



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship of Alexithymia to Social Withdrawal among Students with Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the level of alexithymia and its relationship to social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities. The study population consisted of teachers with learning disabilities in the schools of the Directorate of Education in Zarqa Governorate (132 male and female teachers). The descriptive approach was adopted. The alexithymia scale and the social withdrawal scale were used to identify The results of the study found that the average alexithymia for students with learning disabilities reached (3.83), The arithmetic mean of the level of social withdrawal among students with learning difficulties as a whole is (3.74), and this value is high according to the standard of the scale. The results of the study also found that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the average response of students with learning disabilities to the level of alexithymia and social withdrawal.

INTRODUCTION

Alexithymia is one of the things that limits a student's ability to express his emotions and understand the emotions of others, which hinders his adaptation to his school life, and deprives him of the opportunity to form friendships and successful social relationships with his classmates and teachers.

Lerner (2017) believes that weak social skills are perhaps the biggest problem that students with learning disabilities suffer from, and the impact of weak social skills on the student continues in all aspects of life.

This is what Larsen (2002) confirms that students with learning disabilities show a deficit in social skills. This weakness may hinder them from the ability to form and maintain relationships with peers. He confirms that leaving a student with learning disabilities to receive learning disability program services outside the classroom makes it look like... Students have a different outlook that affects their interaction with him.

Alexithymia is an emotional and cognitive characteristic of a personality that lacks awareness of emotions. It is characterized by the individual's inability to identify, describe, and express emotions and feelings verbally to himself or to others, and the difficulty of distinguishing between emotions and physical sensations resulting from arousal. In addition to restricted imaginative processes

observed through the scarcity of dreams and fantasies and the dominance of an externally oriented thinking style characterized by absorption in the details of external events, more than focusing on feelings and fantasies related to internal experience (Gilbert et al. 2014).

The inability of an individual to describe his emotional state and the suffering he feels makes him lose empathy for others, and the inability to understand the feelings of others may lead to a lack of empathy, lack of emotional harmony with others, increased psychological pressure, and limited social relationships. (Khamis, 2014).

Sifneos was the first to use the term alexithymia, which literally means “there are no words to describe feelings,” and it is taken from the Greek, where (a) means there are no and (lexis) means “words” and (thymia means “feelings”). I consider it a disorder in emotional and cognitive performance and the inability to describe feelings with words. The most important manifestations of alexithymia are the person’s failure to distinguish between his feelings and the physical sensations that accompany them, his inability to express his feelings to others, and the absence of inner fantasies and thoughts. (Tahir, Ghayas, & Tahir 2012)

Difficulty in processing and controlling emotional processes is associated with a wide range of psychological and mental problems. Several studies indicate that there is a relationship between alexithymia and many disorders, such as: psychosomatic disorders, such as digestive system disorders, and psychological disorders, such as eating disorders, anxiety, alcohol abuse, depression, and social isolation. (Al-Sayed, 2020)

In general, withdrawal is considered the tendency to avoid interaction with others, failure to participate in social situations appropriately, and lack of social communication methods. This behavior ranges from not establishing social relationships or building friendships with peers to poor communication with others, isolation from people and the surrounding environment, and indifference to what is happening. In the surrounding environment.(Qadi, 2017).

The problem of the study:

According to what was observed from the observations of teachers of learning disabilities, they found that many students with learning disabilities have a problem in expressing their emotions and feelings or expressing them to others, and students with learning disabilities tend to be less confident in themselves.

A student who is unable to interact with others and speak in front of them may avoid social interaction, and this would lead to isolation and absence from school, with an accompanying negative impact on achievement. Academic, psychological and social adjustment of the student (Al-Faydi and Bani Younis, 2017).

Based on this reality that students with learning disabilities suffer from in expressing their feelings or participating in social activities, and to achieve the goals, this study came to identify the relationship between alexithymia and social withdrawal for students with learning disabilities by answering the study questions:

- What is the level of alexithymia among students with learning disabilities from the point of view of teachers of learning disabilities?
- What is the level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities from the point of view of their parents?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation between students’ averages for the level of alexithymia and social withdrawal?

The importance of this study appears as it provides theoretical information about alexithymia and social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities, which may help in developing strategies and programs to treat and reduce them.

Search terms:

- **Learning disabilities:** Al-Rosan (2013) defines them as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using spoken or written language, which can express itself through a lack of ability to pay attention, think, speak, read, write, or calculate. .

- **Alexithymia:** It is considered an emotional and cognitive trait linked to personality, as the sufferer lacks awareness of emotions, the inability to identify and describe feelings, and express them verbally, and the inability to distinguish between emotions and physical sensations resulting from arousal, in addition to a pattern of thinking characterized by directedness. External And getting immersed in the details of external events (Daoud, 2016).

- **Social withdrawal:** It is behavior directed inward or toward oneself. It includes physical, psychological, and emotional distancing from other people and from social situations that require the child to interact socially (Nouri and Al-Maaytah, 2007).

THEORETICAL LITERATURE:

Learning disabilities:

Learning disabilities can be defined according to the American Educational Advisory Committee (2013) for children with disabilities, and they are those who suffer from deficiencies in one or more of the basic psychological processes necessary for using or understanding language or learning to read, write, and arithmetic, which are four processes of attention, memory, perception, and thinking. Which is involved in understanding or using written and spoken language, and may appear in disorders of listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic operations (Adaka, 2019).

The concept of learning disabilities:

One of the most prominent concepts that have emerged in the field of learning difficulties, as mentioned by Al-Khatib (2012), is that the medical concept focuses on the organic causes of learning difficulties, as this approach believes that they are represented by neurological dysfunction or brain damage. Abraham (1992) defines learning difficulties as an imbalance in the functions of the central nervous system. This category shows a multiple or different set of characteristics, and they show a disparity between mental ability and the level of achievement and failure in some tasks, but not all achievement or educational abilities. Their methods of processing information are inadequate.

Abdel Wahed (2010) points out that children with learning disabilities are those who show an educational discrepancy between the mental abilities they actually possess and their actual level of achievement, and that these disorders may or may not be accompanied by an apparent malfunction in the system. Central nervous system, while their learning disorders are not due to mental retardation, educational or cultural deprivation, or sensory deprivation.

Therefore, it can be said that children with learning disabilities are children who show a clear discrepancy between their expected capabilities, as measured by intelligence tests, and their actual performance, as measured by achievement tests, in one or more academic fields, where the child is observed to have deficiencies in performing tasks compared to his peers in the same field. The mental, temporal, and academic level. Children with sensory disabilities, as well as the mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed, are excluded from the category of people with learning disabilities. Al-Sammadi (2017).

Alexithymia:

Alexithymia, as stated by Mason, Tyson, and Potts (Mason, Tyson, & Potts 2015), is a specific personality characteristic, manifested in difficulties in understanding and verbally describing the feelings and emotions of the person around him, distinguishing physical sensations, distinguishing experiences, and reduced ability to encode and imagine, mainly focusing on the external aspects, at the same time, not paying due attention, internal feelings, a tendency to utilitarian concrete logical thought processes combined with the lack of emotional response are built. All the described features may be manifested to the same degree, or one of them may predominate. Alexithymia is often considered a psychological problem that leads to the emergence of psychological and physical diseases.

Elzinga and Bermond (2020) also state that alexithymia is a condition in which a person finds it difficult to identify and express his feelings, and it is not considered a mental health disorder. People with alexithymia may have problems maintaining relationships and engaging in social situations. The condition may be accompanied by an accompanying psychological disorder such as depression. The reasons for the formation of alexithymia are also unclear and it is believed that the main form of deviance lends itself to psychological misdirection. At the same time.

Symptoms of alexithymia:

As mentioned by Tahir Ghayas (Tahir & Ghayas, 2012), who considers alexithymia to be a type of emotional disorder, a specific functional feature of the nervous system. The intellectual sphere of the personality with alexithymia is not violated, many sufferers of this disorder are distinguished by a high level of mental development. Many studies indicate that approximately 20% of citizens have manifestations of alexithymia. One of the symptoms that appear in people who suffer from alexithymia is that they are practically unable to empathize with themselves and it is difficult for them to empathize with others. But they are neither selfish nor insensitive. Individuals with this disorder simply do not understand how this works and it is easier for them to avoid contact or come up with any familiar phrase. They also do not have words to express feelings, or more simply, they are described as emotionally illiterate.

Al-Saaida (2009) also mentions that there is difficulty in realizing and showing their feelings towards different situations and towards other people, but they are unable to describe what they feel in words, so they find it difficult to understand the emotional reactions of others, which often raises enormous difficulties in communicative interaction. Therefore, gradually, individuals with this deviation form a desire for loneliness. These people are characterized by limited imagination problems in most cases, and individuals suffering from this disorder are also characterized by the inability to work creatively and creatively. They often confuse emotional anxiety with physical pain and it shows that when asked about their feelings, they are more likely to describe their physical pain as excruciating. They also find it difficult to cope with themselves due to a lack of emotional management skills, which leads to the absence of emotional feelings from awareness. Their relationships are pre-doomed to failure because they do not know how to distinguish and understand their partner's feelings. They also do not understand their negative feelings and often place responsibility on others, which leads to constant confrontation and destruction of relationships with loved ones.

The relationship between learning disabilities and alexithymia:

People with learning difficulties are characterized by general characteristics represented by a feeling of confusion when confronted with the feelings of others, as well as a deficiency in the ability to express private feelings, in addition to the presence of a group of psychological disorders such as anxiety, tension, and loss of motivation resulting from deficiency and deficit in social skills, and this is consistent with the characteristics of alexithymia. According to the results of a study that confirmed

that the basic characteristics of alexithymia include difficulty verbally expressing feelings, limited imagination, as well as difficulty understanding the feelings and feelings of others. (Al-Khatib, 2012).

This deficiency in the emotional side of people with learning disabilities, in which the student suffers from difficulty in the ability to identify and describe feelings, may make him have a sharp temper and be violent with others as a result of his weak ability to communicate emotionally with them, and then the seriousness of this emotional disorder increases for them and suspicion, jealousy, and hatred increase. And stubbornness towards others at times, and also towards oneself at other times. These negative feelings may lead to demolition and destruction, which makes their integration into a society without disabilities an issue that fails with obstacles. Which confirms the existence of a relationship between people with learning disabilities and those with alexithymia as one of the emotional disorders they have, and given the problems this disorder causes that may in turn affect the cognitive and emotional aspects of these individuals. Therefore, the researcher seeks to provide a selective counseling program to reduce alexithymia among students with Learning disabilities in the middle school (learner, 2017).

Social withdrawal:

Withdrawal behavior is a psychological state that affects children, and it appears among some of them in the age group of 2-3 years. There are children who are naturally introverted and withdraw from social situations. They tend toward isolation, and there are children who become isolated as a result of certain social situations, and withdrawal is often misunderstood. Some blame the child for his withdrawal and see this as cowardice, while others favor this behavior and see him as a rational and sober child who maintains his social status. There are also many terms and descriptions that have been used in educational and psychological studies to describe the concept of social withdrawal, the most important of which are:

- A - Social isolation.
- B - Self-absorption.
- C - Withdrawal resulting from anxiety.
- d. Social introversion.

Social withdrawal for people with learning disabilities:

1. Feelings of inferiority: This feeling is due to the presence of physical disabilities or what the child has heard about himself since childhood, that he is ugly. It may be the result of his inability to acquire things due to his poverty. Sometimes the environment makes the child feel inferior as a result of the problems he is exposed to that reduce him, and he does not find the approval he found within his family, which makes him feel inadequate and lacking in confidence, so he becomes an introvert.
2. Lack of a sense of security: due to his loss of trust in others and his fear of them, they threaten him, and remind him of his introversion. Perhaps he considers his entering into interactions with them a new source of criticism as a result of some of his negative attitudes that he is not accustomed to other than as a result of his isolation.
3. Making the child feel dependent: Making the child dependent on adults, and imposing severe control on him makes him feel helpless when trying to be independent, as well as making decisions related to the child without consulting him, such as the color of his clothes or whether he will not go on a trip.
4. Parental imitation and parental support: Introverted parents usually have introverted children, and parents' support for the child's introversion on the grounds that it is polite or modest is one of the fundamental reasons for this problem.

5. Changing the domicile: Changing the family's domicile from one country to another has some effects, including that some of the children of those families avoid the new society to which they moved as a result of different customs and traditions. (Fadiya Kamel, 2002, pp. 213-214).

The relationship between alexithymia and social withdrawal:

Alexithymia is a personality trait that affects personal behavior and psychological and mental health. It is characterized by difficulty in expressing feelings, difficulty distinguishing between physical sensations and feelings, lack of imagination, and interest in external influences. It is considered a model of a deficit in emotional regulation, and has been studied more than A trend: Psychological and biological studies indicate that its cause is due to a defect in the cerebral cortex responsible for regulating emotion, while neuropsychological studies have indicated a defect in the response to emotional stimuli through negative facial expressions.

Clinical experimental research has linked alexithymia to climatic conditions, and social and psychological variables that surround the individual from childhood to adulthood, such as: the quality of poor communication and communication between spouses, insecure attachment patterns, exposure to abuse, and neglect, which leads to embarrassment, loneliness, and distance from the course of social life, and so on. The child reaches social withdrawal. (Torrado, Ouakinin, & Nicolau, 2013).

There are many studies related to this study and its content includes a study by Tilebruefach and Reynolds (2022), a study to identify the level of social isolation and achievement of students with learning difficulties. Al-Humairi (2021) also conducted a study aimed at identifying the effectiveness of the program used based on play therapy in reducing the level of social withdrawal among kindergarten children who suffer from learning difficulties. Hafni (2020) conducted a study that aimed to implement a proposed program for general practice in social service to alleviate the social withdrawal of children with learning difficulties. The study by Taş & Güneş (2019) also aimed to reveal the predictive ability of age, gender, alexithymia, and social anxiety in computer game addiction in children.

Search procedures:

The descriptive, correlational approach was used to suit the nature of the study.

Research community:

The study population is represented by all families of students with learning disabilities in the resource rooms of the schools of the Ministry of Education/Directorate of Education of Zarqa Governorate, who number (132) male and female students, , who are the study sample.

Search tools:

The two study tools, namely the Alexithymia Scale and the Social Withdrawal Scale, were developed by referring to theoretical literature and previous studies, such as in the study of Shaheen (2013), the study of Scimeca et al (2014), and the study of Kaur & Kaur (2015), and studies that are partly similar. With the current study, to identify the level of presence of these symptoms among students with learning disabilities, a five-point Likert scale was used.

RESULTS

The first question: What is the level of alexithymia among students with learning disabilities from the teachers' point of view?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the level of alexithymia among students with learning disabilities were extracted from the teachers' point of view, and Table (1) shows this.

Table (1): Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the level of alexithymia among students with learning disabilities from the teachers' point of view, arranged in descending order according to the arithmetic means.

Rank	number	Paragraph	SMA	standard deviation	level
1	19	He does not have specific rules for dealing with his colleagues	3.92	1.187	high
2	10	He finds it difficult to describe his feelings towards others	3.91	1.164	high
3	1	He has feelings that he cannot define	3.90	1.138	high
4	15	He gets angry for reasons he cannot explain	3.87	1.086	high
5	3	He has difficulty knowing what words to use to describe his feelings	3.86	1.068	high
6	7	It is difficult for him to reveal his deep feelings	3.84	1.164	high
7	12	He finds it difficult to choose the right words for his feelings	3.82	1.049	high
8	2	I find it difficult to describe how I feel about people	3.81	1.181	high
9	14	He doesn't know what's going on inside him	3.81	1.152	high
10	11	He is often confused about the emotions he is feeling	3.77	1.077	High
11	18	He always thinks that others do not understand his feelings correctly	3.77	1.182	High
12	6	He gets into a state of chaos when he tries to describe how he feels about an important event	3.76	1.207	High
13	20	He exaggeratedly expresses what is on his mind	3.76	1.177	High
14	9	He uses gestures to express his feelings	3.74	1.101	High
15	4	He can describe his feelings with ease	3.42	1.225	Medal
		Alexithymia scale	3.73	.876	High

Table (1) shows that the arithmetic means ranged between (3.42-3.92), and these values range between medium and high and indicate that students with learning disabilities have alexithymia, as indicated by (Lerner, (2017), who mentioned that deficiencies in social skills and low concept of Self-esteem leads to alexithymia, as paragraph No. (1), which states, "He does not have specific rules for dealing with his colleagues," ranked first, with a mean of (3.92). This may be due to the fact that students with learning disabilities do not have a strategy to use as a rule for dealing with others. This may also be due to the fact that the repetition of failed experiences among students with learning disabilities leads to a failure to interact with different situations. This is due to the high level of alexithymia, while Paragraph No. (15) Its text: "He can describe his feelings with ease" ranked last, with a mean of (3.42). This may be due to his low level of memory, which leads to a lack of vocabulary that he uses to describe his feelings. Al-Khatib mentioned this (2012). The student with learning difficulties has weak memory, whether distant or close, which leads to the inability to recall the vocabulary he needs to describe his feelings. The arithmetic average of the level of alexithymia among students with learning disabilities from the point of view of teachers as a whole was (3.73). This average is high and indicates that students with learning disabilities have a high degree of alexithymia. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of the study of Al-Masry (2018), the study of Kaur & Kaur (2015), and the study of Taş & Güneş (2019), as they all concluded that students with learning disabilities have a high level on the alexithymia scale.

The second question: What is the level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities from the teachers' point of view?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities were extracted from the teachers' point of view, and Table (2) shows this.

Table (2) Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the dimensions of the level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities from the point of view of teachers, arranged in descending order according to the arithmetic means.

Rank	number	Paragraph	SMA	standard deviation	Level
1	1	He spends most of his time alone	3.88	3.88	High
2	11	His linguistic responses are one word or the least number of words	3.87	3.87	High
3	10	He doesn't think about himself and what he wants	3.86	3.86	High
4	2	His personality is shrouded in mystery	3.84	3.84	High
5	4	There is no specific person who is a role model	3.82	3.82	High
6	12	When he is with his peers	3.81	3.81	High
7	10	Doesn't interact with them	3.80	3.80	High
8	9	He does not take the initiative to talk about seeing any of his peers	3.78	3.78	High
9	5	He doesn't show any interest when he sees one of his peers Being among his peers does not make him happy	3.63	3.63	Medal
10	6	Doesn't want to make friends	3.63	3.63	Medal
11	7	When one of his peers talks to him, he leaves him and goes	3.63	3.63	Medal
12	3	He avoids all forms of social interaction with others	3.59	3.59	Medal
		Social withdrawal scale	3.74	3.74	high

Table (2) shows that the arithmetic averages ranged between (3.59-3.88), where paragraph No. (1), which states "He spends most of his time alone," came in first place with an arithmetic average of (3.88). This may be due to the inability of the student with disabilities to Learning difficulties in social interaction with others and not having the social skills through which to interact with other people. This is what Ennas (2008) mentioned, that manifestations of social withdrawal appear in people with learning disabilities, including remaining alone most of the time, while Paragraph No(12) It reads, "Avoid all forms of social interaction with others." It ranked last, with a mean of (3.59). This may be due to the fact that students with learning disabilities avoid these situations due to their inability to interact with others and their feeling of failure in establishing a correct social relationship with other people. This is This is what Al-Subaie (2018) mentioned when he stated that students with learning disabilities avoid participation due to repeated failed experiments. The arithmetic average of the level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities from the point of view of teachers as a whole was (3.74). This confirms what Al-Khatib (2012) stated that students with learning disabilities have difficulty in social interaction and difficulty in social skills, which leads to social withdrawal. The results of this study are consistent with the results of the study of Scimeca et al (2014), the study of Kaur & Kaur (2015), the study of Taş & Güneş, (2019), and the study of Al-Masry (2018). All of these studies concluded that students People with learning disabilities have social difficulties, one of which is social withdrawal.

The third question: Is there a statistically significant correlation at the level ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the average response of teachers of students with learning disabilities to the level of availability of alexithymia and social withdrawal?

To answer this question, the Pearson correlation coefficient was extracted between the average response of student teachers to the level of availability of alexithymia and social withdrawal, and Table (3) shows this.

Table (3) Pearson correlation coefficient for the relationship between the average response of student teachers to the level of availability of alexithymia and social withdrawal

		Difficulty identifying feelings	Difficulty describing feelings	relationships with others	availability of alexithymia
social withdrawal	Correlation coefficient t	.362(**)	.320(**)	.360(**)	.367(**)
	Statistical significance	.000	.000	.000	.000
	number	132	132	132	132

It is clear from Table (3) that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the averages of students' responses to the level of availability of alexithymia and social withdrawal. This may be due to the high level of alexithymia leading to a high level of social withdrawal among students with learning disabilities. This has been confirmed by many specialists, as Al-Khatib (2012) stated that alexithymia in children with learning disabilities leads to social withdrawal, and he justified this by the inability of students with learning difficulties. From identifying or describing feelings, which leads to the inability to interact socially Which in turn leads to social withdrawal, and the results of this study are consistent with the findings of the study of Shaheen (2013), Taş & Güneş (Taş & Güneş, 2019, the study of Al-Masry (2018), and the study of Hamaideh, 2018), as they all indicated the positive correlation between Alexithymia and social withdrawal for students with learning disabilities.

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