## Assessing the Educational Landscape for Students with Intellectual Disability in Special Education Institutions: A Case Study in Punjab, Pakistan

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### Abstract

*The current strategies for educational planning and assessment in Special Education Schools in Punjab, Pakistan, fall short in adequately supporting the school to community transition for students with intellectual disability. Despite the Special Education Department's emphasis on economic rehabilitation alongside education, achieving successful post school transitions and fostering independent living with meaningful employability remains a significant challenge for individuals with intellectual disability. This qualitative descriptive study explores the existing gaps in the implementation of educational planning and assessment strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 7 purposively selected participants, including 3 teachers, 1 parent, 1 vocational teacher, and 2 administrators from special education schools catering to students with intellectual disability. Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data, revealed four prominent themes characterizing the situation of students with intellectual disability in these special education schools: 1) Curriculum Suitability for Post School Readiness; 2) Assessment and Monitoring Mechanism; 3) Causes of Underachievement; and 4) Available Support System. This study sheds light on critical areas requiring attention and improvement, offering valuable insights for teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders. It aims to enhance the educational experiences and future prospects of students with intellectual disability in special education institutions in Punjab, Pakistan.*

**Keywords**:     Intellectual Disability, Special Education, Curriculum, School to Community Transition.

## Introduction

The provision of quality education is a global imperative, essential for fostering community development and advancing national progress by ensuring the active participation of every individual from the early stages of life (Hernández-Sánchez & Ainscow, 2018). The evolving global approach to education, embracing inclusivity as an inherent right for all, has shifted towards Inclusive Education (IE), welcoming students irrespective of their social or personal conditions (UNESCO, 2015/2023). This paradigm asserts that every child, regardless of learning differences due to disabilities or other physical and psychological diversities, has the fundamental right to education and deserves social and emotional support (Singal, 2018; Khurshid & Tassawar, 2019; Turnbull et al., 2013; McGrath, 2012).

Diversity among individuals with intellectual disability spans challenges in intellectual capabilities, adaptive functioning, physical appearances, and other skill domains. Their unique learning patterns necessitate adaptive approaches and ongoing development to seamlessly integrate them into society. Education, serving as the primary catalyst for positive change in their lives, facilitates a continuous refinement of human competencies to an unlimited degree. The adoption of outcome-based education and training is instrumental in enhancing the cognitive processes of individuals with intellectual disability (Schinkel, 2017; Khurshid & Tassawar, 2019). Aligned with the principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the fundamental goal of education should be to enhance the quality of life for students with disabilities.

Despite numerous international commitments and clear steps taken, the percentage of students with intellectual disability included in mainstream settings has not increased proportionately to other students with special educational needs and Disabilities (SEND). Students with intellectual disability still constitute a significant population within segregated schools (Buchner et al., 2020). In developing

countries like Pakistan, systematic marginalization exacerbates the critical situation of children with intellectual disability. Multiple studies indicate that education outcomes for these children in Pakistan are considerably lower compared to other Asian countries (Buchner et al., 2020). Despite recent efforts prioritizing the right to education for all children, the future for intellectually disabled students in Pakistan remains less promising than for their counterparts. These students face double exclusion, with limited or no access to academic progression and inadequate support services. Various factors contribute to this situation, including systemic challenges and the absence of targeted interventions. The aim of this study is to identify the gaps hindering the progression of students with intellectual disability (ID).

**Statement of the Problem**

The current strategies for educational planning and assessment in Special Education Schools in Punjab, Pakistan, fall short in adequately supporting the school-to-community transition for students with intellectual disability. Despite the Special Education Department's emphasis on economic rehabilitation alongside formal education, achieving successful post-school transitions and fostering independent living with meaningful employability remains a significant challenge for individuals with intellectual disability in particular.

**Objectives**

Objectives of the study are:

1.      To identify the existing gaps in the implementation of educational planning and assessment strategies in Special Education Schools in Punjab, Pakistan.
2.      To explore the challenges hindering the school-to-community transition for students with intellectual disability in Special Education Schools.
3.      To examine the effectiveness of the current curriculum and assessment mechanisms in addressing the needs of students with intellectual disability.
4.      To furnish recommendations for improving educational planning and assessment strategies to enhance the educational experiences and future prospects of students with intellectual disability in special education institutions in Punjab, Pakistan.

**Research Questions**

Following are research questions to achieve the objectives:

1.      Does the existing curriculum produce the desired outcomes for the education of students with mild to moderate Intellectual Disability? Highlight the major gaps.
2.      What are the causes of underachievement of students with ID?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address critical gaps in the educational landscape for students with intellectual disability in special education schools in Punjab, Pakistan. By assessing the existing educational program of these students, the study aims to determine the necessity for reforms. Presently, the segregated nature of education for children with intellectual disability in Punjab, coupled with the absence of comprehensive transition plans, poses challenges for their future integration into skill based programs and active participation in society. Through offering targeted recommendations to teachers, stakeholders, and policymakers, the study endeavors to bridge these gaps in educational planning. The overarching goal is to enhance access to education, promote increased participation, enrich learning experiences, and foster optimal development for students with intellectual disability. This study can facilitate in following ways:

•       The study can provide teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders with valuable insights into the practical challenges faced by special education schools. This information can contribute to informed decision-making regarding curriculum development, resource allocation, and support services for students with ID.
•       Understanding the specific challenges in both settings special and inclusive education allows for targeted efforts to improve mutual practices. It enables teachers to identify areas that may need additional support or modifications to create more inclusive learning environments for students with ID within the special education schools.
•       Findings from the study can inform the development of training programs for teachers and professionals. This training can address the unique needs of students with ID and equip them with the tools to create more effective and supportive classrooms.
•       The study can raise awareness within the community about the unique challenges faced by

students with ID in different educational settings particularly in special education schools. This awareness can lead to increased community support, reduced stigmatization, and the inclusivity beyond the school environment.

**Literature Review**

The school curriculum is a crucial factor in shaping the academic progress of students at all levels, offering flexibility to accommodate diverse needs. For students with intellectual disability, the significance of a flexible curriculum is paramount, adapting to their unique learning patterns (Zona, 2020). Despite challenges in intellectual and adaptive functioning, these students can enhance understanding with appropriate support (Hazmi & Ahmad, 2018). Regrettably, in Pakistan, students with intellectual disability are often confined to segregated special education schools, facing barriers to academic advancement and lacking transition plans for community integration. Approximately 8,000 students with ID are enrolled in public special education schools in Punjab, encountering limited academic progression and insufficient support services.

Research demonstrates the feasibility of including students with Intellectual disability (ID) in mainstream schools, acknowledged for the benefits of Inclusive Education (IE) (Hehir et al., 2016; Kurth and Mastergeorge, 2010; Shogren et al., 2015). However, translating research findings into daily practice poses distinct challenges. Ground realities differ; schools and professionals navigate the ongoing responsibility of addressing evolving student needs, meeting curricular goals, and managing resource constraints. These operational factors can frame the inclusion of students with ID as a challenge rather than an opportunity for development (Amor, 2019).

The situation in special education schools differs from inclusive education schools for students with ID. Special education schools provide specialized instruction and support tailored to diverse learning needs. Inclusive education aims to integrate students with ID into mainstream settings, presenting challenges in adapting to the curriculum and social interactions. The primary difference lies in the approach: special education schools are specialized settings, while inclusive education integrates students into mainstream classrooms. Challenges and opportunities vary based on context and resources (Amor, 2021).

Considering these differences, special education schools are expected to offer improved outcomes for students with intellectual disability through the provision of necessary support services, specialized instruction under supervision of a trained professional team. A successful education program relies on systematic planning, including curriculum selection and effective implementation. For students with ID, selecting an appropriate curriculum aligning with their personalized support needs is crucial. With the right assistance, their competencies can improve, fostering successful transitions and independent living (Schalock et al., 2010; Amor et al., 2021; Verdugo et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2018).

**Research Design**

The research design was qualitative descriptive in nature. Seven participants from govt. special education schools of children with ID were selected through purposive sampling technique from Lahore district. Semi structured interview was developed based on the literature review and framework of the study. An interview guide was formed by the researcher validated by the experts of the field. The instrument was pilot tested. Face-to-face semi structured interview was conducted. Interviews were transcribed and coded. Thematic analysis was employed.

Following themes were derived from the analysis.

Theme 1: Curriculum Suitability for Post School Readiness
Theme 2: Assessment and Monitoring Mechanism
Theme 3: Causes of Underachievement
Theme 4: Available Support System

**Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data from a purposively selected sample of participants. The study involved 7 participants, including 3 teachers, 1 parent, 1 vocational teacher, and 2 administrators, all of whom were directly involved in special education schools catering to students with intellectual disability in Punjab, Pakistan.

### Study Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was selected for this study as it allowed the researchers to select participants who possessed valuable insights and experiences relevant to the research topic. By including a diverse range of stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, vocational teachers, and administrators, the study ensured a comprehensive exploration of the issues at hand from multiple perspectives.

### Data Collection

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to gather in-depth insights and perspectives from participants regarding the challenges and gaps in educational planning and assessment strategies. This approach provided flexibility in questioning, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences and opinions, thus enriching the data collected.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data, which involved systematically identifying patterns and themes within the dataset. This analytical approach facilitated in finding similarities, differences, and deeper meanings in what the participants said.

### Findings

Summary of the findings is provided in this portion followed by proper quotations from the participants. Participants' responses were classified into four wider themes that are as follows:

### Theme 1: Curriculum Suitability for Post School Readiness

The following information was given by the Teachers regarding the suitability of curriculum including objectives, content, instructional methodology and assessment procedures. Majority of the participants reported that existing curriculum does not meet the needs of post school transition phase.
Participant 1 informed,

*"… Presently the curriculum offered by Directorate general of Special education is not on based on need analysis and support needs of children with IDD because department did not made any research on need based analysis to find out the gaps in previous curriculum.*
*Curriculum is not on based age because there is huge difference in mental and chronological age of every child and it is only measured by IQ test which was never offered by department to cheek the exact mental and chronological age of children with IDD …NO, the curriculum does not emphasis on the transition planning and vocational skills because we have no one in school who can teach vocational skills to make their transition in work place…however, curriculum is suitable to some extent but not completely to prepare students for post school transition…" (AD1)*
Participant 2 informed,

*"…In my opinion, the given curriculum is not fulfilling the individual learning needs of the educable group of IDs. The curriculum objectives do not support the successful inclusion, also not aligned with the regular national educational goals… Curriculum modifications in all areas are needed to make them appropriate for all IDs according to their age groups …Vocational and skills development trainings play important roles in successful transition from school to work place. Vocational and skill development curriculum objectives should be realistic, clear and marketable to prepare IDs for work/ self-employed and to make them productive and independent member of the society. But unfortunately, this curriculum does not emphasis on successful transition from school to employment. Curriculum needs modifications to make it effective for post school readiness…" (AD2).*
Participant 3 informed,

*"… Curriculum designed according to the needs of children with special needs but need to be aligned with General Education curriculum. Yes it is age appropriate and quite functional but still needs to define skills more into task analysis…It does not fulfill criteria for school to employment criteria actually, it is important to include vocational tasks, but for vocational courses in the schools we don't have vocational resource rooms at schools… No it is not suitable for post school transition…" (T1).*
Participant 4 informed,

*"… Need revision and should be aligned with general education curriculum at least at early level. Educational Levels not defined and should be categorized in more than 3 levels. Curriculum should be more functional, daily functional skills be included at very early level. Yes but more social and practical skills should be added according to social norms (needs improvement)…No, in centers limited resources and facilities restrict the inclusion and employment transition … To some extent it is suitable but practical based skills and professional trainings should be included…" (T2).*

Participant 5 informed,

*"… The objectives of curriculum for special needs has its own specifications, its little bit aligned with regular curriculum. It really meets the objectives of curriculum. It's aligned with the vision of Special Education. Yes it is age appropriate and Functional because it's designed in the light of the special needs of children… No, I guess it's not as much helpful in successful transition to secondary education. Because practical activities should be included to check the generalization… no it needs improvement…" (T3).*

Participant 6 informed,

*"…being mother I am afraid and worried about the future of my 21 years old daughter who is downsyndrom and where she will go after this school… there should be a residential sheltered place with skill based training opportunities…"(P).*

Participant 7 informed,

*"… Well... curriculum of special needs person should must have some aspects of regular curriculum but it should be according to needs and severity of disability of special person. To mainstream a special person he/she should be some objectives of regular curriculum. It is age appropriate to some extent and Functional and useful... The knowledge or skill that we taught to learner is very effective and useful socially as well as academically ... I think such components [vocational training and skill based] are very less as we don't teach any skill to students which will be helpful for them after completion of their education. If there are some content in curriculum that are helpful for vocational rehabilitation then it will be definitely helpful or children with I. D... no it needs improvement…" (VT).*

**Theme 2: Assessment and Monitoring Mechanism**

The majority of the participants indicated that the curriculum in special education schools provides guidelines for assessment procedures and leaves it up to teachers to determine how they utilize assessments. However, progress monitoring is deemed unjustified and in need of improvement.

Participant 1 reported,

*"...No, the Curriculum does not emphasize on the diversified instructions and alternative assessment procedure. Because we have no any alternative and augmentative devices… Yes, the present curriculum discusses the progress monitoring mechanism by the end of every year…" (AD1).*

Participant 2 informed,

*"…It emphasizes the diversity of instructions. However, Assessment procedures need adaptations according to the individual's level.... For better results and achievements, a good monitoring and evaluation procedures play important role. Monitoring mechanism need to be adapted according to the individual learning needs of the IDs to achieve the maximum objectives of the curriculum in true sense. Assessment and evaluation procedures need to be clearly described in curriculum document…" (AD2).*

Participant 3 informed,

*"... Yes it does, keeping this curriculum in the view diverse needs of the children can be seen and met and alternative assessment procedures can be used... However, it doesn't give such monitoring mechanism to measure student's skills…" (T1).*

Participant 4 informed,

*"...To some extent, more professional trainings and assessment procedures are required to be adopted at essential level… To some extent, more latest monitoring mechanism need to be introduced…" (T2).*

Participant 5 informed,

*"... Yes this curriculum has many assessment forms ... Yes it's helpful for the good monitoring mechanism ..." (T3).*

Participant 7 informed,

*"...It depends upon the severity of disability some learners learns such contents but some are not… I am not satisfied with progress monitoring system…" (VT).*

**Theme 3: Causes of Underachievement**

All respondents highlighted causes under the diverse factors contributing to the underachievement of students with intellectual disability, encompassing educational, social, and community related challenges.

Participant 1 informed'

*"... non availability of proper testing and screening we have no tools to check their IQ level..."(AD1).*
Participant 2 informed,
*"…Modification and addition is required in the vocational and functional academics goals, academic accessibility is important as per needs of the IDs, poor monitoring and evaluation system, implementation in true sense is missing, less Parents cooperation, student teacher ratio is not appropriate, multi-grade teaching is in practice…"(AD2).*
Participant 3 informed,
*"...Curriculum guide is missing, skill monitoring mechanism is missing, unavailability of resources, lack of experts, resource rooms, labs, libraries are missing..." (T1).*
Participant 4 informed,
*"...Lack of parents participation, lack of awareness among parents about students' disability..." (T2).*
Participant 5 informed,
*"...Health issues affecting attendance, less material for regular use, focus on documentation and file work, student's strength in classes is not ideal, have not appropriate trainings and workshops for teachers, not good arrangements of exercises and sports for the students with special needs, sitting in the same classrooms for years as a routine is also the cause of under achievements, have no fun activities for the ID students, not good reinforcement, have not good collaboration of institutions, all are running to compete not child friendly…"(T3).*
Participant 6 informed,
*"...resources for the training of our children should be arranged and provided by the government and sheltered workshop should be established… no one accepts our children and hire them for work in the community because they are not trained for these…"(P).*
Participant 7 informed,
*"… causes may be social, economic, mental or genetic…" (VT).*
The above reported causes can be categories under following factors:

| Sr.# | Themes / Factors | Causes Of Under Achievement |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Assessment and Monitoring Challenges | • Lack of proper testing and screening tools for assessing IQ levels.<br>• Poor progress monitoring and evaluation systems. |
| 2 | Curricular and Academic Accessibility Issues | • Modification and addition needed in vocational and functional academic goals.<br>• Inadequate academic accessibility based on the needs of students with IDs.<br>• Missing curriculum guides.<br>• Lack of skill monitoring mechanisms |
| 3 | Resource Limitations | • Unavailability of resources, including resource rooms, labs, and libraries.<br>• Lack of experts in special education. |
| 4 | Parental Involvement and Awareness | • Insufficient parental cooperation.<br>• Lack of awareness among parents about their children's disabilities.<br>• Lack of parents' participation. |
| 5 | Educational Environment and Practices | • Inappropriate student-teacher ratio.<br>• Implementation gaps in the educational system.<br>• Multi-grade teaching practices.<br>• Health issues affecting attendance.<br>• Insufficient material for regular use.<br>• Focus on documentation and file work.<br>• Fixed seating arrangements for years.<br>• Inadequate training and workshops for teachers.<br>• Limited arrangements for exercises and sports for students with special needs.<br>• Lack of fun activities for ID students.<br>• Insufficient reinforcement strategies<br>• Limited collaboration among institutions. |

| 6 | Social and Community Integration Challenges | • Social, economic, mental, or genetic factors affecting students with IDs.<br>• Lack of acceptance and employment opportunities in the community. |
| 7 | Government Support and Infrastructure | • Need for government-arranged resources for training.<br>• Establishment of sheltered workshops for ID students |

**Theme 4: Available Support System**

All respondents reported the availability of a support system from different perspectives, encompassing Curricular Support, Technological and Innovative Support, Professional Support Services, Comprehensive Support System, and Audio-Visual Aids Support. However, the majority of the participants reported that the support system is either unavailable or, for those who acknowledged its presence, its effective utilization is lacking. Notably, there is a lack of a well-conceived understanding among the participants regarding the concept of support needs for students with intellectual disability (ID) and the corresponding required support systems.

Participant 1 revealed,

*"...Every type of support is available to achieve the objectives of curriculum but unfortunately. We have no standardized screening tests to identify their needs according to their level..."* (AD1).

Participant 2 informed,

*"…Only traditional support system is available. There is a need of innovative modern and ICT based support to achieve the national curriculum goals…."* (AD2).

Participant 3 informed,

*"… Nothing except few service providers i.e. psychologist, speech therapist..."* (T1).

Participant 4 informed,

*"...Right now following support system should be there which is not: Para professionals, Family support, Teachers parents collaboration..."* (T2).

Participant 5 informed,

*"...Yes, it's available. Curriculum is designed to improve independency of the students with intellectual disability ..."* (T3).

Participant 6 informed,

*"…we are afraid about the future because there is no support system after our death..."* (P).

Participant 7 informed,

*"...Additional Audio Visual aids can be used for support..."* (VT).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

**Discussion:**

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the challenges faced by special education schools in Punjab, Pakistan, regarding the education and transition of students with intellectual disability (ID). The identified themes provide a comprehensive overview of the existing issues, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.

**Theme 1: Curriculum Suitability for Post School Readiness**

The findings highlight a significant gap in the existing curriculum, particularly in addressing the post school transition needs of students with intellectual disability (ID). The study reveals a lack of alignment with individual learning needs, inadequate emphasis on vocational skills, and the necessity for crucial modifications. This curriculum gap presents a notable challenge for effectively preparing students with ID for successful transitions to work or self-employment. Addressing this gap requires a multifaceted approach. Recommendations arising from the study advocate for a comprehensive revision of the curriculum, aligning it more closely with mainstream education principles, and integrating practical and vocational skills into the educational framework. These proposed solutions aim to bridge the identified gaps and better cater to the unique needs of students with ID during their transition to post school life.

Research in this area consistently supports the effectiveness of implementing support strategies to enhance students' functional abilities across various major life activities and domains (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). Moreover, aligning the curriculum document to prioritize "what to teach" and providing a robust framework of action based on a support paradigm emerges as a promising strategy. Studies such as those by Amor (2021), Schalock et al. (2010), and Thompson et al. (2009) reinforce the notion that this approach not only addresses the curriculum gap but also has the potential to significantly improve the overall quality of education and life for students with ID.

Moreover, recent investigations in curriculum design and special education indicate the importance of tailored educational approaches. A study by (Schalock & Mostert, 2018) found that a personalized curriculum, considering the unique needs and strengths of students with ID, positively impacts their engagement and learning outcomes. These findings align with the recommendations of the current study, emphasizing the significance of curriculum revisions and personalized approaches to enhance the educational experience and post-school transitions for students with intellectual disability.

**Theme 2: Assessment and Monitoring Mechanism**

The participants in the study conveyed significant concerns regarding the assessment procedures and progress monitoring embedded in the current curriculum. Although guidelines for assessment were acknowledged, participants emphasized the imperative need for adapting these procedures to individual levels and ensuring clarity in evaluation processes. Notably, the participants highlighted the absence of pertinent resources and materials, emphasizing challenges in providing diversified instructions. These insights highlight the crucial need for comprehensive improvements in these vital areas.

Recent research findings align with the participants' concerns. Studies by (Tetzlaff et al., 2021) emphasize that personalized assessment strategies significantly enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of evaluating students with intellectual disability (ID). The identified absence of relevant resources and materials echoes the findings of (Tomlinson, 2000; Ying, 2013; Turnbull, 2013; Schalock et al., 2002), emphasizing the necessity for a well-equipped learning environment to facilitate diversified instructions and cater to the unique needs of students with ID. Moreover, the participants emphasized the pivotal role of effective progress monitoring for meaningful educational outcomes. Researches by (Tomlinson, 2000; Ying, 2013; Turnbull, 2013; Schalock et al., 2002; Sternberg, 1998; Csikszentmihaly, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986)) have consistently demonstrated that robust progress monitoring positively correlates with improved learning outcomes for students with ID.

The call for schools to adopt a comprehensive framework for understanding the personal outcomes of students with ID is substantiated by existing literature. A framework that integrates personalized supports is crucial for schools to assess the extent to which they contribute to the fullest development of students with ID (Tetzlaff et al., 2020). This highlight the study's emphasis on the implementation of personalized supports to address the identified gaps in the curriculum, promoting a more inclusive and effective learning environment for students with intellectual disability.

**Theme 3: Causes of Underachievement**

The causes of underachievement identified by the participants are broad and encompass several factors, highlighting the complexity of the challenges faced by students with intellectual disability (ID) in public special education schools Punjab. These factors include assessment and monitoring challenges, curricular and academic accessibility issues, resource limitations, parental involvement, educational environment and practices, and social and community integration challenges.

Research by Tomlinson, (2000) and Tetzlaff et al., (2020) supports the notion that assessment and monitoring challenges significantly impact the academic performance of students with ID. The study emphasizes the need for tailored assessment strategies to accurately gauge the progress and learning outcomes of these students.

Curricular and academic accessibility issues have been extensively studied in the works of Moljord, 2010; Ayres et al., 2011; Shurr and Bouck, 2013; Jiu and Haryanto, 2020. Their findings underscore the importance of creating curricula that are inclusive and accessible to meet the diverse learning needs of students with ID. Resource limitations as a contributing factor align with the research conducted by Tomlinson, 2000, who highlights the correlation between adequate resources and improved educational outcomes for students with special needs. The role of parental involvement in the academic success of students with ID is supported by studies such as Jiu and Haryanto, 2020. Their research emphasizes the positive impact of active parental engagement on students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Educational environment and practices, along with social and community integration challenges, have been addressed in studies by Amor, (2020) respectively. These studies stress the significance of fostering inclusive educational environments and promoting social integration for students with ID.

**Theme 4: Available Support System**

While participants acknowledged the availability of support systems, concerns were raised about their effective utilization. The need for innovative, modern, and ICT-based support was highlighted, indicating a gap in the current support infrastructure. The lack of a standardized screening test, the absence of certain support systems (Para professionals, family support, teachers-parents collaboration), and concerns about future support after parents' death underscore the need for a more holistic and well-coordinated support framework.

However, teachers perception about support needs of students with intellectual disability is not updated as discussed in the studies by (Wehmeyer and Shogren, 2017; Thompson, et al., 2009).

**Conclusion:**

The study highlights the challenges faced by special education schools in Punjab in adequately preparing students with intellectual disability (ID) for post-school transitions. The identified gaps in the curriculum, assessment procedures, and support systems emphasize the need for targeted interventions. The causes of underachievement reflect a complex interplay of educational, social, and systemic factors that necessitate a comprehensive approach for improvement.

In alignment with the findings of the study conducted by Jiu et al. (2016), parental concerns regarding the future careers of children with ID are evident. Many parents express the hope that their children with ID can acquire essential skills such as reading, writing, and the maximization of their potential. Consistent with other research, it is emphasized that parents and teachers play a crucial role in fostering positive beliefs and optimistic perspectives regarding the future of children facing intellectual or other disabilities. Consequently, support is deemed essential, with teachers at school identified as key contributors to this support system.

The researcher asserts that parents' and teachers' expectations for the independence of children with intellectual disability in both career and education are entirely natural. This expectation stems from the universal desire of every parent and teacher to secure the best possible future for each child and, by extension, all students. Given the practical impossibility of children being under the constant supervision of their parents, concerted efforts and interventions become imperative. Such interventions primarily involve providing quality education at school and imparting skills that promote independence. This result is supported by the study of Wehmeyer and Shogren (2017), wherein special education teachers have the most crucial and intimate role in carrying out relevant assessments, planning social-related instruction, designing and delivering special education services for students with intellectual disability, and developing partnerships with other stakeholders.

Teachers play a pivotal role in fostering the development and independence of children with intellectual disability. Their responsibility extends to adopting innovative and effective teaching methods tailored to the unique needs of these students. Utilizing appropriate instructional strategies is crucial for facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the presented material, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience (Morningstar et al., 2016).

Numerous studies (Wehmeyer et al., 2017; Morningstar et al., 2001; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000) advocate for a shift from the traditional education model towards a more inclusive living system, emphasizing the importance of support and inclusivity. Research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between school experiences and post-school transitions. Practical school experiences, particularly those supported with paid and community-based jobs, significantly contribute to the likelihood of students achieving greater independence after leaving school (Carter et al., 2012; Wehman et al., 2014; Wehman & Sima et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). This highlights the critical need for an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also equips students with intellectual disability with the practical skills necessary for a successful post school transition.

**Participants wise suggested Improvements:**

Following are the suggestions from the participants to improve the system:

| Sr.# | Participants | Suggested Improvements | Key Focus |
|------|--------------|------------------------|-----------|
| | 1 | • Implement an annual survey to assess the curriculum's effectiveness by gathering feedback from teachers actively involved in practical instruction.<br>• Ensure the collaboration of experts from academia and the operational field, specializing in the education of intellectual disability (ID), in the curriculum design process. This | **Effective Curriculum Evaluation and Design** |

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|---|---|---|
| | collaboration ensures alignment with the diverse IQ levels, and support needs for adaptive skills of students with ID. | |
| 2 | • Integrate both formal and informal assessment procedures to track the academic progression of students with IDs.<br>• Address the absence of ICT and assistive devices, establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism.<br>• Ensure clarity and alignment of curriculum objectives with national standards. | **Enhanced Assessment Strategies and Technological Integration** |
| 3 | • Expand the curriculum by incorporating more vocational and life skills, emphasizing practical components over theory.<br>• Provide essential resources like computer labs, art/resource rooms, and kitchens. Set skill-based goals and include real-life exposure objectives.<br>• Strengthen monitoring mechanisms for improved outcomes. | **Comprehensive Life Skills Integration** |
| 4 | • Foster self-identification and confidence among students, offering age-appropriate knowledge.<br>• Collaborate with the medical department to prioritize students' health.<br>• Emphasize personal attention over paperwork,<br>• Establish partnerships with other Special Education institutions, and facilitate student rotations for comprehensive social integration. | **Holistic Development and Collaborative Initiatives** |
| 5 | • Deliver foundational content with repetitive drill practice to enhance retention.<br>• Introduce technical skills to empower students with the ability to earn a livelihood.<br>• Ensuring that the curriculum covers both fundamental and practical aspects of their education. | **Structured Learning for Livelihood Skills** |

**Future Implications:**

The insights gained from this study can inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the challenges faced by students with intellectual disability in special education settings. Addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations proposed in this study can lead to improved educational outcomes and better opportunities for students with intellectual disability in Punjab, Pakistan.

**Suggestions and Recommendations for Improvement:**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Recognizing the urgent need for curricular revision, a comprehensive needs analysis and research initiative are imperative to align the curriculum with the needs of students with intellectual disability (ID). This alignment should prioritize age appropriateness, functional skills development, and vocational training.

2. To improve assessment and monitoring, there is a crucial requirement to establish an effective mechanism for evaluating student learning goals outcomes. This involves a clear articulation of assessment and evaluation procedures within the curriculum document, coupled with the enhancement of progress monitoring mechanisms.

3. Implementing targeted interventions is essential to address the identified causes of underachievement. This includes provisions for necessary resources, the establishment of parental involvement programs, and improvements in the overall educational environment.

4. Strengthening existing support systems is vital, incorporating innovative and ICT-based approaches. This entails the development of standardized screening and assessment tests for effective identification of individual support needs for the proper educational placement of students with intellectual disability, ensuring the delivery of need-based services.

5. Foster collaboration between teachers, parents, and professionals, establishing support mechanisms that extend beyond the lifetimes of parents. Recognizing that the concept of identifying support needs of students with intellectual disability is relatively new, it is crucial to provide teachers with training in this area.

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Implementing these comprehensive recommendations will significantly contribute to creating a more inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment for students with ID in special education schools in Punjab, Pakistan.

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