

The Impact of Portage Early Intervention Program on Developing the Basic Skills of Children with Mental Disabilities

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received 12 March 2025 Revised 20 April 2025 Accepted 25 May 2025	Reviewing previous literature indicates that children with mental disabilities suffer from poor coping with other individuals. However, early intervention program such Portage technique was suggested to enhance children's integration into their society. The present research is a quasi-experimental design study that adopted a quantitative method, involving 10 children with mental disability. The children were identified to have a mental disability, and data were then exposed to the descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon signed rank test. The results showed that coping skills were enhanced after students trained based on the Portage early intervention program. Furthermore, significant differences were noticed between the pre-posttest, in favor of post-test results among children with disability. The study indicated that the participants have improved their coping skills which helps them to engage and integrate into their society. The study, therefore, encouraged decision making academicians to regularly organize positive counseling and psychological training for children with special needs in general and children with mental disability in particular.
Keywords: Children Early Intervention Mental Disabilitie Portage	ملخص تشير مراجعة الأدبيات السابقة إلى أن الأطفال ذوي الإعاقة العقلية يعانون من ضعف القدرة على التكيف مع الآخرين. ومع ذلك، فقد تم اقتراح برامج التدخل المبكر مثل تقنية بورتج لتعزيز اندماج هؤلاء الأطفال في مجتمعهم. وتُعد الدراسة الحالية دراسة شبه تجريبية ذات منهج كمي، حيث شملت (10) أطفال من ذوي الإعاقة العقلية. تم تحديد هؤلاء الأطفال على أنهم يعانون من إعاقة عقلية، ثم خضعت البيانات للتحليل باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي واختبار الرتب الموقعية لولكوكسون. وأظهرت النتائج أن مهارات التكيف لدى الأطفال قد تحسنت بعد تدريبهم على برنامج بورتج للتدخل المبكر. كما لوحظ وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين نتائج الاختبار القبلي والبعدي لصالح الاختبار البعدي لدى الأطفال ذوي الإعاقة. وأشارت الدراسة إلى أن المشاركين قد طوروا مهارات التكيف لديهم، مما يساعدهم على التفاعل والاندماج في مجتمعهم. وبناءً عليه، أوصت الدراسة صنّاع القرار والأكاديميين بضرورة تنظيم برامج إرشادية وتدريبية نفسية إيجابية بشكل منتظم للأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة بشكل عام، وللاطفال ذوي الإعاقة العقلية بشكل خاص..
الكلمات المفتاحية: الأطفال التدخل المبكر الإعاقات العقلية برنامج بورتج	
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1 Introduction

In recent years, and since preparing children with disabilities to face life requires their acquisition of as much experience and skills as possible through interaction with various life situations, mental disability has received a growing interest in medical, research, or counseling programs. Individuals with mental disabilities have their capabilities and have a right to live like other average individuals. Therefore, there is a need to provide them with experiences and social skills to help them rely on themselves, interact with others, and cope with the demands of their community. Ellen (2009, 65) defines coping as psychological balance, i.e., the child trusts himself

and others surrounding him (within and outside the family), receives their acceptance, and enjoys happy social relationships characterized by self-reliance, responsibility, and objectivity in facing problems.

Reviewing previous literature indicates that children with mental disabilities suffer from poor coping with other individuals (Adenuiy & Omigbodun, 2016; Adibsereshki et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a need for an intervention to help them improve their coping abilities to bring them to an appropriate level of growth and inclusion into society. Research indicated the need to provide opportunities for children with mental disabilities to integrate into their society, by introducing Inclusion and its importance in engaging the education system and as a measure emphasizing equal opportunities in education. Generally, inclusion aims to meet the special educational needs of children with disabilities within the framework of mainstream schools under the supervision of specialized educational staff.

Portage was one of the programs used for integration. Due to its flexibility, the Portage Program has been acknowledged in Britain as a highly successful inclusion program in helping children with disabilities, teachers, and parents through the use of its theoretical and applied methods for childcare. The services of the Portage program reached many countries around the globe and suited all social and economic segments of society. The Portage program consists of a set of interrelated and integrated experiences provided to children between (5-6) years old under the supervision and guidance of either teachers or parents. It aims to provide children with some cognitive, linguistic, and social skills for attaining appropriate levels in various areas related to their chronological age (Hamouda, 2004, 11).

Recently, some researchers examined the effect of therapeutic programs on developing the personal, psychological, and cognitive skills of children with mental disabilities. A study by Adeniyi et al. (2016) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of training on the social skills of (30) private school students with mild and moderate mental disabilities in Nigeria. The results of the study indicated that training has a positive effect on improving the social skills of children with mental disabilities. Nazli (2014) indicated the importance of culturally appropriate play in improving the social skills of children with mental disabilities. In the same way, a study by Adibsereshki et al. (2014) also indicated the importance of a mind theory-based program in improving the social skills of children with mental disabilities.

After a comprehensive review of related literature, the researcher found that the Portage inclusion program has positive effects on improving the personal, psychological, and cognitive skills of average individuals. However, few studies examined its impact on developing the personal, psychological, and social skills of children with mental disabilities, which may enhance their coping levels. Accordingly, and to verify the importance of the Portage integration program in Arab settings, the current study aims to develop a Portage-based intervention and to examine its impact on a sample of children with mental disabilities. Through its findings, the study would contribute to the enrichment of the related theoretical literature, and help specialists and academics in allocating specialized programs for the positive inclusion of this category in their societies.

2 Methodology

To achieve the purposes of this study, a post-test quasi-experimental design was employed, as the effect of the independent variable (Portage's inclusion strategy) on the dependent variable (Coping skills) was verified. The sample of the study consisted of (10) children with mental disabilities between (5 and 6) years old and were divided into two equal groups: a full inclusion group and a partial inclusion group.

In this study, data collection measures were adopted to achieve its objective and purpose. More specifically, the coping construct was measured by the items adopted from Crawford (2007) and Brown (2004). For measuring the coping skills level among mentally disabled children, a coping skills test was prepared in Arabic language by reviewing the tests used in the related literature. The test in its final form consisted of (50) items measuring the coping skills of kindergarten children, including the domains of: social interaction (16 items), cooperation (16 items), and emotional engagement (18 items), which were scored using a 3-point Likert scale (mostly = 3, frequently = 2

and never = 1). To verify the validity and reliability of the scale, it was presented (along with the training program) to a group of experts, who indicated the deletion of two items and the amendment of some sections of the program. After taking the remarks and recommendations of experts into account, the coping skills test was applied to a Cronbach's alpha which showed that the reliability value was .751. This indicates that the reliability coefficients of the coping skills were high and sufficient to achieve the objectives of the study, and this justifies the reliability of the scale. For the training program, several activities were applied using a number of behavior therapy strategies such as modeling, reinforcement, listening, homework, and role play. However, the training was implemented within two months and divided into sessions (6 sessions each week) for 30-45 minutes each. Proper permission was obtained from the participants' families, and they were assured that data would only be utilized for research purposes.

This study used statistical software SPSS to analyze the gathered data. Several tests were used to analyses the data and answer the study questions such as mean and standard deviation values of the dependent variables as well as the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

3 Results

On examining the results obtained from the two tests (pretest and posttest), the mean standard deviation and Wilcoxon signed rank test of the dependent variables are presented in Table 1 below. Hypothesis one stated that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of coping skills measures between the pre-posttest scores. The result of the Wilcoxon test in Table 1 showed that there are statistically significant differences between the average of both the pre-and post-measurements for the coping skills test, in favor of post-measurement, as the calculated (Z) value ($Z = 2.023$, > 0.05) is greater than the table value at the level (0.05).

Table 1. Z value and its Significance on the Pre-Posttest Results of Coping Skills.

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean Ranking	Total Ranking	Z	Sig
Pretest		59.20	2.38	0	0	
Posttest	123.40	2.30	3	15	2.023	0.0

On examining the results obtained from the two tests (posttest and follow-up test), the mean, standard deviation and Wilcoxon signed rank test of the dependent variables are presented in Table 2 below. Hypothesis one stated that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of coping skills measures between the pre-posttest scores. The result of the Wilcoxon test in Table 1 showed insignificant differences between the average of both the post and follow-up measurements for the coping skills test, as the calculated (Z) value ($Z = .378$, < 0.05).

Table 2. Z value and its Significance on the Posttest – Follow-Up Results of Coping Skills.

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean Ranking	Total Ranking	Z	Sig
Posttest	123.40	2.30	3	6		
Follow Up	123.20	1.30	2	4	0.378	> 0.5

4 Discussion

In the pre-test of both full and partial inclusion groups, statistically significant differences in coping skills level were, in favor of the full inclusion group. This indicates that the improvement of coping skills helps individuals to establish and maintain good relationships with others. The researcher attributes these findings to the parental follow-up and encouragement provided to children for performing the coping skills on which they received training through continuous guidance, praise, reinforcement, and incentives to ensure a reasonable level of performance. The allocation of some sessions aiming to retrain children on certain skills contributed to the program's continuous impact. The results of the study can also be attributed to the attitudes of the specialists, academics, and therapists towards the importance of such specialized programs in developing and strengthening children's skills, as well as modifying their misbehaviors, as they are repeated and corrected in

due course. Therefore, such programs may have positive effects on children, sustain their appropriate behaviors, and help them acquire the necessary skills.

5 Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Portage Early Intervention Program on developing the basic skills of children with mental disabilities. The study findings support a significant impact of the Portage training program on coping skills among children. The study contributes to theory and practice as it responded to the call-in literature to minimize the gap of studies examining the impact of the Portage program on children with mental disability. The study findings are useful in helping people working with individuals especially children with disability as to how to communicate and teach children and enhance their needed skills.

6 Study Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is related to its examined sample and its size. The extensive size of the sample and examination of more sample size are required to be investigated by future studies. The study also adopted a quantitative data collection approach which may contain biases and as such, future studies can opt for a qualitative approach or mixed approach. Lastly, other individual factors may affect the study variables which future studies can focus on.

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