

Educating Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Nepal: Exploring Realities and Challenges from Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring the realities and challenges that have been taking place for years while providing educational services to students with intellectual disabilities in Nepal. Interpretive-constructivist paradigm accompanied by phenomenological research design was used to carry out this research. Eight teachers teaching to the students with intellectual disabilities were chosen from four special schools (two from each) located within Kathmandu valley by using purposive sampling method, and then all sample teachers were interviewed by using in-depth interview technique to collate credible and authentic information required for the study. Study results reveal that a number of attempts such as special education services in a separate setting, distinct structure of curriculum, community-based instruction, etc. had been made to optimize the access of these students to educational program. Nevertheless, the students with intellectual disabilities were not receiving quality educational services because of various challenges such as inadequate training to teachers, poor expectations from children, insufficient resources, etc. These students, therefore, should be taught in an inclusive educational setting by providing community-based services based on the severity of their disability.

Keywords: *Students with intellectual disabilities, special education, separate curriculum, community-based instruction*

Introduction

People with intellectual disabilities show deficit especially in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (Richards, Brady, & Taylor, 2015; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018), which eventually affects their academic performance (Heward, 2013; Kirk et al., 2015). An individual must meet three criteria to be marked as a person with intellectual disabilities under DSM-5. These criteria are poor intellectual functioning, marked deficits in adaptive behavior, and onset of intellectual and adaptive deficit during the developmental period (Brue & Wilmschurst, 2016; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Due to inadequate cognitive abilities, these students are poor in memory, learning, motivation, generalization, self-care skills, social relationship, and meta-cognitive skills

(Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Brue & Wilmshurst, 2016; Heward, 2013). Consequently, they cannot get adequate access to general education curriculum without its proper accommodations and modifications. Curriculum, therefore, should be adjusted as per the peculiar learning needs of these students to develop their inner potentialities to a fuller extent possible.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities comprise a very heterogeneous group ranges from mild to profound level of severity (Heward, 2013; Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018; Westwood, 2007). Consequently, these students cannot get sufficient benefits from general education services without their considerable accommodations and modifications (Downing, 2010; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018) in spite of possessing similar type of disability. Since the degree of severity of students with intellectual disabilities ranges from mild to moderate, severe, and profound level; they need intermittent, limited, extensive, and pervasive supports respectively based on their individual differences to maximize their academic and functional growth to a greater extent (Heward, 2013; Kirk et al., 2015). Deficits in cognitive, communicative, and social domains limit their ability to cope academic and social challenges of an educational program introduced under a school (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Some students with intellectual disability cannot get proper access to academic curriculum, therefore, functional curriculum needs to be developed and enacted to make them independent in their course of living as their peers without disabilities (Heward, 2013; Kirk et al., 2015). Functional reading, writing, and mathematical skills are developed to enable them to perform daily life activities effectively (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Richards et al., 2015). Considering the reality, different educational programs have been offered for students with intellectual disabilities under a formal education system in Nepal.

Constitutionally all citizens including those with intellectual disabilities have equal rights to get compulsory and free education up to basic level in Nepal (Ministry of Education, 2016; Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The Nepal Government has been sanctioning a number of educational policies and programs through general, integrated, and special schools to ensure the access of all children, including those with intellectual disabilities, to education across the country (Ministry of Education, 2016; Jung & Niure, 2018; Niure, 2019) by allocating large chunk of national budget. Providing residential facilities, conducting resource classes under the general educational settings (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Jung & Niure, 2018), distributing scholarships, providing instructional materials with free of cost, etc. (Curriculum Development Center, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2016, Jung & Niure, 2017) are some representative endeavors made in Nepal to provide education for all. Nevertheless, these attempts are not enough to enhance accessibility, relevancy, and quality of education as per the peculiar learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities (Jung & Niure, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2011). All of them, especially in general and integrated schools, are expected to follow the same lessons disregarding their individual learning differences, and they cannot show satisfactory performance at their classroom as compared to their typically developing peers. Some students with intellectual disabilities stay in the same class for years (Human Rights Watch, 2011). As a result, these children cannot get an opportunity to be educated and trained based on their special learning needs either in special or general educational settings in Nepal. In this regard, this article is related to explore the realities and challenges that teachers had been facing for long time while implementing educational interventions for children with intellectual disabilities under the special educational settings.

There is no clear data about the total number of children with disabilities in Nepal and how many of them are out of school (Human Rights Watch, 2011). World Health Organization estimates that Nepal has 60,000 to 180,000 children ages 4 to 14 with disabilities. Furthermore, UNICEF (2016) revealed that 30.6 percent of children with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, ages 5 to 12 did not attend school (cited in Human Rights Watch, 2018). Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) states that 45,885 people have intellectual disability and 16,922 students with intellectual disability are receiving educational services in Nepal (Department of Education, 2016) through 14 special schools and 122 resource classes (Ministry of Education, 2017) based on right-based approach. Nevertheless, children with intellectual disabilities have lower enrolment and higher dropout rates as compared to other children. The curriculum taught to them is not found fully accessible (Human Rights Watch, 2018) and they cannot learn what is intended to be learnt by them under formal educational setting.

Although functional curriculum is very beneficial to some children with intellectual disabilities, some of them require academic curriculum (Downing, 2010; Hallahan et al., 2012, Heward, 2013; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018) to develop their inner potentials to an optimum level. However, academic curriculum has not been developed yet for children with intellectual disabilities in Nepal. Those who do attend school learn only basic life-skills such as personal hygiene, brushing teeth, going to toilet, eating independently, and the like (Human Rights Watch, 2018) to a limited extent generally in self-contained classrooms. It means; these students are not receiving educational interventions as per their special learning needs and the educational programs designed and implemented by targeting them is not found cost-effective. In this regard, this aims at exploring the realities and challenges of educating students with intellectual disabilities in special schools of Nepal.

Objective and Research Questions

Students with intellectual disabilities cannot get sufficient benefits from general education curricula without adjusting them based on their individual learning needs and styles. In this regard, the study aimed at exploring the realities and challenges that have been taking place for years while educating students with intellectual disabilities in Nepal. To achieve this objective, two questions – How do teachers interpret the educational services that have been providing for students with intellectual disabilities? How do teachers experience the challenges that have been facing by them while teaching these students under a special educational setting? – were answered through the research process.

Research Methodology

This study was based on interpretive-constructivist paradigm accompanied by transcendental phenomenological research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994), which focuses less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on the description of the experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Study problem, therefore, was investigated based on the experiences shared by key informants participated in the research process. Eight teachers teaching to students with intellectual disabilities were chosen from four special schools (two from each) located within Kathmandu valley by using purposive sampling method. The size and nature of sample involved in the research process is given in the table below:

Table 1.
Size and Nature of Sample

Schools	Gender		Qualification		Duration of Special Education Training		Experience	
	Male	Female						
School-A	-	2	Below Intermediate	-	Up to one week	2	Up to 5 years	1
School-B	2	-	Intermediate	3	One week to one month	4	5 years to 9 years	3
School-C	1	1	Bachelor	2	One month to three months	2	10 years to 14 years	3
School-D	-	2	Master	3	More than three months	-	15 years and above	1

Based on the phenomenological research design, a number of in-depth interviews with special education teachers were held to garner information regarding educational services that have been providing in special schools to educate children with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the challenges that have been facing by special education teachers, while providing educational services to these students, were also explored through interview process. Each sample teacher was interviewed from thirty-five to forty minutes. And then the information collated from teachers was analyzed through emic perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marriam & Tisdell, 2016) by generating some themes under the research questions explored in the research process. While doing so, we have tried our best to set my pre-experiences aside to a possible extent to take fresh perspective toward the phenomenon being investigated. A number of verbatims has been used to provide broader pictures of the studied phenomenon. Various methods namely triangulation, peer review, and thick description were also applied to ensure the reliability and validity of the data primarily collected from sample teachers.

Results

All children including those with intellectual disabilities have equal rights to receive education in Nepal. The government has been endorsing various policies and programs for ensuring educational opportunities of all children for several years. Establishment of general schools with resource centers, special schools, residential facilities, etc. are some endeavors that have been made by Nepal government to ensure educational rights of children with disabilities including those with intellectual disabilities. Since some students with intellectual disabilities are significantly different from their age-matched peers without disabilities, teachers may face difficulties while teaching these students either in special or general educational setting. Based on the study results, the educational services that have been providing to students with intellectual disabilities and the challenges that have been facing by teachers while teaching them under special educational setting are given below respectively:

Educational Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Since students with intellectual disabilities are different from their peers without disabilities in terms cognitive abilities, learning pace, learning styles, and motivation, they should be taught either in separate educational setting or in an inclusive learning environment to optimize their learning to a fuller extent possible. Based on the research findings, following services have been

providing in Nepalese special schools to meet the distinct learning needs and preferences of these students:

Special education services in separate setting: A significant number of students with intellectual disabilities have been receiving special education services mainly from 32 special schools across the country. Study results indicated that primarily students with severe and profound types of disabilities were attending special schools to get education as per their individual learning needs. Almost all teachers participated in the study concurred that the separate education setting for students with intellectual disabilities is far better than the general educational setting because of their distinct educational needs, learning styles, and learning pace. In this regard, some sample teachers shared their experiences as below:

Special schools are very beneficial for students with intellectual disabilities because they can learn functional knowledge and skills from there that they need to solve their daily life problems...they are neither humiliated nor dominated by their peers since all of them have been encountering similar types of problems [Teacher-2 from School-B].

...special schools are more disabled-friendly, instructional activities of the schools are carried out by considering the distinct learning needs of these students, different life skills are taught to them based on their peculiar learning characteristics...vocational skills are also taught to some extent for their independent living...[Teacher-1 from School-C].

Teachers teaching in special schools have participated into different types of training and learned various skills that need to be applied while teaching students with intellectual disabilities...but such teachers are not found in resource classrooms located within general schools [Teacher-1 from School-D].

Thus, teachers teaching in special schools argued that separate educational setting is far better as compared to general and integrated educational setting to provide quality education services to the students with intellectual disabilities. Most of them contended that educating these students in inclusive learning setting is expensive and not effective as compared to special educational settings.

Separate structure of curriculum: Study results revealed that separate curriculum was taught to the students with intellectual disabilities in Nepal. The curriculum is developed by Curriculum Development Center for the students with intellectual disabilities to develop a number of functional skills that they need to run their daily life effectively. Usually, academic curriculum is taught in general education settings, but all students with intellectual disabilities cannot get mastery of contents encompassed under the academic curriculum and need functional curriculum. Therefore, separate curriculum was developed especially for students with severe and profound types of disabilities to develop various life skills to make them independent in their adult life. In this regard, some informants shared their experiences as below:

A functional curriculum has been prepared by organizing it into three levels. These levels are determined by age instead of the severity of the disability possessed by the learners. First level is for students ages 5 years to 9 years, second level is for 10 years to 13 years of age, and third level is for 14 to 15 years of age...this curriculum is made not only for students with intellectual disabilities but also for students with cerebral palsy and autistic spectrum disorders ages from 5 years to 15 years [Teacher-1 from School-B].

...although the government has been recommended separate curriculum for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, these students, except a few examples, cannot be independent to run their daily life activities smoothly...further steps need to be taken by responsible authorities to improve the educational services that have been providing to these students for years [Teacher-1 from School-C].

Separate curriculum has been developed for students with intellectual disabilities. This curriculum is comprised of three levels namely first level, second level, and third level. First level is five years of duration; second level is three years of duration, and third level is two years of time. As a whole, each students with intellectual disabilities has to spend ten years of time to complete the cycle of curriculum [Teacher-2 from School-C].

A separate curriculum, organized into three levels, has been teaching for students with intellectual disabilities. First level aims at preparing these students to be adjusted into general classroom located in general school, second level intends to make them independent for their daily life activities, and third level aims at preparing them for vocational-skills-related training [Teacher-2 from School-D].

The statements expressed by sample teachers indicate that a functional curriculum had been developed by targeting students with intellectual disabilities for developing their competency in different functional skills. Different levels of contents had been taught to students with intellectual disabilities based on their age rather than considering the severity of their disability. A number of conceptual, practical, and social skills have been embodied within the curriculum to provide functional knowledge to them. Nevertheless, some teachers raised questions about the relevancy and learnability of the curriculum and argued that some improvements need to be made by considering special learning needs of these students to make it more relevant.

Community-based instruction: Some teachers participated in the study stated that they were using community-based instruction to provide real life experiences to students with intellectual disabilities. Almost all teachers argued that children with intellectual disability cannot learn as effectively as their peers with normal cognitive abilities. They are also slow in conceptualizing and generalizing the knowledge and skills into another situation due to poor cognitive abilities. Concrete and fist-hand experiences, therefore, should be provided to them to develop some practical and social skills – using public transportation, buying something from grocery stores, getting help from known people, for example – to make them independent in their daily chores. The statements expressed by some respondents as below also indicate so:

Community-based instruction is very useful for students with intellectual disabilities to teach different practical and social skills such as travelling, ordering food at a restaurant, buying commodities from departmental store, using public vehicles, etc....these skills cannot be taught effectively only within four walls of a classroom...[Teacher-2 from School-C].

...we have been conducting a number of community-based activities by targeting students with intellectual activities especially to develop those skills that cannot be inculcated within structured classroom settings...but these activities have not been carried out on a routine basis due to the limited resources... [Teacher-1 from School-D].

A significant number of sample teachers concurred that community-based instruction was found effective as compared to other instructional techniques to develop different life skills within the students with intellectual disabilities. Nevertheless, *these activities were not conducted continuously due to limited resources in schools*, Teacher-1 from School-C replied. Most teachers participated in the research argued that functional curriculum should effectively be taught to these students to make them independent in their adult life.

Teaching functional skills: Most of the respondents contended that some persons with intellectual disabilities cannot perform daily life activities efficiently. Consequently, they face various difficulties in their course of living and become fully dependent on others. Basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are very crucial to enable them to spend their daily life smoothly and successfully. Furthermore, they indicated that the curriculum designed for students with intellectual disabilities has also encompassed the basic skills of 3Rs and were taught accordingly. The responses given below by key informants also indicate that these skills are taken as core part of the curriculum.

Different daily life skills such as self-feeding, being hygiene, dressing, receiving supports from others, maintaining relationship with family and community, greeting, recognizing objects, telling time, using money, etc. are taught to students with intellectual disabilities by following the curriculum developed for them [Teacher-1 from School-B].

...students with intellectual disabilities learn various functional skills such as self-feeding, requesting others, protecting own commodities, self-care, self-toileting, learning something by friends, helping others, and so on in school...these skills are very essential to make their daily life comfortable...[Teacher-2 From School-D].

Since students with intellectual disabilities have poor social and adaptive behaviors as compared to their normal peers, they encounter different problems at home and school. *Functional skills help them adjust at home and school*, Teacher-2 from School-C said. Furthermore, another informant indicated, *although some students with intellectual disabilities cannot learn academic contents as an intended manner, most of them can learn functional contents for their independent living* [Teacher-2 from School-B]. Thus, all teachers participated in the study coincided that daily living skills are very crucial for students with intellectual disabilities.

Developing vocational skills: Most of the respondents argued that vocational skills have also been taken as an integral part of the curriculum proposed for the learners with intellectual disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities should be trained into particular vocational field to generate income on a required basis for their independent living. Study results show that different types of skills (handicrafts, candle and chalk making, basket weaving, for example) were taught to students with intellectual disabilities in Nepal. However, these skills were not inculcated in such a way by which these children can be employed or self-employed because of limited resources of the school. Such reality has also been reflected in the verbatims shared by key informants below:

Vocational skills should be taught to students with intellectual disabilities to make them economically independent in their future lives...therefore, we teach different skills such as candle making, chalk making, envelop making, etc. to these students to make them self-employed after completing school education [Teacher-1 from School-B].

We have been teaching some vocational skills to intellectually disabled students as curricular content. Nevertheless, we cannot teach such skills as an intended manner due to limited budget...we only get teachers' salary and approximately Rs. 25,000 (\$235) in a year as miscellaneous cost...[Teacher-1 from School-C].

Almost all teachers participated in the study agreed that vocational skills should be taught to intellectually disabled children to enable them to adjust in broader society comfortably. But competencies in particular skill or a set of skills were not developed in these schools due to limited resources. Even though additional budget was required to develop vocational skills within these students, responsible agencies, primarily the government, did not allocate separate budget for developing such skills to a satisfactory level. Sample schools were conducting some vocational skills training but these were too short and irregular.

Challenges Facing by Teachers Teaching to the Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Children with intellectual disabilities are not identical with their typically developing peers in terms of their learning profiles. These students, therefore, should be treated differently for their optimal cognitive growth and development. Complete immersion of academic curriculum may not be suited to these students. They, therefore, should be taught by following individualized education plan (IEP) to optimize their access to the curriculum. Teachers should be qualified and trained enough to provide quality special education services to them. But study results depicted that teachers had been facing different problems while teaching to these students under a special educational setting. Some challenges, facing by teachers, were identified based on the experiences shared by sample teachers as below:

Inadequate training: Although special education teachers were recruited in special schools to teach students with intellectual disabilities, these teachers were not well qualified and trained. Study results show that all teachers teaching to these children received their higher education degree from other disciplines instead of special/inclusive education. Several trainings were provided to special teachers working in special schools for their professional development and quality education. Nevertheless, these training were too short to develop the essential competency

on the teachers required to deal with these students. The responses given below by some sample teachers also reveal so.

Even though a short-term training is conducted by governmental authorities for teachers teaching to children with intellectual disabilities, the training cannot provide sufficient knowledge and skills to the them to such extent that they required to support these students appropriately. Training only provides conceptual knowledge about the disability... [Teacher-1 from School-A].

...teachers teaching to students with intellectual disabilities can receive nearly three-week training into two stages. In the first stage, they learn concept and characteristics of intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, and autism, and in the second stage, contents related to assessment procedures, individualized education plan, and educational intervention... The training gives more priority to conceptual understanding of disability instead of educational interventions that need to be provided to the children with intellectual disabilities [Teacher-1 from School-B].

A training program has been designed for special teachers either working in special schools or in resource classes of general schools...Training has two modules and each module consists of 10 days...therefore, teachers can receive 20 days training, which is not enough to develop mastery of content that they need to learn to teach students with developmental disability effectively...[Teacher-2 from School-D].

Though teachers teaching to children with intellectual disability should be professionally sound by receiving proper educational degree and training, teachers working in special schools of Nepal were neither sufficiently trained nor qualified to provide quality education services to these students. *We do not have clarity about Individualized Education Plan (IEP), we have made some attempts but do not have proper idea whether prepared IEPs are appropriate due to limited training and monitoring [Teacher-2 from School-B answered].* Consequently, instructional activities were not differentiated appropriately by considering peculiar learning needs and interests of these learners.

Lack of Monitoring: Study results reveal that teachers made some attempts to provide quality educational services to students with intellectual disabilities in special schools. Almost all teachers argued that they had made these endeavors (teaching functional skills, vocational skills, developing IEPs, for example) based on the knowledge and skills that they learnt from training. Nevertheless, instructional activities carried out in the classrooms were rarely monitored by governmental authorities. Consequently, these teachers cannot get appropriate feedback on time to improve the prevailing drawbacks of instructional activities to make them accessible for all children. In this regard, a sample teacher stated,

We have been conducting different instructional activities (preparing IEP, teaching vocational skills, for examples) by targeting students with intellectual disabilities. Nevertheless, we are not clear whether these activities are appropriate or not due to the lack of frequent monitoring from higher authorities...[Teacher-1 from School-C].

Some teachers argued that sometimes higher authorities from department of education come to monitor their schools but they rarely provided suggestions based on the educational services that have been delivering to meet the special learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities. *We have been preparing IEP for each student based on their individual learning needs but we knew that our IEP development process was wrong after participating the training run by LUPIC*, Teacher-1 from School-D said. Thus, poor monitoring is another problem to provide relevant educational services to these students.

Inadequate resources: Study results revealed that all special schools did not have sufficient resources to provide quality education services to the students with intellectual disabilities. *Curricular contents recommended to these students are not accessible because of limited instructional materials*, Teacher-2 from School-D responded. Consequently, teachers could not inculcate intended knowledge and skills to make them independent in their adult life. *Vocational skills are not properly taught to these students because of the scarcity of separate room(s) to teach such skills*, Teacher-1 from School-C answered. *We have only limited number of teachers... ;therefore, we cannot provide individual supports to students with intellectual disabilities as per their special learning needs*, Teacher-1 from School-A said. Furthermore, another teacher said, *we do not get enough budgets to run vocational activities by targeting students with intellectual disability* [Teacher-2 from School-D]. Moreover, *students prepare different products by applying their knowledge and skills learned in school but we cannot sell these products in competitive market because of limited human resources...* Teacher-1 from School-B stated. Various statements given by teachers reveal that the students with intellectual disabilities had not been receiving quality education services in special schools due to limited human as well as physical resources.

Poor expectations from children: Study findings reveal that a large portion of teachers teaching to students with intellectual disabilities had low expectations from these children. Some sample teachers argued that since students with intellectual disabilities are poor in terms of their cognitive ability, social skills, and generalization, they neither learn curricular contents to a fuller extent nor contribute their society and nation as their same-aged peers without disabilities. On the other hand, a few number of teachers contended that it is state's responsibility to provide equal opportunity to all children including those with intellectual disabilities to receive education in their own locality based on their language and culture. *A significant number of teachers and parents have low expectations from children with intellectual disabilities...* Teacher-2 from School-B said. Furthermore, *some students with intellectual disabilities do not get proper learning environment at home as compared to their typically developing peers because their parents have no hope that their children can contribute to family in future* [Teacher-2 from School-A]. *In general education setting, classroom teachers only teach to students without disabilities instead of giving priority to students with intellectual disabilities*, Teacher-2 from School-D replied. Thus, poor expectation from these children has also been jeopardizing their access to and success in formal education system.

Inappropriately prepared curriculum: Separate curriculum has been developed to meet the special learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities. *The curriculum has been structured into three levels based on the age rather than the degree of severity of students'*

disability, Teacher-1 from School-D answered. First level curriculum had been suggested for five to nine years of age children and second level had been prescribed for ten to twelve years of age children. Finally, third level curriculum had been made for thirteen to fourteen years of children with intellectual disabilities. Although the curriculum was prepared based on the chronological age of children, some teachers were enacting the curriculum based on the degree of severity of students' disability. *Curriculum has been made based on the chronological age of children but we implement it as per the degree of the severity of their disability*, Teacher-2 from School-D replied. Thus, the study results revealed that the curriculum devised for intellectually disabled children was not appropriately prepared by considering their special learning needs and styles.

Limited curricular contents: The curriculum prepared for children with intellectual disabilities has encompassed a list of contents for preparing them for their adult lives. *Contents incorporated within first, second, and third levels aim at enabling the learners to adjust in school, making them independent to perform their daily life activities, and preparing them for vocational training activities respectively*, Teacher-1 from School-C informed. Furthermore, another teacher indicated that *curricular contents selected for these children are neither enough to make them independent in their daily life activities nor adequate for developing their vocational competency* [Teacher-2 from School-A]. More contents, therefore, should be encompassed and taught to make them economically and socially independent in the days to come.

Discussion

Since the severity of students with intellectual disabilities ranges from mild to profound level, all of them cannot get equal benefits from a curriculum without its accommodations and modifications. Students with moderate intellectual disability can be trained to perform unskilled work under close supervision, but learners with profound intellectual disability cannot learn same skills into same degree of intensity (Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). They may need nearly constant supervision and can only be benefitted from a one-to-one relationship with a caregiver. Most of them can get benefits from individualized and inclusive instruction (Copeland & Keefe, 2017). Nevertheless, study results show that students with moderate, severe, and profound intellectual disabilities were taught under a separate educational setting by following a special curriculum comprised of three levels. Based on the degree of the severity of their disability, these students were placed into different levels based on their learnability and then special educational services were provided accordingly. Furthermore, these children are poor in their cognitive abilities and adaptive behaviors (conceptual, social, and practical skills) as compared to their peers with average cognitive abilities (Heward, 2013; Kirk et al., 2015). They, therefore, need reality-based learning, high-quality direct teaching, and contents broken down into very simple steps to ensure their high success rates (Westwood, 2007). Ample opportunities, therefore, should be provided to learn under natural settings to enable them to transfer acquired knowledge and skills into another situation (Heward, 2013). In this regard, the study results reveal that a number of these skills were taught in special schools by devising separate curriculum to make them independent in future lives. Different instructional techniques such as direct instruction, community-based instruction, etc. were applied for them to teach some life skills.

Though students with intellectual disabilities can learn vocational skills such as candle-making, sewing, origami, etc. in the schools as indicated by Human Rights Watch (2018), the products that they made in their schools did not have proper access to open and competitive market. This condition indicates that most of them did not learn knowledge and skills to that extent by which they could spend their adult life independently. In other words, curriculum should develop communication skills, self-care and daily living skills, social skills, basic academic skills, employability, etc. to enable students with intellectual disabilities to spend their social life efficiently (Westwood, 2007). In this regard, study results indicate, although a separate curriculum was prepared for children with intellectual disabilities to develop a number of functional skills, such skills were not developed through the curriculum as an intended manner because of limited curricular contents and inappropriate instructional techniques. In a nutshell, these students had access to formal education but they did not get quality education that they required to spend their life independently.

Less qualified and poorly trained teachers influence negatively in students learning and achievement (William-Diehm & Palmer, 2017). Teachers either working in resource rooms or special schools do not receive adequate training about the special educational interventions that need to be provided to the children with intellectual disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Study results also indicate that almost all teachers teaching to these students were poorly trained and none of them had degree under special/inclusive education. As a result, a significant number of teachers were teaching prescribed curriculum without developing Individualized Education Plan as per the personal learning profile of their students. Furthermore, limited staff, inflexible curricula, and inadequate instructional materials caused inferior quality of education for children with intellectual disabilities.

Children with intellectual disabilities have low access to formal education because of limited awareness about their rights to education, long distance of school, frail physical infrastructure, scarcity of instructional materials, and negative attitude towards their learning abilities (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Even though students with intellectual disabilities can achieve some academic skills, many teachers have low expectation from these children, which ultimately leads to poor instructional delivery (Copeland & Keefe, 2017). Results of the study also show that a significant number of teachers had poor expectations from these children and quality educational services were not provided to them based on their individual needs and learning styles. These students need learning materials in accessible format, cooperative staff to provide regular supports, etc. to uplift their educational status; otherwise, these students will be alienated from quality education services. Failure to ensure quality education for children with disabilities leads concomitant increment into social and financial cost for society in terms of health and social security mechanisms (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Free and appropriate public education, therefore, should be provided to these children to convert them into skilled human resources and then they can contribute their family and society in significant way as their peers without disabilities.

Conclusions

The students with intellectual disabilities are significantly different as compared to the children without disabilities in terms of their cognitive abilities, learning styles, motivation, and learning pace. These children, therefore, can neither get enough benefits from general educational setting nor have easy access to the general education curriculum without its accommodation and modification. Considering the fact, a significant number of children with intellectual disabilities have been taught in separate educational setting by devising a special curriculum comprised of three levels and then different adaptive behaviors are taught to make them independent in their future life. Although different attempts have been made by the side of government, school, and teachers to optimize their learning, the educational services provided to them have not left desirable consequences because of poorly trained teachers, limited resources in schools, poor expectations from these students, inappropriately devised curriculum, etc. These problems should be solved on time to make them independent in their future lives by providing quality education services based on their individual learning profiles. Finally, this study will be handy for policy makers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, teachers, parents, and all of those who are directly and indirectly associated with the children with intellectual disabilities to make functional policies, training packages, relevant curriculum, and the like.

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