

Full Length Research Paper

Promoting active participation of children with intellectual disabilities in social activities through citizenship education in disability centers in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia

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This study evaluates the positive impact of citizenship education in students with an intellectual disability in disability centers in Saudi Arabia. The understanding of citizenship rights is widely perceived to be helpful for the successful integration of disabled students in a diverse society. A qualitative close-ended questionnaire was used as a data collection tool to evaluate the citizenship knowledge of 6-12-year-old students who were randomly recruited from the disability centers in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. The study revealed an average level of citizenship knowledge among the students with intellectual disabilities. The results of the present study are statistically significant and suggest the importance of reforms in the educational institutes of disabled students, in order to ensure the development of citizenship knowledge in these students and help them to be a part of a diverse society.

Key words: Citizenship, students, intellectual disabilities, citizenship education.

INTRODUCTION

All around the world, people with intellectual disabilities face difficulties in every aspect of their lives and are often barred from enjoying their fundamental human rights. In many cases, these people are the victims of social discrimination, resulting in their inability to obtain acceptance or full integration into society. Citizenship is the right of every person regardless of their health status. However, while individuals with intellectual disabilities have equal citizenship rights, they are often deprived of them. The provision of equal citizenship rights to people

with intellectual disabilities is only possible by providing them access to education and giving them employment opportunities where they can express their talent. Considering the current situation and policies about people with intellectual disabilities, policymakers in Western countries have endeavored to maximize the opportunities for their social inclusion, empowerment, and independence.

The successful acceptance of intellectually disabled people in the society is associated with the behavior of

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the general population. Special education schools also play a vital role in the preparation of students with intellectual disabilities for active citizenship in diverse societies. This is important, given that many children with intellectual disabilities have poor intellectual security and are vulnerable to the harmful consequences of their behavior. These children are often unable to interpret difficult situations, which can adversely affect their overall well-being (Beirne-Smith et al., 2006). Schools and intellectual disability centers play a crucial role in developing the concept of citizenship in students with an intellectual disability, thereby enhancing their intellectual security.

Opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to develop citizenship can also be promoted through different learning and social networking programs (O'Brien et al., 2009), which teach skills that develop intellectual thinking and self-advocacy (Hart et al., 2010). One study argues that citizenship for intellectually disabled individuals seems impossible, due to the common traditional concept in the society (Johnson et al., 2010). This means that individuals with an intellectual disability will often need to contribute more to society in order to access full citizenship rights (MacIntyre, 2014; Moore and McNaught, 2014). However, it can be challenging for individuals with an intellectual disability to actively contribute to the current diverse society. Another study found that disempowerment and oppression of individuals with intellectual disabilities can sometimes be associated with political issues. Effectively, the authorities protect their political interests by not giving full citizenship rights, which can be argued as being a kind of an attack on the intellectual security of individuals. However, intellectual security can be improved through teaching students with intellectual disabilities about their citizenship rights.

National education systems should be capable of providing apolitical education to all children, irrespective of their disabilities and thereby ensure that their citizenship remains intact (Lampropoulou, 2015). However, many children who are intellectually disabled encounter problems in acquiring an education that teaches them about these rights. The political position of children with intellectual disability remains weak, making them vulnerable to an intellectual security breach. As a consequence, government policies should be reformed to ensure the provision of equitable education to all students. The main goal of public education institutes is to provide necessary citizenship education to all children regardless of intellectual ability, which is fulfilled by the social studies curriculum (Anthony, 2010). The main objective of this curriculum is to promote the active participation of students in their societies and enhance their intellectual security (Permata, 2017). The concept of citizenship can be developed in students with intellectual disabilities through the inclusion of the citizenship curriculum in social studies.

Citizenship education is also valuable in developing life

skills, which are the basic competencies required to live in a particular society. Students who study citizenship rights can also develop valuable skills, such as critical reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. The teachers of disability centers should therefore emphasize the development of those citizenship abilities that make the students more intellectually secure. This can also support the acquisition of the necessary skills that are essential for becoming an active citizen.

Ultimately, the objective of citizenship education is to prepare students with an intellectual disability to be an important part of democratic society. Related to this overarching goal, citizenship education is therefore not only limited to the development of citizenship skills, but it also provides students with the opportunity to progress in their careers and to contribute to their society. Citizenship education is a continuous process, so every interaction that students with an intellectual disability make with their peers can support the development of their intellectual skills and interaction should therefore be encouraged (Fernández-López et al., 2013). Working in groups is also beneficial for students with intellectual disabilities to develop essential citizenship skills and can enable them to critically think about their personal life experiences, supporting the development of positive self-concepts (Davies, 2011).

The present research has focused on the development of citizenship skills in people with disabilities. However, there is a gap in the research to determine how the students with mental ages of 6 to 12 years can develop as active citizens of society.

Aim and objectives

The present study has the following aims and objectives:

- (a) How are civic rights promoted in students with intellectual disabilities?
- (b) How does active participation of students with intellectual disability in social activities improve their citizenship skills?
- (c) What is the role of social skills in the development of citizenship education?

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study sought to learn how students with intellectual disabilities can become more active citizens and strengthen their intellectual security during their educational training in the disability centers in Saudi Arabia. A qualitative descriptive research study design was selected for data collection, using an open-ended research questionnaire that provides a description of citizenship understanding among students with intellectual disabilities.

Study participants

Initially, 50 students with intellectual disabilities and a mental age

ranging from 6 to 12 years were recruited from the disability center of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia by means of diversity sampling. This type of sampling helps to develop similarities between the diversified situations and provide different dimensions of the problem (Yildirim and Simsek, 2008). Out of 50 participants, 36 participants completed the questionnaire while others were excluded from the study due to their health condition. The response of 36 students was analyzed further to evaluate the data findings.

Data collection tool

A research questionnaire was developed to investigate the current knowledge of the participants with regards to citizenship and to gather information on their level of participation in community activities. The students were asked to provide the answers to the questions with the assistance of an instructor who helped them to understand the questions accurately. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was determined through reliability testing. The Cronbach's alpha value was found to be $\alpha \geq 0.708$. Although this value is slightly lower than the expected value, but it is acceptable and shows that all the items of the questionnaire provide answer to the research question.

Validity of data collection tool

In order to test the validity of the data collection tool, a pilot study was conducted in the Intellectual Disability Center, Tabuk City. Ten students with a mental age of 6 to 12 years were selected randomly. The data collection tool was administered to the selected students in order to evaluate their understanding of citizenship. The mean score of the pilot study showed good understanding of citizenship concepts in the students with intellectual disability. However, two questions were modified in order to ensure that the objectives of the study were achieved. Question 2 and Question 3 were modified. Initially, Question 2 was about the interactions with peers in the school environment. However, to better understand the social interactions in the community, the question was changed. Likewise Question 3 was about respecting family members; therefore it was changed to generalize the findings which are more related with respecting community and the country.

Social validity

The social validity of the research objective was developed by conducting a short survey to evaluate the perspective of teachers on the citizenship knowledge of their students with intellectual disabilities. The teachers therefore completed a short questionnaire using a Likert Scale (1 = false, 2 = somewhat false, 3 = somewhat true, and 4 = true) to determine teacher perceptions of the knowledge level of their students. At the end of the questionnaire, the teachers also gave individual suggestions about how it might be possible to improve the citizenship knowledge of students with intellectual disabilities. The social validity questionnaire is available in Appendix.

Data analysis

The completed questionnaires were collected and the data was compiled in the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Studies) version 22. Descriptive statistics were performed to find out the percentage of citizenship knowledge in the students and their level of participation in community activities. The results were compiled based on the data analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participating students with intellectual disabilities were given the close-ended questionnaire in order to determine their awareness of citizenship rights and knowledge about the roles of citizens in society. The results (Table 1) reveal that their overall knowledge and awareness of citizenship is average. However, a detailed analysis of the results shows that students have some information about their civic rights. The first item of the questionnaire concerned participation in community activities: 63.9% responded that they actively participate. It should be noted that some studies have shown that the community participation of intellectually disabled students tends to focus on physical exercise rather than social inclusion (Amado, 2014). However, the results of the present study do not reveal whether participation in community activities is intended to foster social inclusion or physical inclusion. Another study shows that adults with intellectual disabilities often participate in community activities, such as shopping and hanging out (Wu, 2011). Despite this, many still face social isolation and loneliness. Therefore, policies should be developed to enhance the social integration and community participation of children with disabilities in order to improve their citizenship understanding and therefore their quality of life.

The results of the present study reveal that 58.3% students with an intellectual disability help others in the community to improve their social interactions (Table 1). These results also suggest that these students demonstrate knowledge of human rights and that many participants have some understanding of citizens towards other citizens. However, the results also show that students need to improve these skills to better integrate within their communities. Helping others also demonstrates the training of youth, which leads to a flexible community (Flanagan and Levine, 2010). It is evident from a recent study that helping others in a community creates more opportunities, in turn improving the prevailing social issues of a community. This collaborative spirit also enhances information sharing, which is beneficial to the positive integration of volunteers into a community. These findings therefore suggest that students with an intellectual disability actively help others to improve their social relations and increase their contacts, based upon their understanding of the important features of a responsible citizen in a diverse community.

When asked about whether the participants love their country and respect their community, the results were quite promising. A sizeable majority (88.9%) of the participants reported feelings of love and respect towards their country and community, respectively. These findings show that participants understand the meaning of country and community and their responsibility towards it. A strong national identity is strongly correlated with

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of questionnaire.

Variable	Response	Mean	Frequency (n)	Percentage
I take time to actively participate in community activities	Agree	0.36	23	63.9
	Disagree		13	36.1
I help others in the community to improve the social interactions	Agree	0.42	21	58.3
	Disagree		15	41.7
I love my country and respect my community	Agree	0.11	32	88.9
	Disagree		4	11.1
I respect the rights of other people	Agree	0.72	10	27.8
	Disagree		26	72.2
I participate in the community activities to contribute my due role	Agree	0.64	13	36.1
	Disagree		23	63.9
I understand my civic rights in the community	Agree	0.33	24	66.7
	Disagree		12	33.3
I respect my country's flag	Agree	0.00	36	100
	Disagree		0	0

awareness of citizenship rights and therefore crucial in fostering community engagement and encouraging individuals to respect their community (Akar, 2007). The findings of the present study are consistent with Akar's findings.

Respect for others is an important feature of citizenship, allowing better integrating of individuals into a diverse community where social interactions occur on a daily basis. In other words, showing respect towards others is an important feature of citizenship (Waghid, 2009; Kubow, 2007). Only 27.8% students showed respect towards other people in a community, suggesting that they do not have information about the rights of other people. Previous studies have shown that students with disabilities typically have some knowledge and respect towards the rights of other people. The result of the present study reveals a lack of respect towards others, which shows the deficiency in citizenship knowledge of students with an intellectual disability.

The participants were asked whether they perform their due role in the community and only 36.1% stated that they did. These results show that most of the participants do not feel that they contribute their due role in the community. Therefore, there is a need to properly train students with intellectual disabilities about their due role in the community. The result of the present study is consistent with the extant literature, which shows that participants typically have no knowledge about their due role in the community (Tipton and Blacher, 2014). These findings can be associated with different factors, such as poor communication skills, friendly behavior, and a lack of citizenship knowledge (Porto and Byram, 2015).

Therefore, it is important to teach students with an intellectual disability to contribute appropriately and to perform their duties as citizens.

Participants were also asked about their understanding of civic rights in the social community. Two third (66.7%) reported a sound knowledge of civic rights, which is a higher proportion than in the majority of previous studies. Individuals with disabilities in Latin America, for example, have shown a very poor level of understanding about civic rights (Quaynor, 2012). Similarly, another study also shows a low level of civic knowledge (Frisancho and Reátegui, 2009). The present study shows significantly higher knowledge of citizenship. Social studies classes in schools have been shown to play an important role in the development of the concept of citizenship in the students (Myers, 2006). Promoting social interactions is also beneficial for students with an intellectual disability to develop a citizenship concept. Comparison of the results of the present study with established research literature clearly shows that a citizenship concept develops in students with an intellectual disability through increased social interactions. Few other studies have highlighted the role of teachers and instructors at the disability centers in developing students with intellectual disability into good citizens (Gay, 2002).

The present study has shown the importance of active participation in the community and also respect towards the community. Other studies have shown that students often consider social participation and being respectful to other people as an element of great virtue (O'Brien and Smith, 2011). Students also consider good virtue as an indispensable duty of good citizens (Schultheis, 2011).

Many have the perception that being a good citizen means being respectful of other people, obeying the rules, loving their country, and keeping the environment clean (Tonga and Keles, 2014). The results of the present study are quite promising, suggesting that proper training and better social integration of students with intellectual disabilities can develop the concept of citizenship. This process can also help them to obey the rules and respect their fellow citizens. The findings of the present study illustrate a comparatively high level of citizenship knowledge among the intellectually disabled students of Saudi Arabia. However, this study is based on close-ended questions, meaning that a detailed analysis was not performed. The results of the present study will assist future research on the ways to develop the concept of citizenship in students with intellectual disabilities.

Conclusion

The survival of individuals in a diverse society is significantly influenced by their knowledge of citizenship. Students with intellectual disabilities often possess poor understanding on the rights and roles of citizens in a society. Citizenship knowledge in these students is a matter of interaction and communication, with active participation in community activities helping them to establish communication skills and improve their awareness of citizenship. The results of the present study reveal slightly better citizenship awareness. The involvement of social studies and proper training has therefore been shown to be necessary for the development of a greater understanding of citizenship rights among students with intellectual disabilities. The results of the present study will inform future research into the best ways to develop citizenship awareness among students with intellectual disabilities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX**Social validity**

Students with intellectual disability needs understanding of their citizenship rights.

False * Somewhat False * Somewhat Trust * True *

Teaching citizenship rights to the students with intellectual disability will benefit these students to integrate in the community.

False * Somewhat False * Somewhat Trust * True *

Citizenship knowledge help my students to become an active citizenship of the society.

False * Somewhat False * Somewhat Trust * True *

Inclusion of social studies in the curriculum is beneficial in the development of citizenship knowledge in students with intellectual disability.

False * Somewhat False * Somewhat Trust * True *

Use the below box to suggest different ways of developing citizenship knowledge in the students with intellectual disability.