

# SKILLS IN ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: TOWARDS INDEPENDENT LIVING WITHIN THE SOCIETY

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## **Abstract**

After reaching adulthood most of the individuals with intellectual disabilities drop out from school/workshop or if employed from employment. The main aim of this research is to explore the skills needed for the adolescents with intellectual disabilities to function as economically and socially independent individuals in the society. This is a pilot study conducted in Prague, Charles University (Czech Republic). 16 teachers, 16 parents and 2 employers were given questionnaires and interviewed to elicit their views about the skills taught to adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the schools and the relevance of the skills learnt in helping the adults function independently in the society. The findings show that though the adolescents are trained in work behaviour, independence skills, production skills, interaction skills, social skills, self help skills and academic skills actual on the job training is required for the individuals with intellectual disabilities. During the research process it was also found that the employers of the individuals with intellectual challenges appoint them only because there is a government policy in the Czech Republic which insists on it or else the employer has to pay compensation of kc 49,000/- per year.

**Keywords:** 1- intellectual disabilities, 2- skills, 3- function independently.

## **Introduction**

Individuals with intellectual disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged groups in most societies. They are subject to social discrimination, reduced work and educational opportunities. However one way of making progress and helping individuals with challenges is to look across countries, to know the different aspect such as the culture and the organisational structures and to look at the situation with one's own new eyes and broader perspective.

It is believed that any institutions regular or special should focus on the planning in such a way that the students (able/disabled) are geared up for their future to become an independent individual of the society. According to Robson (2002:9) in the social world every individual have skills such as interviewing, designing, analysing, interpreting and reporting. These skills require practice and which takes time. Keeping in mind this statement which encourages a debutant researcher like me have moved ahead with my research to explore the skills needed for the adolescents with Intellectual disabilities to function as economically and socially independent individuals in the society.

## **Objective of the Research**

The objectives of the research are:

- a) To explore the views of the teachers whether the skills taught and learnt by their adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the schools are relevant to make them independent in their future.
- b) To explore the views of the parents whether the skills taught and learnt by their students with intellectual disabilities in the schools are relevant to make them independent in their future.
- c) To explore the views of the employers whether the adult with intellectual disabilities who are working in their place possess the skills to cope with the needs in the job.
- d) To propose a guideline to help teachers develop curriculum that would help in the training of the students with intellectual disabilities.

## **Methodology**

Quantitative and Qualitative methods were used to collect data for the research question “what skills need to be taught in schools that will benefit individuals with intellectual disabilities to be an independent individual in the society”

The questionnaire had 7 subtitles related to skills that individuals with intellectual disabilities needs.

The skills are:

1. Work behaviour
2. Independence skills
3. Production skills
4. Interaction skills
5. Social Skills
6. Self- help Skills
7. Academic Skills

The teachers, parents and employers were asked to evaluate the students based on the skills. This questionnaire is evaluated on three likert scales and that is ‘Always’ ‘Occasionally’ and ‘Never’. The questionnaire was done in English but the school where the research is carried uses the Czech language. So a PhD student who is fluent in English and Czech translated from English to Czech. The questionnaire was circulated to 16 teachers in two schools, 18 parents from two schools and two employers from two work places to collect data and had qualitative method to explore, describe or explain in an open and unbiased way. In this study self-completion and face-to-face interview were held. The questionnaire has been filled by the teachers and the parents themselves. Questionnaire was developed with the help of the faculty staff and after discussing in a group. Referral of books ‘Gaining and Providing Yourself in Social competence’ (Hamond. B. V & Haccou. R, 2006) for framing questionnaire.

When the collection of data is in one language and the presenting in another language there were number of translation related decisions such as words which exists in one language may be present in another, the concepts which are not equivalent is different, syntactical structures and grammatical issues in languages which call for very specific decisions (Birbili. M, 2000). Thus there were factors which influenced the direct impact on the quality of the research. The reason for having qualitative framework for the

research was to enquire about the skills the intellectual disables students learn in schools and workshop and whether it would help them in the future employment (Cohen et al, 2000:181) however working in such a framework helped to gain a better and in-depth understanding of the research question mentioned above.

Interviewing as a research method is widely used in social research and there are many different types. It involves the researcher and hopefully the researcher seeks to find answer to his/her research question (Robson, 2002:269). Fully structured, semi structured and unstructured interviews were developed to have one to one and face to face with the parents, staff and employers. The limitations the researcher had during the interview were the language but with the help of the interpreter the answers given by the parents and teachers was well translated. The employers could speak English and thus had no problem interviewing the employer.

As per Robson (2002:275) 'question to avoid in interviews' states that during interviews, researchers should avoid doing certain kinds of questions such as doublebarrelled questions, long questions, leading questions and questions that involve jargon. Extra care was taken to follow the advice as per Robson (2002).

### Procedure of collecting data

Two schools (School A and school B) were selected which was working for the individuals with intellectual disabilities and age range was also with the requirement for the research.

Questionnaires were distributed to the teachers and flexibility of selecting students was given to the teachers themselves. Likewise the parents were also given the questionnaire but interestingly found the parents had lot of interaction while filling in the questionnaire.

### Result and discussion

The responses obtained from teachers and parents about their views for the skills taught and learnt by the adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the schools towards:

Skills	Teachers		Parents	
Work behaviour	13/16	Occasionally	14/16	Always
Independence skills	8/16	Occasionally	10/16	Occasionally
Production skills	8/16	Occasionally	8/16	Always
Interaction skills (Communication)	8/16	Always	11/16	Occasionally
Social skills	9/16	Always	11/16	Always
Self-help skills	14/16	Always	15/16	Always
Academic skills	10/16	Occasionally	8/16	Always

### During one to one and face to face interviews teachers responded to the questions:

1. Do you find that the skills taught to the adolescents are adequate for finding a job in the open market?  
 If yes, how? If no, why?

*"I am not sure, one cannot say what will be their future" but the children get money from the government depending upon their special needs"*

*"We teach them as per the curriculum but we don't know because the parents decide what is best for their children"*

*"I never thought about it"*

*Yes they are learning money value, cooking, shopping etc which will help them in the future if they go for open employment"*

*"The government will pay them the benefit so the parents can decide what have to be done"*

2. What are the views of the teachers' regarding the relevance of the skills learnt by the adolescents to help them to function independently?

*"Yes, for example when (Y) came to me she was not independent in activities of daily living but today she has really become smart"*

*"One cannot say about the future but whatever they are learning will definitely make them to take care of themselves in the future which is very important"*

*"We are trying our best to make them independent" they are independent and I am sure they will be able to manage themselves when they grow up"*

*Of course they are coming to school to learn to be independent only"*

*"we are teaching them math, grammar, to do shopping, dressing up, taking care of children, self help skills etc so they will be independent and they will also get the support from the government for their living in the future. So with whatever skills they learn and with the support from the government they will have an independent living"*

**During one to one and face to face interviews (interpreter present) parents responded to the questions:**

1. What are the views of the parents regarding the relevance of the skills learnt to help their children to function independently? (5 parents in group)

*"We know what our children are learning in the school and also we attend the meetings whenever we are called to see the progress of our children"*

*" I am not bothered as long as my child is happy in the school I don't want to brood over what the future holds for her, she will get support from the government and I will send her to the workshop for the special needs in the vicinity so that she will spend some time outside the house. Let her be happy"*

2. Do they have any monetary support for their future living? (5 parents in group)

*“They are not bothered about their future” “the government gives them grant and they can purchase the service which is best for their child”*

3. What are the views of the parents’ regarding the relevance of the skills learnt to help their children to function independently?

*“It depends upon the children”*

*“I am more worried who will take care of my child”*

*“I am sure my sister will take care of my daughter, she will go to some workshop to spend her time as she will be happy”*

**The employers responded to the following questions during one to one and face to face interviews**

1. Do they feel obligated to employ individuals with intellectual disabilities? If yes, how? And if no why?

*Employer 1: said “no feels that if the individual with disabilities is able to do the job then, why not give them the opportunity.*

*Employer 2: Said”no feels that it is not an obligation but anybody can do any job it is nothing to do with special needs”*

2. Do they feel it as a sense of responsibility towards society? If yes, how? And if no, why?

*Employer 1. Feels ‘yes’ by giving them the opportunity they also will feel that they too are the important people in the society.*

*Employer 2. Said ‘I don’t know’ but we wanted to appoint someone who will do the job and there is a government policy to appoint individual with special needs. So we have to appoint. If the company does not appoint them it has to pay kc 49,000/- per year. So we decided to appoint an individual with special needs.*

3. Do they do it because they pity them? If yes, how? And if no, why?

*Employer 1. said no. We treat them like any other staff in the office.*

*Employer 2. Said no. In the beginning it was pity, but later we felt he is like any other normal individual*

4. Do they believe that they are equally competent as any other employee? If yes, why?  
And if no, how?

*Employer 1. said yes. We have no complaints against her. So I feel she is equally competent.*

*Employer 2.said I don't know but he does the work efficiently.*

4. How long has the individual been working with the employer and whether they needed any specific training to cope up with their daily work routine?

*Employer 1. She has been working for the past two years, the non governmental agencies helped in training the individual with intellectual disabilities with the skill required in the work place.*

*Employer 2. The employee has been working for the past 8 months and the non governmental agencies helped in training the individual with intellectual disabilities in the work place.*

5. For how long did the employer have to train the individual with intellectual disabilities?

*Employer 1 & 2. It is the Non Governmental Agencies which train the individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Non Governmental Agencies has registered name of individuals with intellectual disabilities for whom the Agency finds placement in the open market so once the individual with intellectual disabilities gets the opportunity to work the Agencies send mentors from their office to train them in the work unit. The individuals with intellectual disabilities get the training for few months and slowly the agency diminish the support and the individual with the intellectual disabilities have to work independently. The employees are working with employer 1 for 2 years and with employer 2 since 8 months.*

### **Outcome of the interviews with the teachers, parents and employer**

Teachers felt that the curriculum they are following in the school definitely prepares the adolescents to work for the open employment. The teachers also felt ultimately it is the parents who have to decide the best for their children. Whereas one of the parents felt that it is the responsibility of the school to give the best for the child, she said “*school has to take care of my child*”

Both the employers were in fact not aware of what the adult have learnt in schools before coming to them. The Non Governmental Agencies which arranges the individual with intellectual disabilities to work in the site train the adults on the job. “job analysis generates information on the job and workplace to match that available for the individual from the vocational profile in order to confirm how well suited the job is for the individual (and vice versa ) and to assess how much input may be required to close any gap between the requirements of the employer and the competencies of the worker ( Hamond B &

Haccou R. 2006:25 ). In this case the NGO's assessed and give the placement for the individual with intellectual disabilities.

The employers (1) who had appointed a boy with intellectual disabilities said that it is compulsory to appoint an individual with special needs and thus they have appointed this boy. As per the Government policy if these criteria are not fulfilled then the company has to pay a compensation kc 49,000/- per year to the Government. So the employer decided to employ a person with special needs who will be of help to them.

Furthermore, it is clear that the adolescents are trained in skills for work behaviour, independence, production, to communicate, social skills, self – help skills and in academics. But looking at the above data it is clear that more emphasis should also be given to activities like cleaning and developing the social skills as it is said that people with intellectual disabilities are commonly disadvantaged with respect to understanding and joining in the ever changing social transactions (Hamond, B & Haccou. R, 2006:18).

### **Recommendations**

Looking at the information collected and analysing it is found that adolescents with intellectual disabilities are taught the skills, as per the school curriculum.

1. Keeping in mind the long term goal of the student the curriculum should be planned.
2. Each activity should be focused looking at the future of the student.
3. Teachers should explore the type of job the individuals with intellectual disabilities needs to know and stimulate situations in class to teach the individuals using task analysis and for this parents' views and help to be taken.
4. Allowing visitors and bringing visitors to the school will also bring exposure to the students and develop their social skills and interaction skills practically.

### **Conclusion**

**A critical evaluation of work undertaken and future plans:** To seek answer for the research question the data collected were through questionnaires and interviews. Through this research process, I felt at sea but learning to swim (Blaxter. L, Hughes.C & M. Tight, 2006:1). Furthermore it encouraged me to think of research as a kind of spiral through which the various stages of the process had been always with different and developed insights but nevertheless the hardship to know about the activities taught to individuals with intellectual disabilities in schools. At the end of this research I feel satisfied with the way I investigated and the cooperation of the school staff to carry out my investigation and despite the various limitations with language as barrier I enjoyed the process of research and it had provoked a series of anxiety within me. However after completing the research I realize two things could have done differently:

1. Individuals with intellectual disabilities could have observed in the work situation to find out whether they can transfer the skills learnt in the schools to the job.
2. Could have interviewed more number of employers which could have given various dimensions into the research findings. However it was not possible given the time constraint.

Employment indeed is one of the key elements for the social inclusion and economic independence of all citizens of working age (Hamond B. V & Haccoum R, 2006:127). Individuals with intellectual disabilities like any other have many abilities, strengths and potentials, which are often overshadowed by their deficits (Hamond B. V & Haccoum R, 2006:128) looking at various aspects a right placement will definitely boost their self esteem and self confidence. The knowledge and ideas I gained in Prague can be used back home (India).

Future inquiry should examine more number of schools, workshops, work place.

### **Implication of my research finding**

This research has inspired curiosity within me to research what is happening in India. I have also realized the importance of taking into account the opinion of the parents before making an individual educational plan. This is unfortunately not given importance in most of the schools in India.

Through this research I would propose guideline for the teachers to develop a curriculum that would help them to train the student with intellectual disabilities.

- The teachers need to focus on skill training which will be beneficial for the individuals with intellectual disabilities for their future.
- The teachers need to explore the type of job an individual with intellectual disabilities needs to know and stimulate situations in school to teach the individual using task analysis.
- Individual educational plan for the students with intellectual disabilities should be developed keeping in mind the long term goal of the students.

This is only a pilot study, but it gave an in-depth knowledge on how to do research. Research is a process of learning (Blaxter. L, Hughes. C & M. Tight, 2006:150) and during the process learnt that only being employed is not a panacea for loneliness, or a guarantee of companionship (Atkinson and Williams, 1990, cited in Gilbert. P, accessed on 15/7/2007), in essence the dignity and value of each individual must be considered at all times. One of the most powerful statements of the past few years has been 'know me as I am' which is very true.

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