

## BUILDING A PROGRAM OF TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS TO YOUNG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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**Abstract:** The overall purpose of a study is to develop a training program for young preschool children with autism spectrum disorder in Ho Chi Minh City and according to this develop an authorized training program for preschool teachers, teachers in special education and other groups of staff working with children with autism syndrome. On top of that, the study wants to inspire to renewing parts of the curriculum in education.

**Keywords:** young preschool children with autism spectrum disorder, program, teaching social skills

### INTRODUCTION

There are several conditions we want to point out as important factors. We have categorized the factors into four fields.

**Background 1:** In Vietnam, there has been an increasing number of children diagnosed with ASD over the last decades. In VN ASD is not recognized as a disability by law. Therefore, there is a gap between the need of skilled and specialized preschool teachers and the focus of educational system on the curriculum about ASD. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for further education for the existing educated social workers and teacher at the preschools.

**Background 2:** There is a wide knowledge worldwide about how to train preschool children with ASD. However, there are less knowledge and the overall environment's importance for the effect for the children's development. Every training program for children with ASD must take into consideration how the environment in special schools and inclusive kindergarten can fit into the profound premises of a program. We distinguish between premises belonging to classic learning theories of L.S.Vygotsky, Bandura and J.Piaget and the theories categorized as behaviorism.

**Background 3:** Each country has a random way of organized the education of preschool children and the most countries regulate these institutions by laws and curricula. But there are big differences according to managing and supervising the pedagogical practice at special institutions. Furthermore, the great difference is when it comes to managing finance in education at special institutions. In Denmark, most kindergartens are supported by income from the taxpayers, but in VN there are a lot of

private funds especially in the field of special needs institutions. We want to take the steering of the institutions into account in our study. What do the differentials mean in praxis? Which part of the daily life do the differentials effect? And how can we tell?

**Background 4:** The research regarding to guiding and teaching preschool children at special schools and at their homes by parents are pointing out the development of social skills as important and crucial objectives. However the study does not take into account how parents socio - economic backgrounds and living conditions in general effects the outcome of the training. How important is the training for the opportunities for the disadvantaged child that home can be transformed into a learning environment?

### OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to investigate and evaluate the evident-based research of guiding and training programs and results concerning the development of social skills for children with an ASD diagnose. We do not take into consideration of diagnose procedures or tools used by doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists. Though, we depend on solid descriptions of the symptoms of ASD - especially the effects on social skills. Therefore we included studies on the epidemiology of ASD (Chakrabarti, Fombonne et al.; Ozonoff and Rogers; DSM-5 and ICD 10).

The overall objective is to develop a training program for young preschool social competencies with autism spectrum disorders in HCMC and a training program for teachers in the future.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- i. Study of the rationale for a program in social skills training for preschool children with ASD
- ii. Assess the current situation in social skills training for preschool children with ASD in HCMC
- iii. Build a program of social skills training for preschool children with ASD in HCMC in cooperation with the research program: Inequality and Disadvantaged People
- iv. Test the program of social skills training for preschool children with ASD at 3 special schools of HCMC (Khai Tri, Uoc Mo, Thao Dien)
- v. Create a training course (Certificate) as a further education for educated preschool teachers and others in the field of ADH and others mental disorders.

## METHODS

We know that research is important to the success of their career. Here are some qualitative methods that can be utilized to advance with a special education degree. In our study, we use a combination of different research methods, including questionnaires, interviews, observation, case study, action research, narrative research.

*a) Questionnaires:* Questionnaires are used to collect information from 220 teachers, managers, parents at 10 special schools and 17 teachers, managers, 24 parents at three special schools Khai Tri, Uoc Mo, Thao Dien.

*b) Observation:* The researchers observe the activities of teachers using lesson plans, games to teach social skills for preschoolers children with autism and observe their behaviors learning over 9 months.

*c) Interviews:* Conducting the interviews of 12 teachers, 6 managers, 24 parents at three special schools Khai Tri, Uoc Mo, Thao Dien to clarify the issues to be studied. The interviews focus on topics such as awareness of the importance, necessity, feasibility consistent practice, the benefits, the difficulties using the program teaching social skills for preschoolers children with autism.

*d) Case Study* - This is a method that explores a particularly bounded system. The system can be an event, a process, or an individual study.

*e) Action Research* - The purpose of this qualitative research method is two-pronged: to apply theories during fieldwork and to create an impact on the participants/setting. Perhaps the most unforgettable action research was that of Robert Edgerton, an anthropologist. In the early 1960s, he interviewed mentally challenged people who were confined in institutions. The results of his research revealed the inhumane conditions inside these institutions. Edgerton's work inspired an advocacy that called for the overturn of laws against the marriage of people with such cognitive disabilities.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is designed as an action research (Fuller-Rowell 2009) – which means the results of the desk study will be analyzed by chosen theory of learning and theory of the development of children in general. The results of this process will perform a scaffold for a program for training social skills and will be validated by inviting a group of researchers, practitioners, lecturers and students to join a workshop. Furthermore, we will conduct a pilot testing of the program before we put it into action. In this way, we create the scientific foundation, principles, and process and building the program and make sure the framework of the program can be implemented in VN. As a special part of the program, we have to choose an evaluation tool. At and the moment we are preferred Vineland scale and in addition, we want to use a tool for evaluating the environment – just call Environment Testing Scale (Miller 2014). The tool operates with three levels of quality; high, middle and poor. It is based on measuring the possibilities of developing relationships, participation and learning.

The next step is about testing the program in a period of time. We will be testing in three schools and staff will be in front of receiving instructions and is lead into the general ideas of the training program. The study must make sure that materials and surrounding are available and if not it has to be put into a research log and documented.

The study is planned to do observations in everyday life praxis minimum at two occasions and interviewing the staff about challenges and successes. We want to have the children's perspectives on the activities – but are not sure whether to have to perform this

challenge. It depends on the level of the children's language skills and the parent's willingness to participate in the study.

As a part of the testing, we will test the children's social skills ability before, in the middle of the study and in the end of the study. This will allow us to make changes if we see something in the environment needs to be looked into. And it will provide results or the outcome of the children's development process. We will also make tests of the quality of the pedagogical environment three times for generated a set of variations factors.

The collected data will be analyzed based on theory and by comparing the results from different schools in consideration of their overall conditions.

Based on the main result, the program will be repeated and changed according to the finding. This quality secured program will be the scientific foundation of the authorized training program for existing educated preschool teachers in HCMC.

#### ***State of the implemented research***

The state of the implemented research is focusing on the development of social skills of children with ASD and on how the development of social skills are connected to the development of others skills – language skills.

We define social skills as following: Social competencies contain early communication, self-care, social interaction, empathy, conflict management attachment and social skills. Social skills are about 1) skills according to create social contact and be able to handle social situations 2) knowledge of culture, groups and empathy 3) to have an opinion of make sense on a personal level in the terms of attachment, engage and self-esteem.

There are a lot of studies on social skills of children with ASD. We will just present a few at this stage of our work.

First of all, we will mention the work of Lorna Wing, Utah Frith, and Rita Jordan. The diagnose they created the diagnose of Asperger put the light on the importance of differing between several syndromes. They underlined that children with Asperger are more likely to create Theory of Mind than other kinds of autism.

Main impairments in social interaction and communication and rigidity in behaviors. Social skills deficits are confirmed by other

authors (White, Romanczyk, Weiss and Harris) ad DSM-V; later on by Bellini; Rogers; and Grandin.

Deficits of social skills by Gresham and Elliot; Nikopoulos & Keenan, 2004; Elliott, Racine và Busse, 1995 and Jennifer Yakos, 2014 include impaired Theory of Mind (Cohen 2000) and lack of empathy (Cohen 2000; Dewar 2009)

The rationale for developing social skills teaching for preschool children with ASD is based on the 5 premises (Bellini, 2002):

- i. In order to have good interaction people with asd need good social skills
- ii. Social skills are at the base of social interaction
- iii. Good social skills are not necessarily suitable at all times
- iv. Our success in society is based on our adaptive skills
- v. Social skills are not like academic skills

In the line of studies on social skill training for children with ASD we will mention:

Carr and Darcy; Leap model; ABA; peer models; play groups ineffectiveness of social skills training in North America was mentioned by many authors because of unclear goals and the lack of pre-training assessment and post-training evaluation (Bellini et al. 2007), mainly relying on parents comments.

Bellini has introduced a 49-items assessment scale to be adapted; and the SMART model (specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable and time-limited) on social skills training.

The most prominent programs of social skills training are those of Jed Baker, Bellini and Garcia Winner.

Vaughan et al (2003) has evaluated 10 models, and found Social Thinking of Winner (2007); PEERS of Frankel and Laugeson (2010) and Building Social Relationships (Bellini, 2007) to meet the standards of evidence-based training, which is being assessed independently and positively by at least 5 studies (Chambless; Odom and Wang).

One exemplary model is Social Skills for 40 young people with Asperger, carried out by the Addiction Treatment Centre of Toronto in 2010 (Lunsky, Weiss and Vecili) now being replicated across Ontario.

Ontario Special Education Board has based on 12 studies to build a broad eclectic

model (2011) of social skills training, which claims to be built on two models: ABA and the cognitive based therapy.

The Social Stories of Carol Gray is another model, alongside TEACCH, RDI and DIR. However, the coordination between programs and the school has not been smooth. In 2007, Bellini, Benner and Hopf have shown through 55 reviews that the achievement of social skill training has been minimal, because too brief, and children do not have the opportunity to carry out what they have learned in real life.

According to Baker (2005), there are five factors that they have to meet:

- i. assessment of objectives;
- ii. mobilization of training;
- iii. choosing the appropriate model;
- iv. generalization;  
and transfer to peer modeling.

Evaluation needs to assess the objectives of each stakeholder (parents, students and teachers) otherwise it will not be effective.

Studies have shown that if we focus on some specific skills, and specific deficits, for a longer period of time, it will be more effective. Students, parents and teachers will list the skills to be taught in priority, about 4 each time to be practiced in various setting, then the goals will be achieved and parents would be able to help in every different setting.

Skills are to be chosen in consultation with students, according to their level of abilities.

The York County Division in the USA has created a curriculum in social skills, that has been translated into Vietnamese and well known in VN. The curriculum has 7 components: Conflict Management; Peer Relationships; School/Classroom Skills); Feelings and Self-Awareness; Conversational Skills; Problem Solving Skills; and Community Conduct. Each skill is described, analyzed as to its use (The York county school division, 2006).

Teachtown is another program supported by animated media, covers 5 areas of skills for children from 2 to 7 years old, each area with 10 lessons, total 50 lessons on social adaptation, social awareness, arts, language development, math, emotions and social skills [<http://web.teachtown.com/products/social-skills> 29/10/2015].

Psychologists Sally Rogers, Ph.D., and Geraldine Dawson, Ph.D., developed the Early Start Denver Model as an early-age extension of

the Denver Model, which Rogers and colleagues developed and refined. This early intervention program integrates a relationship-focused developmental model with the well-validated teaching practices of [Applied Behavior Analysis](#) (ABA). Its core features include the following:

Naturalistic applied behavioral analytic strategies

- Sensitive to normal developmental sequence

- Deep parental involvement

- Focus on interpersonal exchange and positive affect

- Shared engagement with joint activities

- Language and communication taught inside a positive, affect-based relationship [<https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/treatment/early-start-denver-model-esdm>].

The above are important theoretical and practical information for the base of development of this program. This research project will be grounded on are elaborated review of the literature.

## RESEARCH PLAN

The research plan will be conducted in order to fit into Vietnamese practice.

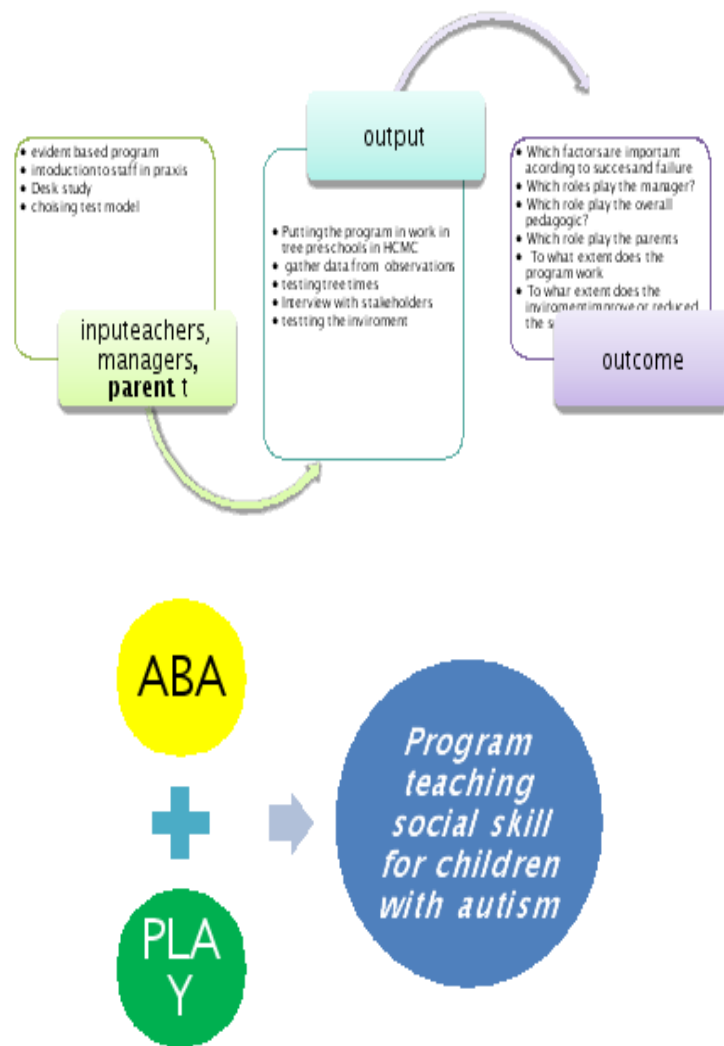
Special education for children with ASD has been limited still, and more so with social skills training, mainly focusing on Preschool Education (2009) and Kindergarten Education (2010). A study on awareness of children with ASD in HCMC (Ngo Xuan Diep, 2009) and ASD, from early detection, diagnosis to intervention, according to updated DSM-5 criteria (Phan Thieu Xuan Giang, 2013) referred again to social skills as one critical area of deficits in children with ASD. Nguyen Nu Tam An (2011) developed a curriculum of behavior intervention for children with ASD based on the model of Catherine Maurice. Hanoi Life Skills Curriculum Guide for PreK-12 emphasized on life and social skills to be taught across the country for children with ASD, including Khai Tri well know special education school in HCMC. Nguyen Trang Thu (2012) also developed Study on the UNREAL method in developing communication for children with ASD, Tran Phuong Dung (2013) TEACCH method for ASD; Dao Thi Thu Thuy (2014) defended her Ph.D. thesis on Adjustment of verbal behavior

for children 3-5 yrs to prepare them for inclusion in the community. Do the Thao (2015) published her work on social skills with 11 concrete steps for children with ASD as well as Early Intervention for children with ASD with a solid curriculum on motor skills, cognition and social skills. Nguyen Thi Hoang Yen (2015) Study on early intervention and inclusive education for children in Viet Nam in the period of 2011-2020 has reviewed the

achievement as well as analyzed the challenges of VN in education.

In summary, because this autism spectrum disorder is affecting the whole psychological and personality of the child, especially his behavior and social skills, they deserve the most appropriate social skills training in order to function in society.

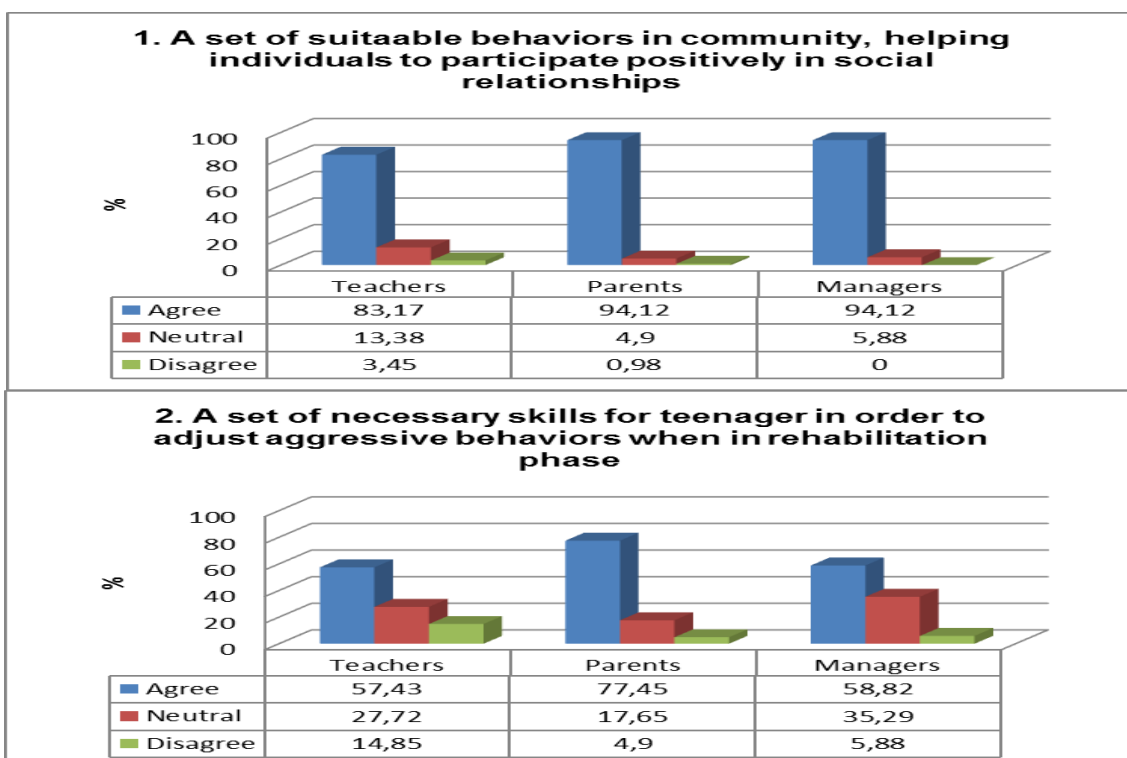
**Model of program teaching social skill for children with autism**



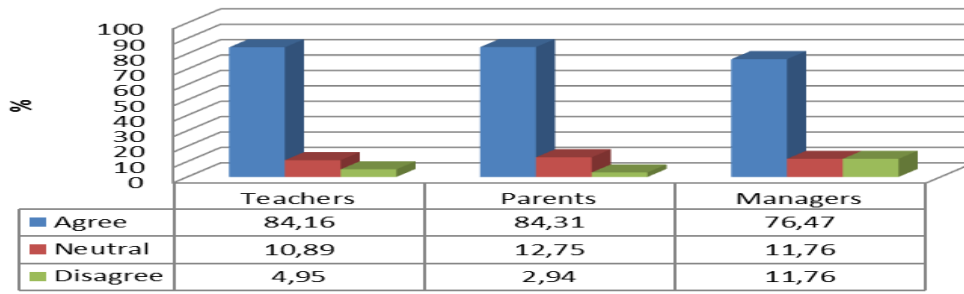
We conducted a survey with the aim of getting knowledge of how much teachers, parents and managers aware the definition of social skills of children with autism. There had been 17 managers, 101 teachers working with children

with autism in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 102 parents having children with autism and managers of schools for children with autism. This survey of awareness included 18 items and the results presented through charts below.

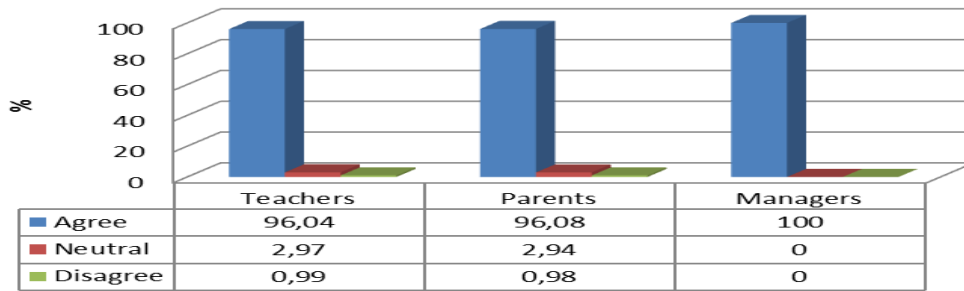
No.	Item
1.	A set of suitable behaviors in community, helping individuals to participate positively in social relationships
2.	A set of necessary skills for teenager in order to adjust aggressive behaviors when in rehabilitation phase
3.	Communication skills accepted and well evaluated by schools
4.	Communication and interaction skills in order to adapt to daily life
5.	Skills in order to build positive relationships in community
6.	Skills in order to help individuals to start and maintain positive relationships in community
7.	Skills in order to help individuals to solve social situations occurred outside of schools
8.	Skills in order to solve emotions when interacting with others
9.	Skills in order to live together and interact well in multi-societies
10.	Skills in order to promote positive relationships leading to responsible decisions in life
11.	Skills in order to help individuals to interact well with others in community
12.	Skills to interact with others in specific situations through well-accepted behaviors by community
13.	Skills to help individuals achieve benefits for themselves and others
14.	A set of skills in the field of society, such as early communication skills (how to take care of oneself); social interaction skills; empathy skills; solve-problems skills
15.	Social communication behaviors in each specific situation accepted by community and get positive achievement
16.	Methods in order to solve problems in community to help people to adapt and develop
17.	Skills to cope with conflicts in cooperation
18.	One of the three groups of life skills



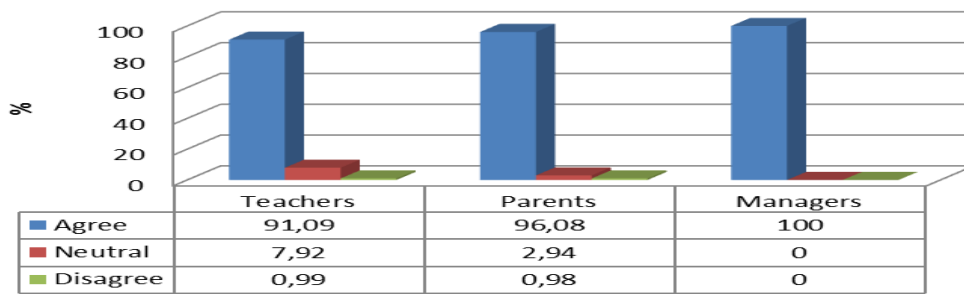
**3. Communication skills accepted and well evaluated by schools**



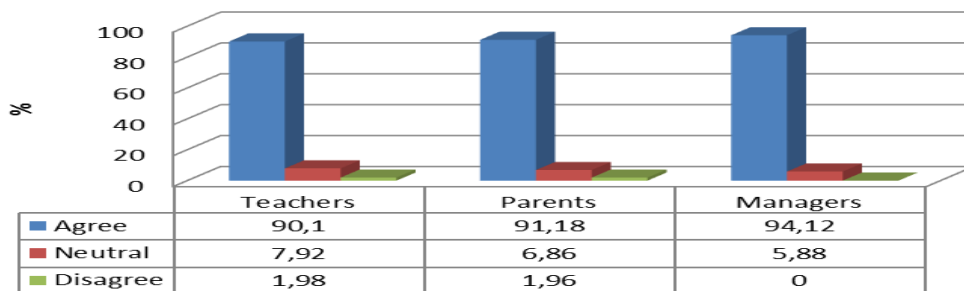
**4. Communication and interaction skills in order to adapt to daily life**

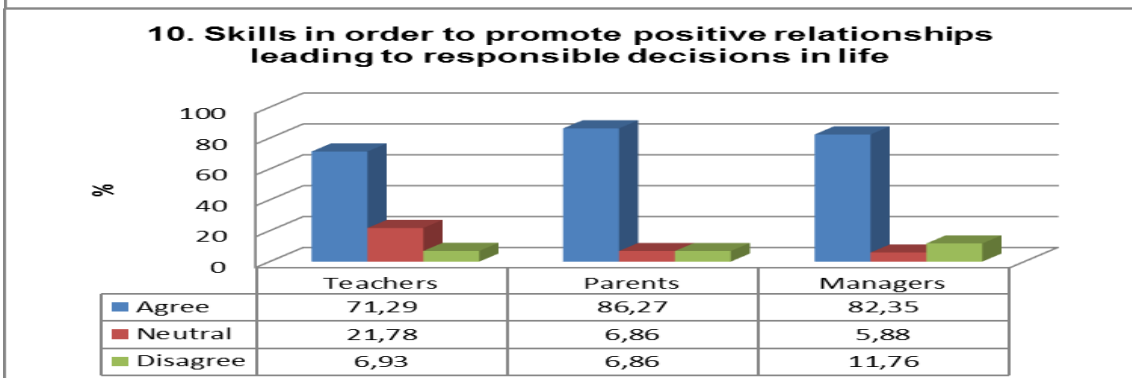
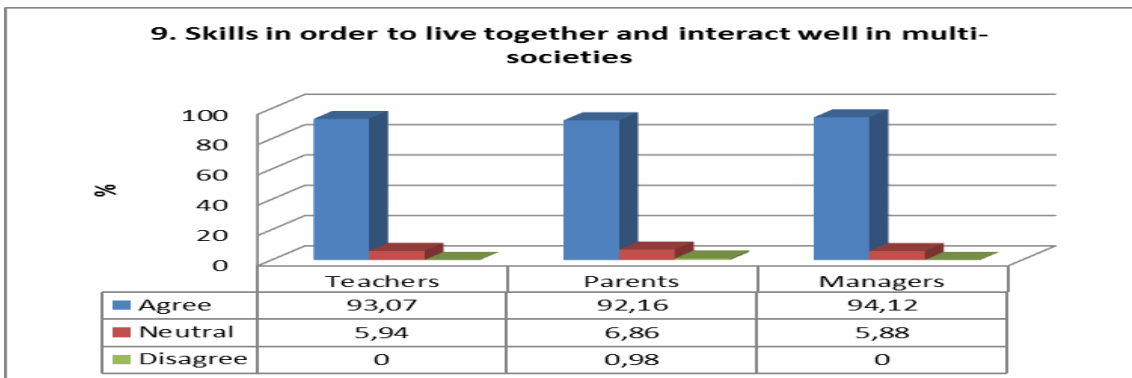
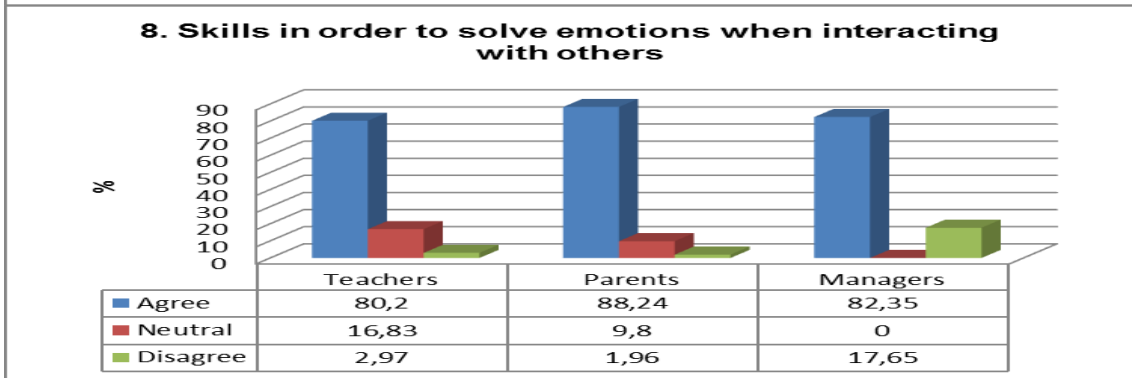
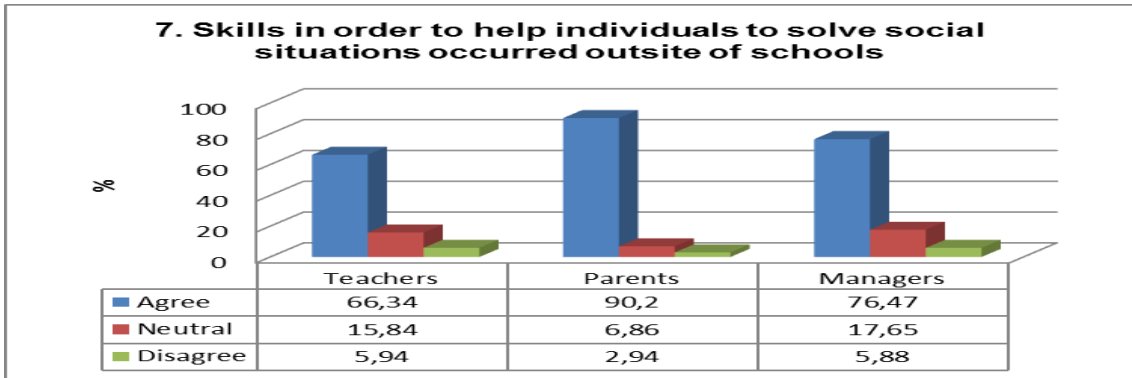


**5. Skills in order to build positive relationships in community**

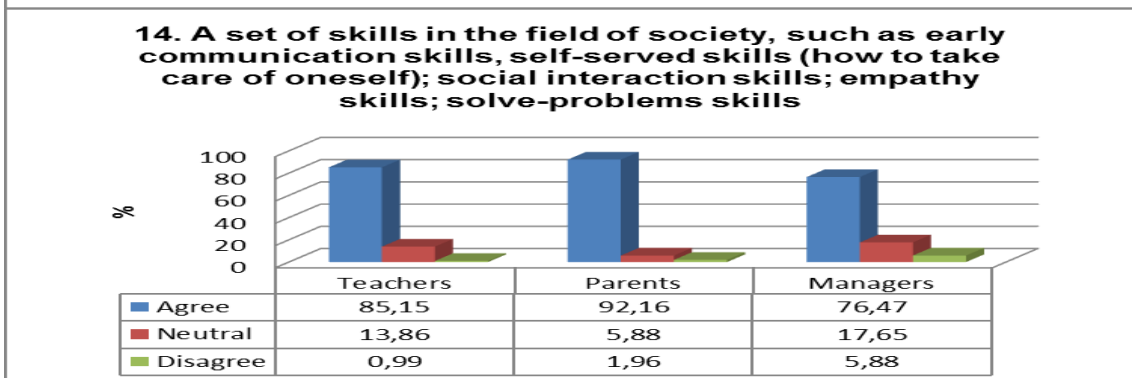
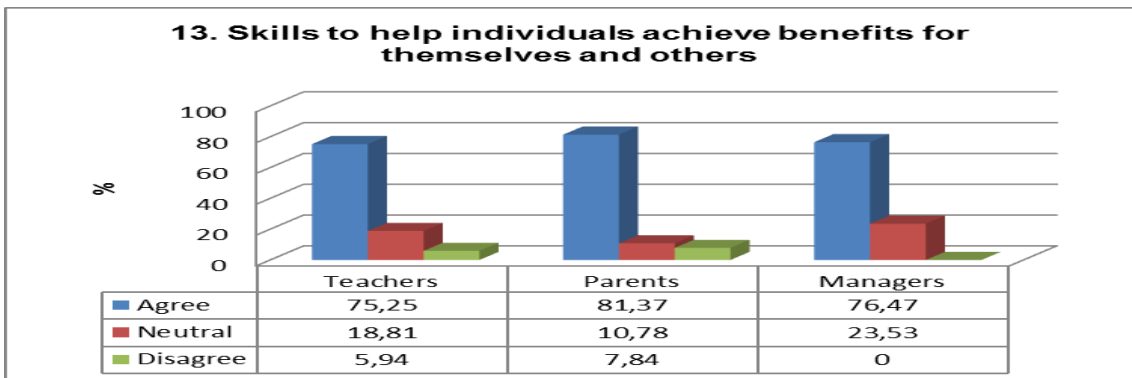
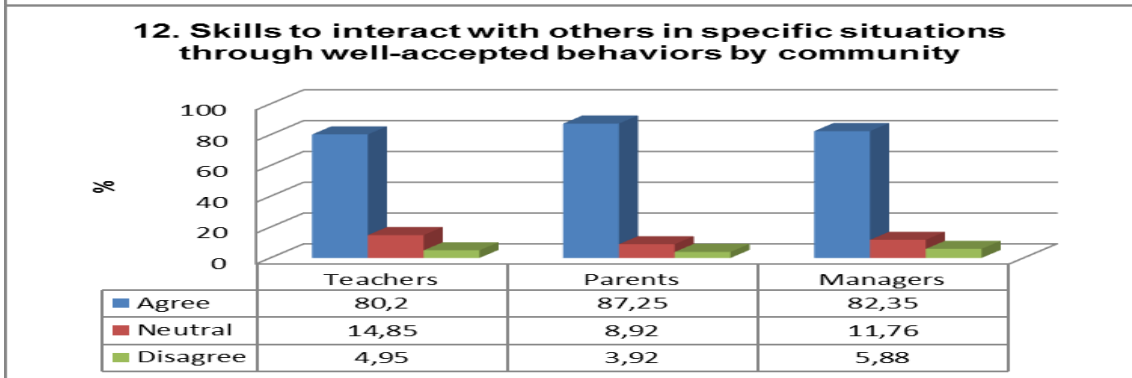
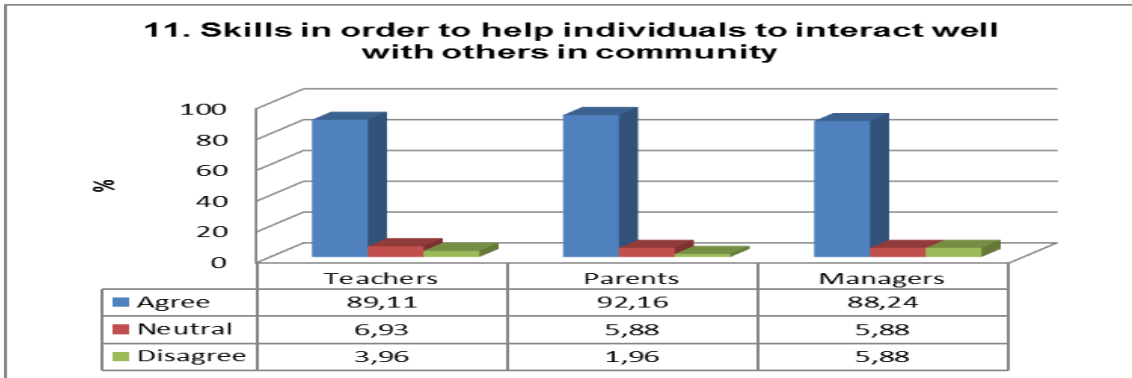


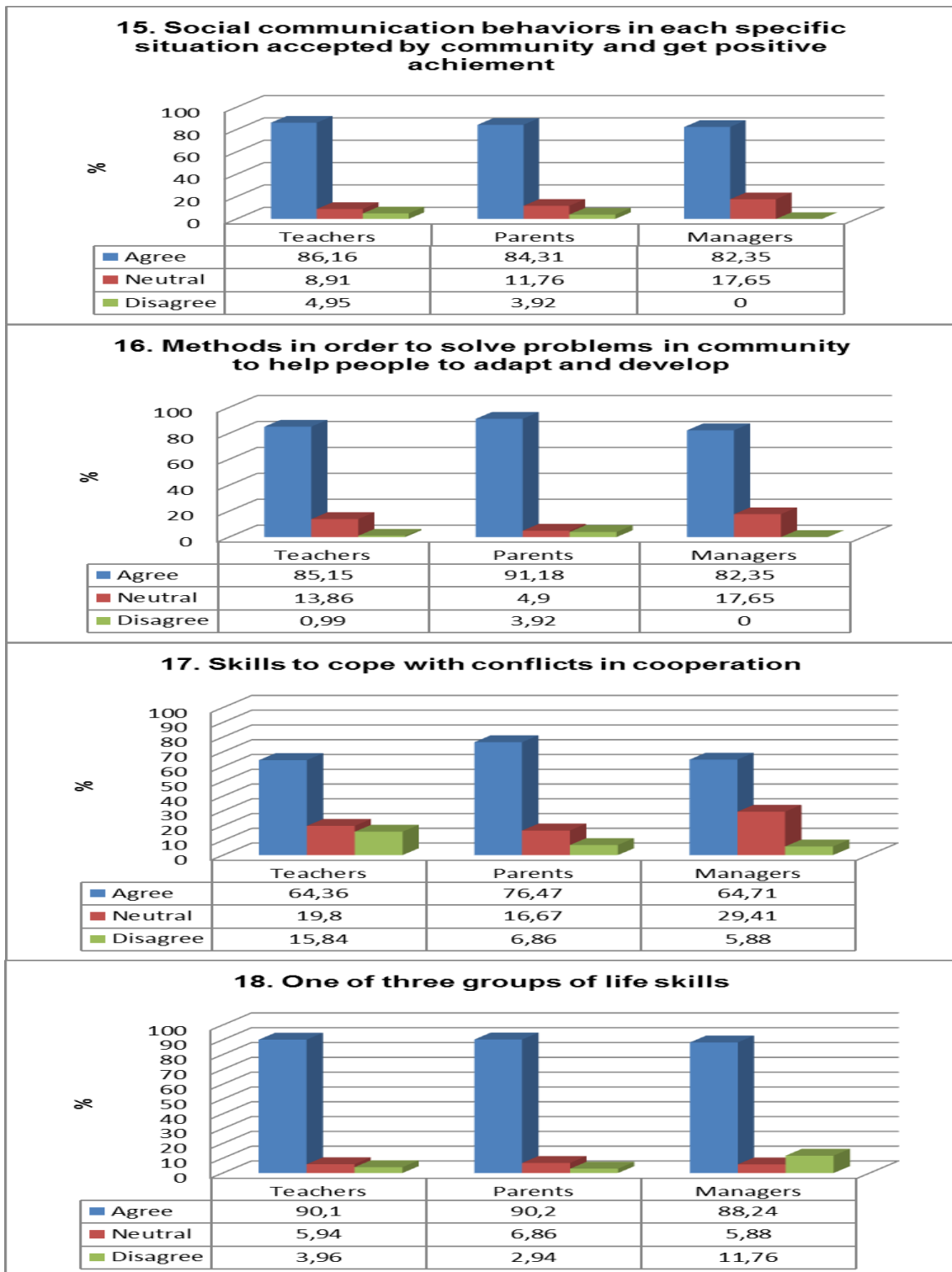
**6. Skills in order to help individuals to start and maintain positive relationships in community**











## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research will (1) create opportunities for preschool children with autism in order to get significant benefits, carried out and evaluated by evidence of research, (2) provide teachers and parents having children with autism with a huge range of tools and programs with the aim of guiding their children how to learn and develop social

skills, which is concerned as very necessary but they are lack of, (3) donate a useful program as supportive tools to educate social skills for children with autism in special needs school, (4) raise people's awareness in community of children with disability in general and children with autism in particular, which help them to be able to integrate successfully in their community. With these

benefits as mentioned, conducting this research and building a program of teaching social skills will have humanistic, educational and economic-social values.

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