

Assessment of academic achievements of special children

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Abstract

Life skills play a key role in the academic achievement of students and the development of a society and nation. This research aims to investigate the life skills of male and female mentally retarded students, to assess the life skills of female and male mentally retarded students as perceived by their teachers, to analyze the academic achievements of the mentally retarded students, and to investigate the impact of the life skills of mentally retarded students on their academic achievement. A total of 20 students in the 10th grade and their teachers were selected for the current study. The researcher used a questionnaire for data collection and they were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and percentage formula. The results of the study showed that students with mental retardation achieved low academic scores. These low academic achievements of students with mental retardation indicated that children with mental retardation need special care and extra efforts to achieve better academic achievements.

Keywords: Life Skills; Academic Achievement; Mental Retardation; Students, Teachers

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1. Introduction

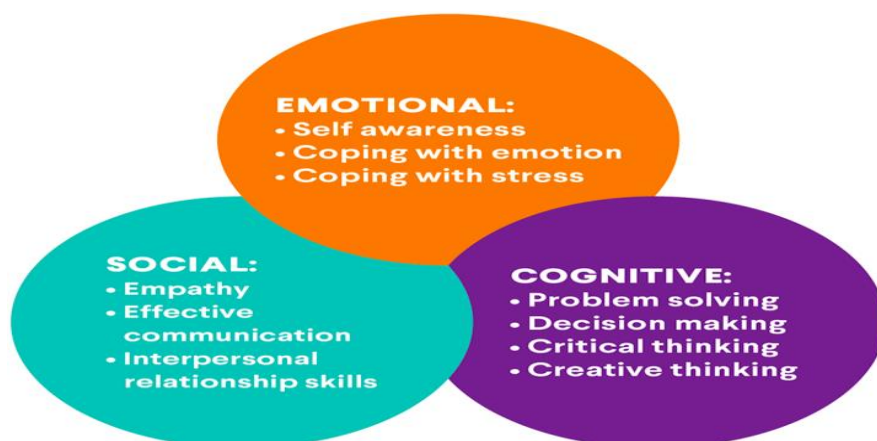
Learning is the necessary element for life skills development (Hafeez et al., 2020). Life skills are the capabilities for malleable and positive behavior that allow people to deal efficiently with the difficulties and encounters of daily life. These capabilities facilitate the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of persons (Shin et al., 2018). Life skills are abilities that will support the learners to be fruitful in living a creative life (Cronin & Allen, 2018). Educational and practicing life skills support learners to improve their individual and communal abilities such as self-confidence, sympathy, respect, and assurance (Jacobs & Wright, 2018). Life skills consist of three skills such as thinking, social and emotional skills (Shek et al., 2020). Thinking skills are the self-awareness interpersonal relationships Managing Feelings/emotions (Rahayu et al., 2019).

The social skills are the problem-solving and decision-making communication skills Pakdaman (Robison et al., 2020). These skills comprised of non-verbal and verbal communication, dynamic listening, capability to express emotions and provide feedback (Al-Twairqi, 2017). The capability to collaborate includes expressing respect for the people around us. Emotional skill is the ability to deal the stress creative thinking with empathy (Erickson et al., 2015).

Life skills are the psycho-social capabilities that reinforce people themselves to allocate with the demands of life (Rafaeli, 2020). Life skills growth is a normal development that starts when a kid is born but it frequently requires involvement to boost up (Srikongphlee et al., 2018). The environment in which an individual grows learns behaves provides the primary stages for life skills development (Adedokun, 2019). Life skills allow persons to recognize their weaknesses and strength for stable behavior (Chiang et al., 2017).

There are ten essential life skills required for persons which come under the general life skill category (Rokhayati & Jayanti, 2018). They are empathy, self-awareness, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making, creative thinking, effective communication, coping with stress, interpersonal relationship, and coping with emotions (Álvarez-Bueno et al., 2017). These skills are interrelated to each other and work together for the development of individuals (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2019). The important emotional, social and cognitive life skills are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Emotional, Social and Cognitive Life Skills



Life skills are comprised of interpersonal skills and psychosocial competencies that support individuals to solve problems, communicate effectively, think critically and creatively, empathize with others and build healthy relationships in a productive manner (Barken & Armstrong, 2018). Nair, (2012) pointed out in a study that there are two types of life skills as problem-specific and generic life skills.

1.1. Review of Literature

1.1.1. Mental Retardation

Mental retardation is a term utilized when an individual has particular restrictions in mental working such as social skills and communication (Al-Mosawi, 2019). These restrictions will cause an individual to develop and learn more deliberately than a normal child (Coutinho et al., 2017). Individuals with any mental retardation take more time to speak, walk, learn and take care of their desires such as reaction or dressing (Putri et al., 2017). According to (Heward, 2013), mental retardation has been separated into four stages of severity largely based on IQ numbers (i) for moderate mental retardation, IQ values range from 55/50 to 40/35 (ii) for mild mental retardation, IQ values range from 70 to 55/50 (iii) for profound mental retardation, IQ values are below to 25/20 (iv) for severe mental retardation, IQ values range from 40/35 to 25/20.

Bakers, (2011) concluded in a study that mental retardation can be caused by any condition which impairs the development of the brain. Several hundred reasons have been revealed, but about 1/3 of the persons affected, the reason remains unidentified. The 3 major identified reasons for mental retardation are fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Down syndrome, and Fragile X Syndrome (Verma et al., 2017).

1.1.2. Life Skills

Life skills are capabilities for malleable and positive practices that allow persons to deal efficiently with everyday life requirements and challenges (Suchyadi et al., 2018). According to (Hayden et al., 2015), the important life skills in individuals are (i) Problem solving (ii) Decision making (iii) Creative thinking (iv) Self-awareness (v) Self-awareness (vi) Coping with stress (vii) Interpersonal relationship skills (viii) Empathy (ix) Coping with emotions (x) Critical thinking. Life skills education varies in its contents and purposes from nation to nation and from one place to another place. However, life skills education does not vary across cultures in three significant ways (Wurdinger & Qureshi, 2015).

Education is the main source for improving life skills. Complementary life skills like creative and critical thinking, empathy, self-awareness, and decision-making skills can be improved and developed by educational activities. Health promotion skills can be improved by teaching these skills for psychosocial competence (Ng et al., 2015).

1.1.3. Life Skills Education Requirement in Schools

A school is a suitable place for the implementation of life skills education as school is a valuable place where young children perform different social activities to improve their learning process (Behrani, 2016; Francis, 2019). Life skills teaching is extremely related to the daily requirements of learners when it is taught in schools with the formulated curriculum (Amansoi & Basseyyi, 2017). Many research studies including (Manjula, 2018; Abualrob, 2019) concluded that teaching life skills in schools improve the efficacy and academic performance of the learners. Life skills learning is learning which prepares the learners with capabilities to develop positive behavior according to the environment (Mayabi, 2015).

1.2. Objectives of the Study

Life skills are important elements for the proper development and growth of a child (Chen & Yang, 2019). Life skills also play an important role in critical thinking and academic achievements for the learners. The elements of life skills are the backbone for the social development and academic achievements of a child (Nasheeda et al., 2019). So, the following are the objectives of the current study:

- (i) To investigate the life skills of male and female mentally retarded students

- (ii) To assess the life skills of female and male mentally retarded students as perceived by their teachers
- (iii) To analyze the academic achievements of the mentally retarded students
- (iv) To investigate the impact of the life skills of mentally retarded students on their academic achievement

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample Size

The causal-comparative research methodology was used in the current research study to evaluate the impacts of life skills on the academic achievements of pupils with mental challenges. The students were taken from the special education school situated in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. The total size of the sample was 20 students with mental retardation studying in grade 10th at the special education school situated in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. The sample was selected by using a random sampling technique.

2.2. Research Instruments and Data Collection

The semi-structured close-ended questionnaire was used as a tool for data gathering. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed to examine the life skills of pupils with mental retarders who were studying in grade 10th at a special education school in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. The questionnaire was distributed among the teachers of the students. 27 close-ended statements were framed. The statements were coded on a five-Likert scale comprising Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (UD), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

2.3. Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis of collected data was done by using the SPSS-20 software package. The descriptive statistics tools were used to analyze and evaluate the collected data.

3. Results

The results of the questionnaire and descriptive statistics about the impacts of life skills on the academic achievement of students with mental retardation are shown in table 1. The statement wise explanation of results is given in the following lines.

Table 1: Impact of Life Skills on the Academic Achievements of Students with Mental Retardation

Sr. No.	Statements	SD (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	St. Dev.
1	Child shows creativity during the classroom activities	26.2	55.5	17.3	0.0	1.0	1.95	0.730
2	Child accepts the challenge enthusiastically	20.0	59.4	19.4	0.0	1.1	2.03	0.705
3	Child tries to present new ideas and concepts	16.8	44.3	37.3	0.5	1.2	2.27	0.776
4	Child asks questions about the set task	13.8	55.7	28.2	1.8	0.7	2.21	0.710
5	Child generates doubts by questioning about unrelated things	26.2	33.8	32.7	7.3	0.1	2.23	0.915
6	Child attempts to help others during the group activity	29.3	32.3	32.1	5.1	1.2	2.17	0.946
7	Child attempts to offer help for others in special Tasks	23.4	45.5	27.3	3.2	0.7	2.13	0.823
8	Child tries to do a single activity in different ways	26.6	40.7	30.1	1.6	1.2	2.11	0.853
9	Child likes to think out of the box	18.3	45.6	31.7	3.9	0.6	2.23	0.811

10	Child tries to apply knowledge or skills in new situations	15.6	59.4	20.6	1.1	3.3	2.17	0.824
11	Child thinks about all the possible options before a task	18.9	44.4	35.0	0.6	1.1	2.21	0.789
12	The child attempts to support a classmate who is feeling low to cope with the given work	14.4	55.0	23.9	3.9	2.8	2.26	0.853
13	A child feels relaxed in sharing his ideas and concepts with others?	18.8	39.0	37.8	4.4	0.0	2.28	0.819
14	Child always enjoys to be respected and appreciated	19.5	51.0	23.2	5.2	1.1	2.17	0.838
15	The child asks about how to right the errors pointed out by the teacher in their tasks	16.1	52.2	28.3	3.3	0.0	2.19	0.738
16	Child keeps a relaxed level of eye contact with tasks	18.2	51.8	26.2	3.8	0.0	2.16	0.761
17	Does child intrude to tell their own opinions?	17.2	45.6	35.0	2.2	0.0	2.22	0.752
18	Child attempts to break rules and principles setup for the tasks	12.8	53.9	28.3	5.0	0.0	2.26	0.741
19	Child attempts to exhibit rude behavior	18.3	55.0	21.7	3.3	1.7	2.15	0.815
20	Child selects an activity according to his capability during the group work	18.3	43.3	31.1	5.0	2.2	2.29	0.901
21	Child attempts to do the tasks again if remained unsuccessful in first try	7.7	51.2	36.6	2.3	2.3	2.41	0.759
22	Child tries to improve the learning by doing regular practice	22.2	43.9	30.6	1.7	1.7	2.17	0.849
23	Child attempts to take help of teacher in difficult situations	10.6	51.1	34.4	2.2	1.7	2.33	0.762
24	Child attempts to get secluded when under stress	16.1	53.3	29.4	0	1.1	2.17	0.729
25	Child attempts to do some healthy activities	22.8	36.7	35.0	4.4	1.1	2.24	0.895
26	Child becomes argumentative during discussions	5.6	62.2	29.4	1.7	1.1	2.31	0.652
27	Child demonstrations disrespect to the discipline of the classroom	14.5	43.8	36.0	5.1	0.6	2.33	0.805

In response to the statement that a child shows creativity during classroom activities, 82% of teachers said that child does not show creativity during classroom activities. The mean value was 1.95 and the standard deviation was 0.730 for this statement. In response to the statement that the child accepts the challenge enthusiastically, 80% of teachers responded that child does not accept the challenge enthusiastically. The mean value for this statement was 2.03 and the standard deviation was 0.705. In response to the statement that the child tries to give new ideas and concepts, 61% of teachers said that child does not try to give new ideas and concepts. The mean value for this statement was 2.27 and the standard deviation was 0.776. In response to the statement that the child asks questions about the set task, 70% of teachers responded that child does not ask questions about the set task. The mean score value for this statement was 2.21 and the standard deviation was 0.710.

In response to the statement that a child generates doubts by questioning irrelevant things away from the task, 60% of teachers responded that child does not generate doubts by questioning about irrelevant things. The mean value for this statement was 2.23 and the standard deviation was 0.915. In response to the statement that the child attempts to help others during group activity, 62% of teachers responded that child does not try to help others during the group activity. The mean value for this statement was 2.17 and the standard deviation was 0.946. In response to the statement that the child attempts to offer help for others in special tasks, 70% of teachers responded that child does not attempt to offer help for others in special tasks. The mean value for this statement was 2.13 and the standard deviation was 0.823. In response to the statement that a child tries to do a single activity

in different ways, 68% of teachers responded that child does not try to do a single activity in different ways. The mean value for this statement was 2.11 and the standard deviation was 0.853.

In response to the statement that a child likes to think out of the box, 64% of instructors responded that child does not like to think out of the box. The mean value for this statement was 2.23 and the standard deviation was 0.811. In response to the statement that a child tries to apply knowledge or skills in the new situation, 75% of instructors responded that child does not try to apply knowledge or skills in the new situation. The mean value for this statement was 2.17 and the standard deviation was 0.824. In response to the statement that a child thinks about all the possible options before a task, 64% of teachers responded that child does not ponder about all the possible choices before a task. The mean value for this statement was 2.21 and the standard deviation was 0.789. In response to the statement that a child attempts to support a classmate who is feeling low to cope with the given work, 70% of instructors responded that child does not attempt to support a classmate who is feeling low to cope with the given word. The mean value for this statement was 2.26 and the standard deviation was 0.853.

In response to the statement that the child feels relaxed in sharing his ideas and concepts with others, 58% of teachers responded that child does not feel comfortable in sharing his ideas with others. The mean value for this statement was 2.28 and the standard deviation was 0.819. In response to the statement that a child always enjoys being respected and appreciated, 71% of instructors responded that child does not enjoy being respected and appreciated. The mean value for this statement was 2.17 and the standard deviation was 0.838. In response to the statement that **the** child asks about how to right the errors pointed out by the instructors in their work, 69% of teachers responded that child does not ask about how to right the errors pointed out by the teachers in their work. The mean value for this statement was 2.19 and the standard deviation was 0.738.

In response to the statement that the child keeps a comfortable level of eye contact with tasks, 70% of teachers responded that child does not keep a relaxed level of eye contact with tasks. The mean value for this statement was 2.16 and the standard deviation was 0.761. In response to the statement, child intrudes to tell their own opinions 63% of teachers responded that child does not intrude to tell their own opinions. The mean value for this statement was 2.22 and the standard deviation was 0.752. In response to the statement that the child tries to break rules and principles set up for the task, 67% of teachers responded that child does not try to break rules and principles set up for the task. The mean value for this statement was 2.26 and the standard deviation was 0.741.

In response to the statement that the child tries to exhibit rude behavior, 74% of teachers responded that child does not try to exhibit rude behavior. The mean value for this statement was 2.26 and the standard deviation was 0.815. In response to the statement that a child selects an activity according to his capability during the group work, 62% of teachers said that child does not select an activity according to his capability during the group work. The mean value for this statement was 2.29 and the standard deviation was 0.901. In response to the statement that a child attempts to do the task again if remained unsuccessful on the first try, 60% of teachers responded that child does not attempt to do the task again if remained unsuccessful on the first try. The mean value for this statement was 2.40 and the standard deviation was 0.759. In response to the statement that the child tries to improve the learning by doing regular practice, 67% of teachers responded that child does not try to improve the learning by doing regular practice. The mean value for this statement was 2.17 and the standard deviation was 0.849. In response to the statement that a child attempts to take the help of a teacher in difficult situations, 62% of teachers responded that child does not attempt to take help from the teacher in difficult situations. The mean value for this statement was 2.33 and the standard deviation was 0.762.

In response to the statement that a child attempts to get secluded when under stress, 70% of teachers responded that child does not attempt to get secluded when under stress. The mean value for this statement was 2.17 and the standard deviation was 0.729. In response to the statement that

the child attempts to do some healthy activities, 60 teachers responded that children do not attempt to do some healthy activities. The mean value for this statement was 2.24 and the standard deviation was 0.895. In response to the statement that a child becomes argumentative during discussions, 68% of instructors responded that child does not become argumentative during discussions. The mean value for this statement was 2.31 and the standard deviation was 0.652. In response to the statement that child demonstrations disrespect the discipline of the classroom, 60% of teachers said that child does not show disrespect to the discipline of the classroom. The mean value for this statement was 2.33 and the standard deviation was 0.805.

Table 2: Achievement Achievements of Students with Mental Retardation

No.	Marks (%)	Frequency
1	33	04
2	33-40	07
3	41-50	05
4	51-60	04
5	61-70	0
	Total	20

Figure 1: Graph Between the Frequency and Percentage

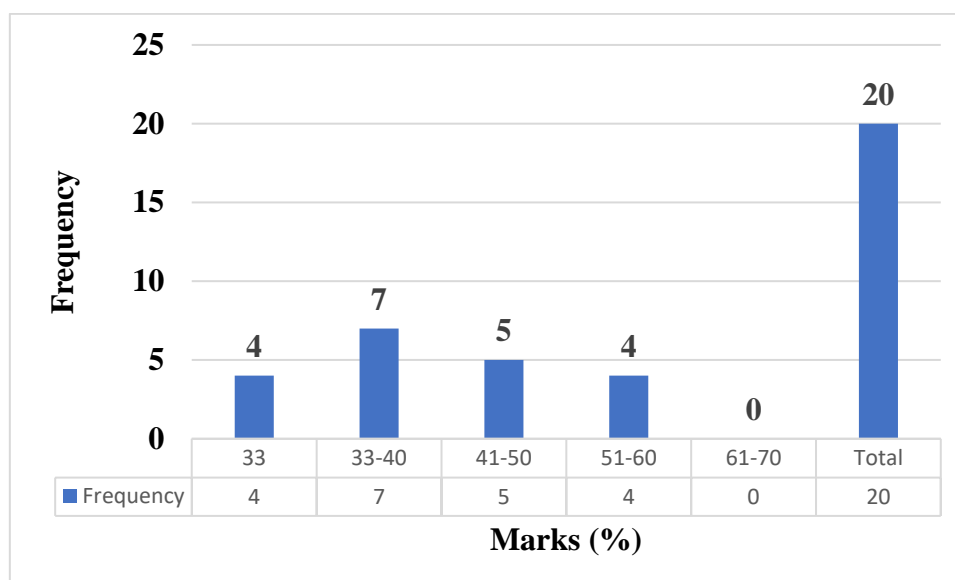


Table 42 displays the percentage and frequency of scores obtained by pupils. It is clear from the table that 4 students obtained 33% marks, 7 students obtained up to 33-40% marks, 5 students obtained between 41-50% marks, 4 students obtained between 51-60% marks and no students obtained more than 60% marks.

4. Discussion

Life skills are important social and psychological capabilities that are very necessary for the development of a country and to achieve better academic records. These Life skills are the important elements for the normal development of an individual (Bean et al., 2018). These life skills play a key role in the learning process and development (Alajmi, 2019). Educational and practicing life skills support learners to improve their individual and social abilities such as self-confidence, respect, sympathy, and assurance (Ghasemian & Kumar, 2015).

Mental retardation is a term utilized when an individual has particular restrictions in mental working such as social skills and communication (Cronin & Allen, 2017, Al-Mosawi, 2019). These restrictions will cause an individual to develop and learn more deliberately than a normal child

(Coutinho et al., 2017). Individuals with any mental retardation take more time to speak, walk, learn and take care of their desires such as reaction or dressing (Allen et al., 2015; Putri et al., 2017). The research was carried out to analyze the influence of life skills on the academic achievements of pupils with mental retardation. The subject of the study was the mentally retarded students who are studying in a special education school situated in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. A total of 20 students were selected for this study. To attain the objectives of the research, a questionnaire was developed. There were 27 items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on five Likert-Scales to judge the impacts of life skills on the academic achievements of pupils with mental retardation. The results of the questionnaire data showed that overall the participants responded negatively which means that mental retardation is a great hurdle in the academic achievement of the students. The results indicated that 4 students obtained 33% marks, 7 students obtained up to 33-40% marks, 05 students obtained between 41-50% marks, 4 students obtained between 51-60% marks and no students obtained more than 60% marks.

The low academic achievements of the students indicated that mental retardation is a great hurdle in achieving higher academic grades. These results were according to the results of the studies conducted by (Rogers, 2016; Dhingra & Chauhan, 2017; Saad, 2018). The consequences of the study also showed that children with mental retardation need special attention and care so that they can also become skillful to cope with society.

5. Conclusion

Life skills are important social and psychological abilities that are necessary for individuals to cope with society and to achieve higher-order thinking skills and academic achievements. These life skills are also important for the development of a country. The research was conducted to assess the impacts of life skills on the academic achievements of pupils with mental retardation. The 10th grades students of a special school situated in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan was selected for the study.

The results of the study indicated that life skills have a great impact on academic achievements. Out of 20 students, 4 students obtained 33% marks, 7 students obtained up to 33-40% marks, 5 students obtained between 41-50% marks, 4 students obtained between 51-60% marks and no students obtained more than 60% marks. The low academic achievements of the students indicated that mental retardation is a great hurdle in achieving higher academic grades.

The special children having fewer life skills require special attention. So, in the schools, they must provide the facilities so that they can easily learn the necessary skills required for daily life to cope with the challenges of society.

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