

A Review of Job Creation for Mentally Retarded Students in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to investigate the creation of employment for mentally retarded students. This paper deals with the employment and finding a job for mentally retarded students. Employment has been one of the most critical challenges and concerns for these students, their parents, Special Education and the society. Therefore, planning, adjustment, and making some arrangements are essential for their employment. Cooperation of the government and its affiliates, such as Ministry of Labor and Social affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, and municipalities are of prime importance, mainly due to the fact that they can provide mentally retard people with certain services, such as tax breaks, grants, technical assistance, accommodation, and facilities. They can also give loans to employers for hiring the mentally retarded people. In our country some measures have also been taken for vocational training of mentally retarded students. For this purpose, pre-vocational and high school vocational programs were designed for their vocational training and meaningful employment which call for cooperation and efforts of teachers employed in Special Education, parents, other stakeholders and government agencies, including Special Education Organization and municipalities, so that mentally retarded students can get employed in the job market after graduating from high school.

KEYWORDS: Students, Mentally Retarded, Special Needs, Employment

1. INTRODUCTION

To be born, or not to be born, we as human beings have no such a choice. However, retardation and talents, disability and health are always with them. The terms exceptional children is referred to children who are significantly different from their peers in terms of intellectual, physical, psychological and social abilities. Therefore, they are unable to take advantage of normal education programs and inevitably require special attention, training and services. Thus, in terms of education, an exceptional child is the one that the provision of appropriate training and educational for her/him required adjustments in educational methods, family training and ordinary school curriculum [1]. Mental retardation, affecting 2-3% of population, poses a tremendous challenge to the societies [2]. A mentally retarded child exerts a crushing pressure on his/her parents. In fact, the birth of mentally retarded child embodies the death of ideas and expectations of parents of a child, giving them the impression that their life would not be as fetterless as they imagined [3]. The mentally retarded children can leave huge effects on their family, with financial responsibilities, marital life impairment, and social isolation and reduced quality time spent with healthy children being only some of the stressors in these families [4]. The constant care of these children is often a major source of stress for such families, with their limiting or disruptive effect giving rise to a plethora of social, economic and psychological problems [5]. The presence of a mentally retarded child can come as a shock, causing a sense of guilt, denial, sorrow, loneliness and loss of family relationships, thereby preparing the ground for the separation of parents [6].

Compared to all other children, exceptional children, in the first place are human, then they are children with some characteristics, differences, and traits (ibid.). A large proportion of exceptional students are mentally retarded. Such students have inherent limitations in intellectual functioning and social communication skills. To learn the course material too slowly, is the result of the limitations mentally retarded student have [7]. These students cannot easily adapt themselves to regular curriculums designed for normal students [8]. Other characteristic of mentally retarded students includes being slow or having low IQ, low school achievement, high risk of neglecting and failure, and increased likelihood of unintentional errors in childhood [9]. Mentally retarded by definition are those who are "significantly limited by their intellectual disability and adaptive behavior, and their problems appear before they are 18 years old" [10]. This group of people comprises nearly 2 to 3 percent of any society [11]. Compared to normal students, mentally retarded students are in special conditions. As mentioned above, their main characteristic is the result of many limitations they have in their intellectual functions, adaptive behavior and social skills [12]. Lack of social skills has a negative impact on students' scholastic performance [8], and destroys their interpersonal relations and creates behavioral-emotional disorders for them [13]. It prevents child's progress and eventually leads to adverse consequences during their schooling and reduces students'

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adjustment [14], and afflicts students with disabilities in all areas [15]. In students who are not able to do their classroom assignments, it also produces an unpleasant feeling of inadequacy, anxiety, decreased motivation and behavioral maladjustment [16]. Child's failure to adapt to everyday life conditions suggests that he may lack adaptive skills such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and concepts of autonomy, responsibility, self-esteem, etc. [17]. Compared to normal children of the same age, mentally retarded children are significantly different in intellectual, physical, social and psychological areas, and cannot take advantage of the education programs in an ideal way, and inevitably would require special care, education and extra services [1].

Therefore, to provide maximum educational and training needs of exceptional children, some changes are needed in family lifestyle and normal education programs (*ibid*). Such children have problems and special disposition that leave some effects on their way of thinking, seeing, hearing, speaking, socializing, and movements. In most cases, they have some talents that are a combination of special abilities and disabilities [18]. By independent living, we mean that mentally retarded people or generally those with disabilities may have the opportunity to live in the community by learning the skills of independent life [19]. One of the most important or perhaps critical decisions one has to make is choosing a career or job. Education of mentally retarded students should commensurate with their intellectual abilities [20]. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the idea of adjustment, balancing and employment of mentally retarded people (*ibid.*). Many believe that since the mentally retarded students cannot successfully learn theoretical subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, geography, history, etc., so the best educational programs for them is vocational education (job training) through which they can find an appropriate job for their future [21].

Vocational education, job and social skills that lead to social and vocational adjustment in the society are made of five following areas:

1 - Career information: students are given some information about the jobs, and the tasks that must be performed in a job in the community are analyzed. This information helps them to examine the importance of their jobs.

2 - Vocational guidance: vocational guidance can help the children to test their ability in doing the jobs that they are interested in and choose a job that is more appropriate. These tips can make the child somewhat aware of other jobs in the field.

3 - Job placement: the children learn manual and non-manual work-related skills, attitudes and the way of treating with others and other skills necessary for a child to be a good citizen or worker.

4 - Employment: the individuals are helped to find a job (Iran has advanced up to here and has failed to continue).

5 - Social adaption: when it is necessary, children are helped to behave in a way that is acceptable in their job or society.

New York research group has planned a curriculum to achieve the aims of vocational education on basic favorite subjects of children which follows:

1. a house suitable for children between 7 to 9;
2. an appropriate neighborhood for 10 years old children;
3. a village suitable for children 11 years old;
4. a town suitable for children 12 years old;
5. to study job descriptions suitable for children 13 years old.
6. vocational training to choose a job, get a job and maintain it, suitable for children 14 years old;
7. to learn the ways of managing one's income for teens 15 years of age;
8. worker as a citizen and social individual for the children aged 16 to 20.

One of the biggest problems of students with special needs is that they need help to consider a real purpose and suitable job [22].

In order to adjust these students to their life and career, they should acquire advanced education and vocational training, so that they can become a useful member of the society and access job opportunities. Vocational training programs and employment of people with special needs have been increasing in different countries [23]. In Iran, Special Education Organization is responsible for vocational education of people with special needs or disabilities. In this educational system, stress on vocational education approach not only empowers mentally retarded students, but also makes way for schools to accomplish their mission of preparing students for an active and useful life in the society (*ibid.*). Iran's Supreme Council of Education in its 753th meeting on 25/09/2007 authorized for three years the test run of pre-vocational junior high school and vocational senior high school education which are specific to students with special needs. Accordingly, Special Education Organization which is in charge of policy-making for education and training of children with special needs or disabilities, set up high school vocational education program for mentally retarded students.

Saremi in a research on different employers' attitudes toward hiring educable mentally retarded people found that very few are familiar with the program, and believes that the media could play an important role in characterizing the abilities and qualities of mentally retarded people, he also believes that government should provide employers with special facilities to take a step in the employment of mentally retarded people. It is

concluded that mentally retarded boys work mainly in semi-specialized and non-specialized jobs, private services, salesmanship and agriculture.[24] Richards[25], Smith[26], Channing[27], Kirk and Johnson [20] found that people with mental disability can work in more simple jobs if they have evaluated plans. People with mental disabilities, like other people of their community, should be able to choose a job. But given their mental and physical conditions, they face some limitations in choosing a job, and this is where proper planning and educational management come to prominence in their employment and job training. Therefore, the systematic adaptation and modification of employment status and vocational training require proper management and planning. In developed countries, several organizations are in charge of such a difficult and important task. However, in Iran only Special Education Organization is in charge of it. Evidently, exceptional children, having finished their elementary school, junior high school (pre-vocational) and senior high school(vocational school) actually stay at home, because employers refrain from hiring such people. Educational management and planning help students choose a meaningful and proper job, as having a proper job brings about job satisfaction, and leads to development of confirmed patterns in employment of mentally retarded people. Once mentally retarded students finish school, vocational training aims to have enabled them to find a job in the career they were trained. In fact, the vocational training program should present the careers as they are in the society, and should take the strengths, weaknesses, abilities and disabilities of the group into account. A variety of jobs are taught in special schools (including carpentry, housekeeping, garment-working, embroidery, agriculture, floriculture, tailoring, carpet weaving, etc.); however, despite the needs of the society and the painstaking effort of those involved in the training of these students, in practice after they are graduated from high school, they are unemployed, stay-home and continue to be a burden for their families. Gradually, these children forgot what they had learned, and virtually all the efforts come to nothing, because no effective strategy has ever been implemented for their employment in Iran.

However, the author of this paper proposes to exploit the potentials of government and non-governmental organizations in creation of employment (working in parks, creating centers for carpet weaving, tailoring, carpentry, etc.) for mentally retarded people. In a way that, they may receive a great help with regard to their abilities rather than their disabilities, and are first of all, no longer a burden on their society (families); secondly, they are not a stay-at-home or a source of trouble for their family or society. Thirdly, they are respected with regard to their abilities not disabilities. However, sometimes their maximum capacities have been abused for destruction of surrounding community and they are involved in corruption (e.g. narcotics distribution, sexual abuse, participation in subversive groups, etc.).

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In vocational training, career needs of every student should be taken into account by their instructors, counselors and parents according to their interests and talents, and then considering the regional, mental and physical conditions, we may analyze the existing job opportunities. Therefore, we should look for jobs with regard to children's mental abilities and also their self-care, independent life, communication skills and enhancement of their cognitive abilities such as reading, math skills, etc. In addition, it is important to take parents ideas into account. Since parents of mentally retarded children have understood their children's limited job prospects. In addition, access to important information about their perception of the future job market and defining a career path involve focusing on cooperation of the parents of children with school vocational teams and cooperation of government and non-governmental agencies. Finding a job is the biggest problem of mentally retarded students that has not been yet resolved, since many of them are still unemployed after finishing high school. However, vocational training programs in the developed countries, after training such students, focus on their employment and even social adaption (to individuals, workplace and community). Besides, cooperation of the government and its affiliates, such as Ministry of Labor and Social affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, and municipalities are of prime importance, mainly due to the fact that they can provide mentally retard people with certain services, such as tax breaks, grants, technical assistance, accommodation, and facilities. They can also give loans to employers for hiring the mentally retarded people. Therefore, considering the present conditions, the vocational training program should plan for the following cases:

- to set up, open and strengthen cooperatives (shops, production workshops)
- to use agricultural lands for agricultural and horticultural activities of mentally retarded students in cities where it is possible.
- to build greenhouses, and allocate funds for renovation and purchase of equipment in special schools. Special Education Organization can also take some steps:
 - to create employment for exceptional students who graduate from (high) school;
 - to promote and strengthen the participation of students, mentally retarded (high school) graduates, parents, teachers and those who are benevolent or interested in issues of the special students;
 - to attract small capitals in order to make investment in employment;
 - to provide for common occupational and psychological needs of mentally retarded graduates and their families;
- to change the attitudes of the society towards the abilities of mentally retarded students.

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