

The Level of Social Intelligence of Special Education Teachers in Al-Ain City, from Their Own Perspective

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The study aimed to determine the level of social intelligence of special education teachers in Al-Ain City from their own perspective, regarding gender variables. The study sample comprised 93 teachers (45 male and 48 female). To achieve the objectives of the study, the two researchers adopted the English copy of the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) prepared by Silvera et al. (2001), in order to measure the level of social intelligence. The scale included 21 items distributed on three dimensions: social information processing, social skills and social awareness. To determine the results, arithmetic means and standard deviations were used to answer the first question and a t-test was used to answer the second question. The results revealed that teachers' social intelligence was high for the dimension 'social information processing' and average for the two dimensions 'social skills' and 'social awareness'. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of social intelligence pertaining to the two dimensions 'social information processing' and 'social awareness attributed to gender', but there were differences in statistical significance for the dimension 'social skills associated with teachers of special education' at Al-Ain, from their perspective, in favour of males. The study came up with some recommendations.

Key words: *Social intelligence, special education teachers, Al-Ain City.*

Introduction and Theoretical Background

Changes in special education have led to developments in teaching methods. Eisenberger, Conti and Antonio point out that if those managing special education want teachers to achieve high performances from their students, they need use new teaching methods that depend on various

dimensions of active teaching, teach new forms of behaviour that lead to development of mental abilities, and finally apply educational activities that help students to succeed.

The researchers searched for modern methods to prepare and train teachers to teach students with special needs. Differences among individuals' capabilities dictate creating special education programs in keeping with such capabilities. This requires employing a variety of educational skills in addition to newly devised strategies for teaching students with different abilities (Eisenberger, Conti & Antonio, 2000). During the last decades of the twentieth century, the educational system globally has strived for education of good quality. The focus has been on developing teachers' mental potential, as human potential is significant in developing a society. This concern with developing the mental potential of humans anticipates the qualities required of the educational system of the future.

Such a system that enlightens the minds of the educated and plays an active role in post-industrial society, which requires high cognitive adaptability on the part of the individual. To achieve this, all efforts are being orchestrated towards developing curricula based on feedback from modern psychological scientific studies, particularly in the field of cognitive psychology. Curriculum development is accompanied by an analysis of the learning mechanism (Hussein 2000).

The scientific and cognitive developments of the twenty-first century require a leap forward in all fields of education, which has become a significant investment in the future. The professionally competent, academically and educationally equipped teacher is one of the most essential factors in the educational process. Therefore, most developed countries pay considerable attention to improving teachers' performances, both scientifically and educationally (Khazaleh & Al-Hayek, 2016).

Many studies point out that special education teachers need specialised training in how to deal with students with disabilities and their families, and in getting the local community involved in educating students of special needs by focusing on emotional and social skills, as well as intelligence skills (Bakhsh, 2009). Gardner (2015) notes that the essence of intelligence in human relations includes the ability to distinguish and to suitably respond to the psychological states of others. He adds that the key to self-perception of personal intelligence relations is to determine particular feelings and distinguish between them, using them for behavioural guidance (Al-Lalla, 2015).

The education literature refers to a group of traits that are essential for special education teachers. Foremost among them are the ability to be respectful, independent and self-confident, and sensitive toward feelings of others. They must also have an above-average mental ability, be flexible, enthusiastic and vigilant, love to teach, be willing to shoulder the

responsibility for their actions, and be able to competently use various educational strategies (Al-Qamsh & Jarwan 2011, 2013).

Definition of Social Intelligence

Thorndike is one of the first scholars to have been concerned with social intelligence as a major component of the three constituents of intelligence. He defined it as ‘the ability to understand and interact with others as manifested in successful social relations’ (Zahran, 2000). Gardner (1987) defined social intelligence as ‘the ability to cooperate with others in small groups and to efficiently communicate and interact with them’. In the *Dictionary of Social Sciences*, social intelligence is defined as ‘the individual’s ability to deal with new situations based on a mutual relationship with members of the group’. Davis and Kolangelo (2003) define it as ‘the ability to inspire and to learn or to lead others responding to their behaviour, understanding their emotions and attitudes and correcting them in an effective and productive manner’. It is also defined as ‘the ability to communicate well with others, to share their feelings and to lead them’ (Webb et al., 2007). Albrecht (2006) defines it as ‘the individual’s ability to deal well with others who will respond in the same way, due to [their] skills to get their cooperation’.

Significance of Social Intelligence

To care for teachers in general and special education teachers in particular, it has become necessary to train them in different skills to face the problems of the world. Due to the mistrust individuals show in dealing with new social and economic situations, this dictates training teachers to positively use their potential (Al-Lalla, 2014). Social intelligence helps the individual feel the needs of others through trying to solve their problems, sympathising with the distressed and trying to protect them. Social intelligence thus creates fraternity among humans (AZ-Zughool, 2001).

Abdulla An-Nafea (2000) mentions that social intelligence and social factors are associated with the talented person, which in turn affects their achievements. Social intelligence is one of the positive basic determinants of psychological health. Therefore, there is a widespread call to develop it in individuals, not through relating educational experiences to several topics but through paying more attention to the childhood stage, which is fundamental in developing the individual’s personality (Hanna, 2009).

Dimensions of Social Intelligence

Marlow specifies the five dimensions of social intelligence:

- 1 *social concern* – refers to the personal level of interest in any group of humans

- 2 *social skills* – refers to the individual’s capability to competently use social intelligence activities with others
- 3 *sympathy skill* – refers to understanding others’ attitudes and being able to sympathise with them
- 4 *social anxiety* – refers to an individual’s anxiety and their experience in a variety of social situations
- 5 *sentimental feelings* – refers to the person’s ability to perceive or predict other reactions to a certain behaviour (Ad-da Souqi, 2008).

Aspects of Social Intelligence

Social intelligence can be determined by certain aspects of behaviour of the person through their self-evaluation or dealings with others. Aspects include:

- 1 *social concordance* – includes living happily with others, commitment to social norms, abiding by the rules of social control, social interaction and working for the welfare of the society, which will eventually lead to a healthy social life
- 2 *social competence* – embodied in achieving satisfaction in social relations and an equilibrium between the individual and their social environment with regard to meeting personal and social needs
- 3 *social success* – includes success in dealing with others as manifested in successful contacts socially, professionally and managerially
- 4 *conformity* – includes abiding by social norms of behaviour in social situations and on social occasions. (Kelfi, 2015).

Study Problem

Intelligence is one of the major success factors for any teacher, so a minimal level of intelligence is necessary in order to achieve functional teaching (Talafha, 2012). Emotional intelligence is one of the patterns that influence the teacher’s performance in class. Several studies indicate a positive correlation between the teacher, their class performance, their productivity and their ability to control a class (Al-Damati, 1991; Abdul Fattah, 2001; Al-Dmeiri, 2008; Jeloudar & Yunus, 2011).

The profession of teaching is a social one that clearly reflects the identity of a teacher. The teacher’s qualities, mood and way of thinking will undoubtedly be echoed positively or negatively in their performance and in positive interactions with students in the classroom. This has been noted by the two researchers who supervised students in school training fields and centres of special education. It is apparent that male and female special education teachers encounter significant problems in utilising their social intelligence in different educational situations, such as tutorials, group teaching, applying an individual education

plan, applying a modified behavioural plan on behaviours that require modification, as a result of work pressure emanating from the significant number of students with special needs who they need to follow up. Those teachers are also required to design educational plans, prepare and modify behaviour plans, and remain in touch with the parents of their students. The special education teacher therefore needs to utilise their social intelligence to deal with situations that need interaction with parents for the benefit of their students, whose motivation to learn increases.

The problem of the study thus lies in its attempt to uncover the level of social intelligence of both male and female teachers of special education at Al-Ain University from their own perspective concerning the gender variable. The problem is limited to answering the following questions:

- 1 What is the level of social intelligence that special education teachers in Al-Ain City have from their own perspective?
- 2 With statistical reference at the functional level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) to social intelligence for teachers of special education at Al-Ain University, can their differences be attributed to the gender variable?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its attempt to unveil the level of social intelligence of teachers of special education at Al-Ain city, from their perspective, which might be attributed to gender variable.

- This study draws attention to how important social intelligence is for teachers of special education at Al-Ain City.
- Teachers of special education should be aware of the important role played by social education in teaching their students and how that will affect teaching strategies adopted by them.
- It is hoped that this study will make teachers of special education more conversant with how much social intelligence influences their methods of teaching, regarding applying individual education plans, mechanisms of communication and interaction with parents.
- To the knowledge of the researchers, this is the first study of its type to be conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the field of social intelligence of teachers of special education at Al-Ain city.

Objectives of the Study

The study objective was to unravel the level of social intelligence possessed by teachers of special education at Al-Ain City, from their own perspective, on the social intelligence scale with regard to the gender variable.

Terms and Definitions of Procedures

Social intelligence is the individual's ability to engage in positive mutual social relations with others. It is represented by three dimensions: social information processing, social skills and social awareness (Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001).

Social intelligence is defined in this study as the ability of the special education teacher to establish positive mutual relationships with students through their own social information, social skills and social awareness in class. It is measured by the score the teacher gets on the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), which was prepared by Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl (2001) and was translated into Arabic to serve this study.

Special education teachers are academically and educationally qualified, and officially appointed by the Ministry of Education in the UAE to teach students with special needs in special education centres and schools in Al-Ain City.

Limitations of the Study

Participants were limited to teachers of special education at Al-Ain in the UAE in the school year 2018–19.

Literature Review

Talafha's (2014) study aimed to reveal the level of social intelligence in teachers of social science studies in Zarqa governorate, from their own perspective. It also attempted to discover the relationship between the level of social intelligence and common patterns of interaction in class. The study sample comprised 26 male and female teachers of social sciences and 674 students. The findings showed that the level of social intelligence for teachers rated as medium for the three dimensions of social intelligence. The pattern of class interaction based on penalty and indifference was the most common among teachers. Then followed the pattern of the one-person speaker, which rated medium, followed by a pattern based on using effective learning, which rated medium. The results showed that there was a positive interest with statistical significance between social intelligence of teachers and their use of class interaction pattern based on effective learning. There was also a negative

interrelatedness with statistical significance between the social intelligence of teachers and their use of the two patterns of class interaction based on induction from speech and penalty and indifference.

In his study, Juchiewicz (2008) unravelled the influence of effective learning on teaching music in public schools in the state of Florida in the United States. The sample selected comprised 40 music teachers at the secondary level. The results showed that teachers who were classified as active scored higher than those who were non-active on the questionnaire of human interaction and social intelligence, but the differences were statistically insignificant. The result concluded that social intelligence did not directly affect the teaching of music.

Al-Manbiri's (2010) study analysed the relationship between social intelligence and social responsibility and academic achievement of pre-experience female teachers. The sample comprised 269 female students of educational preparation in the Faculty of Education at Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia. The results showed that there was a positive relationship with statistical significance between social intelligence and social responsibility, but there was no relationship between social intelligence and academic achievement. The results also showed that there were no differences between sample responses at the scales of social intelligence and social responsibility which might be attributed to the variable of specialisation. Jeloudar and Yunus's (2011) study aimed to determine the level of social intelligence for teachers in public schools in Malaysia in the light of demographic variables and interrelatedness between teachers' social intelligence and strategies of class control. The sample comprised 203 male and female teachers. The results showed that the level of social intelligence for teachers was ranked as medium. The level of social intelligence rises in proportion to age. There was a positive interrelatedness with statistical significance between teachers' level of social intelligence and strategies of class control (strategies of discussion, reinforcement, reward, students' participation in class control, and innuendo). The results revealed a negative interrelatedness with a statistical function between social intelligence of teachers and strategies of class control based on punishment.

Vasilova and Braumgartner's (2005) study comprised a sample of 54 males and 96 females from the College of Arts at Slovakia University. It revealed that culture did not affect components of social intelligence in the countries like Italy, Norway and Slovakia, which applied the scale. It also showed that females excelled more than males in the dimensions of social intelligence (social skills, social awareness and social information processing).

None of the previous studies tackled the relationship between the level of social intelligence for male and female teachers of special education at Al-Ain City, specifically in the Arab environment. The present study endeavoured to do this through the use of the TSIS (Silvera

et al., 2001), which is accepted globally. This makes the study an original contribution to the body of research in this area.

Method and Procedures

Study Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study and to get answers to its questions, the researcher prepared the descriptive survey method to collect data in order to gain precise results, which were then analysed.

Study Population and Sample

The study population comprises all male and female teachers working in schools and private centres for special education students at various educational levels at Al-Ain City. The study sample consisted of 93 male and female teachers working with students of special education in the Ministry of Education in Al-Ain City in the UAE. The teachers comprised 45 males and 48 females, who were purposively selected during the 2018–19 academic year. Those were purposively selected because male and female teachers working with students of special needs showed a readiness to answer questions of the instrument of the study, and the school management were willing to cooperate in applying the study to the sample. Table 1 presents the distribution of individuals of the sample in accordance with study variables.

Table 1: Distribution of members of the study sample with regard to its variables

Variables	Levels	Number	Percentage
Gender	Males	45	48.4
	Females	48	51.6
Total		93	100.0

Study Instrument: Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS)

To determine the level of social intelligence for teachers of special education at al Ein City, the English copy of the TSIS (Silvera et al., 2001) was adopted. This scale is a self-report that, in its original copy, includes 21 items distributed into three dimensions that measure three dimensions of social intelligence: social information processing measured by items 1–7; social skills measured by items 8–14; and social awareness measured by items 21–15. This scale was translated from Norwegian into several languages, such as English and Italian. Reliability coefficients and validity in its original copy were calculated. The validity coefficient for the whole scale according to Cronbach's alpha was 0.88. According to

Cronbach's alpha, for the three dimensions, the coefficients were social information processing (0.81), social skills (0.86) and social awareness (0.79).

Instrument Reliability

The scale was translated into Arabic then retranslated into English to check the appropriateness of translation. To verify the reliability of the scale and its suitability for the UAE environment, it was presented to a group of seven specialised and experienced judges, supervisors concerned with special education, expertise in measurement and evaluation and teachers working in schools and special education centre in Al-Ain City. They were asked to give their opinion on the scale with regard to clarity of statement, language correction and its suitability for the purpose for which it was designed. The researcher made the modifications suggested, which concentrated on the suitability of items to the field and correct use of language. Some items which were rewritten were presented to language editors for correction. All remarks were taken into consideration, and the scale ended up with 21 items.

Validity of the Instrument

To verify the validity of the instrument, it was applied to an exploratory sample extraneous to the sample using test–retest. The sample comprised 40 male and female teachers with a two-week difference between the two applications, then Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Its value was 0.08, suitable for the objectives of the study.

Method of Scale Correction

A seven-point Likert scale was used. The total points of every examinee constitute the average of answers to all items of the dimension which range from 1 to 7. When correcting items with negative attitude, the opposite was taken into consideration. The level of social intelligence was determined according to the average degree for each of the three dimensions of the scale as a whole, as follows:

- 1.00–3.00 points medium level of intelligence
- 3.01–5.00 points high medium level of intelligence
- 5.01–7.00 points high level of intelligence.

Study Variables

Independent Variables

Gender (male, female).

Dependent Variable

Social intelligence of teachers of special education at Al-Ain City presented through arithmetic means for sample evaluations for each item of the study.

Procedures of Study Application

The researchers, in implementing procedures of the study, adopted the following steps:

- limitation of the study population and sample.
- developing the TSIS in accordance with scientific research procedures of reliability and validity
- testing the study instrument on an exploratory sample consisting of 40 male and female teachers of the study population
- distributing the study instrument to the study sample to answer their queries
- collecting and dumping data then analysing them statistically using SPSS to reach conclusions, explications and recommendations.

Study Design and Statistical Processing

In answering the study questions, arithmetic means and standard deviations were used for each item using statistical means appropriate for the present study.

Findings and Discussion

Question 1: What is the level of social intelligence that special education teachers in Al-Ain City have from their own perspective?

In answering the question, arithmetic means, standard deviations and methods of arrangement were used. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Arithmetic means, standard deviations and arrangement of social intelligence for teachers of special education at the intelligence scale with its three dimensions

Serial no.	Dimensions of scale of social intelligence	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Social intelligence level	Arrangement
1	Social information processing	5.65	0.86	High	1
2	Social skills	4.82	0.85	Medium	2
3	Social awareness	4.44	0.88	Medium	3
	Total scale	4.97	0.86	Medium	

Table 2 shows that the level of social intelligence for special education teachers in Al-Ain City was medium at the scale as a whole (4.97); scale dimensions of (social skills and awareness) were at the medium level; the arithmetic mean for social skills was 4.83; and for the social dimension it was 4.44; the arithmetic mean for the dimension ‘processing social information’ was 5.65, which was high, as it ranked first.

The reason for such a result might be because a high percentage of teachers at Al-Ain City are young, and their traditions and obligations differ from those of the older age group, the majority of whom shoulder responsibility, are married and have social obligations. They also have life and social experiences that differ greatly from those of the youth. Jeloudair and Yunus’s (2011) study results implied that the level of social intelligence increases in ratio to the age of the teacher. The level of intelligence for teachers of special education in Al-Ain City ranked medium in the two dimensions (social awareness and social skills). Such a result concurs with the studies of Jeloudar and Yunus (2011) and that of Yahya Zadeh and Goodrazi (2012), which revealed that social intelligence was affected by the age variable.

The high rank that teachers of special education at Al-Ain city scored in the dimension of social information processing may be because these teachers work in a team of various specialisations, and are requested to study health reports, implement education plans, modify behaviour plans, and deal with administration and guardians of students with special needs. All this requires considerable skill in processing social information, which enables them to communicate successfully and effectively with all parties.

Question 2: With statistical reference at the functional level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) to social intelligence for teachers of special education at Al-Ain University, can their differences be attributed to the gender variable?

In answering this question, a t-test was administered for two independent samples. Table 3 reveals the differences in the level of social intelligence for teachers of special education pertaining to gender, from their own viewpoint. Table 3 shows that differences in the level of

social intelligence for the two dimensions (social information processing and social awareness). The general average of the scale as a whole are statistically insignificant at the level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ or less. Thus there are no references with statistical significance at the level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ in the level of social intelligence for special education teachers in Al-Ain City, from their own perspective, which might be attributed to gender.

Table 3: T-test results for the differences in social intelligence for teachers of special education attributed to gender from their perspective.

Serial No.	Dimensions of social intelligence	Gender	No.	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	T	Function
1	Social information processing	Male	45	5.57	0.88	-.911	.365
		Female	48	5.73	0.85		
2	Social skills	Male	45	5.12	0.64	3.516	** .001
		Female	48	5.54	0.92		
3	Social awareness	Male	45	4.41	0.96	-.386	.700
		Female	48	4.48	0.80		
	General average	Male	45	15.11	1.41	.332	.975
		Female	48	14.76	1.99		

This result may be ascribed to the similarity of training, nature of work in special education centres, the sample belonging to the same city, the proximity of teachers' level of education as they are all BA degree holders, and all of them belonging to the youth category. However, there were differences with statistical significance at the level $\alpha \leq 0.05$ or less in the level of social intelligence for the dimension of social skills for teachers of special education in Al-Ain City in favour of males. This may be because the nature of this dimension requires social skills that are more commonly attributed to males, such as confidence about meeting new people, congruity in social situations, easy communication with others, and understanding the wishes of others. Such a result does not agree with the studies of Vasilova and Baumgartner (2005) and Silvera et al. (2001).

Recommendations

In light of findings of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

- 1 Conduct future similar studies on other samples of teachers of special needs from other areas and cities with different economic, social and educational aspects.
- 2 Train teachers of special education from different areas theoretically and practically on how to utilise social intelligence when working with students who have special needs.



- 3 Pay more attention to dimensions of social intelligence, merging them with the education process within training programs offered to all categories of students with special needs.

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