

## The social skills of children with disabilities

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### Abstract

*Starting from the premise that academic and professional success is based mainly on the development of social competences, we are proposing to find out whether, as a result of the existence of a sensory and intellectual disability, can we talk about the different development of social skills? We seek an answer to this question by carrying out a research on a group of 153 children with sensory and intellectual disabilities aged between 9 and 15, coming from four special schools in Timisoara. We set ourselves as a general objective of research: identifying possible statistically significant differences that arise between the level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired children and those with hearing disability. Analysing and interpreting the results confirms the two hypotheses formulated.*

**Keywords:** social competencies, social skills, sensory disabilities, intellectual disability.

### 1. Introduction

Understanding the concept of social competence involves clarifying the concept of social knowledge. Social knowledge is "the set of thoughts, neural processes, behaviours and social interaction skills; It is how a child interprets the behaviour of others, nonverbal processes of perception, memory, and understanding are the intuitive or logical representation of others by the child. The behaviours and skills learned through these processes result in performance in social competence."(Newton, M.A. & Carroll M.)

The difference between the term of social skills and social competence has been clarified more than three decades ago by Dodge and Murphy (1984), which considered "social skills to refer to specific abilities or behaviors that allow an effective response to a task (eg,

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Cavell, 1990; Gambrill & Ritchey, 1986). Social competence, on the other hand, usually refers to a judgment of external observers on the adequacy of performance in a social task (McFall, 1982). Thus, social skills are the sum of responses that underlie socially competent performance." (Douglas W. Nangle & al., 2010).

Bierman (2004) defined social competence as "the ability to coordinate adaptive responses to various interpersonal demands and to organize social behaviour in different social contexts in a beneficial way for oneself and in accordance with social and moral conventions" (apud Satıcı, S. A & al., 2014)

Broderick and Blewitt (2010) identify four categories of fundamental social competencies:

1. emotional processes (empathy, valorisation of relationships and feelings);
2. cognitive processes (cognitive skills, perspectives on ideas and moral judgments);
3. social skills (use of appropriate language and appropriate questions);
4. social concept.

In order for personal development to take place, another five basic social competencies are needed: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, linking skills and responsible decisions.

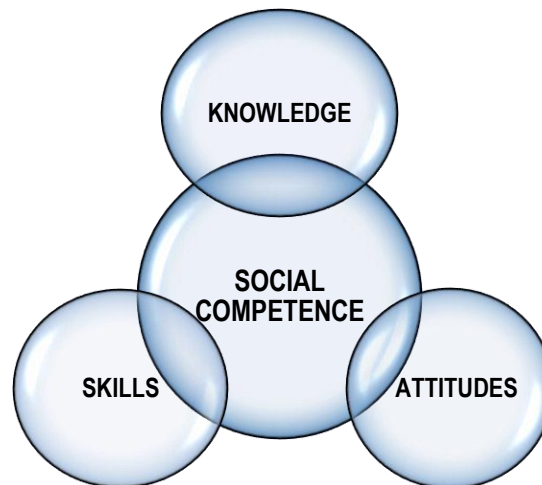


Figure 1. The components of social competence

A comprehensive definition of social competence includes the knowledge, attitudes and skills of a person (Fig. no. 1), referring to at least six elements (Fig. no. 2):

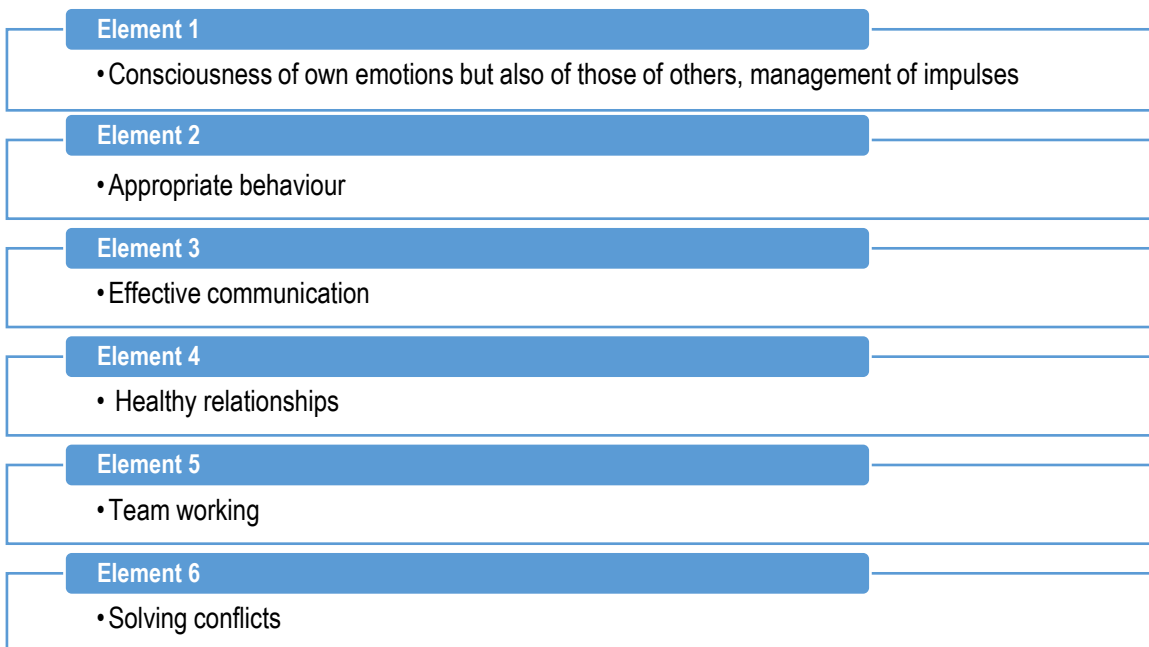


Figure 2. The six elements of social competence

Academic and professional success is based mainly on the development of social skills.

## **2.Developing social skills in conditions of disability**

If we refer to the development of social abilities in children with disabilities, studies have been carried out demonstrating that in school, the acceptance of children with disabilities is lower (Estell et al., 2008; Nowicki, 2003), encounter difficulties in making friends (Estell et al., 2009; Wiener & Schneider, 2002), "and are more often victims of bullying" (Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993 "They are also more anxious (Nelson & Harwood, 2011a) and prone to depression (Nelson & Harwood, 2011b) than students without LDs.)" (apud Mansour, M. & Wiener, J.<https://www.ldatschool.ca/social-skills-training/>)

However, the results of a comparative analysis of the social skills that children with intellectual disabilities (ID) from inclusive schools have compared with other children with moderate intellectual disabilities (ID) from segregated school showed "that children in

inclusive schools did not significantly differ from children in segregated schools.”(Hardiman et al., 2009).

According to Spitzberg (2003), social competence cannot be considered independent of the physical and mental state of a person (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).

The acquisition of social skills by visually impaired students is not learned naturally, but by the significant support provided by people in the pupil's life. Family members of visually impaired students should look at acquiring and maintaining equally important social skills and promote competent social behaviour in all environments where the pupil participates. Families and educators need to work together to achieve socially responsible behaviour in visually impaired students.

As a homogeneous group, children with hearing impairment demonstrate low levels of social skills, as shown by some studies, and therefore have an increased risk of unsatisfactory academic outcomes, high unemployment rates, high rates of social non-adjustment (violence, problems with substance abuse), a higher incidence of stress. However, not all deaf children develop these problems, and the impact of deafness on general development is influenced by several important factors such as the quality of the family environment, the adaptation of parents to deafness, the quality and permissiveness of the educational environment, the presence of community resources as well as their own characteristics of the child.

Many people with intellectual disabilities have underdeveloped social skills. This is due to the fact that the development of social skills relies heavily on certain intellectual capacities. "The development of an individual with intellectual disability depends on the type and severity of disorder that underlies associated disabilities, environmental factors, psychological factors and cognitive abilities.”(Ludwik, et al., 2001)”For people with mental disabilities, their level of social development has implications for the degree of support needed in their literacy and community integration with a focus on integrating competencies into personal, internal and community functioning. It also contributes considerably to the quality of life. Thus, investigating factors that can facilitate or inhibit social development is of particular importance.” (Kumar, I; Singh, A; Akhtar, S., 2009).

### **3. Method**

To answer the **main research question**– *as a result of the existence of a sensory and intellectual disability, can we talk about the different development of social skills?* we have established the following research assumptions.

**Hypothesis 1:** Developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disabilities compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disabilities.

**Hypothesis 2:** There are significant differences in the level of development of social skills in pupils with intellectual, hearing and hearing disabilities.

### **Research objectives**

1.1. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities

1.2. Determining the level of development of social skills in visually impaired students

1.3. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with hearing impairment

1.4. Identify the possible differences that arise between the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities in relation to visually impaired students and those with hearing impairment.

2.1. Identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social competence development.

### **Participants and sampling**

A sample of 153 subjects participated in this research, students with sensory and intellectual disabilities, with aged between 9 and 15 years. The sampling criteria were: type of deficiency and age of subjects, distributed as follows:

Table 1. Sample

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	intellectual disabilities	51	33,3
	visual impairment	51	33,3
	hearing impairment	51	33,3
Total		153	100,0

### **Measures**

The Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment I (ACLSA-I) – Youth is a scale aims at identifying social development specific behaviours.

**Description:**

- The ACLSA is a measure of life skills acquisition, available in youth self-report
- The assessment consists of four developmental levels: ACLSA-I (ages 8-9), ACLSA-II (ages 10-12), ACLSA-III (ages 13-15), and ACLSA-IV (ages 16 and older).
- The youth format contains items to measure self-reported knowledge and behaviours, as well as a brief performance section to test actual knowledge of life skills.

**Items for ages 8 -9:**

1. *I ask for help when I need it.*
2. *I tell my problems to an adult.*
3. *I use good manners when I eat.*
4. *I pay attention when others talk.*
5. *I am polite to adults.*
6. *I tell others how I feel.*
7. *I return what I borrow.*
8. *I stay out of trouble.*
9. *I help others.*
10. *I can get mad without hurting others.*

**Items for ages 10 – 12:**

1. *I ask for help when I need it.*
2. *I explain how I am feeling (like angry, happy, worried or depressed).*
3. *I get help if my feelings bother me.*
4. *I clearly present my ideas to others.*
5. *I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.*
6. *When I disagree with someone, I try to find a compromise.*
7. *I accept compliments or praise without feeling embarrassed.*
8. *I talk over problems with a friend.*
9. *I talk with an adult I feel close to.*

**Items for ages 13 - 15:****Communication:**

1. *I get help if my feelings bother me.*

2. *I can explain how I am feeling (like angry, happy, worried, or depressed).*
3. *I ask for help when I need it.*
4. *I talk with an adult I feel close to.*
5. *I talk over problems with a friend.*
6. *I accept compliments or praise without feeling embarrassed.*
7. *I clearly present my ideas to others.*
8. *I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.*
9. *When I disagree with someone, I try to find a compromise.*
10. *I am polite to others.*
11. *I respect other people's things.*

**Social Skills:**

12. *I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyles and their attitudes.*
13. *I show appreciation for things others do for me.*
14. *I deal with anger without using violence.*
15. *I think about how my choices affect others.*
16. *I can safely interact with others on the internet.*

**4. Results**

To verify the first hypothesis, *developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disability*, we proposed the following objectives:

- 1.1. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities
- 1.2. Determining the level of development of social skills in visually impaired students
- 1.3. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with hearing impairment
- 1.4. Identify the possible differences that occur between the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities in relation to visually impaired students and those with hearing impairment.

The cross tabulation analysis below provides us with the necessary information on which to verify this hypothesis. Only 7 intellectual disabled students have a high level of

social competence development, compared with 16 visually impaired students and 20 pupils with hearing impairment.

Table 2. Cross tabulation analysis of social skills

		Disabilities			Total
		intellectual disabilities	visual impairment	hearing impairment	
Social skills	<i>very low level</i>	10	3	3	16
	<i>low level</i>	22	8	9	39
	<i>medium level</i>	12	24	19	55
	<i>high level</i>	7	16	20	43
<b>Total</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>153</b>

Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed: *developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disability.*

To verify the second hypothesis, *there are statistically significant differences in the level of development of social skills in pupils with intellectual, hearing and hearing disabilities*, we proposed the following objective: Identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social skills development.

For this aim, we will perform a comparative analysis using the *t* pairs test. The analysis has three pairs:

Pair no. 1: The level of development of social competences in intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with visual disability (analysis in Table 3) at a  $p = .017$ , at 50 degrees of freedom (df), we have a  $t = 2,472$ . By comparing this value with the standardized values of the *t* test, we find that our value is higher, so it is statistically significant. We can say that there are significant differences between the level of development of social skills to intellectual disabled children and the level of development of social skills in children visually disabled.

Pair no. 2: The level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability. At a significance threshold  $p = .171$ , at 50 degrees of freedom (df), the value of the test *t* is 1.389. By comparing this value with the standardized values of the *t* test ( $t = 1.303$ ), we find that our value is higher, so it is statistically significant. We can say that there are significant



differences between the level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability.

Pair no. 3: The level of development of social skills for visually impaired people - The level of development of social skills for hearing impaired. In the case of this pair, we cannot speak of a statistical significance because the significance threshold has the value of .417, a value outside the admissible limits. Therefore, we cannot talk about statistically significant differences between the level of development of social skills in pupils with visual disabilities - the level of development of social skills in pupils with hearing disability.

Table 3. Comparative analysis - *t* pairs test

Paired Samples Test									
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Std. Error Mean					
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - Level of development of social skills in children with visual disability	,372	1,076	,150	,069	,675	2,472	50	,017
Pair 2	Level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - Level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability	,235	1,209	,1694	-,104	,575	1,389	50	,171
Pair 3	Level of development of social skills in children with visual disabilities - Level of development of social skills in children with hearing disabilities	-,137	1,200	,168	-,474	,200	-,817	50	,418

As a result of the statistical analysis we can affirm that the second hypothesis is partially confirmed, there are statistically significant differences between the level of development of the social skills of the children with intellectual disabilities compared to the children with sensory disabilities, but we cannot talk about the differences between the subjects with disabilities visual and hearing impaired subjects.

## Conclusions

The two aims of the present study were to compare the social skills in students with intellectual, hearing and visually disabilities and to identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social skills development.

Development of social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disabilities compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disabilities. There are statistically significant differences between the level of development of the social skills of the children with intellectual disabilities compared to the children with sensory disabilities, but we cannot talk about the differences between the subjects with disabilities visual and hearing impaired subjects.

Development of social skills of students with disabilities may be possible if teachers will make teaching of social skills a priority, as important as learning reading. The disability pupil's family needs to look at acquiring and maintaining social skills as a very important stage in the formation of social autonomy. It is recommended that the family and educators work together to develop a socially expected behaviour in the disability student.

Many people with intellectual disabilities have underdeveloped social skills. This is due to the fact that the development of social competences is based on certain intellectual capacities.

For people with intellectual disabilities, academic achievements are relatively devoid of importance when compared to personal autonomy, social adaptation, and vocational training.

Students with intellectual disabilities should be taught to understand the context of the social situation, to determine alternative social behaviours, to choose the most desirable behaviour and to evaluate the effectiveness of the behaviour.

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