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# Bridging the Gap: The Essential Role of Life Skills Training in the Lives of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

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## Abstract

*Training of life skills to the children with intellectual disabilities improves and helps in their independence, self-confidence and social inclusion. But more often than not these children struggle with doing everyday things, communicating and achieving relationships, thus restricting their full place in society. By teaching them life skills, children are trained with necessary skills such as self care, problem solving, effective communication and social interaction, all of which is vital to improving the children's quality of life as well as to further their integration into social, educational and work environments. Such training also helps the children fend not only everyday but also boosts their self esteem since it creates an accomplishment and self independence feeling for the children. In addition, the delivery of life skills programs enhances the development of inclusive communities through reduction of stigma, encouraging understanding and making children with intellectual disabilities feel empowered to play an active role in society. In general, this paper emphasizes the necessity of life skills education for children with Intellectual Disabilities in terms of enabling them to live purposeful, independent lives whilst contributing to a more inclusive and loving society for all.*

**Keywords:** Life Skills Education, Intellectual Disabilities, Social Inclusion, Independence, Problem-Solving, Inclusive Communities, Empowerment.

## Introduction

Life skills education plays a crucial role in the development, independence, and quality of life of children with intellectual disabilities (ID). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills are adaptive behaviors that help individuals effectively manage everyday challenges (Prajapati et al., 2016). For children with ID, life skills training focuses on essential tasks such as personal hygiene, dressing, grooming, and basic household activities, which foster self-reliance and build confidence (Avaz, 2019). Social skills training is another critical component, enabling children to communicate effectively, exhibit appropriate social behaviors, and

develop meaningful relationships. These skills are essential for fostering social inclusion, reducing feelings of isolation, and supporting interactions with peers, family, and the broader community (Hankle et al., 2021). Cognitive delays often associated with intellectual disabilities can impact children’s ability to acquire academic skills and navigate social settings (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Many children with ID struggle with interpreting social cues and adhering to social norms, which can create difficulties in forming relationships (Jacob et al., 2022). Life skills education helps address these challenges by equipping them with practical tools to manage daily tasks and engage effectively in social interactions. By promoting independence and enhancing social competence, life skills education empowers children with ID to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, enabling them to participate more fully in their communities and enjoy enriched life experiences.

### **Understanding Intellectual Disabilities**

Intellectual disabilities involve significant challenges in understanding new or complex information, acquiring new skills, and functioning independently in daily life. This condition manifests before adulthood and has a lasting impact on development (Shree & Shukla, 2016). The American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR, 2002) defines intellectual disability as notable limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, starting before the age of 18 years.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPD) Bill further describes intellectual disability as a substantial disorder affecting thinking, mood, memory, or perception that impairs daily functioning, excluding conditions of incomplete cognitive development. Symptoms often appear during preschool, with delayed language development being a common early sign. These delays can hinder social skills and self-care abilities, with many challenges becoming evident only in school (Sulkes, 2022). Despite these difficulties, students with intellectual disabilities can learn and apply new skills, especially with inclusive teaching methods. Challenges may include slow cognitive processing, struggles with abstract concepts, and difficulties in social communication. Hands-on learning environments can be particularly beneficial (ADCET, 2023). Austed (2014) highlights the difficulties university students with intellectual disabilities face in understanding complex materials. Auditing courses-attending lectures without the pressure of assessments can provide these students access to learning and campus resources, such as libraries, fostering their engagement and growth (ADCET, 2023). courses and attending

### **Understanding the Challenges Faced by CwID**

Children with intellectual disabilities (CwID) encounter problems in daily life, the social relationship, school, and independence. Those challenges they face can be very different based on the party and the degree of their disability. Some of these general areas of difficulty might be below:

#### **Daily Activities**

**Basic Self Care Skills:** Basic self care skills such as dressing, feeding and personal hygiene can be difficult for CwID (García et al., 2020).

**Comprehension and following of routine tasks:** It is challenging for them to do daily activities which require a particular order of steps (García et al., 2020).

## **Social Exchanges**

Expressive and receptive communication issues: CwID might have difficulty in expressing themselves, understanding others and engaging in a meaningful dialogue (Pesau et al., 2020).

Pesau et al. (2020) states that ‘Social Skills’ can be difficult as they find it hard to master nonverbal communication, social cues and reciprocate interactions to establish and continue relationships.

Social Isolation: As a result of building friendships and involving themselves in group activities, children may become excluded from socializing and interact with peers (Pesau et al., 2020).

## **Education**

CwID (Kemp, Smith, & Siegal, 2023), are learning Difficulties such as reading, writing, Math are especially difficult for them.

Adaptations and Modifications: The curriculum needs to be changed and instructors might have to collaborate with inclusion personnel to have an environment that will aid in learning for CwID (Ahammed, 2012).

## **Independence**

Curriculum Changes and Inclusion Personnel: The curriculum has to be changed as the instructors should work together with inclusion personnel so that the environment is toilet which will assist in learning of CwID (Ahammed, 2012).

Mobility and Transportation: Some children with intellectual disability struggle to learn skills for independent use of public transport, or other mobility skills, to get around their community.

## **Importance of Life Skills Training**

Such life skills would include knowledge, attitudes, skills into a comprehensive approach to behavior change as defined by UNICEF. It is for this reason that this holistic approach is necessary for driving meaningful behavioral changes, most especially those geared towards minimizing risky behaviors. But, without knowledge, attitude-based skills, behavioral change is unlikely (Sidharthan, 2014). Prajapati et al. (2016) explain that life skills refers to adaptive and positive behavior used by individuals to meet challenges and deals that they meet on a daily basis.

Psychosocial competencies referred to by life skills education would encompass developing interpersonal skills to build healthy relationships, develop critical and creative thinking, solving issues and making informed decisions. It also stresses the elements like empathy and one’s capacity to suffer through challenges in life in a productive manner. For persons with disabilities, these competencies are of high value for fostering independence and self reliance (Prajapati et al., 2016).

Broadly speaking, life skills are covered under 3 main domains of thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. Problem solving, decision making and creative and critical thinking are the ways of its enhancing the thinking skills which is the logical reasoning. Communication, leadership, advocacy, teamwork and so on are under the chunk of social skills while emotional skills include areas such as self-awareness, stress management, coping with emotions effectively (Prajapati et al., 2016).

The WHO (1997) identifies ten core life skills which are necessary for total development including decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy and coping with emotions and stress. These skills are very important for children, especially children with disabilities, to be able to foster both independence and inclusion.

For instance, decision making, that is, giving them the power to choose what is productive in their everyday lives under the guidance of their parents (Johnson & Francis, 2021). Problem solving

teaches them how to deal with difficulties in a positive way and eliminate negative behaviors such as aggression (Johnson & Francis, 2021). In the area of creative thinking, it will develop flexibility and adaptability in child, enabling them to deal with diverse circumstances in life (Johnson & Francis, 2021). They develop the resilience with which they can cope with stress, give them a handle on dealing with stress, and manage stressful situations constructively (Johnson & Francis, 2021).

In addition, critical thinking enhances their capacity to discriminate and to think logically, and interpersonal relationship skills facilitate development and maintenance of significant interpersonal relationships. By fostering these relationships, these relationships in turn promote mental and social well being resulting in children having the support network that is necessary for their growth and development (Johnson & Francis, 2021).

Overall, life skills training is an invaluable addition to improve overall lifestyle particularly for those with disabilities. These skills allow children to achieve a fulfilling life and to participate in such a way that helps them to be independent, resilient, and reintegrated into society.

### **Key Areas of Life Skills Training**

Daily living (DL) is a very basic and commonplace activity to which most young, healthy people can assent to on their own. The inability to do basic daily chores may result in harmful situations and a low quality of life. Healthcare staff should be aware of the significance of assessing DLs in patients to identify those who require assistance. This activity describes everyday activities and emphasizes the role of the interprofessional team in assessing DLs to improve patient care and management (Edemekong et al., 2023). The activities of daily living are divided into two categories: fundamental ADLs and instrumental ADLs. The skills required to handle one’s basic physical needs, such as personal hygiene or grooming, dressing, toileting, transferring or ambulating, and feeding, are referred to as basic ADLs (BADLs). Personal hygiene is defined as the ability to bathe and groom oneself, as well as maintain dental hygiene, nail care, and hair care (Edemekong et al., 2023). Instrumental ADLs include activities such as food preparation, housekeeping, managing finances, and taking medications. The following are examples of fundamental ADLs:

- **Ambulating:** Refers to an individual’s ability to move independently from one position to another and walk unaided (Edemekong et al., 2023).
- **Feeding:** Describes a person’s capability to eat independently without assistance (Edemekong et al., 2023).
- **Dressing:** Involves selecting and wearing appropriate clothing independently (Edemekong et al., 2023).
- **Brushing Teeth:** Emphasizes the importance of maintaining oral hygiene by brushing teeth twice daily to prevent cavities. Children should be taught proper toothpaste application and brushing techniques (Euro School, 2023).
- **Hair Care:** Involves teaching children the appropriate methods for washing, brushing, and neatly tying their hair (Euro School, 2023).
- **Nail Care:** Highlights the necessity of trimming nails regularly to avoid dirt and germs. Children should also be discouraged from nail biting and instructed on proper nail trimming (Euro School, 2023).
- **Regular Exercise:** Encourages the inclusion of physical activities in daily routines to promote fitness and overall health (Euro School, 2023).
- **Deodorant:** As children approach puberty, they should understand the changes in their bodies, such as increased sweating and body odor, and the importance of applying deodorant to maintain personal hygiene (Euro School, 2023).

- Skincare: Focuses on basic skincare practices like using sunscreen outdoors and cleansing the face daily to maintain healthy skin (Euro School, 2023).
- Toileting: Refers to the ability to use the toilet independently, including accessing the toilet, using it appropriately, and maintaining personal cleanliness afterward (Edemekong et al., 2023).  
Learning how each basic ADL impacts an intellectual disability to care for themselves can help determine if a patient needs daily support. It can also assist the elderly or disabled in determining their eligibility for state or federal benefit programs.

### **Social Skills Development**

Social skills are essential in both personal and professional situations. Strong social skills can help you excel in your career, perform effectively during interviews, achieve career goals, and extend your professional network (Indeed, 2023). Several key social skills include:

- Communication: Clear language, proper spelling, and syntax are vital for effective expression (Indeed, 2023).
- Relationship-building skills: The ability to cultivate, build, and sustain connections is crucial, particularly when interacting with individuals with disabilities (Indeed, 2023; Johnson & Francis, 2021).
- Empathy: Understanding and recognizing others' emotions in various situations is a core social skill (Indeed, 2023).

### **Safety Skills**

Information on students' abilities is crucial for implementing education in both formal and non-formal institutions. By focusing on the talents of students, institutions can design effective learning programs, especially for special schools and inclusive education for students with special needs. Individual characteristics play a key role in the learning process (Yutikasari & Azizah, 2018). Research by Kemm et al. (2022) suggests that students with below-average intellectual capacity may not fully understand the importance of safety skills and require targeted guidance. Teachers can promote safety skills in the classroom through specific strategies (Teach Town, 2023):

- Staying in a defined area (consider your pupils who might elope)
- Checking to see if anything is hot.
- Identifying potentially hazardous or harmful household objects.
- Identifying a friend, an acquaintance, and a stranger.
- When a stranger knocks, keep the door shut and locked.
- Locating and utilizing a first-aid kit.
- Seeking medical attention for major cuts or injuries.
- Responding to fire alarms and reporting smoke/fire.
- Applying sunscreen.
- Safety in the water.
- Hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer.
- Medication administration and identification.
- Identifying emergency telephone numbers.
- Safely crossing the street.

### **Benefits of Life Skills Training**

Life skills education is vital for fostering independence and self-sufficiency in children, enabling them to navigate daily challenges and promote personal growth. Key skills include:

- **Time Management and Organization:** Instructing children in the utilization of tools such as planners and alarm clocks facilitate their ability to manage schedules, prioritize tasks, and enhance their independence (Communicator, 2021; Maryam et al., 2011).
- **Basic Budgeting and Financial Literacy:** The introduction of budgeting and financial planning concepts enables children to develop responsible spending habits and progress toward financial independence (Communicator, 2021; Maryam et al., 2011).
- **Problem-solving and Critical Thinking:** These cognitive skills empower children to analyze issues, engage in critical thinking, and develop practical solutions, thereby fostering self-confidence and autonomy (Maryam et al., 2011).
- **Communication Skills:** Effective communication mitigates misunderstandings, cultivates self-advocacy skills, and supports greater independence (Communicator, 2021; Maryam et al., 2011).
- **Social Interaction and Stress Management:** Life skills training enhances social competence and emotional resilience, enabling children to manage stress effectively and engage in meaningful interpersonal interactions (Maryam et al., 2011).

Practical activities like brainstorming, role-plays, and case studies help children develop these competencies, ensuring they thrive both personally and socially (Prajapati et al., 2016).

### **Challenges and Solutions**

Children with learning difficulties, particularly those with intellectual disabilities (ID), require love, support, and positive reinforcement to build self-worth and confidence (Kemp et al., 2023). Intellectual disabilities impact daily life, affecting basic skills such as speaking, walking, and learning (DDC, 2022). Life skills education is essential for promoting mental well-being and competence in children with ID, enabling them to manage daily challenges (Johnson & Francis, 2021). Mukti (2004) highlights that life skills development should meet children’s daily needs, incorporating real-life learning experiences.

Therapeutic interventions, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, and motor skill exercises, benefit children with ID, such as those with Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and Rett syndrome. Special education and support from caregivers are vital for fostering communication and social interaction (NICHD, 2021). For children with autism, behavioural, occupational, and speech-language therapies are effective in managing symptoms (NICHD, 2021).

Life skills teaching for children with ID often includes participatory methods like role-playing, practice, and feedback. These activities help children apply learned skills in different contexts. Educators also encourage family involvement through homework assignments (Johnson & Francis, 2021). Storytelling can further support emotional development and problem-solving skills.

### **Impact of Life Skill Training for Inclusion**

Life skills are essential abilities that help individuals navigate daily challenges, improve performance, and solve problems. These skills are divided into problem-specific skills for immediate issues and area-specific skills for enhancing performance in specific domains (Rajput, 2022). Life skills education is particularly important for children, as it equips them with the cognitive, emotional, social, and self-management skills needed to thrive in various situations. The World Health Organization defines life skills as abilities that enable adaptive, positive behavior, helping individuals manage life’s demands effectively. For children with disabilities, life skills education is crucial for overcoming social stigma, exclusion, and limited opportunities due to negative stereotypes. Such training helps children with intellectual disabilities develop the resilience, adaptability, and independence needed to engage fully in society, fostering inclusion

and empowering them to participate in education, work, and social activities (Rajput, 2022). Key areas where life skills education supports children with intellectual disabilities include:

1. **Independence and Self-Care Skills:** Teaching basic self-care, such as grooming and personal hygiene, empowers children to become more independent, boosting their self-esteem and enabling them to engage more fully in daily activities (ABA, 2023).
2. **Improved Social Interaction:** Social skills training helps children with intellectual disabilities form relationships, negotiate social situations, and build friendships, enhancing their social integration (ABA, 2023; Prajapati et al., 2016).
3. **Communication Proficiency:** Effective communication is critical. Life skills training supports children in expressing their needs and ideas, improving interactions with peers, teachers, and others, leading to better social inclusion (ABA, 2023; Rajput, 2022).
4. **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:** These skills enable children with intellectual disabilities to face challenges and adapt to changing environments. Such skills as making decisions, solving problems, taking initiative and all of that in social, educational, and professional settings are what they learn (ABA, 2023).
5. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Life skills training aims at accommodating alterations in the routine & social environment of the child, hence making it easier for the child to participate in several activities (ABA, 2023; Prajapati et al., 2016).

Life skills training which is taught to children with intellectual disability helps them become independent, socially functioning and community active members of the society that is more inclusive.

### **Conclusion**

Rehabilitation of a kid with intellectual deficit is vital to boosting his overall and quality of life. Such skills give children the ability to do routine things, interact with people, function on their own and ultimately feel good in themselves and build greater self esteem and confidence. Incorporating these children in life skill development is enabling them play an active role in the world and also contribute in their community positively to individual and community development. This has to be raised awareness, combating misconceptions, and funding programs that address the specific needs of children with intellectual problems. To make sure these programs are available and achieve the desired results, they require sufficient funding, resources as well as community involvement. Apart from that, empowering these children allows us to develop them socially and help them become independent. This ability to succeed in everyday life, fulfill relationships and lead a satisfying life. These initiatives are good enough to support that such an inclusive, the understanding society that worth the dignity of all its members. Investing in training of life skills of children having an intellectual impairment does not only mean preparing them for better, but it also means for a just and compassionate world for every one.

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