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Perceived Effectiveness of Strategies Used by Teachers to Foster Social Skills among Students with Intellectual Disability

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Abstract
This study explores teachers' perceptions of the strategies used to develop social skills among students with intellectual disabilities. Using a survey design, data were collected from 54 special education teachers in Punjab, Pakistan. The findings reveal that Cooperative Learning and Collaboration with Parents are the most frequently used strategies, while Reinforcement and Positive Feedback is perceived as the most effective. Significant differences were observed between government and private sector teachers, with government teachers rating both the use and effectiveness of strategies more positively. The results emphasize the importance of personalized, interactive strategies and the potential for increased integration of technology-based interventions.

Keywords
Social skills, intellectual disability, strategies, effectiveness

Introduction

Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior manifesting before the age of 18 years (Goethals, 2024). This condition affects various developmental domains including social, conceptual and practical skills leading to several challenges in daily life (Luckasson, 2022). Luckasson (2022) and Albertoni et al. (2024) noted that conceptualization of intellectual disability has evolved over the time, stressing the importance of personalized support and recognition of individual capacities. Social skill development among individuals with intellectual disabilities varies in different dimensions, such as social skills, emotional repose, and self-perception. Such characteristics are influenced by genetic specification, age, and educational contexts which collectively shape social adaptation and integration. Verzhihovska & Hrytsiv (2023) note that high school students with intellectual disability develop an average level of social skills with notable understanding of social norms. Younger children, however, display significant challenges emotional sensitivity and self-perception leading towards the feelings of loneliness and compromised social competence (Kovalenko, 2020). Heightened anxiety and self-injurious behaviors were noted among females with DDX3X, were noted, which indicated a complex interplay between genetic factors and social-emotional development (Ng-Cordell et al., 2021).

The development of social skills in children with intellectual disabilities is a multidimensional process affected by several educational and environmental factors. Studies indicates that despite facing challenges in social interaction, children with intellectual disabilities significantly improve their social skills as the result of targeted intervention. Dewi et al. (2024) noted that children with intellectual disabilities face frequent challenges with social interaction often exhibiting low self-confidence with a tendency of withdrawal from peers. It has also been found that students with intellectual disability display superficial understanding of social norms and they also lack motivation to enhance their social skills (Verzhihovska & Hrytsiv, 2023). Several methods including social emotional guidance (Khairunnisa et al., 2023), play therapy and educational videos (Hidayat, 2023), and cognitive training (Georgoula & Koustriava, 2024) have been used for development of social skills for students with intellectual disability. Strategies such as maintaining friendships, questioning skills, and collaboration are vital for development of social skills (Khairunnisa et al., 2023). Instructional videos and play therapy have been found to have a positive impact on improvement of social skills (Hidayat, 2023). Georgoula and Kourstiava (2024) argue that computer assisted cognitive training programs have demonstrated potential in development of adaptive behavior and communication skills, suggesting a link between social skill development and cognition. Literature provides the researchers and academician with the insights on the use and effectiveness of strategies for development of social skills among students with intellectual disability. It seems appropriate to investigate the perceptions of teachers about the use and effectiveness of the strategies they are using in special education set-up in Punjab, Pakistan.

Literature Review

Several strategies have been found to be effective for development of social skills among students with intellectual disability. Effective strategies for development of social skills in children with intellectual disability include classroom-based interventions, peer network interventions, emotional intelligence training and video modeling (Jacob et al., 2022). Interventions like group sessions, interaction models and dialogue building activities have shown the promise in enhancement of social skills resulting in improvement in teamwork, self-control, social stability (Kulnazarova et al., 2023). Bowman-Perrott et al. (2023) noted that peer-medicated interventions are effective for enhancement of social skills among students with intellectual sand developmental disability as evidenced by positive social outcomes across the several studies. Targeted communication training, corrective work, and relationship development with adults and peers have also been found to be effective for development of social skills among students with intellectual disability (Satova & Ingaibekova, 2022). Dialogical learning environment and interaction-based interventions promote social behaviors such as initiation, participation, collaboration, self-regulation and social connection among students with intellectual disability (Fernandez-Villardon et al., 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Social skills play a crucial role in integration of children in the society. Due to limitations in adaptive behavior, students with intellectual disability face considerable challenges in development of social skills. Teachers of students with intellectual disability play an important role in development of social skills among students with intellectual disability. This study was aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers about use and effectiveness of strategies for development of social skills among students with intellectual disability.

Objectives of the Study

This study was intended to achieve the following objectives

To identify the strategies used by teachers for fostering social skills among children with intellectual disability.

To rank order, the strategies used by teachers for developing the social skills among students with intellectual disability on the basis of perceived effectiveness.

To identify the differences between the perceptions of public and private sector teachers about effectiveness of the strategies.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey design for data collection. A researcher-developed and expert-validated survey instrument was used to gather insights from teachers. The survey comprised three sections: the first focused on demographic information, the second examined the frequency of various social skill development strategies employed by teachers, and the third assessed the perceived effectiveness of these strategies. The target population consisted of special education teachers working with students with intellectual disabilities in Punjab, Pakistan. A random sample of 100 teachers was selected for participation. Surveys were distributed both physically and online, resulting in 54 completed responses. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the frequency of strategy usage and effectiveness ratings, while inferential statistics were employed to explore differences in teachers' perceptions.

Data Analysis and Results

Following section outlines the analysis of the data and results obtained on the basis of statistical analysis.

Table No.1. Frequency of the Use of Strategies

Sr.	Strategies	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	Structured Peer Interaction	0	0	0	0	8	14.8	28	51.9	18	33.3
2	Cooperative Learning	0	0	0	0	6	11.1	12	22.2	36	66.7
3	Role-Playing and Social Stories	2	3.7	2	3.7	12	22.2	22	40.7	16	29.6
4	Visual Supports	0	0	4	7.4	2	3.7	16	29.6	32	59.3
5	Modeling and Imitation	0	0	2	3.7	2	3.7	24	44.4	26	48.1
6	Reinforcement and Positive Feedback	0	0	2	3.7	4	7.4	22	40.7	26	48.1
7	Peer-Mediated Instruction	2	3.7	2	3.7	12	22.2	24	44.4	14	25.9
8	Direct Social Skills Instruction	2	3.7	0	0	10	18.5	20	37.0	22	40.7

9	Group Play and Recess Activities	0	0	0	0	10	18.5	14	25.9	30	55.6
10	Communication Devices and Supports	2	3.7	2	3.7	26	48.1	12	22.2	12	22.2
11	Emotion Regulation and Self-Control Strategies	0	0	0	0	16	29.6	16	29.6	22	40.7
12	Collaboration with Parents	0	0	0	0	10	18.5	8	14.8	36	66.7
13	Social Skills Groups	0	0	0	0	4	7.4	18	33.3	32	59.3
14	Integrated Learning Environments	0	0	2	3.7	6	11.1	28	51.9	18	33.3
15	Social Skills Apps and Games	2	3.7	10	18.5	16	29.6	16	29.6	10	18.5
16	Story Telling and Creative Expression	0	0	2	3.7	18	33.3	24	44.4	10	18.5
17	Emotional Intelligence Training	0	0	6	11.1	14	25.9	28	51.9	6	11.1
18	Technology Integration	0	0	6	11.1	18	33.3	22	40.7	8	14.8
19	Conversation Starters	0	0	4	7.4	14	25.9	22	40.7	14	25.9
20	Conflict Resolution Training	0	0	2	3.7	18	33.3	20	37.0	14	25.9

The frequency and percentage distribution table for the usage of strategies to develop social skills among students with intellectual disabilities reveals that Cooperative Learning and Collaboration with Parents are the most frequently employed strategies, with 66.7% of respondents using them "always," 22.2% using "often," and 11.1% using "sometimes" for Cooperative Learning, while Collaboration with Parents has 14.8% "often" and 18.5% "sometimes." Social Skills Groups follows, with 59.3% using it "always," 33.3% "often," and 7.4% "sometimes." Visual Supports are used "always" by 59.3% of respondents, "often" by 29.6%, "sometimes" by 3.7%, and "rarely" by 7.4%. Group Play and Recess Activities are used "always" by 55.6%, "often" by 25.9%, and "sometimes" by 18.5%.

For Modeling and Imitation, 48.1% use the strategy "always," 44.4% "often," 3.7% "sometimes," and 3.7% "rarely." Similarly, Reinforcement and Positive Feedback is used "always" by 48.1%, "often" by 40.7%, and "sometimes" by 7.4%. In contrast, strategies such as Communication Devices and Supports have a lower consistent usage, with only 22.2% using it "always," 22.2%

"often," and 48.1% "sometimes," while 3.7% use it "rarely" and 3.7% "never." Social Skills Apps and Games shows 18.5% "always" usage, 29.6% "often," 29.6% "sometimes," 18.5% "rarely," and 3.7% "never." Finally, Technology Integration is one of the least utilized strategies, with 14.8% "always," 40.7% "often," 33.3% "sometimes," and 11.1% "rarely." This ranking reflects a strong preference for cooperative and experiential strategies, with technology-based strategies and specific tools like apps showing comparatively limited adoption.

Table No.1. Ranking of the Perceived Effectiveness of the Strategies

Strategies	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**
Structured Peer Interaction	54	3	5	3.85
Cooperative learning	54	2	5	4.33
Role-Playing and social stories	54	2	5	4.15
Visual supports	54	1	5	4.26
Modeling and imitation	54	2	5	4.19
Reinforcement and Positive Feedback	54	4	5	4.67
Peer-Mediated instruction	54	2	5	3.85
Direct social skills instruction	54	2	5	4.04
Group play and recess activities	54	2	5	4.30
Communication devices and supports	54	2	5	3.67
Emotion regulation and Self-Control strategies	54	2	5	4.07
Collaboration with parents	54	3	5	4.44
Social skills groups	54	1	5	4.33
Integrated learning environments	54	2	5	4.04
Social skills apps and games	54	2	5	3.70
Storytelling and creative expression	54	1	5	4.04
Emotional intelligence training	54	2	5	3.81
Technology integration	54	1	5	3.52
Conversation starters	54	2	5	3.70
Conflict resolution training	54	1	5	3.56

The descriptive statistics table reveals the mean scores for various strategies perceived by teachers regarding their effectiveness in developing social skills among students with intellectual

disabilities. Among the strategies, Reinforcement and Positive Feedback ranks highest with a mean of 4.67, indicating it is perceived as the most effective. This is followed by Collaboration with Parents (M = 4.44), Cooperative Learning and Social Skills Groups (both M = 4.33), and Group Play and Recess Activities (M = 4.30). Visual Supports and Modeling and Imitation also scored highly with means of 4.26 and 4.19, respectively. Role-Playing and Social Stories (M = 4.15) and strategies such as Direct Social Skills Instruction (M = 4.04), Integrated Learning Environments (M = 4.04), and Storytelling and Creative Expression (M = 4.04) are perceived as effective but slightly less so than the highest-ranked strategies. Conversely, Technology Integration (M = 3.52) ranks lowest, followed by Conflict Resolution Training (M = 3.56), and Communication Devices and Supports (M = 3.67), reflecting comparatively lower perceived effectiveness. This ranking highlights the diversity in teachers' perceptions, with positive reinforcement and parental collaboration at the forefront of preferred strategies.

Table No.3. Independent sample t-test examining the difference between perceptions of the teachers about use of strategies on the basis of their job sector

		Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
use score	Equal variances assumed	1.451	.234	3.425	52	.001	8.55000	2.49653	3.54035	13.55965
	Equal variances not assumed			3.504	51.976	.001	8.55000	2.43981	3.65412	13.44588

The independent sample t-test results for teachers' perceptions of the use of strategies for developing social skills among students with intellectual disabilities reveal that government sector teachers (M = 85.75, SD = 8.04) reported significantly higher scores compared to private sector teachers (M = 77.20, SD = 9.88). Levine's test indicated that the assumption of equal variances was not violated (F = 1.451, p = .234), and the t-test for equality of means showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, t(52) = 3.425, p = .001. The mean difference of 8.55, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.54 to 13.56, confirms that government teachers hold more positive perceptions regarding the use of these strategies than private sector teachers.

Table No.4. Independent sample t-test examining the difference between perceptions of the teachers about the effectiveness of strategies on the basis of their job sector

		Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
effetscore	Equal variances assumed	3.189	.080	3.078	52	.003	10.31667	3.35203	3.590	317.04301
	Equal variances not assumed			3.234	49.40	.002	10.31667	3.18996	3.907	5316.72581

The independent sample t-test examining teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies for developing social skills among students with intellectual disabilities found that government sector teachers (M = 86.25, SD = 8.96) reported significantly higher scores than private sector teachers (M = 75.93, SD = 14.32). Levine's test for equality of variances was not significant (F = 3.189, p = .080), allowing the use of equal variances assumed. The t-test result, t (52) = 3.078, p = .003, showed a statistically significant difference, with a mean difference of 10.32 and a confidence interval of 3.59 to 17.04. This indicates that government sector teachers perceive these strategies as more effective than their counterparts in the private sector.

Findings

Following findings were drawn on the basis of data analysis.

Cooperative Learning and Collaboration with Parents are the most frequently used strategies, with 66.7% of teachers using each "always."

Social Skills Groups is employed "always" by 59.3% of respondents.

Visual Supports and Group Play and Recess Activities are consistently used, with 59.3% and 55.6% reporting "always" usage, respectively.

Modeling and Imitation and Reinforcement and Positive Feedback are applied "always" by 48.1% of teachers.

Communication Devices and Supports and Social Skills Apps and Games are less frequently used, with only 22.2% and 18.5% reporting "always" usage, respectively.

Technology Integration is among the least used strategies, with 14.8% using it "always."

Reinforcement and Positive Feedback is perceived as the most effective strategy, with a mean score of 4.67.

Collaboration with Parents ranks second with a mean of 4.44.

Cooperative Learning and Social Skills Groups share a mean score of 4.33.

Group Play and Recess Activities follows with a mean of 4.30.

Technology Integration is the lowest-ranked strategy, with a mean of 3.52.

A significant difference was found in teachers' perceptions of the use of strategies based on job sector, with government sector teachers (M = 85.75) scoring higher than private sector teachers (M = 77.20), t (52) = 3.425, p = .001.

A significant difference was also observed in the perceived effectiveness of strategies, where government sector teachers (M = 86.25) rated the strategies higher than private sector teachers (M = 75.93), t (52) = 3.078, p = .003.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the significant role of evidence-based strategies in developing social skills among students with intellectual disabilities. Strategies such as Reinforcement and Positive Feedback, Collaboration with Parents, and Cooperative Learning emerged as the most effective and frequently used approaches. These findings align with prior research highlighting the importance of targeted interventions and collaborative approaches in enhancing social competence (Jacob et al., 2022; Kulnazarova et al., 2023). Effective social skills training addresses not only interaction skills but also emotional regulation and teamwork, contributing to better adaptive behavior (Georgoula & Koustriava, 2024).The significant difference in perceptions between government and private sector teachers about the use and effectiveness of these strategies reflects disparities in training and resources, a concern supported by Khairunnisa et al. (2023), who stress the importance of structured guidance for sustained social skill improvement. Additionally, limited use of technology-based interventions contrasts with findings by Hidayat (2023) and Georgoula & Koustriava (2024), indicating the need for increased integration of digital tools. In conclusion, fostering social skills in students with intellectual disabilities requires personalized, interactive, and resource-intensive methods. Future efforts should focus on bridging sectoral gaps in strategy adoption and enhancing access to technology-assisted interventions for sustainable social development outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

Develop professional development programs to equip private sector teachers with effective strategies for social skills development, emphasizing reinforcement, collaboration, and cooperative learning techniques.

Increase the use of technology-based interventions, such as instructional videos and cognitive training programs, to enhance social skills alongside traditional methods.

Establish structured parent-teacher partnerships to reinforce social skill strategies both at school and home for consistent support.

Implement structured peer interaction models in classrooms to foster teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills, leveraging peer influence for positive social outcomes.

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