



## SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RELATION TO THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF THEIR PARENTS

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*Original scientific paper*

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Received: 2019/1/8

Accepted: 2019/3/12

### ABSTRACT

*Social skills are one of the fundamental factors that determine the quality of relationships that an individual realizes with people in his or her environment. In the interpersonal relationship, many human needs are realized, and the learning of the skills that enrich interpersonal relationships starts from the earliest days of the child's life. The paper presents the results of the research aimed at examining the social skills of elementary school pupils in relation to the educational level of their parents. The survey was carried out on the sample of elementary school students from the city of Tuzla (N = 506). As the research tool, Inventory of Social Skills (Riggio and Throckmorton) and the Questionnaire of Socio-status Characteristics were used. The social skills of the respondents were analyzed separately in relation to the educational level of the mother and father, and the results obtained point to the conclusion that there is no statistically significant difference between the social skills of elementary school students in view of the educational level of their mothers, while the differences are present in relation to the educational level of the father; that is, elementary school pupils whose fathers are of lower educational level show a higher level of development of emotional control, social sensitivity and social manipulation.*

**Keywords:** *social skills, parenting, verbal social skills, non-verbal social skills.*

### INTRODUCTION

By nature, man is directed to other people and most needs and potential can be achieved through social interaction. However, the success of each individual in this context is determined by his social skills, which in the most significant sense imply success in establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships.

Children who have developed social skills simply work outside the family environment in which they

are mostly inclined. These children are successful in achieving contacts and establishing friendships with peers. Also, when they go to school, they are successfully affiliated in the classroom (Urdan & Maehr, 1995, according to Mapiasse, 2007) and have a positive attitude towards the school (Denham, et al., 2003). In their research, Segrini Taylor (2007) found that the development of social skills is strongly linked to positive relationships with others, quality of life and optimism, while Spasenović (2009) found social adherence as a significant predictor of school success.

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Exploring the reasons why some scientists are unsuccessful at work, even though intelligence and non-education do not lag behind colleagues, Alan Frehman (according to Shapiro, 1997) pointed to the importance of social skills in this context, finding that individuals lack isolation and social skills isolate themselves and therefore their performance at work is weaker.

In the first years of the child's life, the learning of social skills is most strongly contributed by the family's conservative atmosphere, which is characterized by emotional warmth and respect for the child's needs from one hand, and the setting of demands and borders before the child, on the other. In this environment, they have the basic skills necessary for functioning in the game, and later with the expansion of the network of social relationships, which is accompanied and promoted by the child's cognitive development, the repertoire of social skills in his behavior is expanding.

Parental contribution to the development of social skills in children is realized directly in a way that social competence is demonstrated by its own example, and indirectly, which implies providing specific, explicit instructions on how a child should behave. Covey (1998) points out that providing modeling is the most important form of influence parents have on a child, because what they see in parents' behavior far more leaves a mark on children than a voice instruction.

Klarin (2002) conducted a survey on a sample of 263 children aged 10 to 14 in Zagreb, in order to examine the relationship between the quality of family interactions and child's peer relationships. The results that have been reported indicate that children with parental involvement, an open relationship, a relationship of trust and understanding, make that relationship with their best friend, and that the care and support that parents provide to the child stimulates the behavioral mechanisms that are desirable in relationship with a friend. Children who are accepted by parents have a positive image of themselves and are less rejected by their peers. When it comes to parental influence on the child in general, and so in the context of learning social skills, it is necessary to take into account the specificity of parenting of mother and father and treat them accordingly. In order to emphasize the importance of the father's educational role, which, unlike maternal much less explored and often reduced to foster care only, today it is increasingly tending to the other extreme, which is to identify the educational role of the father with the mother's. Bergmann (2007, p. 81) states that paternity is increasingly viewed "as an auxiliary service for the mother" or as "a complement to motherhood, but not as something in principle different". However, taking

into account the differences in their biological predisposition, it should be emphasized that the father and mother since the first days of the child's life contribute to its development in various ways, and therefore, as Sigman (2011, p. 84) points out, "the unique and necessary contribution of men and women as a parent should be praised, not disputed." The mothers are those who promote safety and help the child to develop empathy and relate their behavior emotionally to the influence on others, while the fathers examine the boundaries and from them children learn more about how to cope in society and associate their behavior with the consequences (Sigman, 2011). The mother plays the role of patron, and the child often seeks maternal support and protection, while preferring to play with the father (Klarin, 2006).

In the set of factors that determine successful parenting, there is also the educational level of parents. When it comes to research concerning the role of the educational level of parents in relation to the social skills and competences of their children, they are mainly oriented towards the educational role of the mother, and the results support the thesis that children of mothers with a higher level of education have a higher level of development of social skills. Thus, Sindik and Lukačić (2012), examining the social competences of pre-school children, in terms of gender, the educational level of the mother and the number of brothers and sisters, concluded that socially more competent children are the ones with mothers with higher education, while Brajša - Žganec (2003) found that children of pre-school age whose mothers have a higher level of education manifest less aggressive behavior in the kindergarten environment.

## METHODS

The aim of the research is to examine the social skills of elementary school students, considering the educational level of their parents. In line with the aim, a research hypothesis was also set up, which assumes that there is a statistically significant difference between the results achieved by the elementary school pupils on the Inventory of Social Skills and in relation to the educational level of their parents. *A sample of the research* was made up of 506 students from six elementary schools from the city of Tuzla. The selection of schools where the research was conducted was made using the Spss quasi-random number generator. In the same way, the class collectives in which the survey was conducted, i.e., sample survey is random. Having in mind the gender of the respondents, the structure of the sample consisted of 225 girls and 281 boys.

The age of the respondents ranges from 11 to 14 years, i.e., the sample included 110 students of the fifth, 129 students of the sixth, 122 students of the seventh and 145 students of the eighth grade.

To measure social skills, the *Inventory of Social Skills - ISS* (Riggio and Throckmorton, 1986) was used, while for the purpose of obtaining data on the educational level of the parents of the respondents, the *Questionnaire of socio-status characteristics* was applied. The modified version of the Inventory of Social Skills, used for the purposes of this paper, consists of 28 items classified into seven subscales, namely two domains of the Inventory: emotional-non-verbal and social-verbal. The emotional-non-verbal domain of the Inventory consists of three subscales: Emotional expression, Emotional sensitivity and Emotional control, while the social-verbal domain of the Inventory is composed of four subscales: Social expression, Social sensitivity, Social control and Social manipulation. Each subscale consists of 4 particles represented in the form of a Likert type scale with response modes from 0 to 8 (0 = complete disagreement, 8 = total agreement).

The subscale Emotional expression reflects the skill of expressing emotions in a non-verbal way. Subscale Emotional sensitivity is a measure of the skill of decoding non-verbal messages, while Subscale of Emo-

tional control measures the ability to control their own emotions. Together, these three skills constitute an index of general emotional / non-verbal competence.

Subscales of the social-verbal domain of the Inventory reflect the verbal communication skills, whereby the Subscale of Social sensitivity is a measure of decoding and understanding of verbal communication, the Subscale of Social expression is a measure of veil expression and the ability to involve others in social interaction, while the Subscale of Social control refers to measuring the self-representing and playing skills role. Subscale Social manipulation is a measure of manipulation in communication with other people.

## RESULTS

### *Social skills of elementary school students with regard to the educational level of the mother*

Indicators that reflect the results of the respondents on the Inventory of Social Skills, with regard to the educational level of the mother, were analyzed individually for the Emotional-Non-verbal and Social-Verbal Area of the Inventory, and presented in the tables as follows.

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of the results of the respondents on the scales of the Emotional non-verbal area of the ISS in relation to the educational level of the mother

		N	M	SD	Std. Error	Min.	Max.
Emotional expression	ES	77	17.80	5.63	.64	.00	28.00
	HSE	247	17.19	5.52	.35	5.00	32.00
	AC	82	17.55	6.66	.73	6.00	32.00
	UD	100	17.44	6.17	.61	3.00	31.00
	Total	506	17.39	5.85	.26	.00	32.00
Emotional sensitivity	ES	77	21.06	7.34	.84	1.00	32.00
	HSE	247	21.43	6.34	.40	3.00	32.00
	AC	82	20.72	6.15	.68	8.00	32.00
	UD	100	19.75	7.71	.77	.00	32.00
	Total	506	20.93	6.77	.30	.00	32.00
Emotional control	ES	77	19.48	6.99	.79	2.00	32.00
	HSE	246	18.16	6.61	.42	1.00	32.00
	AC	82	17.45	6.85	.76	.00	32.00
	UD	100	16.72	7.35	.73	.00	32.00
	Total	505	17.96	6.89	.31	.00	32.00

ES=Elementary school education; HSE=High school education; AC=Academy; UD=University degree

For the purpose of checking the homogeneity of the subgroup variant, the Leven test procedure was applied, which indicates that the variances are uniform

and there are no statistically significant differences, so Variance Analysis was applied to determine the differences between groups.

Table 2. Variation analysis for the Emotional-non-verbal area of the Inventory, in relation to the variable "educational level of the mother"

		Sum of the square	df	Middle square	F	p
Emotional expression	Between the groups	25.04	3	8.35	.24	.87
	Within the group	17289.69	502	34.44		
	Total	17314.74	505			
Emotional sensitivity	Between the groups	205.81	3	68.60	1.50	.21
	Within the group	22928.48	502	45.67		
	Total	23134.29	505			
Emotional control	Between the groups	363.10	3	121.03	2.57	.05
	Within the group	23585.18	501	47.07		
	Total	23948.28	504			

In Table 2 it is evident that there is no statistically significant difference in the results achieved by elementary school students in scales from the

Emotional-non-verbal Area of the Inventory, and in relation to the educational level of the mother ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 3. Descriptive indicators of respondents' results on the scales of the Socio-verbal area of the Inventory, in relation to the educational level of the mother

		N	M	SD	Std. Error M	Min.	Max.
Social expression	ES	77	19.51	5.58	.64	4.00	30.00
	HSE	247	19.31	5.87	.37	0.00	32.00
	AC	82	18.99	5.41	.60	8.00	32.00
	UD	100	18.87	5.87	.59	6.00	31.00
	Total	506	19.20	5.74	.25	.00	32.00
Social sensitivity	ES	77	22.57	6.22	.71	7.00	32.00
	HSE	247	22.07	5.39	.34	6.00	32.00
	AC	82	20.46	5.07	.56	5.00	30.00
	UD	100	21.16	6.14	.61	5.00	32.00
	Total	506	21.70	5.65	.25	5.00	32.00
Social control	ES	77	19.26	5.88	.67	1.00	32.00
	HSE	247	18.60	5.47	.35	3.00	32.00
	AC	82	18.83	5.44	.60	3.00	30.00
	UD	100	17.48	6.47	.65	3.00	32.00
	Total	506	18.52	5.75	.25	1.00	32.00
Social manipulation	ES	77	18.61	5.56	.63	6.00	29.00
	HSE	247	18.60	5.22	.33	3.00	32.00
	AC	82	19.07	5.89	.65	3.00	32.00
	UD	100	20.16	5.94	.59	3.00	32.00
	Total	506	18.99	5.54	.25	3.00	32.00

Using the Leven test, a variance homogeneity test was performed, which found that the variance was uniform and that there were no statistically significant differences, which allowed the application of

the Variance Analysis to determine the difference between the results obtained by respondents on the Scales of the Socio-verbal area of the Inventory (Table 4).

Table 4. Variance analysis for the subscales of the Social-verbal area of the Inventory in relation to the variable „educational level of the mother“

		Sum of the square	df	Middle square	F	p
Social expression	Between the groups	25.12	3	8.37	.25	.86
	Within the group	16636.91	502	33.14		
	Total	16662.03	505			
Social sensitivity	Between the groups	246.60	3	82.20	2.59	.05
	Within the group	15926.51	502	31.73		
	Total	16173.12	505			
Social control	Between the groups	159.85	3	53.28	1.61	.18
	Within the group	16540.49	502	32.95		
	Total	16700.34	505			
Social manipulation	Between the groups	185.50	3	61.83	2.02	.11
	Within the group	15344.43	502	30.56		
	Total	15529.93	505			

By looking at the presented statistical indicators it is evident that there is no statistically significant difference between the results achieved on the scales from the Social-Verbal area by elementary school students whose mothers have different educational levels ( $p > .05$ ).

#### ***Social skills of elementary school students in relation to the educational level of the father***

Table 5. Descriptive indicators of respondents' results on the Inventory of Social Skills in relation to the educational level of the father

		N	M	SD	Std. Error M	Min.	Max.
Emotional expression	ES	41	17.93	5.63	0.88	4.00	32.00
	HSE	264	17.33	5.80	0.36	0.00	30.00
	AC	87	17.39	6.72	0.72	3.00	32.00
	UD	114	17.34	5.40	0.51	3.00	29.00
	Total	506	17.39	5.85	0.26	0.00	32.00
Emotional sensitivity	ES	41	22.46	6.46	1.00	8.00	32.00
	HSE	264	21.42	6.61	0.41	1.00	32.00
	AC	87	19.96	6.60	0.71	8.00	32.00
	UD	114	19.97	7.20	0.67	0.00	32.00
	Total	506	20.93	6.77	0.30	0.00	32.00
Emotional control	ES	41	20.07	6.29	0.98	6.00	32.00
	HSE	263	18.30	6.66	0.41	1.00	32.00
	AC	87	17.57	7.35	0.78	1.00	32.00
	UD	114	16.72	7.10	0.66	0.00	32.00
	Total	505	17.96	6.89	0.30	0.00	32.00
Social expression	ES	41	19.36	5.97	0.93	4.00	30.00
	HSE	264	19.55	5.88	0.36	0.00	32.00
	AC	87	18.65	5.29	0.56	6.00	32.00
	UD	114	18.76	5.67	0.53	7.00	31.00
	Total	506	19.20	5.74	0.25	0.00	32.00
Social sensitivity	ES	41	24.43	5.03	0.79	12.00	32.00
	HSE	264	21.83	5.60	0.34	6.00	32.00
	AC	87	20.42	5.49	0.59	5.00	31.00
	UD	114	21.41	5.83	0.55	5.00	32.00
	Total	506	21.70	5.66	0.25	5.00	32.00

Continuation of table 5.

		<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Std. Error M</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
Social control	ES	41	19.56	5.54	0.86	5.00	28.00
	HSE	264	18.94	5.90	0.36	1.00	32.00
	AC	87	18.16	5.05	0.54	3.00	31.00
	UD	114	17.43	5.85	0.55	3.00	32.00
	Total	506	18.52	5.75	0.25	1.00	32.00
Social manipulation	ES	41	19.95	5.43	0.85	6.00	32.00
	HSE	264	18.32	5.35	0.33	3.00	32.00
	AC	87	19.61	5.90	0.63	3.00	32.00
	UD	114	19.72	5.62	0.53	3.00	32.00
	Total	506	18.98	5.54	0.25	3.00	32.00

In order to verify the homogeneity of the subgroup variance, the method of the Leven test, whose results point to the uniformity of the variance, was used, and in order to verify the difference between the results obtained by

respondents on the Inventory of Social Skills and in relation to the Educational level of the father, the Variance analysis was applied (Table 6).

Table 6. Single-factor analysis of variance for subscales of the Inventory of social skills in relation to the educational level of the father

		<b>Sum of the square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Middle square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Emotional expression	Between the groups	12.92	3	4.30	0.12	.94
	Within the group	17301.82	502	34.47		
	Total	17314.74	505			
Emotional sensitivity	Between the groups	344.11	3	114.70	2.52	.05
	Within the group	22790.18	502	45.40		
	Total	23134.29	505			
Emotional control	Between the groups	401.95	3	133.98	2.85	.03
	Within the group	23546.33	501	46.99		
	Total	23948.28	504			
Social expression	Between the groups	80.90	3	26.97	.82	.48
	Within the group	16581.13	502	33.03		
	Total	16662.03	505			
Social sensitivity	Between the groups	462.81	3	154.27	4.93	.00
	Within the group	15710.31	502	31.29		
	Total	16173.12	505			
Social control	Between the groups	238.41	3	79.47	2.42	.06
	Within the group	16461.93	502	32.79		
	Total	16700.34	505			
Social manipulation	Between the groups	251.02	3	83.67	2.75	.04
	Within the group	15278.90	502	30.44		
	Total	15529.93	505			

According to the results presented in Table 6, there is a statistically significant difference on the Scale of Emotional Control and the Scale of Social Manipulation ( $p < .05$ ), as well as the Scale of Social Sensitivity

( $F = 4.93$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The direction of these differences was determined by applying the Post Hoc Comparison procedure (Table 7).

Table 7. Significance of differences between the results of the respondents on the scales Emotional Control, Social Sensitivity and Social Manipulation, and in relation to the educational level of the father

	(I) The educational level of father	(J) The educational level of father	The difference between M (I-J)	Std. Error	p
Emotional control		HSE	1.77	1.15	.12
	ES	AC	2.50	1.30	.05
		UD	3.35	1.25	.00
		HSE	AC	.72	.85
	AC	UD	1.58	.77	.04
		HSE	UD	.85	.97
HSE		HSE	2.61	.94	.00
Social sensitivity	ES	AC	4.01	1.05	.00
		UD	3.02	1.01	.00
		HSE	AC	1.40	.69
	AC	UD	.42	.63	.50
		UD	-.98	.80	.22
		HSE	HSE	1.63	.92
Social manipulation	ES	AC	.34	1.04	.74
		UD	.23	1.00	.82
		HSE	AC	-1.29	.68
	AC	UD	-1.40	.62	.02
		UD	-.11	.78	.89

According to the data from Table 7, statistically significant difference was observed between the results achieved by children whose fathers have completed only elementary school, compared to those whose fathers have a university degree ( $p < .01$ ). At the same time, pupils whose fathers have only elementary education show higher results. This is also the case with the results of the Social Sensitivity Scale, whereby the results of children whose fathers have elementary school completion are statistically significantly different in relation to children whose fathers have high school, academy and university qualifications ( $p < .01$ ). The results of children whose fathers have completed high school education are statistically significantly different on the Scale of Emotional Control ( $p < .05$ ) and the Scale of Social Manipulation ( $p < .05$ ) compared to the results of pupils whose fathers have academy qualifications, while the results of these students on the Scale of Social sensitivity significantly differ in relation to the results of pupils whose fathers have academy education ( $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In the process of learning social skills in children, the roles of parents are of primary importance. Intense

social changes, which are inherent in the time we live in, and which reflect on the family's educational function, increasingly complicate the role of parents, and it is necessary to empower parents' pedagogical competences.

In order to examine how the educational level of parents reflects on the process of learning and development of social skills in children, we have focused our attention on examining differences in the development of social skills of elementary school pupils, bearing in mind the educational level of their parents. Obtaining an insight into such indicators is one of the fundamental guidelines for understanding the phenomena of learning social skills in a family context, primarily having regard to the educational level of parents in this regard, as well as for identifying parents whose pedagogical perspective needs to be empowered to contribute and stimulate the development of socio-emotional skills of their children. Also, an understanding of social skills learning in different family settings, which is, inter alia, conditioned by the level of parent education is one of the indicators with which the pupils, having in mind the family educational environment from which they come, need additional educational work at school, in order to improve their socio-emotional development.

The results we have come to suggest that there is no statistically significant difference in the development of social skills in elementary school children, when the variables of the mother's educational level are taken into account. As a basis for explaining this result, some findings can be found (Brown & Sar, 1993; Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Windle, 1992; Deković & Raboteg-Šarić, 1997) that indicate that adolescents with close emotional ties with parents exhibit a higher level of social competence, self-esteem and responsibility, where they primarily satisfy the emotional, inner needs of the mother (Petrović & Mihić, 2009). It is well known that mothers unconditionally provide love and support to their children and, thanks to the inherent natural feeling of upbringing, form a strong emotional connection with them and thus a space for greater influence, and probably contribute to the socio-emotional development of their children, while the educational level of the mothers, in this context, is not of primary importance. However, if we consider school as a place of "living and gaining experience", a higher educational level of mothers should imply a higher level of pedagogical culture, that is, to contribute to the improvement of their educational role in general, and also to that part of the greater possibility influences on the development of their children's social skills. Naturally, parenting is also to be seen from the perspective of the wider social context, which is shaped by a multitude of influences, and in that respect it is necessary to consider the time factor that mothers of higher education, especially those employed, spend with their children and dedication to joint activities is a "space" for learning social skills.

Contrary to our results, the researches mentioned earlier in this paper (Brajša-Žganec, 2003 and Sindik & Lulačić, 2012) point to a different contribution of the mothers' educational level to the development of their children's social competences, i.e. pre-school children whose mothers have a higher educational level show a higher level of social competences. The reason for these differences between these and the results of our research can be related to the age of respondents, given that the network of social relationships with age is widening, so adolescents, besides parenting, are exposed to intertwined influence of teachers, peers, media while children of preschool age are exposed to a small number of influences, and dominant is parenting, which is more clearly reflected in the field of social skills and competences. Also, a preschool period in which a child is unable to meet a number of elementary needs independently implies greater involvement

of parents in the child's daily activities and caring for them.

The results we have come to include the social skills of elementary school pupils with regard to the educational level of the father point to the existence of statistically significant differences in the results of the respondents on certain subscales of the Inventory, with the difference in direction being such that pupils whose fathers are of the lower educational level show significantly better results in the Scale of Emotional Control, Social Sensitivity and Social Manipulation, compared to the children whose fathers have higher education. Examining the relationship between interpersonal values and social status, Majstorović (1998) has come up with similar results, i.e. lower status parents present an environment conducive to the development of the child's orientation towards the group, while better living conditions and higher family status stimulate the development of personal independence. This phenomenon is interpreted in a way that children whose parents are of lower social status are more prone to investing in warmth, understanding, and helping the group to get the same in return. Since it is not rare in our society to treat lower education families as inferior, it is possible for these reasons that pupils whose fathers are of the lower educational level show more developed skills such as emotional control, social sensitivity and social manipulation, compared to children whose fathers have higher educational qualifications. In the literature, while emphasizing the educational role of the father, in addition to education, the emphasis is placed on involvement in children's activities. According to the results of the research Wherry (2003, according to Sremic & Rijavac, 2010) aimed at examining the influence of parental involvement on students' school success, students whose parents participate in their activities more easily overcome their obligations, have better developed social skills, prefer to attend classes and are well adapted to the school environment. Stevenson and Baker (1987, according to Sremic & Rijovic, 2010) noted the positive correlation between parent involvement in child activities. All of this points to a possible explanation of our results and in a way that more educated fathers are oriented to their own activities and obligations, and therefore are less involved in everyday activities of children and spend little time with them, unlike fathers who have lower educational status, who possibly through their commitment, closeness and involvement in everyday child activities contribute to their socio-emotional development.



## CONCLUSIONS

Social skills are one of the fundamental factors for the successful functioning of an individual in different social contexts, and in the process of their learning the role of parents is of primary importance. The influence on the development of social skills in children is realized directly and indirectly by the parents, where this influence is determined by numerous factors, such as: development of the social skills of the parents themselves, involvement of parents in children's activities, quality of interaction between parents and child, socio-economic status, etc.

In order to study the social skills of elementary school pupils and in relation to the educational level of their parents, in this paper we have come to the conclusion that there is no statistically significant difference between the social skills of elementary school students, given the educational level of the mother, while the social skills of elementary school students statistically differ significantly in relation to the educational level of the father, in the way that elementary school students, whose fathers are of lower educational level, show greater development of emotional control, social sensitivity and social manipulation.

Such results indicate the need to strengthen the pedagogical culture of the parents, regardless of their educational level.

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