling centers, students who had an IQ between 70 and 85 and needed more effort academically, were selected as slow learner students. Then [Sinha and Singh's \(1993\)](#) adaptive behavior test was performed on them; since the minimum sample size in quasi-experimental research is suggested to be 15 people ([Wilson Van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007](#)), 30 slow learner students who scored low on this test were randomly selected and placed in two experimental (15 people) and control (15 people) groups. Next, social skills training was provided for 2 months with 12

two-hour training sessions (two sessions per week) for the participants of the experimental group and the control group did not receive training. After the sessions, the adaptive behavior scale was again carried out on both groups and the data was analyzed based on covariance statistical method using SPSS version 27 software. An inclusion criterion for the research was the non-participation of students in social skills training classes and also the non-use of drugs. Moreover, the participants were asked to sign the consent form after fully reading the details of the research, and all their information was agreed to remain confidential.

Inventory adjustment of students (AISS):

This scale was prepared by [Sinha and Singh \(1993\)](#) to separate 9 from 18-year-old students with good adjustment from students with low maladjustment in three emotional, social, and academic domains. In this research, the final version with 60 items was used with yes-no questions. For grading, the answers that conform to adjustment are assigned a score of zero, and the answers that do not conform to adjustment are assigned a score of one. The sum of the scores illustrates the individual's adjustment. A lower score indicates higher compatibility and a higher score shows lower compatibility. The coefficient of this scale has been reported by [Sinha and Singh \(1993, as cited in Fatollahzadeh et al., 2017\)](#) by dividing it into two halves for the whole scale as 0.95. Correspondingly, [Bahmani et al. \(2016\)](#) obtained the reliability coefficient of the above scale using Kuder-Richardson's method and divided it into two halves for the whole scale and get 0.86 and 0.79 in their research.

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition:

The fourth edition of the

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (2003, as cited in [Abedi et al., 2012](#)) is derived from the original Wechsler-Bellevue scale. This scale was compiled by Dr. Abedi in Iran and provides the possibility of measuring a general intellectual activity and four indicators of verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory, and processing speed. The tests of picture concepts, letter-number sequencing, matrix reasoning, cancellation, and word reasoning in the fourth edition are presented as new tests of the Wechsler IQ scales for children, which were not included in the third edition of the Wechsler IQ scales for children. The validity coefficient of total IQ was reported as 0.97. Furthermore, regarding other IQs, the highest validity coefficient was related to verbal comprehension IQ (0.94), and the lowest is related to processing speed IQ (0.88) ([Abedi et al., 2012](#)). Regarding the subscales, the highest and lowest validity coefficients belong to words (0.92) and comprehension (0.81), respectively. [Sadeghi et al. \(2011\)](#) calculated the validity of the correlation of the scores of 30 people with Revised Raven and Wechsler's children's test; it was 0.38 and 0.25, respectively. It was also significant at 0.05 level; the validity of this test was 0.75.

Interviews with teachers: after entering schools and during interviews with teachers to identify slow learner children, those students who needed more effort according to the end semester examination or midterm and those students who needed more effort according to the end semester examination or midterm were identified by comparing them to other students whose ability and academic performance were lower; to be sure, the Wechsler test was run to determine their IQ according to the obtained scores.

Table 1

Intervention plan and implementation method taken from the training package of Beh-Pajoo et al. (2010)

Session	Assignment
First session	Introducing and getting to know group members, formulating group rules, discussing the importance of social skills, considering people's feedback on the way of introduction, tone of voice, and giving assignments about how to introduce yourself to others
Second session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, explaining how to introduce yourself to others and greetings in dealing with others, and giving appropriate assignment
Third session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, practicing the ways of exchange, daily compliments, practicing starting a conversation, continuing it appropriately, and ending it, and giving an assignment about starting a conversation with others
Fourth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, discussing the importance of following orders and rules at school and home, and giving assignments on discipline
Fifth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, practicing how to make requests from others, providing a model of how to deal with someone who has rejected our request, giving assignments on making requests and providing appropriate responses
Sixth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, discussing the importance of getting permission from adults to do things and listening to an adult skill, and giving appropriate assignment
Seventh session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, teaching skills related to restraining emotions and expressing positive and negative emotions, and giving appropriate assignment
Eighth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, practicing how to express emotions, providing models about how to express different emotions, such as happiness, anger, sadness, and skills related to asking for help and helping others
Ninth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, practicing the methods of rejecting unreasonable requests, discussing the method of saying no to unreasonable requests, giving assignments on how to reject unreasonable requests and the skill of saying no
Tenth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, discussion about why we should criticize, assignment on giving feedback to others, and the skill of apologizing to others and accepting others' apologies
Eleventh session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, practicing accepting criticism, providing a model on how to deal with criticism properly and effectively, giving assignments on coping with and accepting criticism, and problem-solving skills and dealing with failure
Twelfth session	Presenting the report of the previous session assignment and giving feedback, presenting a summary of the discussed topics, summing up and evaluating the results of the sessions, and self-evaluation

3. Results

The present study included 30 slow learner elementary students in the city of Bandar Anzali, 54.8% (17 individuals) of the participants were girls and 45.2% (13 individuals) were boys. Moreover, 17.23 percent (5 individuals) were in the third-

grade elementary school, 31.74 percent were in the fourth grade (9 individuals), 33.8 percent were in the fifth grade (11 individuals) and 17.23 percent were in the sixth grade (5 individuals).

The mean and standard deviation and research variables are reported in [Table 1](#).

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of pretest-posttest scores in two experimental and control groups

	Test stage	Experimental group			Control group		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Adaptive behavior	Pre-test	15	204.2	6.08	15	200.31	4.43
	Post-test	15	179.18	5.12	15	200.38	5.39

According to the results of [Table 2](#), the mean in the examination of adaptive behavior in the control group, were 200.31 and 200.38 in the pre-test and post-test, respectively; the average adaptive behavior in the experimental group was 204.2 and 179.18 in the pre-test and post-test, respectively. As can be seen, the changes in the control group in the pre-test and post-test stages were insignificant, but the changes in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group in the adaptive behavior variable were considerable.

test was checked in all variables, which was greater than 0.05 (pre-test of the experimental group, $z=0.412$, $p < 0.05$, and post-test of the experimental group, $p < 0.05$, $z=0.289$ and the pre-test of the control group, $z=0.05$, $p < 0.05$, and the post-test of the control group, $z=0.428$, $p < 0.05$); therefore, the normality of the variables was confirmed, and the F value in Levin's test was also not significant, which indicated that the assumption of equal variance of adaptive behavior was the same in both experimental and control groups ($p < 0.05$, $F=0.103$).

Additionally, to perform the covariance test, the p-value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov

Table 3

Results of covariance analysis of the effect of social skills training on social adjustment scores

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	Significance level	Effect size
Group	8.127	1	8.127	0.389	0.014	0.61
Error	173.5	28	11.423			

Based on [Table 3](#), the obtained results indicated that the F value equaled to 0.389 was significant at the error level of less than 0.05. Therefore, social skills training was effective in increasing the adaptive behavior of slow learner children. The effect size showed that 61% of the variance of adaptive behaviors can be explained through group differences.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to teach social skills to slow learner students and to measure and evaluate its effect on their social adjustment. The results revealed that social skills training can improve social adjustment. For this purpose, initially, the skills of slow learner students were assessed and after the skills training, the assessment task was done; if the desired skill was well learned by the student, the skill training was finished; in case of failure, repetition and practice were used to teach them skills and make them gain educational concepts. The findings of [Gandomi et al. \(2021\)](#), [Walker and Nabozoka \(2007\)](#), [Gresham and Elliott and \(2014\)](#) are also consistent with this research. In the results of the mentioned researches, the effectiveness of social skills training in social adjustment has been emphasized. The development of social skills is a part of the process of socialization of an individual; moreover, the main goal of social skills training is basically to flourish the capacities and to develop the abilities, behavior, and personality of an individual to promote the sense of social understanding ([Nazarinezhad, 2008 as cited in Sobhi Gharamaleki et al.; 2016](#)). The determinant factors of social skills include cognitive and behavioral categories, and an individual who has social skills can select and present at the right time in a certain time and situation ([Cartledge &](#)

[Milburn, 1995](#)). An increase in social skills provides the ability to create mutual and prosocial communication for an individual ([Sobhi- Gharamaleki et al., 2016](#)). Since social adjustment reflects an individual's constructive and useful interactions with others, especially friends, peers, and classmates, it can be said that social skills training makes students more clearly realize many of them and other psychological attributes, and understand and accept them ([Hatami & Kavousian, 2013](#)). The possible reason for improving the degree of social adjustment of the participant is the acquisition and application of social skills are the basis on which interpersonal relationships are built. Students who truly learn social skills, practice, and apply their competence, can certainly succeed in entering the peer groups and making friends, having a positive interaction in their relationships with peers, and demonstrating a range of acceptable behaviors ([Beh-Pajoooh et al., 2010](#)). Children and adolescents who learn the social norms of the peer group well and establish strong and stable relationships with family and community members will most likely demonstrate a high level of social adjustment; slow learner students who acquire social skills well and demonstrate more desirable behaviors from a social point of view, have a more positive self-concept, and this makes them evaluate, understand and accept their limitations and abilities in a more correct way ([HosseinKhanzadeh et al., 2016](#)). In the process of skills training, students are informed that there are differences between them and others that they must accept; as a result, they can continue their relationships, friendship, and accompanying each other with these possible differences and distinctions. They achieve the concept of group conformity and finally, with the help of learning social skills, they lead a peaceful and compatible life despite disagreements and

possible associations (Fatollahzadeh et al., 2017). It seems that in this research, the students of the experimental group evaluated their beliefs and mental perceptions during the time of receiving the training, and with the help of these training, they gained the knowledge with which they can adjust more successfully to their environment and their inner and outer world. Among the limitations of this research, its implementation was limited to the students in the city of Bandar Anzali.

5. Conclusion

The use of such psychological interventions can prevent the problems of slow learner children and play an effective role in reducing behavioral problems and increase the adjustment of this group of children. It is suggested that social skills training should be considered a subject in schools and these skills should be taught to teachers, so that they can be successful in adjusting to slow learner students and increasing their academic performance.

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Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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