



RESEARCH PAPER

Development of Social Competence among Students of District Bhakkar Pakistan: An Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Learning Through Discussion (LTD), a constructivism based teaching technique, in classroom to teach selected content from the subject of Islamic Studies at 8th grade level. The objectives of the study was to develop social competence among students and investigate the effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students. Society is a dynamic system of cultural values that builds community and enabled by the social skills to foster healthy interaction and relationships based on Social Constructivism. Experimental group was treated with LTD technique while control group was taught with lecture method as placebo to explore the effect of technique on social competence of students. Questionnaire on social competence was administered before and after experiment to collect data. The results showed significant difference in social competence of students who are taught by LTD. The LTD method may help in developing Social competence among students.

KEYWORDS Social Competence, Learning Through Discussion Technique(LTD), Constructivism Based Teaching Technique, Elementary School Students

Introduction

Human beings are bound to live together in a network of relationships that forms society. Society is not just people living together, but a dynamic system of cultural values that builds community. Social skills in communities allow people to interact well with each other and develop healthy associations. These skills encompass some of the fundamental abilities required for effective communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution. Social skills are acquired, developed, and practiced as one grows through Social competence. Social competence is the feature of social skill that encompasses personal uniqueness, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and an individual's ability to adapt effectively within a social environment (Gedvilienė, 2012). It refers to a person's capacity to communicate productively with others, regulate emotions, take multiple perspectives, cooperate, solve social problems, and adjust behavior across diverse social contexts (Campbell et al., 2016). Despite growing research in early childhood, there remains a need for more comprehensive models that trace the development of social competence from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. Social skills have been found to improve among children in various social contexts and in interaction with peers. (Siekkinen et al., 2013).

Literature Review

Interpersonal abilities like controlling emotions, a sense of self, commitment to social ideals, decision-making processes, and cultural awareness are all important aspects of social competence. Social initiatives targeting students include community

service, raising awareness of the cause, civic participation and introducing social responsibility in educational establishments (Andrushchenko and Khvorostyanko, 2022). Participation in a variety of substantive social programs is a regular activity among students, and they use their energies and innovativeness to bring about positive transformation in their immediate communities and beyond. Social orientation refers to how students interact with peers and authority figures, their attitudes towards group learning, and their alignment with the school's social norms and educational environment. This concept also encompasses the broader school-wide programs and initiatives designed to foster positive social interactions, inclusivity, and civic responsibility among the student body. A positive feeling of dignity and cultural comprehension helps kids create positive interactions with others and ethical principles. Teenage social awareness reflects ethical thinking, encouraging acceptance among peers and bonding quality (Johnson et al., 2022). Social competence fosters not only personal well-being, yet society cooperation, equality, as well as solving disputes (Madu and Madu, 2024). These core capabilities are essential for social competence, as they are shaped by early adult-child interactions, individual temperament, and the educational environment.

In school environment, one of the key responsibilities of the teacher is to facilitate the development of these skills, especially when students move to interactive classroom environments for societal awareness, active behaviour, and ability to tolerate dispute situations, self-control, and optimism (Shnyrenkov and Romanova, 2015). In this way, Teaching strategies such as learner-centered and discussion-based pedagogies are effective in fostering social competence. These methods promote collaboration, critical thinking, and communication, allowing students to connect personal experiences to academic learning (Gunga and Oundo, 2013). Such interactive approaches are especially powerful in developing both academic achievement and essential social skills, preparing students for future social and professional roles. A discussion is one of the most common techniques adopted by a teacher to encourage active learning (Abdulbaki et al., 2018). Xhomara (2020) suggest that discussion is more beneficial than the lecture method when the objectives of a course are to promote long-term information storage, encourage students to study further, allow them to apply material in new situations, and encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills. The learning through discussion is an effective method of pedagogy that can be used to improve the learning outcomes (Abdulbaki et al., 2018). This method also provides teachers with the ability to evaluate students' levels of understanding and conceptual proficiency by questions. Active participation of students in relevant content boosts the motivation and interest. So, Discussions are important in the development of social competence and critical thinking because they allow students to present their thoughts coherently and convincingly in a classroom (Phillips, 2023).

The common characteristics of a learner-centered pedagogy include collaborative learning has the ability to integrate new knowledge with previously learned material, which together lead towards the evolution of social competence (Cade, 2023). In addition, interactive teachers support various learning styles with their students for active social interaction (Appah Bonney, 2023). It has been proved that sharing of experiences in a group discussion, not only improves practical use of gained knowledge but also enhance social skills (Zhou and Colomer, 2024). Teaching strategies that incorporate the use of discussion have many advantages, which include democratic involvement in the learning process and facilitating communication (Kaniki, 2014). Asoodeh et al (2012) also reported positive outcomes of similar interactive strategies by saying that students are

more efficient in yielding learning accomplishment and social competence than the teacher-centered pedagogy.

Despite this around the globe- such as District Bhakkar in Pakistan, students face many social setbacks that resist the refinement of the social skills. Less opportunities to quality education, insufficient parental insight, underfunded education facilities can add more into inadequate community development. Hurdles like peer pressure lack of confidence society and harassment is often associated with challenges in social competency. Confronting such issues demand for the exceeding then mainly scholastic remedies; the issue requires integrated strategy which encompasses psychological and interpersonal development. Such communal transformations exacerbated via economic disparity, inflexible societal expectations and inadequate psychological wellbeing within academic settings. Within numerous situation educators are not trained for the purpose to either acknowledge or address to the psychological and interpersonal needs of pupils. As a result of which it leaves students without any direction while handling complicated social situation.

These studies that have been carried out support the claim that proper discussion may result in a number of pedagogical learning outcomes. Barkley in 2017 postulates that there is an increased curiosity about the subject area, more positive perceptions about the value of the subject, extended time spent reading materials related to the subject as well as enhancing the conception of connecting to other individuals. For developing social competence the discussion 'tool' could be acknowledged as a preferable method of teaching because of an increase in students' participations as well as social interaction; the learning is more effective; and students do not have to rely on rote learning as this method develops positive interdependence and creativity among students (Khaliq and Ullah, 2025). When class discussion is informal, it tends to be loose and that may encourage some students to talk more often. Yet, when discussion is more formal, it tends to be more productive and interesting. The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students.

The following hypotheses recapitulate the discussion above:

H₁. Social competence is higher after utilizing learning through discussion technique.

H₀. Social competence is not higher after utilizing learning through discussion technique.

H₂. There is significant effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students.

H₀. There is no significant effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students.

These hypotheses importantly refer to the net main and interaction effects involving engagement in the learning through discussion technique and prior social competence by holding all other factors constant.

Material and Methods

The pre-posttest study was conducted to determine the effect of learning through discussion technique in developing social competence among students at elementary

level. The students of grade 8 of govt. model elementary school chah chimni Bhakkar were participants.

The research study includes all the 8th grade students of govt. model elementary school chah chimni Bhakkar in 2016-2017. The sample includes 49 of 8th grade of elementary school students. They are chosen as the least suggested number of people for comparison groups in experimental and control group. The researcher then divided the students into control group and experimental group on the basis of odd and even roll numbers through systematic random sampling. Two groups were formed students with even roll numbers were placed in experimental group (24 students) while the students with odd roll numbers were placed in control group (25 students). According to the subject and research nature and the necessity of teaching in a real class and reducing the interaction, these two classes are almost equal in most aspects such as family social and cultural situation, equity in class level and having the same teacher.

The tool used in this research is the social competency inventory of teachers developed by Rydell and his colleagues in 1997. According to the need of research the researcher mould and converted the tool into Urdu language for students. This scale consisted of two factors: social initiative and social orientation. Statements 1, 9, 16, 19 measured to the factor social initiative while remaining statements were related to the factor social orientation. A five point's likert scale on social competence was filled by student to measure their social competency. This scale was pilot tested by 73 teachers through observation technique with reliability coefficient 0.95 (Rydell et al., 1997). The researcher selected 19 items and responses of each item were assigned weight 5 for always, 4 for mostly, 3 for some time, 2 for often and 1 for not at all. The researcher mould the tool for the students' inventory and pilot tested again from 80 students of 8th grade. Reliability of coefficient was 0.829 in present study (table 1).

Table 1
Reliability of Social Competency Scale

Scale	No. of Items	Reliability
Total	19	0.829
Social initiative	4	0.670
Social Orientation	15	0.777

Procedure of Experiment

The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students. The pre-post-test design was used for the experimental research. The duration of the experiment was two month and ten days from 1st November to 10th of January excluding sundays and winter vacation. Keeping the nature of study in mind researcher divided the students into two groups, one group with even roll number and the other with odd roll numbers by using systematic random sampling technique. The class was divided into two groups' i.e. experimental and control. 25 students in control group and 24 students for experimental group were included. The experimental group was further divided into four sub-group having 6 members in each group for the need of the research. 24 lesson plans were developed for both experimental and control group of Islamiat subject. The learning through discussion technique and teacher oriented prepared accordingly. Student oriented pedagogy was offered for experimental group and lecture teaching method was offered for control group. The same teacher taught both groups to control the novel impact of teacher's personality. The researcher took 24 classes of both experimental and control group on alternative days. When the researcher took lecture of one group then the other group conducted paper from previous syllabus from the exercise under the

supervision of other teacher of the school. The duration of time period for the experimental class was divided into following steps.

Preview and introduction

In this section the researcher asked the question from students to check their previous knowledge of the topic. The researcher introduced the purpose and key features of the discussion. The researcher made groups and allotted sub-topic to each group for discussion. The time of this activity was 5-7 minutes.

Group Activity

The group leader led the group activity. The group member discussed the allotted topic. The students were involved by questions and answers in democratic way. The role of a leader was just guiding the group rather than dominating. The teacher used to go around each group to watch the discussion and facilitated them the time of this activity was almost 15-20 minutes.

Class Activity

The researcher rearranged group as a one class. The group leader presented their discussed sub topic and key features in the front of the class and whole class dismissed it in democratic way. The teacher facilitated the students where they felt hurdle and kept on track the discussion. The duration of this activity was 15-20 minutes.

Assessment and consolidation

After the discussion of the topic by group discussion and class discussion was conducted. The researcher asked the referential question to storm the students' brain about the target objective. The teacher discussed the results and evaluated the opinions and answer. The teacher encouraged the students and allotted topics to be prepared for next day discussion.

Data regarding social competence were collected before and after experimentation through pre-posttest for both control and experiment group. Then evaluated by mean comparison through *p* value and mean score.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive analysis was led to explore the effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence among the students. The difference was calculated with the help of gain scores to see the effect of the treatment between experimental and control group.

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of mean scores and gain scores of students taught by learning through discussion technique and students taught through lecture method on social competence scale

Sr No	Factors of Social Competency	No. of Items	Mean score on social competence scale					
			Control Group n=25			Experimental n=24		
			Pre Test	Post Test	Gain Score	Pre Test	Post Test	Gain Score
1	Social Initiative	4	16.00	15.96	-0.04	19.87	18.87	-1

Social orientation	15	57.92	58.52	0.6	58.58	67.75	9.17	
3	Total	19	73.92	74.48	0.56	78.45	86.62	8.17

Table 2 shows the pre-posttest mean scores of students, calculated by subtracting pre-test score from post-test of experimental and control group. Results showed significant difference between pre and post-test scores of experimental group regarding social competence respectively 78.45 and 86.62. While there is no difference between pre and post-test scores of control group regarding social competence respectively 57.92 and 58.52. Findings revealed that the gain score in social initiative factor decreases while on social orientation factor the gain score have major difference between experimental and control group. Consequently the research hypothesis is accepted that social competence is higher after utilizing learning through discussion technique while null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3
Comparison of mean scores of experimental and control group of social competence scale on pre-posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pre-test	Experimental	24	78.45	9.614	1.637	47	0.108
	Control	25	73.92	9.784			
Post-test	Experimental	24	86.62	4.411	5.225	47	0.000
	Control	25	74.48	10.532			

Table 3 depicts a comparison of mean score in pre-posttest between control and experimental group where mean score of experimental group in pre-test (mean=78.45) was not significantly different ($t=1.637$, $df=47$, $p=0.108$) from control group having (mean=73.92). The mean score in post-test of control and experimental group where mean score of experimental group in post-test (86.62) was significantly different ($t=5.225$, $df=47$, $p=0.000$) from control group having mean (74.48) in favor of experimental group. Results revealed in post-test the social competence level of experimental group was significantly greater than control group. Hence null hypothesis is rejected and research hypothesis is accepted, stated that there is significant effect of learning through discussion technique on social competence of elementary school students.

Analysis of Component Factor of Social Competence Scale regarding Social Initiative on Pre-Posttest Data

Independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of component factor of social competency scale regarding social initiative in students taught utilizing learning through discussion technique and lecture method on pre-posttest data.

Table 4
Comparison of mean scores of social initiative in students taught utilizing learning through discussion technique and lecture method on pre-posttest data

	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pre-test	Experimental	24	19.875	6.347	2.678	47	0.010
	Control	25	16.000	3.403			
Post-test	Experimental	24	18.875	1.0759	4.576	47	0.000
	Control	25	15.960	2.936			

Table 4 reflects comparison of mean scores of component factor of social competence scale regarding social initiative in students taught utilizing learning through discussion technique and lecture method on pre-posttest where mean score of experimental group in pre-test (mean=19.875) was significantly different ($t=2.678$, $df=47$, $p=0.010$) from control group having (mean=16.00) in favor of experimental group.

Therefore, it is concluded that in pre-test the social competence level regarding social initiative factor of experimental group and control group was significantly different. Whereas mean score of experimental group in post-test (18.875) was significantly different ($t=4.576$, $df=47$, $p=0.000$) from control group having (mean=15.960). Hence, it is concluded that in post-test the social competence level regarding social initiative of experimental group was significantly greater than control group.

Analysis of component factor of social competence scale regarding social orientation on pre-posttest data

Independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean of social competence scale regarding social orientation in students taught utilizing learning through discussion technique and lecture method on pre-posttest data.

Table 5

Comparison of mean scores of component factor of social competence scale regarding social orientation on pre-posttest between experimental and control group

	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pre-test	Experimental	24	58.583	7.180	0.299	47	0.766
	Control	25	57.920	8.281			
Post-test	Experimental	24	67.750	3.674	4.678	47	0.000
	Control	25	58.520	8.968			

Table 5 reflects mean score comparison of social competence scale regarding social orientation between experimental and control groups where mean score of experimental group in pre-test (mean=58.583) was not significantly different ($t=0.299$, $df=47$, $p=0.766$) from control group having (mean=57.920). Hence it is concluded that in pre-test the social competence level regarding social orientation factor of experimental and control group was the same. Whereas mean score of experimental group in post-test (67.750) was significantly different ($t=4.678$, $df=47$, $p=0.000$) from control group having (mean=58.520) in favor of experimental group. Hence it is concluded that in post-test the component factor of social competence level regarding social orientation of experimental group was significantly greater than control group.

Discussion

The results support all the hypothesis on the effectiveness of learning through discussion method in developing social competence among the elementary school pupils. Also, as was observed in response to the previous studies, empirical evidence shows that social competence improves when this technique is applied (Kutnick & Colwell, 2024). Discussions in classrooms can be considered an efficient tool of enhancing social competence and critical thinking because through discussion the students are able to arrange their thoughts in a proper way and discuss them in a convincing manner (Abdulbaki et al., 2018). As a result, these discussions help in building social competence by offering various chances of interaction as well as offering meaningful negotiation (Hukkelberg et al., 2019). One can conclude that the learning based on discussion has a strong impact on the social competence of elementary school students. Furthermore, the discussion tool can be viewed as a better pedagogical tool as it allows students to participate and socialize more, improve the overall learning efficiency, and avoid the use of rote memorization, which is an outcome, in turn, leading to positive interdependence and creativity in the students (Laal, 2013).

Effect of learning through the discussion methods on the social competence is justifiable and consistent with the existing theoretical literature and empirical studies on

the use of discussion methods in enhancing social competence among young adolescents. This theoretical concept and experimental research confirm that the promotion of social competence is desired, required, and predisposed to be beneficial to early adolescents simultaneously (Hukkelberg et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Implementation of discussion-based learning method help achieve a number of objectives one of which is offering systematic feedback to instructors regarding the cognition of students. It also helps in the realization of higher-order cognitive objectives like application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation along with instilling intellectual stimulation, value development, and attitude change among students. The implications of this approach do not just cover the purely cognitive level but also touch more on the broader social aspects of education. Notably, this change does not reduce the role of teacher as an educator and leader; on the contrary, it can create a dynamic and collaborative atmosphere that allows sharing knowledge and opinions, thereby improving not only academic skills but also social skills.

Recommendations

Educators may consider forming instructional groups that deliberately blend students across gender, caste, sect, nationality, and locality. These diverse groups may then be tasked with discussing course content to collaboratively build social competency. Educators may nurture early social competency by deliberately forming small, diverse discussion groups within the primary classroom. Through guided, collaborative conversations on engaging topics, young learners may build the foundational skills of empathy and respectful communication.

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