

Impact of a Life Skills Program on Self-Awareness among Secondary and Pre-Vocational Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Life skills programs are essential for fostering independence and social adaptation among students with intellectual disabilities. However, the differential impact of such programs across varying educational levels (secondary vs. pre-vocational) remains underexplored. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of a life skills intervention on self-awareness among special needs students with intellectual disabilities at the secondary and pre-vocational levels and to compare the differential outcomes between the two groups. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was employed. A total of 100 special needs students with intellectual disabilities (54 pre-vocational, 46 secondary) were selected. A life skills program was implemented, and self-awareness scores were assessed using a standardized tool before and after the intervention. Posttest mean scores, standard deviations, and an independent samples t-test were computed to compare the effectiveness between the two levels. The posttest mean score for secondary-level students ($M = 89.39$, $SD = 5.20$) was significantly higher than that of pre-vocational students ($M = 82.00$, $SD = 7.83$). The t-test revealed a t-value of 3.45 ($df = 99$), which was significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), indicating a statistically significant difference in favor of secondary-level student. The life skills program was effective for both groups; however, secondary-level students demonstrated significantly greater gains in self-awareness compared to pre-vocational students. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups was rejected. These findings suggest that while life skills interventions benefit all special needs students, developmental and cognitive readiness may influence the magnitude of improvement.

Keywords: Life skills program, self-awareness, intellectual disability, secondary education, pre-vocational education, special education

Introduction

Intellectual disabilities affect various aspects of cognitive, social, emotional, and adaptive functioning, often creating challenges for students in understanding themselves, communicating their emotions, and interacting effectively with others. Secondary and pre-vocational students with intellectual disabilities face additional difficulties during adolescence because this stage of life involves major psychological, emotional, and social transitions. In educational settings, these students may struggle with low self-confidence, poor decision-making abilities, limited social participation, and inadequate self-awareness. Self-awareness refers to the ability of individuals to recognize their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, behaviors, and personal needs. It is considered one of the most important life skills because it helps individuals understand their identity and respond appropriately to situations in daily life. For students with intellectual disabilities, the development of self-awareness is essential for improving communication skills, emotional regulation, social adjustment, independence, and vocational readiness. However, traditional educational approaches often focus more on academic or functional training while giving less importance to emotional and psychological development. This creates a need for structured life skills programs that specifically target self-awareness and related competencies among such students. Life skills education, recommended by organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNESCO, emphasizes practical psychosocial skills that enable individuals to handle daily challenges effectively. These programs include activities related to self-understanding, communication, problem-solving, emotional control, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making, all of which contribute significantly to personal growth and social inclusion.

A life skills program designed for secondary and pre-vocational students with intellectual disabilities can play a transformative role in enhancing self-awareness and promoting holistic development. Such programs use interactive methods including role-play, group discussion, storytelling, games, self-expression activities, and experiential learning techniques that are suitable for the learning needs of intellectually disabled students. Through repeated practice and guided participation, students become more capable of identifying their feelings, recognizing their abilities, expressing their opinions, and understanding their behavior in social situations. Improved self-awareness further supports independent living skills, vocational preparedness, and better interpersonal relationships, which are important for successful integration into society. In pre-vocational settings, self-awareness also helps students identify their interests, strengths, and limitations related to future work opportunities, thereby improving confidence and motivation. Furthermore, life skills training contributes to reducing behavioral problems, anxiety, frustration, and dependency among students with intellectual disabilities. Teachers, parents, and special educators increasingly recognize that emotional and social competencies are as important as academic skills for the overall well-being of these learners. Therefore, examining the impact of a life skills program on self-awareness becomes highly significant in the field of special education. This study aims to explore how structured life skills interventions influence the self-awareness levels of secondary and pre-vocational students with intellectual disabilities and to highlight the importance of integrating life skills education into special and inclusive educational programs for their long-term personal, social, and vocational development.

Life skills are many but most essential life skills are as listed by WHO are the following.⁴

1. Self awareness
2. Empathy
3. Critical Thinking
4. Creative thinking
5. Decision Making
6. Problem solving
7. Effective communication
8. Interpersonal Relationship
9. Coping with stress
10. Coping with emotions

Self awareness

This paper deals with self awareness of students with intellectual disability of secondary and pre vocational classes of special school in Ujjain. 100 students were selected using purposive sample selection method

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of a life skills intervention. Students from two distinct educational levels—Secondary and Pre-Vocational—were selected. A pretest was administered separately to each group prior to the implementation of the life skills program. Following the intervention, a posttest was conducted. The mean scores revealed a significant improvement in both secondary and pre-vocational students, indicating the program's overall positive impact.

The objective of this research was to examine the differential impact of the Life Skills Program on special needs students with intellectual disabilities at the Secondary and Pre-Vocational levels of MPVSS, as measured by posttest self-awareness scores.

Methodology:

Data related to this objective were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to determine the effectiveness of the life skills program on students' self-awareness levels. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation (SD), were calculated to summarize and describe the overall performance and variability of posttest scores obtained by the participants in both groups. These statistical measures provided a clear understanding of the average achievement and distribution pattern of scores among secondary and pre-vocational students with intellectual disabilities. To examine whether a statistically significant difference existed between the posttest performances of the two groups, an independent samples t-test was applied. This inferential statistical method was used to compare the mean scores and evaluate the impact of the intervention across educational levels. The level of significance for the study was fixed at 0.01, indicating that differences observed between the groups were considered statistically significant only when the probability of error was less than one percent.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the life skills program had a positive impact on the self-awareness levels of secondary and pre-vocational students with intellectual disabilities. Analysis of the posttest scores revealed noticeable improvement in students' ability to recognize their emotions, understand their strengths and weaknesses, express personal feelings, and interact more confidently in social situations. Both groups benefited from the intervention; however, secondary-level students demonstrated comparatively higher mean scores than pre-vocational students. The independent samples t-test showed that the difference between the groups was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that the program was more immediately effective for secondary students.

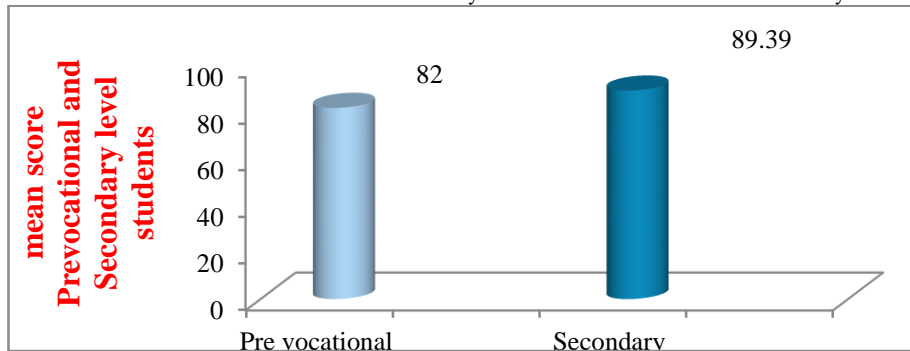
The findings may be attributed to differences in cognitive adaptability, learning pace, and responsiveness to structured educational activities. Secondary students possibly possessed greater readiness to engage in reflective and communication-based exercises included in the life skills program. In contrast, pre-vocational students may require longer duration, repeated practice, and more practical teaching methods to achieve similar levels of improvement. The study supports the importance of integrating life skills education into special education programs, as it contributes not only to self-awareness but also to emotional adjustment, social participation, and independent functioning among students with intellectual disabilities.

Mean Scores, SD, 't' value of Prevocational and secondary special students with intellectual disability

Variables	N	Mean	SD	't'
Pre vocational self-awareness score	54	82.00	7.83	3.45**
Secondary self-awareness score	46	89.39	5.20	
**significance level 0.01 df=99				

The above table indicates that 't' values is 3.45 which is significant at 0.01 level and the mean posttest score for Pre-Vocational students was 82.00 (SD = 7.83), while the Secondary level students achieved a mean score of 89.39 (SD = 5.20). A clear difference in mean scores was observed, with the Secondary level mean being significantly higher than that of the Pre-Vocational level. The independent samples t-test yielded a t-value of 3.45 with 99 degrees of freedom, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates that the observed difference between the two groups is not due to chance.

Post-Test Mean Scores – Pre-Vocational and Secondary Level Students with Intellectual Disability



The above graphical Representation illustrates the posttest mean score differences between the two groups. The secondary level students (M = 89.39) outperformed the pre-vocational level students (M = 82.00), further supporting the statistical findings.

Discussion:

The findings demonstrate that while the life skills program was effective for both groups, it was particularly more effective for secondary-level special students with intellectual disabilities. This enhanced effectiveness may be attributed to several factors: (a) greater cognitive maturity and abstract reasoning abilities among secondary students, (b) longer cumulative exposure to structured educational environments, and (c) better generalization of learned skills. In contrast, pre-vocational students, who are typically at an earlier developmental or academic stage, may require more prolonged, repetitive, or concretely anchored interventions to achieve comparable outcomes. The significant t-value (3.45) confirms that the difference is not random but reflects a true group-based differential effect.

Conclusion:

The findings of the study confirm that the life skills program is an effective pedagogical intervention for improving self-awareness among students with intellectual disabilities at both secondary and pre-vocational educational levels. Self-awareness, which includes recognizing one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, behavior, and personal identity, is a critical component of overall personality development and independent functioning. The program provided students with structured opportunities to engage in activities such as self-expression, communication exercises, role-playing, and reflective learning, which contributed significantly to their emotional and social growth. The improvement observed among participants demonstrates that life skills education can positively influence the psychological and adaptive functioning of special needs learners and support their inclusion in educational and social environments. The study further reveals that secondary-level students experienced comparatively greater and more immediate improvement in self-awareness than pre-vocational students. This difference may be associated with factors such as age, learning adaptability, cognitive responsiveness, and exposure to structured classroom activities. Pre-vocational students often require more practical reinforcement, individualized attention, and repeated learning experiences to achieve similar outcomes. Therefore, educators, special teachers, and curriculum planners should adopt differentiated instructional strategies while implementing life skills programs for diverse learner groups. Approaches such as extended training duration, multi-modal teaching methods, activity-based learning, visual aids, peer interaction, and continuous feedback mechanisms may help pre-vocational learners benefit more effectively from such interventions. Overall, integrating structured life skills education into special education curricula can contribute greatly to the emotional, social, and vocational development of students with intellectual disabilities.

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