

Sultan Qaboos University
Journal of Arts & Social Sciences



جامعة السلطان قابوس
مجلة الآداب والعلوم الاجتماعية

Social Competence of Omani Students with Learning Disabilities from their Teachers' Perspectives

Iman Sulaiman Aljbri

Ministry of Education
Sultanate of Oman
iman88iman@icloud.com

Suhail Mahmoud Al-Zoubi

Department of Psychology
College of Education
Sultan Qaboos University
smalzoubi@squ.edu.om

Yousef Abdelqader Abu-Shindi

Department of Psychology
College of Education
Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat,
yousefaaa@squ.edu.om

Date received: 02/04/2022

Date of acceptance: 06/02/2023

Volume (14) Issue (2), August 2023

Social Competence of Omani Students with Learning Disabilities from their Teachers' Perspectives

Iman Sulaiman Aljbri, Suhail Mahmoud Al-Zoubi, Yousef Abdelqader Abu-Shindi

Abstract

This research aims to identify the level of social competence among students with learning disabilities (LDs) from their teachers' perspectives. The research sample consisted of 840 students with LDs enrolled in the resource room program (RRP) and general education classrooms (GECs) in Oman. Their RRP and general education teachers responded to the social competence scale. This scale consisted of 43 items distributed on three subscales related to teacher-preferred social behavior, peer-preferred social behavior, and school adjustment. The results indicated that the level of social competence was generally moderate among the students, but that this level was influenced by the educational alternative. The students enrolled in GECs had a higher level of social competence than their peers who had been referred to the RRP. The results also showed that there were statistical differences on the school adjustment subscale in favor of male students enrolled in GECs, and differences in favor of female students referred to the RRP on all social competence subscales.

Keywords: Social competence; students with LDs; teachers of students with LDs; social behavior; social adjustment.

تصورات المعلمين للكفاءة الاجتماعية لدى الطلبة العُمانيين ذوي صعوبات التعلم

إيمان الجابري، سهيل الزعبي، ويوسف أبوشندي

الملخص

هدف هذا البحث إلى تعرف مستوى الكفاءة الاجتماعية لدى الطلبة ذوي صعوبات التعلم من وجهة نظر معلمينهم، وتألفت عينة البحث من ٨٤٠ من الطلبة ذوي صعوبات التعلم المحالين لبرنامج غرفة المصادر والملتحقين بصفوف التعليم العام في سلطنة عُمان. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث استجاب معلمو الطلبة ذوي صعوبات التعلم ومعلمو التعليم العام على مقياس الكفاءة الاجتماعية، الذي تكوّن من ٤٣ فقرة وزعت على ثلاثة محاور متعلقة بالسلوك الاجتماعي المقبول للمعلم، والسلوك الاجتماعي المقبول للأقران، والتكيف المدرسي. أشارت النتائج بأن مستوى الكفاءة الاجتماعية لدى الطلبة ذوي صعوبات التعلم جاء بمستوى متوسط؛ إلا أنّ مستوى الكفاءة الاجتماعية يتأثر بالبديل التربوي؛ فالطلبة الملتحقون بصفوف التعليم العام لديهم مستوى مرتفع من الكفاءة الاجتماعية أكثر من الطلبة المحالين لبرنامج غرفة المصادر، كما أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في محور التكيف المدرسي لصالح الطلبة الذكور الملتحقين بصفوف التعليم العام، بينما كانت هذه الفروق على جميع محاور المقياس لصالح الطالبات المحاللات لبرنامج غرفة المصادر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة الاجتماعية؛ طلبة صعوبات التعلم؛ معلم الطلبة ذوي صعوبات التعلم؛ السلوك الاجتماعي؛ التكيف الاجتماعي.

Introduction

The process of interaction is an important means of transmitting shared ideas between people in social, professional, and cultural fields (Salih, 2019). Social communication skills contribute to improving interpersonal and educational interactions and addressing misunderstandings between people (Haddad, 2021). Childhood is one of the crucial stages in the development of social behavior as children develop relationship and social interaction skills. This stage provides children with the behaviors, attitudes, social values, and personality traits that allow them to achieve the acceptable level of social maturity necessary for their social adjustment in later stages of development. In order for a child to feel socially adapted, he/she must possess social skills through his/her ability to play, social interaction, positive constructive cooperation with others, and self-control, which contribute to improving his/her relations with those around him/her (Al-Zoubi & Bani AbdelRahman, 2017).

Social competence is defined as the social responses that allow an individual to construct positive, personal, and healthy relationships with others and to resolve disputes efficiently (Ma, 2012). There is a difference between social competence and social skills. Social skills are characterized as specific behaviors that appear in specific situations, while social competence represents the individual's ability to perform a social task efficiently and effectively (Almeqdad et al., 2011). In other words, social skills refer to what an individual is actually able to do rather than to a general personal characteristic of the individual (Eroglu & Demirel, 2018).

Social competence is among the social skills that appear in childhood. Family relationships and the parents' socialization and social roles contribute to achieving harmony, social adjustment, and social competence for their children. Social competence is a series of behavioral, cognitive, and effective skills that appear among children, bring them satisfaction and compatibility with their peers, and allow them to be influential elements in persuading their peers. Thus, the expression of positive feelings and emotions is a key to social competence. In other words, social competence includes a set of acquired behaviors related to recognizing social standards for acceptable and unacceptable behavior, being able to solve social prob-

lems, and recognizing and understanding emotions during different social situations, enabling children to find effective solutions to different social situations (Almakanin et al., 2014).

A learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes that affects the understanding and use of written and spoken language, and it manifests as disturbances in the skills of listening, thinking, speaking, reading, and writing (Mather & Gregg, 2006; Kunwar et al., 2021). Students with LDs face obstacles in the process of their social adjustment, which reflects negatively on personal and social aspects (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). Academic deficits and failures may play a role in the emergence of these obstacles, and thus highlighting social and emotional skills is no less important than highlighting academic fields among those students with LDs. Positive and easy social interaction with peers and the community is a requirement for success in various areas of life (Khazaleh & Al Khateeb, 2011). Social skills play an important role in the personal and social adjustment of students with LDs (Al-Zoubi & Nefaie, 2019). Social competence is one of the factors that predicts effective positive social participation in the community as well as the achievement of a high quality of life for students with LDs. Students with LDs suffer from a delay in the development of social skills and competence, as they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop these, which may have a negative effect on their ability to engage in social interactions with their peers (Daradkeh & Khazaleh, 2018).

Research into the social reality of students with LDs finds that they show difficulties in social skills and interactions and the formation of friendships, have learned helplessness, and in addition, have poor social communication skills (Sako, 2016). Demonstrating the importance of social skills, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities includes criteria for self-regulation, cognition, and social interaction in its definition of LDs (Wong et al., 2008). Several studies agree that students with LDs have problems with social competence (Almeqdad et al., 2011; Daradkeh & Khazaleh, 2018; Khazaleh & Al Khateeb, 2011; Arabia & Abu-Rabia, 2016).

Social competence is one of the factors that affect the daily interactions and practices between students with LDs and their peers, as it is one of the social skills

they need to be successful in their social relationships (Abbas & ElSabwa, 2019). Regional and global research indicates that social problems are widespread among students with LDs when compared to their peers without LDs (Abu Al Rub, 2018) and that there is a relationship between poor social competence and low academic achievement for students with LDs (Al-makanin et al., 2021). Also, a low level of social competence may have a negative effect on relationships with peers (Hebert et al., 2006); therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the social competence of these students (Hedda & James, 2004).

The reasons for the poor social competence of students with LDs may be attributable to their inability to process information, their cognitive and social processes, their attention processes, and their poor psychological and social adjustment, which may affect the components of their social competence (Terras et al., 2009). Their deficit in these processes may result in them lacking effective participation and integration in different learning situations that require the demonstration of social competence, such as participation, collaboration, and understanding the opinions of others (Al-Mamari et al., 2021).

Typically, problems of low social competence appear among students with LDs after they begin their school education because of their inability to meet the requirements for school performance (Parhiala et al., 2014). As well as their behavioral characteristics and social problems, which can be attributed to their weak social awareness, students with LDs make mistakes in interpreting the feelings of others since they are not good at reading social cues and do not realize that their behavior may be annoying to others (Bryan et al., 2004). As a result, these students are rejected by their peers without LDs. Because of their low social competence, they may have few options to make friends and so they play alone or with younger students (Abbas, 2019).

It is clear from the above that social competence has a pivotal position for researchers in the field of LDs. Therefore, this research adds to these regional and international research efforts by seeking to reveal the level of social competence among students with LDs in the Sultanate of Oman. The results of this research may provide us with a national vision of the extent to which the RRP or GECs contribute to increasing or

decreasing levels of social competence among Omani students with LDs.

Previous Studies

Several studies have examined social skills and social competence among students with LDs. Thus, relevant Arab and foreign research will be mentioned. Almak-anin et al. (2021) identified the level of emotional security and social competence among 161 Syrian refugee children with LDs in Jordan. The participants responded to emotional security and social competence scales. The results indicated that the level of social competence was moderate among children.

Abbas (2019) conducted a study to identify the differences in social competence and friendship skills between Bahraini students with and without dyslexia. The sample consisted of 200 students with and without reading difficulties who responded to the scale of social competence and the scale of friendship skills. The results showed that the students without LDs had better social competence and friendship skills than the students with LDs.

Al-Aqeel and Al-Jawaldah (2018) revealed the differences in social and emotional intelligence among Jordanian students with and without LDs. 272 students with and without LDs responded to the social intelligence scale and the emotional intelligence scale. The results showed that the students without LDs had higher social and emotional intelligence than their peers with LDs.

Al Tarawneh's study (2017) aimed to identify the friendship skills of Jordanian students with LDs from the perspective of their teachers. The sample consisted of 300 students with learning disabilities, whose teachers responded to a checklist of friendship skills. The results showed that the students suffered from problems making friends and that 70% of them had no friends.

Abdulrahman (2017) conducted research to identify the effectiveness of a counseling program based on self-regulation skills and enjoying life for students with LDs. The sample consisted of 10 students with LDs who responded to the pre-scale of self-regulation and the pre-scale of life enjoyment. The students joined a counseling program based on self-regulation and enjoying life. The results showed that the counseling program contributed to improving self-regulation skills and allowing these students to enjoy life.

Al-Abri (2017) conducted research aimed at revealing the social competence of students with LDs from the perspective of their teachers. The sample consisted of 208 students with LDs whose teachers responded to the social competence scale in basic schools in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Oman. The results showed a moderate level of social competence among those students with LDs.

Brooks et al. (2015) conducted research to identify the relationship between extracurricular activity participation and social skill acquisition in children with intellectual disabilities and LDs. The sample consisted of 73 children with LDs and intellectual disabilities. The results of the implementation of the social competence scale showed a decrease in the social skills of these children compared to their peers without disabilities.

Marfa (2015) conducted research to identify the influence of the social intervention program on academic achievement and social skills for 5 students with LDs. The results showed the effectiveness of the intervention program in improving the achievement and social skills of these students.

Saleem (2015) conducted research aimed at measuring the effect of a behavioral counseling program on improving the social competence and quality of life of students with LDs. 17 students with LDs were enrolled in a behavioral counseling program. The results concluded the effectiveness of this program in improving the social competence and quality of life of these students.

Abu Al-Fadl and Osama (2014) conducted research aimed at measuring the effectiveness of a counseling program on the social competence of students with LDs. The sample consisted of 21 students who were divided into two groups (control and experimental). These students responded on the pre-post-social competence scale. The students in the experimental group joined the counseling program. The results showed the effectiveness of the counseling program on social competence in favor of the experimental group.

Yuksel (2013) revealed the social behaviors of primary school children in terms of their grades, learning disabilities, and intelligence potential. The sample consisted of 83 students with LDs in Istanbul. The results showed that there were gender differences in social

behaviors in favor of female students and children's intelligence have a predictive effect on their social competence, and the intelligence potentials of the children with LDs predict their social competence and academic achievements.

Commentary on Previous Research

Previous studies have agreed that it is important to discover the social competence and social skills of students with LDs. Some of the previous research has studied counseling and behavioral programs to improve the social competence of such students. The present research can be distinguished from the previous research in that it attempts to reveal whether there are differences in the level of social competence between students with LDs who are referred to the RRP and students with LDs on the waiting list at GECs. In other words, the previous research did not address whether the level of social competence of students with LDs is impacted by the educational alternative. This research team believes that the attempt to identify the levels of social competence of students with LDs referred to the RRP and students with LDs enrolled in GECs is a qualitative addition to previous research that did not address the impact of the educational alternative (RRP or GEC) on social competence.

Research Problem

Several studies have examined social skills and social competence among students with LDs. Thus, relevant Arab and foreign research will be mentioned. Almakani et al. (2021) identified the level of emotional security and social competence among 161 Syrian refugee children with LDs in Jordan. The participants responded to emotional security and social competence scales. The results indicated that the level of social competence was moderate among children.

Abbas (2019) conducted a study to identify the differences in social competence and friendship skills between Bahraini students with and without dyslexia. The sample consisted of 200 students with and without reading difficulties who responded to the scale of social competence and the scale of friendship skills. The results showed that the students without LDs had better social competence and friendship skills than the students with LDs.

Al-Aqeel and Al-Jawaldah (2018) revealed the differences in social and emotional intelligence among Jordanian students with and without LDs. 272 students

with and without LDs responded to the social intelligence scale and the emotional intelligence scale. The results showed that the students without LDs had higher social and emotional intelligence than their peers with LDs.

Al Tarawneh's study (2017) aimed to identify the friendship skills of Jordanian students with LDs from the perspective of their teachers. The sample consisted of 300 students with learning disabilities, whose teachers responded to a checklist of friendship skills. The results showed that the students suffered from problems making friends and that 70% of them had no friends.

This research team noted that the majority of Master's theses and research in the Sultanate of Oman have been focused on academic and developmental LDs and have neglected to refer to the social aspects for students with LDs. LDs have dimensions that go beyond academic aspects, and it is not enough to deal with the academic aspects separately from the social aspects. There is an urgent need to highlight the social competence of students with LDs. The omission of research into this aspect contributed to the decision to conduct this research to reveal the level of social competence among students with LDs.

A low level of social competence may contribute to students with LDs being reluctant in their studies and communication with their peers, which has a negative effect on their academic achievement and social development. It may go beyond that to affect personal and social coping skills and reduce the chances of these students interacting with society, school, and the family environment (Dyson, 2003). This requires research to be conducted to identify the level of social competence among students with LDs. Despite the large quantity of Arab and international research conducted on the skills and social competence of students with LDs, there has been very little research on social competence among Omani students with LDs. This research aims to identify the level of social competence among Omani students with LDs. In other words, the research problem tried to answer the following questions:

- i. What is the level of social competence among students with LDs?
- ii. Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to the educational alternative (GEC or RRP)?

- iii. Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to gender?

Research Objective

The current research aims to identify the level of social competence among students with LDs in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman. Also, identify whether social competence is affected by gender and the educational alternative (RRP or GEC).

Methods

Research Design

The descriptive survey approach was used. This approach was used to identify the level of social competence among Omani students with LDs by surveying the perceptions of their teachers.

Participants

The research population consisted of 2533 students with LDs. Of these, 1243 were referred students, and 1290 were non-referred students. These students attended basic education schools in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman. While the sample of this research consisted of 840 students with LDs, of these, 426 were referred students, and 414 were non-referred students. The research sample was selected using the convenience sampling method. An electronic link to the social competence scale was sent to all RRP and general education teachers in basic education schools in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to the research variables.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to research variables

Variable	Category	N
Gender	Male	451
	Female	389
Educational Alternative	GEC	414
	RRP	426

Research Instrument

The Social Competence Scale of Walker and McConnell (1988) was used in this research. The original version of the scale achieved high reliability and validity. At the national level, Al-Abri (2017) has standardized the scale of the Omani environment. Al-Abri (2017) translated the scale into Arabic and verified its psychometric characteristics. To check its prima facie validity, Al-Abri (2017) presented the scale to a group of

faculty members in Omani universities. Al-Abri (2017) also verified the reliability of the scale by applying it to a sample of Omani students with LDs using the test-retest reliability method.

The Omani version of the scale consists of 43 positive items distributed into three subscales. These three subscales consist of teacher-preferred social behavior, peer-preferred social behavior, and school adjustment. A five-point Likert scale was used. Each student's total score was calculated by adding his/her scores on each subscale. The overall score on the scale ranges between 43 and 215, with a high score indicating a high level of social competence and vice versa. Table 2 shows the distribution of the scale items over the different subscales.

Table 2. Distribution of scale items distribution according to the subscales

Subscales	N	Items
Teacher-preferred social behavior	16	5,9,10,12,16,18,22,24,26,28,29,31,36,37,39,40
Peer-preferred social behavior	17	1,2,4,6,8,11,13,14,15,17,25,30,32,34,35,38,41
School adjustment	10	3,7,19,20,21,23,27,33,42,43
Total	43	

In order to analyze the results and judge the level of social competence, three levels (high, moderate, and low) were defined according to the mean score for the student for all the items. Table 3 shows the criteria for classifying the level of social competence of the students with LDs.

Table 3. Levels used to classify the social competence using the mean score

Social Competence Level	Low	Moderate	High
Mean	2.33 to 1:00	3.67 to 2.34	3.68 to 5:00

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the level of social competence among students with LDs. The independent sample t-test was used to examine the relationship between social competence, gender, and educational alternative variables.

Results

The results of the first question: What is the level of social competence among students with LDs? To an-

swer this question, descriptive statistics were used to identify the level of social competence. The mean and the standard deviation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics according to subscale scores

Subscales	N	M	SD	Level
Teacher-preferred social behavior	840	3.35	.94	Moderate
Peer-preferred social behavior	840	3.32	.95	Moderate
School adjustment	840	3.34	.94	Moderate
Total	840	3.33	.93	Moderate

Table 4 indicates that the level of social competence among the students with LDs was generally moderate on the subscales and the scale as a whole.

The results of the second question: Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to the educational alternative (GEC or RRP)? To answer this question, the means, standard deviations, and t-test results were calculated as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. T-test results according to educational alternative

Subscales	Alternative	N	M	SD	t	p
Teacher-preferred social behavior	GEC	414	3.97	0.75	24.51	0.001
	RRP	426	2.75	0.69		
Peer-preferred social behavior	GEC	414	3.95	0.77	25.71	0.001
	RRP	426	2.70	0.64		
School adjustment	GEC	414	3.96	0.79	25.27	0.001
	RRP	426	2.73	0.61		
Total	GEC	414	3.96	0.75	25.79	0.001
	RRP	426	2.72	0.64		

Table 5 shows that there are statistically significant differences depending on the educational alternative. These differences are in favor of students with LDs enrolled in GECs; their level of social competence was high, while the level was moderate for students with LDs referred to in the RRP.

The results of the third question: Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to gender? To answer this question, the means, standard deviations, and t-test results were calculated as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. T-test results according to gender

Alternative	Subscales	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p
GEC	Teacher-preferred social behavior	Male	217	4.03	0.66	1.64	0.102
		Female	197	3.90	0.84		
	Peer-preferred social behavior	Male	217	3.98	0.70	0.88	0.378
		Female	197	3.92	0.84		
	School adjustment	Male	217	4.06	0.70	2.68	0.008
		Female	197	3.85	0.87		
RRP	Teacher-preferred social behavior	Male	234	2.47	0.32	-09.22	0.001
		Female	192	3.03	0.83		
	Peer-preferred social behavior	Male	234	2.49	0.31	-7.14	0.001
		Female	192	2.91	0.80		
	School adjustment	Male	234	2.52	0.34	-7.27	0.001
		Female	192	2.93	0.74		

Table 6 shows that there are statistically significant differences in the scores for the school adjustment subscale in favor of male students enrolled in GECs. The table also indicates that there are statistically significant differences in the scores for all subscales in favor of the female students referred to in the RRP.

Discussion

What is the level of social competence of students with LDs?

In general, the results indicate that the degree of social competence of Omani students with LDs was moderate on the total scale and on the subscales. In other words, the results showed that the presence of social behavior preferred by teachers and peers and the school adjustment of the students with LDs were moderate. Social skills are an indicator of students' success inside and outside the classroom. Students develop a range of social skills based on their interactions with classmates. However, students with LDs face problems with the delayed development of social skills and do not have sufficient opportunities to develop these skills. These problems contribute negatively to their ability to engage in positive interactions with peers within GECs and the RRP. The social withdrawal behavior of students with LDs means that they demonstrate a low ability to form effective friendships and social relationships with their peers. Academic problems and the low academic achievements of

students with LDs may be related to social problems caused by their lack of social competence inside and outside school. In this regard, Morris (2002) indicated that low social skills and verbal and non-verbal abilities have a negative effect on academic achievement and social competence among students with LDs.

The weak social competence of students with LDs affects all aspects of their lives. These students fail to construct social relationships with their peers because they do not respond in the right way to social situations. Almeqdad et al. (2011) showed that students with LDs face problems in their social relationships with their peers and in their participation in school activities. Al Tarawneh (2017) asserted that the majority of students with LDs have trouble forming friendships with their peers. Al Tarawneh (2017) found that students with LDs in GECs have more friendship relationships than their peers who are not included in GECs. Many pieces of research have indicated that the level of social skills and social competence of students with LDs ranges from low to moderate (Abbas, 2019; Abbas & ElSabwa, 2019; Al-Abri, 2017; Almakani et al., 2014, 2021; Daradkeh & Khazaleh, 2018; Milsom & Glanville, 2010; Smith & Wallace, 2011).

Thus, the answer to the first research question in this paper, concluding that the level of social competence among the students with LDs was moderate, is consistent with the results of previous research addressing the social competence of students with LDs.

Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to educational alternative?

The answer to the first question was that the level of social competence among the students with LDs was moderate, but the results for the second question were that the level of social competence is affected by the educational alternative. In other words, there were statistical differences in social competence depending on the educational alternative (RRP or GEC). These differences were in favor of students with LDs enrolled in GECs. Such students had a higher level of social competence than students enrolled in the RRP.

This result can be explained by applying social cognitive theory. This theory explains that the learning process consists of observing the behavior of others and imitating it (Lee et al., 2018). Bandura (1997) emphasized that human behavior is defined by a set of dynamic personal, behavioral, and environmental interactions, and this is known as reciprocal determinism in person–environment interaction. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations are core components of Bandura’s theory. Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their ability to perform a behavior (Al-Mamari et al., 2020), while outcome expectations are the individual’s beliefs about the consequences of performing this behavior (Bandura, 2004). This theory suggests that GECs provide students with LDs with the appropriate environment in which to practice the observation of behavior during learning. Therefore, the students with LDs who were included in GECs acquired the positive social behavior preferred by their teachers and peers, and this was reflected in their school adjustment.

It can be concluded that the students with LDs who were included in GECs improved their level of social competence more than their peers with LDs who were referred to the RRP. In this regard, Pijl and Frostad (2010) emphasized that a school’s community and environment contribute to the development of hobbies among students with LDs. Thus, spending a long time with teachers and peers in GECs improves social interactions and the social and academic development of students with LDs. Nouredine (2004) believed that inclusive education programs are significant in bringing about positive changes in the mutual social cognition of students with LDs and their peers without LDs. Mahmoud (2012) also indicated that inclusive

education contributed to the fact that the social competence of students with LDs enrolled in GECs was at a higher level than that of their peers, as referred to in the RRP.

Moreover, referring students with LDs to the RRP may contribute to many psychological, social, and behavioral problems (Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman, 2012). The classification and labeling of the students, which includes identifying the category to which they belong and that they have LDs, may contribute to their low competence and social skills when they are referred to the RRP. In other words, such classifications and labels may contribute to the social stigma that persists among students with LDs within a school and may extend throughout their lives. Social stigma and labels may have psychological and social impacts on students with LDs and their families. Therefore, these classifications, labels, and referrals of students with LDs to the RRP may contribute to the formation of negative attitudes towards them and negative stereotypes that reflect prejudice against them, and they may be treated as not being equal to other students.

In this regard, Hornstra et al. (2010) emphasized that if teachers just label students as having LDs, this may place the students at risk of social stigmatization. This research team believes that it is time to find an alternative system for labeling and classification that respects the humanity of students with disabilities and their dignity and human rights. Backenson et al. (2015) confirmed that referring students with LDs to the RRP has a negative effect on their motivation to learn and their social relationships with others, although Wiener (2004) believed that there is no relationship between educational alternatives and social problems. Hattab (2015) also concluded that the level of psychosocial adaptation among students with LDs is similar whether or not they are included in GECs.

In sum, if the educational system of the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab world remains a mainstream system with two educational systems in schools (special and general education), it would be preferable to search for educational alternatives and training programs that contribute to improving the competence and social skills of students with LDs. In this regard, Alshareef (2020) recommended using behavior therapy programs, as these contribute to improving social competence and reducing anxiety among students.

Marfa (2015) indicated that social intervention programs contribute to improving the social skills of students with LDs. Even the RRP faces obstacles related to facilities and equipment, in addition to the issue of collaboration between RRP teachers and other teachers, parents, and the school administration (Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman, 2016).

Does the level of social competence of students with LDs differ according to gender?

The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the male and female students enrolled in GECs on the first and second subscales. However, there were statistically significant differences in the school adjustment subscale in favor of male students. The results also indicate that there were statistically significant differences on all subscales in favor of female students, as referred to in the RRP. Male and female students with LDs enrolled in GECs have a higher level of social competence in the first and second subscales. However, in GECs, the level of school adjustment is higher for males than for females. This may indicate that school adjustment is a psychological state represented by the ability of students with LDs to harmonize with the requirements of the school environment and their peers and teachers. School adjustment appears through a student's behavior with his/her teachers and peers and his/her positive participation in various social activities in school. School social adjustment is based on students' academic adjustment to the curriculum in addition to positive social relationships with peers, teachers, and others (AlZboon, 2013; Zhang et al., 2018). It could be argued that male students with LDs show better school adjustment than female students in GECs. In this regard, Al-Balah (2018) has shown that the level of social competence is higher for male than female students.

The results indicated that among the students referred to in the RRP, there were statistically significant differences on all subscales of the social competence scale in favor of female students. This result can be justified by the argument that these female students who were referred to the RRP showed acceptable behaviors to their teachers and their peers in the RRP and that this was reflected in their ability to adapt socially to the environment of the RRP more positively than male students referred to the RRP. In this regard, Anderson

(2000) confirmed that the level of social competence of male students is lower than that of female students, while other researchers have confirmed that the level of social competence is affected by gender in favor of female students (Khazaleh & Al Khateeb, 2011; Yukay, 2013). Based on the studies mentioned previously, the team carrying out the current research have noted different results from other research that deals with the impact of gender on social competence. The differences between the results of this research and those of previous research can be justified by considering the differences in population and sample size between the current research and other research.

Conclusion

This research showed that students with LDs have a moderate level of social competence. However, despite this result, social competence is affected by the educational alternative: students with LDs enrolled in GECs have a higher level of social competence than their peers referred to in the RRP. These results suggest that there should be a shift from mainstreaming to inclusive education in Omani schools. Co-teaching could be one of the educational alternatives offered in the Omani educational arena. Co-teaching may help to improve social competence and reduce the social stigma suffered by students with LDs as a result of their enrollment in the RRP (Al-Zoubi et al., 2022). The philosophy behind co-teaching is to create a kind of collaboration between general and special education teachers for teaching students with LDs in GECs rather than referring them to the RRP (Al-Khatri et al., 2020). Therefore, the current research team makes three recommendations: conducting research in all Omani governorates to identify the social competence of referred and non-referred students with LDs; providing educational activities to increase the level of social competence of students with LDs; and activating co-teaching in GECs and basic education schools in Oman.

Limitations

This research was conducted on a sample of students with LDs in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman. Therefore, the results of this research cannot be generalized to all students in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The results are determined by the transparency and objectivity of teachers' responses to the research scale.

References

- Abbas, Z. (2019). The differences between Bahraini pupils with and without dyslexia in the social competence components and friendship skills. *Egyptian Journal of Clinical Psychology and Counseling, 7* (3), 478-513. <https://doi.org/10.21608/PSHJ.2019.99547>
- Abbas, Z., & ElSabwa, M. (2019). Social competency components as predictors of friendship skills for Bahraini students with and without reading difficulties. *Egyptian Journal of Clinical Psychology and Counseling, 7* (2), 267-302. <https://doi.org/10.21608/PSHJ.2019.99374>
- Abdulrahman, M. (2017). The effectiveness of a counseling program for developing self-regulation skills and improving enjoyment of life for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University, 1* (174), 102-145.
- Abu Al Rub, M. (2018). Effectiveness of a training program based on psychodrama in improving social competence in students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies, 12* (1), 40-57. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jeps.vol12iss1pp40-57>
- Abu Fadl, M., & Osama, M (2014). The effectiveness of a counseling program in developing social competence and academic self-concept for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Faculty of Education, Alexandria University, 6* (20), 351-436.
- Al Tarawneh, R. (2017). Friendship skills of students with learning disabilities in Jordan from the perspectives of their teachers and the effect of some variables on it. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 5*, 136-150. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.58011>
- Al-Abri, H. (2017). *Student-teacher relationship and social competence for students with learning disabilities* [Master thesis, University of Nizwa].
- Al-Aqeel, A., & Al-Jawaldah, F. (2018). Differences in social and emotional intelligence between students with and without learning disabilities. *Dirasat: Educational Sciences, 45* (4), 43-62.
- Al-Balah, K. (2018). The relationship between social stigma and social competence among students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Faculty of Education, Benha University 19* (113), 485-536.
- Al-Khatri, T., Al-Zoubi, S., & Abu Shindi, Y. (2020). The effect of a training program on the attitudes of teachers of students with learning disabilities towards co-teaching. *International Journal for Research in Education, 44* (3), 11-40. <http://doi.org/10.36771/ijre.44.3.20-pp12-40>
- Almakanin, H., Alabdallat, B., & Alnjadat, N. (2014). Identifying behavioral problems among students with learning disabilities and its relationship with their social competence. *Jordan Journal of Educational Sciences, 10* (4), 503-616.
- Almakanin, H., Olaimat, A., Al-Hassan, O, Alodat, A., & Al-Rousan, A. (2021). Emotional security and social competence among Syrian refugee children with learning disabilities. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 9* (1), 231-240. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2021.090125>
- Al-Mamari, K., Al-Zoubi, S., Bakkar, B., & Al-Shorman, A. (2021). The impact of e-learning during COVID-19 on teaching daily living skills for children with disabilities. *Journal of E-Learning and Knowledge Society, 17* (3), 135-145. <https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135482>
- Al-Mamari, S, Al-Zoubi, S., Bakkar, B., & Al-Mamari, K. (2020). Effects of a training module on Omani teachers' awareness of gifted students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research, 7* (3), 300-305. <http://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2020.73.300.305>
- Almeqdad, Q., Bataineh, O., & Al-Jarrah, A. (2011). The level of social skills amongst students with and without learning disabilities in Jordan according to their teachers. *Jordan Journal of Educational Sciences, 7* (3), 253-270.
- Alshareef, B. (2020). Effectiveness of behavior therapy in improving the social efficiency and decrease of generalized anxiety amongst students of secondary stage in Jordan. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, 47* (3), 338-350.
- AlZboon, S. (2013). Social adaptation and its relationship to achievement motivation among high school student in Jordan. *International Education Studies, 6* (10), 63-69. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v6n10p63>
- Al-Zoubi, S., & Bani Abdel Rahman, M. (2012). The Effect of resource room on improving reading and arithmetic skills for learners with learning disabilities. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education, 5* (4), 269-277.

- Al-Zoubi, S., & Bani Abdel Rahman, M. (2016). Mainstreaming in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Obstacles facing learning disabilities resource room. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 6 (1), 37-55.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jse.v6i1.8800>
- Al-Zoubi, S., & Bani AbdelRahman, M. (2017). Social empowerment of individuals with intellectual disabilities. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 3 (9), 177-193.
- Al-Zoubi, S., & Nefaie, R. (2019). Challenges facing learning disabilities program at Tabuk in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Dirasat: Educational Sciences*, 46 (1), 619-633.
- Al-Zoubi, S., Alfagih, M., & Awais, B. (2022). Awareness of co-teaching administration among teachers of resource room program. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21 (7), 145-157.
- Anderson, J. (2000). Self-efficacy and social skills as predictors of social competency of students with learning disabilities, Jan Texas A& M university Commerce, Degree: Ph.D., Dissertation Abstracts International, 16 (7), 265.
- Backenson, E., Holland, S., Kubas, H., Fitzer, K., Wilcox, G., Carmichael, J., Fraccaro, R., Smith, A., Macoun, S., Harrison, G., & Hale, J. (2015). Psychosocial and adaptive deficits associated with learning disability subtypes. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 48 (5), 511-522.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2004). Health promotion by social cognitive means. *Health Education & Behavior*, 31 (2), 143-164.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198104263660>
- Brooks, B., Floyd, F., Robins, D., & Chan, W. (2015). Extracurricular activities and the development of social skills in children with intellectual and specific learning disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 59 (7), 678-687.
- Bryan, T., Burstein, K., & Ergul, C. (2004). The social-emotional side of learning disabilities: A science-based presentation of the state of the art. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 27 (1), 45-51.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1593631>
- Daradkeh, E., & Khazaleh, A. (2018). The level of social skills among children with academic learning disabilities in Jordan. *Zarqa Journal for Research and Studies in Humanities*, 8 (1), 64-78.
<https://doi.org/10.12816/0054741>
- Dyson, L. (2003). Children with learning disabilities within the family context: A comparison with siblings in global self- concept, academic self-perception, and social competence, faculty of education, *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 18 (1), 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5826.00053>
- Eroglu, M. T., & Demirel, D. H. (2018). Comparison of social skill levels of 11-14 age students who choose/don't choose sport and physical activity course. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 7 (3), 679-688.
<https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.7.3.67>
- Haddad, E. (2021). The importance of the study of intercultural communication as a social science. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 48 (1), 431-442.
- Hakkarainen, A., Holopainen, L., & Savolainen, H. (2013). Mathematical and Reading Difficulties as Predictors of School Achievement and Transition to Secondary Education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57 (5), 488-506.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2012.696207>
- Hattab, L. (2015). Psychosocial adaptation of students with visual disabilities in mainstream and regular schools. *Jordan Journal of Educational Sciences*, 11 (3), 303-317.
- Hebert, M., Guttentag, C., Swank, P., Smith, K. & Landry, S. (2006). The importance of language, social, and behavioral skills across early and later childhood as predictors of social competence with peers. *Applied Developmental Science*, 10 (4) 174-187.
- Hedda, M., & James W. (2004). Social perceptions of students with learning disabilities who differ in social status. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 19 (2), 71-82.
- Hornstra, L., Denessen, E., Voeten, M., van den Bergh, L., & Bakker, J. (2010). Teacher attitudes toward dyslexia: Effects on teacher expectations and the academic achievement of students with dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43 (6), 515-529.
- Khazaleh, A., & Al Khateeb, J. (2011). Social and emotional skills for children with learning disabilities and its relation to some variables. *Dirasat: Educational Sciences*, 38 (1), 372-389.

- Kunwar, R., Shrestha, B. K., & Sharma, L. (2021). Are teachers aware of mathematics learning disabilities? reflections from basic level schoolteachers of Nepal. *European Journal of Educational Research, 10* (1), 367-380.
<https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.10.1.367>
- Lee, C., Park, S., Lee, S., Kim, H., & Park, J.-W. (2018). Social Cognitive Theory and physical activity among Korean male high-school students. *American Journal of Men's Health, 12* (4), 973-980.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988318754572>
- Ma, H. (2012). Social competence as a positive youth development construct: A conceptual review. *The Scientific World Journal, 2012*, 1-7.
<https://doi.org/10.1100/2012/287472>
- Mahmoud, A. (2012). Social inclusion to achieve social competence for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Psychological Studies, 1* (22), 75-103.
- Marfa, H. (2015). Development of learning and social skills in children with learning disabilities: An educational intervention program", *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 209*. 221-228.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.220>
- Mather, N., & Gregg, N. (2006). Specific learning disabilities: clarifying, not eliminating, a construct. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 37* (1), 99-106.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.37.1.99>
- Milsom, A., & Glanville, J. (2010). Factors mediating the relationship between social skills and academic grades in a sample of students diagnosed with learning disabilities or emotional disturbance. *Remedial & Special Education, 31* (4), 241-251.
- Morris, S. (2002). Promoting social skills among students with nonverbal learning disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 34* (3), 66-70.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990203400309>
- Noureddine, M. (2004). *The effect of integrating children with mild intellectual disabilities with their peers without disabilities at the pre-school stage* {Master's thesis, Cairo University}.
- Parhiala, P., Torppa, M., Eklund, K., Aro, T., Poikkeus, A., Heikkilä, R., & Ahonen, T. (2014). Psychosocial functioning of children with and without dyslexia: A follow-up study from ages four to nine. *Dyslexia, 21* (3), 197-211.
- Pijl, S., & Frostad, P. (2010). Peer acceptance and self-concept of students with disabilities in regular education'. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 25* (1), 93-105.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08856250903450947>
- Sako, E. (2016). The emotional and social effects of dyslexia. *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 4* (2), 233-241.
- Saleem, S. (2015). The effectiveness of a behavioral counseling program on developing social competence and quality of life for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2* (8), 48-86.
- Salih, F. (2019). Teaching by pause technique in the classroom. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, 46* (2), 817-822.
- Smith, T., & Wallace. (2011). Social skills of children in the U.S with comorbid learning disabilities and AD/HD. *International Journal of Special Education, 26* (3), 238-240.
- Tarabia, E., & Abu-Rabia, S. (2016). Social competency, sense of loneliness and self-Image among reading disabled (RD) Arab adolescents. *Creative Education, 7*, 1292-1313.
- Terras, M., Thompson, L., & Minnis, H. (2009). Dyslexia and psycho-social functioning. *Dyslexia, 15* (4), 304-327.
- Walker, H., & McConnell, S. (1988). *Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment*. Austin TX: Pro-Ed
- Wiener, J. (2004). Do peer relationships foster behavioral adjustment in children with learning disabilities?. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 27*, 21-30.
- Wong, B., Graham, L., Hoskyn, M., & Berman, J. (2008). *The ABCs of learning disabilities*. London, UK: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Yuksel, M. (2013). An investigation of social behaviors of primary school children in terms of their grade, Learning Disability and Intelligence Potential. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 13* (2), 781-793.
- Zhang, D., Cui, Y., Zhou, Y., Cai, M., & Liu, H. (2018). The role of school adaptation and self-concept in influencing Chinese high school students' growth in math achievement. *Frontiers in psychology, 9*, 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02356>