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Psychological and behavioral correlates of social adaptation in adolescents

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Abstract

This study examined how self-esteem, emotional regulation, behavior, and communication relate to social adaptation in adolescence. The study involved 72 adolescents aged 13 to 16. Psychological assessments and questionnaires covered five domains: self-esteem, emotional regulation, behavioral characteristics, social adaptation, and interpersonal interaction. Descriptive and correlational analyses summarized the reported distributions and examined associations with social adaptation. The middle category was the most common for each of the five indicators summarized. Constructive behavior had the largest reported positive coefficient with social adaptation (0.61), followed by emotional self-regulation (0.56), communication skills (0.52), and self-esteem stability (0.48). Impulsiveness and conflict-proneness had negative coefficients (−0.44 and −0.39, respectively). These associations identify dimensions that teachers and school psychologists can consider when discussing peer relationships and students' participation. The findings can inform questions for school-based assessment and support. Classroom outcomes for future assessment include participation in cooperative tasks, help-seeking, and constructive disagreement. Evaluating changes over time and the effectiveness of school practices requires a study that directly measures those outcomes.

Keywords: adolescence; social adaptation; emotional self-regulation; self-esteem; peer relationships; school psychology

1 Introduction

During adolescence, young people gain independence, reconsider their relationships with adults and peers, and develop a more differentiated sense of identity. Behavioral changes can express initiative, self-assertion, and responsibility. Some adolescents also experience difficulties with emotional regulation, communication, or participation in social groups. The developmental literature situates these patterns within the changing demands of family, peer, and school relationships (Erikson, 1968; Smetana et al., 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

In school, social adaptation matters for students' participation in group work, their ability to seek help and express disagreement, and their relationships with teachers and classmates. Classroom norms, opportunities to participate, and feedback from teachers shape the situations in which adolescents practice these skills (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1998). Research on school belonging likewise documents links between students' social relationships and their motivational,

behavioral, and academic outcomes (Allen et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2020). Here, school belonging informs the educational interpretation of the study's broader social adaptation measure.

The study asks how adolescents' self-esteem stability, emotional self-regulation, constructive behavior, impulsiveness, conflict-proneness, and communication skills are associated with their level of social adaptation. The educational purpose is to identify dimensions that teachers and school psychologists could consider when assessing participation and peer interaction, and to clarify what would need to be evaluated in a school setting.

Self-esteem concerns how adolescents evaluate themselves, and emotional regulation concerns how they manage and express emotional responses. Both are relevant when adolescents receive feedback, encounter disagreements, or have to negotiate their place in a group. Developmental work describes how self-esteem changes across the life span (Orth & Robins, 2014). Research on emotion regulation distinguishes strategies with different social consequences, including reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross & John, 2003). In school practice, a student can learn to recognize an emotion, consider the situation, and select a way to express it.

Peer groups offer opportunities for recognition, support, and learning through observation (Bandura, 1986). Peer approval can also create pressure to adopt behaviors that a young person would otherwise avoid. Resistance to peer influence develops with age (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Teachers and families can help adolescents negotiate these demands by modeling constructive responses and setting consistent expectations.

A social developmental perspective places learning within interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). In a school context, constructive behavior includes expressing disagreement, listening to another person's account, and accepting responsibility for a response. Opportunities to practice these skills depend on the climate of the group and on adults' responses to conflict. Evidence linking teacher–student relationships to engagement and achievement supports attention to the classroom environment when considering students' social adjustment (Roorda et al., 2011).

2 Methods

Participants and procedure

This descriptive and correlational study involved 72 adolescents aged 13 to 16. The research procedure comprised a review of relevant literature, selection of diagnostic instruments and participants, assessment of the adolescents, and analysis of the resulting scores.

The report gives no details on setting, dates, recruitment, participant characteristics beyond age, or assessment timing.

Measures

Questionnaires and psychological assessments addressed five domains. Table 1 shows the focus of each assessment. The reported descriptive results group scores into low, medium, and high categories.

Table 1

Assessment domains and measures reported in the study

Domain	Measure reported	Assessment focus
Self-esteem	Self-esteem assessment	Level and stability of self-esteem
Emotional regulation	Emotional self-regulation questionnaire	Regulation of emotional responses
Behavioral characteristics	Behavioral questionnaire	Impulsiveness, conflict-proneness, withdrawal, and constructive behavior
Social adaptation	Socio-psychological adaptation assessment	Adaptability, emotional comfort, and social interaction
Interpersonal interaction	Communication questionnaire	Establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships

The measures are described by assessment domain and format. Their exact names, versions, languages, administration procedures, scoring cutoffs, and measurement properties were not specified. The relationship between the communicative adaptation categories in Table 2 and the communication skills scores in Table 3 was not documented.

Statistical analysis

The original analysis was reported to use IBM SPSS Statistics. Table 2 presents counts and percentages by score category, and Table 3 presents reported correlation coefficients with social adaptation.

The correlation estimator, handling of missing observations, and number of valid pairs per comparison were not documented. The coefficients are interpreted descriptively by their direction and magnitude.

Research ethics

Verbal consent was obtained for the study. The available documentation does not identify who provided consent, how it was recorded, or whether an institutional ethics review took place.

3 Results

Table 2 summarizes the reported distribution of scores for the 72 participants. The middle category was the most frequent across all five indicators, with 37 to 41 adolescents per indicator (51.4% to 56.9%). Sixteen adolescents (22.2%) were in the low social adaptation category and 18 (25.0%) were in the high category. Interpretation of these categories depends on the instruments and scoring thresholds.

Table 2

Distribution of participants by score category

Indicator under study	Low level, n (%)	Medium level, n (%)	High level, n (%)
Self-esteem stability	17 (23.6%)	39 (54.2%)	16 (22.2%)
Emotional self-regulation	18 (25.0%)	37 (51.4%)	17 (23.6%)
Constructiveness of behavior	15 (20.8%)	40 (55.6%)	17 (23.6%)
Social adaptation	16 (22.2%)	38 (52.8%)	18 (25.0%)
Communicative adaptation	14 (19.4%)	41 (56.9%)	17 (23.6%)

Note. N = 72. Percentages are shown to one decimal place.

Table 3 presents the associations with social adaptation. Constructive behavior had the largest reported positive coefficient (0.61), followed by emotional self-regulation (0.56), communication skills (0.52), and self-esteem stability (0.48). Impulsiveness (−0.44) and conflict-proneness (−0.39) had negative coefficients. The ordering describes the reported coefficients. Differences in their magnitudes would require a formal comparison.

Table 3

Reported correlations with social adaptation

Indicator paired with social adaptation	Coefficient	Direction
Self-esteem stability	0.48	Positive
Emotional self-regulation	0.56	Positive
Constructiveness of behavior	0.61	Positive
Impulsiveness	-0.44	Negative
Conflict-proneness	-0.39	Negative
Communication skills	0.52	Positive

Note. The table presents the correlation coefficients reported for the sample. The available documentation does not establish the estimator or valid pair count for each coefficient.

4 Discussion

Constructive behavior and emotional self-regulation had the largest reported positive associations with social adaptation. A student’s ability to stay engaged during a disagreement, express a position clearly, and consider the perspective of another person offers one interpretation of this pattern. Another possibility is that experience in supportive relationships helps adolescents practice those skills. Constructive behavior, communication, and adaptation may also share items or concepts. Their definitions and scoring therefore matter when comparing the coefficients.

The positive coefficient for self-esteem stability is consistent with the relevance of self-evaluation to social interaction. Students who perceive feedback as threatening may react defensively or withdraw from a group. A teacher or psychologist can ask how the

student understood a situation before deciding which response might help. Research on school belonging and classroom relationships suggests that feedback, peer support, and opportunities for meaningful participation deserve attention alongside individual skills (Allen et al., 2018; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wentzel, 1998).

The negative associations for impulsiveness and conflict-proneness suggest questions for assessment. A sharp response may arise from frustration, exclusion, fear of rejection, or an effort to maintain personal boundaries. Reviewing the circumstances of a conflict with the student may identify a skill to practice or a classroom condition that needs attention. Family relationships, peers, and school climate are possible influences on the reported associations and warrant direct assessment in future work.

Implications for educational practice

Teachers can use brief, structured opportunities to practice a pause before responding, perspective-taking, and cooperative problem solving. School psychologists can use role-play to rehearse alternatives to an impulsive response, and work with teachers and families to agree on clear expectations and supportive feedback. A school could evaluate such practices using predefined outcomes, such as participation in group work or students' reports of peer interactions, measured at more than one time point.

Meta-analyses of school-based social and emotional learning provide a broader basis for evaluating structured support (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). The present study reports associations and did not evaluate a program. The proposed activities should be adapted to the school context and evaluated with relevant learning or participation outcomes.

Limitations

The sample comprised 72 adolescents within a narrow age range. Generalization to other schools or populations requires information about recruitment and setting. The reported correlations do not establish temporal order, change within individuals, or causation. The analyses presented are pairwise and therefore cannot establish whether associations persist after accounting for shared influences such as age, peer relationships, or classroom climate.

Possible overlap among the measures and uncertainty about their scoring constrain interpretation. Reporting the instruments, valid case counts, and confidence intervals would clarify measurement quality and statistical precision. Future work could specify educational outcomes, measure them directly, and examine whether the relationships replicate across schools and time points.

5 Conclusion

Among the 72 adolescents, the reported coefficients indicated positive associations of social adaptation with constructive behavior, emotional self-regulation, communication skills, and self-esteem stability, and negative associations with impulsiveness and conflict-proneness. The pattern suggests questions for school-based assessment. Studies that follow students over time and measure educational outcomes could examine how these relationships inform classroom support.

Declarations

Author contributions. The sole author is credited with the original manuscript. Specific contributions to study design, data collection, and analysis were not reported.

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Conflict of interest. A conflict-of-interest declaration was not included in the study report.

Data availability. The aggregate results available for this manuscript are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Participant-level data and original SPSS output were not supplied with the report. Conditions for accessing de-identified data were not reported.

Use of generative AI. ChatGPT (OpenAI) assisted with language and structural editing, reference verification, and drafting of educational implications and limitations for this revision.

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