

SOCIAL INTERACTION ABILITIES OF CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM: A STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Received :01 November 202

Published : 08 January 2026

Revised :15 November 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54443/ijerlas.v5i6.4978>

Accepted :10 December 2025

Link Publish : <https://radjapublika.com/index.php/IJERLAS>

Abstract

Social skills are a fundamental aspect of child development, particularly for children on the autism spectrum (ASD). Children with autism often experience difficulties in social interaction, communication, and building relationships with peers and their environment. Educational psychology views social skills not only as a result of individual development, but also as influenced by the interaction between cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. This article aims to analyze the social skills of children on the autism spectrum from an educational psychology perspective, reviewing influencing factors, intervention strategies, and the role of inclusive schools. This literature review shows that the social skills of children with autism can be developed through psychopedagogical interventions, life skills-based learning, the use of interactive social media, and support for an inclusive educational environment. These findings emphasize that the roles of teachers, parents, and special education personnel are key in optimizing the social skills of children on the autism spectrum.

Keywords: *Social Skills, Children on the Autism Spectrum, Educational Psychology, Inclusive Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most crucial component in every individual's life. It not only serves to increase knowledge but also develops skills, attitudes, and character that will be beneficial in society. Education is a fundamental right that every individual possesses, regardless of any differences, including children with special needs. Children with special needs are children who have significant differences in mental, physical, emotional, or social abilities compared to children in general, so that they require special educational services to achieve optimal development. According to Heward (2013), children with special needs are children who experience certain limitations or advantages that cause them to require special education, services, and treatment so that their potential can develop optimally. According to Wong (2015), children with special needs are children who deviate from the average condition of normal children, both in physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and communication abilities, so that they require special handling and educational services. Meanwhile, Koenig & Williams (2017) states that children with special needs are children who require modifications to the curriculum, learning methods, and special education services due to obstacles or differences in their learning and development. Therefore, children with special needs are those who experience certain obstacles in physical, intellectual, emotional, or social abilities, requiring special services tailored to their individual needs. There are many types of children with special needs, one of which is autistic children.

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in communication and social interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. Autism is a recognized disorder characterized by persistent impairments in reciprocal social interaction, communication disorders, and restricted and stereotyped patterns of behavior (Siwi & Anganti, 2017). Children with autism are children who experience neurodevelopmental disorders that affect communication skills, social interactions, and behavior. Autism is included in the *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD), which means this condition has a spectrum or varying levels of severity, ranging from mild to severe. Some characteristics experienced by children with autism include difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, obstacles in social interaction, restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, requests, and activities, sensitivity to certain stimuli (sound, light, touch). Inclusive education emphasizes the

principles of non-discrimination, justice, participation, and accessibility . and adapting the curriculum, learning methods, and school environment to be welcoming to all students. Inclusive education is an education system that provides equal opportunities for all students , including children with special needs, to learn together in regular education units while respecting the diversity of abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs of each individual. Child development is determined not only by cognitive aspects, but also by social skills that form the basis of daily interactions. Social skills include the ability to understand social norms, communicate effectively, cooperate, and build interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, social skills include communication skills, eye contact, cooperation and play with peers, following simple social rules, and understanding expressions and emotions. In children on the autism spectrum, social skills are often a major challenge due to barriers to verbal and nonverbal communication, difficulties understanding others' perspectives (*theory of mind*) , and limitations in expressing emotions. Educational psychology views social skills as a crucial aspect in supporting children's academic and social success in school. Children with autism who have poor social skills are at risk of social isolation, peer rejection, and emotional stress, which impact their motivation to learn. Therefore, research on the social skills of children with autism from an educational psychology perspective is essential to provide a conceptual and practical basis for the implementation of inclusive education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article is a conceptual and literature review using qualitative descriptive analysis methods. Data were obtained through book reviews, national and international journal articles, and research findings related to social skills interventions for children with autism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a perspective in educational psychology on the social interaction abilities of autistic children.

1. The Concept of Social Skills

Social skills are an individual's ability to interact, communicate, and build relationships with others effectively and in accordance with social norms. These skills encompass verbal and nonverbal behaviors that enable a person to be accepted in a social environment (Somantri, 2012) . Social skills are learned behaviors for interacting effectively with others in a social context. In normal children, these skills develop through play experiences, family interactions, and the school environment. In autistic children, communication barriers, difficulty understanding social expressions, and a tendency toward repetitive behavior are major obstacles to developing social skills.

Social skills have several goals, namely improving children's ability to interact with other people, fostering a person's self-confidence and empathy, helping children adapt to the social environment, reducing deviant or aggressive behavior, and improving the quality of social relationships. In the implementation of inclusive education, social skills are very much needed, namely helping interactions between children with very diverse backgrounds, encouraging attitudes of mutual respect and tolerance, helping autistic children adapt to the school environment or in society, and supporting academic and non-academic success. So, social skills are important abilities that must be developed from an early age because they play a big role in the success of individuals adapting and participating in social life , especially in the context of inclusive education.

2. Children on the Autism Spectrum and Social Characteristics

The DSM-5 (APA, 2013) classifies autism as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social communication deficits and restricted and repetitive behaviors. The disorder, recognized in children with autism, is characterized by persistent impairments in reciprocal social interactions, restricted behavior patterns, and stereotypical communication disorders. Children with autism exhibit difficulty maintaining eye contact, experience difficulties understanding nonverbal cues, lack initiative in social interactions, and have limitations in forming friendships.

3. Factors Affecting the Social Skills of Autistic Children

Some factors that influence the social skills of autistic children include:

- a. Internal factors: neurological conditions, cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, and severity of autism.
- b. External factors: parenting patterns, school environment, teacher support, and access to early intervention therapy.

4. Social Skills Development Strategy

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In educational psychology, there are several strategies that can be applied:

- a. Social skills-based interventions (*social skills training*) : include *role play* , modeling, and the use of visual media.
- b. Technology-based interventions: interactive applications, video modeling, and the use of social robots.
- c. Collaborative learning in inclusive schools: group activities, peer discussions, and *peer tutoring programs* .
- d. Family involvement: training parents in supporting children's social skills at home.

5. Educational Psychology Perspective

Educational psychology emphasizes the importance of an adaptive learning environment, appropriate learning methods, and psychopedagogical interventions in developing the social skills of children with autism. Collaborative learning models, play -based learning approaches , and group-based social skills programs have been shown to improve social interactions in children with autism. In the implementation of inclusive education, educational psychology plays a role in supporting children with autism to interact with their environment, understand individual differences, create a fair and friendly learning environment, and develop good social and emotional skills for children with autism.

6. The Role of Inclusive Schools

Inclusive schools provide opportunities for children with autism to learn alongside peers. Through these interactions, children's social skills can develop more naturally. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a welcoming classroom environment, fostering empathy among students, and implementing differentiated learning strategies.

7. Challenges and Obstacles

Although various strategies are available, there are a number of barriers to implementation, such as lack of teacher understanding, limited resources, societal stigma, and the differing characteristics of children with autism. Therefore, multidisciplinary collaboration between educational psychologists, teachers, and parents is essential.

CONCLUSION

Social skills are a crucial aspect of development for children on the autism spectrum, significantly impacting their quality of life and academic success. From an educational psychology perspective, the social skills of children with autism can be developed through appropriate pedagogical approaches, inclusive learning environments, and family involvement. Appropriate early intervention, social skills programs, and the use of learning technology are key factors in supporting the social development of children with autism and improving their quality of life and learning.

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