

Gender and Social Competence of Younger Students

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Abstract

The author found it interesting to check the level of expression of gender differentiated social competence among students of early school age. In this case, four factors constituting social competence were taken into account, namely learning motivation, antisocial behaviour, social inhibition and socialization. The data was provided by the results of the second part of the "Student Behaviour Sheet" drawn up by B. Markowska. The research was part of an experiment conducted among a group of 36 primary school third grade students, of which there were 19 (53%) boys and 17 (47%) girls.

Keywords: gender, social competence, younger student.

Introduction

The etymology of the word „competence” dates back to basic assumptions of psycho- and neo-behaviourism. The notion was used for the first time by R. W. White more relating to an original one, interpreted as the pursue of efficient influence upon the environment (effectance motivation). Thus, this competence was interpreted as every skill of a human being which contributes to an efficient interaction with the environment (White, 1958). The notion was easily absorbed by social psychology, where such concepts as social or interpersonal competence are used (Sęk, 1988). Currently, it appears more frequently among contemporary opinions on education and teaching.

‘Social development, socialising and interpersonal communication competence are related, among others, with the feeling of social competence, or one’s own imaginations of their possibilities and capabilities of certain social behaviours’ (Huget, 2001). Therefore, the more stronger an individual is convinced about their competence, the more successes they experience in their active encounters with the environment, focused on achieving goals (Sęk, 1988); for this reason, it is assumed that people adjusted to function in a society will be characterised by a high level of the feeling of social competence, meanwhile those who are not adjusted will present a low level (Huget, 2001).

Social competence fulfils a plethora of various functions, such as the support for coping with new situations, extending the possibilities of fulfilling social needs, facilitation of providing social support as well as opening broader perspectives of participating in a civil society and revoking the process of self-creation and self-development. Besides, it is worth mentioning the advantages on the communicative level, or better understanding and communicating as well as knowing new people. Social competence also serves group objectives, increasing the effectiveness of cooperation and possibilities of resolving problems, conflicts and social pathology (Borkowski, 2003).

It should be underlined that many children’s behavioural disorders result from deficiencies in terms of social competence. Among the most frequent problems among school children, there are aggression, isolation or seclusion from social contacts and excessive submission. These problem may have a clinical basis, which requires proper diagnostic and therapeutic procedure; however, they may be caused by the lack of competence of dealing with social situations (Hops, 1983). Taking into consideration the aforementioned, there is a need to teach children a set of basic elements of social competence which ensure proper and satisfactory functioning in the encompassing environment.

In the next part of the article, the research results will be provided, constituting part of the pedagogical experiment conducted among younger students. Referring to the data on quantitative stratification of boys (19% – 53%) and girls (17% – 47%) in the examined group of 36 primary school third grade students, it seemed interesting to check whether gender differentiates the level of presented social competence.

Author's Study

Purpose

The author's own study was to discover a possible relationship between the gender and selected elements of social competence. In this case, four elements were taken into consideration: learning motivation, antisocial behaviour, social inhibition and socialization.

Research methods

In order to collect empirical material comprising the statistical analysis basis, the method of estimation was adopted, which involves assessing the examined group from the point of view of defined behavioural features with the use of a several grade scale.

B. Markowska's „Student Behaviour Sheet” used in the second part constitutes a standardised assessment of 50 features of visible child's behaviour. The tool allows an insight, according to the point of view of a teacher, into functioning of the examined children and into the level of presented social competence. The functioning is defined by B. Markowska by an attempt to assess:

- learning motivation, or the level of the features defining the positive and active child's approach towards school requirements,
- level of socialisation, encompassing features defining the positive child approach towards other people, conditioned by the ability of non-conflict contacts and behaviours full of benevolence and tolerance.
- The analysis of the second part of the sheet allows defining types of social and emotional disorders, which in turn proves deficiencies in the presented social competence. Thus, conclusions may be reached on:
 - the level of anti-social behaviour, comprising the features related to lowered child behaviour control and an aggressive attitude towards others,
 - inhibition, that is to say on features proving lowered social activity, panic reactions and a child's withdrawal tendencies.

In addition, the sheet helps to assess the level of sexual interest among the examined children. The factor is expressed in two types of behaviour – when a child likes the company of children of the opposite sex and when they are curious about sex difference issues; however, it will not have serious significance in the context of the described research.

The features are assessed according to a five-grade scale. The numbers on the scale indicate the increase of the feature strength in the order from 1 to 5, whereas the criterion of feature individuality constitutes its frequency. It is worth adding that high results in the scale of learning motivation and socialization are desirable, for they confirm a student's good social and emotional adjustment. Antisocial behaviour and inhibition are not desired, as they indicate deficiencies in terms of social competence.

Presentation of the research results

In order to examine the above-mentioned relation, Student's t-test for independent group was used applying Statistica 6.0., statistical software.

The number of degrees of freedom for the Student's t-test was measured according to the following formula:

$$df = N1 + N2 - 2,$$

where in the analysed case, $df = 34$.

In every case described herein, the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was assumed, then the empirical value of the test was measured and compared with the t-test distribution critical values read out from statistical tables (Fisher, Yates, 1963).

All necessary data to compute Student's t-test value and to verify the hypothesis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender and social competence of students of younger school age

SOCIAL COMPETENCE	average of girls;	average of boys;	t	df	p	girls' standard deviation;	boys' standard deviation;	No. of girls	No. of boys
Learning motivation	48,70588	43,31589	1,740926	34	0,090740	8,59335	10,31861	17	19
Anti-social behaviour	31,00000	34,31579	-0,951557	34	0,348038	10,59481	10,29591	17	19
Inhibition	30,17647	31,94737	-0,652441	34	0,518504	8,19478	8,07241	17	19
Socialisation	44,82353	41,36842	2,121807	34	0,041222	3,81175	5,65892	17	19

Source: own measurements.

Gender and the level of learning motivation

The first factor under analysis was learning motivation. The results show that primary school girls are much less reprimanded and less often hear negative comments from their teachers than boys do. Such a privileged situation leads to developing excessive self-criticism and non-coping with later school difficulties. Boys, more often admonished for bad ideas or incorrect solutions, lose in this situation only apparently. According to the research, the teacher gives boys more relevant hints which results in a situation that statistically they achieve better results, are more motivated to work and can use such advice in the next phases of learning (Konarzewski, 1992).

On the other hand, Belgian studies show another correlation. Poor results of some boys may be related with their general negative attitude towards learning, especially less positive relations with teachers, lack of well-being in their class and unwillingness to work at school. At lower levels of education, however, boys who are less focused during their lessons, less interested in performing tasks and less motivated to study achieve better results than the expected ones. The analysis suggests that such boys are talented, especially those strongly „demotivated” ones (van de Gaer et al., 2006).

With reference to the aforementioned analysis, it is worth looking whether the examined group of children present differences of the level of learning motivation between girls and boys.

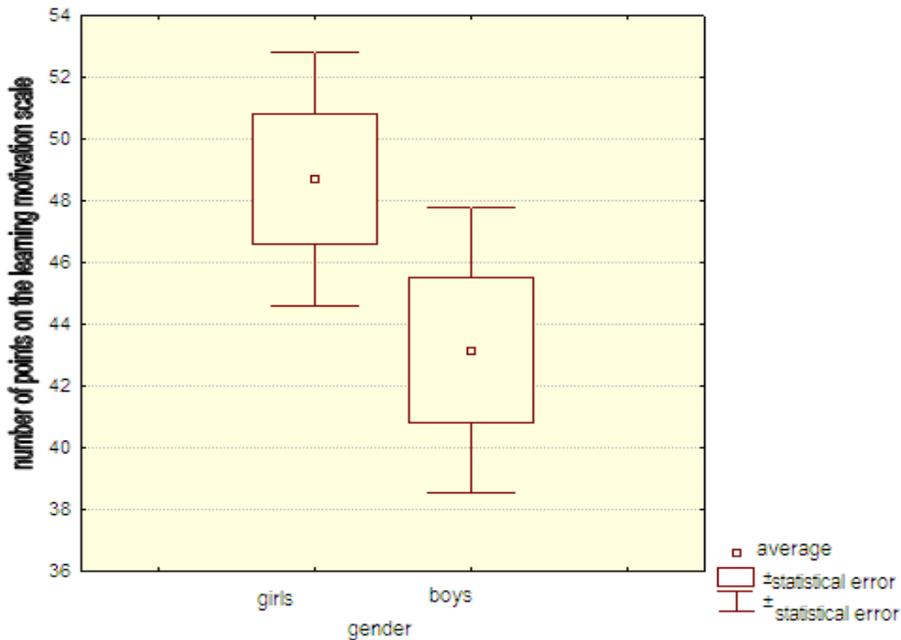
Application of the t-test requires assuming two statistical hypotheses: null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis. For learning motivation, the formulated and tested hypotheses were as follows:

H0: there is no statistical correlation between gender and learning motivation;

H1: there is a statistical correlation between gender and learning motivation.

Table 5 and Figure 1 present the data in question.

Figure 1. Gender and learning motivation of the examined students



Source: own work.

Temp = 1.740 was measured. For the number of degrees of freedom in two independent samples $df = 34$ and the adopted level of significance $\alpha = 0,05$, the theoretical value of the test is $t_{tab} = 2.042$. Since $t_{tab} > temp$, the null hypothesis is to be assumed; which means that no statistical correlation between the gender and the level of learning motivation has been noted. The p-value $p = 0.09$ additionally confirms the assumption of null hypothesis, because $p > \alpha$, so there is no basis to exclude H_0 .

Gender and antisocial behaviour of the examined students

'At the age of 3 – 10, the process of aggression socialization according to sex patterns develops. Girls start presenting verbal and indirect aggression, i.e. they denounce others, they also try to suppress this aggression. Boys, on the other hand, for being socially praised for the ability to defend themselves, get into fights more often" (Danilewska, 2002). For this reason, the next thing to test is the occurrence of an correlation between the gender and the level of antisocial behaviour of the examined third-grade students.

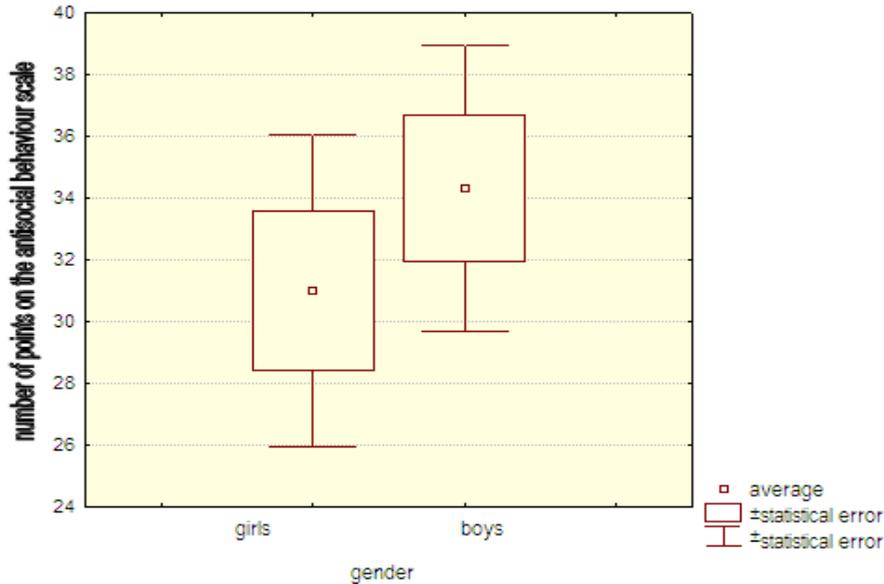
The following statistical hypotheses were formulated:

H_0 : there is no statistical correlation between the gender and the antisocial behaviour level;

H_1 : there is a significant correlation between the gender and the antisocial behaviour level..

All necessary data to compute the t-test value and to verify the hypothesis are in Table 1 and Figure 2 presented below.

Figure 2. Sex and antisocial behaviour of the examined students



Source: author's study

In terms of results of the t-test for the second factor, one will notice that $t_{emp} = -0,951$, meanwhile the theoretical test value with $df = 34$ for $\alpha = 0.05$ is $t_{tab} = 2.042$. Thus, $t_{tab} > t_{emp}$, so the null hypothesis on the lack of a statistically significant correlation between the gender and antisocial behaviour of the examined students is to be assumed. The same conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the p-value $p = 0.34$ which is higher than the assumed level $\alpha = 0,05$ which confirms the null hypothesis.

Gender and inhibition of the examined students

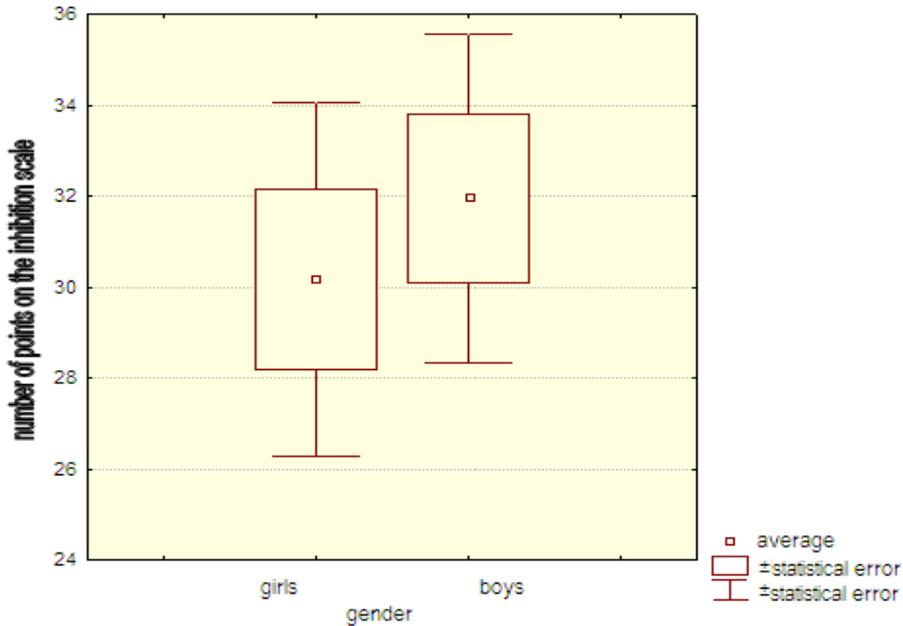
Psychomotor inhibition is one of the five symptoms of social maladjustment. Some of the most common symptoms of inhibition are the following: excessive submission of a child towards others and towards the social environment, passivity in school work, no ambitious aspirations, frequent failures while competing with friends, getting discouraged because of failures, fear from risk-involved situations, shyness, lack of creativity and of initiative, reaction tardiness, low self-esteem and autism. Not all the symptoms, however, have to occur in order to diagnose inhibition of an examined child (Dymek-Balcerek, 1999).

In terms of the research for this article, it seemed interesting to verify the hypotheses on the occurrence of an correlation between the gender and the level of inhibition of the examined students. The hypotheses are as follows:

H0: there is no statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of inhibition;

H1: there is a statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of inhibition.

Figure 3. Gender and inhibition among the examined students



Source: own work.

With reference to the t-test results for the scale of inhibition presented in Table 5, one should notice that $t_{emp} = -0.652$, meanwhile the theoretical test value with $df = 34$ for $\alpha = 0,05$ is $t_{tab} = 2.402$. Thus, $t_{tab} > t_{emp}$, so, as in the previous case, one will assume the null hypothesis because of the lack of a statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of inhibition in the examined third-grade students. The p-value $p = 0.51$ additionally confirms the null hypothesis, as $p > \alpha$, which indicates the lack of basis to exclude H_0 .

Gender and the level of socialization

Socialization of younger students is an important element of their development due to their integrating with the social group – socialization and learning the correct patterns of thinking, acting and experiencing, or shaping a human being in the given social group.

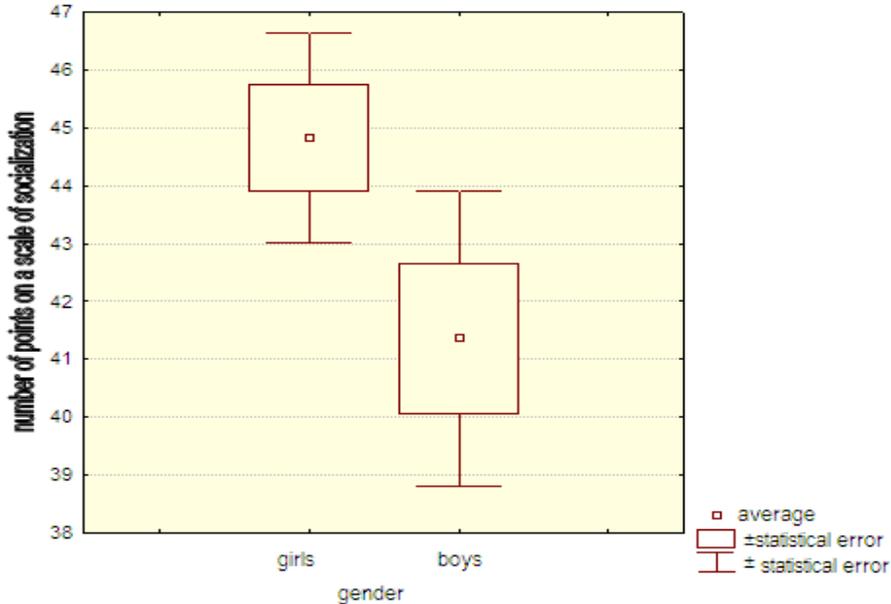
Bringing the research to an end, it is now necessary to examine the correlation between the gender and the level of socialization. For this reason, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_0 : there is no statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of socialization;

H_1 : there is a statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of socialization.

Table 1 and Figure 4 present the data in question.

Figure 4. Gender and the level of socialization of the examined students



Source: Author's study

The final part regards the analysis of the t-test results for the socialization scale. With 34 degrees of freedom and level of significance $\alpha = 0,05$, the critical value to be recovered from statistical tables, is 2.042. Since the test empirical value 2.121 is higher than the critical value from statistical tables: $(t_{tab} 2.042 < 2.121 (temp))$, one will exclude the H_0 hypothesis and acknowledge the alternative hypothesis H_1 . Similar results may be revoked on the basis of the p-value $p = 0.04$ lower than $\alpha = 0.05$, which proves the occurrence of a statistically significant correlation between the gender and the level of socialization.

Conclusions

The aforementioned data, concluded in Table 1 and the above charts show that there is no statistically significant correlation between the child's gender and the presented level of learning motivation, antisocial behaviour or inhibition where in terms of learning motivation one may observe greater tendency of sexual differentiation. Girls have a higher level of learning motivation, such as in terms of socialization, where the correlation is clearly visible and statistically significant. In relation to the above, one may state that there is higher susceptibility among boys towards presenting socially unacceptable behaviours indicating their lower level of social competence, particularly in terms of the scale of socialization. It may be so, because prosocial behaviours are, contrary to aggression, less patterned due to the fact their visually observable effects are less spectacular than the aggressive ones (Kohnstamm, 1989).

Moreover, other research confirms that aggressive and bossy children are often respected widely by their classmates; therefore, their behaviours become strengthened. A child who learned aggression at a very young age will not dispose of this feature even when they become an adult. It is also known that if children are verbally aggressive: they swear and pick

on others, they copy adults. That is why one should not neglect symptoms of aggressive behaviours in their children. A friendly, yet consequently reprimanding position of the parents and teachers against aggression is the most efficient in order not to teach a child socially unacceptable behaviours (Wyckoff, Unell, 2004).

Therefore, it is worth noticing the development of social competence by delivering proper patterns from one's family, peers and other significant people which is part of the process of socialization. Although social development occurs for the entire life, it is the first experience of contacts with others that play a great role in undertaking future social roles and household activities. „Empirical research proves the existence of a correlation between problems in adult life, such as: passive withdrawal from stress situations, dependency from one's family, violent bursts of sudden anger, intellectual dependency from another one, fear from social interactions, and the social functioning of a person of school age” (Van Hasselt, Hersen, Whitehill, Bellack, 1979). In correspondence with the aforementioned, the knowledge of students' social competence should be the key point to start supporting their social development and to conduct further research and finding the correlation not only with the gender, but also with other variables.

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