



The Role of Teachers' Attunement in Enhancing Student Social Competence at Elementary Level

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Abstract

Nurturing social skills in elementary school children is essential for their overall development and future achievements. This study examines how teachers' attunement—their ability to accurately perceive, understand, and respond to students' social and emotional needs affects the cultivation of social skills in young students. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative analyses of student social skill assessments with qualitative interviews of teachers to gain insights into their perceptions and strategies. The results demonstrate that teachers with high levels of attunement play a significant role in enhancing their students' social skills. Key social skills fostered through attuned teaching include communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution. The study underscores the importance of professional development programs aimed at improving teachers' attunement capabilities, suggesting that such initiatives are crucial for creating a supportive classroom environment that promotes social skill development. The findings have important implications for educational practices and policies, advocating for a focused effort on enhancing teacher attunement to support the comprehensive development of elementary school children.

Key Words: Attunement, Social Skills, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, Developmental Challenges, Psychological Barriers

Introduction

Attunement is the process of recognizing and appropriately responding to others' emotions and needs. It is a critical component of emotional intelligence and is essential for developing robust social skills. Social skills, in turn, are necessary for successful interpersonal interactions and relationships. Despite its importance, many individuals encounter challenges that hinder their ability to attune to others and, consequently, their social skills. There are many challenges in development of student's personality. Secure attachment with caregivers during early childhood is vital for developing attunement. Children who experience neglect or inconsistent caregiving may struggle with attunement later in life. Early developmental disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), can impact the ability to recognize and interpret social cues, leading to difficulties in attunement. Conditions like ADHD and specific learning disabilities can affect attentional control and processing speed, making it harder for individuals to attune to others' emotional states. Neurobiological differences can influence the development of empathy and social cognition,

crucial components of attunement. Individuals with poor emotional regulation may find it challenging to manage their own emotions, making it difficult to attune to others. Disorders such as anxiety and depression can distort perception and responsiveness, hindering attunement. Past trauma can result in hypervigilance or emotional numbness, both of which impede attunement. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can alter the ability to connect with others emotionally. Cultural differences in expressing and interpreting emotions can create barriers to attunement. Societal norms and expectations may either facilitate or hinder the development of social skills. Dysfunctional family environments can negatively impact the development of attunement and social skills. Positive family interactions promote better attunement and social skill development. Different Strategies can be used for Overcoming the Challenges: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can help individuals develop better emotional regulation and attunement. Therapies focusing on social skills training can be beneficial for those with developmental or psychological barriers. Mindfulness practices enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation, which are critical for attunement. Empathy training exercises can help individuals improve their ability to understand and respond to others' emotions. Schools can implement programs that teach emotional intelligence and social skills from a young age. Interventions aimed at improving peer interactions and reducing bullying can foster a more attuned social environment.

Literature Review:

Concept of Teacher Attunement

Teacher attunement is about teachers being able to understand and empathize with the psychological experiences, worldviews, perspectives, motivations, learning capacities, skill levels, strengths, weaknesses, interests, affiliations, and affective states of students (Hamm et al., 2011).. This process of understanding is facilitated through attentive observation, deep listening, following responses, receptive body language, and verbal and nonverbal exchanges (Davis, 2006). Attunement can have various meanings depending on the context. Stern, D. N. (2004) defined “Attunement refers to the therapist's ability to deeply understand and resonate with the emotional experience of their client, creating a sense of connection and trust.” Secondly Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2000) described “Attunement describes the process of becoming finely tuned to another person's emotions, thoughts, and needs, fostering effective communication and empathy” Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2000) in his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* lecture explained “Attunement involves being in harmony with oneself, others, and the environment, often achieved through practices like meditation and mindfulness ,, in addition another researcher Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994) focused “Attunement refers to the caregiver's ability to recognize and respond to a child's emotional needs, fostering a secure attachment and healthy development. Lastly Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2012) explained “Attunement in music or art involves being in harmony with the expressive elements of the medium, such as tone, rhythm, or color” These definitions provide a broad understanding of attunement across various domains, from interpersonal relationships to personal growth and artistic expression.

Scholars have put forward different views and perspectives on teacher attunement (Fonagy et al., 2018). Four major perspectives are discussed: 1. Similarity effect of the teacher and the student, thereby reducing the dissonance and being in perfect harmony with the student and further the entire needed state was- as students are, teachers should be. 2. Taking an inference-based approach, this concludes that it is not what teachers say or do based on seeing things they can see. However, by going underneath things, they cannot see. 3. Continuous effort of building an empathetic relationship between a teacher and students where the teacher not only looks into the

academics of the student but also sympathizes with the child all around socio-emotional experiences along with the peer to peer interactions and 4. Taking a standpoint of the teacher and his effort and fluid process of identifying the student's identities and frame of reference, it thus requires an accurate teacher for a transaction and thus the least information to accurately ascertain student inference; therefore, it will be called a sensitive attuning process of the teacher.

In psychology, attunement often refers to the process of being fully present and responsive to another person's emotional state, needs, and experiences. It involves empathy, understanding, and emotional resonance. For instance, in parent-child relationships, attunement describes the caregiver's ability to tune in to the child's emotional cues and respond appropriately (Stern, D. N. (1985). In spirituality, attunement can signify a state of alignment or harmony with higher spiritual principles, energies, or frequencies. It involves being receptive to spiritual guidance, enlightenment, or the divine presence. This concept is often associated with practices like meditation, prayer, or mindfulness. (Assagioli, R. (1965). Lastly In music, attunement refers to the adjustment of one's musical pitch to match or harmonize with another, such as when singers or instrumentalists tune their instruments to a standard pitch or when musicians adjust their playing to match the tonality of a piece. Cross, I. (2001).

Significance of Development of Social Skills

Students need to develop important social skills to participate and function in society. Therefore, a student's social adjustment is vital. To develop these skills, schools are a major media in placing students on the track to mastering the skills needed for life; however, with the current teaching techniques used in Pakistan, students are not properly equipped with these. One strong influence in this area is the role of the teacher rather than the teaching style in conflict resolution skills in early grades. Teacher attunement is a new and important approach to better understand the students and promote their interpersonal critical skills. Incorporating relevant literature reviews is critical to achieving the research objective. For example, one area of investigation could be the importance of conflict resolution skills in students, which is due to the simplistic grading that students experience in primary schools.

The literature review covers the key concepts from books, journal articles, conference pamphlets, thesis/ dissertations, and other academic sources. It is important to synthesize the knowledge on this topic and build a theoretical grounding for investigating the research problem. This review gives more insight into the teacher attunement techniques for conflict resolution abilities in elementary classrooms, which will lead to new insights. The gaps will also show and will facilitate the need for the study. Social skills are the individual's ability to adjust personal behaviours according to a specific social situation and the individual's competency to behave acceptably in different social circumstances (Gresham et al., 2018). These include communication

skills, listening skills, negotiation skills, and assertiveness skills. Social skills for individuals involved in educational programmes, social skills for interactions with other communications. Other people's feelings and reactions and the ability to communicate with others (Durlak et al., 2011). The characteristics of social skills can be again an advantage to the development of the students, initiating and maintaining positive interactions, making, and keeping friendships, working cooperatively, solving interpersonal problems, and effectively handling and managing emotional behaviours in a social context (Rose-Krasnor & Denham, 2009).

In order to adapt to today's interdependent world, developing social skills is crucial across various life domains. Specifically, socially competent behaviours lead to classroom academic engagement, positive peer relations, psychological well-being, and prosocial social participation

(Durlak et al., 2011). Conversely, a lack of social skills is associated with feelings of loneliness, anxiety in public settings, bullying victimization, difficulties in asserting needs, unresolved interpersonal conflicts, and even antisocial behaviours (Gresham et al., 2018). Therefore, deliberately nurturing students' social skills is critical to ensure their developmental success and enable them to become socially responsive and productive members of their communities.

The reality is that social skills deficits are widespread among students across cultures (Dart et al., 2024; Gresham et al., 2018) and many maladjusted adults display inadequate social skills acquired way back in their younger years (Jones et al., 2015). This makes it particularly important to help young children acquire socio-emotional tools that will enable them to bridge gaps well across life domains. Even as early as in elementary years, they need social competencies (like communication, cooperation, sharing, helping, negotiating differences, and managing interpersonal conflicts) that will help them interact constructively in interpersonal, school, professional, civic, and societal realms. Their development and usage from past primary years would enrich the quality of their relationships and social outcomes.

Schools have several key features that make them ideal systems for intervention. Schools have access to most children and adolescents in Pakistan, and the school staff are trained to deliver instruction and implement programs. The structure of the school day and the number of professionals working within schools also add to the effectiveness of the intervention. Schools are like small social ecosystems that provide opportunities for children and adolescents to learn and practice communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and conflict resolution across situations and with various peers (Greenberg, 2023). Schools are beginning to focus on the social and emotional growth of children and adolescents, as well as their academic growth, in order for students to function successfully in the community as a whole (Durlak et al., 2011).

Evidence-based social skills training programs in schools demonstrate improved peer relations, classroom behaviours, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and reduced aggression/delinquency in various student samples, often with supportive school cultures, modelling of constructive behaviours, and opportunities for guided skill application (January et al., 2011). Programs of this nature are being developed and evaluated for widespread adoption to meet the social-emotional needs of rapidly evolving student populations. Teachers are being trained and incentivized to embed Social-Emotional Learning more intentionally across academic instruction using strategies that motivate skill acquisition and make sense of their workloads.

Need for Social Skills Development in Pakistan

School education in Pakistan usually ignores the socio-emotional side of development and concentrates far more on the cognitive side, i.e., to develop academic skills (Rafi & Islam, 2023). It rarely included any attention to vocational training as well. This usually leaves graduates weak in using what they have learnt, fulfilling personal and social needs, or even surviving in the workplace (Rohail et al., 2023). At an upper level, the provision for formal training on other aspects of personal competencies, i.e., communicating, negotiating, interviewing, leadership, teamwork, and resolving conflicts essential to dealing with social partners, is non-existent (Rafi & Islam, 2023; Rohail et al., 2023).

Lectures are the primary way Pakistani students learn, and there is limited use of collaborative work and projects, entirely inquiry-based study, and no emphasis on discussion and debate as strategies for learning (Aslam & Awan, 2019; Dean, 2005). Co-curricular activities—some schools have started offering co-curricular activities; however, these primarily focus on competition and do not foster creativity, leadership, and expression of ideas amongst all students

(Bashir et al., 2012). This is especially the case for most girls in most Pakistani schools, which offer no such opportunities. Rates of high-stakes external testing for student selection into higher levels of schooling are so high, and the fear of failure is so intense that there is little to zero opportunity for activity-based or social learning to occur in any given school (Masood et al., 2017). This is a combined consequence of the low abilities of teachers when it comes to teaching and assessing skills and attitudes by Pakistani education systems and a lack of teacher and student engagement in the learning materials they are required to cover.

Statement of the Problem

Early adolescence is the period of development in physical, psychological, and social aspects of life. The students of this age spend most of their time in schools or school related activities. Schools are considered to serve as important contexts for social, emotional, psychological and behavioral adjustment of the students of early adolescent age. Maladjustment of students in a society is a serious problem for parents and all stakeholders. Parents send their children to schools for the development of their balanced personality to adjust them in the society. In Pakistani education system the teachers remain busy to deliver the content. There is no proper system and framework for the personality development. Attunement techniques help the teacher to understand student's personality. Teacher understanding of their students enable them to develop social skills among the students. The importance of the attunement induced the researcher to assess the effect of teacher attunement on development of conflict resolution skill among elementary school students. The researcher will try to examine the effect of teacher's attunement on development of different types of conflict resolution among elementary school students.

Significance of the Study

Following will be the significance of the Study. This study may be helpful for elementary school teachers to make them aware about different attunement strategies. The study may also be helpful for elementary school students to make them aware about the development of conflict resolution skill. This study may be helpful for policy makers, teacher trainer, teacher educators and classroom teachers to understand teacher attunement strategies and its implication in the classroom setting.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study was as follows:

- How does teachers' attunement to students' emotional and social cues impact the development of social competence in elementary school children

Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis of this study was as follows:

Teachers' attunement to students' emotional and social cues positively impacts the development of social competence in elementary school children by fostering improved emotional regulation, empathetic understanding, and cooperative behaviors.

Delimitation of the Study

Following will be the delimitation of the study;

1. Public sector boy's elementary schools in Lahore.
2. Public sector elementary school students.
3. Academic session 2022-23

4. Class 6th

Research Methodology

The researcher developed an open-ended questionnaire. Four teachers from Govt Lahore City conducted an open, discussion-based interview. Opinions and comments were recorded on mobile phone and also noted.

Participants: Four high school teachers holding a master's degree and above ten years' experience. All teachers were female above forty years age. Two teachers have science background and two have social sciences educational background. All teachers belong urban background of teaching. All teachers are from high school from public sector School Education Dept. Punjab Pakistan. The participants under study were five, and sample size is consistent with Creswell (2013) sampling of participants in phenomenological research, which recommends a sample size of between 5- 25. Using this number made it possible to focus on cases without losing opportunity to see the general trends. The study employed semi-structured interviews, that interview guide was formulated based on research objectives and conducted literature review. The interviews were done over WhatsApp, and the participants' consent was sought to record the interviews; all interviews were recorded, and the participants' responses were transcribed into text form for analysis. All the interviews were held for 60-90 minutes.

Data Collection: Data was collected through a self-developed questionnaire from four high school teachers from the Govt. High School in Lahore City

Data Analyze: Thematic analysis was led as per to Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze data and report patterns within data. This method offered flexibility and provided a detailed and complex data picture. The study used qualitative data analysis software as NVivo 14 to help organize, code, and visualize data.

Findings of the Study

. Following findings were made from the analyses of the data. Teachers can play very important role in the development of social skills through attunement. Class in charge and subject educators can enhance the social skills of their student through understanding and attachment with their pupils.

Findings and Discussion: The first question asked from teachers was about the importance of social skills. The first teacher commented, "Social skills are a novel idea for me in my teaching career. I read about this idea one year ago. The concept of Social skills is a new idea to deal with the problematic learner in my class." The second teacher shared, "After understanding the concept of social skills attunement, I changed my teaching strategy according to the students' needs. Usually, I collect the basic information of the learner skills, like IT Skills, composing repairing, Speeches and writing etc., etc. The third teacher shared her views about the importance of Social Skills. "The concept of social Skills totally changed my thinking about my students; now I understand the students' Skills after planning the strategies for teaching." The fourth teacher said, "Attunement, Social Skills and other new ideas are important in the modern era for understanding and improving the students in our society. Really, this idea gave me new thoughts and improved my teaching skills. Now I deal with the new students in an effective way."

The researcher asked the second question about when you attune your students about social skills and what challenges they face. One teacher shared, "It is a great challenge to maintain the discipline and decorum of the class. Some of the students feel hesitant to share skills and some students are not aware about their hidden skills." The second teacher commented, "Students feel

embraced and shy in the school. Some students feel free and don't care about the class room rules due to their affiliation with me." The third one stated, "During the attunement and the development process of social skills process, I feel difficulty overlooking all classes and students. I feel challenged to maintain quality work and to follow the timetable of school." The fourth teacher said, "My colleague also criticizes attunement activities, makes relationships and development of social skills with students. School administration raises objections about not following the timetable, lesson plan format, and routine of school."

A third question was asked from the panel about how the social skills process can be improved in the Pakistani education system: The first teacher stated, "I think the social skills should be elaborated to the high authorities, school leaders, and teaching faculty from the upper to the lower level." The second teacher suggested, "Parents and students can be informed about the importance, function, and implementation of the attunement strategy and social skills at school level. The third teacher shared, " Social Skills, training should be inculcated in curriculum and to implement at the school level." The fourth teacher suggested, "New teaching strategies like social skills, attunement and technological changes can be shared with teachers and students. According to the modern era, all new changes should be incorporated into the curriculum, textbooks, and education policies."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the growth of social skills in elementary students is significantly shaped by teachers' attunement to their needs and behaviors. When teachers are skilled in recognizing and addressing the emotional and social cues of their students, they create a nurturing and supportive classroom environment. This sensitivity promotes positive interactions, helps students navigate social complexities, and fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth. Strong teacher-student relationships are essential for developing social competencies such as empathy, cooperation, and communication. Teachers who model and reinforce these skills encourage students to apply them in their interactions with peers, thereby internalizing social norms and values.

Additionally, professional development programs that focus on emotional intelligence and responsive classroom management are crucial. These programs enable teachers to be more attuned and responsive to the diverse social and emotional needs of their students, leading to better social outcomes. Ultimately, teacher attunement is a vital aspect of elementary education that profoundly impacts students' social development. By becoming more attuned to their students, educators not only enhance academic learning but also prepare students to thrive in their interpersonal relationships and broader social contexts.

Recommendations

1. Research should investigate how teachers' emotional attunement influences students' peer relationships, particularly in collaborative and group activities. This can help identify whether attuned teachers contribute to a more positive social environment and fewer instances of conflict among peers.
2. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of teachers' attunement on students' social skills, such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. This will provide insight into the sustained impact of attuned teaching over time, from early elementary years through later grades.

3. Investigate how cultural contexts influence the role of teacher attunement in enhancing social competence. Comparative studies between different school environments (rural, urban, multicultural) can provide deeper insights into how attunement practices need to be adapted for diverse student populations.

4. Research can focus on designing and testing intervention programs aimed at improving teachers' attunement abilities. By examining the effectiveness of training modules in empathy, active listening, and emotional regulation, researchers can explore how such interventions impact student social competence.

5. Investigate how teachers' attunement practices affect the social inclusion of students with special educational needs or those from marginalized backgrounds. This will highlight the importance of attuned teaching in promoting equity and fostering a supportive environment for all students.

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