

Social Cognition in Typically Developing Children: Comparing the Frequency and Typology of Responses

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Abstract:

The current study investigates the development of social cognition in typically developing children, by comparing the number of relevant and socially acceptable responses produced by 200 children in 3rd to 7th grade. Equal number of male and females were considered across each of these grades. A questionnaire based on 15 scenarios tapping skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptive skills, social cue interpretation, and cognitive abilities predominantly the problem solving skills. The task was open ended and for the purpose of analysis, the responses were coded into relevant responses (R), irrelevant responses (IR), and amateur responses (AR), these responses were analysed across grades. The median scores showed an increasing trend with relevant responses and the relevant and amateur responses decreased with age. Kruskal-Wallis test, non-parametric test revealed significant differences in response types across grade levels ($p < 0.05$). These findings show that social cognition shows an exponential trend and becomes relevant in advocating social cognition and emotional intelligence at home as well as school. The study emphasises on the importance of cultivating an environment enhancing the children's social skills, which are crucial for holistic development.

Key words: emotional intelligence; affective; social; developmental trend; theory of mind

Introduction

Social cognition refers to the processes by which individuals understand and interpret the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and behaviours of other individuals. In typically developing children, social cognition is assumed to develop in the early years of life. Social cognition skills rely on underlying processes such as joint attention and emotion recognition seen predominantly in the early childhood [1]. The skills are studied under the label of theory of mind. This ability enables children to organise their own thoughts and build perspectives of their own. This skill typically initiates at the age 4 or 5 and is important in facilitating social interactions,

The social cognition evolves over time and is influenced by a variety of factors, including social interactions with family, peers, and educators. The social cognition also facilitates the language development as it provides a room for children to socialise and communicate [2]. By the age at which the child attains adolescence, children would develop emotional intelligence, empathy and also cognitive skills which would enable in resolving conflicts and contribute for emotional wellbeing of the individual [3].

Need for the study: Social Cognition has been extensively studied in pre-schoolers and school going children and is often carried out in western context [4,5]. These studies unanimously show an exponential trend in terms of development, however social cognition is found to vary across certain variables like the geographical context, culture, socio economic

status etc., hence there is a need to study social cognition in the Indian context per se.

Aim of the study: To document social cognition in typically developing children

Objective of the study: To compare the number of relevant and socially acceptable responses in children between 3rd to 7th grade

Methods

Participants

A total of 200 participants were considered for the current study. The participants were pupils from classes 3rd to 7th. Eighty participants were selected from a school in Mysore and the rest of the participants were selected from a school in Kerala. Both of these schools followed the CBSE curriculum. Equal number of boys and girls were selected at random i.e., no prior selection criteria was instilled. Information about the study was provided and consent was taken from children, consent was taken from parents and teacher of the participants before the data collection.

Stimulus

A questionnaire containing of 15 scenarios related to daily life were coined by the investigators of the current study. The questions presented were open ended. The questionnaire aimed to assess emotional

intelligence (ex if you get lost in crowded place, what will you do?) , adaptive skill (ex If you failed at a test in spite of studying hard, what will you do?), interpretation of social cues (ex You have a chocolate with you but have no money left and a homeless child asks you for the chocolate, what will you do?) and problem solving (ex If you miss your alarm and are late to school, what will you do?).

Procedure

The data collection was carried out in a classroom setting in both the schools. Verbal responses were recorded for further analysis. Time taken for the completion of data collection with one participant was approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The responses ranged from no responses to maximum of 5 responses. Participants were expected to respond to the questions based on individual interpretations and reasoning, foregoing search for socially acceptable answers.

Analysis

The recorded data was analysed perceptually. Through perceptual analysis, options for each question were generated. Responses were categorized into male, female and classes between 3rd and 7th grade.

Results and Discussion

The responses produced by the participant was categorised into relevant responses (R), irrelevant responses (IR) and amateur responses (AR). The response was considered as relevant when the response was socially acceptable, the response was considered as irrelevant responses when the response was not socially acceptable and amateur was when the response was socially acceptable but was not in par with the age. The median of R, the four grades were 31, 38, 53,56 respectively while the median of IR was 19,11,7,3 across the four grades and the median of AR across the four groups were 19,16,8 and 2 respectively. It can be observed that the number of meaningful and relevant responses increased with age. While the number of irrelevant and amateur responses decreased with age. As the data was non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test was done to compare if there was a significant difference between the number of responses across the grade and the X2 value for three responses were 2.58,1.84 and 1.22 respectively and the corresponding p values showed significant difference across the grades for all the three response types.

The responses were not analysed across the different question types as it was beyond the objectives considered for the study. The analysis of the scores showed that the responses become more meaningful with age. Children with 3rd grade and 4th grade produced irrelevant responses and amateur responses showing that the social cognition is still in the verge of development in this particular age especially for the domain of problem

solving. The results of this study emphasises on the critical role of social cognition in the typically developing children. The aforementioned response categories highlighting the dynamic nature of development across the years. It is noteworthy that there was a significant increase in the number of relevant and socially acceptable responses as children and there was a significant decline in the irrelevant and amateur responses. This pattern aligns with the findings reported in literature and the social cognition skills entirely depend on the essential substrates like affective and cognitive development [3,4]. The limitation of the study was the study was carried out on a small group of individuals and has to be replicated on a larger group to ensure better generality of findings

Conclusion

The current study was carried out with the aim of comparing the frequency and typology of responses on social cognition domain and children between 3rd-7th grades were considered and a total of 200 children were enrolled for the study. Questionnaire tapping social cognition was specially constructed for the study and the questions revolved around emotional intelligence, adaptive skills, interpretation of social cues and problem solving. The task was open ended and the number of relevant, irrelevant and amateur responses produced by children was compared across the grade and the analyses showed that number of meaningful responses increased with age, while the number of irrelevant response and amateur responses decreased with age. The study would be extended by comparing the responses across gender and the response for each of the question type.

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