

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to explore the development of social skills among elementary school children and identify similarities and differences based on socio-demographic characteristics. The research was conducted in 2017. This study used a sample of 1639 fifth and eighth-grade students from 17 primary schools in the area of the Central Bosnia Canton. The obtained findings provided significant results. The high level of self-assessment of social competence was determined. The results also showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents in the assessment of social competence with regard to the gender and grade of the students. The correlation between social competence and students' school performance was determined. These findings will have their practical application in teaching process, and help teachers and students in the development of social competence through teaching process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today's educational system prepares children for the life in the third decade of the 21st century. It is important to foresee the knowledge that will be necessary for children in the age in which they'll live. Therefore, it is necessary to enable children to master these skills successfully and develop certain skills and abilities.

The school of the future aims to develop the competencies of children. "Competencies are the general abilities of action based on knowledge, experience, values and dispositions which an individual has developed while engaging in educational practice, and they are related to the improvement of one's own qualities and the empowerment that enables a person to be independent, to be able to cope

with problems and to deal with nature and society." (Selimović, 2009, page 424). In order to achieve social development as a social being, a person must be familiar with the norms, rules and values of the society in which s/he lives, as well as to master the skills necessary for him/her to achieve effective interaction within that community. A man who succeeds in this is socially adapted and competent, and so is a child who has succeeded.

The problem of social competence was studied in detail by Blažević (2015); Buljubašić-Kuzmanović, (2008, 2010, 2012); Katz, McClellan (1999); Opić, (2010); Previšić (1999, 2003); Zrilić (2010) and others. Suzić (2005) has dealt with this issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since social competences are pivotal, it is important to analyze its concept in detail. Meanwhile, it should be noted that it often happens that social competences are considered as social skills, i.e. it seems there is no distinction between these two terms. However, it is necessary to emphasize that there are differences between these two terms. "Skills include the specific behavior of individuals (e.g. tolerance, non-violent conflict resolution, constructive communication), while competence determines how a person uses skills in

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the social environment. We can say that an individual is socially competent if he uses social skills appropriately and successfully achieves key personal goals at the same time” (Markuš, 2010, page 435). According to this interpretation, an individual cannot become socially competent without social skills, or more precisely, without the appropriate use of social skills. Both terms refer to the ability to deal with different social situations (Klarin, 2006).

Social competence includes effective functioning in a social context and consists of the ability and/or groups of abilities that make it easier to start, develop and maintain relationships with people (Brdar, 1993). Brust Nemet (2015) states that social competence is the ability to create and align flexible, customized responses to requests, and create and exploit opportunities in the environment.

In the process of competence development, all educational factors should be involved: a family, the social environment in which the individual lives, the attendance in preschool and school institutions, friends with whom s/he gets together, children’s organizations that organize extracurricular activities and psycho-physical condition of the individual. Katz and McClellan (1997) emphasize the role of the environment in creating the context of social development. Family, school, and peer groups have the most impact on social development. Peer interaction is a prerequisite for encouraging social competencies that leads to an individual’s satisfaction. If these relationships are positive and fulfilled with satisfaction, they maintain positive behavior and motivate students to work. “Students who have more developed interaction pattern and eager to engage in peer cooperation, make better adaptation and achieve better learning outcomes rather than students who avoid social interactions within and out of classroom” (Buljbašić-Kuzmanović, 2010, page 193). Thus, peer interaction contributes to the better achievement of students. Besides, peer interaction also contributes to meeting individual’s needs. According to the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it is clear that the students’ need for love is met simply through socializing with other children. It is the same case with the need for respect. “The individual’s need for others to show respect for him and to be appreciated by them is of great importance since respect received from others internalizes, contributes to self-esteem and a good relationship with oneself and others” (ibid., page 193).

To what extent the students will de-

velop their social competences through peer interaction depends on themselves. Their behavior, or the models of the behavior they have developed substantially determines the success in social interaction. Likewise, the emotional and social life of children is an essential prerequisite for the development of social competence. In order to develop these competencies, the elements that are related to social knowledge and understanding are required, and it is these elements that can only be learned through interaction with others by creating an experience. However, it happens that children do not always maintain effective communication with other children, in another words, they have challenges in interaction. Such children whose behavior is not accepted in the group are rejected and they must seek for new adaptation models. For this reason, older children tend to look for smaller groups of children with similar preferences in order to establish those relationships and to feel equal with other children.

Social competence and its development through the educational system constitute “a new approach to upbringing” (Goleman, 1997). This approach contains a series of abilities that belong to empathy, expression and understanding of one’s own feelings, ability to solve problems in cooperation with others, even friendship, kindness and respect that need to be learned through social interaction. Due to all this, the role of peers in the development of social competence is significant for every individual, because it ultimately allows each individual to develop their sense of belonging, to be accepted and to thus be respected by others and show respect for others. All this makes an individual a member of a particular community.

There is a number of strategies that can strengthen social competence. Katz and McClellan (1999) list the following strategies: open communication with parents, respect for children’s feelings, establishment of authority and trust, positive labeling of children’s character, respect for individual differences, invoking fundamental rules, enhancing prosocial skills, addressing children’s common sense and helping children overcome adversity.

These strategies for strengthening social competence can be successfully used by teachers and parents. The role of schools and teachers themselves in the implementation of developmental strategies of social competence is multiple and irreplaceable. For this very reason, the first objective of this research is to examine the level of development of so-

cial competence among elementary school students.

The second aim is to determine the differences between the respondents with regard to the gender and grade of the students.

The third objective is to determine the correlation between the level of development of students' social competence and their school performance.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research on the development of social competence among students was conducted in May 2017 in the schools of the Central Bosnia Canton. The consent was obtained from the Ministry of Education, as well as from all the principals of the primary schools in which the research was conducted, in order to carry out this research. Before the survey was delivered, the respondents were introduced with the significance of the research and instructed on how to fill out the questionnaire. Each student responded to the questions voluntarily, by circling the answers which s/he deemed to be true. The students gave answers quickly and honestly, and the respondent who had troubles in understanding the items were provided additional explanations. The survey was conducted in such way that the appropriate pace of the research was assured without any ambiguity. The survey was conducted during one school class.

The study population consisted of 14732 students from 5th and 8th grades of elementary schools in the Central Bosnia Canton. 1639 students participated in the survey, which is 11,13% of the total study population.

In this study, there were 802 (49%) female students and 837 (51%) male students. The total population of female is 7066 (48%) and 7666 (52%) is male students in the Central Bosnia Canton.

This study included 846 (52%) students from the fifth grade and 793 (48%) students from the eighth grade.

All the above data in regards to the sample indicate the uniformity of the sample and the fact that the sample is representative.

The instrument that was used in the study was the Student's Social Competence Questionnaire which consist of 24 items. The first part of the instrument consists of sociodemographic data on pupils who participated in the research. Data refer to gender, grade, and school performance. Besides, this part of the study includes a brief explanation of the pur-

pose of the instrument, the problem of the study that is being investigated and the way of responding to the items.

The second part of the questionnaire refers to the scale items. The Likert's five-point scale was used in order to obtain participant's preferences or degree of agreement, (1 - *never*, 2 - *rarely*, 3 - *occasionally*, 4 - *regularly*, 5 - *always*).

3. RESULTS

The first objective of this research was to examine the level of students' self-assessment of their social competence development. The descriptive analysis of each variable was used to determine the mean value and the standard deviation.

According to the results shown in Table 1, the mean value of the observed variables ranges from $M=2.49$ for the item "I would not like to be the only one in the class who has all A's and knows everything." up to $M=4.69$ for the item "*I am proud of being a member of my nation, but I also respect the members of other nationalities.*". Based on a detailed analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the respondents rated 19 out of 24 variables ($mode \geq 4$) related to social competence.

Table 1. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation for 24 items of social competences

	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I can understand the "strange" behavior of other students when they have some problems.	3.60	1.090
2.	When a problem occurs in a group in which I socialize, I want to help.	4.20	1.089
3.	I can explain my own behavior and behavior of others in conversation with friends.	3.36	1.161
4.	When I am planning an activity or set goals with my peers, I try to respect their opinions.	3.99	1.202
5.	When someone presents the facts and convinces me that I'm wrong, I change my mind.	3.15	1.412
6.	I like to work and study in a group.	3.43	1.539
7.	I try to make all the members of the group active and satisfied when I am chosen as the leader of a group	4.31	1.134
8.	When I am the leader, I successfully cooperate with all the members of the group.	4.08	1.133
9.	I quickly establish relationships and acquaintances with peers who I did not know before.	4.01	1.107
10.	When the leader is another student in the group, I know how to listen, make suggestions and execute decisions of the group.	3.92	1.195
11.	When someone is talking, I wait for them to finish, and then say what I think.	3.78	1.321
12.	I always listen carefully to the person I'm speaking with.	3.92	1.145
13.	I always speak openly and have eye contact with my interlocutors.	3.87	1.193
14.	If people are not listening to what I am saying, I draw their attention without raising my voice.	2.89	1.386
15.	I would not like to be the only one in the class who has all A's and knows everything.	2.49	1.649
16.	I like when people around me succeed, I like to be in a company of successful people	4.36	1.046
17.	When some of my peers achieve something very successful, my parents, people around me, and I feel good.	4.08	1.138
18.	I like to help students with homework or tests.	3.75	1.350
19.	I like to socialize with children of different nationalities.	4.03	1.269
20.	I can socialize with black folks and members from other nations.	4.28	1.147
21.	Some of my friends have some personality traits which I don't like, but they are dear to me and I respect them.	4.11	1.019
22.	I am proud of being a member of my nation, but I also respect the members of other nationalities.	4.69	0.802
23.	I feel sorry when children beg. I always give them a coin if I have it.	4.27	1.010
24.	I feel that I belong to the society in which I live because it nurtures different cultures and customs.	4.26	1.098

Confirmation of the above results is also found in the summary results for the entire instrument of *social competence* Table 2.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 indicates the high reliability and internal agreement of the scale for this sample of respondents.

The arithmetic mean of all items is $M=3.81$. It shows that the assessment of students on the development of their social competence was above average. This was confirmed by the results of the One-Sample t-Test which indicated that the respondents positively assess their social competence

($t=63.74$; $df=1638$; $p=0.000$; $meandiff=0.81$, $test\ value=3$).

The standard deviation value of 0.51 indicated that the dispersion around the arithmetic mean was small, which was also confirmed by the coefficient of variability of 13.39%, and thus the results were homogeneous.

The skewness value of -0,743 indicated that the results are slightly negatively asymmetric. Therefore, the results were oriented towards higher values, in another words positive assessment, in accordance with the direction of the scale.

The kurtosis value of 1,660 suggested

that it is a leptokurtic distribution, id est. small dispersion of results around the arithmetic means (according to values of the coefficient of variability). Although the value of the K-S test indicated a deviation of the normal dis-

tribution (K-S = 0.045; df = 1639; p = 0.000), it was accessed in the area of inferential statistics by parametric statistical tests due to its large sample, unimodal distribution, moderate dispersion, slight asymmetry and kurtosis.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (sum of social competences)

Claims	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of Difference		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Lower	Upper		
Social competence	1639	3,81	0,51	0,013	3,78	3,83	-0,743	1,660

In order to reduce the 24 manifest variables that the Social Competence Instrument consist of, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (method: principal component analysis). The goal was to determine clusters that form latent dimensions (collinearity) using the principle of intercorrelation of manifold variables,

The aim was to summarize the manifest of the collinearity variables on the latent dimensions on the principle of parsimony, that is, the main components that are composed of clusters of interrelated sets of variables (main components).

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin correlation value of 0.886 showed that there is a large correlation between the particles and linear dependence among the scattering particles. KMO is based on the ratio of the sum of the partial and observed correlations in the matrix. The specified value indicated that the matrix was suitable for carrying out a factor analysis. Bartlett’s test of sphericity (6776,634 p<0.05) showed a statistical significance, which implied that the matrix of correlations statistically significantly differs from the identity matrix, which allows the extraction of factors or the continuation of the implementation of factor analysis.

The Guttman-Kaiser criterion was used as a model for stopping the extraction of the main components. Incipiently, six major components were found with 47.66% of the variance. Since the GK criterion leads to hyper factorization, Cattell’s scree plot was applied. We extracted the components on the steep slope of the graph where there is a sharp drop in the plot.

This can also be the case when there is a small number of main components that are above the limit value of 1, which is a rare case in the research of education (pedagogy) (Opić, 2012).

From the Cattell’s scree plot, we could take 3 (or 2 because it’s a better solution to

decrease the number of main components on the scree plotted by 1). Since we obtained opposite results on the number of main components because the mentioned criteria for stopping the extraction showed different values, we decided to use a Monte Carlo simulation, a robust version based on permutations of raw data. (Figure 1).The five main components are optima in Figure 1.

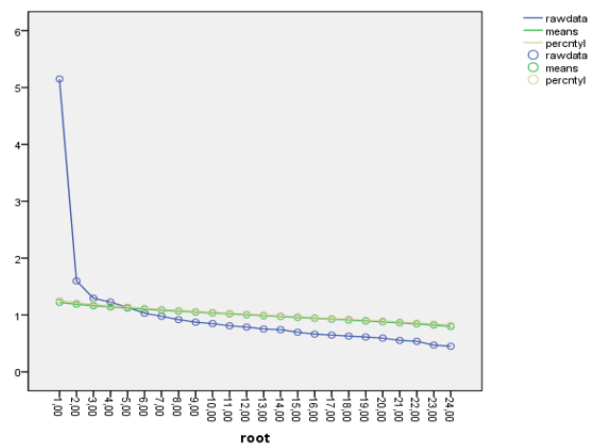


Figure 1. Scree Plot of Social Competence

Findings in Table 3 showed a set of manifest indicators of 24 variables of social competences are reduced to “five latent dimensions” (21,461; 6,664; 5,391; 5,111; 4,731).

Table 3. Characteristic Roots (LAMBDA) matrix of inter-correlation of social competence

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1	5,151	21,461	21,461	5,151	21,461	21,461
2	1,599	6,664	28,125	1,599	6,664	28,125
3	1,294	5,391	33,516	1,294	5,391	33,516
4	1,227	5,111	38,627	1,227	5,111	38,627
5	1,136	4,731	43,359	1,136	4,731	43,359

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

In order to determine the realistic structure of the latent dimensions of social competence, according to the assessment of elementary school students, the rotation of the main components was performed and five interpretive main components were obtained: *Consistency with the goals of the group and relation-*

ships in the group, Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others, Collaboration and sensibility for others, Effective communication and understanding of other individuals, and Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation (Table 4).

Table 4. Pattern matrix

Variables	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
7. I try to make all the members of the group active and satisfied when I am chosen as the leader of a group.	0,83				
8. When I am the leader, I successfully cooperate with all the members of the group.	0,74				
4. When I am planning an activity or set goals with my peers, I try to respect their opinions.	0,65				
10. When the leader is another student in the group, I know how to listen, make suggestions and execute decisions of the group.	0,59				
12. I always listen carefully to the person I'm speaking with.	0,50			0,43	
13. I always speak openly and have eye contact with my interlocutors.					
19. I like to socialize with children of different nationalities.		0,81			
20. I can socialize with black folks and members from other nations.		0,80			
15. I would not like to be the only one in the class who has all A's and knows everything.			0,59		
3. I can explain my own behavior and behavior of others in conversation with friends.			0,54		
5. When someone presents the facts and convinces me that I'm wrong, I change my mind.			0,48		
14. If people are not listening to what I am saying, I draw their attention without raising my voice.				0,54	
1. I can understand the "strange" behavior of other students when they have some problems.				-0,54	
11. When someone is talking, I wait for them to finish, and then say what I think				0,50	
23. I feel sorry when children beg. I always give them a coin if I have it.					0,68
24. I feel that I belong to the society in which I live because it nurtures different cultures and customs.					0,67
17. When some of my peers achieve something very successful, my parents, people around me, and I feel good.					0,65
16. I like when people around me succeed, I like to be in a company of successful people.					0,43
22. I am proud of being a member of my nation, but I also respect the members of other nationalities.		0,37			0,41
2. When a problem occurs in a group in which I socialize, I want to help.					0,38
18. I like to help students with homework or tests.					
9. I quickly establish relationships and acquaintances with peers who I did not know before.					
6. I like to work and study in a group.					
21. Some of my friends have some personality traits which I don't like, but they are dear to me and I respect them.					

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 21 iterations.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.830
 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 1075.037 Sig. 0.00

The obtained factor structure was satisfactory, although some variables had double-factor solutions (v12, v22). Saturation of two variables two factors were evident. Although no pure Thurston structure was obtained, the conducted rotation with iterations showed the best factor structure of the latent space of the observed variables (criterion of factor loading is 0.37).

The obtained factors represent subscales for which a descriptive statistical analysis is presented. Descriptive analysis of each sub-scale was used to determine mean values and standard deviations (table 5).

According to the results shown in Table 5, the mean values of the sub-scales range from M=3.00 for the third subscale “*Collaboration and sensitivity for others*”, up to the mean value M=4.33 for the subscale “*Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others*”.

The first subscale - *Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group*, refers to the students’ assessment of how they behave when they are leaders and when they follow the leader in a group in regards to activities and cooperation in the group, listening carefully and appreciating the opinion of others in the group.

The second subscale - *Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others*, refers to communication and socializing with others and those who are different from us, as well as respecting interlocutors in communication.

Collaboration and sensibility for others is a subscale that refers to sensitivity towards classmates and accepting the opinions of others when there are arguments and explanations for their behaviors.

The fourth subscale - *Effective communication and understanding of others* refers to focusing on the scope of communication in appropriate manner, understanding the problems and behavior of others, as well as respecting interlocutors.

Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation refers to helping others when they are in need, a sense of belonging to the environment in which one lives with all the diversities, helping and respecting others and their differences appreciating their achievements, as well as being proud of who you are and where you belong to.

Based on a detailed analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the respondents rated 3 out of 5 subscales (mode \geq 4) related to social competences.

Table 5. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation for five subscales of social competence

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group	4.05	0.804
2. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others	4.33	0.808
3. Collaboration and sensibility for others	3.00	0.891
4. Effective communication and understanding of others	3.42	0.809
5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	4.23	0.684

The second aim is to determine the differences between the respondents with regard to the gender and grade of the students. There is a statistically significant difference of arithmetic means between boys and girls within the subclasses: *Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group* (t=-8,899; p=0,00); where the value for male students is M=3,88 and M=4,22 for female students. The Mean values for the subscale *Effective communication and understanding of other individuals* is M=3,29 for the male students and M=3,57 for the female students (t = -7,067; p=0,00).

A statistically significant difference is evident in the subscale of *Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation* where the mean value is M=4,13 the male students and M=4,34 for the female students with the value

(t=-6,242; p=0,00). This result showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the male and female students’ assessment of social competence. In another words, the female students assessed the development of social competence more positively. The female students have a statistically significant higher assessment of 4 out of 5 subscales of social competence (on the scale *Collaboration and sensibility for other individuals* the male students indicated higher level of social competence than the female students).

Table 6. Differences in assessments of the development of social competence with regard to the gender of students

Subscales factors	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviat.	Mean Differe.	df	t	Sig.																																																												
1. Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group	M	837	3,88	0,89	-0,34	1549	-8,899	0,00																																																												
	F	802	4,22	0,66					2. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others	M	837	4,28	0,84	-0,11	1632	-2,838	0,01	F	802	4,39	0,76	3. Collaboration and sensibility for others	M	837	3,05	0,92	0,10	1637	2,316	0,02	F	802	2,95	0,86	4. Effective communication and understanding of others	M	837	3,29	0,85	-0,28	1619	-7,067	0,00	F	802	3,57	0,73	5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	M	837	4,13	0,73	-0,21	1611	-6,242	0,00	F	802	4,34	0,59	Social competence Sum	M	837	3,73	0,55	-0,16	1604	-6,744
2. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others	M	837	4,28	0,84	-0,11	1632	-2,838	0,01																																																												
	F	802	4,39	0,76					3. Collaboration and sensibility for others	M	837	3,05	0,92	0,10	1637	2,316	0,02	F	802	2,95	0,86	4. Effective communication and understanding of others	M	837	3,29	0,85	-0,28	1619	-7,067	0,00	F	802	3,57	0,73	5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	M	837	4,13	0,73	-0,21	1611	-6,242	0,00	F	802	4,34	0,59	Social competence Sum	M	837	3,73	0,55	-0,16	1604	-6,744	0,00	F	802	3,89	0,46								
3. Collaboration and sensibility for others	M	837	3,05	0,92	0,10	1637	2,316	0,02																																																												
	F	802	2,95	0,86					4. Effective communication and understanding of others	M	837	3,29	0,85	-0,28	1619	-7,067	0,00	F	802	3,57	0,73	5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	M	837	4,13	0,73	-0,21	1611	-6,242	0,00	F	802	4,34	0,59	Social competence Sum	M	837	3,73	0,55	-0,16	1604	-6,744	0,00	F	802	3,89	0,46																					
4. Effective communication and understanding of others	M	837	3,29	0,85	-0,28	1619	-7,067	0,00																																																												
	F	802	3,57	0,73					5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	M	837	4,13	0,73	-0,21	1611	-6,242	0,00	F	802	4,34	0,59	Social competence Sum	M	837	3,73	0,55	-0,16	1604	-6,744	0,00	F	802	3,89	0,46																																		
5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	M	837	4,13	0,73	-0,21	1611	-6,242	0,00																																																												
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The results of *social competence* in regards to the grade that the students are attending, showed that there is a statistically significant difference in arithmetic means at the level ($p < 0.00$) between the students of the fifth and eighth grade of elementary school, since the value ($t = -6.744$; $p = 0,00$) Table 7. Fifth-grade students indicated the development of social competence with higher values, compared to the eighth-grade students. In three subscales at the level ($p < 0.05$) a statistically significant difference was observed. By comparing arithmetic means, it can be concluded that the students of lower grades more positively assessed the development of social competence compared to the students of the eighth grade in the

subclass of *Consistency with the goals of the group*, the value of the arithmetic mean among the students of the fifth grade was $M=4.20$ and $M=3.89$ for the 8th grade students.

Another positive assessment of students of the fifth grade is also found in *Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation* ($M = 4.47$; $M = 3.98$) as well as for the subclass - *Collaboration and sensibility for others* where ($M = 3.05$; $M = 2.94$) in favor of the fifth-grade students.

Student's assessment for the subscales *Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others* and *Effective communication and understanding of others* did not provide statistically significant differences.

Table 7. Differences in assessments of the development of social competence with regard to the students' grade

Subscales factors	Grade	N	Mean	Std. Devia.	Mean Differe.	df	t	Sig.
1. Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group	V	846	4,20	0,75	0,31	1594	7,905	0,00
	VIII	793	3,89	0,83				
2. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others	V	846	4,36	0,79	0,05	1637	1,232	0,22
	VIII	793	4,31	0,03				
3. Collaboration and sensibility for others	V	846	3,05	0,93	0,11	1636	2,716	0,01
	VIII	793	2,94	0,85				
4. Effective communication and understanding of others	V	846	3,46	0,84	0,07	1637	1,733	0,08
	VIII	793	3,39	0,77				
5. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	V	846	4,47	0,60	0,49	1637	15,795	0,00
	VIII	793	3,98	0,67				
Social competence Sum	V	846	3,91	0,50	0,21	1637	8,428	0,00
	VIII	793	3,70	0,50				

The third objective was to determine the correlation between the level of development of students' social competence and their school performance. The results are presented in Table 8.

In order to measure the correlation, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was used.

Table 8. Correlation (Pearson) between social competence and students' school performance

Variables	Core.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Performance	r		0,23**	0,13**	0,08**	0,10**	0,17**	0,22**
2. Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group	r			0,25**	0,17**	0,48**	0,52**	.0,74**
3. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others	r				0,12**	0,17**	0,30**	0,57**
4. Collaboration and sensibility for others	r					0,23**	0,13**	0,55**
5. Effective communication and understanding of others	r						0,35**	0,69**
6. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation	r							0,67**
7. Social competence total	r							

Note: ** level of significance $p < 0.01$ * level of significance $p < 0.05$

1. Performance 2. Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group 3. Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others 4. Collaboration and sensibility for others 5. Effective communication and understanding of others 6. Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation 7. Social competence - total

A statistically significant and positive correlation exists between students' school performance and all five factors that were treated as subscales: Consistency with the

Based on the results presented in Table 8, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant low positive correlation ($r = 0.22$ **; $p < 0.01$) between students' school performance and the development of social competence.

goals of the group and relationships in the group ($r=0,23^{**}$), Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others ($r=0,13^{**}$); Collaboration and sensibility for others ($r=0,08^{**}$);

Effective *communication and understanding of others* ($r=0,10^{**}$); *Supporting others and a sense of positive affiliation* ($r=0,17^{**}$).

A statistically significant and positive correlation also exists between all factors, as well as between the factors and the overall subscale of development of social competence.

Although statistically significant correlations were observed, caution should be used while making generalizations. In other words, the size of the sample can affect statistical differences or correlation and refer to the potential increase in Type I error. Thus, observed correlations can be considered as indications rather than generalization.

4. DISCUSSION

The research aimed to examine the development of social competence among students and the impact of various socio-demographic indicators on this development. The development of social competence is above average ($M=3,82$) and ($t=63.74$; $df=1638$; $p=0.000$; $\text{mean diff}=0.81$, $\text{test value}=3$), which indicates that the level of students' self-assessment is high.

The results also indicated negative asymmetry, and thus the positive assessments of the development of social competence is evident.

The kurtosis values indicated elongation curve, so the results were grouped around the arithmetic mean. In other words, the arithmetic mean was well represented by the data, the results were correctly distributed and represented a reflection of the situation in the population.

The development of social competence was observed among students of elementary schools. Hence, the results obtained were a result of the influence of the teaching process that can be considered as successful. The results of this survey were consistent with previous research. [Fabra-Brell and Romero-Naranjo \(2017\)](#), in an experimental study on a sample of second-grade secondary school students, showed that social competencies methods can be improved through BAPNE.

The findings of this research confirmed the results of the research conducted by [Jašarević, Jašarević, Hadžić \(2016\)](#) since the value of the arithmetic mean of all indicators of social competence was very high ($M=3.94$).

[Ključević \(2008\)](#), using the experimental treatment while having a workshop with

students promoted the development of students' social competence through the development of self-confidence, encouraging students to accept and show respect for diversity, developing openness for cooperation, teaching students about nonviolent conflict resolution, developing and encouraging the empathy. The analyzed results of the research indicated that "social competence includes empathy, communication skills, tolerance, co-operation and mutual assistance, responsibility towards oneself and others, determination in performing tasks, delaying satisfaction, controlling violent behavior, expressing feelings of value, uniqueness and positive image of oneself ([Mlinarević-Tomas, 2010, page 144](#)).

"Since social interactions involve a series of social skills, socially competent children align their behavior with others by finding a common language, exchanging information and examining similarities and differences according to acquired prosocial skills" ([Brajša-Žganec, 2003, page 25](#)).

Therefore, social competence can be encouraged using various approaches through a curriculum reform that will precisely define ways to do so. "An effective approach to design a teaching curriculum that promotes the development of students' social competence requires that a teacher constantly stimulates and shapes his/her own social competencies in order to effectively apply them in the teaching process and initiate activities for social development (education for community life, education for non-violence). A teacher's competencies need to effectively promote the structure of the content of social education in an appropriate form ([Jurčić, 2010, page 2007](#)).

Teacher's social competence in the educational process, that are enriched with advice, dialogue, coordination, guidance, motivation and guidance of students, significantly influences a student's orientation towards the development of individual opportunities, abilities, independence of acting using knowledge and behavior appropriate for cultural and social beings ([Previšić, 1999](#)).

The motivation of students is important for the development of social competence. The influence of motivation was examined by [Magelinskaitė et al. \(2014\)](#), who found a positive correlation between social competence and student motivation.

However, [Babić, Čikeš and Buško \(2015\)](#) warn that the results obtained during the assessment of socio-emotional competence can be the result of upbringing and cultural influences and not the actual representa-

tion of the socio-emotional competence of the respondents. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that “The results of the research show that encouraging the development of social competence in schools positively influences numerous areas of student behavior and experience - decreases the incidence of unintended and risky behaviors, significantly improves the quality of relationships with peers and adults, besides a positive correlation between academic achievement and cognitive competence was observed” (Markuš, 2010, page 442). Of course, all these remarks should be taken into account while making conclusion on the development of social competence.

The differences between respondents in the assessment of social competence has been significant in regards to the socio-demographic characteristics.

It is evident in this study as well. The significant differences in regards to the gender of the students were found for all subscales, as well as for the social competence as a whole. Female students have assessed more positively *Consistency with the goals of the group and relationships in the group; Respect for diversity and tolerance towards others; Effective communication and understanding of others; Supporting others and the sense of positive affiliation. Meanwhile, male students* on the other hand, positively assessed only *Collaboration and sensibility for others*. These findings point to a different assessment of social competence in which female students perceive the segment of personality development more positively than male students.

The findings of some other studies confirm the results of our research. Dražić (2016), Magelinskaitė et al. (2014), stated that female students indicated a higher level of development of socio-emotional competence.

Research conducted by Jašarević, Jašarević, Hadžić (2016) completely validate the results of our research, as they observed that female students have more developed social competence. According to Denham et al. (2010); according to Brajša Žganec and Hanžec, (2015) boys face more challenges in social adjustment and tend to show inappropriate behavior in social interactions to a greater extent than girls, which leads to the conclusion that girls have a higher level of development of social competences.

The findings by Tatalović-Vorkapić and Lončarić (2014) also indicate the fact that girls have more developed social skills, self-control, enjoyment of research and emotional stability.

The confirmation of the differences between boys and girls is also found in the results of the research conducted by Šipek (2016), Dražić (2016). They have concluded, using a sample of first and second-grade students, that girls have better developed social skills. The results of the Brajša-Žganec and Slunjski (2007) study revealed that women in their young and adult age behave prosocially compared to men. Confirmation of differences in social skills with regard to gender is also found in the research conducted by Buljubašić Kuzmanović and Botić (2012). They concluded that girls assess their social skills more positively than boys. However, Vinaj (2014) using a sample of second, third and fourth-year high school students found that there was no statistically significant difference between the respondents regarding gender in the development of social skills. Ali, Singh, Smekal (2011) concluded the same. They confirmed that there was no difference between the boys and girls sample of 300 adolescents. All of the above results indicate that there are differences between boys and girls in regards to the development of social competences, but those differences disappear when students get older.

The results of *social competence in this study in regards to the grade that the students are attending*, show that there is a statistically significant difference between students of the *fifth and eighth grade* of elementary school. The fifth-grade students assessed the development of social competence with higher values compared to the eighth-grade students. These findings indicate that teachers pay more attention to co-operation with students and helping them when needed outside the classroom, however this cooperation lacks in the classroom. The result of this study suggests that teachers should find ways to communicate with students in order to help students and to establish a better co-operation that will promote social competence. Research conducted by Šipek (2016) reported that the eight-year-old students have more developed social skills compared to the seven-year-old students.

The findings of Dražić's (2016) research demonstrated that students of higher grades of elementary school achieve better results on twenty out of twenty-two variables. In other words, they showed a higher level of socio-emotional competence.

In this research, we also explored the connection between social competence and students' school performance. The results showed that there is a correlation between students' school performance and social com-

petence. This means that better performance develops the quality of social competence. In other words, children with more advanced social competences also perform better in school. Studies by Elias, Haynes, (2008) and Magelinskaite (2011) also confirmed the positive relationship between social competences and school performance.

Buljubašić Kuzmanović, Botić's (2012) findings confirm the results of our research. Namely, based on a study of students of the fifth and seventh grade, they showed that students with better academic achievement have better developed social skills.

The influence of school performance on the development of social skills was also examined by Vinaj (2014), and she came to the conclusion that the effect of school performance on social skills as well as on responsibility and competence proved to be significant. Furthermore, the post hoc analysis showed that a statistically significant difference occurred between a group of straight-A student and their B-average counterparts. The results indicated that straight-A students have more developed social skills than B-average counterparts. Research conducted by Pečjak, Levpušček, Valenčič Zuljan, Kalin, Peklaj (2009) also confirms the difference in the development of social skills with regard to school performance. All these studies imply a correlation between school performance and social competence, which confirms the fact that better students are also socially competent.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research was to explore the development of social skills based on gender and grade of the students and to investigate the correlation between social competence and students' school performance.

The research was conducted among the students of the fifth and the eighth grade, an based on the analysis of the results we reached the following conclusions:

We examined the assessment of social competences through 24 items. The results showed that the students indicated a high assessment on the development of social competence.

The results of the *development of social competence in regards to gender and grade* that the students are attending, showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the respondent groups.

Based on Pearson's correlation coefficient

it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant correlation between students' school performance and the development of social competence. Based on the analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the research objectives have been fulfilled.

It is evident, as confirmed by the results of our research that social competence is an important social phenomenon, significant in the life of every individual. The development and usage of social competences should not be underestimated for the purpose of personal progress, development and self-assertion. The task of the school and the management of the school is to raise teacher's education to a higher level, to provide permanent professional development for teachers, to enable them to work with students in order to develop socio-emotional competence. The goal which we aim to achieve is to prepare students for quality and creative communication and interaction in the social environment. The development of social competence can be achieved in different ways, through interactive learning, cooperative learning, through extracurricular activities, various ecological activities, etc.

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is the fact that the development of social competences was determined by the self-assessment of respondents through transversal research. Additionally, research should also be conducted in other Cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Brcko District and the Republika Srpska. In order to eliminate deficiencies in research, longitudinal or experimental research needs to be carried out, and teachers and other factors of the teaching process need to be included as well.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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