

## The Effect of Social Standing on the Social Skills of Kids with Special Needs in Regular School: Does Being Kind Help Them Make Friends?

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### Abstract

The establishment of inclusive education in schools may present difficulties for kids with special needs in developing interpersonal connections with their peers. In order to foster constructive interactions with individuals within one's peer group, it is imperative to possess the requisite social competencies that align with the developmental stage of one's age cohort. Students who possess insufficient social skills are more likely to experience exclusion from classroom activities. This study examines the social skills of children with exceptional needs and explores their relationship with the children's social status within inclusive classroom settings. A cohort of 989 kids spanning from fourth to seventh grades participated in the data collection process. The study is based on three distinct indicators of social inclusion: peer acceptance, friendships, and belonging to a cohesive group. Based on the research findings, it has been observed that a range of twenty to twenty-five percent of students with special needs face challenges in effectively integrating socially with their fellow peers.

In the majority of instances, there exists no significant correlation between an individual's social status and their social aptitude. Nevertheless, this assertion does not hold true for adolescents grappling with behavioral challenges. The correlation between an individual's social status and their capacity to engage in social interactions is significant. The acquisition of social skills could prove advantageous for those within this specific cohort who aspire to cultivate and sustain interpersonal connections with their contemporaries, forge new acquaintances, and uphold existing friendships.

**Keywords-** Social Standing, Social Skills, Special Needs, Regular School, Make Friends

### Introduction

Individuals that possess a superior social status compared to oneself, often referring to fellow students within the same academic context. Schaffer (1996) posited that children's developmental progress is notably enhanced through their engagement with peers who share a comparable social status.

In order to foster favorable interpersonal connections with individuals of the same age group, it is imperative to possess the requisite social aptitudes. Based on the research conducted by

Gresham and Elliot (1990), the behaviors in question are acquired and seen as socially acceptable, serving the purpose of preventing incorrect social responses and facilitating the establishment of constructive interpersonal connections. Several examples of this phenomenon include engaging in acts of assistance towards others, establishing interpersonal connections, seeking assistance from others, expressing admiration towards individuals, and incorporating the usage of polite expressions such as "please" and "thank you" during verbal exchanges. Children develop these skills mostly through imitation, the opportunity to make mistakes, and by heeding the advise of older, more competent individuals. The process of enhancing one's social competency is an ongoing endeavor. Young children possess distinct interaction and communication capabilities that differ from those of older children, adolescents, and adults. The acquisition and development of these skills undergo a transformative process from the stage of toddlerhood through early adulthood.

Research has demonstrated that adolescents who lack adequate avenues to cultivate and utilize their skills experience difficulties in social engagement and effective communication. Children may encounter difficulties in their ability to engage with peers, collaborate effectively, and acquire new knowledge, resulting in potential experiences of social isolation. In the educational context, individuals often face the potential hazard of being disregarded or dismissed, encountering challenges in assimilating into social circles, and experiencing a sense of isolation. Furthermore, individuals may face the potential hazard of experiencing social isolation.

Extensive scholarly investigation and literature have been dedicated to examining the implications associated with residing in a highly isolated geographical setting. Asher and Coie (1990) suggest that peer rejection can engender adverse consequences for students, including diminished sense of school community, challenges in engaging in social activities, and deleterious effects on motivation, self-esteem, self-perception, and academic achievement. The choice to leave from a secluded spot is a complex option. Insufficient engagement with peers hinders the development of social skills, hence impeding the learning of necessary abilities to meet age-appropriate demands. It is not unexpected that this phenomenon results in a further inadequate acquisition of social skills (Schaffer, 1996).

Providing guidance to young individuals who lack essential social skills in order to develop the necessary competencies is frequently beneficial. However, the outcomes observed over an extended period of time are discouraging, as indicated by research conducted by Pfiffner and

McBurnett (1997), Grizenko et al. (2000), and Soresi and Nota (2000). The newly acquired powers exhibit a reduction after a period of around four to five months. Despite their higher level of competence, the instructed students encounter challenges in establishing connections and engaging in effective communication with their peers, hence contributing to the underwhelming long-term outcomes. The limited success of individuals in this context is not attributable to their lack of talent, but rather to the pervasive conduct and attitude exhibited by their peer group as a collective entity. The appraisal of students who have received instruction remains unchanged, as indicated by previous studies (Bierman et al., 1987; Mize & Ladd, 1990; Grizenko et al., 2000). The students undergoing education are provided with limited opportunities to engage in practical application of their recently gained talents, resulting in ineffective training and eventual abandonment of these newfound abilities due to perceived lack of utility.

The social interaction abilities of students with special demands

Establishing social connections might provide difficulties for individuals with special needs when interacting with their typically developing peers. Based on the findings of King et al. (1997), certain individuals may lack the requisite cognitive, perceptual, or motor abilities required for acquiring social competencies. Some individuals exhibit deviant behavior that hinders the establishment of interpersonal connections and meaningful dialogues among peers. Spence et al. (1999) argue that disentangling the causal relationship between a given cause and its future consequence might provide a significant challenge. Nevertheless, pupils with few and worse social interactions will ultimately exhibit less advanced social skills compared to students who have a greater quantity of experiences, but of poorer quality. Students who do not possess the necessary skills may have challenges in establishing social connections.

Despite the inherent capability of kids with special needs to acquire age-appropriate social skills, they may encounter a limited number of opportunities to develop such abilities in comparison to their peers. The results of the investigation pertaining to the social interactions among students reveal a tendency for individuals to gravitate towards classmates who have comparable characteristics.

The term "homophily" has been attributed to this particular phenomena (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily can arise due to various circumstances, including an individual's age, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, values, interests, or perspectives. Based on the findings of

Guralnick et al. (1995), it has been shown that kids who exhibit standard development tend to display a proclivity for forming cliques and marginalizing their peers with special needs. This phenomenon can be attributed to the observation that students with special needs often struggle to fulfill the criteria for one or more elements of homophily. In this specific case, it is not feasible to ascertain the relevant dimension. The factors that may contribute to this phenomenon include the individual's mannerisms, physical appearance, and degree of education. Irrespective of the underlying factors, the eventual outcome is that children, both with and without special needs, derive mutual benefits from engaging in cooperative activities. Furthermore, it has been observed that individuals also exhibit a preference for associating with those who are perceived as being of same status or standing (Minnett et al., 1995).

The classification of pupils based on homophily and their sometimes restricted ability to develop essential social skills presents a significant threat to the core goals, objectives, and values that underpin inclusive education. The notion of "normalization," proposed by Bank-Mikkelsen in 1959 (Hanamura, 1998, p. 74), advocates for the idea that individuals with disabilities should be afforded the opportunity to lead lives that closely resemble those of non-disabled individuals. The notion of "normalization" posits that individuals with disabilities should be empowered to lead lives that closely resemble those of individuals without disabilities. The central emphasis of the provided explanation was the process of de-institutionalization pertaining to this subject. During that period, social inclusion was not accorded major importance; instead, there was a prevailing belief in the imperative of integrating children with special needs into classroom environments alongside their usually developing peers. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1995, p. 15), integration can be characterized as a strategy aimed at promoting increased engagement between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Booth and Ainscow (2002) argue that the concept of "inclusive education" has emerged in recent decades, leading to an improved potential for social inclusion. Flem and Keller (2000) assert that the manner in which students interact with one other is a significant issue within the context of inclusive education.

The concept of inclusion is often associated with the expectation that parents, specifically, envision it as a means to enhance opportunities for social interaction with children in the vicinity, foster the growth of social abilities, facilitate the establishment of friendships, and

encourage involvement in the local community (Strayhorn & Strain, 1986; Sloper & Tyler, 1992).

The enrollment of students with special needs in inclusive courses tends to be very limited, and it is improbable that these pupils will exhibit significant similarities with other children who also possess exceptional needs. In order to foster a sense of belonging inside the group, it is imperative for individuals to establish positive relationships with their fellow classmates. Ultimately, the fundamental objective that inclusion endeavors to attain is to be considered.

The existing body of literature mostly examines the pedagogical interventions aimed at imparting social skills to children with special needs. However, these studies fail to establish a clear link between these acquired social skills and the social duties that students with special needs undertake within inclusive educational settings. The present study is centered on a specific facet of the issue at hand.

### **Methodology**

Could you please provide an example?

The sample consisted of elementary and lower secondary schools located in and around Trondheim, Norway. Due to the comprehensive nature of Norway's inclusion approach, there is a limited provision of personalized help for special education pupils in contemporary Norway. The majority of students continue to opt for enrollment in traditional educational institutions. All educational institutions within the vicinity of Trondheim were invited to participate. A total of 26 educational institutions exhibited either non-reaction or delayed response, citing various causes. The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon was the schools' recurrent solicitation to participate in research endeavors initiated by diverse academic departments and other training establishments. Certain educational institutions did not provide a response due to the factors elucidated in the subsequent investigation. The final sample consisted of fifteen schools, encompassing a total of fourteen fourth-grade children (aged 9-10) and thirteen seventh-grade classes (aged 12-13). A total of 989 students in the fourth and seventh grades participated in the data collection process.

The formal identification of kids with special needs is not encouraged throughout the public school system of Norway, however the extent to which different institutions have discontinued this practice varies significantly. Due to the potential inadequacy of selecting pupils solely based on a formal declaration, we were compelled to depend on the viewpoints of teachers

within the classroom. Educators were requested to provide concise descriptions of kids whom they have identified as requiring special education accommodations. Among the total of 42 fourth graders and 37 seventh graders, teachers identified a proportion of 8.0% of the sample. The official feedback rate was recorded at 4.2%.

Sociometric indicators derived from peer nomination were commonly employed in conventional school environments to assess the social status of children with exceptional needs. A study conducted in 2006 by Pijl et al. involved surveying students to ascertain their perceptions of friendship within their peer group. Due to ethical considerations, the researchers opted against soliciting unfavorable nominations from the participating teachers, as they were aware that such a request would be perceived as unethical. Only students who were in the same grade level or age group, or in the same classroom, were eligible to nominate their peers. An increasing number of educational institutions in Norway are opting to replace big classroom cohorts with smaller, more manageable groups consisting of approximately 15 students each. Students engage in collaborative efforts to complete assignments and engage in interdisciplinary study sessions with their peers. This methodology guarantees the inclusion of children from all schools within a specific grade level in the sample, hence ensuring their representation as a reference group.

The number of names eligible for consideration in the semi-fixed vote is limited to a maximum of five. In peer research, it is customary to impose a restriction on the number of nominations, typically limiting it to three. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this approach may lead to potential inaccuracies due to the fact that it is highly unlikely for every student to have precisely three individuals whom they consider their closest friends (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). A consensus was reached about the establishment of a limit of five nominees, with the stipulation that students were granted the liberty to submit less than five names, should they choose to do so. The utilization of this option seems to result in a marginal decrease in the respondents' autonomy.

The study examines the social skills of students in special education, specifically focusing on those aged 19.

The analysis incorporates three unique metrics of social inclusion. The first index, referred to as "in degrees" within the field of social network analysis, quantifies the concept of "peer acceptance" by tallying the number of individuals inside a group that nominate others in

response to a positively framed inquiry. Subsequently, an examination was conducted on the interpersonal dynamics among the pupils in the classroom. According to Cullinan et al. (1992), the presence of a shared experience between individuals is a prerequisite for the establishment of a friendship. In order for a genuine friendship to form between two children, it is imperative that both individuals independently choose to establish a bond with one another. The ultimate measure examined the extent to which an individual's identification was aligned with a specific subgroup within the broader class (Farmer & Farmer, 1996).

In this discussion, we are referring to groups of individuals that have strong connections with one another in terms of their physical proximity, emotional intensity, frequency of interaction, or overall positive nature (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 249). Cullinan et al. (1992) propose that individuals with special needs can be deemed socially integrated when they actively engage in collective endeavors, are acknowledged as peers, and possess at least one shared companion. This aligns with the three indices that have previously been introduced. Social inclusion refers to the state in which a student is integrated into a social group, maintains at least one friendship within that group, and is accepted by their peers. The researchers provided a description of the social skills exhibited by the students and conducted an evaluation of their social status using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS: Gresham & Elliot, 1990) based on straightforward criteria. These norms encompass cooperativeness, assertiveness, empathy, and self-control. The subscale of cooperation include quantifiable behaviors like as assisting others, engaging in resource sharing, and adhering to established norms and regulations. Engaging in self-introduction, information-seeking, and responding to insults or peer pressure are all instances of aggressive conduct. Empathy can be exemplified by actions that demonstrate respect for the opinions and feelings of others. Behaviors that manifest in circumstances necessitating compromise and the practice of taking turns are encompassed within the self-control subscale (Gresham & Elliot, 1990, p. [page number]).

The scale comprises a total of 34 components. The measurement instrument consists of two subscales, each including a total of six items. The raw scores for these items range from 0 to 10, resulting in a maximum possible raw score of 40. The age distribution of our sample closely resembled that of the elementary level of the SSRT. Ogden (1995) conducted the translation and validation of the original Norwegian version of the Social Skills Rating System. Consistent with the findings of Gresham and Elliot (1990), the overall dependability coefficient for the

student form of the Norwegian version was determined to be 0.83. The study conducted by Gresham and Elliot (1990) identified a clear subtest structure. However, subsequent factor analysis failed to validate these initial findings. Based on Ogden's analysis, the 34 elements assessed in the examination can be reduced to a singular factor, so enabling the examination to be regarded as a comprehensive assessment of social skills. The SSRS was employed in Ogden's modification. The rubric items were orally presented to the students by the test administrator. The data for the tests was collected by a group consisting of authors and three students who were pursuing their master's theses in the field of education.

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