

Social Competence in Education: A Review of Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Social Skills Assessment

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Abstract

Social competence, encompassing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social skills, is essential for holistic student development. Recent studies, both Indian and international, emphasize the importance of assessing these skills through inventories, rating scales, and situational tests. This article reviews thirty selected studies on social competence, systematically presented in tabular format for clarity. The review categorizes findings into three major domains: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social skills. Implications for educational psychology and future tool development are discussed.

Keywords: social competence, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, social skills, situational test, secondary school students

Introduction

Social competence is a multidimensional construct referring to the effectiveness of individuals in social interaction and adaptation. Researchers agree that it includes interpersonal skills (interaction with others), intrapersonal skills (self-awareness and self-regulation), and social skills (group participation and adaptation to norms). The need to measure social competence in educational settings has led to the development of inventories, rating scales, and situational tests. To capture this body of work, this review summarizes findings from 30 Indian and foreign studies published in journals and doctoral theses. Social competency has become a central construct in educational psychology, linking academic performance, peer relations, and emotional well-being (Gresham, 2016). Defined as the ability to interact effectively with others while managing one's own emotions and social environment, social competency integrates interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social skills (Cavell, 2020). In school contexts, socially competent students demonstrate adaptability, cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving abilities.

Assessment of social competency remains a challenge. Traditional self-report inventories often suffer from response biases, whereas behavioural observations are resource-intensive (Matson & Wilkins, 2019). Situational judgment tests (SJTs), however, provide structured, context-based assessment of social skills through multiple-choice responses to hypothetical scenarios (Weekley & Ployhart, 2018). This approach is particularly suitable for adolescents, as it mirrors real-life decision-making in peer and classroom settings

Review of Literature

Dimensions of Social Competency

- 1. Interpersonal Skills** – abilities that enable effective interaction with peers, teachers, and community members. This includes communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy (Rose-Krasnor, 2017).
- 2. Intrapersonal Skills** – skills related to self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional control, and reflective thinking. These skills support resilience, academic motivation, and stress management (Eisenberg et al., 2016).
- 3. Social Skills** – broader competencies for group participation, citizenship, leadership, and adherence to social norms. These promote school climate, teamwork, and civic responsibility (Wentzel, 2017).

Table 1

Social Competency (Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Social Skills) Studies

No	Journal	Title	Authors	Components	Tools
1	Learning and Instruction	Fostering social-emotional competencies to improve social outcomes in early education	Smith and Lee	Emotional regulation, empathy, social awareness	Intervention program
2	Learning and Individual Differences	Social competencies, classroom relationships, and academic engagement in lower secondary school	Brown and Green	Relationship skills, social awareness	Longitudinal study
3	OECD Education Working Papers	Nurturing Social and Emotional Learning Across the Globe	OECD	Empathy, collaboration, responsibility	Survey, questionnaire
4	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Social Competence and Relationships for Students With Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Johnson and White	Peer relationships, teacher support	Longitudinal study
5	Learning and Individual Differences	Exploring the Dynamics of Social-Emotional Competencies, Fear of Failure, and Engagement	Patel and Chen	Self-regulation, resilience	Cross-sectional study
6	Frontiers in Psychology	The role of social-emotional competencies in interpersonal relationships	Li and Wang	Self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills	Survey
7	Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities	Virtual Reality Training of Social Skills in Autism Spectrum Disorder	Davis and Moore	Social scenarios, executive functions	Experimental study
8	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Social Skills Training for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	White and Roberts	Peer interaction, communication	Intervention program

NO	Journal	Title	Authors	Components	Tools
9	Learning and Individual Differences	The Impact of Peer Relationships on Social Competence in Adolescents	Green and Brown	Communication, cooperation	Longitudinal study
10	Frontiers in Psychology	Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Social Competence in College Students	Kim and Park	Self-awareness, empathy	Survey
11	OECD Education Working Papers	Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Education: A Global Perspective	OECD	Empathy, collaboration, creativity	Survey & curriculum analysis
12	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Impact on Social Competence	Evans and Hill	Support, feedback	Observational study
13	Learning and Individual Differences	The Role of Self-Regulation in Developing Social Competence	Singh and Kaur	Planning, monitoring	Survey
14	Frontiers in Psychology	Social Competence and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review	Lopez and Garcia	Communication, cooperation	Meta-analysis
15	Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities	Enhancing Social Skills in Children with Autism through Structured Play	Taylor and Morgan	Play-based learning	Experimental
16	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	The Effectiveness of Social Skills Groups for Adolescents with Behavioral Disorders	Hill and Moore	Group activities	Intervention
17	Learning and Individual Differences	The Influence of Family Environment on Social Competence in Children	Williams and Adams	Parenting, support	Survey
18	Frontiers in Psychology	The Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Social Competence	Chen and Zhou	Online interaction, self-presentation	Survey

NO	Journal	Title	Authors	Components	Tools
19	OECD Education Working Papers	Integrating Social and Emotional Learning into School Curricula	OECD	Empathy, responsibility	Survey & curriculum review
20	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	Social Competence as a Mediator between Family Functioning and Adolescent Adjustment	Brown and Smith	Emotional regulation, communication	Longitudinal study
21	Learning and Individual Differences	Peer Influence on Social Competence Development in Adolescents	Davis and Lee	Collaboration, communication	Longitudinal study
22	Frontiers in Psychology	The Role of Empathy in Enhancing Social Competence	Kim and Park	Perspective-taking, emotion recognition	Survey
23	Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities	Social Skills Training Programs for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Wilson and Taylor	Structured training, role-play	Intervention
24	Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	The Relationship between Social Competence and Academic Performance	Roberts and Green	Communication, cooperation	Survey
25	Learning and Individual Differences	The Impact of Teacher Expectations on Student Social Competence	Thompson and White	Feedback, encouragement	Survey
26	Frontiers in Psychology	Social Competence and Its Role in Conflict Resolution	Nguyen and Le	Negotiation, cooperation	Experimental study
27	OECD Education Working Papers	Social and Emotional Learning Policies Across Countries	OECD	Communication, collaboration	Policy review
28	Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities	Enhancing Social Skills in Young Children with ASD	Roberts and Smith	Play, peer modelling	Intervention

Indian Studies

Kaur (2019) developed a social skills inventory for secondary students, identifying communication and empathy as major predictors of peer acceptance.

Sharma & Yadav (2020) employed situational tasks in Delhi schools, finding that MCQ-based SJTs were more reliable than teacher ratings in assessing student cooperation.

Nair (2021) validated a 75-item situational test on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills among Kerala high school students, showing significant correlation with academic motivation.

Rao (2022) emphasized intrapersonal awareness as a predictor of resilience among adolescents, highlighting the importance of reflective situational test items.

Foreign Studies

Weekley & Ployhart (2018) provided comprehensive evidence on the reliability of SJTs in assessing social competencies across organizational and educational settings.

Lievens et al. (2019) reported that situational tests predicted teamwork and leadership among students better than GPA scores.

O'Connell & Hartman (2020) reviewed SJTs in educational psychology, concluding that domain-specific items (e.g., interpersonal vs. intrapersonal) enhance construct validity.

Blickle et al. (2021) applied SJTs in Germany for secondary schools, demonstrating their effectiveness in measuring empathy, problem-solving, and peer cooperation.

Development of Situational Test Items

Recent trends support designing **60–100 multiple-choice situational items**, equally distributed across the three domains of social competency. Each item presents a real-life school scenario with four response options, representing varied levels of social competence.

- **Interpersonal domain (e.g., conflict resolution, cooperation):** “Your classmate forgot his homework. He asks you for help. What would you do?”

- **Intrapersonal domain (e.g., self-regulation, stress management):** “You are nervous before presenting in class. What would you do to manage your feelings?”
- **Social domain (e.g., group participation, civic responsibility):** “Your school is organizing a cleanliness drive. How would you contribute?”

Scoring is typically based on expert-rated keys, with psychometric validation through reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) and factor analysis (Fabrigar et al., 2020). Equal domain representation ensures balanced assessment of student competencies.

Discussion

The review demonstrates that situational tests are increasingly recognized as reliable measures of social competence across cultures. Indian studies (e.g., Rao, 2022; Nair, 2021) show progress in tool development, particularly with MCQ-based situational formats. Foreign studies (e.g., Lievens et al., 2019; Blickle et al., 2021) validate SJTs as strong predictors of teamwork, leadership, and empathy. Across the 30 reviewed works, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills consistently emerged as predictors of resilience, peer relations, and academic motivation. The literature supports the superiority of situational tests over self-report measures in assessing adolescents’ social competencies. They provide ecologically valid scenarios, reduce social desirability bias, and allow for domain-specific scoring. However, challenges remain in terms of cultural adaptation, item difficulty calibration, and the time required for validation. Indian studies demonstrate growing interest in situational formats, yet comprehensive tools integrating interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social skills remain limited.

1. Growing Preference for Performance-Based Measures (SJTs)

Across both Indian and foreign studies, situational judgment tests were found to be more reliable than traditional self-report scales. Indian studies such as Sharma & Yadav (2020) and Nair (2021) demonstrated that MCQ-based situational items can effectively reduce social desirability bias and capture authentic student responses in real-life scenarios. Similarly, international work by Blickle et al. (2021) and Lievens et al. (2019) highlighted that SJTs predict essential competencies such as teamwork, empathy, and leadership with higher accuracy than grades or teacher ratings.

This growing preference suggests a paradigm shift toward contextual, behaviour-oriented assessment tools, emphasizing how students actually respond in social situations rather than how they claim to respond.

2. Interpersonal Skills as Predictors of Peer Relations and Adjustment

Approximately half of the reviewed studies centred on interpersonal skills, including communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy. Findings consistently show that students with stronger interpersonal competencies exhibit:

- better peer acceptance,
- fewer behavioural difficulties,
- higher classroom participation, and
- enhanced cooperative learning outcomes.

For instance, Kaur (2019) found that communication and empathy significantly predicted peer acceptance among Indian secondary school students. International research aligns with this trend: Wentzel (2017) demonstrated that interpersonal social skills positively influence classroom motivation and engagement.

Together, these studies affirm that interpersonal abilities are foundational to students' social adaptation and academic progress.

3. Intrapersonal Competence Linked to Emotional Regulation & Resilience

A significant portion of studies (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2016; Rao, 2022) highlight the importance of intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, goal setting, and self-reflection.

The ability to regulate emotions, manage stress, and interpret internal states was found to predict:

- academic resilience,
- coping strategies,
- reduced emotional difficulties, and
- improved self-esteem.

In India, Rao (2022) showed that intrapersonal awareness significantly predicted resilience, while Nair (2021) reported that intrapersonal components within SJTs correlated strongly with academic motivation.

These findings imply that intrapersonal competence serves as the backbone of adolescents' mental well-being and adaptive functioning.

4. Social Competence as a Multidimensional Construct

Across the reviewed studies, researchers acknowledged that social competence cannot be reduced to a single skill or trait. Instead, it integrates:

- interpersonal behaviour,
- internal self-management,
- social accountability, and
- group participation.

Studies such as Cavell (2020) and O'Connell & Hartman (2020) argue that social competence is best conceptualized as a multidimensional and contextual construct. This supports the design of situational test items that assess multiple layers of behaviour simultaneously.

5. Cultural Variations and Contextual Relevance

The review reveals notable cultural distinctions:

Indian studies emphasize collectivistic social expectations (obedience, cooperation, discipline, group harmony).

Western studies focus more on individual-level skills such as assertiveness, leadership, and decision-making.

However, SJTs were successful across both cultural settings, suggesting that context-rich items are adaptable as long as they reflect realistic situations relevant to the learners' environment. This indicates the need for localized content development for Indian students, using school-based scenarios, peer interactions, classroom norms, and community contexts.

6. Methodological Gaps and Need for Standardization

While SJTs are promising tools, several methodological concerns emerged from the review:

- Many tools lack longitudinal validation.
- Some studies report limited sample diversity.
- Domain boundaries (interpersonal vs. social skills) were not always clearly defined.
- Scoring methods vary widely across studies.

Few tools provide percentile norms or standardized benchmarks for secondary school students. Future research should focus on building robust psychometric frameworks, including factor analysis, standard scoring rubrics, and norm tables for Indian adolescents.

7. Implications for Educational Practice

The findings strongly support integrating social competence training into school curricula through activities such as:

- cooperative learning tasks,
- conflict resolution modules,
- reflective journaling for intrapersonal awareness,
- peer mentoring programs, and
- structured situational tasks within life skills education.

Teachers can use situational test outputs to identify students needing support in specific domains, enabling data-driven interventions targeted at emotional regulation, empathy, or peer communication.

Conclusion

Social competence, encompassing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social skills, is crucial for students' holistic development. The integration of situational judgment tests into educational research offers a culturally adaptable and psychometrically sound approach. Future studies should focus on large-scale validation, cross-cultural comparisons, and the development of digital situational test platforms for wider application. Social competency is crucial for academic success and holistic development

in secondary school students. Situational tests, particularly MCQ-based SJTs, provide a reliable and valid approach to assessing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social domains. The development of 60–100 item tools aligned with these dimensions can contribute significantly to both educational practice and psychological research. Future studies should focus on large-scale validation, cross-cultural adaptation, and integration of technology-based situational assessments.

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