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ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN INDIVIDUALS WITH MILD INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: EFFECTIVENESS OF A STRUCTURED WORK READINESS PACKAGE

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Abstract

Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (IwID) face significant barriers in gaining and sustaining employment due to deficits in functional, social, and adaptive skills. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a structured work readiness training package developed by the researcher to enhance employability skills among IwID. The intervention was designed to improve competencies across six key skill domains: personal, social, communication, occupational, recreational, and computer literacy. A two-group experimental design was adopted, involving 20 participants with mild intellectual disabilities aged 15–20 years, equally divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received the intervention over six weeks through 18 structured sessions, while the control group received regular instruction during this period. A researcher-developed performance-based rating scale comprising 80 items across the six domains was used to assess employability skills. Data were analysed using appropriate statistical methods to compare pre- and post-test scores. The findings revealed significant improvements in the experimental group's employability skills across all domains, while no notable change was observed in the control group. The study concludes that structured, repetitive, and domain-specific training can significantly enhance the work readiness of adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: Employability skills, Mild Intellectual Disabilities, Work readiness training, Vocational skills, Pre-employment intervention.

Introduction

Employment provides not only economic stability but also social inclusion, dignity, and improved quality of life. For individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (IwID), however, transitioning into the

workforce remains a major challenge due to limited functional abilities, lack of social and communication skills, and minimal exposure to real-world job scenarios. According to Carter et al. (2016), many youths with intellectual disabilities are underprepared for employment despite having the potential to work with appropriate support. Research indicates that structured and targeted interventions can improve employability outcomes for this population (Alnahdi, 2020).

Pre-employment training must focus not just on technical skills but also on soft skills such as personal grooming, interpersonal interaction, and decision-making abilities (Lindstrom et al., 2020). Unfortunately, in the Indian context, such structured programs tailored for IwID are limited. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of a custom-developed Work Readiness Package consisting of activity-based modules targeting six essential skill domains: personal, social, communication, occupational, recreational, and computer literacy. This study is significant in demonstrating the impact of real-life simulated, repetitive, and multi-modal instruction in preparing IwID for employment.

Review of Related Literature

Research on the perspective of employers revealed that while employers praised reliability and motivation IwID, they frequently perceived a lack of soft skills such as communication and teamwork (Lindsay et al., 2019). This suggests that pre-employment programs should include social and interpersonal skills training in addition to technical skill development.

Special educators and vocational trainers contributed their insights regarding career difficulties among individuals with intellectual disabilities (Narayan & Mani, 2021) sharing that the lack of structured, culturally relevant pre-employment training programs, emphasising the importance of indigenous intervention models customised to the specific circumstances as a major difficulty. Quantitative studies (Alnahdi, 2020; Szymanski & Parker, 2022; Wehman et al., 2018) on understanding the required factors for sustained and gainful employment for IwID showed that structured, real-world training was effective in enhancing long-term employment outcomes.

Studies showed that employment outcomes for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities showed significant increases in self-care, communication, and occupational abilities, with activity-based and repetitive training strategies (Alnahdi, 2020) as well as in computer literacy and workplace flexibility, with a digital skills training program (Szymanski & Parker, 2022). IwID who received supported employment training had better job retention and skill acquisition as compared to IwID who did not received such training (Wehman et al., 2018).

Longitudinal research with high school students with disabilities suggested that students who engaged in structured transition and pre-employment interventions had better levels of job preparation, emphasising the importance of targeted support in bridging the school-to-work gap (Lindstrom et al., 2019).

Studying the issue of employment of IwID from the perspectives of IwID themselves, Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2016) found that many students lacked access to organised pre-employment training, limiting their

potential to find meaningful work. The study indicated that indicating that targeted training interventions with well-designed skill-based programs are critical and can play an important role in preparing young IwID for modern work environments.

Objective

To find out the effectiveness of work readiness package in developing employment skills among Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Research Question

To what extent is the work readiness package effective in developing employability skills among Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities?

Methodology

Research Design

The study followed a two-group experimental design, where the two groups were, an experimental and a control group. Within this design, the researcher assessed the effect of the intervention (Work Readiness Package) by comparing performance before training, during the training and after the training.

Sample

The study sample were selected using purposive sampling technique and included 20 adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities, aged between 15 and 20 years. They were equally divided into two groups using random assignment.

In the experimental group (n=10), students received the Work Readiness training package, which was the intervention in this study, and the control group (n=10), where students received regular instruction with no specialized training during the time when experimental group received the training.

Data Collection Tool

The Work Readiness Performance Rating Scale, part D of the Work Readiness Package, was developed by the researcher based on a review of existing literature and validated by experts. The tool consisted of 80 items representing specific skills under six domains:

(1) Personal Skills,
(2) Social Skills,
(3) Communication Skills,
(4) Occupational Skills,
(5) Recreational Skills, and
(6) Computer Literacy Skills.

Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale indicating level of independence and these responses were coded from 0 – 4.

4 – Totally Independent, 3 – Verbal Prompt, 2 – Physical Prompt,1 – Totally Dependent, and 0 – Not Applicable/No Response.

The total possible score on the tool ranges from 0 to 320, where a lower score indicates minimal independence across employability skills, and a higher score indicates greater independence and stronger readiness for work."

Intervention

The Work Readiness Package (WRP) developed by the researcher served as the intervention for the experimental group. The package consisted of 18 structured, activity-based sessions delivered over six weeks, with each session lasting 45 minutes. The sessions targeted six domains—personal, social, communication, occupational, recreational, and computer literacy skills. Activities included demonstrations, role play, guided practice, simulations, and computer-based tasks based on real workplace situations. Weekly reinforcement and feedback were provided to support skill acquisition. This brief and structured format was sufficient to deliver the core components of the work-readiness training.

Intervention Procedure

The Work Readiness Package was implemented as a structured intervention consisting of 18 activity-based sessions conducted over a period of six weeks. Each session lasted for 45 minutes and targeted two to four interrelated employability skills. The activities were designed based on real-life job scenarios and included a variety of methods such as role plays, demonstrations, group discussions, field visits, and computer-based tasks. A combination of instructional strategies was used, including direct instruction, PowerPoint presentations, field visits, task simulations, and role-playing. These strategies aimed to engage learners with mild intellectual disabilities and promote meaningful participation. The intervention schedule was repeated weekly to reinforce skill acquisition. At the end of each week, performance assessments were carried out, and individualized feedback was given to help participants improve and retain the learned skills. Two main highlights of this intervention were the plan of integrating skill based on real-life scenarios and sessions in close succession to enhance retention.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in three phases: Pre-test: Before starting the intervention, both groups were assessed using the performance tool, Mid intervention assessment: Conducted after each week of training in the experimental group to monitor progress and post-test: At the end of the 6 weeks intervention, both groups were reassessed using the same tool.

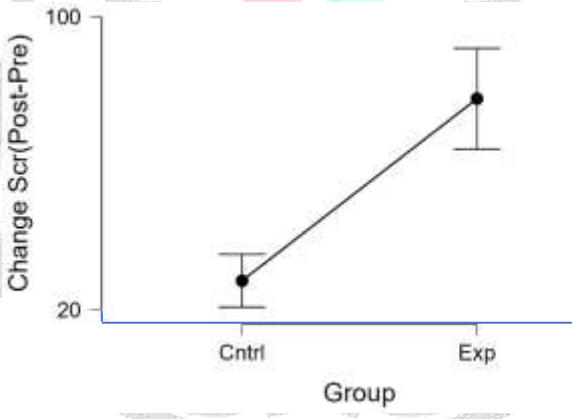
Data Analysis and Results

Research question aims to study the effectiveness of the work readiness package in developing pre-employment skills for IwID. In this research question, the overall effect of the intervention (WRP) on the pre-employment skills was tested using a two-group experimental design. The independent variable was group (control and experimental) and dependent variable was the change score (post-test – pretest). Table 1 gives the means and standard deviations for the control (27.9+/-10.071) and experimental (77.6+/-19.213) groups. These values are shown visually in the figure 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for effect of work readiness package

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Change Scr(Post-Pre)	Cntrl	10	27.900	28	10.071	3.185	0.361
	Exp	10	77.600	80	19.213	6.076	0.248

Figure 1: Graph of mean and standard deviation of change score



The table 1 and figure 1 show that the mean change score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group. In order to find whether this difference is because of the intervention or sampling error (chance variation), statistical test of significance was required. Since the sample size for each group was 10, it was not possible to ascertain if the change scores in the population would follow a normal distribution. Hence the distribution-free non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U test, which is equivalent to the parametric two-independent samples t-test was performed using the statistical software JASP.

The nonparametric statistical hypotheses of the Mann-Whitney U test of difference between control and experimental group are as follows. *Null hypothesis*: there is no difference between the median change scores of the control and experimental groups in the population. *Alternate hypothesis*: there is a difference between the median change scores of control and experimental groups in the population.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney test for statistical significance of difference between change scores of experimental and control groups

	Test	Statistic	p
Change Scr (Post-Pre)	**Mann-Whitney**	**0.000**	**< .001**

The Mann–Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference between the change scores of the experimental and control groups ($U = 0.000$, $p < .001$). Since the p-value is less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that the experimental group showed significantly higher improvement in employability skills compared to the control group.

The results confirm that the Work Readiness Package (WRP) was effective in enhancing the overall preparedness for work among adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities. The difference in median change scores can be attributed to the intervention and not to sampling variation or chance. Therefore, the findings support the research hypothesis that the WRP positively influences employability skill development among IwID. Domain-wise analysis was not conducted because the study focused on the overall effectiveness of the Work Readiness Package and used total change scores as the dependent variable.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Work Readiness Package (WRP) in improving employability skills among adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities. The results clearly showed that the structured and activity-based training programme had a significant positive effect on students' skills across all six domains. The experimental group demonstrated a much higher mean change score than the control group, and the statistical analysis confirmed that the difference between the two groups was significant. These findings indicate that the WRP is useful in building essential skills required for workplace readiness.

Relation to Previous Research

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier research showing that structured, repetitive, and practical training helps individuals with intellectual disabilities acquire work-related skills. Alnahdi (2020) found that repeated learning activities improve adaptive and functional skills, which supports the skill gains observed in this study. Similarly, Carter, Austin, and Trainor (2016) highlighted the importance of providing organized transition programmes to improve employment outcomes. The success of the WRP supports this view, as students who received structured training performed significantly better.

Lindstrom et al. (2019) reported that transition programmes using demonstrations, modelling and guided practice help students develop job skills more effectively. The WRP included these same strategies and produced similar improvements. The growth in computer literacy observed in this study also aligns with

Szymanski and Parker (2022), who noted that digital-skill training increases workplace readiness among individuals with mild ID.

Additionally, Wehman et al. (2018) found that simulated work experiences help improve job performance. The WRP used simulations, role play, and real-life tasks, which may have contributed to the strong progress seen in the experimental group. Overall, the present study supports and strengthens previous findings by showing that a multi-domain, structured programme can result in broad improvement across various employability skills.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study produced positive results, some limitations need to be considered. First, the sample size was small, with only 20 participants, which limits how far the findings can be generalised. Second, the study was carried out in a single institution, so results may vary in different settings. Third, the intervention lasted only six weeks, and the study did not include a long-term follow-up to examine whether the skills were maintained over time. Fourth, only students with mild intellectual disabilities were included, so the findings may not apply to individuals with moderate or severe ID. Finally, the assessment relied on observational ratings, which may include minor subjectivity despite careful standardisation.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples across different schools or regions to improve generalisability. Long-term follow-up studies are needed to examine whether the skills learned are retained and used in real work environments. The Work Readiness Package may also be adapted and tested with individuals who have moderate or severe intellectual disabilities. Additionally, integrating digital tools such as virtual reality job simulations or AI-based training may further strengthen learning outcomes. Workplace-based studies involving employers could also provide valuable information about how well students apply the skills in real job settings.

Implications for Practice

The study has several important implications for educators, vocational trainers, and policymakers. Special educators can integrate structured modules and repeated practice into their daily teaching to help students build work-related skills. Vocational trainers can use demonstrations, role play, and real-life tasks as part of pre-employment training. Schools may introduce work readiness programmes as part of transition planning to better prepare students for adult life. Parents can support learning by encouraging practice at home. Rehabilitation centres and NGOs may adopt the WRP as a practical and low-cost training model. Policymakers can use these findings to support the inclusion of structured work-readiness programmes in special education curricula.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrated that a structured Work Readiness Package significantly enhanced employability skills among individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. The intervention effectively improved skills across six critical domains: personal, social, communication, occupational, recreational, and computer literacy.

Through engaging, activity-based sessions aligned with real-life work tasks, the training fostered both skill development and learner confidence. The consistent and measurable improvements in the experimental group highlighted the value of a focused, well-designed pre-employment program.

This research emphasized the potential of structured interventions in preparing individuals with intellectual disabilities for successful integration into the workforce. The positive outcomes indicated the importance of including such training models in vocational education and rehabilitation programs. With continued implementation and support, many more individuals with disabilities could be empowered to achieve meaningful and sustained employment.

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