

# Integration of Life Skills Training in The Deaf Curriculum: Can it Develop Children's Social Skills?

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the importance of integrating life skills in developing the social skills of deaf children. The method used in this study was case study. The research subject in this study was two students and two teachers. Research instruments in this study used questionnaires. The instrument's preparation used a simple modification of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) measurement and then tested its validity using content validity, namely expert judgment. Data analysis in this study used descriptive qualitative, which was carried out by accumulating respondents' answers and adjusting to social skills criteria in the SSRS measurement. The results of this study indicate that integrating life skills programs into the curriculum can develop the social skills of deaf children. These social skills are shown in interactions with peers, which include cooperative behavior, assertiveness, and empathy.

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Children with special needs or disabilities children need learning that emphasizes pedagogical principles. These principles can be applied through student-centered learning to realize meaningful learning. One form of education that fits these criteria can be recognized by integrating life skills training (Saputra & Mariah, 2018). Life skills training is a form of learning that includes complex skills, such as setting realistic learning goals, solving problems, making decisions, evaluating student work, or developing interpersonal skills. The benefits children with special needs can experience through life skills training are increased abilities in dealing with the challenges and needs of everyday life and during life transitions, including personal affairs and positive social interactions. The life skills integration program can provide important insights for children with special needs through changes to learning interventions (Kingsnorth et al., 2015; McPherson et al., 2016).

Training related to life skills should be a form of learning integrated into all curriculum subjects and not separate content. Several previous studies revealed that life skills in the social aspect are one aspect of life skills that is very important to be imparted to middle and upper-level children (Helm-Stevens et al., 2019; McPherson et al., 2018; Smart et al., 2017), is no exception for children with special needs. Learning transitions that prioritize life skills need to be given to children with special needs, considering they also have a role in the community. This learning transition can be carried out with the cooperation of stakeholders, including parents, the community, and school institutions (DuPaul, 2018; Haack et al., 2019; Pffiffer et al., 2018). This opinion is reinforced by the needs of children with special needs when viewed from the perspective of individual development. A child with special needs growing up needs encouragement about independent life, which can be obtained through mastering life through life skills (Hilt & Riese, 2022).

Paying attention to the urgency of life skills training for children with special needs is necessary. That is because, in the implementation of education for children with special needs, it is still found that the life skills of children with special needs are low. Even though these skills are needed to support their independence in the social environment of society, some children with special needs have a low orientation towards planning their education and career compared to normal children. They also tend to have low expectations regarding work, life, personal relationships, or post-school education (Brooks et al., 2014; Tassé, 2021). Such conditions arise due to the lack of opportunities for children with special needs to develop life skills (King et al., 2018). Therefore, learning opportunities are needed for children with special needs that allow for improving and developing life skills (Aprilia et al., 2019).

Integrating life skills training into learning can help prepare students to face social changes in their surroundings (Ahmad Alwadai, 2023). More broadly, life skills aim to develop skills related to setting goals, handling failure, solving problems, surviving under pressure, communicating, receiving feedback, or working in groups (Hardcastle et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017). These abilities can be the ability of children with special needs to adapt to the social environment. There are several classifications

of children with special needs; this research will focus on deaf children. Deafness is a condition that causes an individual to experience damage, loss, or obstacles to his sense of hearing, so he does not have an excellent ability to perceive auditory stimuli through his sense of hearing (Cahaya, 2013; Evtasari et al., 2015).

The limitations possessed by deaf children cause them to experience difficulties in social adaptation to their environment (Wolters et al., 2014). In addition to communication difficulties, deaf children also tend to withdraw and show a less collaborative attitude when compared to normal children. Some findings reveal that deaf children feel shunned and ignored by their hearing peers. That causes them to have few interactions that support friendship with peers who can hear (Batten et al., 2014; Humphries et al., 2019; Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). Another factor that affects the low social adaptation of deaf children is family relationships. Deaf children from hearing families will experience language delays. The delay has an impact on the development of communication and understanding of the thoughts or feelings of others, the ability to control emotions, the level of understanding of social rules, and understanding of social functions (Bennett et al., 2022; Holman et al., 2022; Timmer et al., 2023).

Issues related to the social adaptation abilities of deaf children are problems that need to be studied. Therefore, this study aims to describe the importance of integrating life skills in developing the social skills of deaf children. Developing these social skills will allow deaf children to be adaptable. This study will focus on the social interaction skills of deaf children with their peers in special schools. This research is also based on the idea that experiential learning will increase abilities in children with special needs, such as self-improvement and personal skills. Learning left behind by experience will provide more significant opportunities for developing one's personality, especially if integrated into cooperative group activities (Jones et al., 2021).

## METHOD

### Research Design

Analysis of the need for integrating life skills training to develop the social skills of deaf children was carried out using a case study method. The selection of this method is based on considerations to describe the results of data findings related to social skills data in a comprehensive manner.

### Research Subject and Place

The subjects in this study were students at the senior high school level. The research subjects were determined by purposive sampling, with several criteria: 15—19 years old, deaf, and have received life skills training for three months. The subjects in this study were two students and two teachers who attended SLB Negeri Seduri Mojokerto, Indonesia. All subjects in this study had given informed consent for the research before they participated in this study. This research has been implemented in line with scientific research ethics with humans as subjects.

### Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The instrument's preparation uses a simplified modification of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) measurement for students and teachers, then re-tests its validity using content validity, namely expert judgment. SSRS contains three measurement focuses: social skills, behavioral problems, and academic competence (Gresham, 2001). First, the social skills scale consists of cooperation, affirmation, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. The number of subscales yields the level of behavior expressed in a particular behavior's descriptive frequency (based on a cut-off score). Second, the scale of behavioral problems includes externalization problems, internalization problems, and hyperactivity. This scale is interpreted in the same way as the social skills scale. Finally, the academic competency scale contains a single scale without any subscales. All subscale scores can be summed to give a standardized score and a percentile rating based on a normative sample. Each questionnaire contains ten items that can assess individual social behavior.

The questionnaire for students and teachers (social skills and problem behavior aspects) is divided into two parts using a Rating scale. The first part is determining how often students perform the behavior described in the statement. The first part has three scales, namely Never (0), Sometimes (1), and Very Often (2). The second part determines how essential students' behavior is to their relationships with others. The second part also has three scales, namely Not Important (0), Important (1), and Critical (2). At the same time, the questionnaire for teachers in the aspect of academic competence used a scale of (1) to (5). Number 1 indicates the lowest or most unfavorable performance, placing students in the lowest 10% of the class. A (5) indicates the highest or best performance, placing the student in the top 10% of the class. Based on the expert judgment that has been made, all statement items can be used for research.

**Table 1. SSRS Rating Scale in Social Skills and Problem Behavior Aspects**

| How Often? |           |            | How Important? |           |          |
|------------|-----------|------------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| Never      | Sometimes | Very Often | Not Important  | Important | Critical |
| 0          | 1         | 2          | 0              | 1         | 2        |

**Table 2. SSRS Rating Scale Academic Competency**

| Lowest | Next Lowest | Middle | Next Highest | Highest |
|--------|-------------|--------|--------------|---------|
| 10%    | 20%         | 40%    | 20%          | 10%     |
| 1      | 2           | 3      | 4            | 5       |

### Data Analysis

Data analysis used in this study uses data analysis that has been patented in measuring SSRS. In simple terms, data analysis in this study can be classified as a qualitative descriptive analysis, which is carried out by accumulating respondents' answers and adjusting to the withdrawal of social skills in the SSRS measurement: social skills, behavioral problems, and academic competence. Rating of importance and frequency of respondents' answers are used in this analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in this study were categorized according to the respondents, namely findings based on students' skills and findings based on teacher perceptions. Teacher perceptions in this study were divided into three domains: students' social skills, behavior problems, and academic competence. Two students were the subject and object of this study, namely one female student and one male student. The teacher who was the respondent in this study was the teacher who was responsible for teaching the two students. Each questionnaire in this study contains different indicators. The indicators on questionnaire to measure students' social skills consist of four social indicators, namely cooperative (C), assertiveness (A), empathy (E), and self-control (S). The indicators on the questionnaire to measure teachers' perceptions of students' social skills consist of three social indicators, namely cooperative (C), assertive (A), and self-control (S). While the questionnaire to measure student behavior problems consists of two indicators: internalizing (I) and externalizing (E). The research results will be described in more detail in the sub-sections below.

### Student Social Skills

One female student and one male student answered all the statements listed in the questionnaire to measure and find out students' social skills. There are 24 statements consisting of four leading indicators. The cooperative indicator (C) indicates social skills such as helping friends, sharing materials, and obeying rules and directions. Assertive indicators (A) indicate social skills such as asking others, introducing themselves, and responding to other people's actions. The empathy indicator (E) is used to indicate social skills, such as behavior that shows concern and respect for the feelings and perspectives of others. Meanwhile, the self-control indicator (S) demonstrates social skills such as responding to ridicule or compromising in non-conflict situations.

**Table 3. Summary of Student (Female)**

|           |    | Summary        |         |      |
|-----------|----|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer          | Average | More |
| C         | 10 |                |         |      |
| A         | 9  |                |         |      |
| E         | 12 |                |         |      |
| S         | 6  |                |         |      |
| Total     | 37 |                |         |      |

**Table 4. Summary of Student (Male)**

|           |    | Summary        |         |      |
|-----------|----|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer          | Average | More |
| C         | 9  |                |         |      |
| A         | 9  |                |         |      |
| E         | 15 |                |         |      |
| S         | 6  |                |         |      |
| Total     | 39 |                |         |      |

The research findings reveal that gender differences between female and male students affect the differences in social skills a student possesses. The results obtained in this study indicate that the social skills of male students are superior when compared to the social skills of female students. Female students still need to improve social skills in cooperative attitudes, empathy, and self-control. Meanwhile, male students need increased skills in cooperative attitudes and self-control. The two students who were the subjects of this study had similarities in assertiveness, in which both of them had assertive attitudes in the average category. When examined according to each attitude in social skills, cooperative attitudes and self-control become attitudes that require an urgency for improvement compared to other attitudes. That is because the two research subjects still show the need to increase cooperative attitudes and self-control.

The scores obtained from the answers of the two students can illustrate the lack of social skills possessed by deaf children, both female, and male. Social skills are one aspect of the skills taught in life skills training programs (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Life skills training on social skills can help deaf children learn and develop the essential social skills they need. These social skills will help them become more productive individuals and make life transitions from school to community life (Movallali et al., 2014). However, the current learning trend for children with special needs often forgets the vital role of forming and developing the social behavior of students with special needs, which in this study was devoted to children with hearing impairments. Several other problems are shown in education programs for deaf children, namely functional life skills and educational transition services (Kirk et al., 2015).

The lack of social skills possessed by deaf children can hinder the process of transitioning their lives toward community life (Baranauskienė & Kovalenko, 2021). Life skills training can be a multilevel behavioral intervention that emphasizes social learning to prevent the emergence of problems related to emotional problems, behavioral problems, and the self-concept of each deaf student. Life skills training can also improve relationships and interactions between students and their peers (Hodge et al., 2013; Xie et al., 2014). Similar research also revealed a significant and positive increase in students' cooperative, assertive, and self-control attitudes through life skills training (Kazemi et al., 2014; Nafiseh et al., 2022; Pourmohamadreza Tajrishi et al., 2019). Although the subjects in this study had not shown significant improvement, the two students began to show an increase in social skills, namely assertiveness, compared to before receiving life skills training. Suppose the training continues to be given to students. In that case, there may be changes in the results of social skills, namely in the form of an increase in all attitudes, which are indicators of measuring and knowing the social skills of deaf children.

### Teacher Perceptions

#### 1) Student Social Skills

There are 26 statements consisting of three leading indicators. The cooperative indicator (C) indicates social skills such as helping friends, sharing materials, and obeying rules and directions. Assertive indicators (A) indicate social skills such as asking others, introducing yourself, and responding to other people's actions. Meanwhile, the self-control indicator (S) demonstrates social skills such as responding to ridicule or compromising in non-conflict situations.

**Table 5. Summary of Student (Female)**

| Summary   |    |                |         |      |
|-----------|----|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer          | Average | More |
| C         | 14 |                |         |      |
| A         | 11 |                |         |      |
| S         | 10 |                |         |      |
| Total     | 35 |                |         |      |

**Table 6. Summary of Student (Male)**

| Summary   |    |                |         |      |
|-----------|----|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer          | Average | More |
| C         | 15 |                |         |      |
| A         | 10 |                |         |      |
| S         | 10 |                |         |      |
| Total     | 35 |                |         |      |

#### 2) Problem Behaviors

There are 11 statements consisting of two leading indicators. The internalizing indicator (I) indicates anxiety, sadness, loneliness, and low self-esteem. At the same time, the externalizing indicator (E) is used to indicate verbal or physical aggression towards other people, poor emotional control, and fighting.

**Table 7. Summary of Student (Female)**

| Summary   |   |                |         |      |
|-----------|---|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |   | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |   | Fewer          | Average | More |
| E         | 3 |                |         |      |
| I         | 2 |                |         |      |
| Total     | 5 |                |         |      |

**Table 8. Summary of Student (Male)**

| Summary   |   |                |         |      |
|-----------|---|----------------|---------|------|
| How Often |   | Behavior Level |         |      |
|           |   | Fewer          | Average | More |
| E         | 4 |                |         |      |
| I         | 4 |                |         |      |
| Total     | 8 |                |         |      |

#### 3) Academic Competency

Nine statements are used to determine the teacher's perception of the academic competence shown by their students in the class compared to other students.

**Table 9. Summary of Student (Female)**

| Summary   |    |                  |         |      |
|-----------|----|------------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Competence Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer            | Average | More |
| Total     | 42 |                  |         |      |

**Table 10. Summary of Student (Male)**

| Summary   |    |                  |         |      |
|-----------|----|------------------|---------|------|
| How Often |    | Competence Level |         |      |
|           |    | Fewer            | Average | More |
| Total     | 37 |                  |         |      |

Based on the detailed results of the entire section above, there are differences between what is felt by students and what is observed by the teacher. The findings in this study indicate that in the teacher's perception, there has been an increase in students' social skills. Students who are the object of teacher observation in this study have shown improvement in both aspects of social skills and in handling social behavior problems. This increase was shown in the change in the student's social behavior category, which was previously low or less towards the average category. The academic competence of students also supports this increase.

The results obtained in this study are in line with similar studies. Research by Ambarudin (2020) revealed that life skills training relates to students' academic abilities. Although it has shown an increase in social skills, the implementation of life skills training in schools in this study still needs to be integrated. The effectiveness of life skills training for deaf children may show

more significant results if the training program is integrated into the general curriculum to integrate academic competencies, social skills, and other skills (Ashori, 2021; Behroz-Sarcheshmeh et al., 2017). Life skills training also shows that some skills or abilities can improve the welfare of children with special needs. In addition, life skills training can be a form of education that pays attention to interpersonal relationships, decision-making, effective communication, empathy, self-awareness, self-control, and students' emotions (Pramesti Anindyawardhani et al., 2023; Purba Bagus Sunarya et al., 2018).

Life skills training given to deaf children can also be an effort to shape the personality of deaf children into individuals who can fight negative pressure, make more positive decisions, and avoid behavior that is risky or can endanger deaf children in their lives in society (Jaya et al., 2018). Integrating life skills training into education for children with special needs can help modify learning approaches for children with special needs (Adibsereshki et al., 2015), which in this study was specifically for deaf children. The teacher's perception of changes and improvements in the social skills of the deaf students they teach is the answer to this research question.

Even though this research was conducted on a narrow and limited subject, the results obtained in this study have similarities with some of the findings of previous studies. Vernosfaderani (2014), in his research, proved that life skills training has a significant effect on the social skills of deaf children, such as self-esteem. Kazemi et al. (2014), in his research, also proved that providing life skills training can improve the social behavior of children with disabilities. Behroz-Sarcheshmeh et al. (2017) also proved a positive and significant increase in cooperative, self-control, and assertive skills in children with intellectual disabilities. The latest research was conducted by Ashori (2021), which proved that life skills training for deaf children impacted the multilevel social skills of deaf children. Life skills training can also encourage improving the relationship between deaf children and their peers.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, integrating life skills training into the curriculum for deaf children can be a means and effort to develop deaf children's social skills. However, in its implementation, life skills training must be integrated and not used as separate content. The increase in social skills shown by students in this study was an increase in cooperative, assertive, and empathetic attitudes. At the same time, self-control is an attitude that still needs further development. The findings obtained in this study can illustrate the vital role of life skills training aimed at the social skills of children with special needs so that they can interact positively with their surroundings. Some of the limitations contained in this study can be noted. The first limitation is the small number of research subjects. The second limitation is that the subjects in this study have yet to receive life skills training for a long enough period, so the improvement in social skills is not seen significantly. The third limitation is that this study ruled out the influence of students' socioeconomic status on the social behavior they exhibit at school. Based on the limitations of this study, there are several suggestions for further research. First, it is hoped that other researchers will be able to conduct similar research using different methods that can reveal the urgency of integrating life skills training into the curriculum for deaf children, which is focused on aspects of social skills with a broader research subject. Second, the research subjects focused on deaf children who had received life skills training for a more extended period. Third, other studies can include factors of students' socioeconomic status to measure and determine their influence on the social behavior shown by students in their schools.

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