



Defining and Assessing Social Skills in Primary Education in China: Toward an Integrated Conceptual and Empirical Framework

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Social skills are essential for children's holistic development, influencing not only their academic performance but also their emotional well-being and ability to build healthy interpersonal relationships. In China, many primary school students face challenges in social communication, highlighting an urgent need to better understand and support their social skill development within the local educational context. This study explores the definition and components of social skills among Chinese primary school students and evaluates their skill levels.

Materials and Methods: The study employs a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative phase involves five senior experts holding doctoral degrees or associate professorships in education, psychology, or educational psychology, who provide valuable insights into the conceptualization of social skills. The quantitative phase uses cluster sampling to select a total of 92 fourth-grade students (46 students per class) from Jiangxia District Experimental Primary School in Wuhan, China, to assess their social skill levels.

Results: The results reveal that social skills are defined as a set of learned behaviors and abilities that enable primary school students to interact effectively with others, navigate various social situations, and build positive relationships. It includes five dimensions, which are cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. The evaluation demonstrates that students exhibit moderate levels of these skills, with no significant differences between the two classes, indicating that social skills among primary school students are generally at a moderate level.

Conclusion: This study contributes to the understanding of social skills by providing a clear definition and identifying key dimensions crucial for primary school students' social skills. It offers a foundation for future interventions aimed at enhancing social skills.

Keywords: Social Skills; Definition and Components; Primary School Students

Introduction

Social skills are fundamental to children's development, significantly influencing their academic achievement, emotional well-being, and future social integration (Alghazo et al., 2023). In China, many primary school students face interpersonal challenges, including inadequate communication abilities and frequent conflicts. Some students struggle to express their thoughts and emotions, resulting in passive or withdrawn behavior during social interactions. Others, influenced by factors such as personality, academic performance, and family environment, exhibit low self-esteem, social withdrawal, or aggression—behaviors that can lead to peer rejection and even bullying (Xia, 2025).

Social skills development is a critical concern in primary education, as it affects interpersonal relationships and classroom participation. Children with well-developed social competencies tend to enjoy stronger peer relationships and achieve better academic outcomes (Kamei & Harriott, 2021). However, cultural expectations and educational practices vary across contexts, shaping how social skills are taught and assessed (Chen & French, 2008). These cultural distinctions highlight the importance of localized research to ensure that interventions address the specific needs of Chinese primary students (Qi & Li, 2022).

Previous research has examined various dimensions of social skills, such as emotional regulation, verbal and non-verbal communication, and social problem-solving (Gresham & Elliott, 2008; Spence, 2003; Wilkins & Matson, 2009). However, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies defining the specific components of social skills among primary school students, particularly within the Chinese educational context. The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to explore the definition and key components of social

skills among primary school students in China and (2) to systematically assess their social skill levels. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating surveys, teacher interviews, and behavioral observations conducted in a selected primary school. By analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, this research aims to establish a culturally informed framework for understanding and measuring social skills in primary education.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by addressing the existing research gap in defining and evaluating social skills among Chinese primary school students. By developing a culturally informed framework, this study aims to support practical applications in school settings. Educators will be better equipped to identify social skill deficits and implement targeted interventions. Policymakers and psychologists can also use these insights to design more effective programs that foster social development. Additionally, the findings will support future research on intervention strategies that enhance social competencies, ultimately improving their academic performance and social development.

Objectives

1. To explore the definition and components of social skills among primary school students.
2. To evaluate the social skills among primary school students.

Literature review

Social Skills

Current research on social skills among primary school students has predominantly focused on two key aspects: the conceptual definition and component structure of social skills, and the evaluation methods used to assess these competencies (Xia, 2025). Early theoretical contributions by Gresham and Elliott (1984, 1990) defined social skills as “socially acceptable learned behaviors” that facilitate positive interpersonal interactions. This foundational definition has been extended by subsequent scholars such as Mize and Ladd (1990) and Spence (2003), who argue that social skills are not merely observable behaviors but are the result of the interplay among cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes. These perspectives underscore the complexity of social skills, suggesting that they serve as a critical tool for enabling individuals to navigate varied social contexts effectively.

Bandura’s social learning theory (1977, 1986) has emerged as a central theoretical framework in this domain, positing that social skills are primarily acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. This theory provides a robust explanation for how children develop social competencies through exposure to role models and the consequent internalization of observed behaviors. Empirical studies have further substantiated the importance of observational learning and the role of positive reinforcement in enhancing social skills among children (Alghazo et al., 2023; Avşar & Alkaya, 2017; Qiu & Li, 2022). These findings not only strengthen the theoretical foundation but also have practical implications for the design of intervention programs aimed at promoting social competence in primary education settings.

In terms of the specific components of social skills, various researchers have proposed multi-dimensional models. For instance, Gresham and Elliot (2008) identify five key dimensions—cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—which are critical for effective social functioning. Other models, such as those proposed by Caldarella and Merrell (1997) and Wilkins and Matson (2009), highlight additional dimensions such as peer relations, self-management, communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. Although there is a consensus regarding the importance of these core competencies, differences in the dimensional breakdown across studies indicate the need for an integrated model that is specifically tailored to the developmental stage and contextual realities of primary school students.

Based on previous literature, a gap exists regarding the transferability of existing Western models of social skills to Chinese cultural contexts, where values such as collectivism and group harmony may play a significant role in shaping the development of social skills. Furthermore, there is a lack of an integrated model that combines both practical considerations and cultural factors, which would more effectively address the social skills needs of primary school students in China.

Evaluation of Social Skills

The evaluation of social skills in educational settings has been approached through a variety of methods, including behavioral observations, rating scales, sociometric techniques, and self-report measures. Instruments such as the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham et al., 2011) and the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliot, 2008) have gained prominence due to their demonstrated reliability and ease of use. However, each assessment method has inherent limitations. For example, while behavioral observations can provide rich contextual data, they are vulnerable to observer bias; rating scales, on the other hand, may be influenced by subjective evaluations from different informants (Chen & French, 2008). Previous literature advocates for a multi-method, multi-informant approach to capture a more comprehensive and objective picture of social skills (Cordier et al., 2015).

Despite significant advancements, the literature reveals notable gaps.

1. While multiple models offer valuable insights into the components of social skills, no universally accepted integrated framework encapsulates the unique characteristics of primary school students.

2. The disconnect between theoretical models and practical evaluation tools remains problematic, as existing assessments often do not adequately reflect the multifaceted nature of social skills in early educational contexts.

3. Much of the research is based on data from Western contexts, with relatively few studies examining the applicability of these models and measures within Asian or other culturally diverse populations.

Based on previous literature, there is a lack of standardized, localized assessment tools for evaluating social skills in primary school students within Chinese cultural contexts. This gap highlights the need for the development of culturally relevant instruments that can more accurately capture the unique social competencies of students in China.

In summary, while existing literature provides a solid foundation for understanding the theoretical underpinnings, component structure, and measurement of social skills, significant gaps remain. The integration of diverse theoretical perspectives—anchored by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory—and the synthesis of various dimensional models into a unified framework are needed. Furthermore, developing a culturally sensitive, multi-method evaluation strategy that accurately captures the complexity of social skills among primary school students is essential. This study aims to address these gaps by refining the conceptual definition and components of social skills and by proposing an integrated, comprehensive assessment framework that bridges theory and practice, thereby offering novel insights and practical implications for educational interventions.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a study that aims to explore the definition and components of social skills among primary school students and evaluate the social skills of primary school students. The researcher establishes the conceptual framework (see Fig.1) for this study by integrating social learning theory with existing research on social skills in educational contexts. The detailed framework is presented below.

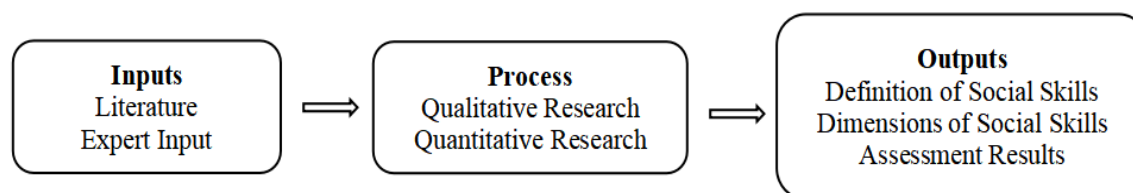


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a two-phase mixed-methods design to comprehensively address its dual objectives. The first phase used qualitative methods to develop a contextually grounded conceptualization of social skills in the primary school setting, while the second phase utilized quantitative methods to evaluate the current levels of social skills among students. This integrated approach allowed for the triangulation of data, ensuring that theoretical definitions derived from the literature and expert insights could be empirically validated through robust measurement techniques (Renk & Phares, 2004).

Population and Sample

This study first incorporated a qualitative phase involving five senior experts, each holding either a doctoral degree or an associate professorship in education, psychology, or educational psychology. These experts provided in-depth insights into the conceptualization and key components of social skills among primary school students, contributing to the refinement of the study's theoretical framework.

For the quantitative phase, the population for this study consisted of all fourth-grade students ($N = 250$) enrolled at Jiangxia District Experimental Primary School in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. From this population, two intact classes were randomly selected, resulting in a total sample of 92 students. These students were evenly assigned to two groups, with key demographic variables such as age, gender, and class composition recorded to facilitate further subgroup analyses.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were developed for this study:

(1) Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the theoretical and practical dimensions of social skills. The guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from five senior experts regarding the definition and constituent components of social skills among primary school students. The qualitative data derived from these interviews were analyzed using content analysis and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

(2) Social Skills Questionnaire:

This study employed a structured questionnaire to assess the social skills of primary school students. The questionnaire was developed based on an extensive literature review and expert consultations, drawing on the frameworks established by Gresham and Elliott (2008). It measured five key dimensions of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.

The questionnaire was adapted from the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales (SSIS-RS, 2008) and the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS, 1990), ensuring both theoretical and empirical validity. It comprised 50 items, with 10 items per dimension, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). Content validity was established via the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index, with scores ranging between 0.67 and 1.00 (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 2007), and reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha (> 0.70) (Cronbach, 1974).

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in two distinct phases:

Phase 1 (Qualitative):

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to synthesize existing definitions and frameworks of social skills. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with five expert scholars, conducted via online communication platforms.

Phase 2 (Quantitative):

The Social Skills Questionnaire was administered to the 92 fourth-grade students during the 2024–2025 academic year. Data collection was performed in a controlled classroom setting, ensuring that each student completed the questionnaire anonymously. Prior ethical approval was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was secured from the parents or guardians of all participants.

Data Analysis



The analysis process integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches:

(1) Qualitative Analysis:

The qualitative data obtained through literature review and expert interviews were subjected to content analysis. This process helped to refine the definition and composition of social skills for the questionnaire. Additionally, the researchers used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes and categories from the interview transcripts.

(2) Quantitative Analysis:

Data from the Social Skills Questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS 24.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed for the overall sample and each social skills subcomponent. The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed via Cronbach's alpha. Additionally, an independent t-test was employed to examine differences in social skills scores across subcomponents. Table 1 presents the range of mean score interpretation.

Table 1 The Range of Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score Range	Respondents' Perceptions Level
4.21-5.00	Highest
3.41-4.20	High
2.61-3.40	Moderate
1.81-2.60	Low
1.00-1.80	Lowest

Source: Abu-Baker et al. 2019

Results

Objective 1. To explore the definition and components of social skills among primary school students. The definition and components of social skills were obtained by combining the results of the literature review with expert insights.

(1) The definition of social skills among primary school students

Previous scholars have proposed various definitions of social skills, with the operational definition by Gresham and Elliott (1990) being the most applicable to this study. Social skills are learned behaviors that conform to societal norms, enabling individuals to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and avoid negative ones. This definition offers several advantages. First, it emphasizes observable behaviors, making it highly practical for assessment and intervention. Second, it highlights social reinforcement, which aligns with the learning process through feedback and interaction, especially among primary school students. Finally, it focuses on positive and negative responses, providing a clear framework for evaluating the effectiveness of social interactions.

Other definitions in the literature introduce valuable perspectives but also have limitations. For example, the goal-oriented perspective (Merrell & Gimpel, 2014) views social skills as tools for achieving specific outcomes, such as forming friendships or resolving conflicts. While this perspective holds merit, directly observable behaviors are more needed in practical educational settings, making this definition less specific in its application. Additionally, the cultural contextuality perspective (Chen & French, 2008) emphasizes the influence of cultural norms on social skills, which is crucial for cross-cultural studies. However, its lack of specificity in identifying universally measurable behaviors limits its practical application in structured educational environments.

Additionally, based on the results of the literature review, expert interviews were conducted. Experts offered several significant revisions to the definition of social skills proposed by Gresham and Elliott (1990). First, they emphasized the learnability of social skills, arguing that these skills are acquired through learning and practice, rather than solely relying on behaviors that align with socially accepted norms. Therefore, experts suggested incorporating the phrase "learned behaviors and abilities" into Gresham's definition, highlighting that social skills are not innate but can be progressively developed through education and social interaction. Second, the experts pointed out that the expression of social skills is not



fixed or uniform; instead, it varies depending on the specific social context. For example, the social skills required in classroom settings may differ from those needed in extracurricular activities. Consequently, experts recommended expanding the definition to include the ability to "navigate various social situations," thereby more accurately reflecting the context-dependent nature of social skills. Lastly, experts added that social skills should not only focus on avoiding negative reactions but also contribute to the establishment of "positive relationships." This aligns with the concept of "positive responses" in Gresham and Elliott's (1990) definition, but experts emphasized that the goal of social skills should be to actively build and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, rather than merely preventing negative interactions.

Incorporating the feedback, the revised conclusion, social skills in this study are defined as a set of learned behaviors and abilities that enable primary school students to interact effectively with others, navigate various social situations, and build positive relationships.

(2) The components of social skills among primary school students

Various frameworks for categorizing social skills have been proposed in the literature. Through a review of the literature on the components of social skills, this study adopts Gresham's (1997) five core dimensions due to their comprehensiveness and practical applicability. These dimensions are:

1. Cooperation: Refers to engaging in group activities, sharing resources, and adhering to rules.
2. Assertion: Refers to expressing needs, opinions, and rights respectfully.
3. Responsibility: Refers to the ability to fulfill obligations, complete assigned tasks, and take ownership of their actions and decisions.
4. Empathy: Refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and share the feelings and perspectives of others.
5. Self-Control: Refers to the capacity to regulate emotions, impulses, and behaviors in different social situations.

Based on the refined definitions provided by the expert interviews, it appears that the experts placed a strong emphasis on the practical application of social skills in real-world school environments. Experts discussed how cooperation goes beyond simply following rules, highlighting that it involves actively participating in group activities, sharing resources, and helping others. This skill, they argued, is crucial for achieving shared goals while maintaining a positive group dynamic. Similarly, assertion was described as the ability to express needs, opinions, and rights in a respectful, clear manner, with experts noting that students should be confident in initiating social interactions without infringing on others' rights. In terms of responsibility, experts pointed out that it encompasses not just fulfilling tasks but also understanding the consequences of one's actions. This responsibility includes being reliable and accountable in both academic and social situations. The experts also emphasized the significance of empathy, explaining that it involves recognizing and responding to the feelings and perspectives of others, which is critical for emotional support and understanding in diverse social contexts. Lastly, self-control was discussed as a key skill, with experts highlighting that students must learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors in various social situations, particularly in managing frustration and conflicts, using appropriate coping strategies to adapt to different social expectations.

Therefore, five key components of social skills for primary school students have been finalized:

Cooperation refers to the ability of students to engage in collaborative behaviors, such as following rules, sharing resources, actively participating in group activities, and offering help to peers and teachers. It emphasizes working harmoniously with others to achieve collective goals while maintaining a positive group dynamic.

Assertion refers to the capacity to express their needs, opinions, and rights clearly and respectfully. It includes initiating social interactions, advocating for oneself appropriately, and demonstrating confidence in various social contexts without infringing on the rights of others.

Responsibility refers to competence in fulfilling obligations, completing assigned tasks, and taking ownership of their actions and decisions. It encompasses reliability, accountability, and an understanding of the consequences of one's behavior in both academic and social environments.

Empathy refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and share the feelings and perspectives of others. It includes demonstrating compassion, offering emotional support, and responding sensitively to the emotional states of peers and adults across diverse social contexts.

Self-control refers to the capacity to regulate emotions, impulses, and behaviors in different social situations. This includes managing frustration, remaining calm during conflicts, utilizing appropriate coping strategies, and adjusting behavior to meet the expectations of various social settings.

Objective 2. To evaluate the social skills among primary school students. A total of 92 fourth-grade students from a primary school participated in the evaluation, with 46 students in Class 2 and 46 students in Class 3.

Based on the five dimensions identified in the first research objective—cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, this study integrated and modified the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales (SSIS-RS) (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) and the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) to create a customized measurement tool for assessing primary school students' social skills. Each of the five dimensions was covered with 10 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 2 presents the pre-test mean (M), standard deviation (SD), t-test results (t, df, p), and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the overall social skills and its five components—cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. The independent t-tests were conducted to compare the initial social skills levels between Class 2 and Class 3. The following is the explanation of the results from Table 2.

1. Cooperation: Class 2 (M = 3.38) falls in the Moderate range, while Class 3 (M = 3.18) is also within the Moderate range. Though the difference between the classes is not significant (t = 1.91, p = .06), the mean scores indicate that both classes have a moderate level of cooperation.

2. Assertion: Both Class 2 (M = 3.13) and Class 3 (M = 3.02) have mean scores that fall within the Moderate range for assertion skills. With no significant difference between the classes (t = 1.02, p = .31), both groups show a moderate level of ability to express needs and opinions respectfully.

3. Responsibility: Class 2 (M = 3.29) and Class 3 (M = 3.23) both fall within the Moderate range for responsibility, as their mean scores indicate. Since no significant difference was found (t = 0.57, p = .57), both groups exhibit a moderate level of responsibility at baseline.

4. Empathy: Class 2 (M = 3.27) and Class 3 (M = 3.15) are within the Moderate range for empathy. There was no significant difference between the two groups (t = 1.11, p = .27), indicating that both groups have a moderate level of empathy and emotional understanding.

5. Self-control: Class 2 (M = 3.10) and Class 3 (M = 2.93) both fall within the Moderate range for self-control. Despite the slightly higher score for Class 2, the difference was not significant (t = 1.44, p = .15), and both groups exhibit a moderate level of self-regulation.

6. Overall Social Skills: Both Class 2 (M = 3.23) and Class 3 (M = 3.10) fall within the Moderate range (2.61 - 3.40) for overall social skills. Since there was no significant difference between the two classes (t = 1.35, p = .18), both groups display a moderate level of social skills at baseline. Although the independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in overall social skills between the effect size, as indicated by Cohen's d (≈ 0.28), suggests a small effect according to Cohen's criteria. This implies that while the difference is not statistically significant, it is not entirely negligible and may warrant attention in educational interventions.

Table 2 Independent Samples T-test Results for Social Skills Scores

Variable	Class	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Cooperation	2	46	3.38	0.45	1.91	90	0.06
	3	46	3.18	0.52			
Assertion	2	46	3.13	0.53	1.02	90	0.31
	3	46	3.02	0.55			
Responsibility	2	46	3.29	0.50	0.57	90	0.57



Variable	Class	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Empathy	3	46	3.23	0.53	1.11	90	0.27
	2	46	3.27	0.49			
	3	46	3.15	0.59			
Self-control	2	46	3.10	0.57	1.44	90	0.15
	3	46	2.93	0.56			
Overall Social Skills	2	46	3.23	0.47	1.35	90	0.18
	3	46	3.10	0.47			

In summary, although students scored moderately in cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, no statistically significant differences were found between the two classes, as evidenced by the statistical tests (all p-values greater than .05). These findings indicate that the social skills of primary school students require improvement, and interventions may be necessary to enhance their social competence.

Discussion

This study first aimed to explore the definition and components of social skills among primary school students. Social skills in this study are defined as a set of learned behaviors and abilities that enable primary school students to interact effectively with others, navigate various social situations, and build positive relationships. The findings align with Gresham and Elliott (1990) and Merrell and Gimpel (2014), who similarly conceptualized social skills as essential for fostering interpersonal competence and social adjustment.

The results identified five key dimensions of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Each component plays a significant role in shaping the ability to function effectively in social environments. These findings have direct implications for classroom practice, offering educators a clear framework for observing and nurturing students' social competence. For example, cooperation—defined as the ability to follow rules, share resources, and collaborate—can be supported through structured group tasks and peer learning strategies. This is consistent with Alzyoudi et al. (2015), who emphasized the importance of cooperative behavior in maintaining positive peer interactions.

Assertion pertains to the capacity to express needs and opinions respectfully. This includes initiating interactions, self-advocacy, and confidence in communication. However, in the context of Chinese culture, where modesty and group harmony are highly valued, the development of assertiveness may be constrained by social expectations that discourage overt self-expression. As such, teachers need to create safe, culturally sensitive classroom environments where students feel encouraged to speak up while still respecting collective norms. This finding supports Avşar and Alkaya (2017), who noted the importance of cultural context in shaping assertive behavior.

Responsibility reflects the ability to fulfill obligations and take ownership of actions. It includes reliability and accountability. In collectivist cultures like China, responsibility is often framed in terms of duty to the group (e.g., class or family) rather than individual initiative. As Alghazo et al. (2023) observed, fostering responsibility may require educators to balance moral education with opportunities for independent decision-making. Teachers can use project-based learning or classroom leadership roles to develop both personal accountability and group-oriented responsibility.

Empathy involves understanding and responding to others' feelings, which contributes to prosocial behavior and emotional intelligence, as noted by Del Prette and Del Prette (2019). Teachers can model empathetic communication and incorporate activities like role-playing to enhance perspective-taking skills.

Self-control, the capacity to manage impulses and emotions, is essential for navigating peer conflict and classroom expectations. This aligns with Schonert-Reichl et al. (2012), who emphasized its importance in emotional regulation. Classroom routines and emotion-regulation strategies can help students build self-discipline over time.



Overall, the study supports the notion that social skills are multidimensional constructs essential for academic and social success. The findings reinforce prior research and provide a structured framework that can guide future interventions aimed at enhancing social competence among primary school students.

Moreover, the evaluation revealed moderate levels of cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control across both classes, with no significant differences. These findings are consistent with Xia (2025), who reported generally low levels of social skills among Chinese primary school students. The lack of significant differences between the two classes suggests that this is a broader issue, not limited to specific classroom dynamics. This underscores the need for school-wide social skills curricula and teacher training programs that address these five dimensions systematically and culturally appropriately.

Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding social skills among primary school students by defining these skills as a set of learned behaviors and abilities that enable effective interaction, adaptability across varied social contexts, and the formation of positive relationships. The multidimensional model, which encompasses cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, provides a clear and structured lens through which educators and researchers can assess and nurture social competence in young learners. This work lays the groundwork for future interventions by highlighting the importance of targeted educational strategies to enhance these critical social abilities. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of social skills development and underscores the need for continued efforts to support the holistic growth of primary school students in both academic and social domains.

One limitation of this study is the small sample size (92 students from only two classes), which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single school, limiting the diversity of the sample. Future research should consider expanding the sample to include multiple schools, which would enhance the external validity of the results.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that social skills development be emphasized at the primary school level, particularly in areas such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Schools could facilitate more targeted opportunities for students to develop social skills through structured programs. Peer mentoring programs can pair older or more socially skilled students with younger peers to model positive interaction, offer guidance, and build confidence in real-life social contexts. Role-play simulations allow students to practice handling common interpersonal scenarios, such as resolving conflicts or initiating conversations, in a safe, guided environment, enhancing their empathy and communication strategies. Additionally, cooperative learning activities, such as group projects or problem-solving tasks, encourage students to collaborate, listen actively, and share responsibilities, thereby reinforcing teamwork and mutual respect. These practices not only strengthen social competence but also support their academic engagement and emotional resilience.

Future research could employ experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as peer mentoring, role-play-based training, or structured social skills curricula. Such studies would yield actionable insights into evidence-based strategies for fostering social competence among primary school students.

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