



Research Article

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Quality of Life of Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Schools: Special Education Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The main purpose of the current study is to investigate the QoL of students with intellectual disabilities from special education teachers' perspectives. 72 special education teachers participated in an Arabic version of the Questionnaire for Measuring Health-Related Quality of Life in Children and Adolescents-Revised (KINDLR). The current study was quantitatively analyzed using both descriptive and inferential analyses via SPSS 23. The results showed that the majority of students with ID had a low level of QoL based on their special education teachers in Taif schools. The results also showed a positive and significant correlation between the school domain and the three domains of QoL including emotional well-being, relationships with friends, and self-esteem. Finally, the current study represented some recommendations and suggestions to support the QoL of students with intellectual disabilities within their schools.

Keywords: Quality of life, Intellectual disabilities, Perspectives, Special education teachers

1. Introduction

Students with intellectual disabilities (ID) frequently experience a wide range of difficulties in many functioning aspects including social, motor, and communication aspects and independently performing activities of daily life. For instance, students with Down syndrome vary in terms of disabilities from mild to moderate intellectual disability; some can show an acceptable function of quality of daily life such as emotional well-being, self-esteem, social contacts, and school life, whereas others cannot show those aspects (Leonard et al., 2002). Consequently, children with ID are likely to live in unhealthy conditions affecting their communication, walking, self-feeding, or psycho-social aspects of quality of life (Williams et al., 2021).

Quality of life (QoL) has become a key topic of many sciences and disciplines such as economics, social sciences, and public health (Cummins 2005; Davis et al., 2008). It is not surprising that a wide range of interests is given to QoL as it promotes the daily functioning and value of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Pennacchini et al., 2011; Ventegodt et al., 2003). It is defined as a multidimensional concept incorporating essential aspects, generally known as material conditions, physical aspects and functional capabilities, social contacts, and emotional well-being (Schipper et al., 1996). However, Schalock and Verdugo (2012) proposed a model including eight

domains of QoL that was known as the widest model used with individuals with intellectual disabilities including (1) emotional well-being; (2) interpersonal relationships; (3) material welfare; (4) physical welfare; (5) personal growth; (6) self-determination; (7) social involvement; and (8) rights.

2. Literature Review

Despite growing recognition of QoL in special education schools to enhance the inclusive education of students with disabilities (Kober 2011; Turnbull et al. 2003), a few service providers are known about important aspects of QoL of students with ID in inclusive education schools; including Emotional well-being, Self-esteem, social contacts, and school life (Sakız, et al. 2015).

Emotional well-being is the most important aspect of QoL of students with ID to develop their communication skills in schools (Davis et al., 2017). However, many students with ID encounter difficulties in having a medium rate of emotional well-being compared to their peers without disabilities. According to a study conducted by (Biggs, & Carter, 2016; Sakız, et al. 2015), that investigated the parent's description of the QoL of youth with autism or ID, it showed that students with ID had a lower rate of emotional well-being compared to the normative sample without disabilities (Biggs, & Carter, 2016). Also, parents' rating of psychological well-being and other aspects of QoL indicated that their sons and daughters with high-functioning autism or developmental disabilities showed a low QoL (Kamp-Becker et al. 2010; Kuhlthau et al. 2010, 2013; Shipman et al. 2011).

Self-esteem is another essential aspect of QoL of students with ID that can be affected due to the self-stigma of students with ID (Trani et al., 2020; Sakız, et al. 2015). The feeling of shame, stereotypes, and negative views of themselves can increase their self-stigma and consequently result in a higher risk of lower self-esteem (Luoma et al., 2012). Also, Picco et al. (2016) pointed out that the self-esteem variable was the lowest among all variables and it was associated with the higher internalized stigma of individuals with ID.

Additionally, Social contacts or relationships with friends are one of the indicators of interpersonal relation of QoL of individuals with ID (Verdugo et al., 2012). Previous studies showed that individuals with ID often have small social networks and their contact is only with people without ID including professionals or families (e.g. Lippold & Burns, 2009; Verdonschot et al., 2009; Sakız, et al. 2015). However, the study by (van Asselt-Goverts et al., 2015), showed that people with ID had a high rate of satisfaction in regards to the friendship and relationship of others without ID. The QoL in inclusive schools is an emerging field in the education of students with ID (Faragher & Van Ommen, 2017). Also, the association between the students with ID' perceived QoL, attitudes and satisfaction, and school achievement and relationship with teachers is significant (Mok & Flynn, 2002; Sakız, et al. 2015). Malin and Linnakyla (2001) clearly illustrated the mechanism of QoL in schools through their definition of school QoL which refers to "students' general well-being and satisfaction, from the point of view of their positive and negative experiences, particularly in activities typical of school" (pp. 70-71).

2.1 Cultural context

Research examining QoL of students with ID across several countries suggests that the cultural context is an essential consideration in the assessment of QoL (Sapiets et al., 2020). In Saudi Arabia for example, some issues face children with intellectual disabilities along with their families and professionals including limited knowledge and acceptance, and limited studies to notify policy (Bagadood & Sulaimani, 2023).

Very few studies have conducted challenges related to QoL of children with intellectual disability and all of them based on their parents' description (AlAhmari et al., 2022; Haimour & Abuhawaash, 2012; Awaji et al., 2021). Haimour et al., (2012) reported that caregivers of mental

disabilities along with other disabilities scored higher in the environmental domain whereas the spiritual domain was the lowest among the general health domains of WHO-QOL-100. Recently, AlAhmari et al., (2022) found QoL of caregivers of Down syndrome children was significantly impacted on various domains and that the environmental domain reached the highest score; whereas the social domain reached the lowest score. Awaji et al., (2021) pointed out that the QoL of mothers of children with Down syndrome and other disabilities was lower compared to children without disabilities during the COVID-19 lockdown; especially, in social well-being and environmental well-being.

2.2 The need of study

As can be illustrated above, all studies were mainly conducted on the QoL of caregivers or parents of children with ID in Saudi Arabia. None of the studies has investigated the QoL of students with ID or their teachers in Saudi Arabian schools. However, the present study aims to investigate the QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives. This study is unique as it provides relative knowledge and experiences about the nature of QoL of students with ID within inclusive schools in Saudi Arabia.

2.3 The importance and questions of study

The current study is important to research in the field of intellectual disabilities due to the lack of studies related to the QoL of students with ID. This study also reinforces the practices of inclusive education provided to students with ID by identifying their abilities in the domains of QoL from the importance of the current study, important questions can be drawn to investigate about QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives; these questions are (1) What is QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives? (2) What is the most influential domain that affects the QoL of students in schools with ID from special education teachers' perspectives?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A descriptive survey method design was used to collect data from special education teachers; which is suitable to all individuals by exploring them as they are in their settings (Siedlecki, 2020). The study community was consisted of 118 special education teachers in Taif City. However, 72 special education teachers participated in the current study to investigate their perspectives on the QoL of students with ID in Taif, Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Background information on special education teachers

Variables		N of Participants	Percentages %
Gender	Male	34	47.2
	Female	38	52.8
Teaching experiences	Less than 5 years	29	40.3
	5-20 years	29	40.3
	20 years and above	30	19.4
Qualification	Bachelor	29	40.3
	Master	27	37.5
	Doctorate	16	22.2
Total		72	100

3.2 Instrument

The current study used an Arabic version of the Questionnaire for Measuring Health-Related QoL in Children and Adolescents-Revised (KINDLR) (Eser et al., 2008) to measure special education teachers' perceptions of their students' QoL. The KINDLR includes 24 items with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (1) to "all the time" (5) and including six domains: physical well-being, emotional well-being, self-esteem, relationship with family, relationship with friends, and school. The interpretation of the results is that higher scores in each domain are an indication of better QoL of participants.

For the study purposes, the researcher adopted the updated parent version of the KINDLR in Arabic, with the reduction of six domains to four domains to be appropriate for special education teachers. therefore, the questionnaire only included emotional well-being, self-esteem, relationships with friends, and school. Due to teachers' inability to evaluate children's QoL on physical well-being and relationships, items related to these domains were not included. Finally, the teacher version includes 16 items ranging from "never" (1) to "all the time" (5).

Table 2. Validity between the questionnaire's items

N	Items	Pearson Correlation	(p-value)
1	My student with MID had fun and laughed a lot	.360**	.002
2	My student with MID didn't feel much like doing anything	.377**	.001
3	My student with MID felt alone	.316**	.007
4	My student with MID felt scared or unsure of itself	.355**	.002
5	My student with MID was proud of himself	.340**	.003
6	My student with MID felt on top of the world	.370**	.001
7	My student with MID felt pleased with himself	.495**	.000
8	My student with MID had lots of good ideas	.330**	.005
9	My student with MID played with friends	.332**	.004
10	My student with MID was liked by other kids	.485**	.009
11	My student with MID got along well with his friends	.345**	.003
12	My student with MID felt different from other children	.237*	.045
13	My student with MID coped well with the assignments set in school	.365**	.002
14	My student with MID enjoyed the school	.248*	.036
15	My student with MID looked forward to school	.331**	.004
16	My student with MID made lots of mistakes when doing minor assignments or homework	.485**	.000

** (p-value) at (0.01), * (p-value) at (0.05)

Table (2) shows the survey validity using Pearson's correlation coefficients between items of special education teachers' perspectives toward the QoL of students with ID at Taif schools and the total degree of perspectives is statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01) or (0.05).

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

The scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Special education teachers' perspectives	0.85	16

The instrument's reliability regarding the special education teachers' perspectives toward the QoL of students with ID at Taif schools was analyzed through the use of Cronbach's alpha on a survey sample consisting of 25 participants. (See Table 3).

3.3 Procedure

After the preparation of the teacher version of KINDLR in Arabic, the researcher typed the questionnaire in a Google Drive document and then provided the questionnaire link to his workplace (College of Education) to contact the administration of education in Taif to obtain a consent letter for participating special education teachers in the current study. Next, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the Deanship of Scientific Research at Taif University. Finally, an e-mail was randomly sent to all special education teachers in Taif which included the questionnaire link. However, 72 special education teachers returned the filled questionnaire.

3.4 Data analysis

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives. The current study was quantitatively analyzed using both descriptive and inferential analyses via SPSS 23. The first question was asked about the QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives. For this question, the mean and standard deviation of the survey items were used to identify special education teachers' perspectives. The second question asked about the influences of emotional well-being, social contact, and self-esteem domains on the QoL of students with ID in the school from special education teachers' perspectives. For this question, a multiple linear regression was used to investigate the most influential domain from their perspectives of QoL of students with ID.

4. Results

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of Special education teachers' perspectives

N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Scale responses
1	My student with MID had fun and laughed a lot	1.79	1.278	Seldom
2	My student with MID didn't feel much like doing anything	1.85	1.307	Never
3	My student with MID felt alone	2.32	1.072	Seldom
4	My student with MID felt scared or unsure of itself	2.28	1.064	Seldom
	Overall Emotional Well-being	2.05	.762	Seldom
5	My student with MID was proud of himself	2.07	1.314	Seldom
6	My student with MID felt on top of the world	1.76	1.284	Never
7	My student with MID felt pleased with himself	1.85	1.285	Never
8	My student with MID had lots of good ideas	2.24	1.132	Seldom
	Overall Self-esteem	1.97	.810	Never
9	My student with MID played with friends	1.77	1.269	Never
10	My student with MID was liked by other kids	1.89	1.359	Never
11	My student with MID got along well with his friends	2.29	1.168	Seldom
12	My student with MID felt different from other children	2.28	1.131	Seldom
	Overall Relationship with friends	2.06	.820	Seldom
13	My student with MID coped well with the assignments set in school	1.79	1.299	Never
14	My student with MID enjoyed the school	1.87	1.310	Never
15	My student with MID looked forward to school	1.93	1.356	Never
16	My student with MID made lots of mistakes when doing minor assignments or homework	1.95	1.378	Never
	Overall School	1.88	.780	Never
	Total	1.99	.601	Never

The table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of perspectives of special education teachers

regarding the QoL of students with ID in Taif. The results revealed that the majority of students with ID had a low level of QoL based on their special education teachers in Taif schools. The mean scores of items ranged between $M = 1.76$ $SD = 1.284$ and $M = 2.29$ $SD = 1.168$.

In addition, the lowest mean score among the four domains of QoL was the school domain with $M = 1.88$ $SD = .601$. This would indicate that the QoL of students with ID is weak in schools.

Table 5. Summary of multiple linear regression analyses

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.749 ^a	.561	.541	.52856	.561	28.920	3	68	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), relation, emo, self; b. Dependent Variable: school

Table 6. Coefficients of multiple linear regression analyses

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	.091	.226		.403	.688			
Emotional well-being	.088	.087	.086	.021	.311	.303	.123	.082
Self-esteem	.412	.088	.428	4.664	.000	.641	.492	.375
Social contact	.388	.089	.408	4.345	.000	.638	.466	.349

a. Dependent Variable: school

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of multiple linear regression analyses which were conducted to examine the impact of emotional well-being, social contact, and self-esteem domains on the QoL of students with ID in the school from special education teachers' perspectives. As can be seen, each of the school scores is positively and significantly correlated with the criterion, indicating that those with lower scores on emotional well-being, social contact, and self-esteem variables tend to have lower QoL in the school domain. The multiple regression model with all three predictors produced $R^2 = .575$, $F(3, 68) = 45.67$, $p < .001$. This would indicate that the school domain had significant positive regression weights, indicating students with lower scores on these domains were expected to have lower QoL in school.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of the current study is to investigate the QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives. The study results illustrated that a large number of students with ID have a low level of QoL based on their teachers' perspectives. More specifically, although students with ID represented a seldom self-esteem and relationships with friends, they never had an acceptable level of emotional well-being and QoL in schools based on their teachers' perspectives.

In terms of low self-esteem and relationships with friends that were revealed that the decrease in the self-esteem of students with ID is mostly a result of self-stigma as students with ID based on their teachers in the current study, it was similarly noted in the study of Luoma et al. (2012) who believed a feeling of shame, stereotypes and negative views. Also, the results of the current study were aligned with the study of Verdugo et al. (2012) which individuals with ID mostly have a lack of social contacts which can affect their interaction with their peers without disabilities. Therefore, students with ID might face some types of self-stigma causing a low level of self-esteem and social contacts for students with ID in their schools.

The second question of the current study was examining the most influential domain of QoL for students with ID in schools. The current study found that there is a positive and significant

correlation between the school domain and the three domains of QoL including emotional well-being, relationships with friends, and self-esteem. This result was similarly revealed in the study which found most students with ID did not spend time with friends which resulted in a lower QoL in friendship and then in school. Also, it was found that the emotional well-being, friendship, and self-esteem of students with disabilities are closely related to the QoL in schools (Sakız, et al. 2015). They also found a lower score in emotional well-being, friendship, and self-esteem such as feelings of failure and experiences of loneliness and helplessness which can lead to the underachievement of students with disabilities in schools (Sakız, et al. 2015).

6. Recommendation and Suggestions

The current study presented some weaknesses in the QoL of students with ID in Saudi Arabia. This is noted in the overall self-esteem domain and QoL in school which were the lower scores compared to friendship and emotional well-being domains. Therefore, it is recommended that students with ID be directed to schools and centers implementing psychical education programs to improve their QoL; and developmental contributions (Özkan & Kale, 2023).

Some suggestions can be provided to improve the current study and future studies. First, the current study had a small sample size in one region of Saudi Arabia which makes it hard for the author to generalize over the whole country. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct a similar study with a large sample size from different regions of Saudi Arabia. previous studies and this study revealed a relationship between the domain of self-esteem and self-stigma of students with ID. Consequently, it is beneficially suggested to conduct a study focusing on the effects of self-stigma on the general QoL of students with ID in school. Finally, less is known about the development of QoL of students with ID; thus, this issue can be another area for future research.

7. Conclusion

The current study mainly examined the QoL of students with ID from special education teachers' perspectives. All results of QoL domains were surprisingly low which negatively can affect the learning and socialization of students with ID in their schools. Personally, policymakers within special education administrations need to assess the unexpected decrease in the QoL of those students and then reinforce effective practices to increase their QoL in schools.

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