

Social Skills as Predictors of Cognitive Failure, Attention Deficits and Psychological Maladjustment in School Children

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Poor social skills are linked with presence of cognitive and attention difficulties as well as poor social functioning and presence of cognition disturbances. Present research aimed to explore poor social skills as predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children. Sample included 200 students (100 girls & 100 boys) of class 4 & 5 with the mean age= 10.12 ($SD= 1.37$). Social Skills Rating System, The Cognitive Failure Questionnaire, Attention Deficits Questionnaire (child version) and Personality Assessment Questionnaire were used to assess social skills, cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological adjustment respectively. Results revealed significant inverse correlation of different social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control with cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment ($p<0.01$) Whereas cognitive failure, attention deficits had positive correlation with psychological maladjustment ($p<0.01$). Hierarchical regression analyses showed social skills deficits emerged as significant predictors of cognitive failures, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children .

Keywords: *Social skills, cognitive failure, attention deficits, psychological maladjustment, school children.*

Social skills are socially acceptable behaviors which are learned from interpersonal communication with the interaction with people in the environment. A child learns social skills from parents, siblings, teachers and peer-group. Effective social skills are learnt from positive interpersonal communication

between the child and the individuals interacting with the child (Gresham, Elliott, Vance & Cook, 2011) while poor social skills are associated with impaired social cognitive capacity along with adjustment problems in children. Researches have shown that impaired social cognitive capacity may disturb executive functions i.e., cognitive and attention deficits that can further predict psychological maladjustment (Brüne, Schaub, Juckel, & Langdon, 2011). Social skills are defined as socially acceptable behaviors that allow an individual to positively interact with others. Social skills are learned and are necessary for successful academic and peer-group settings in school (Gresham, 2002). Poor social skills can lead to psychological maladjustment for these children as well. Main social skills are included as listening attentively, comprehend the instructions, follow classroom or group rules, request for help, cooperate with teachers and peers and most important control in conflicting situations (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004; Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003). Whereas unable to pay attention or comprehend the rules can be an indicator of poor or defective social skills that are associated with other disabilities such as attention deficits/hyperactivity disorder (Hinshaw & Blachman, 2005) and cognitive deficits. Children who demonstrate poor social skills also prone to exhibit emotional and behavioral disorders Walker, Ramsey and Gresham, (2004), conduct disorder (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002). Children who experience difficulties in their interpersonal relationships are at risk for difficulties in areas of educational, psychosocial, and vocational domains of functioning (Berndt & McCandless, 2009).

Social skills are categorized into three major divisions i.e., non-verbal, verbal and conversational skills. The non-verbal skill comprises the body posture, gestures or physical proximity (Spence, 1985) while verbal and conversational skills need direct or indirect interpersonal communication. Effective social skills are learned through working out appropriate encoding of information and to manage emotions and behaviors according to the demands of situation (Riggio, 1986). Learning effective social skills consistently depends upon how the child conceives social condition while poor social skills roots in problematic interpersonal communication with other people and are positively associated with cognitive and attention deficits accompanied with psychological maladjustment (Miller & Eisler, 1977).

Cognitive failure is described as lapses in memorizing or recalling learned material, giving attention and responding to the environmental stimuli according to the demands. For school children, this may comprise in being unable to complete the given tasks in class-rooms or at home. This may be due to distorted memory, distraction and attention deficits. Cognitive failure accompanied by attention and memory deficits in children is a neuro-developmental disorders characterized by multifaceted conditions such as problematic communication, cognitive failures and motor or behavioral

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dysfunctions (Mullin, Gokhale, Luca, Sanyal, Waddington & Faundez, 2013). Ultimately, the child remains unable to continue education or learning effective skills.

The components of effective social skills comprised in three stage process including receiving skills, processing skills and sending skills (Lieberman et al., 1975). Receiving skills measures identifying interpersonal cues in combination with environmental prompts while processing skills require potential to recognize and to devote internal resources for inter action. Sending or transforming skills needs timely administering the genuine content and flow in interaction (Moghaddam et al., 1993). Learning and transformation of social skills involves synchronization of different practical mechanism of an individual to construct a satisfactory action to the social surroundings keeping in view of societal norms, rules and regulations, cultural values etc. (Segrin & Flora (2000). But many miscellaneous disruptions may impede the social skill presentation.

Cognitive failure is cognitive-based inaccuracies which are demonstrated by gaps of attention or distorted memory, faulty perception, failure to retrieve information and/or performing proper motor functions e.g., unintended actions or action slips. Broadbent, Cooper, Gerald and Parkes (1982) defined cognitive failures as having minor slips that derange and interferes the smooth flow of routine activity because of interference of distorted memory, distractibility, physical blunders (Wallace, Kass & Stanny, 2002).

Effective social skills have been anticipated to be the important aspect to predict psychological adjustment. Psychological maladjustment is an inability to react successfully according to the environmental needs (Atkins & Pelham, 1991; Tanssely & Gulliford, 1982). Psychological maladjustment frequently involves broad level of biological and social conditions in which the individual is incapable to meet the social or cultural expectations. Literature showed that lack of effective social skills, experiencing cognitive failures and attention deficits are major factors of psychological maladjustment in children. It is proven that maladjusted children perpetually remain on trouble, show nuisance in class, annoy class-fellows and generally they are unable to go along with the normal school's life with their rude, stubborn and emotionally disturbed behavior (Tanssely & Gulliford, 1982). Psychologically maladjusted children are insecure and unhappy due to failure in their unsuccessful relationships with others which nourish psychological distress along with internalizing or externalizing behaviors. Moreover, these children are reported to be indulged in fighting, biting, hitting and kicking. They use abusive language and remained unable to organize class work or home assignments that further deteriorate their temperament. They receive scolding and rejection from teachers, peer or parents who label them as slow, stupid unsuccessful which fill them with frustration

disrupting their mental health (Monroe & Simons, 1991). Similarly, some researchers from Pakistan have also reported significant positive relationship between learning disabilities, cognitive failure, interpersonal relationship anxiety and teacher's rejection in Pakistan as well (Habib, & Naz, 2015). In another research, Naz and Kausar (2012) also found that lack of normal communication between children and teachers or parents was reported to be the significant predictor of psychological maladjustment and development of psychological issues i.e., anxiety, depression etc. Ashraf and Najam (2020) have also highlighted prevalence of these variables in general population of children with learning disabilities in Pakistan. Further, Saleem and Mahmood (2012) endorsed feelings of rejection from significant others contribute significantly in poor academic performance and behavioral problems in school children.

The present study is significant as we explored social skills in relation to cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in children. By recognizing these variables, the current research may provide directions to parents and school teachers to understand the importance of social skills in children to save them from having maladjusted behaviors in future. Teachers can formulate some teaching plans within the class-rooms to teach these students how they can learn effective communication skills that can help them to get cognitive disturbances and attention spans. With practice, the child may be well adjusted and become a useful member of society.

The present research explored the following hypotheses i.e.,

- i. There is likely to be a relationship between social skills, cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children.
- ii. Social skills are likely to be the predictor of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children.

Methods

Research Design: The present research used a *Correlational Research Design* to explore predictive relationship between social skills, cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in children.

Participants: Sample comprised of 200 students (100 girls & 100 boys) of grade 4-5 from different public schools from Lahore city. The mean age of the sample was ($M=10.2$, $SD=1.37$). The children were administered with three questions from Social Skills Rating and two questions for cognitive disturbances to gauge whether the child is facing social skills deficits and/or cognitive difficulties. Those students were excluded who had any physical disability or diagnosed psychological problem.

Measures

Social Skills Rating System(SSRS-Student form: Gresham, Elliott, Vance & Cook, 2011): SSRS consists in 39 statements which is used to assess social skills in terms of assertion (10 items), cooperation (10 items), empathy(10 items) and self-control (10 items) whereas item number 11 falls in two categories i.e., cooperation and self-control. The response options are never (0), sometimes (1) and very often (2). The SSRS first component is “Begin working when told to do so”. The SSRS is to be administered on children from 03 to 18 years and the completion time is 10-25 minutes. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the sub-scales range from 0.73-0.86.

Cognitive Failure Questionnaire(CFQ; Broadbent, Cooper FitzGerald & Parkes, 1982; $\alpha=.89$): CFQ is a three factors questionnaire that consists in 25 items used to assess everyday errors and mistakes due to absent-mindedness, slips of perception or motor activities that demonstrate cognitive failure in children. The three factors are forgetfulness, distractibility and false triggering. Response options range from never (0) to very often (4) and the score range is 0-100. The more the score, the more cognitive disturbances the child would have. Cronbach’s alpha reliability for the present research was good i.e., $\alpha=.82$

ADHD Symptoms Checklist(Child Version; Health Link System): ADHD Symptoms Checklist which is used to assess inattention (9-items), hyperactivity (6-items) and impulsivity (3-items) of a child. The total items are 18 which are to be responded at five points Likert scale. In research, we used only first scale inattention to assess the attention deficits with the score range between 9-36. Cronbach’s alpha reliability for this research was 0.85.

Personality Assessment Questionnaire(PAQ-Child; (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer, 2007)PAQ-Child assesses seven dimensions of psychological maladjustment in children. PAQ-Child consists in 42 items questionnaire with the response options almost never true (1) to almost always true (4). Higher score (168) is an indication of individual’s psychological maladjustment. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities are reported from .83 to .89 (Naz & Kausar, 2012).

Demographic Information: Information included gender, age, education, number of siblings, birth order, family system, family income, parental age and education.

Procedure

The researcher, after taking permission from authors to use questionnaires and approval of synopsis from BOS, recruited students from grade 4-5 from different public schools from Lahore city. First, the class-teacher was contacted to identify the children who would get higher scores on PAQ-Child. The identified children were asked two to three questions from cognitive failure questionnaire

and attention deficits questionnaire. If they got high scores on both, they were included in the sample and were administered questionnaires. After data collection, data were analyzed and results were calculated and discussed.

Results

The data analytic strategy involved performing descriptive analyses for demographic characteristics, Pearson Correlation analyses for exploring correlation between variables and Hierarchical Regression analyses for identifying social skills as predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children.

Descriptive analyses

Descriptive analyses i.e., mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. The results are presented in table1.

Table 1

Description of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=200)

Variables	Mean	SD	Variables	M	SD
Age(in years)	10.1	1.37	Mother's age	33.5	3.66
Father's age	37.8	5.37	Family monthly income	27000	12.54
Gender	<i>f</i>	<i>%age</i>	Education	<i>f</i>	<i>%age</i>
Boys	100	50	Class 4	76	38
Girls	100	50	Class 5	124	62
Family system	<i>f</i>	<i>%age</i>	-	-	-
Nuclear family system	124	62.0	-	-	-
Joint family system	76	38.0	-	-	-
Father's education	<i>f</i>	<i>%age</i>	Mother's education	<i>F</i>	<i>%age</i>
≤ Metric	34	17.0	≤ Metric	3	1.3
Intermediate	75	37.5	Intermediate	67	33.5
Graduation	85	42.5	Graduation	103	51.5
Masters	6	3.0	Masters	27	13.5
No. of Siblings	<i>f</i>	<i>%age</i>	Birth Order	<i>F</i>	<i>%age</i>
Only child	7	3.5	1 st	46	23.0
1-2	24	12.0	2 nd	85	42.5
3-4	113	29.5	3 rd	57	28.5
5-6	56	28.0	4 th	12	6.0

Descriptive statistics show that children's mean age was around ten years and they all were from lower socio-economic class as shown by family's monthly income which falls below 16 US dollars per month. Most of the children (62%)

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belong to nuclear family system and around thirty percent children had three to four siblings.

To see the correlation among variables i.e., social skills e.g., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-confidence and cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children, Pearson Product Moment Correlation analyses were employed. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Relationship between Social Skills, Cognitive Failure, Attention Deficits and Psychological Maladjustment in School Children (N=200).

Variables	Mea	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7
	n							
Social Skills								
1-Assertion	6.53	1.97	.67** *	.57** *	.43** *	- .69***	-.31**	-.47***
2-Empathym	7.81	1.74	-	.63** *	.42** *	- .44***	- .49***	-.65***
3-Cooperation	8.32	2.31	-	-	.55** *	- .55***	-.29**	-.48***
4-Self-control	7.20	1.62	-	-	-	- .67***	- .52***	-.50***
5-Cognitive failure	17.59	4.32	-	-	-	-	.55***	.33***
6-Attention deficits	29.74	7.85	-	-	-	-	-	.42**
7-Psychological (Mal)adjustment	138.2	27.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
	9	3	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Results in the table 2 revealed significant inverse correlation of different social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control with cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment ($p < 0.01$). Results also showed that cognitive failure, attention deficits had positive correlation with psychological maladjustment ($p < 0.01$).

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

To see social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control as predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment, hierarchical regression analyses were used. Accordingly, controlled variables gender, age, education, family-system were entered in the first block and social skills were entered in the second block. In the third block,

cognitive failure and attention deficits were entered and the scores for psychological maladjustment were entered in the fourth block. Resultantly, the hierarchical regression analyses worked out in four steps accounting 17%, 31%, 54% and 69% of the variance in all four steps respectively with overall model fit as $F= 21.38$ ($p<0.01$).

Table 3

Hierarchical regression analyses indicating variance in Psychological Adjustment by (lack of) social skills, cognitive failure and attention deficits ($N=200$)

Predictors	R^2	ΔR^2	B
Step 1			
Control Variables	.17	.08	.12
Step 2			
Assertion			-.31***
Empathy			-.22**
Cooperation			-.42***
Self-control			-.45***
Step3			
Cognitive failure	.54	.35	.44***
Attention deficits			.25**
Step 4			
Psychological maladjustment	.69	.52	.49***

Note. Control variables: gender, age, education, family-system

** $p<.01$. *** $p <.001$.

Results from hierarchical regression analyses showed social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control emerged as significantly negative predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children. This means that lack of proficiency in social skills contribute significantly in cognitive disturbance and attention deficits which ultimately disrupt the psychological adjustment of children in their environment.

Discussion

Psychological adjustment is important to behave in accordance with the environmental demands for both humans as well as animals. Effective social skills help the individuals to cope with the environmental challenges. A child with effective social skills learns to behave in normal or in emergency situations. Social skills are learned competencies that contain societal rules which facilitate verbal and non-verbal communication and interpersonal interaction with others. In actual, this whole procedure is called socialization in developmental period but lack of effective social skills can be detrimental for maintaining normal interpersonal relationship with other people that further cause to develop stresses. These stresses affect cognitions and attention and can lead to psychological maladjustment in children.

The present study explored descriptive statistics e.g., frequency count including percentages for demographic variables, correlation between social skills, cognitive disturbances, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children and explored social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control as predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children.

Results revealed significant inverse correlation of different social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control with cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment ($p < 0.01$). Results also showed that cognitive failure, attention deficits had positive correlation with psychological maladjustment ($p < 0.01$). According to research literature, researches directly related to social skills and adjustment of children with environmental hazards in Pakistan are lacking but some researches have found home environment and psychological adjustment e.g., Shujjah et al.,(2017) found perceived adverse home circumstances as significant predictors of psychological maladjustment in children in Pakistan and the researchers found that social competence was associated with negative emotions and psychological maladjustment in girls in Pakistan. Naz and Kausar (2012) found significant association between childhood adversities and psychological maladjustment in girls who developed depressive disorder (Naz & Kausar, 2012) and somatic symptoms disorder.

These results are supported by Kathryn (2011) who argues the importance of social and emotional skills and describes how these skills contribute in socio-emotional development in young children. Literature has confirmed relationship between poor social skills and psychological maladjustment including different psychological problems (Curran, 1977; Youngren & Lewinsohn, 1980). Similarly, Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich and

Gill (2013) examined socio-emotional skills using data from 356 school children with middle childhood period and found socio-emotional skills were significant predictors of maladjustment.

Childhood period comprised in various developmental stages that are intertwined culturally by societal norms, customs and laws. In this study, the participants were school children from middle childhood period. Middle childhood period is recognized for learning social values, development of cognitive skills, personality and inter-personal relationships. Consequently, the main objective of middle childhood can be described as *integration*, both related to development within the individual and of the individual within the societal contexts. In the present study, these children were studied regarding their lack of effective social skills and its predictive relation with cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment by using hierarchical regression analyses. Results from hierarchical regression analyses showed social skills i.e., assertion, empathy, cooperation and self-control emerged as significantly negative predictors of cognitive failure, attention deficits and psychological maladjustment in school children. This means that lack of proficiency in social skills contribute significantly in cognitive disturbance and attention deficits which ultimately disrupt the psychological adjustment of children in their environment.

These results are supported by researches e.g., Segrin and Flora (2000) found people with poor social skills while interacting in environment was found the strong predictor of developing psychosocial problems including stress. These results were also supported by Salguero, Palomera and Fernández-Berrocal (2012) suggested that emotional intelligence was a stable significant predictor of children's adjustment.

Conclusion

It is stated that effective social skills are essential for normal behavioral and psychological adjustment for children and lack of social skills may lead towards problematic interpersonal relations with others. Parents and teachers should pay attention to teach children good and effective social skills so that they communicate with others confidently and comfortably.

Limitations and suggestions for future researchers

The present research relied only on teacher's report for identifying children with psychological maladjustment. It is suggested that future research should include parents to get children's psychological and behavioral adjustment and that should be compared with the teachers' report to get reliable results. The present research did not include children from private sector so it is suggested

that the future research should contain data from private schools as well to get more demographic variable to be the predictors of psychological maladjustment in school children.

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