

The Special Education Teachers' Perception on Independent Living Skills of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine special education teachers' perceived importance and performance of teaching essential independent living skills for students with intellectual disabilities to live an independent adult life and, on this basis, to propose ways to improve the school curriculum. A survey was conducted among 133 secondary school teachers teaching children with intellectual disabilities in nationwide, South Korea, in order to investigate their perception level of teaching independent living skills. The results revealed that the perceived importance of teaching independent living skills was relatively high, while the degree of actual practice in class was relatively low. Independent living skills that need to be taught more practically for students with intellectual disabilities was suggested. Through importance - performance analysis (IPA) of 10 independent living skills by using the mean difference between the perception of importance and performance of teachers, 4 areas such as concentrate here, keep up the good work, low priority, possible overkill are suggested. There are some suggestions based on the results of the research.

Keywords: Independent Living Skills, Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Teacher Perception

1. Introduction

All human beings wish to lead a successful adult life as independent individuals, achieving self-realization and being integrated in the society. Students with intellectual disabilities going through a transitional period would be no exception [1] [2]. When they learn the skills required for a successful transition, not only is the range of skills limited since they have difficulty in acquiring complex skills, but the amount of time and number of opportunities to practice them are considerably less, compared with students without disabilities. From this point of view, transition education is of vital importance for students with intellectual disabilities, so that they successfully acquire the skills and prepare for their lives after graduation [3] [4].

The goal of special education for students with intellectual disabilities is to develop and improve their ability to live as independently as possible in adulthood, the stage of life they will spend the most time in. They need to learn to be self-reliant, actively leading their own lives rather than passively depending on others for protection. If they graduate from school without independent living skills, they might have to live isolated from the society, either at home or in community care centers. It is thus necessary that they acquire independent living skills through systematic education. Independent living skills are essential skills for a successful

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life both as an independent adult and as a member of the community. As students with intellectual disabilities rarely have the chance to receive training to adapt to adult life after graduating from school, an effective transition education program must be provided in school [5].

Independent living skills required when students stand on their own feet are taught at home for a long time by parents and other family members. However, they can also be learned through natural occurring situations in the community or through classes emphasizing particular skills in school.

The school is responsible for teaching students what they need to survive in the society. This is an element of IEPs and one of most important skills that some students need to learn. The point is that schools must make students with and without disabilities prepared to function in the society. Students with severe disabilities especially need help. Accordingly, how the school teaches the required skills plays an integral role in students' future success in the society. Teaching those skills occur not only in school settings but in natural situations. That is because students with disabilities have difficulty in making generalizations or applications in a new environment. If possible, it is much more effective to teach them in natural situations [6] [7].

As the teacher's role is significant in training students with intellectual disabilities to live independently at home and in the community, this study intends to examine how important teachers regard independent living skills and how much they actually teach these skills in class. The results would provide basic information to raise awareness on the importance of teaching independent living skills and contribute to the improvement of transition education.

The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to determine teachers' perceived importance and performance of teaching independent living skills to students with intellectual disabilities transitioning into adulthood, and (2) to investigate independent living skills that need to be taught for students with intellectual disabilities

2. Method

2.1. Participant

As this study aimed to examine the perception of special education teachers toward independent living skills of students with intellectual disabilities, the subjects of this study were special education school teachers and special class teachers in secondary schools in Daegu Metropolitan City. In order to select the subjects of this study, 165 questionnaires were distributed and 138 questionnaires were collected with the cooperation of special education school teachers and special class teachers in secondary schools in Daegu Metropolitan City. A total of 133 questionnaires were analyzed, excluding 5 questionnaires that were not completed properly.

2.2. Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire items were based on the domains of skills necessary for adult life suggested by Steere, Rose and Cavaiuolo [8], in order to examine the teachers' perceived importance and performance of teaching students with intellectual disabilities independent living skills required for a successful transition to adult life.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to examine the background variables of the special teachers as participants and the second part is to examine teachers' perceptions of home and independent living skills of students with intellectual disabilities. The questionnaire is the 5 points likert scales, and the items are 41 items. To investigate the internal consistency of each

questionnaire, the researcher used Chronbach's alpha coefficients. The Chronbach's alpha coefficients for each item are shown in Table 3.2. As each item and overall level is .70 or higher as shown below, the questionnaire has a reasonable internal consistency.

2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 21.0. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the perceived importance and actual performance and then investigate independent living skills that need to be taught for students with intellectual disabilities

Using the mean difference between the perception of importance and performance of teaching functional adult life skills, the Importance - Performance Analysis (IPA) proposed by Martilla and James [9] are implemented.

In this IPA analysis, the average of the performance and importance is crossed on the x-axis and y-axis, respectively, and each item is placed on the fourth quadrant. If both the mean of importance and the performance are higher than the intersection of each average, it is located in the first quadrant, which indicates 'sustainability'. On the other hand, the importance is higher than the crossing average, but the average of the performance is lower in the second quadrant, which means 'improvement effort'. It is necessary to improve the performance because the performance is lower than the importance. Next, when the importance and the performance level are all low, it is located in the third quadrant and means 'low priority'. Finally, when the performance level is higher than the importance degree, it means 'excessive effort'. Using this IPA method, the researchers confirmed the actual items of establishing and implementing a transition education plan that requires 'improvement effort' recognized for successful transition of students with intellectual disabilities into adult life.

3. Result

3.1. Teachers' perceived importance and performance of teaching independent living skills to students with intellectual disabilities

The teachers' perceived importance and performance of teaching independent living skills for students with intellectual disabilities to successfully transition into adulthood were examined based on 10 domains Table 1.

Table 1 Perceived importance and performance of teaching independent living skills

	Independent living skills	Importance	Performance	t
		M(SD)	M(SD)	
Domain	Planning and preparing meals	4.23(.55)	3.54(.89)	7.491***
	Taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene	4.67(.42)	4.06(.75)	8.107***
	Cleaning up and taking care of the house	4.32(1.57)	3.86(.87)	2.912**
	Managing clothes	4.31(.52)	3.73(.87)	6.493***
	Managing money and utility services	4.01(.73)	3.09(1.13)	7.775***
	Using the phone or e-mail	4.07(.58)	3.51(.98)	5.549***
	Leisure activities	3.96(.67)	3.72(.77)	2.687***

Personal safety activities	4.72(.38)	4.04(.95)	7.533***
Planning and managing time	4.26(.58)	3.75(.96)	5.163***
Cooperating with others and standing up for oneself	4.15(.66)	3.48(1.02)	6.297***
Total	4.27(.43)	3.68(.74)	7.869***

10 domains are planning and preparing meals, taking care of oneself such as taking a bath and having good personal hygiene, cleaning up and taking care of the house, managing clothes, managing money and utility services, using the phone or e-mail, leisure activities, personal safety activities, planning and managing time, and cooperating with others and standing up for oneself. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of each domain and questionnaire item, related to special education teachers' perceived importance of helping students to acquire independent living skills required for a successful transition to adult life.

3.2. Independent living skills that need to be taught for students with intellectual disabilities

As shown in Table 1, the average difference between the level of perceived importance (M=4.27, SD=.43) and the perception level of actual performance (M=3.68, SD=.74) of teaching the 10 domains of independent living skills to students with intellectual disabilities transitioning into adulthood was statistically significant (t=7.869) at the .1% level. Special education teachers considered all 10 domains of independent living skills to be important, but the degree they actually teach these domains in class was significantly lower than the level of their perceived importance. In view of these results, teachers are aware of the importance of their roles in teaching the skills required for a successful transition to adulthood, but they generally fail to put their thoughts into practice.

Table 2 shows the top 10 independent living skills with the largest difference in the level of perceived importance and the perception level of actual performance. The greater the difference is, the more it is required to teach that skill at this point for the successful transition of students with intellectual disabilities.

Table 2. Independent living skills that need to be taught more intensively

Independent living skills	Domain	Importance	Performance
Keep credit card, bankbook and seal secure	Managing money and utility services	4.27(.82)	3.21(1.05)
Keeping and using medicines safely	Taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene	4.15(.71)	3.22(.98)
Do not miss out on payment of utility bills	Managing money and utility services	4.41(.75)	3.54(1.16)
Keep food safe	Planning and preparing meals	3.79(.77)	3.01(.97)
Safe use of cooking utensils	Planning and preparing meals	4.58(.69)	3.89(.79)

Service management to ensure continuous supply of telephone, water, electricity, heating, etc.	Managing money and utility services	4.64(.47)	4.01(.85)
Appropriate reaction to fire alarm	Personal safety activities	4.76(.51)	4.13(1.04)
Ask 119 for help in an emergency	Personal safety activities	4.75(.55)	4.11(.89)
Maintaining and managing hair, hands, claws, and teeth	Taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene	4.29(.69)	3.54(1.03)
Evacuating at home in case of fire	Personal safety activities	4.67(.59)	3.99(1.06)

3.3. Importance-Performance Analysis of special education teacher on teaching independent living skills

Table 3 and picture1 shows Importance - Performance Analysis (IPA) of teaching 10 independent living skills by using the mean difference between the perception of importance and performance of teachers. 10 independent living skills are divided into 4 areas such as concentrate here, keep up the good work, low priority, possible overkill.

Table 3. Importance - Performance Analysis of teaching independent living skills

Domain	Independent living skills
Keep up the good work	Personal safety activities
	Taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene
	Cleaning up and taking care of the house
	Managing clothes
Low priority	Planning and preparing meals
	Cooperating with others and standing up for oneself
	Using the phone or e-mail
	Managing money and utility services
Possible overkill	Planning and managing time
	Leisure activities

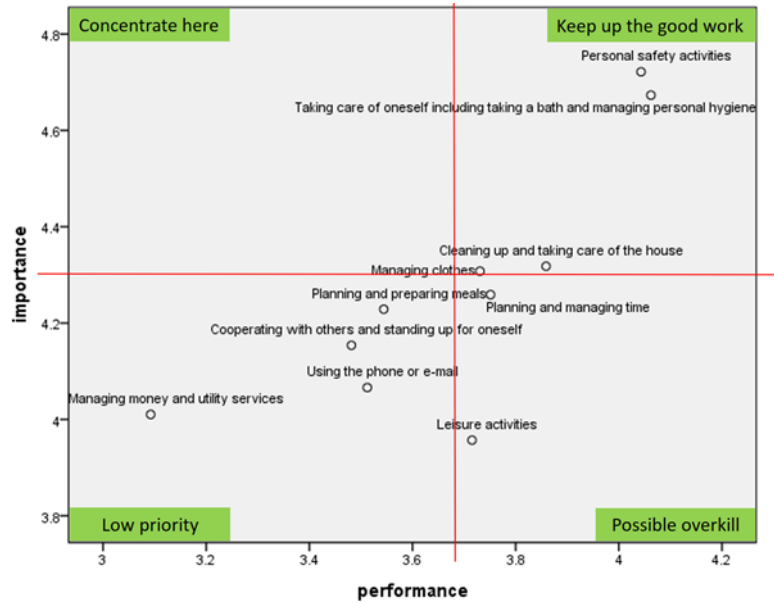


Figure 1. Importance - Performance Analysis

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion and conclusion derived from the research results are as follows.

First, special education teachers' perception level and perceived importance level regarding skills necessary for students with intellectual disabilities to effectively transition into adulthood were high, but the degree of their actual performance was lower than the perceived importance level. There was a significant difference between the perceived importance and actual performance. This could hinder the achievement of the goals of transition education to enhance their quality of life and to promote their social integration of students with intellectual disabilities [10]. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a contents system for transition education by developing and distributing transition education programs and teacher's guidebooks designed for different types and levels of intellectual disabilities or school levels, in order to motivate and facilitate teachers to help their students achieve social and financial independence.

The perception level of importance was highest for personal safety activities, followed by personal safety activities, taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene, cleaning up and taking care of the house, managing clothes, planning and managing time, planning and preparing meals, cooperating with others and standing up for oneself, using the phone or e-mail, managing money and utility services, leisure activities. The perception level of actual performance was highest for taking care of oneself including taking a bath and managing personal hygiene, followed by personal safety activities, cleaning up and taking care of the house, planning and managing time, managing clothes, leisure activities, planning and preparing meals, using the phone or e-mail, cooperating with others and standing up for oneself, managing money and utility services. Special education teachers acknowledged the importance of all independent living skills, but the degree they actually taught them was relatively low. In other words, although they considered their roles in teaching the 10 skill domains significant, they did not put their thoughts into practice. In addition, independent living skills that need to be taught for students with intellectual disabilities were analyzed based on the difference

between the perceived importance and actual performance of teaching skill domains for transition education. It would be imperative to teach the skills showing a large discrepancy through the school curriculum.

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