TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' SOCIAL SKILLS IN JAPAN

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Japanese high school teachers rated 100 students on 30 social behaviors using a Japanese translation of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Items on the Japanese scale (J-SSRS) formed two culturally meaningful subscales: Academic and Interpersonal. Japanese teachers' ratings demonstrated that they considered nearly all 30 skills to be important in their classrooms and that they viewed Academic and Interpersonal skills as equally important. Ratings of students on the Academic subscale were strongly correlated with GPA. Female students were rated higher on both Academic and Interpersonal subscales than were males. Both subscales demonstrated high internal consistency reliability. Based on this initial study, it appears that the scale could be useful for assessing two types of social skills in Japanese high school students: skills that are highly related to academic achievement and skills that are important in school, but are not directly related to academic achievement.

Key words: adolescents, social skills, academic achievement

Our initial goal was to conduct a study of social skills and interpersonal relationships in Japanese adolescents. After an unsuccessful search for an existing social skill scale developed for use in Japan and displaying adequate reliability and validity, we set out to develop such an instrument. Our approach was to obtain teachers' ratings of the importance and prevalence of specific social skills in their classrooms. We took this approach in an attempt to minimize two common problems in research conducted by Western psychologists on Eastern cultures: reliance on expert informants to describe the nature of Eastern cultures and use of instruments designed for Western cultures.

Particularly in the case of East Asian education, there is evidence that some widely accepted assumptions in the West may not be valid. Stevenson (1994) presented examples in which characterizations of Japanese schools by Japanese informants are contradicted by scientific observations. It is likely that the fundamental problem lies in the nature of the questions posed to informants. When

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informants are asked questions about their culture in general (e.g., "How do parents in your culture discipline their children?"), the answers are likely to be stereotypic. This is especially problematic in a culture such as Japan, where individuals are highly motivated to give responses that are consistent with the beliefs and values of their culture. Asking more specific questions about the informant's individual experience (e.g., "How do you discipline your children?") may elicit responses that are more valid.

Cultural researchers have become aware that it is necessary to tailor the content of measurement instruments to the culture in which they are used. Much of the past research on non-Western cultures used linguistic translations of instruments developed in and designed for Western cultures without modifying the form and content of the instruments to be appropriate in the target culture. In the case of social skills, ecological models (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Tietjen, 1989) recognize that cultures differ in the specific skills they value. Members of children's social networks (parents, extended family members, friends, and teachers) promote the development of social skills considered to be important in the culture. Based on these ecological models, we assumed that asking Japanese high school teachers to rate the importance of specific skills in their classrooms would yield a valid picture of the social skills valued in the Japanese culture at least from the perspective of one segment of Japanese children's social network.

Cultures also differ in the ways specific social skills are expressed. For example, shyness and sensitivity indicate a lack of appropriate social skills in Western cultures, whereas the same overt behaviors in Japan indicate appropriate social skills (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Our approach to dealing with this was to describe behaviors in terms of what is considered appropriate in Japan rather than to impose Western values in the descriptions of social skills.

An additional objective in our research was to explore the relationship between social skills and academic achievement. Previous research with U.S. samples shows that positive social skills are associated with better academic achievement. For example, higher academic achievement is associated with peer acceptance (Muma, 1965), cooperation with peers (Kenneth, 1980), and prosocial behavior (Wentzel, 1991). We found only one published study of the relationship between academic achievement and social skills in an Asian sample. Chen, Li, and Rubin (1997) found that sociability, sociometric status, and leadership were positively related to academic performance in Chinese 4th and 6th graders.

For the present study, we used the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990) as an initial pool of social skill items. We chose the SSRS because it covers a wide range of school-related social skills described in relatively specific terms, it allows for raters' assessments of both the importance and the prevalence of specific skills, and it has very good psychometric properties. These characteristics of the SSRS were consistent with our objectives: to obtain Japanese high school teachers' ratings of the importance of various social behaviors in their classrooms and of the incidence of those skills among their students; to examine the relationship between

social skills and academic achievement in Japanese high school students; and to compare Japanese teachers' ratings to U.S. teachers' ratings of high school students' social skills.

METHOD

Participants:

Ten teachers and 100 students from two Japanese public high schools participated in this study. The two schools were selected to be representative of the public high schools in Nara, a prefecture with a population of about 1.5 million and an area of 837 km². Average household living cost in 1995 was ¥361,568 (\$3,000)/month.

The student sample consisted of 49 tenth graders (25 females, 24 males), 35 eleventh graders (16 females, 19 males), and 16 twelfth graders (9 females, 7 males). Each teacher rated 5 female and 5 male students from his or her classes. Researchers selected the students to be rated by systematically sampling (e.g., every 3rd name) from alphabetized class lists. Total enrollments in the two schools were 421 and 738, respectively. Data from recent graduating classes indicate that 42% of graduates pursue post-high school education. Participants were treated in accordance with APA ethical standards.

Instrument:

The instrument used in this study was developed from the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The SSRS assesses social skills in three areas reflecting the three psychometric factors underlying the scale. The Cooperation subscale consists of skills such as sharing materials, helping others, and complying with rules and directions. The Assertion subscale includes skills such as introducing oneself, responding to the actions of others, and asking others for information. The Self-Control subscale covers skills such as responding appropriately to teasing and to situations that require taking turns. Internal consistency reliability of the total scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) is high, as are the reliabilities of the subscales (Cooperation $\alpha = .92$, Assertion $\alpha = .86$, Self-Control $\alpha = .89$; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Convergent validity is supported by significant correlations between teacher, parent, and student ratings (r s range from .33 to .44). Discriminant validity is supported by low correlations (median $r = .18$) between ratings by different persons on different subscales.

A backtranslation procedure (Brislin, 1992) was used for the initial translation of the SSRS into a Japanese version (J-SSRS). Discrepancies were corrected through a series of translations and backtranslations conducted by bilingual Japanese college students under the guidance of the authors. This relatively literal translation of the SSRS was reviewed by a sample of Japanese high school teachers for cultural validity and to minimize the loss of translation fidelity associated with bilingual translators (Bontempo, 1993). Teachers were asked to suggest modifications that would make the items culturally relevant and unambiguous. The resulting Japanese items were translated into English and compared to the items on the SSRS. Differences between the two versions were primarily in terms of specificity. Consistent with the Japanese preference for clarity, examples and/or details were added to many items. For example, "schoolwork" was described as "homework, assignments in class, and class discussions." Consistent with the indirect style of Japanese social interaction, indirect communication was specified as an appropriate behavior in some cases. For example, "compliments others" was translated as "directly or indirectly compliments others." All 30 SSRS items were successfully translated. It was not necessary to eliminate any items, nor was it necessary to add any uniquely emic items.

Two forms of the J-SSRS were developed. The "Importance" form was used to obtain teachers' ratings of the importance of each of the 30 items. This form asked teachers, "In your classroom, how important is it for students to be able to ...?" Response choices were: 0 = not important, 1 = important, 2 = very important.

The student rating form asked teachers to rate the ability of individual students on the 30 items. These questions were of the form, "How able is this student to ...?" Response choices were: 0 = cannot do this, 1 = sometimes can do this, 2 = always can do this.

Academic achievement was assessed using school records. The academic GPA for each student was calculated by averaging that student's school grades in five subjects (Japanese, English, mathematics, science, and history).

RESULTS

Analyses of students' social skill ratings

Teachers' ratings of students' skills were analyzed using principal-component analyses with oblique (Oblimin) rotation. A 3-component analysis was conducted to determine the loadings of the items as clustered on the SSRS. All 10 Cooperation items, 2 Assertion items, and 3 Self-Control items loaded on the first component. Seven of the 10 Assertion items and 3 Self-Control items loaded on the second component. The remaining four Self-Control items and one Assertion item loaded on the third component. Because this 3-component solution did not replicate the three subscales of the original SSRS and because the resulting components were not clearly meaningful from a Japanese perspective, the student ratings were re-analyzed using a 2-component solution. This analysis produced two clusters of items that are meaningful from a Japanese cultural perspective (see Table 1 for loadings). The Academic component consists of behaviors expected of industrious students, including purely academic behaviors, e.g., "Produces correct schoolwork," and social-academic behaviors, e.g., "Ignores peer distractions." The Interpersonal component consists of social behaviors that are expected, not only in academic situations, but in all social contexts, e.g., "Initiates conversations with peers," and "Introduces self to new people." Two items loaded on both components: item 9 ("Accepts peers' ideas") was included in the Academic subscale and item 15 ("Compromises in conflict situations") was included in the Interpersonal subscale based on the subjective judgment that these items fit well with their respective subscales.

Correlation coefficients for the two subscales were: Academic - Interpersonal $r = .35$, Academic - total $r = .90$, and Interpersonal - total $r = .72$, ($ps < .001$). Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of ratings of students' social skills was high for the total scale (.93), the Academic subscale (.93), and the Interpersonal subscale (.90).

A Sex $\times$ Subscale repeated-measures ANOVA on student ratings revealed a significant sex effect, $F(1,96) = 9.04$, $p < .005$, a significant subscale effect, $F(1,96) = 19.83$, $p < .001$, and a nonsignificant Sex $\times$ Subscale interaction, $F(1,96) < 1.00$. Females ($M = 37.31$, $SD = 10.14$) were rated higher than males ($M = 31.10$, $SD = 10.57$). Academic subscale ratings ($M = 18.88$, $SD = 7.31$) were higher than Interpersonal subscale ratings ($M = 15.39$, $SD = 6.17$).

GPA was predicted from subscale ratings using a linear regression analysis. Academic subscale ratings significantly predicted GPA, adjusted $R^2 = .49$, $F(2,97) = 46.53$, $p < .001$. Interpersonal subscale ratings did not significantly predict GPA ($p > .05$).

Analyses of social skill importance ratings

Teachers' importance ratings were analyzed using t -tests ($p < .05$, 2-tailed) comparing the rating for each item to the mean rating for all 30 items ($M = 1.19$). As shown in Table 2, four items were rated significantly more important than average: "Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement,"

"Listens to classmates when they present their work or ideas," "Puts work materials or school property away," and "Acknowledges compliments or praise from peers." Three items were rated significantly less important than average: "Gives compliments to members of the opposite sex," "Finishes class assignments within time limits," and "Appears confident in social interactions with opposite-sex peers."

Table 1. SSRS Item Loadings on Japanese Subscales

SSRS Subscale / Item		Academic Subscale	Interpersonal Subscale
Cooperation			
1	Produces correct work	.81	—
2	Keeps work area clean	.78	—
12	Attends to instructions	.82	—
13	Uses time appropriately	.78	—
17	Easily makes transitions	.77	—
19	Finishes assignments on time	.58	—
20	Listens to classmates ideas	.80	—
24	Ignores peer distractions	.83	—
26	Puts work away	.80	—
29	Complies with directions	.73	—
Self-Control			
3	Responds appropriately to peer aggression	.45	—
11	Receives criticism well	.52	—
18	Controls temper with peers	.69	—
23	Controls temper with adults	.59	—
9	Accepts peers' ideas	.54	.46*
15	Compromises in conflict situations	.46*	.53
6	Politely refuses unreasonable requests	—	.59
8	Responds appropriately to teasing	—	.63
16	Acknowledges peers' praise	—	.58
30	Responds appropriately to peer pressure	—	.47
Assertion			
4	Initiates conversations with peers	—	.68
5	Volunteers to help peers	—	.60
7	Appropriately questions unfair rules	—	.68
10	Appropriately expresses feelings when wronged	—	.57
14	Introduces self to new people	—	.74
21	Appears confident with opposite sex	—	-.74
22	Invites others to join in activities	—	.74
25	Stands up for peers	—	.61
27	Tells you when treated unfairly	—	.44
28	Compliments opposite sex	—	.70

Note: Loadings less than .44 were omitted for clarity. *Items 9 and 15 were assigned to the Academic and Interpersonal subscales, respectively.

A t -test ($p < .05$) showed no significant difference between the mean importance ratings of Academic ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.23$) and Interpersonal ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.20$) items, $t(9) = 1.26$. Mean importance ratings on the Academic and Interpersonal subscales were significantly correlated ($r = .64$, $p < .05$).

Comparisons of importance ratings between the Japanese teachers and the U.S. teachers in the normative sample are of limited meaningfulness due to the dissimilar clustering of the SSRS items in the two samples. However, it is interesting to compare total importance ratings across the 30 items between the two samples.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and t -values of Teachers' Importance Ratings of Social Skill Items

Item	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
15. Compromises in conflict situations	1.70	0.48	3.34**
20. Listens to classmates' ideas	1.70	0.48	3.34**
26. Puts work away	1.70	0.48	3.34**
16. Acknowledges peers' praise	1.60	0.52	2.51*
11. Receives criticism well	1.50	0.71	1.39
9. Accepts peers' ideas	1.50	0.53	1.86
25. Stands up for peers	1.50	0.53	1.86
5. Volunteers to help peers	1.40	0.52	1.29
18. Controls temper with peers	1.40	0.52	1.29
12. Attends to instructions	1.30	0.67	0.52
2. Keeps work area clean	1.30	0.48	0.72
27. Tells you when treated unfairly	1.30	0.48	0.72
29. Complies with directions	1.30	0.48	0.72
10. Appropriately expresses feelings when wronged	1.20	0.42	0.08
22. Invites others to join in activities	1.20	0.42	0.08
23. Controls temper with adults	1.20	0.42	0.08
30. Responds appropriately to peer pressure	1.10	0.74	-0.39
17. Easily makes transitions	1.10	0.57	-0.50
1. Produces correct schoolwork	1.10	0.32	-0.90
4. Initiates conversations with peers	1.10	0.32	-0.90
14. Introduces self to new people	1.00	0.82	-0.74
3. Responds appropriately to peer aggression	1.00	0.47	-1.28
6. Politely refuses unreasonable requests	1.00	0.47	-1.28
8. Responds appropriately to teasing	1.00	0.47	-1.28
24. Ignores peer distractions	1.00	0.47	-1.28
7. Appropriately questions unfair rules	1.00	0.00 ^a	—
13. Uses time appropriately	0.80	0.63	-1.95
28. Compliments opposite sex	0.80	0.42	-2.93*
19. Finishes assignments on time	0.50	0.71	-3.09*
21. Appears confident with opposite sex	0.40	0.52	-4.84***

^a t cannot be computed.

Note: t -values are for differences between the item mean and the overall mean (1.19).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Japanese teachers' total importance rating ($M = 35.7$, $SD = 5.81$), was very similar to that of the U.S. teachers ($M = 34.0$, $SD = 11.7$; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Note that the standard deviation is substantially smaller in the Japanese sample, reflecting greater consistency among Japanese teachers in these ratings.

DISCUSSION

The fundamental goal of this study was to develop an instrument that could be used to assess the social skills of Japanese high school students. As part of the process, we collected data relevant to making preliminary judgments of the validity and reliability of the instrument. Specifically, we obtained Japanese high school teachers' ratings of the importance of various social skills in their classrooms and of the incidence of those skills among their students. Because we started with an instrument (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990) that has considerable data from normative samples in the U.S., we were able to make some tentative comparisons of Japanese teachers' ratings to U.S. teachers' ratings of high school students' social skills.

A principal-component analysis of teachers' ratings of students' social skills based on the three SSRS subscales showed that Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control did not constitute meaningful clusters of social skills. In particular, subgroups of Assertion and Self-Control items loaded on other components. The pattern of loadings appeared to be consistent with the collectivistic nature of Japanese culture. For example, "Accepts peers' ideas for group activities" and "Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement" are Self-Control skills in the U.S. where individualistic cultural values prescribe that students should not change their ideas to fit in with a peer group. By contrast, in a collectivistic culture, such as Japan, the individual is expected as a matter of cultural tradition to accept the group's ideas (Eisenstadt, 1990). Items such as "Receives criticism well," "Controls temper with adults," and "Controls temper with peers" are also Self-Control items in the U.S. where adults are expected to be tolerant of a wide range of individual differences in these skills. By comparison, Japanese culture is greatly influenced by Confucian philosophy in which inhibition and self-restraint are signs of mastery and maturity (Tseng, 1973).

In our Japanese sample, the 30 J-SSRS skills clustered into two subscales. The Academic subscale consists of behaviors that are consistent with academic and social rules and expectations. The Interpersonal subscale consists of behaviors related to initiating and actively participating in social interactions.

Analysis of teachers' ratings of students' skills yielded significant sex and subscale effects. Female students' social skills were rated higher than males' and Academic skills were rated higher than Interpersonal skills. The sex difference, also found in the U.S. normative sample, fits with the Japanese tradition of viewing female students as having better academic and interpersonal skills. The higher Academic ratings reflect the traditional emphasis on academically-related skills in Japanese education.

Strong relationships between social skills and academic success were revealed

from the present study. In the Japanese sample, GPA was used as the measure of academic success. For the U.S. norms, reported in the SSRS manual, academic success was measured using teachers' ratings of academic competence. The correlation between GPA and total scale score in Japan was similar in magnitude to the correlation between GPA and total scale score in the U.S. normative sample. This result is consistent with previous studies (Chen, Li, & Rubin, 1997; Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Kenneth, 1980; Muma, 1965; Wentzel, 1991) showing positive relationships between social skills and academic success in U.S. and Chinese students. Interestingly, in the U.S., all three SSRS subscales are significantly correlated with GPA, but in Japan, only Academic subscale ratings were significantly correlated with GPA; Interpersonal subscale ratings were not. This is consistent with the traditional emphasis on academic skills in determining grades in Japanese schools.

Analyses of the importance assigned to specific skills showed that Academic and Interpersonal skills were rated equally. This finding is consistent with the increasing emphasis in Japanese education on encouraging interpersonal skills in students. The top seven skills in which teachers gave the highest scores were related to the skills considered to be important in a collective society. These skills were to cope with in-group members, to accept the opinions of others, and to take care of other in-group members and the material that belongs to the group. A reason for this result could be that in the Japanese education system, each class is considered to be a group, and classmates are the in-group members. Therefore, these skills are considered to be important to success in the classroom environment. Two items rated significantly lower than average importance were, "Appears confident in social interaction with opposite-sex peers" and "Gives compliments to members of the opposite sex." This reflects that confidence in social interactions with opposite-sex peers is not appropriate in Japanese classrooms.

Another interesting aspect of the importance ratings was that there was substantially less variance in Japanese teachers' importance ratings compared to the importance ratings of U.S. teachers, consistent with cultural differences between the two societies. Given the value placed on Confucian principles of inhibition and self-restraint, Japanese teachers would not be expected to be comfortable giving extremely high or low scores to their students. Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995), found that Japanese and Chinese were more likely to use the midpoint of response scales compared to North Americans. Their results also demonstrated that this cultural difference in the use of response scales did not distort the nature of cultural differences in the behaviors being studied.

In summary, we developed an instrument that appears promising in terms of assessing social skills in Japanese high schools. The J-SSRS has a meaningful structure in terms of Japanese teachers' use of the scale in rating their own students and when considered in terms of Japanese educational traditions and current trends. The two subscales are internally consistent and are related in predictable ways to academic achievement. Differences between ratings of social skills in female and

male students are also consistent with traditions in Japanese education. These preliminary indicators suggest that the J-SSRS is a reliable instrument with adequate cultural and construct validity.

The degree of similarity between the J-SSRS and the SSRS should be especially helpful in studies comparing Japanese and U.S. adolescents. At the same time, differences between the subscales serve as a reminder that the same behavior may have different meanings in different cultures, reducing the likelihood of culture bias in inferences drawn from cross-cultural studies. Importance ratings could be especially useful in studies examining not only what parents and teachers do, but what they do in relation to social skills they feel are important. Within Japan, the scale could be a valuable research instrument in studies of contextual factors related to adolescents' social skills, such as parenting, teachers' behaviors, peer and media influences, cultural values, and socioeconomic conditions.

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