

The Impact of Bullying, Sociability, and Feelings on Gifted and Nongifted Middle School Female Students in Kuwait–A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The current study aims to reveal the forms of school bullying among gifted and non-gifted female students in middle school, identify sociability and feelings between female students, levels of bullying and victimization, and the potential intervention and prevention strategies for preventing bullying behavior. To achieve the aims of the study, the researchers followed a comparative approach by applying a questionnaire to ninety-three gifted and non-gifted female students from eighth and ninth grades and conducting a personal interview with a social worker. One of the most important findings of the study is that gifted female students are less likely to be exposed to abuse and engage in bullying behaviors compared to their non-gifted counterparts. The results of the study also showed that gifted female students have higher levels of sociability and positive feelings towards school compared to non-gifted female students. These results underscore the pivotal role of socialization and feelings in cultivating a positive, inclusive, and socially supportive school culture, which effectively reduces the prevalence of bullying experiences among students. The results of the study also recommended adopting strategies for intervention and prevention of bullying behavior. Finally, the researchers proposed several future research directions.

Keywords: Bullying; Gifted students; Nongifted students; Sociability

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أثر التنمر والتفاعل الاجتماعي والمشاعر على الطالبات الموهوبات وغير الموهوبات في المرحلة المتوسطة بدولة الكويت - دراسة مقارنة

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ملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أشكال التنمر المدرسي لدى الطالبات الموهوبات وغير الموهوبات في المرحلة المتوسطة، وتحديد ما إذا كانت المتغيرات الديموغرافية؛ مثل نوع التعليم وحالة الأقران، تؤثر على سلوك التنمر بينهن. والتعرف على العلاقة بين التفاعل الاجتماعي والمشاعر نحو المدرسة ومستويات التنمر والإيذاء بين الطالبات، وأخيرًا، تحديد استراتيجيات التدخل والوقاية من التنمر. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، اتبع الباحثان منهج المقارنة من خلال تطبيق استبانة على الطالبات الموهوبات وغير الموهوبات البالغ عددهن 93 طالبة من الصفين الثامن التاسع، وإجراء مقابلة شخصية مع الأخصائية الاجتماعية. من أبرز نتائج الدراسة أن الطالبات الموهوبات أقل عرضة للإيذاء وأيضًا أقل عرضة للانخراط في سلوكيات التنمر مقارنة بنظرائهن من الطالبات غير الموهوبات، كما أظهرت النتائج أنه لدى الطالبات الموهوبات مستويات أعلى من التفاعل الاجتماعي ومشاعر إيجابية نحو المدرسة مقارنة بغير الموهوبات. تؤكد تلك النتائج على إسهام التفاعل الاجتماعي والمشاعر الإيجابية نحو المدرسة في تكوين بيئة مدرسية إيجابية وشاملة وداعمة؛ مما يقلل بشكل فعال من انتشار ظاهرة التنمر بين الطالبات. بناءً على نتائج الدراسة، انتهى الباحثان إلى عدد من التوصيات، من أهمها: اتباع استراتيجيات التدخل والوقاية من سلوك التنمر في المدارس. وأخيرًا، قدم الباحثان مجموعة من المقترحات للدراسات المستقبلية المتعلقة بهذا الموضوع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاعل الاجتماعي، التنمر، الطالبات الموهوبات، الطالبات غير الموهوبات

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1. Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that approximately 246 million children and adolescents worldwide are subjected to bullying in schools. These statistics indicate that bullying is becoming a widespread occurrence in schools. In addition, research on bullying in schools and its consequences posits that bullying has been an alarming issue for more than 20 years. According to international studies, approximately 160,000 students drop out of school annually due to peer-on-peer bullying (UNESCO, 2017).

Scholars provide many definitions of bullying. The most recognized is one by Olweus (1993), that is, “aggressive, intentional acts carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (p. 48). Peterson and Ray (2006a) defined it as “aggressive behavior with the potential to cause physical or psychological harm to the recipient” (p. 148). Alternatively, cyberbullying has emerged as a new form of bullying due to developments in communication technology. Similar to traditional bullying, cyberbullying involves the use of peer violence to harm victims through text messages, social media, or other digital technologies (Guilbault & MacFarlane, 2021).

The parties to bullying are categorized as the victim (the one being bullied), bully (the one bullying others), bully-victim (bullies who are also bullied), and bystander (neither victim nor bully but present during bullying incidents; Jumper, 2019). Bullying could lead to significant, long-lasting problems in the lives of the bully and victim and usher in a generation that is unable to face its problems. For example, bullies are at increased risk for various negative outcomes, including, but not limited to, the development of violent and dangerous behavior, academic failure, school dropout, alcohol or drug abuse, abusive relationships, and anxiety or depressive problems (Jadambaa et al., 2019). These outcomes also include the reduction of health-related quality of life (HRQoL) through stress, anxiety, and depressive symptomatology (González-Cabrera et al., 2019; Villora et al., 2020). Conversely, victims frequently struggle with mental health issues (e.g., isolation and low self-esteem), behavioral problems (e.g., irritability and hyperactivity), and emotional issues (e.g., anxiety, sadness, and suicide ideation; González-Cabrera et al., 2022). The negative effects of bullying are more likely to occur for students, whether gifted or nongifted, who are disliked by peers and have low peer status (Peairs et al., 2019; Guilbault & MacFarlane, 2021). Understanding the effects of bullying on the academic performance of students in fourth and eighth grades is one of the goals of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. According to the findings, a negative correlation exists between bullying incidents and the math grades of students in the State of Kuwait.

Social, physical, and psychological factors influence bullying. The victim may be subject to name-calling, teasing, deliberate (intentional) exclusion from others, physical assault, and threats. Furthermore, a power disparity exists between bullies and victims, which indicates that self-protection against bullies is difficult for victims (González-Cabrera et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the incidence of bullying and victimization is likely to decrease with the increase in age. Students exposed to bullying behavior in school range from 20% to 80%, because bullying tends to peak in grade 6 and then decrease throughout high school (Guilbault & MacFarlane, 2021).

1.1. Bullying and Gifted Students

Renzulli (2002) uses a *three-ring conception* (i.e., above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment) to define giftedness, which considers general or specific forms of giftedness. According to this theory, one criterion cannot explain giftedness; instead, it is “an interaction among three clusters of traits-above average but not necessarily superior abilities, task commitment, and creativity” (p. 72).

Gifted students are less aggressive, less rejected, and better liked, and peers rate them higher in sociability, leadership, and friendliness (Estell et al., 2009; Peairs et al., 2019). Peers view giftedness as an advantage in elementary school; however, as gifted students approach adolescence, bullying increases (Lee et al., 2012; Peairs et al., 2019). Furthermore, research that evaluates the views of gifted adolescents and others on their giftedness reveals that participants perceived their giftedness as strongly positive in terms of personal growth and academics. However, this view was strongly negative in terms of social relationships with others (González-Cabrera et al., 2022). Gifted students, like their nongifted peers, are more likely to engage in bullying behavior when mingling with more aggressive and popular peers (Estell et al., 2009; Peairs et al., 2019). According to Pelchar and Bain (2014), gifted students experience greater internalizing and behavioral disorders when bullied. Thus, bullying or cyberbullying can lead to melancholy, anger, frustration, and isolation among gifted students (Connolly, 2018). Compared with gifted students who were not bullied, students who were victims and bully-victims exhibit lower HRQoL scores and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (González-Cabrera et al., 2022).

Adolescents designated as gifted had a more positive self-perception of friendship achievements and proficiency in various social domains compared with their nongifted peers (Cross, 2015). The sociability of gifted students can be explored through an examination of their social circle. This aspect provides valuable insights into various dimensions of their social development and interactions. Their social network offers clues about their social connectedness and integration within peer groups. Understanding these dynamics can inform support strategies to nurture positive social connections and address any challenges related to social interaction and integration. Additionally, gifted students provide a good evaluation of their capacity to begin, establish, and sustain relationships with other students. Aydın et al. (2022) conducted a survey and obtained data from 156 students (gifted: 60, nongifted: 96). The findings revealed that the gifted students perceived themselves as socially better (higher levels of social self-perception) compared with nongifted students. Besides sociability, gifted students' feelings towards school can impact their vulnerability to bullying and their ability to cope with such experiences. Their experiences with bullying and their feelings towards school interact in a complicated way that can profoundly affect their academic, social, and emotional well-being. For some gifted students, negative feelings towards school, such as frustration, alienation, or social isolation, may make them more susceptible to being targeted by bullies (Cross, 2015).

Based on the common characteristics of gifted students, such as perfectionism, a strong sense of justice, heightened sensibilities, and openness to experience (MacFarlane & Mina, 2018; Ogurlu & Sariçam, 2018; Peterson & Ray, 2006b), they may experience bullying differently. However, several quantitative studies found no significant differences in the amount or type of bullying reported by gifted students (Chen et al., 2015; Ryoo, 2017). Although the study did not elaborate on how the gifted

students were bullied differently in terms of the amount or type of bullying, a possibility exists that their unique characteristics influence their disclosure of information about bullying (Jumper, 2019). A few studies suggested that gifted students may believe they need to independently address bullying instead of reporting it or seeking help (e.g., Connolly, 2018; Peterson & Ray, 2006b). Specifically, Connolly (2018) examined bullying among the gifted youth in an Irish Talent Search program. Adolescents who experienced cyberbullying disclosed it to peers or siblings but not parents or adults. Various reasons underlie this choice, including the beliefs that adults would worsen the situation and that they should address the situation by themselves, the desire to exert control over the issue within their terms, or the lack of confidence that adults will seriously consider the issue based on past experiences. Connolly discovered gender and age differences. For example, younger students felt more comfortable confiding in teachers. Male and female students reported cyberbullying to elder siblings and classmates, respectively. In addition, gifted female adolescents experienced a greater effect and more social ostracism, which negatively influences their grades and class participation. Using the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, Jumper (2019) analyzed data from 343 students across five middle schools and found that gifted students were more likely to confide in their peers than in teachers or parents. However, nongifted students confide in their teachers or parents if they are being bullied every week.

Nevertheless, a dearth of research exists on the perpetration of bullying by gifted students. Scholars demonstrate that gifted students display lower rates of behavioral issues and bullying than nongifted students. Erwin (2015) concluded that gifted students were much less likely to be victimized than their nongifted classmates in all forms of victimization, except for physical abuse; the study found no differences (González-Cabrera et al., 2022). In contrast, according to seminal research by Peterson and Ray (2006a, 2006b), gifted students exhibit a higher prevalence of victimization than do nongifted students. Thus, a possibility exists that certain gifted students may become bully–victims and engage in the perpetration of bullying as a result of having been bullied in the past. However, this aspect lacks a thorough investigation (Ryoo, 2017). According to Peterson and Ray (2006a), who conducted a study on 432 gifted students in eighth grade from 11 states, 67% encountered certain forms of bullying throughout their school career. The level of victimization reached the highest point in the sixth grade, and being bullied was associated with negative emotional effects. Additionally, the authors mentioned that the gifted students, compared with nongifted peers, stated that they believe that discrepancies in their abilities may contribute to susceptibility to bullying. Alternatively, other researchers posit that the strong cognitive ability of gifted students helps them to cope better with social and emotional issues. In turn, this notion contributes to decreased engagement in bullying and victimization among them. Francis et al. (2016) concluded that gifted students are more likely than nongifted peers to exhibit superior social–emotional skills and fewer behavioral problems.

González-Cabrera et al. (2019) concluded that 50.9% of the 285 gifted students they examined were involved in types of bullying (victims: 39.6%, bullies: 1.1%, bully–victims: 10.2%). This result aligned with a study in Brazil by Dalosto and Alencar (2013), who surveyed 118 students who participated in a federal program for gifted students. The findings indicated that gifted students experienced numerous instances of school bullying in various forms, the most common of which were verbal (32.1%), physical (21.2%), and social (exclusion from peer groups; 33.9%) violence. In contrast to the abovementioned

studies, others, especially Ryoo et al. (2017), found no difference in victimization between gifted and nongifted students. However, group disparities were noted in prevalence rates as well as changes in the transition patterns of perpetration. In this regard, Garcia et al. (2020) concluded that no significant differences in cyberbullying exist between gifted and nongifted students.

Currently, research on bullying and giftedness is scarce, which is in contrast with many studies conducted on nongifted students. In their evaluation, Espelage and King (2018) identified slightly more than 20 studies that examined the rates of victimization and perpetration among gifted students. However, these authors noted that in addition to being scant, the scientific literature on abuse among gifted students is extremely diverse due to a few factors. For instance, not all studies explained how gifted students were identified or recruited for the sample; a few studies used qualitative methods, and others employed quantitative methods. In addition, many did not specify the cut-off points of the questionnaires used to consider a student as a victim, and the age range of the analyzed samples covers very different developmental stages. Thus, investigations that compared gifted and nongifted students provide conflicting findings due to this variability (González-Cabrera et al., 2022).

Thus, the current study aims to shed light on the forms of school bullying among eighth and ninth-grade gifted and nongifted students in the State of Kuwait, to examine the interaction between the giftedness and levels of bullying and victimization among students, and to identify bullying behavior among students. It also intends to determine whether or not demographic variables, such as type of education and peer status, influence bullying behavior among students. Lastly, it endeavors to examine prevention and intervention strategies against bullying, to provide a database on bullying and victimization for middle school students, and to build further studies to reduce the spread of bullying. Research on this area is important for school principals, specialists, and workers in middle schools, as well as the Ministry of Education, to reduce the spread of bullying and to develop prevention programs to avoid bullying in schools.

Four research questions guide the present research:

1. What is the difference between gifted and nongifted students in terms of sociability and feelings toward schools?
2. What is the difference in bullying and victimization among gifted and nongifted students?
3. What are the relationships between bullying victimization and the type of education, and between sociability and feelings?
4. What are the prevention and intervention strategies for bullying?

2. Introduction

2.1. Research Design

The research methodology focuses on investigating the phenomenon of bullying among gifted and nongifted female students in a middle school in Kuwait by utilizing a comparative approach. The study intends to elucidate and compare the prevalence, types, and impacts of bullying experienced by

the two groups within the educational context of Kuwait. Toward this end, it employs a mixed-method approach by using the School Bullying Questionnaire for students and interviewing the social worker of the school.

This combination of the interview with the social worker and the completion of questionnaires by the students provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the complex dynamics of bullying and its relationships with sociability and feelings among gifted and nongifted female students. Qualitative insights from the social worker and quantitative data from the students contribute to a holistic understanding of the bullying phenomenon within the specific cultural and educational contexts of Kuwait.

2.2. Data Collection

The survey was conducted during the academic year 2022-2023 at Al-Qadisiya Intermediate School for Girls. To obtain authorization for administering the questionnaire, official approval was first secured from the Head of the Special Education Department at the College of Basic Education. Following this, we proceeded with the Educational Research Administration at the Ministry of Education to review the survey, which led to receiving the necessary approval. This included drafting an official letter addressed to the educational district associated with the school. After receiving approval from the Educational Research Administration, we visited the educational district to obtain the final consent. Finally, we secured permission from the school principal to administer the questionnaire to the students. All participation in this study was voluntary, and we have ensured compliance with ethical standards throughout the research process.

The data collection phase was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the questionnaire was administered to gifted female students. The questionnaire aimed to gather information about students' personal experiences with bullying, the nature of the bullying, the frequency of occurrences, and the emotional and psychological consequences. Then, an interview was conducted with the social worker to gather insightful information regarding the resolution of bullying incidents based on the social worker's professional experience and expertise. Additionally, the interview aimed to gather information on the school's current policies, support networks, and preventive measures.

2.3. Participants

In Kuwait, the criteria to accept gifted students into the gifted program are based on:

- Academic achievement: measured by the average of the first semester grades in fifth grade, especially in Mathematics, Science, and Arabic.
- Behavioral characteristics of the talented and creative: assessed using a criterion for evaluating behavioral traits (by the teacher).
- Academic readiness: measured through performance in academic readiness tests for verbal and quantitative reasoning.
- General mental ability: assessed using collective and individual intelligence tests that can be applied in some special cases determined by the testing and guidance management advisor (Sabah AlAhmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, 2018).

In addition, female gifted students are only integrated into regular school, but in separate classrooms. Thus, the research sample was purposively selected from a school that comprised two types of education, regular and gifted classrooms. The sample consisted of 93 female students from the eighth ($n = 43$) and ninth ($n = 50$) grades, which were classified under four classes, namely, two regular classes in grades eight ($n = 19$) and nine ($n = 29$), and two gifted classes in grades eight ($n = 24$) and nine ($n = 21$). The selection of participants from the regular and gifted classrooms enables a comparative analysis in terms of bullying experiences, sociability, and feelings toward school. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of bullying among gifted and nongifted female students in middle schools in Kuwait. The GPAs of the participants were also provided as an indicator of academic achievement. In the regular classes, GPAs reached a mean of 87.5, which ranges from a minimum of 70 to a maximum of 98.8. Conversely, the gifted classes obtained a mean GPA of 96.04, which ranges from a minimum of 90 to a maximum of 100. These differences in GPA between the two groups may help in identifying potential associations between academic performance and bullying experience.

Conversely, the study initiated a qualitative data collection process by interviewing the social worker at the school. This interview was intended to gather insights into various aspects of bullying, including its nature, typology, underlying motivation, prevalent issues, and practical approaches for addressing such incidents. The interviewee presented an extensive professional background with 17 years of hands-on experience in school-based social services. The interview lasted 22 min and 52 seconds and was conducted in the school's social service office.

2.4. School Bullying Questionnaire

Using questionnaires enables the collection of quantitative data directly from the gifted and nongifted female students. The questionnaires are designed to obtain information about personal experiences with bullying, including the type of bullying, frequency of incidents, and emotional and psychological impacts. By including both groups in the study, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify any differences or similarities in bullying experiences.

The questionnaire items are rated using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. The authors developed the questionnaire after conducting a comprehensive review of the related literature and examining previous empirical studies on bullying. The questionnaire focuses on different aspects related to bullying experiences among gifted and nongifted female students in middle schools in Kuwait and is structured into three sections. The first collects demographic information, including class, grade, and GPA (four items), to provide a contextual understanding. The second aims to identify the degree of sociability and feelings among participants (six items). The third focuses on the experiences of participants as victims of bullying (19 items) to explore various types of bullying, such as social, verbal, and physical bullying, and incidents related to possessions. The participants indicated the frequency with which they experience each type of bullying behavior, which enables a comprehensive assessment of the prevalence and nature of victimization experiences. Lastly, the fourth assesses participants' engagement in bullying behaviors (19 items) by asking about their tendencies to engage in physical, verbal, and social bullying, as well as their inclination to damage others' possessions. This section aims to elucidate the involvement of the participants in bullying behaviors and provides insights into the potential dynamics of aggression within the sample.

2.5. Interview With the Social Worker

The interview with the social worker serves as a valuable source of qualitative data by providing insights into professional observations and experiences of addressing bullying incidents among students. The expertise and perspective of the social worker can shed light on the overall school climate, intervention strategies, and existing support systems in place to address bullying. The authors conducted a semi-structured interview in the office of the social worker, which lasted for approximately 23 min. The interview protocol consisted of 15 questions, which were designed to explore various aspects related to school bullying, victimization, bullying behavior, the negative impact of bullying, and school procedures against bullying.

The questions posed during the interview aimed to collect valuable insights from the professional experience and expertise of the social worker in addressing bullying incidents. For example, one question focused on the different forms of bullying that the social worker encountered in the role to understand the range of bullying behaviors prevalent within the school environment. Another question asked about the frequency of bullying cases every week, which indicates the extent of the bullying problem. In addition, a question to rank the types of bullying (verbal bullying – physical bullying, bullying by property – social bullying) from most prevalent to least prevalent, and a question to know if there is bullying among students in gifted classes due to academic competition or other factors. This information can contribute to the assessment of the prevalence and severity of bullying incidents. Additionally, the interview sought to explore the perspectives of the social worker on the impact of bullying on students. By inquiring about the effects of bullying, the researchers intended to gain insight into the emotional, psychological, and academic consequences experienced by the students as victims. Furthermore, the interview protocol included questions about the school procedures and interventions against bullying by asking the social worker these questions: is there an action plan to reduce the phenomenon of bullying and what does it entail, is there a therapeutic program for the bully to modify their behavior, and also, a therapeutic program for the victim of bullying to reduce the negative effects. This line of inquiry aimed to collect information on the existing policies, support systems, and preventive measures implemented within the school to address bullying effectively. By conducting the semi-structured interview, the authors aimed to obtain a professional perspective on the dynamics of bullying among gifted and nongifted female students in middle schools in Kuwait and the school's procedures for dealing with bullying.

2.6. Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was developed following the applied steps to ensure validity and reliability. First, the researchers reviewed the related literature and empirical studies to compare their research procedures with current ones (i.e., Erwin, 2015; Espelage and King, 2018; Peterson and Ray, 2006a; Ryoo et al., 2017). Second, an advisor and two lecturers specialized in gifted education examined the tool to check its appropriateness in terms of content, language, style, and typographical error; changes were made based on feedback. Third, we conducted a pilot study on 39 middle school students to check for consistencies among items, domains, and subscales. The students were encouraged to add notes for each item that they deemed imprecise.

Table 1: Internal Reliability of Major Subscales

Scale	Pilot Sample	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Spearman–Brown Coefficient	Split-Half Coefficient
Victimization	39	18 (from 7 to 24)	0.868	0.814	0.809
Bully Behavior	39	17 (from 25 to 42)	0.935	0.922	0.922

As a result of the piloting procedures, three items were omitted (VPB5, PB6, and DB4) to increase the internal reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Table 1 indicates that multiple reliability tests confirmed the reliability of the victimization ($\alpha = 0.868$) and bully behavior subscales ($\alpha = 0.935$). In addition, the items of each domain illustrate acceptable degrees of reliability, in which Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.583 to 0.859 (Table 2).

Table 2: Internal Reliability of Domains

Subscales	Domain	N of Items	Items	Deleted Item	Alpha
Victimization	Social bullying	4	VSB1, VSB2, VSB3, and VSB4	–	0.583
	Verbal bullying	6	VVB1, VVB2, VVB3, VVB4, VVB5, and VVB6	–	0.675
	Physical bullying	4	VPB1, VPB2, VPB3, and VPB4	VPB5	0.771
	Incidents related to possessions	4	VIP1, VIP2, VIP3, and VIP4	–	0.610
Bullying behavior	Social	4	SB1, SB2, SB3, and SB4	–	0.740
	Verbal	5	VB1, VB2, VB3, VB4, and VB5	–	0.763
	Physical	5	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, and PB5	PB6	0.859
	Damaging the possessions of others	3	DP1, DP2, and DP3	DP4	0.779

The majority of domains exceeded .7 in the Cronbach's alpha test, apart from the three other domains, namely, victim of social bullying ($\alpha = 0.583$), victim of verbal bullying ($\alpha = 0.675$), and incidents related to possessions ($\alpha = 0.610$). However, these domains remain acceptable due to the small number of items in these domains. As Pallant (2013) statistically justified, Cronbach's alpha can be influenced by the number of items in scales, which include fewer than 10 items, and tend to obtain low Cronbach's alpha values.

Table 3: Internal Validity of Subscales

Victimization subscale							
Social bullying		Verbal bullying		Physical bullying		Incidents related to possessions	
Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha
VSBI	0.704**	VVB1	0.682**	VPB1	0.753**	VIP1	0.700**
VSBI2	0.632**	VVB2	0.531**	VPB2	0.894**	VIP2	0.761**
VSBI3	0.561**	VVB3	0.472**	VPB3	0.883**	VIP3	0.623**
VSBI4	0.793**	VVB4	0.585**	VPB4	0.456**	VIP4	0.627**
		VVB5	0.774**				
		VVB6	0.686**				
Bully behavior subscale							
Social bullying		Verbal bullying		Physical bullying		Damaging the possessions of others	
Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha	Item	Alpha
SB1	0.561**	VB1	0.736**	PB1	0.827**	DP1	0.727**
SB2	0.914**	VB2	0.759**	PB2	0.950**	DP2	0.971**
SB3	0.806**	VB3	0.888**	PB3	0.691**	DP3	0.784**
SB4	0.873**	VB4	0.747**	PB4	0.668**		
		VB5	0.415**	PB5	0.955**		

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

According to Table 3, nearly all 35 items were significantly correlated with their domains, in which the correlations ranged from 0.415 to 0.971, except for item 19, which was weakly correlated with its domain. Moreover, the correlations between domains and subscales were also significantly correlated with the results, ranging from 0.658 to 0.960 (Table 4).

Table 4: Correlations Between Domains and Scales

Scales	Domains			
Victimization	Social bullying	Verbal bullying	Physical bullying	Incidents related to possessions
	0.658**	0.910**	0.887**	0.811**
Bully behavior	Social bullying	Verbal bullying	Physical bullying	Damaging the possessions of others
	0.863**	0.960**	0.935**	0.885**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

To ensure the credibility of the interview, two researchers were involved in the coding process to enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis. In the case of discrepancy or disagreement, the coders discussed dissimilar codes to reach a consensus and ensure the accuracy of the coding. In addition, one

of the researchers tended to maintain proper documentation throughout the process, including detailed notes, memos, and an audit trail of decisions made. This documentation aided in ensuring the transparency and traceability of the data analysis process and enhances the overall validity and reliability of the study.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis involves quantitative analyses of questionnaire data using SPSS 23 and interview data using MaxQDA Pro. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the demographic information of the participants, which includes class, grade, GPA, and sociability, including social concept, number of friends, and feelings toward school. Inferential statistics, especially the *t*-test, were frequently employed to examine group differences between gifted and nongifted students in terms of bullying experiences, sociability, and feelings to explore associations among sociability, feelings, and the likelihood of being a victim or engaging in bullying behaviors.

The coding strategy for the interview data can involve a thematic analysis approach. First, interview recordings can be transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in representing the responses of the social worker. The data were then subjected to open coding, in which data are examined per line to identify initial codes that capture important concepts or ideas related to school bullying, victimization, bully behavior, impact of bullying, and school procedures against bullying. The coding process was guided by the interview questions and the emerging themes from the data. Following open coding, the codes were organized into categories or themes that capture the major ideas and patterns observed in the interview data. These categories were refined and further developed through axial coding, which involves the examination of the relationships between the codes and identifying subthemes or higher-order themes. The process was iterative with constant comparisons made between data segments to ensure consistency and coherence in the coding structure.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings based on descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and statements of the social worker. The section is divided into three subheadings, namely, friendships and feelings, bullying and victimization, and relationships among bullying, friendships, and feelings.

3.1. Sociability and Feelings

Beginning with sociability, the study found interesting results from the analysis. Table 5 presents the findings that female students, who were identified as gifted, exhibit higher degrees of sociability.

Table 5: Sociability Between Gifted and Nongifted Groups

Number of friends		None	Only 1 friend	2 to 3 friends	3 to 5 friends	Above 5 friends	Total
Group	Gifted students	1	0	7	12	25	45
	Nongifted students	9	7	11	6	15	48
Total		10	7	18	18	40	93

Among the cohort of 45 gifted students, 25 reported having more than five friends, while 12 out of 45 attested to having a social network comprising four to five friends. The study found that seven of the gifted students maintained a circle of two to three friends, and only one reported the lack of any friends. Conversely, within the cohort of 48 nongifted students, nine disclosed that they lacked friends entirely, while an additional seven students indicated having only one friend. Furthermore, 11 nongifted students were found to maintain two to three friends, and merely 15 nongifted students reported having more than five friends. This result demonstrates that gifted students have larger social networks, with the majority having more than five friends. In contrast, a greater number of nongifted students have limited social connections, because a significant percentage reported having no friends at all or only one friend.

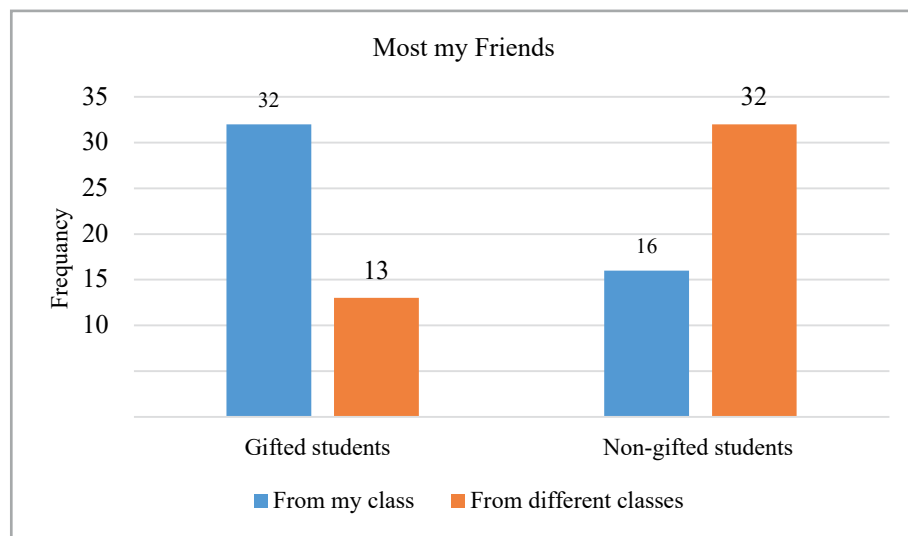


Fig. 1: Sociability among gifted and nongifted female students

Figure 1 exposes an interesting pattern of sociability among gifted and nongifted female students. The study observed that many gifted female students (32 out of 45) reported that their friends primarily consisted of other gifted students who were also classmates. In contrast, the remaining gifted students (13 out of 45) stated that a significant portion of their friends originated from different classes, which indicates a broad social network. Conversely, a different trend emerged from the nongifted students, because the majority (32 out of 48) had friends from various classrooms, which suggests a diverse social circle.

From another angle, sociability and feelings toward school are compared between the two groups. *t*-Test analysis revealed a statistically significant differentiation in terms of sociability between gifted ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.91$) and nongifted ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.51$) female students, as attested by the *t*-statistic ($t(77.85) = -4.318$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, another statistically significant distinction was observed in feelings toward school, in which gifted students ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.54$) demonstrate a favorable disposition compared with nongifted students ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.04$; $t(91) = -2.966$, $p < 0.001$). These results are followed by a correlation test to examine potential connections. The study found a significant positive correlation between sociability and feelings toward school ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.001$).

3.2. Victimization and Bullying

The study examined experiences of bullying by utilizing two distinct subscales, namely, one focused on being a victim of bullying and the other on bullying behavior. The results presented substantial disparities in subscales between the gifted and nongifted groups. Regarding victimization, the mean score of the gifted group ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.38$) was notably lower than that of the nongifted group ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.47$), which results in a highly significant t -test statistic ($t(91) = 12.912$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the subscale related to perpetrating bullying behavior indicated that the gifted group ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 0.29$) displayed a lower mean score compared with that of the nongifted group ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.45$), which signifies a reduced tendency toward bullying behavior among the gifted students ($t(72.652) = 21.619$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings suggested that gifted students are less likely to experience victimization and are less prone to engaging in bullying behavior compared with their nongifted counterparts. To gain a nuanced understanding of these results, the study conducted further comparisons to examine specific domains within each subscale (Table 6).

Analysis revealed substantial differences in victims of bullying between gifted and nongifted groups. The gifted students consistently reported significantly lower mean scores across various dimensions of bullying, including social ($M = 1.34$ vs. $M = 2.48$), verbal ($M = 1.53$ vs. $M = 2.67$), and physical ($M = 1.15$ vs. $M = 2.57$) bullying, and incidents related to personal possessions ($M = 1.42$ vs. $M = 2.57$), compared with their nongifted counterparts in regular classes. These findings underscore that nongifted students are more likely to experience and engage in these forms of bullying as victims, as evidenced by the higher mean scores. Furthermore, SDs indicated that although both groups exhibit variability in their responses, students from regular classes tend to have slightly more varied experiences in these bullying dimensions. These findings highlighted a notable disparity in victimization between gifted and nongifted students.

Table 6: Differences Between Gifted and Nongifted Groups Regarding Bullying Dimensions

Subscale	Domain	Class type	N	M	SD	Equality of variances	df	t	Sig.
Victim	Social bullying	Regular	48	2.48	0.57	Assumed	91	10.937	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.34	0.42				
	Verbal bullying	Regular	48	2.67	0.54	Assumed	91	9.869	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.53	0.57				
	Physical bullying	Regular	48	2.57	0.65	Not assumed	66.55	13.456	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.15	0.29				
	Incidents of related possessions	Regular	48	2.57	0.47	Assumed	91	6.696	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.42	0.38				

Subscale	Domain	Class type	N	M	SD	Equality of variances	df	t	Sig.
Behavior	Social bullying	Regular	48	2.56	0.68	Not assumed	76.81	12.092	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.18	0.40				
	Verbal bullying	Regular	48	2.60	0.48	Assumed	91	15.909	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.17	0.37				
	Physical bullying	Regular	48	2.78	0.54	Not assumed	86.61	16.707	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.14	0.40				
	Damaging the possessions of others	Regular	48	3.13	0.70	Assumed	91	16.853	0.000*
		Gifted	45	1.20	0.32				

Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of the dimensions of bullying behavior between gifted and nongifted groups pointed to consistent disparities. The gifted students consistently obtained significantly lower mean scores across various forms of bullying behavior, including social ($M = 1.18$ vs. $M = 2.56$), verbal ($M = 1.17$ vs. $M = 2.60$), and physical ($M = 1.14$ vs. $M = 2.78$) bullying and the tendency to damage the possessions of others ($M = 1.20$ vs. $M = 3.13$), compared with nongifted students in regular classes. These findings emphasized that nongifted students are more likely to behave as bullies. SD values indicate variability in responses within both groups, but unequal variances in a few dimensions necessitated the use of Welch's *t*-test, which still confirmed significant differences between groups. In summary, this data highlights the notable distinction in bullying behavior between the gifted and nongifted students, which underscores the significance of addressing and preventing bullying within educational contexts.

3.3. Bullying, Sociability, and Feelings

Table 7 provides compelling insights into the relationship between bullying victimization and two critical variables, namely, socialization and feelings among the participants. Strong negative associations characterized these correlations, which indicates the significance of these factors in mitigating bullying experiences.

Table 7: Correlations Among Sociability, Feelings, and Domains of Victimization

		Victim of social bullying	Victim of verbal bullying	Victim of physical bullying	Incidents related to personal possessions	Total victimization
Socialization	Pearson's correlation	-0.391**	-0.273**	-0.373**	-0.222*	-0.353**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.032	0.001
Feelings	Pearson's correlation	-0.370**	-0.267**	-0.179	-0.232*	-0.290**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.010	0.085	0.025	0.005

Notably, heightened levels of socialization were strongly linked to reduced victimization in various dimensions, including social ($r = -0.391, p < 0.001$), verbal ($r = -0.273, p = 0.008$), and physical ($r = -0.373, p < 0.001$) bullying and incidents related to personal possessions ($r = -0.222, p = 0.032$). These findings underscore that individuals who are more socially engaged are less likely to experience different forms of bullying, which highlights the protective role of social interaction. Additionally, a global measure of total victimization demonstrated a strong negative correlation with socialization ($r = -0.353, p = 0.001$), which reaffirms the universal protective impact of socialization against bullying across various domains.

Similarly, feelings toward the school environment exhibit substantial negative correlations with bullying victimization. Positive feelings are strongly linked to a reduced likelihood of being victims of social ($r = -0.370, p < 0.001$) and verbal ($r = -0.267, p = 0.010$) bullying. Although the correlation between feelings and physical bullying victimization is statistically nonsignificant ($r = -0.179, p = 0.085$), it suggests a potential protective effect. Furthermore, the association between positive feelings and incidents related to personal possessions was significantly negative ($r = -0.232, p = 0.025$), which emphasizes the role of positive attitudes in reducing such victimization. Ultimately, feelings are also negatively correlated with the total measure of victimization ($r = -0.290, p = 0.005$), which emphasizes their universal protective impact against bullying.

Table 8 provides critical insights into the interplay between bullying behavior and two key variables, namely, socialization and feelings within the participant groups. Strong negative associations characterized these correlations, which underscored the pivotal roles of these factors in the formation of bullying dynamics. Socialization emerges as a significant protective factor against various forms of bullying behavior, as evidenced by strong negative correlations between socialization and social ($r = -0.331, p = 0.001$), verbal ($r = -0.288, p = 0.005$), and physical ($r = -0.362, p < 0.001$) bullying and incidents related to damaging the possessions of others ($r = -0.348, p = 0.001$). These findings emphasized that individuals actively engaged in social interactions are less likely to engage in bullying behaviors, which highlights the preventive role of socialization.

Table 8: Correlations Among Sociability, Feelings, and Domains of Bully Behavior

		Social bullying	Verbal bullying behavior	Physical bullying behavior	Damaging the possessions of others	Total bullying behavior
Sociability	Pearson's	-0.331**	-0.288**	-0.362**	-0.348**	-0.361**
	correlation					
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.001	0.005	0.000	0.001	0.000
Feelings	Pearson	-0.362**	-0.286**	-0.260*	-0.242*	-0.307**
	correlation					
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.005	0.012	0.019	0.003

In a parallel fashion, positive feelings toward the school environment emerge as a robust protective factor against bullying behavior. Positive feelings are strongly associated with the reduced likelihood of participating in social ($r = -0.362, p < 0.001$) and verbal ($r = -0.286, p = 0.005$) bullying, which indicates the role of positive attitudes in deterring these forms of bullying behavior. Although the correlations between physical bullying behavior ($r = -0.260, p = 0.012$) and incidents related to damaging the possessions of others ($r = -0.242, p = 0.019$) are slightly lower, they continue to emphasize the essential role of positive feelings in preventing these types of bullying behavior. The total measure of bullying behavior also exhibits a strong negative correlation with socialization ($r = -0.361, p < 0.001$) and feelings ($r = -0.307, p = 0.003$), which reiterates the universal protective impact of these factors against engaging in various forms of bullying behavior.

3.4. School Social Services Versus Bullying Experiences

The personal interview with the social worker yielded a range of results that shed light on the prevalence, types, causes, evaluation methods, and management of bullying. The social worker stated the following:

... bullying occurs daily, primarily among eighth and ninth-grade female students, with occasional minor problems swiftly resolved, but severe cases necessitate intervention by the school's social services office ... typically ranging from one to two cases per week These problems among gifted students are much less prevalent, potentially attributed to their smaller class sizes or superior communication skills.

Verbal bullying emerged as the most common form of bullying among female students, followed by property damage, with physical bullying as the least frequent. Several motivations for bullying were identified, including "feelings of power and boldness, boredom, jealousy, competition ..., family issues, and domestic violence. Occasionally, students may support their friends in disputes and engage in bullying as a form of support."

The social services of the school employ two primary strategies, namely, community-level guidance (e.g., enlightening sessions, workshops, and qualitative training sessions), while individual counseling services encompass four categories, namely, addressing behavioral, social, and familial issues, scholastic hindrances, and special educational needs, in addition to health-related concerns. Paying attention to bullying cases falls under the domain of behavioral, social, and familial issues, which involves collaboration between the social worker, a psychological specialist, and, if necessary, interviews with counselors, parents, and teachers to diagnose and address the problem.

The social services office aims to support victims and bullies to understand the issue and prevent its recurrence. The counselor frequently seeks psychological relief, support, and safety in the cooperation among the social worker, psychological specialist, and school administration, "as it constitutes half of the remedy. The other half involves an anti-bullying program that focuses on strengthening the counselor's social circle" and enhances communication skills through "various enjoyable activities aimed at mitigating different bullying issues, fostering a sense of belonging, social acceptance, and emotional relief," and encouraging participation in the "school's social and skill-based activities such as art, music, and agriculture."

4. Discussion

The result fills a gap in the literature by providing insight into the various manifestations of school bullying experienced by gifted and nongifted students in the State of Kuwait. Additionally, the research intended to examine the relationship between giftedness and levels of bullying and victimization, as well as to find out the relationships between bullying victimization and the type of education and between sociability and feelings. Lastly, the study aimed to identify potential interventions and prevention strategies for bullying behavior.

4.1. Difference Between Gifted and Nongifted Students in Sociability and Feeling Toward Schools

During the data collection and analysis, a trend that emerged was that the gifted female students demonstrated higher levels of sociability compared with their nongifted peers. The study found that many gifted female students reported that their closest friends were also high-achieving peers. However, a distinct pattern appeared among average students: they were more likely to have friends outside of their classroom, which suggests a diverse social circle.

This finding can be linked to earlier observations on the sociability tendencies of gifted and nongifted students. The fact that the friends of the majority of the gifted students are also gifted may reflect shared academic interests and abilities. Alternatively, the inclination of nongifted students to make friends from different classrooms may signify a broader range of social connections, which could be influenced by various factors beyond academic performance. These patterns of socialization shed light on the potential impact of educational grouping and academic identity on the social networks of students.

This result implies the existence of a robust association between socialization levels and attitudes toward school. Students who exhibited high levels of socialization tended to hold more positive views regarding school experiences. These findings are in line with those of Francis et al. (2016), who proposed that gifted students displayed stronger socio-emotional abilities and fewer behavioral difficulties than their nongifted classmates.

4.2. Difference in Bullying and Victimization Between Gifted and Nongifted Students

One of the most important results is that gifted students are less likely to experience victimization and are less prone to engaging in bullying behaviors compared to their nongifted counterparts. This result follows that of Erwin (2015), who reported that gifted students were much less likely to experience victimization compared with nongifted peers across forms of victimization.

However, studies that compared the prevalence of bullying among gifted and nongifted students produced different conclusions, because the data of certain studies, such as Ryoo et al. (2017) and Garcia et al. (2020), suggested that no differences exist in bullying and victimization between gifted and nongifted students. However, this finding is in contrast with those of Dalosto and Alencar (2013) and González-Cabrera et al. (2019), who revealed that gifted students frequently experienced bullying at school in various forms.

A potential explanation for the higher rate of prevalence of bullying among nongifted students is the fact that the number of gifted students is very limited per grade level; that is, they do not exceed 40 students per grade and are divided into two classrooms. These students stay together from the sixth to twelfth grades and do not want to engage in bullying behavior, because they will need to stay together until graduation from high school. Therefore, the phenomenon of bullying is small for them, because they know each other and are socially together, which leads to the response to the following research question.

4.3. Relationships Between Bullying Victimization and Type of Education and Between Sociability and Feelings

In the context of Kuwait, this study is the first to identify the relationship between bullying victimization and socialization with feelings. Consistent with previous studies, the results underline the protective function of social interaction, which demonstrates that social engagement is negatively correlated with various types of bullying. In addition, social engagement is positively correlated with positive feelings toward the school. Collectively, these findings underscore the pivotal role of socialization and feelings in cultivating a positive, inclusive, and socially supportive school culture, which effectively reduces the prevalence of bullying experiences among students (Ryoo et al., 2017). A possibility exists that the greater the social interaction of students, the stronger the sense of belonging to others, which decreases bullying and victimization. More precisely, addressing the relationship between gifted students' sociability, feelings towards school, and bullying requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes both prevention and intervention strategies. Creating a positive and inclusive school climate that celebrates diversity, promotes empathy and respect, and provides support for social-emotional development can help mitigate the risk of bullying and foster a sense of belonging for all students, including the gifted (Cross, 2015).

4.4. Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Bullying

The findings continue to support the importance of prevention and intervention strategies for bullying. The social services of the school use two major strategies for preventing bullying. The first is community-level guidance, which includes illuminating seminars, workshops, and qualitative training sessions. The second refers to individual counseling services, which are classified into four areas, namely, solutions for behavioral, social, and familial issues, academic difficulties, special educational requirements, and health-related concerns. Bullying occurs within the context of behavioral, social, and familial concerns, which requires coordination between social workers and psychological experts and interviews with counselors, parents, and teachers, if necessary, to diagnose and solve the problem.

The social services office intends to understand the problem and prevent its recurrence by assisting victims and bullies. As it constitutes half of the remedy, a counselor frequently finds psychological comfort, support, and safety in the collaboration among social workers, psychological experts, and school administrations. The other half consists of an anti-bullying program that focuses on "strengthening the

counselor's social circle" and improving communication skills through "various enjoyable activities aimed at mitigating different bullying issues, fostering a sense of belonging, social acceptance, and emotional relief." It encourages participation in the "social and skill-based activities, such as art, music, and agriculture, of the school."

Instead of assuming that gifted students are immune to victimization, educators should focus on their experiences for the prevention of bullying of gifted students. The findings collectively underscore the need to cultivate positive school environments and promote active socialization and positive attitudes to create a culture that reduces bullying behavior, which ultimately contributes to a safer and more inclusive educational setting that welcomes gifted and nongifted students. In other words, by fostering a supportive and nurturing school environment, educators and school communities can promote the well-being and academic success of gifted students while preventing and addressing the harmful effects of bullying (Cross, 2015). In addition, educators should consider the vulnerability and unique characteristics of gifted students and help them develop problem-solving and socioemotional skills to cope with peer victimization because it is likely that, for gifted students, the perpetration of bullying is related to prior experiences with victimization. Given that gifted students are more susceptible to covert forms of bullying (relational perpetration), formulating interventions for all forms of bullying, including verbal and relational bullying, is imperative for educators instead of focusing solely on physical bullying. Students may be safeguarded from bullying and victimization only if preventive and intervention measures are developmentally appropriate, address all (gifted and nongifted) students, and consider individual characteristics (e.g., grade, giftedness) (Ryoo et al., 2017).

4.5. Limitations and Recommendations

Although the findings appear instructive, the study has its limitations. The conclusions were confined to data acquired from a self-reported questionnaire, which was mostly reliant on the personal opinions of students. Second, the findings are based on quantitative and qualitative approaches (interviews). Thus, further research should incorporate other qualitative methods, such as evaluation, observation, and longitudinal follow-up, to corroborate the findings. Third, data were derived only from the students and the social worker. Therefore, future research should collect data on bullying from various sources (e.g., peers, teachers, and families). Lastly, conduct experimental research to identify evidence-based practices that contribute to the creation of safer, more inclusive learning environments for all students.

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Final declarations:

- The authors declare that they got the required voluntary human participants consent to participate in the study as well as the necessary institutional approvals.
- The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

تصريحات ختامية:

- يصرح المؤلف / المؤلفون بالحصول على موافقة الأشخاص المتطوعين للمشاركة في الدراسة وعلى الموافقات المؤسسية اللازمة.
- تتوفر البيانات الناتجة و/ أو المحللة المتصلة بهذه الدراسة من المؤلف المراسل عند الطلب.