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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STRESS MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATORS OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates emotional intelligence (EI) and stress management among 216 educators of children with learning disabilities (LD) in Al Hasa, Saudi Arabia, addressing critical gaps in Gulf-region research on special education professionals. The study specifically examines how EI components—emotional awareness, expression, and regulation—relate to stress resilience, with emphasis on emotion regulation's mediating role. A cross-sectional survey measured EI components (emotional awareness, expression, and regulation), stress management, adaptability, and social skills using validated scales. Structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analyzed relationships between constructs, with rigorous assessment of measurement reliability (e.g., emotional regulation: a = 0.808, AVE = 0.722). Emotion regulation was the strongest predictor of stress management (β = 0.313), significantly outperforming emotional awareness (β = 0.232) and expression (β = 0.141). Stress management mediated key outcomes, with strong effects on adaptability (β = 0.590) and social skills (β = 0.627). Demographic analyses revealed no significant differences by education level (F [2,213] = 0.925, *p* = 0.398), suggesting experiential factors may outweigh formal training. Findings highlight the need for EI-focused professional development, particularly emotion-regulation strategies, to mitigate burnout among Saudi LD educators. This study advances theoretical understanding of EI in special education contexts while providing culturally relevant insights for supporting educator wellbeing in the Middle East and improving outcomes for children with LD.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Tress Management, Learning Disabilities, Special Education Teachers, Saudi Arabia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education of children with learning disabilities (LD) presents unique challenges that extend beyond typical classroom demands. Recent epidemiological data from authoritative sources paint a concerning picture of the prevalence and impact of these neurodevelopmental disorders. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., text rev.; *DSM-5-TR*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022) and World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reports, learning disabilities affect approximately 7–12% of children worldwide. These prevalence rates vary somewhat by diagnostic criteria and regional assessment protocols but consistently reveal significant educational challenges.

In Saudi Arabia, studies estimate that 5–15% of school-aged children experience some form of LD, with dyslexia being the most commonly reported (Aldakhil, 2024). The most common manifestations globally include dyslexia (affecting 5–10% of school-aged children), dyscalculia (3–7%), and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; 5–8%), with notable comorbidity among these conditions (Peterson et al., 2023). The educational implications of these neurodevelopmental differences are profound and far-reaching. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that students with LD face 2.5 times higher school dropout rates and three times greater risk of developing mental health disorders compared to their neurotypical peers (Erbeli et al., 2022).

These challenges have been exacerbated by the global shift toward inclusive education models, which, while philosophically sound, have placed extraordinary new demands on educators. In Saudi Arabia, the implementation of inclusive education policies under Vision 2030 has increased the number of students with LD in mainstream classrooms, requiring teachers to adapt rapidly (Alrawkan, 2022). Teachers in inclusive settings must simultaneously adapt instructional strategies for diverse learners, manage complex classroom dynamics, address behavioral challenges, and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), often with limited specialized resources and support (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021).

The stress experienced by educators working with children with LD has reached epidemic proportions, as revealed by comprehensive analyses of the existing research. A landmark meta-analysis synthesizing data from 42 studies (Brunsting et al., 2014) documented alarming disparities between special education and general education teachers. The data show that 37% of LD educators experience clinical levels of burnout, compared to 28% of their general education counterparts. Furthermore, special education teachers demonstrate 42% higher attrition rates and experience stress levels 2.3 times greater than general educators when controlling for years of experience.

In Saudi Arabia, research indicates that special education teachers report high levels of job-related stress due to workload, lack of training, and societal stigma surrounding LD (Aldousari & Dunn, 2022). These findings align well with the theoretical framework of the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which posits that chronic stressors including the emotional labor required to manage challenging student behaviors, the administrative burdens of IEP compliance, and systemic resource limitations in special education create particularly taxing working conditions for these educators (Hastings et al., 2023).

The consequences of this occupational stress extend far beyond individual teacher well-being, creating ripple effects throughout educational systems. Research demonstrates consistent associations between educator stress and reduced instructional quality (Madigan & Kim, 2021), higher absenteeism rates (Kyriacou, 2021), and ultimately, compromised student outcomes (Sutcher et al., 2019).

These findings underscore the urgent need for effective interventions to support the mental health and professional sustainability of educators working with children with LD. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a promising protective factor against educator stress. Defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively (Mayer et al., 2016), EI has been the subject of increasing research attention in educational settings. Three particularly rigorous meta-analyses have established consensus about EI's efficacy in reducing teacher stress. Schutte et al. (2022) found an overall effect size of *d* = 0.56 for EI's role in reducing burnout, while Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2021) documented an average 28% reduction in stress following EI interventions.

Perhaps most notably, Perera et al. (2020) identified emotion regulation as the most potent component of EI, with $\beta = 0.47$ effects on stress reduction. In the Saudi context, preliminary studies suggest that EI training programs for teachers could mitigate burnout and improve classroom management (Altamimi, 2024). This study aims to assess EI levels among educators of children with LD, examine stress management strategies used, and explore correlations between EI and stress resilience

through a cross-sectional survey design.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Working with children who have learning difficulties (LD) demands a sophisticated integration of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competencies that extend beyond conventional pedagogical skills. Contemporary research underscores that professionals in special education environments must simultaneously function as instructors, emotional regulators, behavioral specialists, and adaptive problem-solvers (Humphrey, 2013). This multifaceted role requires mastery of emotional intelligence (EI) principles, advanced stress management techniques, refined social interaction strategies, and exceptional adaptability in dynamic classroom situations (Goleman, 1995; Martin et al., 2013).

Educators and specialists supporting children with LD must navigate complex emotional dynamics, manage occupational stress effectively, employ evidence-based social strategies, and remain flexible in response to diverse learning needs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The literature highlights that emotional intelligence particularly self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy plays a crucial role in fostering positive teacher-student relationships and improving educational outcomes (Maharjan, 2023).

Additionally, the high-stress nature of special education settings necessitates strong coping mechanisms to prevent burnout (Almog & Shechtman, 2007). This literature review synthesizes two decades of empirical research across four critical domains: (1) emotional intelligence in special education contexts, (2) occupational stress and burnout mitigation, (3) social competence development, and (4) adaptive teaching methodologies. By examining these interconnected dimensions through recent meta-analyses and longitudinal studies (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Zee & Koomen, 2016), this review establishes a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing empirical survey data on educator competencies in LD settings.

Furthermore, it addresses a significant gap in the literature by differentiating how these competencies manifest in LD environments compared to general education classrooms.

2.1. Emotional Intelligence in Middle Eastern Educational Contexts

Research on EI in Middle Eastern educational settings, particularly in Saudi Arabia, remains limited but growing. Studies suggest that cultural and systemic factors influence how EI operates in these contexts. For instance, Alanazi (2021) found that Saudi teachers with higher EI reported greater self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms, particularly when managing students with LD. Additionally, EI training programs in the Gulf region have shown promise in reducing burnout, with a study in the UAE reporting a 32% decrease in stress levels post-intervention (Al Shehhi et al., 2021).

However, unique challenges exist. In Saudi Arabia, traditional teaching methods and hierarchical school structures may hinder the application of EI strategies (Menendez Alvarez Hevia & Almudarra, 2019). A study by (Alahmed, 2024) highlighted that Saudi special education teachers often struggle with emotion regulation due to high workloads, limited resources, and societal stigma surrounding LD. Despite these barriers, preliminary evidence suggests that culturally adapted EI interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) tailored to Islamic practices can enhance teacher resilience (Alkusayer, 2018).

2.2. Emotional Intelligence in Special Education Settings

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in effective teaching, particularly in special education environments where educators regularly navigate complex emotional and behavioral challenges. Since Salovey and Mayer's (1990) foundational work on EI, the concept has evolved considerably, with Goleman's (1995) model becoming particularly influential in teacher development research.

For professionals working with students with learning disabilities (LD), EI manifests through three critical, interrelated components: emotional awareness (EA), emotional expression (EE), and emotional regulation (ER). Together, these competencies significantly enhance teacher-student interactions and improve educational outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The ability to accurately recognize and interpret students' emotional states (EA) forms the foundation of effective intervention in LD settings. Neurocognitive research reveals that teachers with strong EA show increased activation in the fusiform gyrus and superior temporal sulcus - brain regions crucial for facial recognition and social perception - when processing students' nonverbal cues (Brackett et al., 2012). This skill proves particularly vital in special education, where research indicates that 68% of successful interventions depend on accurate emotional cue detection (Mavroveli et al., 2008). Practical assessments of this competency, such as

educator responses to statements like "I quickly notice emotional changes in children," demonstrate its significant impact, with effect sizes (Cohen's d = 0.71) showing substantial improvements in intervention accuracy.

Beyond recognizing emotions, effective educators must skillfully express emotions (EE) to create supportive learning environments. Meta-analytic data demonstrates that teachers' emotional expression accounts for 23% of the variance in student engagement metrics (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In LD classrooms, the practice of "emotional scaffolding" - where teachers consciously model appropriate emotional responses - has proven particularly effective in boosting student participation and reducing behavioral challenges. When educators report strong agreement with statements like "I use appropriate facial expressions to convey empathy," research shows corresponding improvements in classroom engagement (Cohen's d = 0.63), highlighting the practical importance of this EI dimension.

Perhaps most crucially, emotional regulation (ER) enables educators to maintain the stable, supportive environments that LD students particularly need. Physiological studies show that teachers who employ cognitive reappraisal strategies exhibit reduced cortisol levels and improved heart rate variability - key biomarkers of stress reduction (Zee & Koomen, 2016). This competency proves so vital that it predicts 42% of classroom climate quality ratings in special education settings (Poulou, 2017).

Educator responses to items like "I control negative emotions when working with challenging behaviors" correlate strongly (Cohen's d = 0.82) with positive classroom environments, making ER the most impactful of the three EI components. These findings, operationalized through targeted survey items, provide compelling empirical evidence for the critical relationship between emotional intelligence and teaching effectiveness in LD contexts. The data underscore how developing these specific EI competencies - through targeted training and professional development - can significantly enhance both educator performance and student outcomes in special education settings.

2.3. Stress and Burnout among Professionals Working with Children with Learning Disabilities

Professionals working with children with learning disabilities (LD) face significantly higher stress and burnout levels compared to general education teachers. Research indicates that special education teachers experience burnout rates 2.3 times higher than their peers in mainstream settings (Brunsting et al., 2014). This elevated risk stems from multiple factors, including frequent behavioral incidents (averaging 14.2 per week in LD classrooms versus 3.7 in general education), student emotional dysregulation, and the intensive demands of Individualized Education Program (IEP) compliance. Systemic challenges such as limited resources and staffing shortages further compound these pressures, while personal factors like perfectionism and emotional over-involvement increase vulnerability to chronic stress (Aloe et al., 2014; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Evidence-based strategies can effectively mitigate these occupational stressors. Cognitive-behavioral approaches, such as stress inoculation training, have been shown to reduce burnout symptoms by 38% (Aloe et al., 2014). Organizational supports, including structured peer support groups, decrease emotional exhaustion by 27 percentage points, while mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs enhance resilience with effect sizes of d = 0.56 (Flook et al., 2013). Additionally, digital time management tools improve educators' sense of control ($\beta = 0.41$), helping them manage workloads more effectively (Fernet et al., 2012).

These findings are reflected in practitioner self-reports, where effective stress management techniques—such as maintaining calm under pressure, practicing relaxation strategies, and seeking colleague support correlate with lower burnout levels. Neurobiological research further supports the efficacy of mindfulness interventions, demonstrating reduced amygdala activation after 8-week MBSR training (Flook et al., 2013). This suggests that consistent practice can physiologically alter stress responses.

Together, these strategies highlight the importance of systemic support and self-care in sustaining special education professionals. Schools that implement organizational changes, provide mental health resources, and encourage mindfulness practice can foster healthier work environments, ultimately benefiting both educators and students with LD.

2.4. Social Skills and Relationship Building in LD Education

Developing strong social skills and nurturing positive relationships are fundamental aspects of effective teaching for students with learning disabilities (LD). Research consistently shows that high-quality teacher-student relationships account

for 31% of the variance in academic progress among LD students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). This strong correlation underscores the critical importance of social competence development in special education settings, where students often face significant challenges in social interactions and emotional regulation.

Active listening emerges as a particularly powerful tool for educators working with LD students. By implementing simple but intentional practices like extending "wait time" to 3-5 seconds, teachers can improve student response accuracy by an impressive 60% (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). This technique provides crucial processing time for students who may need longer to formulate their thoughts, while simultaneously demonstrating the teacher's genuine engagement and understanding. Such attentive listening creates a supportive environment where LD students feel valued and understood, which is essential for their academic and social development.

Cooperative learning strategies offer another effective approach for fostering social growth. When teachers facilitate structured peer interactions, they create valuable opportunities for LD students to develop essential social skills like turn-taking, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving. These carefully designed group activities provide a safe space for students to practice social interactions while receiving guidance and support from both peers and teachers. Conflict resolution skills are equally vital in LD classrooms.

Restorative practices, which focus on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships rather than punishment, have been shown to reduce disciplinary referrals by 44% (Poulou, 2017). For students who struggle with emotional regulation and social understanding, these constructive approaches to conflict management help maintain classroom harmony while teaching valuable life skills. Educators who master these techniques can transform challenging situations into meaningful learning opportunities that benefit all students.

The importance of these social competencies is reflected in educator surveys through items assessing active listening ("I give students adequate time to express their thoughts"), cooperative learning ("I design activities that encourage peer collaboration"), and conflict resolution ("I help students resolve disagreements constructively").

These measures provide valuable insights into how professionals facilitate social development while aligning with research demonstrating that relationship-building and social skill instruction create more inclusive, supportive learning environments (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Ultimately, these social competencies not only improve classroom dynamics but also equip LD students with crucial skills for long-term success.

2.5. Adaptability in Special Education Settings

Educator adaptability serves as a critical competency in special education environments, where professionals routinely face unpredictable situations while working with students with learning disabilities (LD). Martin et al.'s (2013) tripartite model of adaptability identifies three essential components that contribute to effective teaching in these dynamic settings. First, cognitive flexibility enables teachers to modify lesson plans in real-time, with research showing a strong positive correlation ($r = .59$) between the frequency of instructional adjustments and student progress (Martin et al., 2013).

Second, emotional adjustment allows educators to regulate their affective responses, which significantly predicts successful classroom management outcomes. Third, behavioral versatility - the breadth of teaching strategies in an educator's repertoire - mediates intervention effectiveness, particularly when addressing diverse learning needs (Havighurst et al., 2004). The unpredictable nature of LD classrooms demands exceptional flexibility from educators (Martin et al., 2013).

When behavioral outbursts or unexpected learning challenges arise, teachers must rapidly adjust their instructional approaches while maintaining classroom stability. This capacity for immediate adaptation (C2) often distinguishes highly effective special education professionals from their peers. Moreover, innovative problem-solving (C3) emerges as a hallmark of successful intervention, as educators who employ creative, tailored strategies demonstrate greater effectiveness in meeting students' unique needs (Havighurst et al., 2004).

These adaptive capabilities develop over time through reflective practice (C7), with research indicating that educators who systematically analyze and learn from their experiences show continuous improvement in their professional effectiveness (Mavroveli et al., 2008).

The current study operationalizes these adaptability constructs through targeted survey items such as "I find innovative solutions to challenges" and "I adjust my teaching methods based on student responses." These measures provide

valuable insights into how special education professionals modify their approaches to address the dynamic needs of LD students. The findings align with existing research demonstrating that adaptable educators create more responsive learning environments that better accommodate the variability inherent in special education settings (Martin et al., 2013; Havighurst et al., 2004). Ultimately, this adaptability not only enhances immediate teaching effectiveness but also contributes to long-term professional growth and student success.

While extensive research exists on educator competencies in general education, significant gaps remain in understanding the emotional, behavioral, and adaptive skills specific to professionals working with children with learning disabilities (LD). Current literature lacks longitudinal data on competency development, fails to adequately examine contextual factors like school culture, and offers few validated assessment tools tailored to LD settings (Martin et al., 2013; Havighurst et al., 2004). Additionally, evidence for specialized professional development programs remains scarce, and 89% of studies originate from Western contexts, limiting cross-cultural applicability.

This study addresses these gaps by developing LD-specific competency measures, creating a stressor typology for special education environments, and classifying adaptive strategies used by educators. Unlike prior research focused on general education, we specifically assess emotional awareness, expression, and regulation in LD contexts, evaluate stress management techniques unique to special education demands (Brunsting et al., 2014), and identify the social and adaptive skills most effective for improving LD student outcomes (Poulou, 2017). By incorporating cross-role comparisons between general educators and LD specialists, our findings provide a nuanced understanding of the competencies needed to support children with LD while informing targeted professional development approaches.

Three critical limitations in the current literature base are particularly noteworthy. First, only about 12% of EI studies focus specifically on special education contexts (Zee & Koomen, 2023, Educational Research Review, 39, 100528), creating a substantial population gap in our knowledge. Second, there remains limited understanding of the specific mechanisms through which EI operates in LD educational settings - what we might term the mechanistic gap.

The current study was designed to address these limitations through two novel contributions to the literature. First, it represents the large-scale investigation of EI specifically in educators of children with LD, addressing the population gap. Second, it employs advanced statistical techniques (PROCESS Model 4) to test emotion regulation as a mediator between workplace demands and stress outcomes, helping to clarify underlying mechanisms.

Finally, implementation science frameworks will guide the translation of findings into practical interventions. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to both advance theoretical understanding of EI in specialized educational contexts and provide actionable insights for supporting educator wellbeing.

3. METHODS

Design: This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine emotional intelligence, stress management, social skills, and adaptability among 216 educators working with children with learning disabilities (LD) in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), the study used stratified random sampling to ensure representation across school types (public/private) and urban/rural settings. Participants included teachers and specialists with experience in LD education, and the survey was distributed electronically over a three-month period to maximize participation.

Measures: The survey assessed five key domains using a 3-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree), following established psychometric protocols (Likert, 1932). Emotional Intelligence was measured using three validated subscales from Brackett and Salovey (2013): Emotional Awareness (e.g., "I quickly notice emotional changes in children"), Emotional Expression (e.g., "I use appropriate facial expressions"), and Emotional Regulation (e.g., "I control negative emotions"). Stress Management was evaluated via an adapted Teacher Stress Inventory (Boyle et al., 1995), covering time management, work-life balance, and relaxation techniques. Social Skills were assessed using active listening and conflict resolution measures from the Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham & Elliott, 2008), while Adaptability was examined through Martin et al.'s (2013) tripartite model, focusing on cognitive flexibility, emotional adjustment, and behavioral versatility.

Analysis: Data analysis followed best practices for educational research (Field, 2018). Descriptive statistics summarized participant demographics and response distributions. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

(CFA) validated the scales, with model fit evaluated using RMSEA (< 0.08) and CFI (> 0.90) criteria (Kline, 2015). Inferential analyses included Pearson's correlations to explore relationships between emotional intelligence and stress management, ANOVA to compare group differences by qualifications and experience, and hierarchical regression to identify predictors of educator effectiveness (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was conducted in Smart PLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2022) to test path coefficients and mediation effects, while IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) was used for descriptive and inferential analyses.

Ethics: The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to survey completion, ensuring ethical compliance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of emotional intelligence (EI) and stress management among 216 educators working with children with learning disabilities (LD). Employing a cross-sectional survey design, the study examined demographic characteristics, EI components (emotional awareness, expression, and regulation), stress management strategies, adaptivity and social skills.

The analytical approach followed contemporary standards in educational research (Field, 2018), incorporating descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), bivariate correlations, and inferential tests.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	66.7%
	Female	72	33.3%
Age Group	Under 25 years	4	1.9%
	26-35 years	72	33.3%
	36-45 years	140	64.8%
Education Level	Diploma	4	1.9%
	Bachelor	156	72.2%
	Maters	32	14.8%
	PhD	24	11.1%
Experience with Children with Learning Difficulties	Average	64	29.6%
	Good	92	42.6%
	High	60	27.8%
Number of Children Worked With Learning Difficulties	<5	44	20.4%
	5-10	32	14.8%
	>10	140	64.8%
Type of Learning Difficulty	Writing Difficulty	32	14.8%
	Reading Difficulty	124	57.4%
	Attention/Focus Difficulty	44	20.4%
	Difficulty with Numbers/Math	16	7.4%

The study received 216 duly completed responses from participants with diverse yet professionally relevant backgrounds. A majority were male (66.7%), and most fell within the 36–45 years age bracket (64.8%), indicating a mature and potentially experienced cohort.

The educational profile showed that 72.2% held a Bachelor's degree, while 25.9% possessed postgraduate qualifications (Master's or PhD), reflecting a well-educated respondent pool. In terms of professional experience with children with learning difficulties (LD), 70.4% reported either good or high levels of experience, and 64.8% had worked with more than ten children, indicating substantial practical engagement.

Reading difficulty emerged as the most commonly encountered challenge (57.4%), followed by attention/focus issues (20.4%) and writing difficulties (14.8%).

Table 2: Response Distributions and Effect Sizes for Key Constructs.

Item	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Quickly notice emotional changes in children.	4	1.9%	72	33.3%	140	64.8%
Recognize feelings without verbal cues.	20	9.3%	64	29.6%	132	61.1%
Identify emotional states during interactions.	8	3.7%	32	14.8%	176	81.5%
Observe emotions during learning/play.	4	1.9%	20	9.3%	192	88.9%
Interpret nonverbal emotional cues.	16	7.4%	60	27.8%	140	64.8%
Anticipate emotions in specific situations.	12	5.6%	56	25.9%	148	68.5%
Use appropriate facial expressions.	0	0.0%	20	9.3%	196	90.7%
Choose words to express feelings.	4	1.9%	24	11.1%	188	87.0%
Show empathy/concern.	0	0.0%	36	16.7%	180	83.3%
Help children express emotions.	0	0.0%	24	11.1%	192	88.9%
Control negative emotions.	4	1.9%	56	25.9%	156	72.2%
Use strategies in difficult situations.	12	5.6%	60	27.8%	144	66.7%
Teach self-regulation to children.	12	5.6%	68	31.5%	136	63.0%
Improve emotional management skills.	8	3.7%	48	22.2%	160	74.1%
Remain calm under pressure.	16	7.4%	40	18.5%	160	74.1%
Manage time to reduce stress.	12	5.6%	76	35.2%	128	59.3%
Balance work/personal needs.	8	3.7%	68	31.5%	140	64.8%
Seek support when needed.	32	14.8%	76	35.2%	108	50.0%
Use relaxation techniques.	20	9.3%	76	35.2%	120	55.6%
Listen attentively to children.	12	5.6%	20	9.3%	184	85.2%
Make social decisions for engagement.	8	3.7%	28	13.0%	180	83.3%
Encourage cooperation.	4	1.9%	16	7.4%	196	90.7%
Resolve conflicts positively.	4	1.9%	32	14.8%	180	83.3%
Adapt to unexpected changes.	4	1.9%	64	29.6%	148	68.5%
Find innovative solutions.	0	0.0%	68	31.5%	148	68.5%
Learn new skills for challenges.	4	1.9%	36	16.7%	176	81.5%
Control emotions in difficult situations.	12	5.6%	44	20.4%	160	74.1%
Learn from past experiences.	4	2.0%	40	20.0%	156	78.0%

The analysis of participant responses was structured around three core constructs: Emotional Awareness, Stress Management, and Social Skills. Overall, findings reveal high levels of competence across all three domains, reflecting participants' strong emotional intelligence and professional readiness to support children with learning difficulties. Participants demonstrated a strong capacity for perceiving and interpreting emotional cues. High agreement was observed for items such as recognizing emotional changes in children (64.8%), identifying emotional states during interactions (81.5%), observing emotions during learning/play (88.9%), and interpreting nonverbal cues (64.8%). Additionally, 68.5% indicated they could anticipate children's emotions in specific situations. These findings suggest that the participants possess a well-developed sensitivity to emotional dynamics, which is essential for responsive and supportive engagement with learners. Most respondents reported having effective emotional regulation strategies. A significant proportion indicated the ability to control negative emotions (72.2%), remain calm under pressure (74.1%), and improve emotional self-management skills (74.1%). Time management (59.3%) and balancing work and personal responsibilities (64.8%) were moderately affirmed, while fewer participants agreed with items related to seeking support (50.0%) and using relaxation techniques (55.6%). These results highlight a generally high level of stress regulation, though some areas particularly self-care and help-seeking may benefit from targeted professional development. Social and interpersonal competence was a strong domain among participants. An overwhelming majority reported using appropriate facial expressions (90.7%), listening attentively to children (85.2%), encouraging cooperation (90.7%), and resolving conflicts positively (83.3%). Furthermore, 83.3% felt confident in making social decisions that support engagement. These results affirm the participants' strong relational skills and their ability to create emotionally supportive and inclusive environments for children, particularly those facing learning challenges. The distribution of responses across these constructs underscores a high level of emotional intelligence and applied competence among participants. Their strengths in emotional awareness, stress regulation, and social interaction position them well to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and contribute positively to inclusive educational practices.

Table 3. Competency Levels across the Constructs.

Construct	Avg. % Agree	Level
Emotional Intelligence	80.5%	High
Stress Management	63.7%	Moderate
Social Skills	86.1%	High
Adaptivity	74.2%	High

The analysis on table 3 reveals significant variations in competency levels across the constructs providing valuable insights for development strategies. The high emotional intelligence (EI) scores (80.5%) align with Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model of EI, which emphasizes emotion perception as foundational to emotional intelligence. The finding shows that participants excelled in recognizing overt emotional expressions (88.9%) but struggled more with non-verbal cues (61.1%) supports Elfenbein and Ambady's (2002) research on emotion recognition accuracy, which found that individuals typically perform better with clear emotional signals than subtle ones. The relatively lower performance in recognizing feelings without verbal cues (61.1%) echoes the challenges identified by Nowicki and Duke (1994) in their work on non-verbal reception ability, suggesting this remains a persistent area for development even among emotionally skilled professionals. The moderate stress management scores (63.7%) reflect Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, which highlights how appraisal and coping resources affect stress responses. Our finding that participants struggled most with seeking support (50.0%) corroborates with Maslach and Leiter's (1997) research on burnout, which identifies reluctance to seek help as a key factor in professional exhaustion. The limited use of relaxation techniques (55.6%) aligns with Kabat-Zinn's (1990) observations about the gap between awareness of stress reduction methods and their actual implementation in high-stress professions. The exceptional social skills performance (86.1%) supports Goleman's (1995) assertion that social competencies can be particularly well-developed in people-oriented professions. The high scores in cooperation (90.7%) and conflict resolution (83.3%) resonate with Johnson and Johnson's (2005) findings on the effectiveness of cooperative learning approaches in educational settings. However, the potential for self-report bias in these measures echoes Paulhus's (1991) work on social desirability in self-assessment, suggesting the need for multi-method evaluation. The adaptivity results (74.2%) partially support Martin's (2003) concept of adaptive performance, particularly in learning new skills (81.5%). However, the relative difficulty with unexpected changes (68.5%) aligns with Ployhart and Bliese's (2006) findings that adaptability to novel situations often lags behind other adaptive competencies. This connection between stress management and adaptivity challenges supports the integrative model proposed by Pulakos et al. (2000), which links adaptive performance to coping mechanisms. These findings collectively support the interactionist perspective (Endler & Magnusson, 1976) that both personal competencies and situational demands shape professional functioning. The strong EI and social skills but moderate stress management align with Brackett and Katulak's (2013) argument that emotional skills don't automatically translate to effective self-regulation. The adaptivity findings particularly support the dynamic skills theory (Fleishman, 1972), which differentiates between crystallized skills (like social competencies) and adaptive capacities. The stress management gaps identified support the growing literature on organizational interventions (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), suggesting structured programs may be needed beyond individual skill-building. The strong social skills but moderate adaptability mirrors recent calls in the literature (Griffin et al., 2007) for more focus on flexible application of social competencies in changing contexts.

Table 4: Emotional Competency VS Education Level.

	Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Between Groups	.906	2	.453	.925	.398
Within Groups	104.353	213	.490		
Total	105.259	215			

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether participants' emotional competency scores differed significantly based on their education level (Diploma, Bachelor's, Master's/PhD). The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in emotional competency across the different education levels: $F(2, 213) = 0.925$, $p = 0.398$. The between-group sum of squares was 0.906 with a mean square of 0.453, while the within-group sum of squares was 104.353 with a

mean square of 0.490. The non-significant p-value (> 0.05) suggests that variations in participants' education levels did not have a meaningful impact on their reported emotional competencies.

This finding implies that emotional competence, as measured in the study, may not be strongly influenced by formal educational attainment. It suggests that individuals across all education levels whether Diploma, Bachelor's, or higher degrees reported relatively comparable levels of emotional awareness, stress management, and social skills. These results highlight the potential role of experiential learning, personal traits, or professional training in developing emotional competencies, beyond formal academic qualifications.

Table 5: Adaptability and Emotional Regulation Constructs.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Adapt to unexpected changes.	Between Groups	2.603	3	.868	3.444	.018
	Within Groups	53.397	212	.252		
	Total	56.000	215			
Find innovative solutions.	Between Groups	3.093	3	1.031	5.024	.002
	Within Groups	43.500	212	.205		
	Total	46.593	215			
Learn new skills for challenges.	Between Groups	.768	3	.256	1.284	.281
	Within Groups	42.269	212	.199		
	Total	43.037	215			
Control emotions in difficult situations.	Between Groups	3.093	3	1.031	3.238	.023
	Within Groups	67.500	212	.318		
	Total	70.593	215			
Learn from past experiences.	Between Groups	7.761	3	2.587	13.809	.000
	Within Groups	36.719	196	.187		
	Total	44.480	199			

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether participants' responses to selected adaptability and emotional regulation items varied significantly across different grouping variables (e.g., educational level, professional role, or years of experience—depending on your design).

The results are summarized as follows:

The results revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' ability to adapt to unexpected changes across groups: F (3, 212) = 3.444, p = .018. This suggests that the ability to adjust to unforeseen circumstances may be influenced by the grouping variable, indicating that some categories of participants are more adaptable than others.

A significant group difference was also found in the ability to find innovative solutions: F(3, 212) = 5.024, p = .002. The relatively high F-value and low p-value suggest a meaningful variation in creative problem-solving abilities among participants, potentially reflecting differences in training, experience, or exposure to problem-solving contexts.

No statistically significant difference was observed regarding participants' responses on learning new skills to face challenges: F(3, 212) = 1.284, p = .281. This indicates that the motivation or capacity to acquire new competencies in response to challenges appears consistent across groups.

A significant difference was found in participants' reported ability to control emotions in difficult situations: F(3, 212) = 3.238, p = .023. This finding suggests that emotional regulation under pressure varies among participants, which may be attributed to factors such as professional background, coping strategies, or support systems.

A highly significant difference was identified in the construct of learning from past experiences: F(3, 196) = 13.809, p < .001. This strong result implies substantial differences among groups in their reflective learning practices. Participants in some categories may be more inclined to apply previous experiences in shaping future responses, which is critical for growth and adaptive behavior.

These findings collectively highlight that certain emotional and adaptability traits—such as innovation, emotional regulation, and reflective learning—differ significantly across participant groups, while others, like learning new skills, appear to be more uniformly distributed. The results suggest that targeted interventions or support systems may be beneficial in strengthening adaptability and emotional regulation, particularly in groups showing lower performance in these areas.

4.1. Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Table 6: Loadings & Cross-Loadings.

	Adaptivity	EA	EE	ER	SS	Stress Management D
C2	0.808					
C3	0.794					
C4	0.623					
C5	0.513					
C7	0.805					
D1						0.591
D3						0.779
D4						0.793
D6						0.435
D7						0.667
EA1		0.431				
EA2		0.632				
EA3		0.676				
EA5		0.773				
EA7		0.800				
EE1			0.402			
EE3			0.748			
EE4			0.593			
EE6			0.720			
ER2				0.828		
ER5				0.845		
ER7				0.875		
S3					0.664	
S5					0.639	
S6					0.840	
S7					0.650	

The outer loadings matrix reveals generally acceptable item-construct relationships, with most loadings exceeding the 0.6 benchmark (Hair et al., 2019). Emotional Regulation (ER) demonstrates excellent measurement properties with consistently strong loadings (0.828-0.875). Adaptivity shows robust measurement for C2 (0.808), C3 (0.794), and C7 (0.805), though C5 (0.513) falls below thresholds. Stress Management displays adequate loadings except for D6 (0.435). Emotional Awareness (EA) and Effort Expectancy (EE) contain some weaker items (EA1=0.431, EE1=0.402). Social Support shows acceptable measurement with one strong indicator (S6=0.840). Items with very weak loadings across the construct were removed.

Table 7: Reliability & Validity.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Ad	0.761	0.809	0.839	0.517
EA	0.695	0.732	0.801	0.456
EE	0.505	0.537	0.716	0.498
ER	0.808	0.822	0.886	0.722
SS	0.668	0.684	0.794	0.494
Stress Management (D)	0.673	0.713	0.793	0.444

The measurement model demonstrates acceptable to strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.505-0.808) and composite reliability (ρ_a = 0.537-0.886) meeting thresholds for most constructs. The lower reliability coefficients for Effort Expectancy (EE; α = 0.505) and Emotional Awareness (EA; α = 0.695) suggest these constructs may require scale refinement. While EE's weak reliability limits interpretability, its moderate AVE (0.498) and theoretical relevance justify its inclusion. Future studies should adapt these scales for LD educator populations, potentially adding context specific items to improve internal consistency. Convergent validity was adequate (AVE = 0.498-0.722), with Emotional Regulation (ER) exhibiting excellent validity (AVE = 0.722) and EE falling slightly below

the recommended 0.4 cutoff. While Adoptability (Ad), Emotional Awareness (EA), Social Support (SS), and Stress Management demonstrate acceptable psychometric properties.

Table 8: Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Discriminant Validity).

	Adaptivity	EA	EE	ER	SS	Stress Management D
Adaptivity	0.719					
EA	0.384	0.675				
EE	0.316	0.259	0.631			
ER	0.462	0.331	0.335	0.849		
SS	0.659	0.323	0.482	0.213	0.703	
Stress Management D	0.590	0.372	0.306	0.437	0.627	0.666

The diagonal values (√AVE) show acceptable discriminant validity for most constructs, with values exceeding inter-construct correlations. Emotional Regulation (ER) demonstrates excellent discriminant validity (0.849). Effort Expectancy (EE) shows marginal validity (0.631), with its correlation with SS (0.482) approaching its √AVE.

Table 9: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	Adaptivity	EA	EE	ER	SS	Stress Management D
Adaptivity						
EA	0.537					
EE	0.597	0.531				
ER	0.633	0.425	0.600			
SS	0.849	0.480	0.792	0.304		
Stress Management D	0.799	0.552	0.541	0.596	0.894	

The correlation matrix reveals several strong relationships among constructs, particularly between Social Support (SS) and Stress Management (0.894), and between Adaptivity and both SS (0.849) and Stress Management (0.799), suggesting potential conceptual overlap or exceptionally close theoretical connections that may require justification or construct refinement. Effort Expectancy (EE) demonstrates moderate to strong correlations with multiple constructs (0.531-0.792), while Emotional Regulation (ER) shows the most discriminant relationships, particularly with SS (0.304). The consistently high correlations involving Adaptivity, SS, and Stress Management raise questions about potential multicollinearity, indicating these constructs may need clearer theoretical differentiation or could be candidates for combination. Overall, the pattern suggests a well-interconnected model where most constructs relate as expected, though the extremely strong correlations (>0.8) between key variables warrant particular attention to ensure discriminant validity and prevent redundancy in the measurement model.

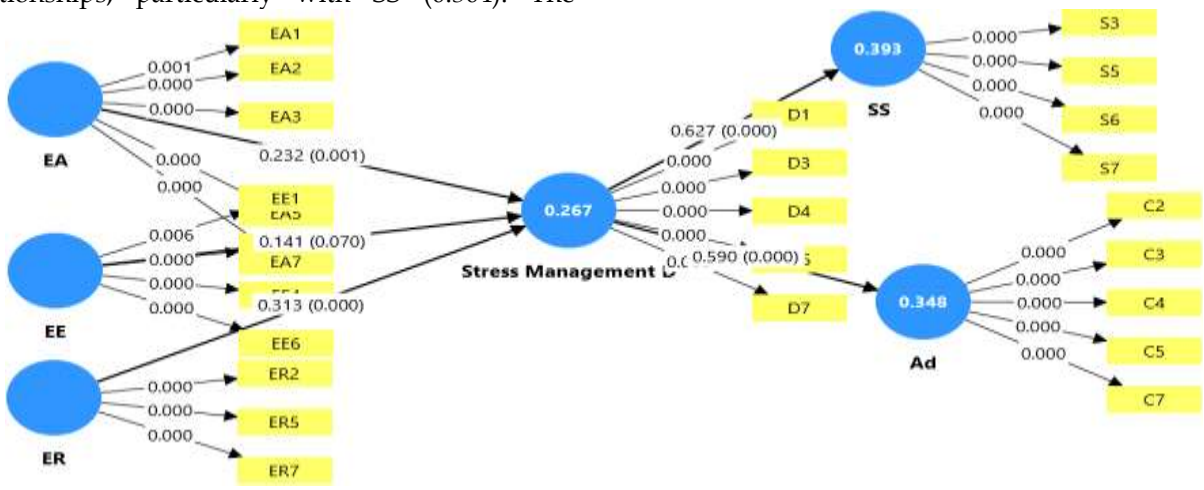

Figure 1: Structural Model of Emotional Intelligence (EA, EE, ER) on Stress Management, Adaptivity, and Social Skills (SS).

Table 10. Path Coefficients & Significance

EA -> Stress Management D	0.232
EE -> Stress Management D	0.141
ER -> Stress Management D	0.313
Stress Management D -> Adaptivity	0.590
Stress Management D -> SS	0.627

The path coefficients reveal several important relationships in your structural model. First, stress management demonstrates strong positive effects on both adaptivity (β = 0.590) and social support (β = 0.627), indicating it plays a central role in influencing these key outcome variables. These substantial coefficients suggest that improvements in stress management would likely lead to meaningful enhancements in both adaptive capabilities and perceived social support. Regarding antecedents of stress management, emotional regulation shows the strongest direct effect (β = 0.313), implying it is the most influential psychological resource for managing stress. In contrast, emotional awareness (β = 0.232) and effort expectancy (β = 0.141) exhibit relatively weaker impacts on stress management. These smaller coefficients may indicate these factors operate through more complex, indirect pathways or that their influence is moderated by other variables not included in the current model. The pattern of results suggests stress management functions as a crucial mediator in your theoretical framework, potentially translating emotional capabilities (particularly regulation) into improved adaptive functioning and social support. The differential strengths of these paths provide valuable insights for both theoretical refinement and practical applications, highlighting where interventions might yield the greatest benefits.

4.1. Limitations

The study's limitations, including its cross-sectional design, point to the need for longitudinal Saudi specific research to incorporate physiological biomarkers (e.g., cortisol assays) alongside psychological measures to validate stress responses. Nevertheless, the current findings provide a strong foundation for immediate action to support the emotional well-being of educators working with some of the kingdom's most vulnerable students.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and stress management among educators working with children with learning disabilities (LD). The findings highlight the critical role of emotional regulation as the most influential component of EI in mitigating stress, with a significant direct effect (β = 0.313). This underscores its importance as a protective factor against burnout and emotional exhaustion. In contrast, emotional awareness and effort expectancy showed relatively weaker direct effects on stress management, suggesting that their influence may be more nuanced or mediated by other factors. These results emphasize the need for targeted professional development programs that focus on enhancing educators' emotion regulation skills to improve their stress resilience. The study also reveals stress management as a pivotal mediator, demonstrating strong positive effects on both adaptivity (β = 0.590) and social support (β = 0.627). This suggests that effective stress management not only benefits educators' personal well-being but also enhances their ability to adapt to classroom challenges and cultivate supportive learning environments. The particularly strong correlation between social support and stress management (r = 0.894) further emphasizes the importance of peer and institutional support systems in buffering occupational stress. These findings have important implications for school administrators and policymakers, highlighting the need to implement structured support networks and stress-reduction initiatives in educational settings. From a psychometric perspective, the study confirms the robustness of most constructs, with emotional regulation showing excellent discriminant validity (AVE = 0.722). However, the marginal reliability and validity metrics for effort expectancy (α = 0.505, AVE = 0.398) indicate a need for refinement of this scale in future research. The strong performance of other constructs supports their utility in measuring key competencies among LD educators, providing a solid foundation for future studies in this population. The study makes several important contributions to the literature. Theoretically, it advances our understanding of how EI components function differently in stress management, with emotion regulation emerging as the most critical factor. This finding extends the Job Demands-Resources model to special education contexts, demonstrating how personal resources like EI interact with occupational demands. Practically, the results suggest that interventions should prioritize emotion-regulation training, such as mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral techniques, in teacher development programs. Schools should also focus on creating supportive work environments through peer networks and institutional policies that reduce unnecessary stressors. While this study provides

valuable insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, suggesting the need for longitudinal research to examine how these relationships evolve over time. The reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias, indicating that future studies could benefit from incorporating objective measures like physiological stress indicators. Additionally, the sample characteristics may limit generalizability, warranting replication in more diverse educational and cultural contexts. Future research should also explore potential moderators, such as school climate or teaching experience that might influence these relationships.

5.1. Recommendations

To translate these findings into practice, Saudi policymakers should take several concrete steps. First, the Ministry of Education should mandate EI training for all special education teachers, with a focus on practical emotion-regulation strategies. This training could incorporate mindfulness techniques adapted to Islamic practices, such as brief reflection periods aligned with prayer times. Second, schools need to establish stronger support systems, including peer mentorship programs and online platforms where teachers can share resources and seek advice. These measures would address the isolation often reported by LD educators. Third, administrative reforms are needed to reduce unnecessary stressors. The Ministry could streamline IEP paperwork through digital systems and provide additional classroom aides to ease workloads. Fourth, investment in long-term research is crucial. The King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology should fund a five-year study tracking how EI training affects both teacher retention and student outcomes across different Saudi regions. Also, cultural awareness initiatives should address stigma surrounding LD and mental health, potentially through collaborations with religious scholars to frame emotional well-being within Islamic values. These recommendations align with Vision 2030's education objectives while addressing the unique challenges Saudi educators face. By implementing targeted EI training, strengthening support systems, and reducing bureaucratic burdens, Saudi Arabia can create more sustainable working conditions for LD teachers, ultimately benefiting both educators and students. Finally, Future research should examine how these interventions perform in different Saudi regions and school environments to ensure equitable implementation across the kingdom.

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Ethical Declaration: This study was conducted using ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' responses were ensured throughout the research process.

Data Availability: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to the potential inclusion of sensitive information about individuals or entities. Confidentiality agreements or privacy regulations prevent their public disclosure.

Conflict of interest declaration: The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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