

Identification of Social Needs among Students with Disabilities from the View Point of Their Teachers: UAE Perspective

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Abstract

The goal of this research endeavor was to discern the social requirements of children with disabilities within the educational context of schools situated in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. Additionally, the study sought to explore potential differentials in the extent of these needs predicated upon variables such as gender and age. To this end, the researchers used a questionnaire consisting of 17 distinct items was methodically constructed and subsequently administered to a demographically diverse cohort of 83 educators, encompassing both male and female participants.

The empirical findings of this investigation underscored the considerable significance of addressing the social needs encountered by children with disabilities in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi's educational institutions. Furthermore, the research focused on disparities in social needs were not significantly contingent upon gender-based distinctions. However, the analysis shows that age emerged as a substantively influential variable. Specifically, the researchers found that children within the age range of 7 to 10 exhibited a greater degree of social needs in comparison to their counterparts belonging to other age brackets.

Keywords: social needs mentally disabled, social skills, special education

1. Introduction

Scholars and experts demonstrate a profound interest in mental disability due to its extensive implications for diverse dimensions of an individual's existence, encompassing cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional functioning. These difficulties extend their reach to families and society on a broader scale. As outlined by the American Society for Intellectual Disability, intellectual disability entails a substantial obstacle in an individual's present capabilities, characterized by subpar intellectual and functional proficiencies, along with deficits in two or more adaptive skill domains including communication, personal care, and domestic life (Al-Shinawi, 2014; Abu-Ghazaleh, 2006).

The terminology of "mental retardation" is frequently misconstrued and often perceived as pejorative. A common misconception is that retardation is diagnosed solely based on below-average intelligence quotient (IQ), leading to the belief that individuals with mental retardation are incapable of acquiring knowledge or tending to their own well-being. For an individual to be diagnosed with mental retardation there needs to be a confluence of significantly low IQ and considerable challenges in daily functioning. It is pertinent to note that a majority of children with mental retardation possesses substantial learning potential, and as adults, they can lead lives characterized by at least partial autonomy. The prevailing incidence of mental retardation tends to be mild in severity. Additionally, mental retardation often presents concomitant physical and emotional complexities. Issues related to auditory and visual impairments, as well as speech difficulties, can be prevalent among affected children (Al-Quraiti, 1996; al-Khatib and al-Hadidi, 1997; Abd al-Mu'min, 1986).

Historically, professionals often recommended the institutionalization of children displaying significant mental retardation to parents. Presently, the focus centers on facilitating the integration of children with mental retardation within the familial and communal milieu. Across most jurisdictions, legislative provisions ensure access to educational

and other services for such individuals, covered by public funding.

To determine the strengths and needs of the child, a comprehensive evaluation is imperative. Given the multifaceted nature of the task, a collaboration of various specialists becomes necessary, as no single professional encompasses the entirety of requisite skills. Comprehensive assessments encompass general medical examinations, coupled with assessments in areas such as neurology, psychology, psychiatry, special education, auditory and visual capacity, and physical therapy. Orchestrating these evaluations, a pediatrician or child and adolescent psychiatrist typically takes the role of coordinator (Maylor, 2015). These medical practitioners then proceed to refer the child for pertinent assessments and consultations, amalgamating the outcomes into a cohesive treatment and educational strategy, developed in conjunction with the family and school.

Notably, emotional and behavioral disorders can co-occur with mental retardation, potentially impeding the child's developmental trajectory. A proportion of children dealing with mental retardation perceive their developmental gap relative to peers. As a response, feelings of frustration, withdrawal, anxiety, or even attention-seeking behaviors might emerge. In the case of adolescents and young adults, instances of depression could materialize. Lacking proficient language skills to articulate their emotions, these individuals might manifest their depression through novel behavioral, dietary, or sleep-related aberrations (Aysun, 2004).

Timely identification of psychiatric disorders in children with mental retardation facilitates prompt intervention. Pharmaceutical interventions are a constituent of the comprehensive treatment regimen for children with mental retardation. Engaging in regular consultations with child and adolescent psychiatrists can aid families in establishing realistic anticipations, delineating boundaries, providing avenues for achievements, and implementing conducive measures to assisting their mentally challenged offspring in navigating the challenges associated with maturation (Kennedy, 2008).

This particular classification corresponds to mild mental disabilities, encompassing youngsters whose IQ ranges from 50 to 70. Children within this spectrum can access primary-level education and engage with their peers, albeit at a measured pace. Notably, they tend to display reclusive tendencies, even introverted behaviors, and manifest disinterest in participating in communal endeavors with their peers. Consequently, tailored programming is essential to cultivate socially acceptable behaviors within this cohort (Safar, 2005; Nolan, 2017).

By their IQ levels, mentally impaired children exhibit a mental age spanning from 7 to 10 years. While possessing the capacity for learning and training, this subgroup diverges from their disabled counterparts due to their delayed physical maturation, leisurely tempo, and comparatively diminutive stature relative to their peers. Additionally, they commonly register below average weight metrics. Al-Khatib and Al-Hadidi (2009) assert that these children also experience developmental delays in fundamental motor skills such as sitting, crawling, standing, walking, and speech development. Trainable individuals experience potential for growth across three primary domains upon receiving specialized education tailored to individualized curricula. These facets encompass: A) acquiring foundational academic proficiency, B) fostering adeptness in social adaptation to the extent of self-sufficiency, and C) attaining a rudimentary level of vocational competence conducive to pursuing adulthood careers, as delineated by Al-Rayhani (1981).

All children with disabilities, regardless of the extent of their impairment or the number of categories they fall under, possess the inherent capacity and motivation to acquire knowledge, evolve, contribute to the workforce, and actively engage in social endeavors. Thus, it becomes imperative to recognize their competencies and untapped potential, in order to provide appropriate care and education that fosters their development. These individuals are entitled to the same rights concerning care, education, rehabilitation, and employment as any other member of the community. They constitute an integral component of a nation's human resources and warrant due consideration in the formulation and implementation of policies pertaining to humanitarian concerns, as underscored by Baarat and Zuraikat (2012).

Shqair (1999) stipulates that individuals with mental disabilities exhibit distinct educational requirements, necessitating repetitive exposure to educational scenarios to grasp the material. Repetition aids their memory retention and comprehension. Furthermore, they demand focused attention directed towards learning materials, owing to their limited capacity for spontaneous observation and their inclination towards tangible entities. In order to facilitate their scholastic advancement, it is imperative to harness their potential and capabilities through guidance, training, and support to facilitate their academic reintegration.

Al-Khatib (2006) accentuates the pivotal role of specialized educators working with mentally disabled children. These educators stand as a cornerstone within the educational framework, second in significance only to the family unit. The educator's function in relation to mentally disabled children holds critical and transformative complications. When

provided with appropriate guidance, children with mental disabilities who possess a capacity for learning can experience adaptation and growth. Through the provision of pertinent pedagogical approaches and requisite learning resources, specialized instructors can enable mentally disabled children to reach their fullest potential.

Furthermore, the role of the special education teacher extends beyond mere content delivery to encompass the tailoring of instructional activities in alignment with the unique requirements of mentally disabled children. This encompasses constructing an environment conducive to learning within the classroom and the effective management of student behavior. Moreover, the educator must align educational objectives with the individualized needs of students, providing supplementary activities and cultural engagements. Utilizing appropriate and engaging instructional methodologies is paramount, entailing the deconstruction of intricate concepts and the application of reinforcement strategies to stimulate participation and comprehension (Al-Khatib, 2010).

As indicated by Elliott et al. (2001), the realm of social needs holds considerable sway over an individual's psychological and emotional constitution, in addition to influencing their academic performance. The authors contend that adherent behavior directly impinges upon prosocial conduct. Establishing social congruity assumes a pivotal role in engendering an educational milieu conducive to scholastic growth, whereas its dearth compounds the educational challenges faced by individuals, potentially culminating in academic setbacks due to the absence of avenues for social engagement with peers and educators (Mercer, 1997).

Limited attention has been accorded to prior investigations into the training methodologies tailored for disabled children. For instance, Hassan (2018) embarked on a study with the objective of discerning the impact of school radio on cultivating certain social proficiencies within a cohort of gifted individuals categorized under "mentally disabled" or "down syndrome," who exhibit learning abilities. The study findings indicated a substantial contribution of radio broadcasts toward the development of social skills among mentally disabled students.

Abdulkareem (2017) conducted a study aimed at evaluating the influence of an active learning-centered curriculum in the domain of social studies upon certain subsets of mentally disabled individuals possessing learning abilities. The research cohort encompassed twenty students. The researcher formulated a curriculum inclusive of a compendium of life skills tailored for mentally disabled students with learning potential. Grounded in this life skills compilation, a proposed program predicated on active learning principles was developed. The research affirmatively substantiated the program's pronounced influence.

Baroody (2009) undertook a study targeted at calculation enhancing and addition strategies within a group of children manifesting moderate intellectual disabilities, constituting thirteen participants. The intervention transpired over a span of six months, during which the children underwent training to manipulate arithmetic and single-digit addition operations in a hands-on, concrete manner. Subsequently, they transitioned to problem-solving employing abstract strategies. An outcome of the study was the discernible enhancement of calculation and addition strategies subsequent to the intervention. The study did not detect gender-based disparities nor discrepancies based on the age of the disabled students.

The literature review undertaken earlier underscores the divergence observed in studies concerning their designated legal frameworks, variables under investigation, hierarchical levels, and target age demographics. Nevertheless, certain parallels can be drawn between some of these studies and the present inquiry. Despite adopting analogous scientific research methodologies, this study stands apart from its counterparts on two principal grounds. Primarily, it is conducted within a distinct societal context and with different sample constituents. Secondly, its focal point encompasses pivotal concerns, particularly relating to the social training requirements of intellectually disabled children possessing learning potential, specifically within educational institutions situated in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi.

Given the inherent significance of providing comprehensive care for disabled children, grounded both in humanitarian imperatives and their consequential societal contributions, this research endeavors to address the educational prerequisites of intellectually challenged children, characterized by their capacity for learning, within educational establishments located in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi.

2. Research Questions

Scholars and experts have properly acknowledged the comprehensive impact of mental disability on diverse dimensions of the afflicted child's psyche, spanning academic, social, linguistic, and emotional facets. To facilitate the advancement of this cohort, harnessing their inherent capacities and untapped potential takes precedence, necessitating concerted efforts toward their social and psychological reintegration, facilitated through directed guidance, structured

training, and supportive measures. Furthermore, the integration of these individuals within inclusive educational institutions stands as a pivotal endeavor, serving to augment their overall efficacy and pave the path toward their substantial integration within the fabric of society.

This research endeavor aimed to investigate the social requirements of intellectually disabled children who exhibit learning potential and are safe for educational training within institutions located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The survey method was employed, targeting specialized educators actively engaged in the educational and learning processes. The primary research inquiries are the following:

- 1) To what extent do specialized teachers perceive the social needs of intellectually disabled children, possessing the capacity for training, within schools located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi?
- 2) To what extent do the perspectives of specialized teachers diverge concerning the social needs of intellectually disabled children amenable to training, based on variables such as gender and age?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The selection of the descriptive approach as the prevailing research methodology for this study based upon its suitability in facilitating comprehensive and precise data accumulation pertaining to the social training requisites of intellectually disabled children who manifest the capability for learning and training within educational institutions situated in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

The researchers developed a survey instrument to evaluate the social needs of intellectually disabled children who can contribute in educational training within the educational establishments situated in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi. The collaborative insights of educators engaged with this specific demographic informed the construction of the questionnaire items. Furthermore, to ensure the inclusion of gender-specific nuances, the researchers developed a distinct questionnaire for male and female children.

3.2 Participants

The research sample encompassed 83 educators, actively solicited for their insights pertaining to the social needs of intellectually disabled children exhibiting the aptitude for educational training within the educational institutions of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The central objective of this investigation was the assessment of the extent of these requirements for this specific subgroup of children, along with the exploration of potential variations in these needs in relation to gender and age considerations. The selection process encompassed 10 schools, from which a cohort of 32 intellectually disabled children demonstrated the capacity for educational training was drawn. Within this group, there were 15 males and 18 females. Among the total sample, 19 children were aged below 7 years, while the remaining 23 were situated within the 7 to 10-year age bracket.

To establish the reliability and accuracy of the research instrument, a panel consisting of 20 arbitrators and domain-specialized experts affiliated with universities in the UAE, in addition to specialized educators associated with the Ministry of Education, undertook the task of evaluating the tool. The primary objective of this assessment pertained to the appraisal of the instrument's adequacy in gauging the intended attributes, the rationality of the employed language, and the pertinence of the item content to the designated domain. The researchers, culminating in the vital refinements, diligently incorporated the input provided by the evaluators. A panel of experts conducted a definitive iteration of the instrument comprised of 17 accurately constructed items, all item were scrutiny and received the endorsement of the expert panel.

Upon piloting the questionnaire with an exploratory sample of 15 individuals, distinct from the cohort study, the researchers proceeded to assess its stability. The researchers conducted this evaluation through the application of the internal consistency method, coupled with the utilization of the Cronbach alpha equation. The outcome of this analysis yielded a commendable reliability coefficient of 89% for the instrument.

To investigate the social training requirements of mentally disabled children amenable to education and training within schools in Abu Dhabi, the present study adopted the ensuing methodology: Each section of the questionnaire underwent assignment of a weighted value, predicated on the established five-point Likert scale. Within this scale, a rating of 5 indicated agreement is pronounced, while a rating of 1 signified strong agreement. Subsequently, the quantification of social needs transpired by partitioning the span between the upper and lower bounds of the Likert scale into five discrete levels, rendering each level's value as 0.8 (i.e., very low, low, medium, large, very large).

The process of determining the weight assigned to each questionnaire section ensued by augmenting the foundational value of 0.8 with an incremental progression of 0.1 for each increment on the Likert scale. This progression yielded the ensuing weightings:

- (1 - 1.8) very low level
- (1.81 - 2.6) low level
- (2.61 - 3.4) average level
- (3.41 - 4.2) great level
- (4.21 - 5) very high level

The researchers used this methodology to calculate the social training needs of children with mental Disabilities for this study.

4. Results

To address the inquiry, "What is the extent of social needs of children with disabilities who are capable of receiving education and training in the schools of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, as perceived by their teachers?" the table below presents the means, standard deviations, and the level of need.

Table 1. Means, SDs, and Extent of Need for Trainable Mentally Disabled Children

No	Items	Mean	S.D	Necessity
1	Needs training to maintain his possessions and textbooks.	3.86	0.66	high
2	Needs training to play with students.	3.82	0.70	high
3	Needs to be trained to practice cooperative and competitive play	3.81	0.73	high
4	Attention training is required for explanation in the classroom	3.81	0.75	high
5	Needs training on how to establish social relations with ordinary students	3.79	0.74	high
6	He needs training on how to say hello to others	3.77	0.76	high
7	He needs training to keep his clothes on while eating	3.75	0.79	high
8	He needs curricula that suit his needs	3.73	0.82	high
9	He needs training on how to ask permission during entry	3.72	0.83	high
10	He needs training on how to maintain order inside the room	3.71	0.91	high
11	Needs training on how to talk to others	3.69	0.85	high
12	He needs training to develop his social skills	3.68	0.87	high
13	He needs to be trained in how to thank those who help him	3.68	0.90	high
14	He needs to be trained not to abstain from food if someone bothers him	3.67	0.91	high
15	He needs to be trained not to withdraw while doing an action	3.66	0.93	high
16	He needs training on how to distinguish between his property and the property of others	3.64	0.99	high
17	He needs training to get out of loneliness and introversion.	3.56	1.09	high
<i>Total</i>		<i>3.62</i>	<i>0.77</i>	<i>high</i>

It is clear from Table (1) that the extent of the social needs of mentally disabled children who are trainable from the point of view of specialized teachers came largely.

-To address the second research question, "What differences exist in teachers' evaluations of the social needs of mentally disabled children who are capable of receiving training based on variables such as the child's gender and age?"

This question was answered according to the variables of the study and my agencies:

- The Gender of the disabled child:

After educators provided their responses regarding the social needs of disabled children, we categorized the teachers' inputs concerning male participants into a dedicated table. Similarly, we compiled the responses related to female

participants of the same gender into a separate table. We then conducted calculations to determine the mean values and standard deviations, subsequently applying the t-test to discern the significance and discrepancies between genders. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, SDs, t-value, and Significance Level for Child's Gender Variable

Field	Gender	mean	standard deviations	t-value	significance
Social needs	Male	3.65	0.78	0.161	0.003*
	Female	3.59	0.86		

* Statistical function at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$)

The test results showed that there were no significant differences at the level of ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) in the responses of the respondents attributed variant Gender of the child.

-Age of the disabled child:

Upon collecting responses from teachers concerning the social requirements of disabled children, we organized the teachers' inputs regarding male children below 7 years of age into one table, and another table was used for answers pertaining to children aged 7 to 10 years. Following this, we computed the mean values and standard deviations, subsequently conducting a t-test to ascertain differences and the level of significance regarding the gender variable of the children.

Table 3. Means, SDs, t-value, and Significance Level for Child's Gender Variable

Field	Age	mean	standard deviations	t-value	significance
Social needs	Less than 7 years	3.75	0.74	-2.216	0.003*
	Between 7 and 10 years	3.48	0.82		

* Statistical function at the significance level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$)

The test results showed that there were statistically significant differences at the level of ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) in the responses of the respondents attributed to the age variable of the disabled child, and in favor of children under the age of 7 years.

5. Discussion

The results of the first question confirmed: What is the level of social needs of disabled children that can receive training in schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi from the point of view of teachers?

The extent of the social needs of mentally disabled children who are trainable from the point of view of specialized teachers has come largely. This indicates that this category needs attention, training, and care to provide the maximum that can support them and make them effective members of society, as practicing social skills and needs is a basic input and a main base for understanding academic skills in the process of Education. The results of this study are consistent with Hassan's Study (2018), which emphasized the role of radio in the development of social skills among mentally disabled students, and Abdul Karim's Study (2017), which confirmed that the program has a major role in the development of some groups of mentally disabled who are capable of learning.

As for the results of the second question, to what extent are the differences between the averages of teachers' opinions about their assessment of the social needs of mentally disabled children trainable due to the gender of the disabled child, and the age of the disabled child?

- The Gender of the disabled child:

The examination outcomes concerning the gender aspect of disabled children revealed that discernible statistical distinctions did not manifest at the significance level of ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) in respondents' responses predicated upon variations in the gender of the child. The researchers attribute this phenomenon to the uniformity of needs within this particular demographic, coupled with the inherent potential for advancement through tailored educational interventions imbued with efficacious attention and nurturing care. In concurrence with the tenets of this investigation, congruence emerges with the observations posited by the Baroody study (2009), which substantiates the assertion that disparities between genders—male and female—are absent.

5.1 Influence of Disabled Child's Age

Upon scrutinizing the outcomes derived from the tests related to distinct age categories within the population of disabled children, it becomes readily apparent that statistically significant disparities manifest at a level of significance denoted by ($\alpha \geq 0.05$). These disparities are discernibly associated with respondents' reactions and are linked to the variable of the child's age. It is noteworthy that a conspicuous divergence is particularly observable in favor of children who fall within the age range below 7 years. This differentiation is attributed to the pronounced importance accorded to scholastic prerequisites during the formative stages of development. The foundational nature of establishing such fundamentals within this tender cohort underscores the essence of this discernment.

Conversely, this pattern contrasts distinctly with their counterparts aged between 7 and 10 years. This older subgroup arguably benefits from prior exposure to instructional interventions targeting these proficiencies. It is important to underscore that these divergent outcomes diverge from the conclusions drawn from the research undertaken by Baroodly (2009), which advocated the absence of age-linked variances among disabled students.

6. Conclusions

In accordance with the predefined research objectives and inquiries, grounded in the empirical data meticulously amassed by the investigators, and evaluated within the parameters delineated by the employed statistical methodologies, alongside the confines of the sample under scrutiny, and illuminated by the comprehensive analysis and discourse on the findings, the researchers have derived the subsequent deductions:

It is affirmed that the implementation of various interventions, encompassing techniques such as writing with a pen, tactile exercises, oral stimulation exercises, interactive competitive activities, and the strategic integration of other discerningly chosen drills, has yielded a favorable and constructive impact upon intellectually challenged. Individuals who exhibit receptiveness to cognitive advancement.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers suggest the following recommendations:

- 1) Providing comprehensive academic support for mentally disabled children, including both material and moral resources.
- 2) Conducting specialized training courses for teachers led by experts in the field of intellectual disability. Teachers are encouraged to be involved in planning and program development at the Education Department and Ministry of Education level.
- 3) Utilizing technology in care programs for mentally disabled children and establishing effective means of communication to keep up with the constantly evolving technological landscape.
- 4) Utilizing mass media platforms to raise awareness among community members about the unique needs of mentally disabled children, and encouraging support and advocacy efforts for this population.

Development of a comprehensive parental guidance program aimed at cultivating essential life skills within mentally disabled children. This program has to encompass a holistic approach, offering parents the requisite tools and strategies to nurture the life skills development of their children.

Formulation and implementation of an inclusive instructional program tailored for educators responsible for mentally disabled children. This program can enhance the pedagogical proficiency of teachers in fostering the acquisition and refinement of life skills among their students.

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