

The Impact of Utilizing Social and Emotional Strategies on Improving Self-Regulation Among Students with Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the levels of social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties. The study also detected the impact of utilizing social and emotional strategies on improving self-regulation among students with learning disabilities. The study used the descriptive approach to measure the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties and compare them to the social and emotional skills of normal students in light of several variables. The sample included 440 female and male students. The instrument of the study was a questionnaire divided into four dimensions. The results of the study showed that the average scores of students with learning difficulties on the social and emotional skills scale were below the theoretical average in all areas of the instrument. The findings revealed significant differences between the average statistical level of male scores and the average female scores for students with learning difficulties in all areas of social and emotional skills and on the scale as a whole, in favour of females. The findings also indicated that there are statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) scores of social and emotional skills in the field of relationships with others between the average of the second, third, and fourth-grade students, in favour of the fourth-grade students. The results revealed differences between the average scores in social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties according to the learning difficulty variable.

KEYWORDS: virtual classrooms, developmental learning challenges, Abha Governorate

1. Introduction

Learning difficulties are still the focus of the attention of educators and have become one of the modern issues to which conferences, research, studies, and budgets are allocated in many countries of the world. Great efforts are still being made to study the nature of learning difficulties and the distinctive characteristics of students who have these difficulties, and effective therapeutic intervention strategies and methods are known to alleviate their severity as much as possible (Sanders et al., 2021). Most workers in the field of special education agree that people with learning difficulties constitute a heterogeneous group, even within the same age range. Therefore, many definitions have emerged for learning difficulties. Students with learning difficulties

show a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes associated with understanding and using spoken language, or written language, which appears in a lack of ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, and do arithmetic, which is due to a disorder in cognitive processes but is not due to related sensory, mental or emotional disability (Korucu et al., 2022; Ghbari et al., 2014).

Some students with learning difficulties who do not receive appropriate care suffer from difficulties in psychological and social adaptation. Learning difficulties that may appear in the academic aspect can lead to multiple problems in the personal or social aspects (Fang et al., 2023). Therefore, paying attention to the social and emotional aspects of individuals with learning difficulties is no less important than paying attention to the academic aspect. Success in life requires dealing well with people, interacting with them, and receiving acceptance from them (Kayaalp et al., 2022). Social and emotional skills also play a prominent role in the overall life of an individual because of their great importance in personal and social adaptation. Studies indicate that approximately one-third of students with learning difficulties have social and emotional difficulties. Therefore, the deficit in social and emotional skills among people with learning difficulties receives great attention, as many studies have been conducted over the past years, the aim of which was to study the social and emotional manifestations of students with learning difficulties. It was concluded through a review of previous studies that students with learning difficulties suffer from behavioural problems or Weak social skills, in addition to their many academic difficulties, which called for a focus on studying social and emotional manifestations (Popham et al., 2018).

The social-emotional frameworks, especially the CASEL framework, provide a theoretical basis that supports the study. Competencies in self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are emphasised in this framework as being fundamental to effective SEL (Khasawneh, 2021). The interdependence of emotional health and social competence is shown by the close relationship between these abilities and emotional control. While previous studies have looked at how social and emotional learning (SEL) affects students' grades and mental health, further study is required to find out how DSPs work in other cultural settings, including Saudi Arabia.

1.1. Problem statement

The problem of a deficit in social and emotional skills is one of the most negative behavioural problems among students with learning difficulties, and one of the most common because of the negative effects that result from it, worrying everyone who deals with these students. The importance of this problem increases in light of the modern trend of special education toward integrating students with special needs. Special students, including those with learning difficulties, and the social and academic interaction resulting from the integration process between ordinary students and those with learning difficulties in school. Accordingly, interest has recently increased in evaluating and treating deficits in the social and emotional skills of children with learning difficulties. Addressing these aspects is no less important than addressing academic problems. Since social and emotional competence are an important dimension of human development, trying to evaluate

them and develop programs to improve them is an important matter that cannot be overlooked. Hence the importance of revealing the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties in light of the high percentage of students with learning difficulties in regular schools and their influence and influence on their regular classmates.

The interest of this study in the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties came in light of the observation that many of these students lack social and emotional skills during their interaction with the teacher and classmates and their lack of adherence to social behaviours within the school. Although many foreign studies have dealt with the social and emotional dimensions of students with learning difficulties, there is still a scarcity of Arab studies that have dealt with the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties in the Arab environment in general and the Saudi environment in particular.

1.2. Research Questions

Accordingly, the study aims to evaluate social and emotional strategies for improving students with learning disabilities. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the social and emotional skills of students with learning disabilities due to the gender variable?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in the social and emotional skills of students with learning disabilities due to the academic grade variable?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in the social and emotional skills of students with learning disabilities due to the variable type of learning difficulty?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in revealing the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties and their relationship to specific variables, to assist educational specialists in preparing appropriate rehabilitative educational programmes to provide students with learning difficulties with the appropriate social and emotional skills. The importance of the study is also due to the importance of the primary stage from which the study sample was chosen because it is the broad base that includes large numbers of students from all segments of society, and it is in it that students acquire many of the basic skills necessary for their growth and human formation, and it contains the foundations for developing their abilities, mental aptitudes, social skills, and personality characteristics. The importance of this study is also due to its preparation of a measure to detect the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties, which can provide teachers and school specialists with information about the behaviour patterns of their students so that appropriate educational interventions can be carried out.

In addition, the study offers empirical data on the effectiveness of social-emotional strategies, which is a big gap in the literature. The impact of technology on social

and emotional learning must be carefully considered as it finds more and more uses in classrooms around the globe, especially in areas where cultural diversity is strong. The present understanding of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is going to be improved by this study, which is centred on digital interventions. The ongoing conversation on 21st-century educational techniques will benefit from this.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

The results of this study are determined by the following:

1. The population and sample of the study and the method of selecting them. The population and sample of this study were limited to students with learning disabilities in the Directorate of Education in Abha, Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the results are valid for generalization to the statistical population of this study.
2. The extent of accuracy in resource room teachers' diagnosis of students with learning disabilities.
3. The application of the social and emotional skills scale was limited to resource room teachers and educators in grades two to four.
4. The extent of accuracy in the answers of resource room teachers and classroom teachers in diagnosing students' social and emotional skills.

2. Literature Review

Regarding the interaction of students with learning difficulties with their parents, it indicates that children with learning difficulties receive less positive reinforcement from their parents compared to their normal peers (El Wafa et al., 2020). Students with learning difficulties are also exposed to negative attitudes from their parents more than their normal peers, as parents describe their children with learning difficulties as reckless and more worrying compared to normal students (McNaughton et al., 2022). Regarding the interaction of teachers with children with learning difficulties, teachers have negative attitudes and use less positive behaviour during their interactions with children with learning difficulties, in addition to not providing them with sufficient reinforcement. They also describe students with learning difficulties as using aggressive behaviours and showing weak social skills (Maksum et al., 2021) If we look closely at the previous attitudes of the school and the family in general towards students with learning difficulties, we find that they are mostly negative attitudes, which may be attributed to prior expectations towards these students, which are mostly negative, in addition to the difficulties and pressures that may appear as a result of working with students with learning difficulties by teachers and parents (Daunic et al., 2021).

It is important to realize that many students with learning disabilities may experience negative emotional problems - such as depression, anxiety, moodiness, and suicidality - more than typical students. Several previous studies have indicated that adolescents with learning disabilities show levels of anxiety, depression, and frustration that are more frequent and severe than normal adolescents (Irfan, 2022; Al-Sharif et al., 2021). Emotions play an important role in the lives of children with

learning difficulties, especially concerning their relationships with others, as children who suffer from depression do not have strong social relationships. The reason for this may be because people prefer to be in the company of happy people and avoid sad people. Thus, the impact of negative emotions is not limited to the psychological state of the individual only but also affects learning and social relationships with others (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020). Self-concept is no less important than other social and emotional factors. The self-concept is of great importance in a person's adaptation to his present and future, as the self-concept expresses the extent of an individual's awareness of his characteristics and the extent of his similarities and differences with others. Due to the importance of this topic for students with learning difficulties, there is a relationship between self-concept and academic success, as the self-concept is considered a predictor. Important for academic success (Hassan, 2020; Denton et al., 2021).

Digital SEL Programmes are a novel strategy for introducing SEL interventions made possible by the widespread use of digital technology in schools. To expand the reach and accessibility of social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes, Cibrian et al. (2022) highlighted the use of online platforms. According to Hagarty and Morgan (2020), DSPs are appealing to both teachers and students because of their interesting and interactive features. Researchers discovered that DSPs significantly enhanced college students' emotional intelligence and social abilities. Therefore, it seems that students with learning difficulties need help to be aware of their academic, social, and emotional strengths and weaknesses so that they become stronger to develop the coping skills necessary to deal with the multiple demands of school and life in general. According to UNESCO (2017), culturally responsive academic methodologies are crucial in Saudi Arabia's multicultural and technologically-driven educational context. While several studies have examined conventional approaches to social and emotional learning (SEL), few have examined the efficacy of digital signal processors (DSPs) in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Previous studies

Hagarty and Morgan (2020) conducted a systematic evaluation to determine whether these interventions are also beneficial for youths who have learning difficulties by analysing peer-reviewed material published between 2007 and 2018. While there was some early indication of the courses' practicality, the evaluation revealed very little evidence of their efficacy in combining social and emotional development. There is some evidence that interventions based on social learning theory and play-based social skills may help children and youth with learning difficulties improve their social skills. Studies in the future should use well-conducted Single Case Experimental Designs employ more stringent designs such as random assignment, robust measures, and fidelity measures, or employ bigger samples.

Khasawneh, M. (2021) explored how well English language learners with learning difficulties in Irbid Governorate self-regulate, as well as how this self-regulation relates to gender and grade level. Three hundred and eighty-eight primary school boys and girls made up the study's sample. The research used a descriptive methodology and relied on the self-regulation scale to gather data. Repetition and Cronbach's alpha were used to guarantee the instrument's content validity and

reliability. Based on the findings, it was found that individuals with learning difficulties exhibited significantly different levels of self-regulation depending on two variables: gender (in favour of males) and school grade (in favour of second primary grade).

Denton et al. (2021) investigated students with severe reading problems, such as dyslexia, who need an intervention to help them read and self-regulate. In the study, 48 kids from grades 2–4 and 21 special education teachers, dyslexia experts, and reading interventionists took part. In a quasi-experimental study, some educators gave their students the research intervention while others gave them the reading programmes that were already in place at their school. The goal was to compare the two groups' results. Other therapies supported by evidence were administered to over 90% of BAU students. There was no difference in student outcomes between the ID and BAU groups, according to the results. Data from observations suggested that the intervention required some tweaks to make it more workable, while data from qualitative interviews with teachers revealed both the intervention's benefits and its weaknesses, as well as the obstacles to consistent implementation. The data collected from teachers provides significant evidence in favour of including self-regulation lessons in reading intervention programs. The value of teacher-researcher partnerships in creating effective educational interventions is shown by this study.

Maksum et al. (2021) examined how competencies like self-control, social awareness, critical thinking, and problem-solving affect the results of social learning. A quantitative methodology, including survey methodologies and route analytic tools, was used in this study. From November 2015 to October 2016, 250 fifth graders from various Jakarta schools took part. Students' abilities in social learning, self-regulation, and critical thinking were assessed using a non-test instrument in the form of a questionnaire, while their proficiency in problem-solving and social thinking was evaluated with multiple-choice exams. Descriptive analysis and path analysis were used in the data analysis approach. The significance of the path coefficient was tested using the independent sample t-test. Learning outcomes in social studies were positively impacted by self-regulation, social skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, according to the findings. Studies have shown that students' ability to self-regulate, interact with others, think critically, and solve problems is directly related to their performance in social studies classes.

3. Methodology

The current study is a descriptive study that aims to measure the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties and compare them to the social and emotional skills of normal students in light of several variables.

3.1. Sampling

According to the Ministry of Education-approved diagnosis, all students with learning difficulties enrolled in the resource rooms made up the study population. The sample included 440 male and female students in the first to the fourth grades of primary school, distributed among 16 schools affiliated with Aseer Education Directorate. Table 1 shows the distribution of study individuals with learning

difficulties by grade, gender, and type of learning difficulty.

Table 1. Data on the sample of the study

Variable	Level	Number
Gender	Male	218
	Female	174
School grade	First	90
	Second	114
	Third	130
	Fourth	106
Type of learning disability	Reading disability	75
	Writing disability	87
	Math disability	160
	Multiple learning disabilities	118
Total		440

3.2. Instrument

To achieve the aim of the study, a tool was developed to collect data on social and emotional skills through a review of the literature to derive items and social and emotional dimensions for ordinary students and those with learning difficulties and to review the measures and tools related to the study. After that, a special measure was developed to detect the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties. Learning and ordinary students.

The instrument, in its final form, included sixty-five paragraphs within the five dimensions specified as follows; the field of relationships with others, which consists of seventeen paragraphs, the field of self-regulation, which consists of fourteen paragraphs, the field of social-emotional skills related to academic performance, which consists of fourteen items, the field of independence, which consists of ten paragraphs, and the field of self-concept, which consists of ten paragraphs.

The content validity of the tool was confirmed by presenting it to ten specialized arbitrators from the faculty members of the Department of Counseling and Special Education at King Khalid University to judge the suitability of the paragraphs to the field they represent, the linguistic wording, the clarity of the paragraph, and the extent to which it represents social and emotional skills. The paragraphs that 20% of the arbitrators agreed to delete were deleted, in addition to amending or reformulating some paragraphs, and some examples of them were mentioned in the study procedures. After the arbitrators' comments were taken into account by deleting some paragraphs or reformulating some paragraphs with appropriate linguistic wording, the number of paragraphs became 65 after it was 75, as the inappropriate paragraphs were excluded and their number was 10. Thus, the tool was considered valid.

To verify the reliability of the instrument, the researcher applied it to a sample of (50) individuals outside the study sample over two time periods separated by two weeks between the first test. The reliability coefficient was then found by using test-retest and retesting the Pearson correlation coefficient. This gave a reliability coefficient of 0.846, which means that the scale was also reliable (0.874), which is

an acceptable level of reliability for the study.

4. Results and discussion

To answer the first question, the mean scores and standard deviations of the students’ scores on each area of the instrument were extracted, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Social and emotional skills for students with learning disabilities

Dimension	Mean score	Standard deviation
relationships with others	2.22	5.7.5
self-regulation	2.29	3.46
social-emotional skills	2.34	5.15
independence	2.17	7.56
self-concept	2.28	5.85
Total	2.26	4.404

It is clear from Table (2) that the average scores of students with learning difficulties on the social and emotional skills scale were below the theoretical average in all areas of the instrument. Perhaps this is due to some of the characteristics and characteristics of students with learning difficulties, whether resulting from organic factors or social-educational factors, such as recklessness, impulsivity, lack of control over their emotions, difficulty in social communication, low self-concept, and other personal and emotional characteristics that limit appropriate social and emotional skills (Cataudella et al., 2021; Bin Qasimah, 2021).

To answer the second question, the arithmetic means, standard deviations, and t-tests were extracted, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The t-test results for the differences in social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties according to the variable of gender

NO.	Dimension	Gender	MS	T value	Sig.
1	relationships with others	Male	2.09	3.88	.000
		Female	2.23		
2	self-regulation	Male	2.06	4.04	.000
		Female	2.18		
3	social-emotional skills	Male	2.02	4.25	.000
		Female	2.33		
4	independence	Male	2.07	7.09	.000
		Female	2.28		
5	self-concept	Male	2.02	7.44	.000
		Female	2.23		
	Total	Male	2.10	2.434	.000
		Female	2.30		

It is clear from Table 3 that there are significant differences between the average statistic level of male scores and the average female scores for students with learning difficulties in all areas of social and emotional skills and on the scale as a whole, in favour of females. This means that female students with learning difficulties have a higher level of social and emotional skills compared to male students. This may be attributed to factors of maturity and growth. In the childhood stages, female growth is faster than male growth, and thus the acquisition of social and emotional skills is faster in females than in males. Females are faster than males in linguistic

development, which plays an important role in the social aspect.

The means and standard deviations of the students’ grades were extracted to answer the third question, and a one-way ANOVA analysis of variance was used. Table 4 shows the results of that analysis.

Table 4. Results of one-way analysis of variance for differences in social and emotional skills according to the school grade variable

Dimension	Source of variance	Sum of squares	Freedom Value	Mean square	F value	Sig.
relationships with others	Between groups	37.33	4	18.66	12.66	.000
	Within groups	3,324	437	28.17		
	Total	3,361	440			
self-regulation	Between groups	6.79	4	3.40	8.13	.000
	Within groups	3,105	437	26.10		
	Total	3,112	440			
social-emotional skills	Between groups	2.19	4	1.10	7.07	.000
	Within groups	1,991	437	16.73		
	Total	1,993	440			
independence	Between groups	19.75	4	9.88	9.32	.000
	Within groups	3,634	437	30.54		
	Total	3,653	440			
self-concept	Between groups	84.12	4	42.06	11.92	.000
	Within groups	5,454	437	45.84		
	Total	5,538	440			
Total	Between groups	664.06	4	332.03	13.62	.000
	Within groups	63,700	437	535.29		
	Total	64,364.10	440			

The previous table shows that there are statistically significant differences in social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties depending on grade level in each area of the tool and the tool as a whole. To detect sources of differences according to the grade variable, the Scheffé test was used for post-hoc comparisons. The results of the Scheffé test indicate that there are statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) scores of social and emotional skills in the field of relationships with others between the average of the second, third, and fourth-grade students, in favour of the fourth-grade students.

The results related to the field of social and emotional skills related to academic performance show that there are differences in social and emotional skills between the averages of second and third-grade students and the averages of fourth and third-grade students, in favor of fourth-grade students. The results related to the field of

independence also indicated that there were statistically significant differences between second-grade students and male students and first, third, and fourth grades. The results confirm that there are differences between third-grade students, fourth-grade students, and second-grade students, in favor of fourth-grade and second-grade students. This may be because the students in the first three grades are still in an early developmental stage compared to the students in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, and thus the process of physical growth affects the psychological development of these students. Also, the students in the first three grades are still living in the transitional stage from home to school, and thus they have not acquired sufficient social and emotional skills

The means and standard deviations of the students' grades were extracted to answer the fourth question, and a one-way ANOVA analysis of variance was used. Table 5 shows the results of that analysis.

Table 4. Results of one-way analysis of variance for differences in social and emotional skills according to the type of learning disability variable

Dimension	Source of variance	Sum of squares	Freedom Value	Mean square	F value	Sig.
relationships with others	Between groups	0.473	3	0.158	1.66	.000
	Within groups	20,324	437	28.17		
	Total	20,361	440			
self-regulation	Between groups	0.79	3	3.40	1.13	.000
	Within groups	19,105	437	26.10		
	Total	19,112	440			
social-emotional skills	Between groups	0.19	3	1.10	1.07	.000
	Within groups	24,991	437	16.73		
	Total	24,993	440			
independence	Between groups	1.75	3	9.88	2.32	.000
	Within groups	24,634	437	30.54		
	Total	25,653	440			
self-concept	Between groups	1.72	3	42.06	2.92	.000
	Within groups	52,454	437	45.84		
	Total	53,538	440			
Total	Between groups	0.433	3	332.03	13.62	.000
	Within groups	20,700	437	535.29		
	Total	20,364	440			

Table 4 shows the significance of the differences between the average scores in social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties according to the learning difficulty variable. It is clear from the table above that there are no statistically significant differences between the arithmetic averages for the type of

learning difficulty in any of the areas of the tool or the tool as a whole. This may be because students with learning difficulties, regardless of the difficulties they face, suffer to the same extent from a deficiency in social and emotional skills. They are characterized by social and emotional characteristics that apply to students with learning difficulties, regardless of their difficulty.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the social and emotional skills of students with learning difficulties came in light of the observation that many of these students lack social and emotional skills during their interaction with the teacher and classmates and their lack of adherence to social behaviours within the school. The results of the study showed that the average scores of students with learning difficulties on the social and emotional skills scale were below the theoretical average in all areas of the instrument. The findings revealed significant differences between the average statistical level of male scores and the average female scores for students with learning difficulties in all areas of social and emotional skills and on the scale as a whole, in favour of females. The findings also indicated that there are statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) scores of social and emotional skills in the field of relationships with others between the average of the second, third, and fourth-grade students, in favour of the fourth-grade students. The results revealed differences between the average scores in social and emotional skills among students with learning difficulties according to the learning difficulty variable.

6. Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, the researchers recommend the necessity of providing educational programs that are concerned with providing social and emotional skills for students with learning difficulties. The study recommends identifying students with learning difficulties who suffer from social disorders and providing services to them. It is also important to emphasize the role of the family, parents, and cooperation with the school in developing the emotional and social skills of students with learning difficulties at an early stage of life. Teaching and training social and emotional skills for pre-school students and including them in the school curriculum is also very important.

Acknowledgments

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Small Research Groups under grant number (RGP.2 / 192 /45).

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