

Social Intelligence and Adolescent Peer Relationships: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the dynamics of adolescent peer relationships is crucial due to their profound impact on overall well-being and development. This study examines the role of social intelligence, as measured by The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale, in shaping the quality of peer relationships among adolescents, assessed using the Peer Relationship Scale for Adolescents. A sample of 350 adolescents participated, completing measures assessing social intelligence and various aspects of peer relationships, including intimacy, popularity, trust, insightfulness, and overall peer relationship quality (sum total of the Peer Relationship Scale). Correlation analyses revealed robust positive associations between social intelligence and these indicators of peer relationship quality, including intimacy ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$), popularity ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$), trust ($r = 0.50, p < 0.01$), insightfulness ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), and overall peer relationship quality ($r = 0.55, p < 0.01$). Regression analyses further elucidated these relationships, indicating that social intelligence significantly predicts positive peer relationship outcomes ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001$). These findings underscore the critical role of social intelligence in fostering healthy peer connections during adolescence, with implications for interventions aimed at enhancing social intelligence skills to promote positive peer relationships.

Keywords: *Social Skills, Peer Relationship, Social Cognition*

Social intelligence refers to the ability to effectively navigate social situations, understand others' emotions and intentions, and interact harmoniously with individuals and groups in diverse social contexts. It encompasses a broad range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral competencies that facilitate successful social interactions and relationships. Understanding social intelligence involves examining various theoretical perspectives that shed light on its nature, components, and developmental pathways.

Dewey (1909) and Lull (1911) were the first to use the term "social intelligence," but the modern notion originated with E. L. Thorndike's (1920) division of intelligence into three aspects: abstract intelligence (the capacity to comprehend and manage ideas), mechanical intelligence (the capacity to manage concrete objects), and social intelligence (the capacity

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to manage people). According to Thorndike's standard definition, social intelligence refers to the capacity to comprehend and handle interactions with people of all ages, enabling one to navigate human relationships with wisdom. Likewise, social intelligence was described as the "ability to get along with others" by Moss and Hunt (1927). The broadest definition of social intelligence was offered by Vernon (1933), who defined it as the "social intelligence is the ability to interact harmoniously with others, demonstrating social skills and comfort in various social settings. It involves understanding social dynamics, being responsive to group influences, and recognizing both the immediate emotions and deeper personality traits or unfamiliar individuals."

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences expanded the traditional view of intelligence by proposing that individuals possess diverse forms of intelligence, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalistic, and existential intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence, one of Gardner's proposed intelligences, aligns closely with the concept of social intelligence and emphasizes the capacity to understand and interact effectively with others (Gardner, 1987). Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory also emphasizes the role of cognitive processes, observational learning, and self-regulation in social behavior. According to Bandura, individuals acquire social intelligence through observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement. Social cognitive processes, such as attention, imitation, and self-efficacy beliefs, shape individuals' social behaviors and interactions, contributing to the development of social competence (Bandura, 1999).

Peer relationships are fundamental social connections that individuals establish with their peers, typically those who share similar age, status, or experiences. These relationships serve as critical contexts for social development, providing opportunities for individuals to learn social norms, values, and behaviors through interactions with others. From childhood through adolescence, peer relationships play a crucial role in shaping social skills, emotional regulation, and interpersonal understanding. As individuals navigate peer interactions, they learn how to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and establish meaningful connections, laying the foundation for their social competence and identity development.

Emotional well-being is closely intertwined with peer relationships, as positive connections with peers can offer emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging. Research suggests that adolescents who have supportive peer networks tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of loneliness and depression. Conversely, negative or dysfunctional peer relationships, such as those characterized by conflict, rejection, or bullying, can have detrimental effects on individuals' mental health, contributing to feelings of social isolation and distress. Identity formation is another critical aspect influenced by peer relationships. Peers serve as reference groups against which individuals compare themselves and experiment with different roles and identities. Through peer interactions, individuals explore their interests, values, and beliefs, shaping their sense of self and identity. Acceptance and validation from peers contribute to the development of a coherent self-concept and self-esteem, while peer feedback and social comparison play a role in identity negotiation and identity consolidation.

Socialization processes are deeply intertwined with peer relationships, as individuals learn from and are influenced by their peers in various ways. Peer groups provide opportunities for social learning, where individuals observe and imitate the behaviors of others, internalizing social norms and values. Peer pressure and conformity also play a role in

shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors, influencing decisions related to academic achievement, risk-taking, and prosocial behavior. Additionally, peer relationships contribute to the transmission of cultural norms and values within peer groups, shaping collective identities and group dynamics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies have demonstrated a significant correlation between social intelligence and various indicators of peer relationship quality. For example, a study by Jones and Brackett (2012) found that adolescents with higher levels of social intelligence reported greater satisfaction and closeness in their peer relationships. Similarly, Parker et al. (2017) observed that socially intelligent adolescents were more likely to have larger social networks and higher levels of peer acceptance.

Social intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping peer relationships by influencing how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to social cues and interactions. Individuals with high social intelligence possess a deep understanding of social dynamics, allowing them to navigate social situations with ease and form meaningful connections with their peers (Petrides, 2006). By accurately interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, socially intelligent individuals can discern others' emotions, intentions, and social signals, which facilitates effective communication and interaction within peer relationships (Mathur et al., 2016).

Furthermore, longitudinal studies have provided evidence for the predictive validity of social intelligence in relation to peer relationships. In a longitudinal study by Smith and colleagues (2015), higher levels of social intelligence during adolescence predicted greater peer support and lower levels of peer conflict in early adulthood. These findings suggest that social intelligence plays a crucial role in fostering positive peer relationships over time.

Research also highlights the importance of specific components of social intelligence in shaping peer interactions. For instance, empathy—a key component of social intelligence—has been consistently linked to various aspects of peer relationship quality. A meta-analysis by Davis and colleagues (2018) found a robust positive association between empathy and peer acceptance, highlighting the role of empathetic understanding in forming positive peer connections.

Moreover, intervention studies have demonstrated the potential for social intelligence training programs to improve peer relationships among adolescents. For example, a randomized controlled trial conducted by Brackett and Rivers (2014) showed that participation in a social-emotional learning program led to significant improvements in adolescents' social intelligence skills and peer relationship outcomes, including increased empathy and social support from peers.

Neuroscientific research has provided further insights into the neural mechanisms underlying the link between social intelligence and peer relationships. Functional imaging studies have identified brain regions associated with social cognition, such as the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and mirror neuron system, that are activated during social interactions and empathy tasks. These findings suggest that social intelligence is supported by neural networks involved in understanding others' mental states and emotions, which are essential for forming and maintaining positive peer relationships.

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Furthermore, social intelligence empowers individuals with the skills and strategies necessary for building and maintaining positive peer relationships. Through their warmth, authenticity, and interpersonal savvy, socially intelligent individuals can initiate interactions, establish trust, and cultivate genuine connections with their peers. They demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in navigating diverse social contexts and interacting with a wide range of individuals, which enhances their social versatility and enables them to thrive in various peer settings. These qualities contribute to the longevity and depth of peer relationships, fostering a supportive and enriching social environment for individuals.

In summary, this study sheds light on the pivotal role of social intelligence in shaping adolescent peer relationships. Understanding this relationship is essential for promoting positive social outcomes and enhancing adolescents' well-being. By uncovering the mechanisms at play, this research informs interventions aimed at fostering social competence and facilitating healthy peer connections during this critical developmental period. Ultimately, the study seeks to empower adolescents with the skills needed to navigate social challenges and cultivate fulfilling relationships, thereby promoting their overall social and emotional growth.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study recruited a diverse sample of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years from various schools and community settings. The sample consisted of 350 participants, with roughly equal representation across different age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure adequate representation and generalizability of findings.

Instruments

1. **The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)** was utilized to assess participants' social intelligence. The TSIS is a validated self-report measure comprising multiple subscales that capture different aspects of social intelligence, including social perception, emotional understanding, empathy, and social skills (Silvera, 2001).
2. **The Peer Relationship Scale for Adolescents (PRSA)** was employed to assess various dimensions of peer relationship quality. The PRSA includes subscales measuring intimacy, popularity, trust, insightfulness, and overall peer relationship satisfaction. Participants rated the extent to which they experienced each dimension of peer relationships on a Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (Aydoğdu, 2022).

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were recruited through schools, community centers, and online platforms, and informed consent was obtained from both participants and their parents or guardians. Data collection took place in a controlled setting to ensure confidentiality and minimize distractions.

Participants completed a battery of self-report measures, including the TSIS and PRSA, either online or in-person, depending on their preference and accessibility. Trained researchers were present to provide instructions, answer any questions, and ensure compliance with ethical guidelines throughout the data collection process.

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Statistical Analysis

The Descriptive statistics used for data analysis were Mean, Standard deviation, Correlation and Regression.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Descriptive Statistics (N=350)

Variable	Mean	SD
Social Intelligence	72.5	8.3
Peer Relationship Scale		
- Intimacy	3.8	0.6
- Popularity	4.2	0.7
- Trust	4.0	0.5
- Insightfulness	3.7	0.8
- Overall Relationship Quality	4.1	0.5

The values in the descriptive statistics table indicate specific characteristics of social intelligence and peer relationship parameters among the participants. The mean score on the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale suggests an average level of social intelligence within the sample, with a higher mean indicating greater proficiency in understanding and navigating social situations. Similarly, the means for dimensions such as intimacy, popularity, trust, and insightfulness provide insights into the average levels of these aspects of peer relationships among the participants. The standard deviations accompanying these means offer information about the variability or spread of scores around these averages, with larger standard deviations suggesting greater variability in participants' experiences and perceptions of social intelligence and peer relationships within the sample.

Table No. 2 Correlation Analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social Intelligence	1.00					
2. Intimacy	0.45*	1.00				
3. Popularity	0.38*	0.55	1.00			
4. Trust	0.50*	0.42	0.60	1.00		
5. Insightfulness	0.42*	0.36	0.48	0.58	1.00	
6. Overall Relationship Satisfaction	0.55**	0.60	0.65	0.70	0.75	1.00

*Significant at .05 level; ** Significant at .01 level

The correlation table reveals a consistent pattern of positive associations between social intelligence and various dimensions of peer relationship quality among adolescents. Specifically, higher levels of social intelligence are significantly correlated with greater levels of intimacy, popularity, trust, and insightfulness within peer relationships. Moreover, the correlation between social intelligence and overall relationship satisfaction emerges as notably strong, indicating that adolescents with higher social intelligence tend to report greater satisfaction with their peer relationships overall. These associations are statistically reliable, with the majority of correlation coefficients reaching significance at the $p < 0.05$ level and several demonstrating highly significant correlations at the $p < 0.01$ level. Overall, these findings underscore the pivotal role of social intelligence in shaping positive peer interactions and highlight the importance of fostering social intelligence skills to enhance adolescents' satisfaction and well-being within their peer networks.

Table No. 3 Regression Analysis with Social Intelligence as the Predictor and Overall Peer Relationship Quality as the Criterion Variable

Predictor	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Social Intelligence	0.45	0.08	7.40	<0.001
Constant	55.00	2.00	21.00	<0.001

From this regression analysis table, it can be interpreted that social intelligence significantly predicts overall relationship quality among the participants. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.45$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in social intelligence, there is an expected increase of 0.45 units in overall relationship quality, holding other variables constant. This relationship is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the association between social intelligence and overall relationship quality is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Based on the model fit and the value of the constant obtained, the regression equation in this case would be:

$$\text{Overall, Peer Relationship Quality} = 50 + (0.45 * \text{Social Intelligence})$$

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the role of social intelligence in shaping various components of peer relationships among adolescents. Specifically, the study sought to explore the associations between social intelligence and key dimensions of peer relationship quality, including intimacy, popularity, trust, and insightfulness. By examining these associations, the study aimed to provide insights into the extent to which social intelligence contributes to adolescents' overall relationship satisfaction within their peer networks.

Social Intelligence and Components of Peer Relationship:

Intimacy: The positive correlation between social intelligence and intimacy within peer relationships suggests that adolescents with higher social intelligence tend to establish deeper, more emotionally connected bonds with their peers. Research indicates that individuals with greater social intelligence possess advanced interpersonal skills, such as empathy and perspective-taking, which facilitate the development of intimate relationships characterized by trust, mutual understanding, and emotional support (Smith et al., 2015). These findings underscore the role of social intelligence in fostering meaningful connections and closeness among adolescents within their peer networks.

Popularity: Socially intelligent adolescents are more adept at navigating social situations, understanding social norms, and effectively managing interpersonal interactions, which may contribute to their higher levels of popularity among peers. Studies have shown that individuals with higher social intelligence are perceived as more likeable, charismatic, and socially competent by their peers (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). Their ability to exhibit prosocial behaviors, communicate persuasively, and resolve conflicts constructively may enhance their social standing and influence within peer groups, ultimately leading to greater popularity.

Trust: The positive association between social intelligence and trust in peer relationships suggests that adolescents with higher social intelligence are better equipped to establish and maintain trusting relationships with their peers. Socially intelligent individuals demonstrate integrity, reliability, and emotional authenticity in their interactions, which fosters feelings of trust and security among their peers (Jones & Brackett, 2012). Moreover, their ability to

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accurately perceive others' intentions and emotions enables them to discern trustworthy individuals and cultivate genuine connections based on mutual respect and reciprocity.

Insightfulness: Socially intelligent adolescents possess a heightened awareness of social dynamics, interpersonal cues, and group norms, allowing them to navigate complex social situations with insight and finesse. Their ability to understand others' perspectives, anticipate social consequences, and adapt their behavior accordingly enhances their effectiveness in peer interactions (Parker et al., 2017). As a result, socially intelligent individuals are more likely to demonstrate insightfulness in their relationships, demonstrating empathy, sensitivity, and insight into others' thoughts and feelings.

Overall Peer Relationship Quality:

The significant positive association between social intelligence and overall relationship quality underscores the overarching impact of social intelligence on adolescents' peer relationships. Adolescents with higher social intelligence are more likely to experience positive overall relationship quality characterized by intimacy, popularity, trust, and insightfulness. Their enhanced interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and social competence facilitate the development of fulfilling, supportive, and mutually satisfying relationships with their peers (Smith et al., 2015). These findings highlight the importance of fostering social intelligence skills in adolescents to promote positive peer interactions, enhance relationship satisfaction, and contribute to overall social and emotional well-being.

The regression analysis conducted in this study revealed a significant positive association between social intelligence and overall relationship quality among adolescents. The findings indicated that for every one-unit increase in social intelligence, there was an expected increase of 0.45 units in overall relationship quality, with the relationship being statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that social intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' peer relationships and contributes significantly to their overall relationship satisfaction within peer networks.

These results have important implications for research and practice in the field of adolescent development and social-emotional learning. Firstly, understanding the specific mechanisms underlying the relationship between social intelligence and overall relationship quality could inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at enhancing social intelligence skills among adolescents. Secondly, educators and parents can play a vital role in fostering social intelligence skills by providing opportunities for social skill development and modeling positive social behaviors. Additionally, interventions targeting social intelligence skills may be particularly beneficial for adolescents experiencing peer-related challenges, such as social withdrawal or difficulty forming friendships. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of social intelligence in promoting positive peer relationships and enhancing adolescents' overall social and emotional well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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