



# Unspoken Bonds: Navigating Non-Verbal Communication in Mentally Retarded Children

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## Abstract

The unique traits of children with special needs call for teachers to adeptly integrate each child's diverse abilities and strengths. This encompasses effectively addressing the communication needs of children with Mental Retardation, ensuring that they receive the same level of interaction as their typically developing peers. Mentally retarded children often face difficulty with verbal communication, which can impede their social interaction and overall development. Mental retardation is a term used to describe individuals with significant limitations in cognitive functioning that can affect a person's ability to communicate. It is an important aspect of human interaction and can be especially important for children with mental retardation, as they may have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. To effectively communicate with a mentally retarded child, it is important to pay attention to their non-verbal cues and respond appropriately. One key characteristic that enables exceptional children to live independently is their ability to communicate. It is also important to provide opportunities for children with mental retardation to practice non-verbal communication, this can be done through various activities. Therefore, using educational methods that improve and enhance such abilities in these children is very important and necessary. Parents, teachers, and caregivers can support children with mental retardation by responding appropriately to their non-verbal cues. This paper aims to explore the importance of nonverbal communication in mentally retarded children. This paper also discusses the role of teachers, parents, and caregivers in promoting effective non-verbal communication in mentally retarded children and strategies that can be used to enhance their communication.

**Keywords:** Non-Verbal Communication, Mentally Retarded Children, Educational Endeavors, Teaching Process

## Introduction

When it comes to the learning activities of children with mental retardation, it is considered to be different from average normal children, as students with mental retardation learn by imitating others; they have an academic disability defined by intellectual or cognitive function. Since the 1970s, researchers have been interested in the measurement of behaviors, communication skills, and the actions that go with them. According to the studies, people with poor communication skills may be rejected by their peers during school years and even years later in various life situations. Meanwhile, people with high communication skills are more comfortable communicating with others, and by managing their excitement and understanding the excitement of their audience, they express their demands constructively, and as a result, they have a more robust social network. According to the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), mental retardation is defined as having a level of intellectual ability lower than the average normal child while also experiencing obstacles to adaptive behavior during development that leads to poor performance of children's education (Heward, 2009: 132). Students struggle to communicate with others as a result of these difficult adaptive abilities.

## Mentally Retarded Children

Jean Itard (1774-1837), an environmentalist and physician, was a pioneer in the field of Mental Retardation when he discovered a boy about twelve years old in the forest of Aveyron. No one knew his antecedents; having lived in the jungle, the boy displayed animal-like behaviors such as eating, running, and sleeping. Itard worked with a boy for five years because he couldn't speak. He developed socialization and self-help skills through repeated rewarding trials. Underdeveloped children, mental handicaps, mental retardation, intellectual disability, and tunagrahita are some general terms used to refer to a child with intellectual impairment. People frequently describe how difficult it is for a child with an intellectual disability to adapt to academic and environmental sciences (Mukhtar, 2009). The American Association on Mental Retardation defined the disorder in 1992 as "Mental retardation is a characteristic of disability that causes significant obstacles in intellectual function and adaptive skill"/mental retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitations of both intellectual functioning and adaptive skills" The above definition emphasizes that disorder is a challenge in a person's development period for adapting and integrating with his environment in developing skills. The second pioneer was Edward Seguin (1812-1880), who studied Itard and worked with him on mental defectives. Seguin developed a technique "Physiological method". Montessori (1870-1950), an Italian doctor who worked in a psychiatric clinic in Rome, studied Itard in-depth and developed her technique to educate mentally retarded children.

The term mental retardation is a label used to identify an observed performance deficit i.e., failure to demonstrate age-appropriate intellectual and social behavior. They respond slowly to what others say and to what happens in their surroundings. Sometimes they do not respond at all. They can't express their thoughts, needs, and feelings, and also face problems in learning new and different tasks as easily as others. Along with the above-mentioned things it is also difficult for them to comprehend what they see, hear, touch, smell, taste, or even take simple decisions. They have a lack of

concentration, short-tempered, inability to remember, lack of coordination, and delay in development. Deficits in communication, language, and speech can make them slow in learning other skills which are necessary for independent living. Communication is essential for every living being to share ideas, feelings, desires, emotions, etc. Everyone is either giving or receiving information throughout the day. These two aspects, i.e., receptive and expressive languages, are very active in exchanging this information. Thus, it is necessary to provide help to mentally retarded children in learning to communicate better. Clark and Delia (1974), Delia Kline and Burleson (1979), and O'Keefe (1979) studies showed that the mentally retarded could learn complex community adaptation skills if they are trained. Social perspective-taking behavior was a very important prerequisite for successful interpersonal communication. Another study conducted by Black and Cleworth (1978) on the communicative skills of moderately mentally retarded children aged 13 to 14 years (I.Q. 40-50) indicated that moderately retarded children if given appropriate training could interact verbally. Matson (1981) did a study on 20 mildly mentally retarded persons on the use of independent training to teach shopping behavior in a natural environment to develop social skills. Snell (1988) recommended curriculum and methodology for individuals with disabilities to enhance the communication abilities of mentally retarded children. Mundy, Peter, Sigman, Marian, Kesari, Connie, Yirmiya and Nurit in their study Nonverbal communication skills in Down Syndrome Children found that a deficit in expressive language is associated with a deficit in earlier developing nonverbal requesting skills among down syndrome children.

## **Understanding Non-Verbal Communication in Mentally Retarded Children**

Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of human interaction and plays a crucial role in conveying meaning and understanding between individuals. For mentally retarded children, nonverbal communication can be especially important as they may struggle with verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is a crucial component of human interaction and plays a significant role in conveying meaning and understanding between individuals. Nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and eye contact, can provide valuable insight into the thoughts, feelings, and needs of mentally retarded children, making it an important tool for both them and those who interact with them. Mentally retarded children are individuals who have limited intellectual functioning and impaired daily living skills. They may experience verbal communication difficulties and struggle to express themselves effectively. For example, a child may use hand gestures to indicate a desire for food or a need for comfort. Facial expressions, such as smiling or frowning, can also provide insight into a child's emotions and state of mind. Eye contact is another important aspect of nonverbal communication and can be used to signal interest, engagement, or discomfort. For mentally retarded children, maintaining eye contact can be a challenge, and a lack of eye contact may indicate a need for support or a feeling of discomfort. In addition to being a valuable tool for mentally retarded children, nonverbal communication is also important for those who interact with them. Understanding and interpreting nonverbal cues can help to build better relationships with mentally retarded children and promote effective communication. It is important to recognize that nonverbal communication is not universal and may vary across cultures, so it is essential to approach nonverbal communication with an open mind and a willingness to learn and understand. Interpreting nonverbal communication can be challenging, especially for individuals who are not familiar with the cues used by mentally retarded children. However, with practice and observation, it is possible to gain a deeper

understanding of nonverbal communication and the messages it conveys. It is also important to remember that nonverbal cues are not always clear-cut, and it may take time to fully understand their meaning.

## **Importance of Non-Verbal Communication in Mentally Retarded Children**

Nonverbal communication is essential for all children, including those with intellectual disabilities or mental retardation. Here are some reasons why nonverbal communication is important for mentally retarded children:

- It helps them understand social cues
- It helps them communicate their own emotions
- It helps them build relationships
- It can improve their behavior
- It can improve their overall communication skills

## **Role of Teachers in Promoting Non-Verbal Communication in Mentally Retarded Children**

Teachers play a critical role in promoting nonverbal communication in mentally retarded children. Here are some ways teachers can promote nonverbal communication in their students:

- Modeling
- Instruction
- Practice
- positive reinforcement
- Individualized support
- Collaboration with other professionals

## **Role of caregivers in promoting Non-Verbal communication in Mentally Retarded Children**

Caregivers, including family members, childcare providers, and others who provide care for mentally retarded children, play an important role in promoting nonverbal communication. Here are some ways caregivers can promote nonverbal communication in children with mental retardation:

- Encouraging communication
- Using visual aids
- Reinforcing positive behavior
- Providing opportunities for social interaction

- Seeking professional help

## Educational Endeavours

Education for the disabled, particularly for children with mental retardation and associated disabilities, has undergone rapid changes in India over the years, including systematic changes, the development of teaching-learning material, bringing technology applications within reach, the use of effective manpower in the institution, and rehabilitation, but there is no homogeneity or universal adherence to minimum standards in service delivery by service providers, except for a few exemplary organization. There is a need to assess, access, retention, and success rates of children with mental retardation in various educational settings, similar to exercise being done for regular schooling. This will ensure process accountability. National and state education surveys must focus on the educational development of children with intellectual disabilities as well as other disabilities.

## Teaching Process Variations and Technology Use

Teaching is the process of bringing progressive improvement in learning. The teaching of mentally retarded children has evolved from a teacher-centered process to IEP, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, CAI, multisensory approach, and clinical diagnostic teaching. In India, behavioral technology has contributed to the training of mentally retarded children. All mentally retarded children can be taught a lot more if appropriate training methods are used. Drills and practice, tutorials, educational games, demonstrations, simulations, and problem-solving, discovery learning can all play a vital role in teaching mentally retarded people at all stages of their lives. Exclusive software to be developed to meet the needs of this target group instead of bringing out a handbook on TLM applying these teaching strategies and understanding nonverbal communication may enhance the learning of mentally retarded children. When delivering technological inputs, one must consider our country's multilingual characteristics. The use of cooperative teaching/learning ensures the concept of working together, building bridges for increasing self-concept and reducing peer rejection, and teaching communication skills which leads to academic gains. Peer tutoring is a promising approach to accommodating students, enhancing their non-verbal communication and social adaptive skills and special intellectual needs in a regular or inclusive classroom setting. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) is a step forward. Aside from concretizing abstract ideas for the intellectually disabled, it can also be interactive. Teachers must use this technological advancement in a variety of ways, including drills and practices, computer games, tutorials, and simulation, as previously mentioned. We should see the increasing application of technology as assistive devices to enhance a person's cognitive and nonverbal communication skills and act as a companion which can facilitate independent living in the case of the Mentally Retarded.

## Conclusion

Various studies have revealed that indigenous innovations such as yoga, dance, drama, nonverbal cues, music, foster home care, and water bath have enormous value for people with mental retardation. Such measures require more support if we are to improve the quality of life for the mentally retarded. The study of nonverbal and verbal communication is an important precursor of language and the transition from paralinguistic to linguistic communication. Nonverbal communication and the communicative functions of abnormal behaviors, psychological and behavioral factors influencing social and emotional development and expression in mental retardation and other developmental disorders. Non-verbal communication is an essential aspect of social interaction and plays a vital role in the development of mentally retarded children. These children may have difficulty in understanding and expressing verbal communication, and therefore non-verbal cues such as facial expression, body schemas, body images, body language, and gestures become more important. Clear and simple non-verbal cues along with visual aids can help mentally retarded children understand and respond to emotions in others and improve their overall development.

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