

## **Effectiveness of life skills training on social adjustment and communication skills of mentally retarded female students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of life skills training on social adjustment, communication skills and social skills of educable mentally retarded female student in Abhar. This is an experimental study with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population includes all educable mentally retarded high school female students (14-19 years old) studying in exceptional schools of Abhar city in the academic year 2016-2017. The statistical sample includes 52 mentally retarded female students (14-19 years old). To do the study, the researcher referred to the files available in Pouyan School and Ofogh Institute. 44 students with same Wechsler IQ and disability were selected. After taking pre-test, 30 students with lower levels of social adjustment, communication skills and social skills were selected, aligned in pairs, and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group (n = 15) received life skills training for ten 90-minute sessions over eight weeks. Data was collected via Bell Social Adjustment Questionnaire, Interpersonal Skills Inventory and TISS Social Skills Questionnaire. The results of ANCOVA analysis showed that training life skills leads to increased level of social adjustment, improved communication skills, and increased levels of social skills of the participants. It is concluded that life skills can increase social adjustment, communication skills and social skills.*

*Keyword: Life school, Social adaptation, Communication skills, social skills, Mentally retarded students*

### **Introduction**

Since long times ago human being has wanted to find a fellow-man, and gradually as s/he became social, took steps to organize a family. The majority of people wish to have healthy, intelligent and efficient children for society, and certainly any defect or backwardness in the path of growth not only does not take the burden off society, but also imposes heavy burdens on the family and society (Kakavand, 2014). Exceptional children are the product of intertwined factors that interact with each other. Genetic findings show that pathogens are more common in inbred marriages than in non-inbred marriages. This is because the multiplicity of inheritance is prevalent in such marriages due to inbreeding and common ancestry (Ghobari Bonab, 2007). In the meantime, the family institution has a serious duty to protect, take care, train, and establish a healthy communication with children in order to help their independence, even if the child is mentally retarded (Turnbull, Turnbull, Ervin and Soodak 1995: Translated by Sharifi Daramadi, Hejazi, Fallah and Azdalmaleki 2009). In Iran, out of 18 million students, there are at least 1,800,000 children and students of 6-18 years old who need special programs (Afrooz, 2007).

Some of these children may belong to families with more than one exceptional child. Having two or more exceptional children not only affects the child but also the parents and impose financial and psychological pressure on the family (Torres and Shaw, 1998; quoted by Ghezel Sefloo, 1999). It needs to be considered that life skills training is inevitable for growth in social skills, communication skills, social adjustment and job skills (Behrad, 2005).

The acquisition of social skills is a necessity for the students with intellectual disabilities. Formation of social relationships, the quality of social interactions, social adjustment and even mental health shape the main axis of social development (Theodoro et al., 2005). According to the studies, children who lack social skills will reveal negative consequences in the long and even short term. They will also have more severe problems during youth and adulthood (Rin and Mark, 1979; quoted by Lowell & Barba, 1993).

Communication skills is a variable under discussion since human relationships are essential to satisfy the basic needs. To establish positive and healthy relations with others is the key to human growth and perfection. Whatever we are today and what we will be in the future are both the result of our relations. They shape our behavior as a social human being and also play a major role in the uniqueness of our personality, identity and self-concept (Sanaei, 1998). Everyone experiences a lot of relations during the life. For many of us, the relationship with parents and other close relatives is perceived as the foremost relation. As we grow older, other relationships become important: making friends, going to work, establishing a romantic relationship, etc. are among the events of daily life that involve interpersonal interactions and have a great impact on life quality. We begin by exploring affiliation- the basic need to relate to others- and then we notice some specific and momentous relations (Weir, 2001; Translated by Biabangard, 2003). Through communication skills, individuals get involved in interpersonal interactions and communication processes in which people share their information, thoughts and feelings through verbal and non-verbal exchange (Harji and Dixon, 2004; Firoozbakht, 1998).

Communication skills are the essentials of a healthy and productive life. They are a set of abilities that enable us to adapt to others and develop positive and useful behaviors, leading to the proper role-playing in society without harming ourselves or others. Actively listening ability is another communication skill addressed in interpersonal relationships. This skill is a form of active participation in a conversation; an activity that helps the speaker to convey the meaning (Yousefi, 2006; quoted by Ghasemi, 2013). Controlling and regulating emotions plays a significant role in establishing, sustaining and health of social relationships. Totally, this skill refers to the ability to express and control emotions and coping with feelings and emotions of others (Coleman, 1995). The acquisition of social adjustment is the other factor needed for intellectually disabled students. They are placed in situations to succeed according to their basic educational standards. Their parents and teachers demand disabled students to behave beyond their ability. Or, they are expected to behave like others, and whenever they could not succeed or get adapted, they are looked down upon. Hence, the desire to feel competent through success is suppressed in mentally retarded children (Shantz, 1982 & Grossman, 1983). To develop adaptive behavior is one of the main goals of educating mentally retarded children. Adaptive behavior is not mere obedience to the use of force, but it means increasing one's ability to adapt to situations without being supervised and led by others. This adaptation includes such a behavior that helps the person to adapt to situations with the least anxiety; it is a behavior that helps the growth of the person.

Mentally retarded children, like other children, have a number of basic needs. Although the desire for security or a sense of belonging is strong in all children, when a child is unable to adapt to a plan set by society, he or she cannot see him/herself as an integral part of that social group (Bayanzadeh and Arjmandi, 2003).

Students with mental retardation also need to acquire life skills. We all confront challenges and problems during the life. Having resources and skills that help us to deal with difficulties in the best way gives a feel of comfort (Klinikah, 1995; translated by Mohammad Khani, 2009). Being independent is critical for educating people with disabilities. Training life skills for independent living aims at allowing people with mental disabilities to live independently in communities. Society's attitude towards mentally retarded children is changing all over the world. The current educational systems is expected to prepare this group of children to enter adult life in the best way. Improving health, expanding education systems, and reducing national and manpower costs require providing adequate and necessary education for daily living. Training mentally disabled children needs to be based on new scientific findings and increasing practical skills (Behrad, 2005).

### **Method, statistical population and sample size**

This is an experimental study in which the subjects were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The study is to evaluate the effectiveness of life skills training on social adjustment and communication skills of mentally retarded female students. The statistical population includes 52 high school girl students with mental disabilities studying in Pouyan School affiliated with exceptional education for educable mentally retarded children, and Ofogh Institute affiliated with Welfare Organization of Abhar city (Zanjan province) during 2016-2017.

Pouyan Exceptional School and Ofogh Institute were selected according to the availability sampling and because of the staff cooperation and satisfying the required equipment.

### **Sampling**

First, 52 subjects were selected based on age (14-19 years), educational level (first, second and third high school), Wechsler revised IQ test (according to health records, cooperation of rehabilitation instructor and health instructor of Pouyan school and Ofogh Institute) (75-90). They didn't suffer any specific physical, motor and brain problems (according to health records, cooperation of rehabilitation instructor and health instructor of Pouyan School and Ofogh Institute). Then, as a pre-test, students were asked to respond the Bell Adaptation Questionnaire (1934) and interpersonal skills inventory. In the next step, 30 students with low scores in social adjustment and communication skills were selected. Finally, they were leveled in pairs and randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The intelligence of the studied students was measured by Wechsler intelligence test. Their IQ ranged from 85 to 70. Most of the subjects' fathers were worker and their mothers were housewives. They were almost economically similar.

Interpersonal Skills Inventory: This inventory includes 19 items to assess the level of interpersonal communication skills in different people. It is a Likert type scale which is presented in the table below (Monjemizadeh, 2012). Monjemizadeh (2012) calculated the concurrent validity of the questionnaire and found a strong correlation between the inventory and the questionnaire for effective communication skills ( $r = 0.698$ ); thus, concurrent validity of the interpersonal skills inventory was confirmed (Monjemizadeh, 2012).

### **Administration of questionnaires**

To run the pre-test, the students were assured of answers confidentiality. Answer sheets were distributed among them, every item was read for the participants and the items were explained for clarification.

### **Statistical Methods**

All of the questionnaires were administered in groups. First, the purpose of the questionnaires was explained to the students and they were told that they do not need to mention their first and last name, so they were asked to answer the question honestly. Then, the researcher read the instructions and gave the necessary explanations in each section. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Frequency, tables, mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive analysis. Moreover, according to

the research design and the hypotheses and data, univariate covariance analysis was applied at the inferential statistics level, run via SPSS version 22.

### Educational box

The content of training sessions for the experimental group was derived from the full collection of life skills by Chris L.Kleinke, translated by Mohammadkhani (2016), along with supplementary materials that the researcher had prepared and compiled from existing sources. Using Power point, the content was presented to the experimental group in ten 90-minute sessions over 8 weeks. At the end of the last session, a post-test was run for adaptation and communication skills in the two groups.

### Findings

#### Testing

**Hypothesis 1:** Life skills training increases the social adjustment of mentally retarded female students.

Considering that the effect of life skills training on increasing the adjustment of students with mental retardation is examined for the experimental group's post-test results, univariate covariance is used to analyze the hypothesis. The result is reported in the table below.

**Table 1: Covariance analysis for the effect of life skills training on social adjustment**

Variation source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Significance level	Impact factor (Eta squared)
Group	60.121	1	60.121	11.37	0.002	0.301
Pre-test	141.89	1	141.89	83.26	0.0001	0.513
Error	142.77	27	5.29			
Total	344.78	29				

According to the table, ANCOVA results show that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of social adjustment ( $F = 60.121$  and  $P < 0.001$ ). Therefore, with a confidence level of 99% it can be said that training life skills affects students' social adjustment and thus the first hypothesis is confirmed.

**Hypothesis 2:** Training life skills improves communication skills of mentally retarded female students.

ANCOVA analysis for post-test RESULTS in the experimental group is conducted in order to test the second hypothesis (Table 2).

**Table 2: Analysis of covariance to examine the effect of life skills training on communication skills**

Variation source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Significance level	Impact factor (Eta squared)
Group	1377.01	1	1377.01	25.61	0.001	0.124
Post-test	410.95	1	410.95	7.87	0.009	0.264
Error	1409.79	27	52.12			
Total	3157.68	29				

According to the table, ANCOVA results show that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of communication skills ( $F = 25.61$  and  $P < 0.001$ ). Therefore, with a confidence level of 99% it can be said that training life skills affects students' communication skills and thus the second hypothesis is confirmed.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Consistent results**

Our results are consistent with the findings of Madadi and Soltani (2016), Badie, Jamali Pa Ghaleh and Fiqan (2014), Shahabi Nejad (2012), Poor Chenari and Golzari (2008), Sepah Mansour (2007), Behrad (2005), Kazemi et al. (2014), Abgart et al. (2011), Jahuda (2010, quoted by Aghajani, 2008), Croter (2009), Kahan et al. (2008), Tatile (2006), Jahanian (2012), Lesani et al. (2012) ), Rahmati, Adib, Tahmasebian and Sedghpour (2011), Maghsoudi et al. (2011), Tuzandeh Jani and Sedighi (2011) and Arabi (2001) who have studied the effectiveness of life skills training on increasing social adjustment. Results of studies conducted by Thomson et al. (2009), Kahan et al. (2008), Smith (2006), Ahmad Khani, Hyudi and Pour Mohammad Reza Tajrishi (2015), Abdollahi Yagrabadi (2015), Hassanvand Amouzadeh (2015), Mohammadian, Shaarbaf et al. (2013) ), Khanzadeh et al. (2012), Kian Manesh (2012), Khalatbari and Azizzadeh Haghighi (2011), Javadipour, Azizi and Norouzzadeh (2011), Soltani Ali Abai, Amirjan, Younesi, Azkhosh and Asgari (2011) Soleimani (2010) , Kayvand, Shafiabadi and Sudani (2009), Amiri Barmkoohi (2008) and Haji Amini et al. (2008) on the effectiveness of life skills training in improving communication skills are consistent with the results of our research.

### **Explanation**

It can be said that having life skills help individuals to endure difficult and challenging situations, to react appropriately by recognizing communication styles, and to act bravely based on communication style. As a result, they will be able to behave more flexibly, they will feel more dynamic and active and they will experience cheerful and respectful relations. Further, the repetition of life skills exercises in real-life situations develops an adaptive procedure and style that creates a sense of well-being and satisfaction as a prominent behavioral feature. This study suggests that a defined program for life skills training can expand the adaptive skills of subjects and reduce the severity of maladaptation. Some adolescents usually do not have adaptive and problem-solving skills and thus they act impulsively when they are physiologically motivated. By participating in life skills training programs along with cognitive reconstruction, people can acquire the needed skills, react adaptively in different situations, and improve their social relationships. In addition, having communication skills is considered as one of the most basic types of life skills that increase self-esteem and self-confidence. Improved self-esteem strengthens the ability to establish a good relationship. As a result, the individual will feel valued and useful and s/he will be able to express himself /herself more appropriately in social interactions. S/he will be able to perform better and more effectively in communicating with others due to the positive attitude about his/her talents and competencies. Thus, using the techniques that the individual learn, s/he can easily communicate with others.

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