Social Anxiety Symptoms Among Students With Learning Disabilities in Jordan

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Abstract

The current study aimed to describe the symptoms of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning disabilities in Jordan. The study included 120 students with learning disabilities, 60 males and 60 females. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher constructed a scale of social anxiety symptoms and achieved its validity and reliability coefficients. The results indicated that the means ranged between (3.08-2.05), where emotional symptoms came in the first place with the highest mean of (3.08), while Physiological symptoms came in the last place with an means of (2.05), and the mean of the level of social anxiety among the Students with learning disabilities as a whole (2.73). There were no statistically significant differences (α = 0.05) due to the effect of gender in all fields and in the total degree. And there were statistically significant differences (α = 0.05) between the fifth grade on the one hand and the fourth, sixth and seventh grades on the other hand, and the differences came in favor of the fifth grade in physiological symptoms. Also, there were statistically significant differences (α = 0.05) between the seventh and sixth grades, and the differences were in favor of the sixth grade in cognitive symptoms. In addition, there were statistically significant differences (α = 0.05) between the seventh and fifth grades, and the differences were in favor of the fifth grade in the total score. The study recommended the need to provide remedial services for this category of students to enable them to overcome their psychological challenges.

Key words: Social anxiety symptoms; Students with learning disabilities; Jordan

INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities are a group of neurological problems that affect the organization, storage, or use of information. Learning difficulties affected information acquiring and entering into the brain, understanding this information, storing and retrieving it. Therefore, learning disabilities are a lifelong condition that affects people differently depending on the situation (Integra, 2009). Learning disabilities are described by the discrepancy between a student's ability and achievement in areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, or speaking. Students with learning disabilities are characterized by a variety of characteristics that include problems with reading comprehension, spoken language, writing and thinking, hyperactivity, distractibility, and problems with perceptual coordination. In addition to underachievement compared to peers in the class, impulsivity, frustration, and difficulties in communication and daily social interactions (naset.org. 2021). Some people with learning disabilities have difficulty interpreting and understanding the meanings of facial expressions, understanding body language or role taking in conversations (Integra, 2009).

Social anxiety disorder is a type of anxiety disorder that causes intense fear in social settings. People with this disorder show a range of cognitive, social and behavioral symptoms that negatively affect communication and interaction with people in the surrounding environment. Social anxiety affects one's ability to work, attend school, and develop and acquire social and personal relationships with others (Healthline, 2021). Humans experience social anxiety to different degrees and in different areas. At school, this can be a barrier to learning. School is a

social place and experiencing anxiety around peers can be challenging, especially if a student also has a learning disability. Social anxiety problems are often associated with learning difficulties. However, the symptoms of social anxiety negatively affect social performance, and this effect is also reflected significantly on academic achievement. Therefore, it constitutes an obstacle to school and academic adjustment (Cowden, 2010). Marwood and Hewitt (2013) explained that people with learning disabilities show increased levels of psychological anxiety compared to the average of normal person. Despite of that, they often face a lack of social support and poor coping techniques to deal with their psychological problems. The results of a study carried out by Mammarella, Ghisi, Bomba, Bottesi, Caviola, Broggi, and Nacinovich (2016) indicated that children with nonverbal learning difficulties suffer from social anxiety and have more intense anxiety about school. While a study of Devine, Hill, Carey, and Szucs (2018) found that children with developmental dyscalculia were twice as likely to have high sports anxiety as children with typical athletic performance. Wang, Li, and Chung (2021) studied the role of metacognition in the relationship between test anxiety and literacy difficulties among typically developing Chinese adolescents as well as those identified as having specific learning difficulties. The study recommended the importance of encouraging teachers to take into account students' anxiety about testing and metacognition when preparing their educational materials. On the other hand, Marwood, and Hewitt (2013) indicated that the intervention was successful in treating anxiety for people with learning difficulties.

Thus, it seems clear that students with learning difficulties show various levels of symptoms of social anxiety, and this negatively affects achieving optimal psychological and school adjustment, as well as achievement. In the current study, the researcher seeks to study the symptoms of social anxiety among a sample of students with learning difficulties in Jordan.

STUDY PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

Students with learning disabilities suffering from lack of the necessary social skills to adapt to their environment. These traits in a person may cause a student to develop social anxiety. Therefore, it is important to identify the levels of social anxiety in this group of students and help them overcome their fears and succeed in their schooling or education (Cowden, 2010). The current study seeks to answer the following questions:

• What are the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan?

• Do the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan differ according to gender?

• Do the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan differ according to grade?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study is a descriptive survey that aims to measure the social anxiety symptoms among students with learning disabilities in Jordan.

The Study Sample

The study sample consisted of 120 students, 60 males and 60 females. The following table shows the variables of the study sample.

Table 1
Frequencies and percentages according to the study variables

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	60	50.0
	female	60	50.0
Class	fourth grade	30	25.0
	fifth grade	30	25.0
	Sixth grade	30	25.0
	Seventh grade	30	25.0
	Total	120	100.0

Study Tool

To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher constructed a social anxiety symptoms scale with reference to studies such as Mattick and Clarke (1998), Nunes, Ayala-Nunesb, Pechorroc, and Greca, A. (2018), and Ankrom (2021). The scale consisted of 20 items divided into four dimensions: physiological symptoms domain which includes 6 items, social symptoms domain that consists of 4 items, emotional symptoms domain which consists of 5 items, and finally, cognitive symptoms domain that contains 5 items.

Statistical Standard

The Quadruple Likert scale was adopted to correct the study tools, by giving each of its items one degree out of its four degrees (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree) and they were represented digitally (4, 3, 2, 1) respectively, and the scale was adopted the following for the purposes of analyzing the results:

From 1.00-2.00 a low

From 2.01-3.00 medium

From 3.01-4.00 high

The scale was calculated by using the following equation:

(The upper limit of the scale (4) - the lower limit of the scale (1)) / The number of required categories (3 .(

(4-1) /3=1.00

And then add the answer (1.00) to the end of each category.

Construct Validity of the Study Tool

In order to extract the construct validity of the scale, the correlation coefficients of each item and the total score, and between each item and its correlation with the domain to which it belongs, and between the domains with each other and the total score, were extracted in a survey sample from outside the study sample that

consisted of (30), and the items' correlation coefficients ranged with the tool. As a whole it is between (0.38-0.69), and with the range (0.44-0.91). It should be noted that all correlation coefficients were of acceptable and statistically significant degrees, and therefore none of these items were deleted.

Reliability of the Study Tool

To ensure the reliability of the study tool, the test-retest method was verified by applying the scale, and reapplying it after two weeks on a group from outside the study sample consisting of (30), and then the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between their estimates in both times.

The stability coefficient was also calculated by the internal consistency method according to Cronbach's alpha equation, and Table No. (2) shows the internal consistency coefficient according to Cronbach's alpha equation and the repetition of the fields and the total score and these values were considered appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Table 2
Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient and the test-retest reliability of the domains and the total score

Domains	Test-retest reliability	Cronbach's alpha internal consistency
Physiological symptoms	0.89	0.79
Emotional symptoms	0.86	0,79
Social symptoms	0.86	0.83
Cognitive symptoms	0.88	0.81
Total score	0.90	0.87

RESULTS

This part of the study shows the results organized according to its questions.

• **What are the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan?**

To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties were extracted, and the table below illustrates this.

Table 3
Means and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety among students with learning disabilities, arranged in descending order according to the means

Rank	N	domains	Mean	Std. Deviation	degree
1	3	emotional symptoms	3.08	.598	high
2	4	Cognitive symptoms	3.03	.507	high
3	2	social symptoms	2.93	.591	medium
4	1	Physiological symptoms	2.05	.651	medium
		Total Score	2.73	.443	medium

Table 3 shows that the means ranged between (3.08-2.05), where emotional symptoms came in the first place with the highest means of (3.08), while Physiological symptoms came in the last rank with an means of (2.05), and the means of the level of Social anxiety among students with learning difficulties as a whole (2.73).

• **Do the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan differ according to gender?**

To answer this question, the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety among students with learning difficulties were extracted according to the gender variable, and to indicate the statistical differences between the arithmetic averages, a "t" test was used, and the table below illustrates this.

Table 4
Means, standard deviations, and t-test for the effect of gender on the level of social anxiety among students with learning difficulties

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Physiological symptoms	Male	60	2.13	.684	1.385	118	.169
	female	60	1.96	.611			
Social symptoms	Male	60	3.00	.608	1.396	118	.165
	female	60	2.85	.568			
Emotional symptoms	Male	60	3.03	.633	-.946	118	.346
	female	60	3.13	.562			
Cognitive symptoms	Male	60	3.00	.560	-.574	118	.567
	female	60	3.05	.452			
Total	Male	60	2.75	.503	.493	118	.623
	female	60	2.71	.376			

It is clear from the Table 4 that there are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to the effect of gender in all fields and in the total score.

• **Do the levels of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties in Jordan differ according to grade?**

To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties were extracted according to the grade variable, and the table below illustrates this.

Table 5
Means and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety among students with learning difficulties according to the grade variable

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physiological symptoms	fourth grade	30	1.84	.524
	fifth grade	30	2.44	.697
	Sixth grade	30	1.95	.705
	Seventh grade	30	1.95	.503
	Total	120	2.05	.651
Social symptoms	fourth grade	30	2.90	.571
	fifth grade	30	3.12	.691
	Sixth grade	30	2.98	.512
	Seventh grade	30	2.72	.528
	Total	120	2.93	.591
Emotional symptoms	fourth grade	30	3.00	.603
	fifth grade	30	3.19	.610
	Sixth grade	30	3.24	.513
	Seventh grade	30	2.90	.625
	Total	120	3.08	.598
Cognitive symptoms	fourth grade	30	3.09	.419
	fifth grade	30	3.09	.469
	Sixth grade	30	3.17	.433
	Seventh grade	30	2.76	.609
	Total	120	3.03	.507
Total	fourth grade	30	2.66	.380
	fifth grade	30	2.93	.446
	Sixth grade	30	2.78	.412
	Seventh grade	30	2.54	.455
	Total	120	2.73	.443

The Table 5 shows an apparent discrepancy in the means and standard deviations of the level of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning difficulties due to the different categories of the grade variable.

Table 6
ANOVA analysis of the effect of class on the level of social anxiety symptoms among students with learning disabilities

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Physiological symptoms	fourth grade	30	1.84	.524		
	fifth grade	30	2.44	.697		
	Sixth grade	30	1.95	.705	5.831	.001
	Seventh grade	30	1.95	.503		
	Total	120	2.05	.651		
Social symptoms	fourth grade	30	2.90	.571		
	fifth grade	30	3.12	.691		
	Sixth grade	30	2.98	.512	2.501	.063
	Seventh grade	30	2.72	.528		
	Total	120	2.93	.591		

To be continued

Continued

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Emotional symptoms	fourth grade	30	3.00	.603		
	fifth grade	30	3.19	.610		
	Sixth grade	30	3.24	.513	2.179	.094
	Seventh grade	30	2.90	.625		
	Total	120	3.08	.598		
Cognitive symptoms	fourth grade	30	3.09	.419		
	fifth grade	30	3.09	.469		
	Sixth grade	30	3.17	.433	4.140	.008
	Seventh grade	30	2.76	.609		
	Total	120	3.03	.507		
Total	fourth grade	30	2.66	.380		
	fifth grade	30	2.93	.446		
	Sixth grade	30	2.78	.412	4.518	.005
	Seventh grade	30	2.54	.455		
	Total	120	2.73	.443		

It is evident from the Table 6 that there are statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha=0.05$) due to the effect of the class in all areas and in the tool as a whole except for social symptoms, and emotional symptoms. As shown in the Table 7.

Table 7
Verbal dimensional comparisons of the effect of class on the level of social anxiety among students with learning difficulties

Dependent Variable	(I) class	(J) class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Physiological symptoms	fourth grade	fifth grade	-.606*	.159	.003
		Sixth grade	-.111	.159	.921
		Seventh grade	-.111	.159	.921
	fifth grade	fourth grade	.606*	.159	.003
		Sixth grade	.494*	.159	.025
		Seventh grade	.494*	.159	.025
	Sixth grade	fourth grade	.111	.159	.921
		fifth grade	-.494*	.159	.025
		Seventh grade	.000	.159	1.000
	Seventh grade	fourth grade	.111	.159	.921
		fifth grade	-.494*	.159	.025
		Sixth grade	.000	.159	1.000

To be continued

Dependent Variable	(I) class	(J) class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Cognitive symptoms	fourth grade	fifth grade	.007	.126	1.000
		Sixth grade	-.073	.126	.953
		Seventh grade	.333	.126	.078
	fifth grade	fourth grade	-.007	.126	1.000
		Sixth grade	-.080	.126	.940
		Seventh grade	.327	.126	.088
	Sixth grade	fourth grade	.073	.126	.953
		fifth grade	.080	.126	.940
		Seventh grade	.407*	.126	.019
	Seventh grade	fourth grade	-.333	.126	.078
		fifth grade	-.327	.126	.088
		Sixth grade	-.407*	.126	.019
Total Score	fourth grade	fifth grade	-.270	.110	.114
		Sixth grade	-.128	.110	.712
		Seventh grade	.112	.110	.792
	fifth grade	fourth grade	.270	.110	.114
		Sixth grade	.142	.110	.644
		Seventh grade	.382*	.110	.009
	Sixth grade	fourth grade	.128	.110	.712
		fifth grade	-.142	.110	.644
		Seventh grade	.240	.110	.193
	Seventh grade	fourth grade	-.112	.110	.792
		fifth grade	-.382*	.110	.009
		Sixth grade	-.240	.110	.193

The data shows that there were statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the fifth grade on the one hand and the fourth, sixth and seventh grades on the other hand, and the differences came in favor of the fifth grade in physiological symptoms. Also, there were statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the seventh and sixth grades, and the differences were in favor of the sixth grade in Cognitive symptoms. In addition, there were statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the seventh and fifth grades, and the differences were in favor of the fifth grade in the Total Score.

DISCUSSING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results showed that emotional and cognitive symptoms were high, and this may be due to the fact that students with learning difficulties suffer from fear, tension, psychological stress, attention deficit and lack of concentration memory, and this came as a result of the learning difficulties they suffer from, and that these symptoms accompany and distinguish them due to their suffering and their learning disabilities.

Fifth-grade students with learning disabilities had higher physiological symptoms and this may be due to the developmental changes they are going through. Also, maybe this refer to the fact that the learning problems that have affected their school performance were becoming more aware and they feel that they have challenges that prevent them from participating in school assignments like their classmates. Therefore, they appear to have sleep problems, insomnia and tension. While the sixth grade, the cognitive symptoms were higher, and this may be due to the awareness about their problem and suffering, and perhaps also because learning difficulties have become more affecting the performance of academic tasks, which distracted them and increased their thinking about their problem. Furthermore, may this due to their awareness that they were less able to complete tasks and compete with their peers.

Based on the results, the researcher recommends:

• Determining the levels of social anxiety among students with learning difficulties and studying the variation and extent of symptoms.

• Develop remedial programs to enable students with learning difficulties to overcome their psychological problems, including anxiety.

• The current study focused on studying social anxiety among students with learning difficulties in Jordan, and it is also important to study their levels of depression.

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