



An Analysis of Communication and Social Skills in Individuals with Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

Individuals with intellectual disabilities (IwID) encounter persistent challenges in securing meaningful employment. This is primarily due to their difficulty in accessing information about job opportunities in their residential areas and a lack of guidance on the application process. Understanding their strengths and weaknesses related to job options is also a challenge. Limited access to information further narrows their employment prospects, exacerbated by employers' reluctance to hire individuals with intellectual disabilities. A significant barrier to successful employment is the lack of employability skills. To prepare IwID for independent living, it's essential to assess their current proficiency in employability skills, making it possible to provide the necessary interventions. This study focuses on two crucial 21st-century employability skills: communication and social skills, among adolescents and young adults with intellectual disabilities. The research found that while individuals with mild intellectual disabilities had similar levels of communication and social skills, they outperformed those with moderate intellectual disabilities.

Key Words: Communication and Social Skills, Intellectual Disability

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Introduction

Gainful employment is a fundamental requirement for leading an independent and comfortable life. Individuals, both with and without disabilities, need specific skills to confidently enter the job market. While those without disabilities have ample opportunities to develop employability skills during their education and training, individuals with disabilities face challenges in this regard. Possessing employability skills is particularly crucial for individuals with disabilities, as these skills are essential for even applying for jobs.

The United Nations has identified a set of "Employability Skills of the 21st Century," which are deemed necessary for success in today's workforce. These skills can be categorized into learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. Learning skills include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Literacy skills encompass information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy. Life skills include flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills. In the current job market, employability goes beyond occupation-related skills.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities experience delays or deficits in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. They typically undergo early intervention and special education. During adolescence and young adulthood, they engage in pre-vocational and vocational training programs, aiming to prepare them for future employment and independent living. However, they often struggle to secure gainful employment. Research has shown that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities exhibit 75% independence in work readiness-related skills.

Two fundamental skills, social skills, and communication, play a vital role in any environment, especially in the workplace. Proficiency in these skills enables individuals to interact effectively with others, share ideas, seek assistance, and improve their social acceptability. Additionally, these skills help individuals gain recognition from employers and colleagues. This study aims to determine the proficiency levels of these two essential employability skills in individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To find out the current levels of communication skills among individuals with intellectual disabilities undergoing vocational training.
2. To find out whether differences exist in the levels of these skills among individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities.

Research Questions:

1. What is the average level of communication skills relevant to preparedness for employment among individuals with intellectual disabilities?
2. What is the average level of social skills relevant to preparedness for employment among individuals with intellectual disabilities?
3. Are there differences in the average levels of communication skills between individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities? If yes, what is the difference?
4. Are there differences in the average levels of social skills among individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities? If yes, what is the difference?
5. Is there any difference in mean scores for both skills based on annual family income levels?

Methodology:

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research methodology. The sample consisted of individuals with intellectual disabilities aged 18-25 undergoing vocational training (n=40). Their proficiency in communication and social skills was assessed using relevant sections of the standardized tool 'Vocational Assessment Programming System' (VAPS). The dependent variables were communication skill and social skill, while the independent variable was the level of disability. Data analysis was conducted using a student's t-test for two independent groups.

Results

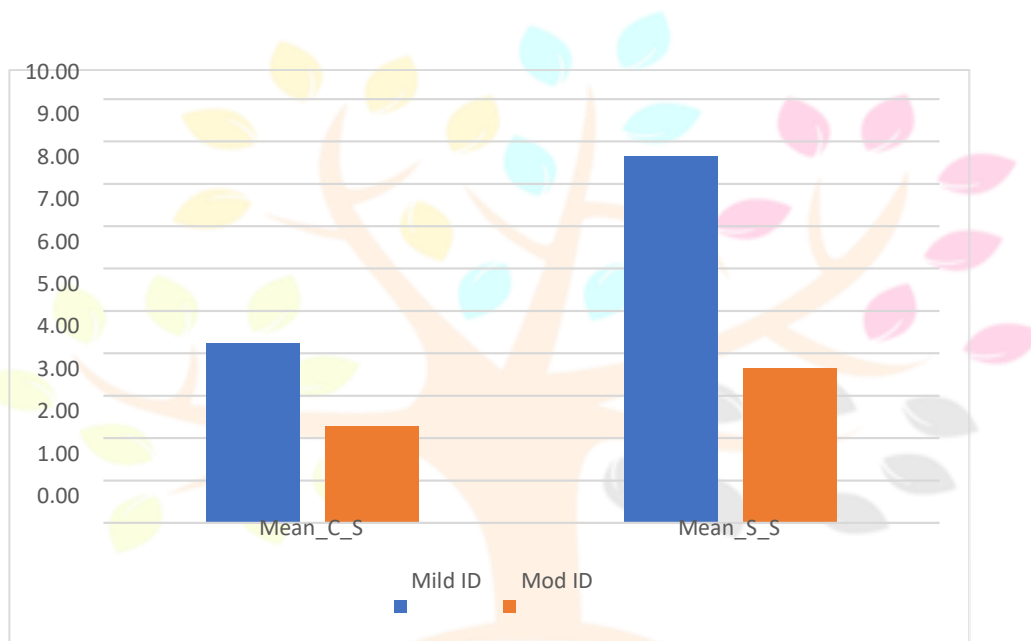
The first part of the research hypothesis was that there are differences in the levels of communication and social skills among adolescent and young adults in vocational training. To analyze this part of the research hypotheses, the average scores of the individuals who participated in this study (n=40) for communication and social skill component of VAPS tool, were compared. They are presented in table 1. Since the total scores for communication skill and that for social skill are different, the original average scores are converted into percentage to facilitate comparison.

Table 1: Average communication and social scores for adolescents and young adults in the study (n=40).

Skill	Average score	Total score	Percentage
Communication Skill	3.7	5	74
Social Skill	7.3	10	72

It can be seen from table 1 that all the individuals with ID in the study, have similar levels of communication and social skills. The next part of the analysis focused on the finding if there are differences in the two skills based on level of disability – mild and moderate ID. To do this, the descriptive statistics of mean score in both communication and social skills for mild and moderate disability were plotted. This is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Bar graph depicting the mean scores on communication and social skills for individuals with mild (n=29) and moderate ID (n=11).



It can be seen from figure 1 that individuals with mild ID are better than individuals with moderate ID in both communication and social skills. In order to ascertain if this difference was due to the level of disability or due to variation by chance, the inferential statistical test, t-test for two independent samples was conducted. The results of the t-tests are shown in tables 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 2: T-test results for difference in mean communication skill for individuals with mild and moderate ID

Group	N	Mean_Comm_Skill	p-value for t-test
Mild ID	29	4.24	0.00
Mod ID	11	2.27	

Table 3: T-test results for difference in mean social skill for individuals with mild and moderate ID

Group	N	Mean_Social_Skill	p-value for t-test
Mild ID	29	8.66	0.00
Mod ID	11	3.64	

The difference observed in the mean scores for communication and social skills among adolescents and young adults with mild and moderate ID seen in figure 1 was tested using the t-test. The results of the t-test show that the difference in levels of communication skills (table 2) and social skills (table 3) are statistically significant. This indicates that the differences seen in the sample are actually due to the level of disability and not due to any change or natural variation.

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Discussion & Conclusion:

This study revealed that individuals with intellectual disabilities in vocational training programs possess communication and social skills at levels averaging 70-75% based on assessments using the relevant domains of the VAPS tool. Furthermore, young adults with mild intellectual disabilities displayed higher levels of these skills compared to individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities. These findings suggest the potential to facilitate the development of employability skills for this target population by creating specialized intervention strategies and programs. Further studies can explore the existing levels of other employability skills for individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, followed by the development of appropriate training programs and evaluations of their effectiveness.

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