

from Cognitive Barriers to Emotional Strengths: Understanding the Emotional Intelligence of Children with Learning Disabilities, a Qualitative Review

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Abstract

Academic achievement in children with learning disabilities has traditionally been addressed through cognitive remediation and subject-specific instructional strategies. However, growing evidence suggests that such approaches alone are insufficient to support the holistic development of these children, who coexist with cognitive barriers. Children with learning disabilities frequently experience frustration, anxiety, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal, which negatively influence their academic engagement, motivation, and classroom participation. The present study aims to explore emotional intelligence as a transformative factor that bridges cognitive barriers and emotional strengths in children with learning disabilities. This study uses a library research method to systematically review and synthesize the body of knowledge on emotional intelligence and learning impairments using a qualitative descriptive design. The review looks at how children with learning difficulties' academic engagement, coping mechanisms, resilience, social competence, and classroom participation are impacted by different emotional intelligence levels; low, moderate, and high. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that emotional intelligence acts as a mediating mechanism between cognitive difficulties and academic outcomes by enabling children to regulate negative emotions, sustain motivation, and build supportive relationships with peers and teachers. Overall, this study highlights the necessity of integrating emotional intelligence development into educational interventions and curriculum design to foster inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, learning disabilities, cognitive barriers, and emotional strength

1. Introduction

Academic success, including learning literacy, numeracy, and subject-specific knowledge, has historically been the focus of education. But for children with learning disabilities, academic achievement frequently goes beyond test scores and textbooks. Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini (2014) stated that learning disabilities refer to several disorders that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These children often face emotional obstacles such as social isolation, low self-esteem, and frustration, which can overshadow their academic

promise. Grigorenko et al. (2020) reported that the academic promise similar to the academic deficits in specific learning disability, to other cognitive skills has always been recognized, but the diagnostic and treatment relevance of this connection has remained unclear. More than that, some specific teaching techniques are needed to address these challenges; therefore, children's emotional and social skills must be fostered in order for them to learn with resilience and confidence. Teaching techniques and emotional intelligence are deeply knotted, in particular in classrooms that support children with learning disabilities. Thus Kgosiemang, & Khoza (2022) mentioned that emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize one's own and others' emotions, to distinguish between different feelings and categorize them accordingly, and to use emotional information to influence others' thinking and behavior (Abraham & Scaria, 2017). In those, rendering an effective instructional process not only builds academic skills but also strengthens children's capacity to understand and manage their emotions. Children with learning disabilities undergo a profound metamorphosis that impacts their cognitive, emotional, and social development when emotional intelligence is cultivated. This was also in addition to academic teaching. Children with learning disabilities gain greater emotional awareness and self-control, and their emotional intelligence also improves their ability to deal with challenges. On the whole, with their interrelationship with their peers and others, they maintain motivation in the face of disappointments. Ahonen et al., (2022) analyzed that high percentages of children with learning disabilities, irrespective of the learning disability type, demonstrated behavioral-emotional symptoms in the clinical range. The percentages of behavioral-emotional symptoms in the clinical range were alarmingly high in all learning disabilities groups in all scales, ranging from 15% to 59%

In order to support children with learning disabilities more comprehensively, this study examines how developing emotional intelligence can supplement academic approaches. Beyond the classroom, it is found that a healthy or strong emotional intelligence not only improves learning outcomes but also fosters the resilience, empathy, and self-assurance required for lifetime development. Children with learning disabilities face ongoing difficulties in the emotional, behavioral, and social domains in addition to academic ones. Although cognitive remediation and the development of subject-specific skills have been the main focus of traditional educational techniques, there is mounting evidence that these approaches are not enough to promote these children's holistic development. Research consistently reports high prevalence of emotional and behavioral difficulties among children with learning disabilities, including anxiety, frustration, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and reduced motivation (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014; Ahonen et al., 2022). These emotional challenges often exacerbate cognitive barriers, limiting academic engagement and overall learning outcomes. Grigorenko et al. (2020) emphasized that although the interconnection between cognitive skills and emotional functioning has long been acknowledged, its diagnostic and intervention relevance remains unclear, particularly in the context of specific learning disabilities. Furthermore, there is a knowledge vacuum about how emotional intelligence might convert cognitive obstacles into emotional strengths because current research frequently looks at academic or emotional results separately. For children with learning disabilities to succeed in inclusive learning environments, emotional intelligence can boost resilience, encourage adaptive coping mechanisms, improve peer connections, and increase classroom involvement. The alarming proportion of behavioral-emotional symptoms reported among children with learning disabilities across different disability types (Ahonen et al., 2022) underscores the urgency of addressing emotional dimensions alongside cognitive challenges. A qualitative review summarizing research on emotional intelligence and learning impairments is needed, highlighting how emotional competencies

promote social growth, academic engagement, and resilience. This study aims to bridge cognitive therapies and emotional development, fostering inclusive and productive learning environments.

2. Context establishment

The problem of children with learning disabilities is a significant area of this study. Learning is a complicated process for school-age children who are influenced by social, emotional, and cognitive elements. Academic success might be more difficult for children with learning disabilities due to difficulties with information processing, memory, and attention. However, emotional intelligence has a big impact on how well these children participate in their education, even beyond cognitive impairments. This article examines the effects of low, medium, and high emotional intelligence on the educational experiences and academic achievement of children and children with learning disabilities. Initially, emotional intelligence is defined according to children in this existing era; the same can be narrated with relevant themes in the domain of children with learning disabilities. Followed by a structured explanation of what typically happens at each level of emotional intelligence in children with learning disabilities, it is focused on reaching the scope of the study.

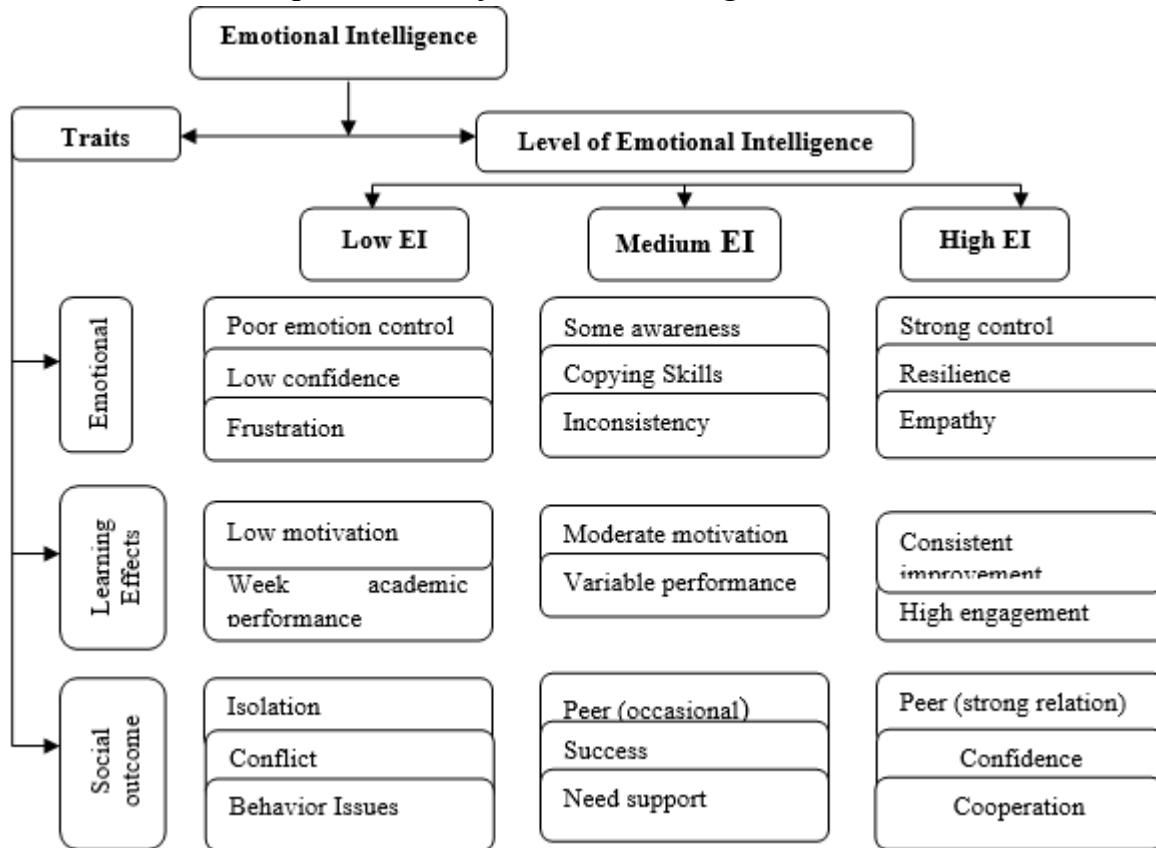
2.1 The concept of Emotional Intelligence

A set of abilities for recognizing, understanding, managing, and utilizing emotions in oneself and others is referred to as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, according to O'Connor (2019), is the capacity to analyze one's own and others' experiences and emotions, distinguish between them, and utilize this knowledge to direct one's thoughts and behavior. They suggested that emotional intelligence is a unique type of intelligence that combines cognitive and emotional processing. According to Goleman claims, that five essential elements make up emotional intelligence: (i) Self-awareness, the capacity to identify and comprehend one's feelings, (ii) Self-regulation, the capacity to restrain or reroute erratic feelings and urges, (iii) Motivation, the inner urge to be positive and accomplish goals, (iv) Empathy, the capacity to perceive and comprehend the feelings of others, and (v) Social Skills, the capacity to establish connections, speak clearly, and settle disputes. (Salovey and Mayer, 1990)

2.2 Bridging EI and LDs

How children with learning difficulties comprehend and express emotions, control their reactions, engage with others, and take part in class activities are all indicators of their emotional intelligence. Important indicators include identifying emotions, calming down, demonstrating empathy, forming connections, expressing requirements clearly, and persistently completing learning tasks. These actions demonstrate their degree of emotional intelligence, self-control, social awareness, and general classroom participation. In general, the exemption of learning disabilities and emotional intelligence has some traits that depend upon the level of emotional intelligence, which can be well established in the table below.

Table 1: Representation of Emotional intelligence level and its traits



3. Methodology

This study uses the library research method. It gathers and examines data from many research papers and thematic articles. The goal is to understand research questions better. It draws on key documents to tackle issues. Research often aims to build a solid base of documentation of the undertaken criteria. The main approach here is qualitative descriptive, which means it focuses on describing details in depth. Qualitative work looks at qualities and patterns, not just numbers. Descriptive parts focus on words, step by step. This method fits well for studies that need to explain ideas without new field data. This assists the readers in understanding what experts have already shared. As shown in Table 1, the qualitative descriptive approach runs through the whole article. This keeps the work focused and true to the sources reviewed.

3.1 Scope of the study

1. To examine the emotional intelligence as a mediator between cognitive challenges and academic engagement in children with learning disabilities.
2. To focus on how emotional intelligence enhances coping and resilience in learning contexts for children with learning disabilities.
3. To describe how emotional intelligence strengthens social competence and classroom participation in children with learning disabilities.

4. Result and discussion

Children with learning disabilities, in an academic setting, perceive their teaching-learning process as significantly influenced by their emotional functioning. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses abilities like emotional awareness, self-control, empathy, and social comprehension, directly affects

these children, their interaction with peers and teachers, participation in learning activities, and handling academic difficulties. Researchers argue that emotional intelligence is not merely an add-on to cognitive instruction; it is a foundational element that determines the learner's readiness, motivation, and capacity to benefit from academic supports (Kgosiemang & Khoza, 2022; Abraham & Scaria, 2017). As well as emotionally, these children often struggle with persistent frustration, low self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and fear of failure due to repeated difficulties in academic tasks (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014).

On addressing scope 1, it is to examine emotional intelligence as a mediator between cognitive challenges and academic engagement in children with learning disabilities. The major problem identified from some focused research reports is, children with learning disabilities often experience significant cognitive difficulties. These include difficulties with problem-solving, memory, processing speed, and attention. These issues make it difficult for them to comprehend, remember, and apply academic material. These cognitive obstacles increase the difficulty of activities in the classroom and can cause dissatisfaction, low motivation, and diminished self-confidence. Many of these children get disengaged from school activities, participate less in class, and find it difficult to keep up with their peers as a result. The fundamental issue is that learning impairments' cognitive obstacles directly impede long-term academic engagement, which limits learning outcomes and overall academic success. In spite of cognitive obstacles, children with higher emotional intelligence are better able to control their negative emotions, maintain motivation, and form supportive relationships. Emotional intelligence lessens the effect of cognitive difficulties on learning behavior by controlling emotional reactions, boosting self-efficacy, and strengthening social relationships. Therefore, children with learning difficulties can greatly increase their academic engagement by developing their emotional intelligence through classroom activities and focused interventions, which are all taken care of by the teachers. Elshaeret al., (2025) reported that higher levels of emotional intelligence are significantly related to improved QoL, which consequently has a positive impact on students' academic performance. The results confirmed that QoL demonstrated partial mediating effects in the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievements, signaling that EI can contribute to academic success both directly and indirectly by fostering students' overall QoL

On focusing on scope 2, Sahoo et al. (2015) reported that children with learning disabilities often face persistent academic difficulties that can lead to stress, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy. There is a high risk of psychological comorbidity in learning-disabled children. The comorbidity of developmental dyslexia with both internalizing and externalizing disorders, as well as with other learning disabilities, underscores the need for cognitive and behavioral approaches in the remediation programs offered to dyslexic children. Also, children with learning disabilities often face repeated academic frustrations, slow information processing, and feelings of inadequacy. These challenges can become emotionally overwhelming unless they develop effective coping and resilience skills. The problem, therefore, is the insufficient development of emotional intelligence among children with learning disabilities, which negatively affects their social functioning and participation in learning environments

So, it is understood that good emotional intelligence helps children with learning disabilities to cope with academic challenges and build resilience by improving how they understand, manage, and respond to their emotions. Emotional intelligence enables those children to recognize feelings like frustration, regulate emotional reactions, and maintain motivation during difficult tasks. It also enhances problem-solving, supports positive relationships with peers and teachers, and fosters optimistic, persistent

attitudes. Together, these emotional intelligence-based skills reduce emotional barriers, encourage adaptive coping, and help children bounce back from setbacks, leading to stronger resilience in learning contexts. Sara et al (2025) concluded that from a neuroscience perspective, emotional intelligence involves key processes such as self-regulation, attention, and executive control, which are fundamental for learning and academic performance. In this context, the findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating emotional intelligence development into curriculum design, not only to enhance well-being but also to promote resilient coping and strengthen academic motivation.

Finally, we concentrate on scope 3 to describe how emotional intelligence strengthens social competence and classroom participation in children with learning disabilities. The major problem, according to social competence in children with learning disabilities, is that they often experience difficulties in understanding social cues, managing emotions, communicating effectively, and forming positive peer relationships. These social challenges can lead to isolation, misunderstandings, and low confidence during group interactions. At the same time, many struggle to participate actively in classroom activities because anxiety, fear of failure, and limited self-regulation interfere with engagement. The problem is that without targeted support to build stronger social and emotional skills, these children are less able to interact successfully with peers and are less likely to take part in classroom learning, which ultimately affects their academic progress and overall school experience.

Thus, children with learning difficulties benefit from emotional intelligence because it enhances their capacity to comprehend and control emotions, communicate effectively, and read social cues. These abilities improve peer connections, boost self-assurance in social settings, and reduce conflict, all of which contribute to increased social competence. Stronger emotional control and self-awareness in the classroom lower anxiety, improve concentration, and promote active engagement in class discussions and group projects. All things considered, emotional intelligence promotes more interest in learning as well as more seamless social relationships.

Children with low emotional intelligence often struggle to recognize, understand, and control their emotions. When they experience obstacles in learning, such as difficulty with reading, writing, or math, they may feel angry, frustrated, or anxious and struggle to bounce back from setbacks. For instance, dyslexia is one of the reading disabilities. Thus, Nachshon & Horowitz (2019) reported that reading difficulties showed significantly lower executive functions and emotional abilities compared to typical readers. Decreased reading ability was related to decreased executive functions and emotional abilities. Elias & Arnold (2006) reported that children with low levels of emotional intelligence often give up easily, seem to lack motivation, and mostly struggle with self-regulation in a learning context. Goleman (2006) highlights that poor emotional control and self-regulation reduce motivation and persistence, leading these learners to give up more easily in academic settings. Concerning children with learning disabilities (dyslexia) who have a low level of emotional intelligence, their emotional and cognitive challenges hinder their ability to learn effectively. Their limited capacity to recognize and regulate emotions often leads to frustration, anxiety, and withdrawal when confronted with academic obstacles such as reading or writing difficulties. Children with a moderate level of emotional intelligence are somewhat conscious of their feelings and, occasionally, though not always, can control them. Rashmi Gupta (2025) reported that the moderate levels of EI and academic performance suggest potential for improvement within this group, especially by enhancing emotional intelligence. Thus, these kinds of children recognize when they are upset or discouraged and occasionally use coping strategies (like seeking help). This resembles the regulation of emotions. De Neve et al. (2023) support that regulation

of emotion is theorized to shape students' engagement in learning activities, but the specific pathways via which this occurs remain unclear. Even though children's progress at this stage resembles their academic progress, it is often inconsistent. It can be improved when emotional regulation is strong and declining under pressure. Children with a high level of emotional intelligence are emotionally aware, empathetic, and able to regulate their emotions effectively. Eren, et al. (2018) concluded in their study that in the study of gifted children, they have defined themselves as more inattentive and hyperactive than children and adolescents with normal intelligence in the SDQ self-report scale. The children in this category are generally able to identify emotional triggers and employ coping mechanisms to maintain composure. Despite their seeming resilience, they can overcome obstacles and see them as chances for personal development. They are powerful when it comes to self-motivation, especially when learning activities are challenging. They consequently participate more actively, are more interested in learning, and frequently attain higher academic and emotional results.

5. Implications

Higher levels of emotional intelligence in children are consistently associated with improved resilience and adaptive coping skills. Children, even in a state of experiencing cognitive challenges, can be enhanced with social interactions and greater participation in learning activities. Conversely, limited emotional intelligence exacerbates emotional distress and disengagement from learning. This study highlights the necessity of integrating emotional intelligence development into educational interventions and curriculum design to foster inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments. Strengthening emotional competencies alongside academic instruction can help children with learning disabilities transform cognitive barriers into emotional strengths, thereby promoting long-term academic success, well-being, and lifelong development. This qualitative review emphasizes that cognitive approaches alone are insufficient to properly comprehend or effectively manage learning disabilities. This research shows unequivocally that emotional intelligence is a critical mediation factor between cognitive obstacles and favorable educational results for children with learning disabilities. These children's emotional intelligence helps them stay motivated, control their anxiety, handle frustration, and become resilient in the face of ongoing academic difficulties. Thus, emotional intelligence emerges as a fundamental ability that influences how students interact in classroom settings, engage with learning, and react to failure, rather than just serving as a supplement to cognitive rehabilitation.

The results also show that different patterns of academic engagement, coping mechanisms, resilience, and social competence are linked to different emotional intelligence levels—low, moderate, and high. Children with low emotional intelligence are especially susceptible to emotional dysregulation, disengagement, and withdrawal, which frequently exacerbate the effects of cognitive challenges. Children with modest emotional intelligence, on the other hand, exhibit growth potential, particularly when assisted by focused interventions. Stronger self-regulation, adaptive coping, and social engagement are characteristics of people with high emotional intelligence, which enables them to turn cognitive obstacles into chances for both academic and emotional development.

In conclusion, fostering the holistic development of children with learning disabilities requires including emotional intelligence development into curriculum design, teacher preparation, and intervention programs. Deliberately fostering emotional strengths in the classroom can help children overcome cognitive obstacles, enhance their quality of life, and gain the confidence, resilience, and dignity to

study. With this method, education is shifted from remediation to inclusion, well-being, and long-term human development.

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