The Effect of Cyberspace on the Learning of Students' Social Skills from Teachers' Perspective
(Case Study: Hamoun County)

* Saeid Mohammadi Sadegh iD   ** Hossein Ebrahimzadeh Asmin iD
*** Farhad Gholamiyan iD

⁎ Assistant professor department of social sciences faculty of literature and humanities, university of Sistan and Baluchistan, Zahedan, Iran. sms@lihu.usb.ac.ir
⁎⁎ Associate Professor of ,Urban and regional planning‹Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran.. h.ebrahim@lihu.usb.ac.ir
⁎⁎⁎ Master's student, Social Sciences, Faculty of Literature, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran. farhadgholamiyan76@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of cyberspace on the learning of social skills among secondary school students from the perspective of teachers in Hamoun County. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational method, the study surveyed 313 teachers using the Matson Social Skills Questionnaire. Results from Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses showed a significant positive relationship between cyberspace usage and five components of students' social skills: appropriate social behavior, avoidance of antisocial behavior, reduced aggression and impulsivity, reduced superiority seeking, and improved peer interaction. These findings highlight the dual potential of cyberspace in enhancing or weakening students' social development depending on how it is used

Keywords: Cyberspace, Social Skills, Students, Teachers, Hamoun.

Corresponding Author: Hossein Ebrahimzadeh Asmin– H.ebrahim@lihu.usb.ac.ir

Introduction

The advent of cyberspace and digital technologies has drastically transformed how students communicate, interact, and learn social norms. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for connection and collaboration, concerns have been raised about their impact on face-to-face interactions and non-verbal social abilities. The central question of this study is whether cyberspace fosters or hinders students' acquisition of essential social skills. Social skills, as fundamental components of students' personal and academic success, encompass a range of competencies including empathy, emotional control, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Previous research has pointed to both the opportunities and threats posed by digital media. Some studies highlight how digital platforms enhance students' verbal expression and participation, while others emphasize the risk of isolation and superficial relationships. Given these mixed findings, this study aims to provide empirical evidence from the Iranian context, focusing specifically on Hamoun County.

Methodology

This research employed a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population included all secondary school teachers (N=740) in Hamoun County during the 2023–2024 academic year. Based on Morgan's table, a sample of 313 teachers was selected via simple random sampling. The main instrument was the Matson Social Skills Questionnaire (1983), consisting of 56 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In addition, a researcher-made questionnaire measured students' cyberspace usage patterns. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (v26) and AMOS for descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and path analysis.

Findings

The results indicated a significant positive correlation between cyberspace use and all five dimensions of social skills:
- Appropriate behavior ($r = 0.440$, $p < 0.001$)
- Avoidance of antisocial behavior ($r = 0.491$, $p < 0.001$)
- Reduction in aggression and impulsivity ($r = 0.338$, $p < 0.001$)
- Reduced superiority seeking ($r = 0.151$, $p = 0.014$)
- Improved peer communication ($r = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$)

The regression analysis confirmed that cyberspace use significantly predicts variations in social skill dimensions, with the highest predictive power for avoidance of antisocial behavior. Path analysis results showed good model fit indices (RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.96), confirming direct positive effects of cyberspace on social skills.

Conclusion

The study concludes that cyberspace, when used consciously and within a guided educational framework, can enhance students' social competencies. It provides platforms for meaningful peer interactions, access to diverse perspectives, and opportunities for collaboration. However, unregulated or excessive use may hinder non-verbal communication development and reduce real-life social engagements. Hence, integrating media literacy and balanced digital use into educational policies is essential. Training teachers and students in mindful cyberspace use can maximize its benefits while minimizing its risks.

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