

# A social-cognitive intervention program for adolescents with autism: A pilot study

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**Background:** People with ASD often present a core deficit of ToM, and lack the ability to engage with and relate to others. Their manner of communication typically appears to be one-sided and self-centered. Such functional impairments are a serious barrier to establishing and maintaining meaningful friendships amongst peers and can undermine the academic success of children with ASD (Montroy, Bowles, Skibbe & Foster, 2014).

**Objectives:** This pilot study explored the efficacy of a social-cognitive intervention program for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Seven adolescents with ASD (mean age = 12.57 years) attended a school-based 10-week program.

**Methods:** Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales, Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) and Theory of Mind Inventory was administered at baseline, immediately after the program and post 2-months. There were significant positive gains in Theory of Mind knowledge and in individualized goals (of GAS), and there were further gains after two months. Qualitative evaluation was conducted by a focus group interview with parents of participants. Consistent with the quantitative findings, parents observed that their children have increased knowledge of social skills, socialize more with friends, and had increase in positive social behavior. On the other hand, they perceived an even more intensive and ongoing program could further benefit their children.

**Conclusion:** This study has added to the understanding of the potential impact of social skills programs run in mainstream school.



Figure 1. Bar chart of mean difference scores at pre-test, post-test, and two-month test

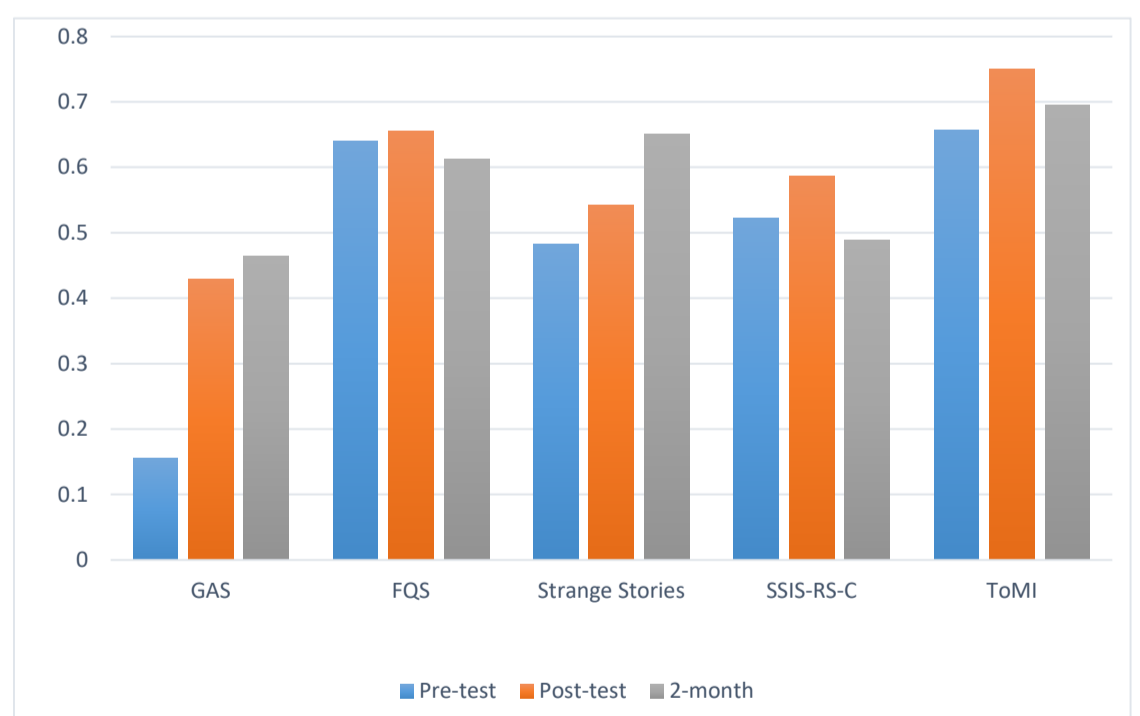


Table 3. Comparison of outcome scores at pre-test, post-test, and 2-month test.

Assessment Outcomes	Time			p
	Pre-test (T1) mean (SD)	Post-test (T2) mean (SD)	2-month follow-up (T3) mean (SD)	
SSIS-RS-C				
Total scores	72 (13.83)	80.86 (14.15)	67.4 (11.84)	0.82
Domain scores:				
Communication	10 (4.83)	12.14 (2.12)	9.8 (2.05)	0.61
Cooperation	10.57 (2.30)	11.14 (1.35)	10.2 (2.05)	0.50
Assertion	13.71 (4.31)	12.71 (4.75)	12.6 (2.07)	0.80
Responsibility	10.71 (3.82)	11.86 (2.67)	8.6 (2.70)	0.80
Empathy	8.57 (3.91)	10 (3.74)	6.4 (1.82)	0.95
Engagement	11.14 (2.91)	13 (2.52)	10.8 (4.66)	0.44
Self-control	7.29 (2.81)	10 (4.20)	9 (3.46)	0.33
Problem behavior: total	58.14 (11.51)	58.57 (16.82)	55.2 (15.96)	0.85
Autism: total	19.29 (6.07)	22.86 (5.84)	19 (3.32)	0.25
GAS	-1.38 (0.53)	-0.29 (0.64)	-0.14 (0.88)	p < .01
FQS	3.20 (0.43)	3.27 (0.63)	3.06 (0.67)	0.55
Strange Stories Test	11.57 (2.82)	13 (4.29)	15.6 (2.51)	0.04*
TOMI-2	13.15 (2.78)	14.99 (1.59)	13.89 (1.47)	0.82

Note. SSIS-RS-C = Chinese version of Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales; GAS = Goal Attainment Scaling;

FQS = Friendship Qualities Scales; TOMI-2 = Inventory: Second Edition.

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < .01