

Exploring Social Skill Deficits in Children with Learning Disabilities

Shijimol Mathai

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE), JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract: *Learning disabilities affect not only academic performance but also children's social, emotional, and behavioural functioning. Difficulties in communication, cooperation, peer interaction, self-control, and classroom participation can hinder overall development and reduce academic success. The present study aimed to explore social skill deficits among children with learning disabilities using a standardized teacher-rating scale. A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted, involving 200 school-going children with diagnosed learning disabilities selected from educational institutions. Data were collected using a demographic information form and the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Teacher Rating Scale. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to examine overall social skills, domain-wise performance, demographic differences, and the relationships between social skills, problem behaviours, and academic competence. The findings indicated that a large proportion of children demonstrated below-average social skills, particularly in engagement, self-control, and cooperation. Social skill deficits were also associated with increased problem behaviours and reduced academic competence. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating structured social-skills interventions alongside academic support to promote holistic development among children with learning disabilities. Early identification and school-based intervention programmes may significantly improve children's educational experiences, peer relationships, and psychosocial wellbeing.*

Keywords: Learning Disabilities; Social Skills; Social Skill Deficits; SSIS Teacher Rating Scale; Academic Competence; Problem Behaviour; Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

Learning disabilities (LDs) are neurodevelopmental disorders that interfere with the acquisition and application of essential academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Although these difficulties primarily affect academic achievement, their impact often extends beyond the classroom, influencing children's emotional well-being, social relationships, and behavioural adjustment. Many children with learning disabilities experience challenges in peer interactions, communication, cooperation, self-regulation, and participation in classroom activities, which may reduce their confidence and overall quality of life. These social difficulties can persist throughout childhood if they are not identified and addressed through appropriate educational and psychosocial interventions.

Social skills represent a broad set of learned behaviours that enable individuals to communicate effectively, establish positive interpersonal relationships, cooperate with others, resolve conflicts, and function successfully in different social environments. These competencies play an essential role in promoting academic engagement, emotional resilience, and healthy psychological development. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that children with learning disabilities are more likely to experience deficits in social competence, resulting in peer rejection, loneliness, behavioural difficulties, and poor academic adjustment. The severity and nature of these deficits may vary according to individual characteristics, educational experiences, and environmental support.

Recent studies have highlighted the close relationship between social competence, academic performance, and behavioural functioning among children with learning disabilities. However, many investigations have focused on

isolated psychosocial variables rather than providing a comprehensive assessment of multiple domains of social skills. Furthermore, relatively few studies have employed standardized teacher-rating instruments to evaluate children's observable classroom behaviour across large samples. These limitations highlight the need for further research that systematically examines social skill deficits using reliable and validated assessment tools.

The present study was undertaken to explore the nature and extent of social skill deficits among children with learning disabilities using the Social Skills

Improvement System (SSIS) Teacher Rating Scale. Specifically, the study assessed overall social skills, identified major areas of deficit, examined differences across demographic and educational characteristics, and investigated the relationships between social skills, problem behaviours, and academic competence. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based educational planning and support the development of effective school-based interventions that promote both academic success and psychosocial well-being among children with learning disabilities.

2. Materials and Methods

A quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted to examine social skill deficits among children with learning disabilities. The study was conducted in selected inclusive schools, special education centres, and remedial education institutions that provide educational services to children diagnosed with learning disabilities.

The study included **200 school-going children** with documented learning disabilities who met the predefined

inclusion criteria. Participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique involving purposive selection of participating institutions followed by the identification of eligible children according to the study criteria. Teachers who had observed each child for at least three months completed the assessment forms.

Data were collected using two instruments: (1) a researcher-developed demographic and educational information form, and (2) the **Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Teacher Rating Scale**, a standardized instrument developed by Gresham and Elliott to assess children's social skills, problem behaviours, and academic competence within the school environment. The SSIS evaluates several domains of social functioning, including communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control.

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the participating institutions, and informed consent was secured from parents or guardians. Child assent was obtained whenever appropriate. Participant confidentiality was maintained by assigning identification codes instead of personal identifiers, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Data were analysed using appropriate statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participant characteristics and social skill scores. Inferential statistical analyses, including independent-samples *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA, chi-square tests, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression, were performed to examine group differences, associations between variables, and predictors of social skill deficits. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

A total of **200 children with learning disabilities** participated in the study. The sample consisted predominantly of **male participants (61.5%)**, while females accounted for **38.5%**. Most participants were between **11 and 13 years of age (37.5%)**, and the largest proportion belonged to **Grades 6–8 (38.5%)**. Reading disability (34.5%) and mixed learning disability (34.0%) were the most frequently reported diagnostic categories. Most children were enrolled in inclusive schools (77.0%), and approximately two-thirds (67.0%) were receiving remedial educational support.

Overall Social Skills

The mean overall social-skills standard score was **74.09 ± 12.38**, indicating that the majority of participants demonstrated below-average social functioning. Scores ranged from **55 to 107**, reflecting considerable variability among children with learning disabilities.

Table 1: Overall Social Skills Score

Variable	Mean ± SD	Median	Range
Overall Social Skills Score	74.09 ± 12.38	73	55–107

Domain-wise Social Skills

Among the seven domains assessed, **engagement** demonstrated the lowest mean score, followed by **self-control** and **cooperation**, indicating that these were the areas in which children experienced the greatest social difficulties. Conversely, **empathy**, **responsibility**, and **communication** showed comparatively higher scores, suggesting relatively better functioning in these domains.

Table 2: Mean Item Scores of Social Skill Domains

Domain	Mean Item Score
Empathy	1.32
Responsibility	1.09
Communication	1.07
Assertion	0.96
Cooperation	0.87
Self-Control	0.78
Engagement	0.65

Distribution of Social Skill Deficits

A substantial proportion of participants (**78.5%**) were classified as either **below average** or **well below average** in overall social skills, whereas only **21.5%** demonstrated average social functioning. No participant achieved an above-average classification, indicating that social skill deficits were highly prevalent within the study population.

Table 3: Classification of Overall Social Skills

Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Well Below Average	80	40.00%
Below Average	77	38.50%
Average	43	21.50%
Above Average	0	0.00%

Problem Behaviours

The assessment of behavioural characteristics indicated that **hyperactivity/inattention** recorded the highest mean score among the problembehaviour domains, followed by **externalising** and **internalising** behaviours. These findings suggest that behavioural regulation difficulties frequently co-occur with reduced social competence in children with learning disabilities.

4. Discussion

The present study explored social skill deficits among children with learning disabilities using a standardized teacher rating scale. The findings revealed that most participants demonstrated below average social skills, confirming that social functioning represents an important area of concern in addition to academic difficulties. More than three-fourths of the participants were classified within the below-average or well-below-average range, highlighting the widespread nature of social skill deficits among children with learning disabilities.

The domain-wise analysis showed that **engagement**, **self-control**, and **cooperation** were the areas with the greatest deficits. Children experienced difficulty participating in classroom activities, maintaining peer relationships, regulating their behaviour, and working cooperatively with others. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that children with learning disabilities often

encounter challenges in classroom participation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication.

The study also demonstrated that behavioural difficulties frequently coexisted with poor social functioning. Higher levels of hyperactivity, inattention, and other behavioural problems were observed alongside reduced social competence, suggesting that behavioural regulation and social interaction are closely interconnected. These findings emphasize the importance of assessing both behavioural and social functioning when planning educational interventions for children with learning disabilities.

Another important finding was the relationship between social skills and academic competence. Children with stronger social skills generally showed better classroom adjustment and greater academic competence, whereas lower social skill scores were associated with poorer educational functioning. This finding reinforces the view that social competence contributes significantly to successful learning and school participation. Educational programmes should therefore integrate social-skills training with academic remediation rather than addressing academic deficits alone. Overall, the findings support existing literature indicating that social competence plays a vital role in the educational and psychosocial development of children with learning disabilities. Early identification of social difficulties and the implementation of structured, school-based interventions may improve peer relationships, classroom participation, behavioural adjustment, and long-term educational outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that children with learning disabilities experience significant deficits in several domains of social functioning, particularly engagement, self-control, and cooperation. These difficulties extend beyond academic performance and influence children's interpersonal relationships, classroom behaviour, and psychological well-being. The findings emphasize the importance of incorporating systematic social-skills assessment into routine educational evaluation.

Schools should adopt comprehensive intervention programmes that combine academic remediation with evidence-based social-skills training, behavioural support, and teacher-guided classroom strategies. Early identification and multidisciplinary intervention can improve children's confidence, social participation, academic achievement, and overall quality of life.

6. Educational Implications

The findings have several practical implications:

- Schools should include regular assessment of social skills alongside academic evaluation.
- Teachers should receive training to identify and manage social skill deficits effectively.
- Individualized educational plans should incorporate social-skills development.

- School psychologists, counsellors, special educators, and parents should collaborate to provide comprehensive support.
- Structured peer-interaction activities and classroom-based
- Social-skills programmes should be integrated into inclusive education settings.

7. Limitations

The study was limited to selected educational institutions and employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretation. Social skills were assessed through teacher ratings only, and findings may not fully represent children's behaviour in home or community settings. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs and multiple informants to obtain a broader understanding of social functioning.

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