

## AWARENESS AND PERSPECTIVE OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS ON DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES USING SCERT FUNCTIONAL SKILLS CURRICULUM

**Jaison M Peter**

Research Scholar, jaisonpeter007@gmail.com

**Dr. G. Thamilvanan**

Associate Professor and Head ..

Email:mgthamilvanan@gmail.com

**Dr. K. Mohanasundaram**

Professor, Dept. of Education, PeriyarManiammai Institute of Science and Technology (Deemed to be University), Thanjavur. Email: dr.k.mohanasundaram@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Life skills approach in education is very important because it creates an awareness of self and one's own environment. To introduce and incorporate Life skills into special education classrooms, special educators must have a thorough understanding of these skills. These educators should have a constructive perspective towards teaching these skills to their students with mild intellectual disabilities. The purpose of this study is to understand the level of awareness of special educators about Life Skills and their perspective in developing these skills among their students using SCERT functional skills curriculum. The web-based survey was conducted in three strata of Kerala – North, South and Central Kerala. 120 special educators were selected as the sample. Random sampling technique was adopted in the study. The findings report that a greater number of special educators have high level of awareness about life skills and constructive views on life skills training using SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum.

**Key words:** life skills, intellectual disability, SCERT Curriculum, special educators, awareness and perspective

### **Introduction**

Life skills are a group of skills related to social competency, cognition, emotional intelligence, capability building, and psychosocial well-being. Acquisition and application of life skills in simple to complicated activities of life like addressing issues, being inventive and analytical, fostering relationships, participating in effective communication, self-awareness etc., differs human beings from other animals (Botvin, 1990). We live in a difficult and challenging world. To thrive in this world and effectively deal with the many problems facing us requires a specific set of skills. These sets of skills are called Life Skills. They are “the abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life” (Peter et al., 2022).

Life Skills are important for holistic development of every individual; vital for personal success in all spheres of life and importantly to live a quality and productive life in community. (Powell, 1985) reflects this dimension in his definition of life skills - 'the life-coping life skills consonant with the developmental tasks of the basic human development processes, particularly those life skills necessary to perform the tasks for a given age and sex within the following areas of human development: psychosocial, physical-sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego, and emotional'. World Health Organization (WHO) describes life skills as group of skills that enable oneself to adapt to situations and to deal with the demands and challenges of life in a healthy and positive manner. WHO (1997) has proposed ten core life skills that are important for healthy living in home, school, community and employment settings - self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress, and coping with emotions.

Education is an important medium for life skills enhancement. These skills are important components of quality education since the aim of education is to equip individuals to lead a life not merely for the sake of living but to live it to the fullest, realizing the potential within self (Saravanakumar, 2020). However, students with intellectual disabilities, considering their limitations in cognitive functioning, these higher-level skills are not introduced. Students with intellectual disabilities tend to have a curriculum plan that focuses more comprehensively on the skills necessary for everyday life. Various research studies have highlighted the potential of students with mild intellectual disabilities in learning higher level of skills if evidence-based strategies are used in training program (Peter et al., 2022). Therefore, special educators play a significant role in providing these skill development programs to students beginning from an early age pertinent that special educators plan activities and introduce these skills in their classrooms.

### **Special Educators and Life Skills Training among Children with Intellectual Disabilities**

In India, the life skills training program in the education system is in an evolving stage (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2020). There is an increasingly stronger focus on developing comprehensive life skills in children and young people in India so that they are empowered and are responsible citizens of society. In addition to academic, vocational, and technical skills, the focus is now on building those skills or competencies that are needed to meet the demands of the increasingly vulnerable situations of our diverse societies (UNICEF India Comprehensive Life Skills Framework). Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India has made life skills training a compulsory component in its curriculum. CBSE has developed a life skills training manual for different age groups, with instructions to respective grade teachers. However, in the training of students with intellectual disabilities functional skills are considered as an essential component of the educational process.

The functional curriculum that encompasses essential areas of everyday life and focuses on teaching skills that would enable an individual to function independently in his/her own environments in vocational, domestic, community living, leisure, and social skill domains rather than strictly academic (e.g., reading, writing, arithmetic) or developmental domains (e.g., fine and gross motor skills, perceptual skills) (Davis & Rehfeldt, 2007; Hunt & Marshall, 2012).

The special schools in Kerala use a unique curriculum developed by State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT), Kerala for children with intellectual disabilities at the primary level. This curriculum was developed based on the findings and recommendations suggested by Dr. Jayaraj Commission set up by the then Kerala Government, after the field study to learn the status of students with special needs across Kerala. This curriculum includes items based on functional skills, handbooks for teachers, workbooks for students and activity-based resource CD for the transaction of the books. The curriculum aims at developing different abilities, skills and attitudes; the activity package ensures full participation of students.

The role of a special educator as life skills trainer of students with intellectual disabilities cannot be overemphasized. An educator must be a constructive teacher i.e., cooperative, observer, novel, supportive, tactful, rational, understanding, collaborative, thoughtful, inspirational, versatile, sensitive and managerial, to impart life skill – based education (Anjali, 2014). As a matter of fact, someone who has life skills means having personal, social, intellectual, work skills and can strive to live independently (Jaya, et al., 2018). Since life skills includes cognitive, social and emotional abilities, training of students with limited intellectual functioning is not given much importance and not considered as skills to be taught or learnt. Therefore, special educators' level of awareness about life skills, and their active participation in life skills training of students with mild intellectual disabilities with a view that their students can be taught these skills by using research-based strategies is vital. It is imperative that life skills are addressed in the functional curriculum and it is transacted to the students with mild intellectual disabilities using child-specific strategies and methods. The present study focusses on understanding the level of awareness of special educators about 10 Life skills proposed by WHO and their perspective on life skills training of students with mild intellectual disability using SCERT Curriculum.

## Objectives

1. To study the level of awareness of special educators about life skills.
2. To study the perspectives of special educators about life skill training using SCERT Curriculum.
3. To study the relationship among demographic variables (age, qualification, and experience) awareness and perspective of special educators about life skills.
4. To study the relationship between awareness and perspective of special educators about life skills.

## Methodology

### Method

The study was based on a survey method.

### Population and Sample

The population of the research consists of special educators teaching students with mild

intellectual disabilities across Kerala. 120 special educators working in various special schools of Kerala were used as sample for the study. Random sampling techniques was used in the study.

**Tool**

“Life skill awareness and perspective scale of special educators” (2021) constructed and validated by Jaison m Peter, G. Thamilvanan and K. Mohanasundaram was used to collect the data. The tool consist of 30 statements to understand the awareness of special educators about life skills proposed by WHO and the perspective of special educators in training Life skills to students with mild intellectual disabilities using on SCERT curriculum. The statements were with both positive and negative connotations with 4-point rating scale - strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. A participant information sheet was part of the questionnaire seeking information on socio demographic variables such as age, educational qualification, special education qualification, and years of teaching experience of the special educators.

**Data collection Process**

The web-based questionnaire in Google form was sent to special educators, teaching students with mild intellectual disabilities in the special schools and the data was collected from 120 special educators.

**Analyses of the Data**

Descriptive statistics, F test and product moment correlation methods are used to analyze and interpret the data

Table 1 provides the characteristics of the respondents based on factors like age, general educational qualification, special education qualification and the years of teaching experiences in the field.

**Table 1**  
**Breakup of the sample with socio demographic variables**

Variables	Strata	Number	Percentage
Age	21 - 25	13	10.8
	26 - 30	16	13.3
	31-35	27	22.5
	36-40	19	15.8
	Above 40	45	37.5
Highest educational	SSLC	1	0.8
	PDC/Higher secondary	11	9.2

<b>qualification</b>	Diploma	28	23.3
	Graduation	44	36.7
	Post-Graduation	32	26.7
	PhD	4	3.3
<b>Special educational Qualification</b>	Certificate course	3	2.5
	Diploma	82	68.3
	B.Ed Special Education	28	23.3
	M.Ed Special Education	7	5.8
<b>Teaching Experience (Years)</b>	1-5	39	32.5
	6-10	29	24.2
	11-15	29	24.2
	16-20	12	10.0
	Above 20	11	9.2

A greater number of participants in this survey are above 30 years (75.8%) and less than one-fourth were in the age group of 21 to 29 years (14.1%). More than one-third of the respondents are of above 40 years, indicating that the participants are with life experiences that can instill life skills in human beings. In terms of their general education qualification, majority of the special educators are with graduation and above graduation educational experiences - 36.7% of them are graduate 26.7% of them are post graduate and 3.3 % of them are Ph.D. holders. Above three-fourth (68%) of the participants hold diploma in special education, a small group of special educators with Bachelor's degree in special education.

Table.2 represents the awareness of Life Skills among special educators

**Table 2**

**Level of awareness of special educators about life skills**

Awareness scores	Level of awareness	N	Percentage of awareness
15-29	Below Average	0	0

30-44	Average	38	31.7%
45-60	Above Average	82	68.3%

All the respondents of the questionnaire show an average and above average level of awareness about Life skills as proposed by WHO. 31.7% of the respondents have average level of awareness and 68.3% of the respondents have above average level of awareness interestingly, no one has scored below average.

The table 3 represent the perspectives of special educators about life skill training using SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum.

**Table 3**

**Perspective of special educators on life skills training using SCERT Functional skills Curriculum**

Perspective scores	Level of awareness	N	Percentage of Perspective
15-29	Below Average	7	5.8%
30-44	Average	19	15.8%
45-60	Above Average	94	78.3%

Above three-fourth of the special educators have scored high on their views on life skills training of students with mild intellectual disabilities using SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum, whereas less than one-fourth have scored average (15.8%) and below average scores (5.8%). It indicates that greater number of special educators have constructive views regarding life skills training of their students with mild intellectual disabilities while teaching skills as suggested in the SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum.

Table 4 represent awareness and perspectives of special educators on the basis of socio demographic variables (age, general and special education qualification, and years of teaching experience)

**Table 4**

**ANOVA of awareness and perspective of special educators with respect to Socio-demographic variables**

<b>Source</b>		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig. p</b>
<b>Age</b>						
<b>Awareness</b>	Between Groups	952.242	4	238.060	3.491*	0.010
	Within Groups	7842.125	115	68.192		
	<b>Total</b>	8794.367	119			
<b>Perspective</b>	Between Groups	493.043	4	123.261	1.154	0.335
	Within Groups	12285.624	115	106.832		
	<b>Total</b>	12778.667	119			
<b>Educational Qualification</b>						
<b>Awareness</b>	Between Groups	466.393	5	93.279	1.277	0.279
	Within Groups	8327.974	114	73.052		
	<b>Total</b>	8794.367	119			
<b>Perspective</b>	Between Groups	89.844	5	17.969	0.161	0.976
	Within Groups	12688.823	114	111.305		
	<b>Total</b>	12778.667	119			
<b>Special Education Qualification</b>						
<b>Awareness</b>	Between Groups	555.174	3	185.058	2.605	0.055
	Within Groups	8239.193	116	71.028		
	<b>Total</b>	8794.367	119			
<b>Perspective</b>	Between Groups	139.963	3	46.654	0.428	0.733
	Within Groups	12638.704	116	108.954		

	<b>Total</b>	12778.667	119			
<b>Teaching Experience (Years)</b>						
<b>Awareness</b>	Between Groups	891.100	4	222.775	3.242*	0.015
	Within Groups	7903.267	115	68.724		
	<b>Total</b>	8794.367	119			
<b>Perspective</b>	Between Groups	1056.153	4	264.038	2.590*	0.040
	Within Groups	11722.514	115	101.935		
	<b>Total</b>	12778.667	119			

\*= significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*= significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The study examined how these characteristics related with the level of awareness of life skills and the views of special educators on life skills training of students with mild intellectual disabilities using SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum. In relation to the highest educational qualification of special educators, there is no significant difference between the awareness and perspective scores of special educators towards life skills development of students with mild intellectual disabilities through SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum ( $F=1.277$ ;  $p > 0.05$  and  $F=0.161$ ;  $p > 0.05$  respectively).

The analyzed data indicate that there is no significant difference between the level of awareness on life skills and perspective scores of special educators towards life skills development of students with mild intellectual disabilities through SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum with respect to their special education qualification ( $F=2.605$ ;  $p > 0.05$  and  $F= .428$   $p > 0.05$  respectively), whereas statistically significant difference was noted between the awareness and perspective scores of special educators towards life skill development of children with special needs through SCERT curriculum ( $F=3.242$ ;  $p < 0.05$  and  $F= 2.590$   $p < 0.05$  ) with respect to their teaching experience.

Moreover statistically significant difference was noted between the awareness scores of special educators towards life skill development of children with special needs through SCERT curriculum  $F= 3.491$   $p < 0.05$  with respect to their age but there is no significant difference between the perspective scores of special educators towards life skills development of students with mild intellectual disabilities through SCERT Functional Skills Curriculum with respect to their age

The result obtained on the correlation between awareness and perspective of special educators is shown in table 5.



**Table 5**  
**Correlation between awareness and perspective**

variables	N	r	p
Awareness	120	0.436**	0.00
Perspective	120	0.436**	0.00

\*\*= significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The statistical analysis of data reports that there is a positive correlation between the awareness about life skills and perspective of special educators.

### Conclusions

Greater number of special educators have high level of awareness about life skills proposed by WHO. These educators have a positive view that their students with mild intellectual disabilities can learn higher level of life skills through SCERT Functional Skills. There exist a positive correlation between awareness and perspectives of special educators regarding life skill training among students with mild intellectual disabilities.

### Discussion

Undoubtedly life skills empower individuals to manage their lives in meaningful and responsible ways by and to participate effectively in the development of society and to operate well in numerous areas of life including school setting, vocational unit, family and community life. The results of the present study reveal a greater number of special educators have high level of awareness about life skills proposed by WHO. These educators have a positive view that their students with mild intellectual disabilities can learn higher level of life skills through SCERT Functional Skills. With regard to the relation among socio demographic characteristics, awareness and perspective of special educators, significant difference is observed in age and teaching experience. Elder teachers having had many years of teaching experience and more mature (Ismail et al., 2018) Their experience help them to create awareness and perspective about life skill training. There also exist a positive correlation between awareness and perspectives of special educators regarding life skill training among students with mild intellectual disabilities. Given the importance of life skills training, the special educators must provide relevant and meaningful learning experiences to their students with mild intellectual disabilities to enable them to cope with challenges and demands of school, family community and workplace.

### References:

Abu Warda, M. H. M. (2020). The effectiveness of life Skills Program in Enhancing Students' life- Satisfaction and self-efficacy among Female Students in Al Majmaah University. *Journal of Research in Curriculum Instruction and Educational Technology*, 6(1), 29–53.

doi:10.21608/jrciet.2020.67943

Botvin, G. J. (1990). *Life skills training: Student guide: Level 1*. Smithfield Press pg. 6 & 7.

Dey, S., Patra, A., Giri, D. D., Varghese, L., & Idiculla, D. (2022). The Status of Life Skill Education in Secondary Schools -An Evaluative Study. 12, 76–88.

Hunt, N., & Marshall, K. (2012). *Exceptional Children and Youth 5th Edition*. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Ismail, M., Arshad, R., & Abas, R. (2018). Can Teachers' Age and Experience influence Teacher Effectiveness in HOTS? *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Social Science & Innovation*, 2, 144–158. <https://doi.org/10.30690/ijassi.21.11>

Jagtap, A. (2014). Role of Constructivist teacher in developing life skill of effective stress management. *Conference: National Conference on Life Skills At: Tilak College of Education, Pune, 1*.

Jaya, H., Haryoko, S., Saharuddin, Suhaeb, S., Sabran, & Mantasia. (2018). Life skills education for children with special needs in order to facilitate vocational skills. *Journal of Physics. Conference Series*, 1028, 012078. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1028/1/012078>

Peter Jaison M, Thamilvanan, G., & Mohanasundaram, K. (2022). Construction and Validation of Life Skills Scale for Primary Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6. <https://mail.journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/2286>

Powell, M.F. (1985). A program of life-skills training through interdisciplinary group processes. *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama, & Sociometry*, 38(1), 23-34

Saravankumar, A. R. (2020). *Life Skill Education through lifelong Learning*. Lulu Publication.

Subasree, R., & Nair, R. (2014). The Life Skills Assessment Scale: the construction and validation of a new comprehensive scale for measuring Life Skills. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 19(1), 50–58.

Tiwari, P and Bajpai, A. (2020). Strategies for Inculcating Life Skills in CBSE Schools of Varanasi City Educational Quest: *An Int J EduApplSocSci*, 11(4): 197-204

World Health Organization. (1997). *Life skills education for children and adolescents in schools: Introduction and guidelines to facilitate the development and implementation of life skills programmes* Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Programme on Mental Health.