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Social Isolation Among Gifted Students in Upper Basic Education: Teachers' Perspectives and Student-Reported Coping Strategies

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Abstract

This study examined the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage from teachers' perspectives. It also explored coping strategies from the perspectives of the students themselves. The study further investigated differences in perceived social isolation according to teachers' gender, years of experience in gifted education, and academic qualifications. A mixed-methods design was employed. A scale with established validity and reliability was developed and administered to a convenience sample of 100 teachers of gifted students in Hebron Governorate. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 gifted students. The interviews explored factors contributing to social isolation and strategies used to address it. The results indicated a high level of social isolation among gifted students. Peer relationships were the most affected domain. Statistical analyses showed significant differences related to selected teacher variables. The qualitative findings revealed varied views on the role of the family in social integration. Many students reported difficulty forming friendships due to differences in interests. They also noted challenges in communicating with teachers and concerns about criticism. The study recommends strengthening structured social and psychological support programs tailored to gifted learners.

Keywords: social isolation; gifted students; upper basic education.

Introduction

Gifted students represent a vital human resource for societal advancement due to their advanced cognitive abilities and creativity. However, their asynchronous development and heightened sensitivities may hinder social integration, increasing vulnerability to social isolation (Gross, 2004).

Social isolation among gifted learners is a multidimensional psychosocial construct involving perceived disconnection and limited peer belonging (Alfaiz, 2024). Cognitive and interest differences often restrict meaningful peer interaction and complicate school adjustment (Cross et al., 2019). Empirical evidence links isolation to lower self-confidence and higher risks of anxiety and depression (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Insufficient social support may also impair social skill development and academic engagement, negatively affecting achievement trajectories (Baum & Owen, 2004). Early isolation has been associated with later adjustment difficulties (Davis & Rimm, 2011), as well as constraints in leadership and social participation (Silverman,

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2007).

Isolation may further stem from limited teacher awareness of gifted students' socio-emotional needs and the absence of structured peer-interaction programs (Tannenbaum, 2009; Renzulli, 2004). Nevertheless, intervention studies demonstrate that social skills programs effectively reduce isolation and enhance peer relationships (Cross et al., 2019).

In Arab contexts, interactive activities and group counseling have shown positive effects in strengthening peer interaction and reducing isolation (Abu Hammad, 2019; Al-Shawawreh, 2018). Early psychological guidance and structured social skills integration have also been recommended (Al-Muhammadi, 2017). Despite this, many gifted programs continue to prioritize academic excellence over socio-emotional development, potentially exacerbating isolation (Al-Farouq, 2020). Limited institutional support has also been linked to increased anxiety and depression among gifted learners in Gulf schools (Al-Zahrani, 2016; Al-Ghanem, 2015).

Despite growing attention, research remains fragmented, particularly within Arab educational contexts, with limited integrative examination of the determinants and consequences of social isolation among gifted students. Accordingly, the present study investigates social isolation and its association with psychosocial adjustment and academic engagement within Arab school settings.

Problem Statement

Social isolation is a significant psychological and social problem faced by gifted students in the upper basic education stage in Palestine. Based on the researchers' field observations and professional experience, this issue has a clear impact on the lives of gifted learners. Students at this educational stage are particularly vulnerable to psychological and social difficulties. They therefore require careful identification of their challenges and emotional needs.

This calls for focused attention on this group in order to address cognitive, social, and psychological problems. Some of these difficulties may stem from the marginalization of non-academic talents. Excessive emphasis on academic achievement may lead some teachers to overlook other domains of giftedness. These include talents in sports, visual arts, public speaking, literature, poetry, and vocal performance. The lack of recognition of such abilities may exacerbate feelings of inferiority, social alienation, and frustration. These experiences may, in turn, reduce students' motivation for learning and creativity.

The problem appears more pronounced in Palestine due to prevailing political, economic, and social conditions. Teachers also face challenges in identifying social isolation and understanding its manifestations. These factors may limit their capacity to provide effective intervention. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine the reality of gifted students in Palestine. It investigates the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage from teachers' perspectives and explores coping strategies from the students' perspectives.

Research Objectives

Main Objective

To examine the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage and to identify strategies for overcoming it from the perspectives of gifted students.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage?

2. Are there statistically significant differences in the level of social isolation among gifted students, as perceived by their teachers, according to gender, years of experience, and academic qualification?
3. What strategies do gifted students report for overcoming social isolation?

Research Hypotheses

H1. There are no statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to gender.

H2. There are no statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to years of teaching experience.

H3. There are no statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to academic qualification.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research in gifted education has increasingly moved beyond cognitive achievement to examine the socio-emotional experiences of gifted learners, recognizing that advanced intellectual ability does not necessarily ensure successful social adjustment. Contemporary perspectives conceptualize giftedness as a multidimensional developmental condition involving cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics that interact dynamically within educational environments. Scholars have emphasized that asynchronous development, heightened emotional sensitivity, and advanced interests may create disparities between gifted students and their age peers, often contributing to feelings of social disconnection and loneliness (Demir & Konik, 2023).

Empirical studies published in recent years indicate that gifted students frequently encounter psychosocial challenges during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by an increased need for peer acceptance and social belonging. Quantitative investigations have demonstrated that psychological well-being among gifted learners is closely associated with social integration, with higher levels of perceived isolation predicting increased anxiety, emotional stress, and reduced school satisfaction (Suyitno et al., 2024). Systematic review evidence further confirms that socio-emotional variables, including peer relationships and environmental support, play a decisive role in both academic engagement and long-term adjustment among gifted students (Raouf et al., 2024). These findings suggest that social isolation should be understood not merely as an individual difficulty but as a complex interaction between learner characteristics and contextual educational factors.

Recent studies also highlight persistent challenges related to peer relationships. Gifted students often report difficulties forming friendships due to differences in interests, communication styles, and intellectual intensity compared with classmates. Research examining socialization processes in secondary education found that gifted learners frequently experience marginalization within mainstream classrooms, limiting participation in peer networks and contributing to perceptions of exclusion (Shcherbinina & Grushetskaya, 2023). Contemporary investigations additionally show that performance expectations and competitive academic environments may intensify social pressure, leading students to conceal abilities or withdraw socially to avoid negative peer reactions (Helsper et al., 2025). The expansion of digital interaction has introduced further

complexities, as recent findings indicate that gifted students' social vulnerabilities may extend into online environments, where peer dynamics and psychological characteristics influence experiences of cyberbullying and social stress (Durak et al., 2024).

Educational context and teacher awareness have emerged as critical mediating factors influencing gifted students' social experiences. Current research suggests that educators often emphasize academic performance while giving limited attention to socio-emotional development, despite evidence that teacher sensitivity and classroom climate strongly affect students' sense of belonging. Studies demonstrate that when teachers recognize the emotional needs of gifted learners and promote collaborative and inclusive learning environments, students exhibit improved peer interaction and reduced psychological distress (Demir & Konik, 2023). Research conducted in Arab educational settings similarly underscores the importance of structured psychosocial support and teacher preparedness in addressing social isolation among gifted learners, highlighting the need for contextually responsive educational practices (Awad & Hussein, 2025).

Alongside environmental influences, recent scholarship has increasingly examined coping strategies employed by gifted students to manage social challenges. Adaptive coping mechanisms—including selective peer relationships, engagement in interest-based activities, emotional regulation strategies, and reliance on supportive adults—have been associated with improved psychological adjustment and resilience. Empirical evidence indicates that coping skills mediate the relationship between emotional regulation and behavioral outcomes among gifted adolescents, suggesting that effective coping contributes significantly to social adaptation (Yalçın & Sur, 2024). Qualitative findings further reveal that family support and structured peer communities function as protective factors that mitigate loneliness and enhance students' sense of identity and belonging (Helsper et al., 2025).

Despite growing international attention, important research gaps remain. Recent literature indicates limited integration of teachers' perspectives with student-reported coping experiences within unified mixed-methods frameworks. Additionally, empirical investigations addressing social isolation among gifted students in Arab educational contexts remain relatively scarce, particularly at the upper basic education stage. Much of the existing research focuses primarily on psychological outcomes without sufficiently examining educational variables such as teacher experience, gender, or academic qualification. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing culturally grounded interventions that balance academic excellence with socio-emotional well-being. Accordingly, the present study contributes to the field by examining social isolation among gifted students through both teacher perceptions and student voices, providing a contextualized understanding of coping strategies within Palestinian schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on an integrated framework combining gifted education and socio-emotional development theories to explain social isolation among gifted students. Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness suggests that advanced ability and task commitment differentiate gifted learners from peers, which may unintentionally limit social compatibility. Asynchronous development theory further explains that gifted students often display uneven cognitive and socio-emotional growth, increasing vulnerability to social difficulties during adolescence.

Belongingness theory posits that individuals require meaningful social connections for psychological well-being; unmet belonging needs may therefore lead to loneliness and withdrawal among gifted learners. Social cognitive theory highlights the influence of teachers

and classroom environments in shaping students' social experiences, suggesting that teacher characteristics may affect recognition and support of socio-emotional needs. Finally, coping theory explains how students employ adaptive strategies to manage social stressors. Together, these perspectives conceptualize social isolation as emerging from interactions among developmental traits, educational contexts, and individual coping processes.

Theoretical Framework of Social Isolation among Gifted Students

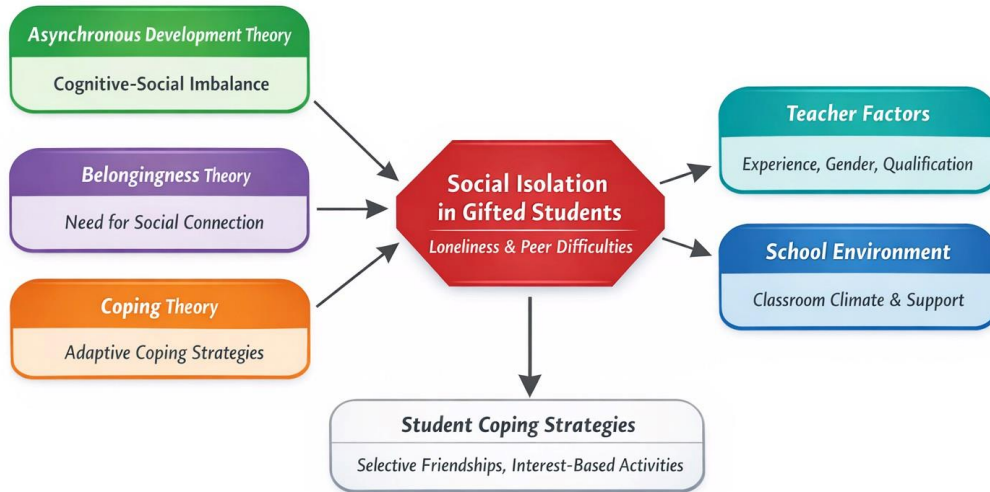


Figure 1. *Theoretical Framework of Social Isolation among Gifted students*

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage and the strategies used to address it.

The quantitative component was used to measure the level of social isolation. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to teachers of gifted students. The instrument assessed the degree of social isolation and its dimensions. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine significant differences according to teachers' gender, years of experience, and academic qualifications.

The qualitative component was used to explore the underlying factors associated with social isolation. Open-ended interviews were conducted with gifted students. The interviews examined manifestations, perceived causes, and effective coping strategies.

Population

The study population comprised all teachers of gifted students and all gifted students in the upper basic education stage in the Directorate of South Hebron. The directorate includes approximately 1,100 teachers serving the upper basic stage across 186 schools. It also includes approximately

182 students identified as gifted in at least one domain, according to official statistics issued by the Directorate of Education in 2025.

Sample

The quantitative sample consisted of 100 male and female teachers selected through convenience sampling. The distribution of participants according to the study variables is presented in Table (1). The qualitative sample included 10 gifted students who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Variable	Level	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	40	40.0
	Female	60	60.0
Years of Experience in Teaching Gifted Students	5 years or less	23	23.0
	6–10 years	37	37.0
	11 years or more	40	40.0
Educational Qualification	Diploma	14	14.0
	Bachelor's Degree	48	48.0
	Postgraduate Studies	38	38.0

Instrument Validity

The questionnaire was initially developed by the researchers and subsequently reviewed to establish content validity. The preliminary version was submitted to the academic supervisor and a panel of experts with relevant specialization and professional experience. The reviewers were asked to evaluate the clarity and linguistic accuracy of the items, the extent to which the items adequately represented the construct under investigation, and the appropriateness of the proposed dimensions. They were also invited to suggest modifications, additions, or deletions. Based on their feedback, the instrument was revised and finalized.

The final scale consisted of 31 items distributed across four dimensions of social isolation:

1. Social isolation in peer relationships (Items 1–7).
2. Social isolation within the educational or school environment (Items 8–14).
3. Feelings of detachment from family and the surrounding community (Items 15–22).
4. Level of social distress or anxiety resulting from social isolation (Items 23–31).

The following table presents the statistical indicators supporting the validity of the instrument.

Table (2): Pearson inter-item correlations for the social isolation scale rated by teachers of gifted upper basic students

Item No.	R Value	Statistical Significance (p-value)	Item No.	R Value	Statistical Significance (p-value)	Item No.	R Value	Statistical Significance (p-value)
1	0.485**	0.000	12	0.729**	0.000	23	0.781**	0.000
2	0.747**	0.000	13	0.758**	0.000	24	0.750**	0.000
3	0.747**	0.000	14	0.850**	0.000	25	0.820**	0.000
4	0.626**	0.000	15	0.762**	0.000	26	0.846**	0.000
5	0.556**	0.000	16	0.702**	0.000	27	0.634**	0.000
6	0.602**	0.000	17	0.682**	0.000	28	0.826**	0.000

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7	0.843**	0.000	18	0.789**	0.000	29	0.671**	0.000
8	0.818**	0.000	19	0.800**	0.000	30	0.754**	0.000
9	0.709**	0.000	20	0.779**	0.000	31	0.732**	0.000
10	0.804**	0.000	21	0.847**	0.000			
11	0.789**	0.000	22	0.781**	0.000			

Note:

** indicates statistical significance at ($\alpha \leq 0.001$).

*indicates statistical significance at ($\alpha \leq 0.050$).

Instrument Reliability

The reliability of the instrument was established by calculating the internal consistency coefficient using Cronbach’s alpha. The coefficient was computed for the total scale score. The overall Cronbach’s alpha value for the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, was ($\alpha = 0.973$).

This result indicates a very high level of internal consistency and confirms that the instrument demonstrates reliability adequate for the purposes of the study.

Table (3): Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for each dimension of the scale, as well as for the total score

Domains	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient
Social isolation in social relationships with peers	7	0.885
Social isolation in the educational or school environment	7	0.928
Feeling of detachment from family and the surrounding community	8	0.929
Level of distress or social anxiety resulting from social isolation	9	0.930
Total Score	31	0.973

To determine the level of the mean responses of the study sample members (teachers), the following scores were adopted:

Table No. (4) illustrates this.

Level	Range of the Arithmetic Mean
Low	2.33 or less
Moderate	2.34 – 3.67
High	3.68 or higher

RESULTS (Quantitative Approach):

Results Related to the First Question

1. What is the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic stage from the perspective of their teachers?

To answer this question, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample to the questionnaire domains that reflect the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic stage, from the perspective of their teachers.

Table (5): Means and standard deviations of teachers' ratings of social isolation among gifted upper basic students

Domain / Item	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level	Percentage
Social Isolation in Peer Social Relationships					
Finds it difficult to form friendships with classmates at school.	1	4.21	0.769	High	84.2%
Feels that classmates do not accept him/her due to differences in interests.	4	3.98	0.841	High	79.6%
Has difficulty finding peers who share the same interests.	5	3.91	0.854	High	78.2%
Prefers withdrawing from social activities held at school.	6	3.84	0.896	High	76.8%
Prefers to remain alone during group activities rather than participate with others.	2	3.82	0.809	High	76.4%
Avoids participating in classroom discussions with classmates.	3	3.81	0.761	High	76.2%
Feels lonely due to limited interaction with classmates.	7	3.75	0.925	High	75.0%
Domain Total	—	3.90	0.645	High	78.0%
Social Isolation in the Educational/School Environment					
Feels there are insufficient opportunities to interact with peers during class.	2	4.09	0.805	High	81.8%
Finds it difficult to speak or interact with teachers.	1	3.93	0.956	High	78.6%
Prefers individual work over group work in school projects.	3	3.85	0.914	High	77.0%
Prefers to avoid extracurricular activities offered by the school.	6	3.83	0.842	High	76.6%
Has difficulty adapting to the school environment due to differences from others.	4	3.74	0.949	High	74.8%
Suffers from a lack of interactive school activities that meet his/her needs.	5	3.73	0.897	High	74.6%
Feels that the school does not understand his/her needs as a gifted student.	7	3.70	0.990	High	74.0%
Domain Total	—	3.84	0.761	High	76.8%
Feeling Disconnected from Family and the Surrounding Community					
Believes he/she has difficulty talking with family members about personal interests.	1	4.00	0.841	High	80.0%
Believes he/she has difficulty participating in social occasions with family.	4	3.97	1.010	High	79.4%
Spends more time in individual activities rather than interacting with family.	3	3.94	1.043	High	78.8%
Believes that the family does not provide sufficient support in social life.	2	3.93	0.924	High	78.6%

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Feels different from others in the community due to personal interests.	5	3.89	0.909	High	77.8%
Feels misunderstood by surrounding people.	7	3.88	0.902	High	77.6%
Has difficulty building new relationships with members of the broader community.	8	3.83	0.900	High	76.6%
Believes that the community does not adequately appreciate his/her talents.	6	3.80	0.953	High	76.0%
Domain Total	—	3.90	0.766	High	78.0%
Level of Distress or Social Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation					
Worries about the ability to form successful social relationships.	4	3.91	0.866	High	78.2%
Fears being criticized when expressing ideas in front of others.	3	3.83	0.911	High	76.6%
Feels uncomfortable when talking or communicating with others.	9	3.75	0.936	High	75.0%
Feels tense during social activities at school.	7	3.70	0.990	High	74.0%
Feels nervous when interacting with classmates.	2	3.69	0.971	High	73.8%
Feels frustrated when unable to interact freely with classmates.	6	3.69	0.873	High	73.8%
Feels anxious when thinking about participating in social activities.	1	3.65	0.892	Moderate	73.0%
Feels shy in situations requiring speaking in front of a group.	8	3.65	0.978	Moderate	73.0%
Feels afraid when asked to join study groups or teams.	5	3.25	1.114	Moderate	65.0%
Domain Total	—	3.68	0.761	High	73.6%
Overall Total Score	—	3.82	0.677	High	76.4%

It can be observed from the previous table, which presents the means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample regarding the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper primary education stage from the perspective of their teachers, that the overall mean score was 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.677. This indicates that the level of social isolation among gifted students in this educational stage, according to their teachers, is high, corresponding to a percentage of 76.4%.

The subdomains of social isolation in peer relationships and feelings of disconnection from family and the surrounding society recorded the highest mean score (3.90), followed by social isolation in the educational or school environment (3.84), and then the level of social discomfort or anxiety resulting from social isolation (3.68).

This result can be explained by the fact that gifted students have different coping strategies compared to regular students, which may lead to social isolation. Additionally, their unique cognitive styles may not align with the social environment, and the lack of support or recognition for their talents, coupled with a strong focus on academic achievement, may contribute to feelings of frustration and isolation.

Social Isolation in Peer Relationships

The overall mean for social isolation in peer relationships was 3.90 with a standard deviation of

0.645, indicating a high level of social isolation, corresponding to 78%. All items in this subdomain scored highly. The item “has difficulty forming friendships with classmates” recorded the highest mean (4.21), followed by “feels that classmates do not accept him/her due to different interests” (3.98). The items “feels lonely due to limited interaction with peers” (3.75) and “avoids participating in class discussions with peers” (3.81) received the lowest means.

This finding can be attributed to the significant cognitive gap between gifted students and their peers. Gifted students often perceive their thinking as more advanced, which can lead to social isolation, as they find it challenging to engage peers in their thought processes.

Social Isolation in the Educational or School Environment

The overall mean for social isolation in the educational or school environment was 3.84 with a standard deviation of 0.761, indicating a high level, corresponding to 76.8%. All items in this subdomain scored highly. The highest mean was for the item “feels there are insufficient opportunities to interact with classmates during lessons” (4.09), followed by “has difficulty communicating or interacting with teachers” (3.93). The lowest means were for “feels that the school does not understand his/her needs as a gifted student” (3.70) and “experiences a lack of school activities that match his/her needs” (3.73).

This can be explained by the demanding cognitive environment of the school, where ideas are abundant and scattered. Gifted students often engage in complex and multiple thought processes that are not shared by their peers, which can lead them to isolate themselves and experience various emotional tensions.

Feelings of Disconnection from Family and Society

The overall mean for feelings of disconnection from family and society was 3.90 with a standard deviation of 0.766, indicating a high level, corresponding to 78%. All items were rated highly. The item “has difficulty discussing his/her interests with family members” recorded the highest mean (4.00), followed by “has difficulty participating in social events with family” (3.97). The lowest means were for “believes society does not sufficiently value his/her talents” (3.80) and “finds it difficult to build new relationships with members of the broader community” (3.83).

The researchers suggest that the nature of gifted students’ ideas and the resources required to realize them may be rejected or constrained by society, imposing social isolation on the gifted students, who recognize that their ideas are neither encouraged nor considered valuable.

Social Discomfort or Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation

The overall mean for social discomfort or anxiety resulting from social isolation was 3.68 with a standard deviation of 0.761, indicating a high level, corresponding to 73.6%. Among the items, six were rated high and three were rated medium. The highest mean was for “worries about his/her ability to establish successful social relationships” (3.91), followed by “fears being criticized when expressing ideas to others” (3.83). The lowest means were for “feels afraid when asked to join study groups” (3.25), “feels shy in situations requiring public speaking”, and “feels anxious about participating in social activities” (3.65).

The researchers interpret this as resulting from gifted students’ awareness of their unique ideas and the lack of understanding or acceptance by their environment. This may prevent them from expressing themselves freely, generating anxiety and stress, as they require someone to listen and support them but often encounter indifference or ridicule, especially in contexts of pressing societal challenges.

Results Related to the Second Question

2. Do levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper primary education stage differ from their teachers' perspectives based on the study variables: gender, years of experience teaching gifted students, and academic qualification?

To answer this question, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Results of Hypothesis One:

H1. There are no statistically significant differences at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level between the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper primary education stage, from their teachers' perspective, attributable to gender.

This hypothesis was tested by calculating the t-test results and mean scores of the study sample regarding the average level of social isolation among gifted students based on gender.

Table (10): Independent samples t-test results for gender differences in average social isolation among gifted upper primary students

Domain	Years of Experience in Teaching Gifted Students	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Isolation in Social Relationships with Peers	5 years or less	23	3.4596	0.65601
	6–10 years	37	3.6795	0.56485
	11 years or more	40	4.3643	0.37020
Social Isolation in the Educational or School Environment	5 years or less	23	3.3789	0.77604
	6–10 years	37	3.5174	0.67373
	11 years or more	40	4.4000	0.40690
Feeling of Separation from Family and the Surrounding Community	5 years or less	23	3.6793	0.79041
	6–10 years	37	3.5676	0.79309
	11 years or more	40	4.3469	0.46812
Level of Social Distress or Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation	5 years or less	23	3.4493	0.69508
	6–10 years	37	3.3243	0.82998
	11 years or more	40	4.1417	0.43942
Total Score	5 years or less	23	3.4951	0.65661
	6–10 years	37	3.5109	0.67449
	11 years or more	40	4.3032	0.32887

The previous table shows that the t-value for the total score is 2.107, with a significance level of 0.038. This indicates that there are significant differences in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper primary stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of gender. Significant differences were also observed in the domains of social isolation in peer relationships and the level of social discomfort or anxiety resulting from social isolation, with the differences favoring female students. Consequently, the first hypothesis was rejected.

This result reflects the nature of the cultural context, which often restricts females from expressing thoughts that may conflict with societal norms. Ideas that might be acceptable for male students may not be permitted for female students, exposing them to higher levels of social

isolation and limiting their opportunities to participate in competitions or group activities, even via social media platforms.

Results of the second hypothesis:

No statistically significant differences were found at the 0.05 significance level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper primary stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to teachers' years of experience in educating gifted students.

The second hypothesis was examined by calculating the mean responses of the study sample regarding the levels of social isolation among gifted students, based on teachers' perceptions, in relation to the variable of years of experience in teaching gifted students.

Table (11): Means and standard deviations of teachers' ratings of social isolation among gifted upper primary students by teaching experience

Domain	Years of Experience in Teaching Gifted Students	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Isolation in Social Relationships with Peers	5 years or less	23	3.4596	0.65601
	6–10 years	37	3.6795	0.56485
	11 years or more	40	4.3643	0.37020
Social Isolation in the Educational or School Environment	5 years or less	23	3.3789	0.77604
	6–10 years	37	3.5174	0.67373
	11 years or more	40	4.4000	0.40690
Feeling of Detachment from Family and the Surrounding Community	5 years or less	23	3.6793	0.79041
	6–10 years	37	3.5676	0.79309
	11 years or more	40	4.3469	0.46812
Level of Social Distress or Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation	5 years or less	23	3.4493	0.69508
	6–10 years	37	3.3243	0.82998
	11 years or more	40	4.1417	0.43942
Total Score	5 years or less	23	3.4951	0.65661
	6–10 years	37	3.5109	0.67449
	11 years or more	40	4.3032	0.32887

Table (11) indicates the presence of apparent differences in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students at the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of years of experience in teaching gifted students. To determine the statistical significance of these differences, a one-way Analysis of Variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted, as presented in Table (12).

Table (12): ANOVA results for teachers' ratings of social isolation among gifted upper basic students by years of teaching experience

Domain	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F Value (Calculated)	Significance Level
Social isolation in peer relationships	Between groups	14.880	2	7.440	27.443	0.000
	Within groups	26.298	97	0.271		
	Total	41.179	99			
Social isolation in the educational/school environment	Between groups	21.286	2	10.643	28.639	0.000
	Within groups	36.047	97	0.372		
	Total	57.333	99			
Feeling of disconnection from family and surrounding society	Between groups	13.194	2	6.597	14.241	0.000
	Within groups	44.935	97	0.463		
	Total	58.129	99			
Level of social discomfort or anxiety resulting from social isolation	Between groups	14.431	2	7.215	16.292	0.000
	Within groups	42.959	97	0.443		
	Total	57.390	99			
Total score	Between groups	15.302	2	7.651	24.671	0.000
	Within groups	30.081	97	0.310		
	Total	45.383	99			

It is observed that the F-value for the total score (24.671), with a significance level of (0.000), is lower than the adopted significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). This indicates the presence of statistically significant differences in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of years of experience in teaching gifted students, as well as across the respective domains. Accordingly, the second hypothesis was rejected.

The results of the Least Significant Difference (LSD) test were further examined to determine the direction of these differences, as presented below:

Table (13): LSD post hoc comparisons of teachers' ratings by years of experience teaching gifted students

Domain	Variable Comparison	Mean Difference	Significance (p)
Social isolation in peer relationships	≤5 years vs. 6–10 years	-0.21991	0.115
	≤5 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.90466*	0.000
	6–10 years vs. ≤5 years	0.21991	0.115
	6–10 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.68475*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. ≤5 years	0.90466*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. 6–10 years	0.68475*	0.000
Social isolation in educational/school environment	≤5 years vs. 6–10 years	-0.13849	0.394
	≤5 years vs. ≥11 years	-1.02112*	0.000
	6–10 years vs. ≤5 years	0.13849	0.394
	6–10 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.88263*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. ≤5 years	1.02112*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. 6–10 years	0.88263*	0.000
Feeling of detachment from family and surrounding society	≤5 years vs. 6–10 years	0.11178	0.538
	≤5 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.66753*	0.000
	6–10 years vs. ≤5 years	-0.11178	0.538
	6–10 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.77931*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. ≤5 years	0.66753*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. 6–10 years	0.77931*	0.000
Level of social anxiety/discomfort resulting from social isolation	≤5 years vs. 6–10 years	0.12495	0.481
	≤5 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.69239*	0.000
	6–10 years vs. ≤5 years	-0.12495	0.481
	6–10 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.81734*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. ≤5 years	0.69239*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. 6–10 years	0.81734*	0.000
Total score	≤5 years vs. 6–10 years	-0.01581	0.915
	≤5 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.80813*	0.000
	6–10 years vs. ≤5 years	0.01581	0.915
	6–10 years vs. ≥11 years	-0.79233*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. ≤5 years	0.80813*	0.000
	≥11 years vs. 6–10 years	0.79233*	0.000

Notes:

*indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

-“Years” refers to years of experience in teaching gifted students.

The differences in the total score were observed between the category (11 years and above) and (5 years or less) in favor of (11 years and above), and between (11 years and above) and (6–10 years) also in favor of (11 years and above).

This result may be interpreted as indicating that teachers' experience plays a fundamental role in understanding students' characteristics, including those of gifted students. Experienced teachers are better able to interpret and analyze students' behaviors even without direct interaction. Accordingly, it is natural that the greater the number of years of teaching experience, the deeper

Results of the Third Hypothesis:

There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of academic qualification.

The third hypothesis was examined by calculating the arithmetic means of the study sample's responses regarding the level of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, according to the variable of academic qualification.

Table (14): Means and standard deviations of teachers' ratings of social isolation among gifted upper basic students by academic qualification

Domain	Academic Qualification	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social isolation in peer relationships	Diploma	14	3.2857	0.66771
	Bachelor's	48	3.8452	0.50601
	Master's	38	4.2030	0.62459
Social isolation in the educational/school environment	Diploma	14	3.1735	0.75214
	Bachelor's	48	3.7679	0.63726
	Master's	38	4.1729	0.73907
Feeling disconnected from family and surrounding community	Diploma	14	3.3214	0.58981
	Bachelor's	48	3.8542	0.68579
	Master's	38	4.1842	0.79946
Level of social discomfort or anxiety resulting from social isolation	Diploma	14	3.0159	0.55446
	Bachelor's	48	3.6204	0.71416
	Master's	38	4.0000	0.72008
Total score	Diploma	14	3.1912	0.50475
	Bachelor's	48	3.7648	0.57950
	Master's	38	4.1324	0.67581

It is evident from Table (14) that there are apparent differences in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of academic qualification. To determine the statistical significance of these differences, a one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) was conducted, as presented in Table (15).

Table (15): Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results

Field	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Calculated F Value	Significance Level
Social Isolation in Social Relationships with Peers	Between Groups	8.915	2	4.457	13.401	0.000
	Within Groups	32.264	97	0.333	—	—

	Total	41.179	99	—	—	—
Social Isolation in the Educational or School Environment	Between Groups	10.681	2	5.341	11.105	0.000
	Within Groups	46.651	97	0.481	—	—
	Total	57.333	99	—	—	—
Feeling of Separation from Family and the Surrounding Community	Between Groups	7.854	2	3.927	7.577	0.001
	Within Groups	50.275	97	0.518	—	—
	Total	58.129	99	—	—	—
Level of Social Distress or Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation	Between Groups	10.237	2	5.118	10.529	0.000
	Within Groups	47.153	97	0.486	—	—
	Total	57.390	99	—	—	—
Total Score	Between Groups	9.388	2	4.694	12.650	0.000
	Within Groups	35.994	97	0.371	—	—
	Total	45.383	99	—	—	—

It is observed that the calculated F-value for the total score (12.650) with a significance level of (0.000), which is lower than the adopted level of significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$), indicates the presence of statistically significant differences in the mean levels of social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic education stage, as perceived by their teachers, attributable to the variable of academic qualification. Statistically significant differences were also found across the respective domains. Accordingly, the third hypothesis was rejected.

The results of the Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test were subsequently examined to determine the direction of these differences, as presented below:

Table (16): LSD post hoc comparisons of teachers' ratings by academic qualification

Domain	Variables (Comparison)	Mean Difference	Significance Level
Social Isolation in Social Relationships with Peers	Diploma – Bachelor	-0.55952*	0.002
	Diploma – Master's	-0.91729*	0.000
	Bachelor – Diploma	0.55952*	0.002
	Bachelor – Master's	-0.35777*	0.005
	Master's – Diploma	0.91729*	0.000
Social Isolation in the Educational or School Environment	Master's – Bachelor	0.35777*	0.005
	Diploma – Bachelor	-0.59439*	0.006
	Diploma – Master's	-0.99946*	0.000
	Bachelor – Diploma	0.59439*	0.006

	Bachelor – Master’s	-0.40508*	0.008
	Master’s – Diploma	0.99946*	0.000
	Master’s – Bachelor	0.40508*	0.008
Feeling of Separation from Family and Surrounding Community	Diploma – Bachelor	-0.53274*	0.017
	Diploma – Master’s	-0.86278*	0.000
	Bachelor – Diploma	0.53274*	0.017
	Bachelor – Master’s	-0.33004*	0.037
	Master’s – Diploma	0.86278*	0.000
	Master’s – Bachelor	0.33004*	0.037
Level of Distress or Social Anxiety Resulting from Social Isolation	Diploma – Bachelor	-0.60450*	0.005
	Diploma – Master’s	-0.98413*	0.000
	Bachelor – Diploma	0.60450*	0.005
	Bachelor – Master’s	-0.37963*	0.014
	Master’s – Diploma	0.98413*	0.000
	Master’s – Bachelor	0.37963*	0.014
Total Score	Diploma – Bachelor	-0.57354*	0.003
	Diploma – Master’s	-0.94118*	0.000
	Bachelor – Diploma	0.57354*	0.003
	Bachelor – Master’s	-0.36764*	0.007
	Master’s – Diploma	0.94118*	0.000
	Master’s – Bachelor	0.36764*	0.007

The differences in the total score were found between (Master’s) and (Diploma) in favor of (Master’s), between (Master’s) and (Bachelor’s) in favor of (Master’s), and between (Bachelor’s) and (Diploma) in favor of (Bachelor’s).

This result may be interpreted to suggest that the higher the academic qualification, the greater the teacher’s ability to understand the nature of students both theoretically and practically. Postgraduate studies provide teachers with broader opportunities to expand their theoretical and practical frameworks for interpreting students’ characteristics and behaviors. Moreover, graduate programs tend to emphasize contemporary issues through engagement with recent studies, which constitute an essential reference framework for teachers.

Results Related to the Third Research Question

3. What are the methods for overcoming social isolation from the perspective of gifted students? To answer this question, qualitative analysis was employed.

Methods Used in the Qualitative Analysis

MS Word software was utilized to transcribe the interview data and to develop coding schemes and thematic categories for analyzing the results of the focus group interviews conducted with gifted students. This process was carried out through the following stages:

Stage One: Pre-Coding Phase

Familiarization with the data was conducted in accordance with the stages of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021). The researchers began by reading and re-reading the data carefully to become thoroughly acquainted with the texts and to clean the data. During this phase,

a word-frequency query was also conducted to identify the most frequently used expressions, in accordance with the thematic map illustrated in Figure (2).

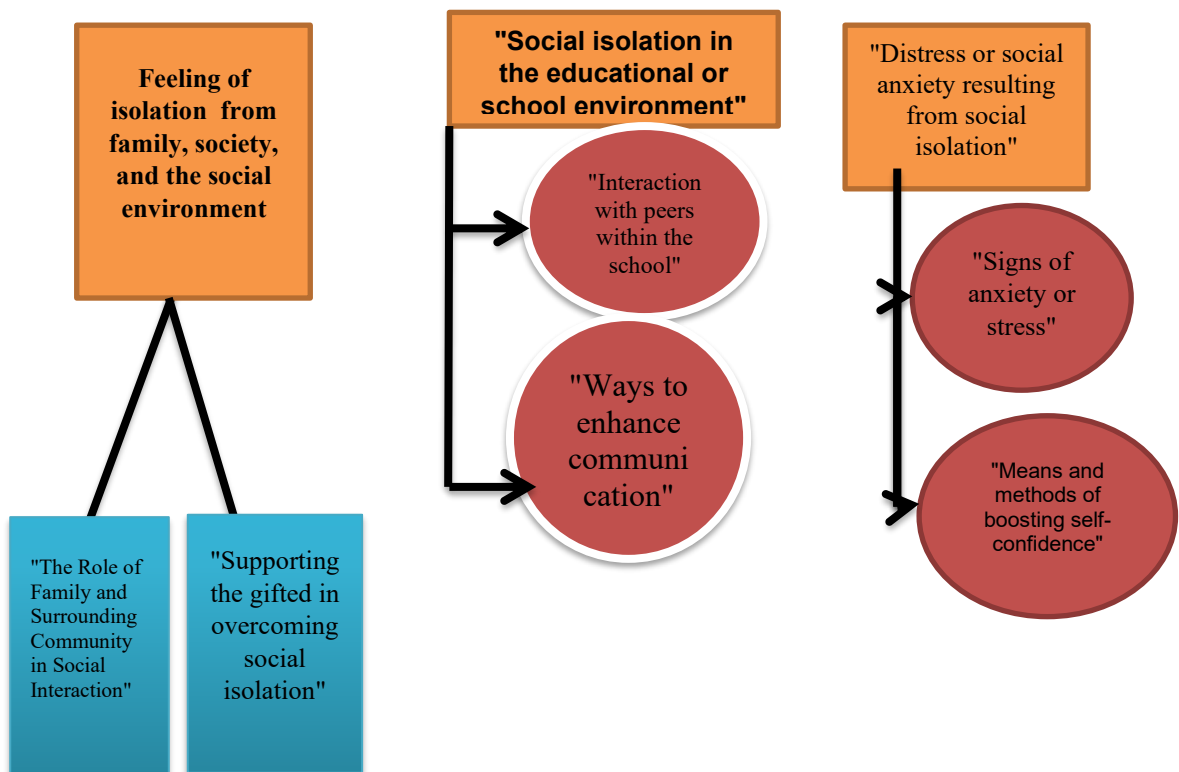


Figure 2. The mind map of main themes, patterns, and key codes from the thematic analysis of gifted students' interviews

Stage Two: Coding Stage – Inductive Approach

This stage covers phases two through five of the thematic analysis process conducted by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2011). After transcribing the interview responses and the data obtained from the focus group of gifted students, the two researchers read and reread the texts one by one using an inductive approach to search for similarities and differences in the participants' narrative patterns.

Using thematic analysis, they coded the texts and identified themes, which helped in organizing, managing, classifying, and evaluating the data in order to develop a meaningful understanding of it. Finally, at this stage, they moved to the analytical process to explore the relationships among the themes and progress toward an informed analytical interpretation.

Stage Three: Subsequent Coding of the Results

This is the final stage of the thematic analysis process. In this stage, the researcher writes the results of the analysis of all themes related to the focus groups addressing the research questions. For each theme, there may be different patterns.

The analysis includes all themes related to the targeted focus group, which in turn contributes to

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 answering the research questions. The following table illustrates this:

Table (17): Interview Results of the Focus Group of Gifted Students

No.	Topic	Percentage of Similarity Among Participants	Percentage of Difference Among Participants	Frequencies	Statements Issued by the Source Verbatim
1	The Role of the Family and Surrounding Community in Social Interaction	80%	20%	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The family is the foundation of social relationships. – Sometimes I do not feel their interest.
2	Supporting the Gifted in Overcoming Isolation	100%	—	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – They must trust us. – We know what to do on our own. – They should rely on us.
3	Interaction with Peers Within the School	100%	—	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I have good relationships with only a few of them; the rest are not important to me. – I consider one friend close to me. – My relationships are not always good.
4	Methods of Enhancing Communication	100%	—	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maybe sports help, and sometimes I help my classmates solve math problems.
5	Reducing Manifestations of Anxiety or Tension	100%	—	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I feel that every day is similar to the other. – I care about many things and used to occupy myself with drawing and doodling in notebooks, as if I were living in a void.
6	Means and Methods of Enhancing Self-Confidence	80%	20%	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It would be better if all students were given their opportunities. – Changing teachers between classes or changing teachers' methods.

Interpretation of the Qualitative Findings

Based on the analysis of the interview data, it is evident that gifted students encounter multiple challenges related to social isolation and the influence of both family and school environments. At the family level, participants' perspectives revealed notable variation. Some students emphasized that their families play a fundamental role in guiding them and fostering their social relationships, whereas others reported insufficient familial support. This disparity underscores the urgent need to raise awareness among Palestinian families regarding their pivotal role in supporting gifted children and encouraging them to engage in positive and sustainable social interactions.

With respect to the school environment, responses indicated that students experience difficulty in forming friendships, thereby intensifying feelings of social isolation. This reality highlights the importance of cultivating a stimulating school climate that promotes positive interaction through the adoption of collaborative activities, such as sports programs and joint academic projects, which enhance cooperation and communication among students.

Regarding social anxiety, the findings suggest that limited teacher–student interaction, coupled with reliance on traditional instructional methods, contributes to heightened feelings of anxiety and isolation among students. Conversely, the implementation of flexible learning environments—characterized by diversified teaching strategies and equitable opportunities for participation—can strengthen students' self-confidence and alleviate anxiety.

Accordingly, the development of an inclusive educational environment that provides psychological and social support and creates spaces for constructive interaction is of paramount importance. Such an environment would enable students to overcome social and educational challenges and enhance their effective integration within the Palestinian context.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined social isolation among gifted students in the upper basic stage from teachers' perspectives. The findings indicate a high overall level of social isolation, with a mean score of 3.82 (SD = 0.677; 76.4%), highlighting substantial socio-emotional challenges in this population. Among the subdomains, social isolation in peer relationships and feelings of disconnection from family and community were highest, both with a mean of 3.90, followed by isolation in the school environment (M = 3.84, SD = 0.761) and social discomfort or anxiety (M = 3.68, SD = 0.761).

Gifted students reported the greatest difficulty forming friendships (M = 4.21, SD = 0.769) and perceiving acceptance from peers (M = 3.98, SD = 0.841), suggesting that asynchronous development between cognitive and socio-emotional growth contributes to social isolation. This aligns with prior studies emphasizing that gifted students' advanced cognitive abilities may inhibit peer engagement due to differences in interests, communication, and shared activities.

Isolation within the educational context was also significant. Teachers noted insufficient interaction opportunities (M = 4.09, SD = 0.805) and difficulty communicating with teachers (M = 3.93, SD = 0.956). These findings suggest that traditional classroom structures, heavily focused on academic performance, may not adequately address gifted students' socio-emotional needs. The observed patterns support the social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the influence of educator awareness and classroom climate on students' social experiences.

Feelings of disconnection from family and society were similarly high (M = 3.90, SD = 0.766), with challenges in sharing personal interests (M = 4.00, SD = 0.841) and participating in social

events ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.01$). Elevated social anxiety, while slightly lower ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.761$; 73.6%), underscores that isolation has both external (social disconnection) and internal (psychological stress) manifestations.

Gender differences were significant, with female students perceived as experiencing higher social isolation in peer relationships ($t = 2.107$, $p = 0.038$) and social anxiety, reflecting sociocultural constraints that may limit opportunities for social engagement. Similarly, teachers' years of experience influenced perceptions of isolation, with more experienced teachers (≥ 11 years) reporting higher sensitivity to students' social challenges ($F = 24.671$, $p < 0.001$; LSD post hoc), highlighting the role of teacher expertise in recognizing and supporting gifted students' socio-emotional needs. No significant differences were found based on teachers' academic qualifications.

Overall, the results support the study's theoretical framework, showing that social isolation among gifted students emerges from the interaction of developmental characteristics, educational contexts, and broader social environments. The findings underscore the importance of structured socio-emotional support programs that enhance peer interaction, communication skills, and psychological well-being, complementing academic enrichment to foster holistic development among gifted learners.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that gifted students in the upper basic stage experience high levels of social isolation, with an overall mean score of 3.82 ($SD = 0.677$; 76.4%), as perceived by their teachers. Isolation is most pronounced in peer relationships and feelings of disconnection from family and society ($M = 3.90$ for both domains), followed by the school environment ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.761$) and social discomfort or anxiety ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.761$; 73.6%).

The findings highlight that gifted students' advanced cognitive abilities, divergent interests, and unmet socio-emotional needs contribute to difficulties in forming friendships, engaging in class discussions, and interacting with family or community members. Gender differences indicate that female students face higher social isolation in peer interactions ($t = 2.107$, $p = 0.038$), while teachers' years of experience significantly influence perceptions of student isolation ($F = 24.671$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of educator expertise in identifying and addressing these challenges.

These results suggest a need for targeted socio-emotional interventions, including peer-support programs, teacher training, and family engagement strategies, to reduce social isolation and promote holistic development. Integrating social-emotional support with academic enrichment is critical to ensure that gifted students thrive both intellectually and socially within school and community environments.

Recommendations

1. Greater attention should be directed toward diverse forms of giftedness (e.g., sports, arts, and other domains), ensuring that they receive equal recognition and support alongside academic talents.
2. Schools should organize competitions and offer both financial and in-kind awards for various talents at the inter-school and national levels, across different fields. These initiatives should involve parents and be inclusive of both male and female students.
3. The Ministry of Education should formally adopt programs that support multiple forms of giftedness as part of broader school development initiatives. This may include organizing talent-

based competitions and providing incentive awards among schools within the same directorate and across different directorates.

4. Efforts should be made to establish a school environment that fosters the development of social relationships among students through interactive activities and counseling programs that promote integration between gifted students and their peers, including structured group activities.

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