

# The Role of Teachers in Increasing Independence in Students With Special Needs Who are Intellectual Disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of teachers in improving the independence of students with special needs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. Using a qualitative approach, the research explores how teachers support independence through learning strategies, individual assistance, and self-development. Data were collected through observation and interviews at an inclusive junior high school. The findings show that teachers play a significant role in developing student independence through systematic routines, such as habituation and social interaction training. Customized learning strategies include module modification, differentiated curriculum, talent development, and individual mentoring using the one-teacher-one-student model. Despite challenges like limited facilities, inadequate tools, and varying student abilities, positive outcomes were observed. Students demonstrated improved ability to complete simple tasks independently, increased self-confidence, and greater initiative in social interactions. These results underline the importance of teacher involvement, flexibility in instructional approaches, and the need for continuous collaboration between schools and families. The study highlights that with proper support and strategies, students with intellectual disabilities can develop meaningful levels of independence and participate actively in their learning environment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the right of every individual, including learners with special needs such as students with intellectual disabilities. In the context of inclusive education, one of the main objectives is to facilitate student independence, both in academic, social and daily life aspects. Dowling (2005: 41) describes independence as the ability of children to think and do things by themselves to meet their needs so that they no longer depend on others but can become individuals who can stand on their own. The independence of learners with intellectual disabilities includes the ability to undergo daily activities independently, manage personal needs, and interact positively with the surrounding environment. This research specifically focuses on assessing the role of teachers in improving the independence of learners with intellectual disabilities through learning strategies, individual learning programs, individual assistance and self-development in inclusive schools.

Learners with intellectual disabilities are expected to be able to fulfill their life needs independently and have adequate social and emotional skills. This is in line with efforts to realize the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, which includes dimensions such as faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, creativity, independence, and critical reasoning. Learners with intellectual disabilities can develop aspects of independence as part of the implementation of Pancasila values, especially in the independent dimension. To increase the effectiveness of independence character education for children with disabilities, participation from schools, families, and other related parties that support its implementation is needed (Sunandar et al 2025.). With the ability to build independence, students with mental disabilities are able to actively participate in school activities and make positive contributions in the surrounding environment. In this process, the teacher has a strategic role as a facilitator, companion, and motivator. Teachers are tasked with implementing appropriate learning strategies to ensure learners with intellectual disabilities can develop into independent, creative individuals in accordance with the values of the Pancasila Learner Profile.

In practice, many teachers face challenges in helping learners with intellectual disabilities achieve optimal independence. Children with disabilities are individuals who have a level of intelligence below the average compared to children in general, with difficulties in adapting and demonstrating behavior according to their stage of development. (Pamungkas, et al 2025) These challenges are often caused by teachers' lack of knowledge about appropriate learning strategies, limited facilities and a lack of external support. In some inclusive schools, training and resources to support individualized learning are still inadequate, hindering the development of independence of learners with special needs.

The limited cognitive and adaptive abilities of learners with intellectual disabilities require more intensive attention in the learning and self-development process. As with children with special needs in general, children with disabilities also have certain deficiencies that suit their needs, which need to be met both at home and at school (Graces Maranata et al., 2023). In addition, many schools are not yet fully prepared to implement inclusive programs effectively, while teachers who are at the forefront of education often have not received special training to deal with learners with these needs. As a result, learners with disabilities do not receive the optimal support needed to develop their independence.

In addition, some recent studies also provide additional insights. (Rahmawati et al., 2024) suggested that independence needs to be taught to students with disabilities so that they do not always depend on parents or others, and the role of the teacher is needed to train independence in daily activities. (Atsnan et al., 2024) in their research on the role of teachers in learning mathematics for students with disabilities confirmed that a holistic and collaborative approach, as well as individualized strategies, are key in maximizing student potential. (Jamin et al, 2021) presents teachers' strategies in developing the independence of mildly retarded students, which includes

various customized mentoring methods. Finally, (Wuryani, 2011) found that integrated learning can significantly strengthen and improve the independence of mildly retarded children, with an emphasis on self-help skills (*bina diri*) through teacher guidance. Consistently, these studies indicate that the role of the teacher, environmental support, and customized learning strategies are crucial factors in developing the independence of learners with intellectual disabilities.

In practice, teachers face challenges such as a lack of knowledge about effective learning strategies, limited facilities and learning tools, and a lack of external support. Inadequate training and resources in many inclusive schools hinder the development of independence of learners with special needs. The cognitive and adaptive limitations of learners with learning disabilities demand intensive attention, but school readiness and teacher training are often not optimal. As a result, learners with disabilities are at risk of continuing to rely on the help of others, hampering their independence into adulthood. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed and in-depth description of the implementation of the teacher's role in overcoming this challenge, as well as the concrete contribution of the approach to improving the independence of learners with disabilities in the context of real practice in inclusive schools. In the context of inclusive education, constructivism learning theory can be applied to support the independence of students with disabilities. Constructivist theory introduced by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky is the basis of the concept of inclusive education (Salma et al, 2024). According to this theory, students learn through direct experience, interaction with the environment, and construction of their own knowledge. This approach emphasizes the importance of learning based on the individual needs of students, where the teacher acts as a facilitator who helps students develop their abilities independently.

The importance of developing independence in learners with intellectual disabilities is not only related to academic achievement, but also to character development, self-confidence, and life skills that can prepare them for a better future. Learners with intellectual disabilities have a future full of potential and opportunities, allowing them to live fully and contribute to society (Pamungkas, et al 2025). Therefore, identifying and strengthening the role of teachers in this process is an urgent matter to do, both in the aspect of teacher training, Teachers must be equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to manage diverse classrooms and meet the needs of each student (Salma et al, 2024) Coupled with teaching strategies that suit the needs of learners with disabilities.

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of inclusive education practices. By identifying and strengthening the role of teachers, this research will provide a deeper understanding of how teachers can effectively facilitate the independence of learners with intellectual disabilities, both through aspects of teacher training and the development of teaching strategies that suit their needs. The importance of developing independence in learners with disabilities is not only related to academic achievement, but

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also to character development, self-confidence and essential life skills to prepare them for a better future.

To achieve this goal, this study specifically focuses on examining the role of teachers in improving the independence of students with intellectual disabilities through learning strategies, individual learning programs, individual mentoring, and self-development in inclusive schools. This is done through observation and interviews at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi, an inclusive school that was established in 2013. As a Child-Friendly School, SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi creates a safe and comfortable environment believed to help children develop, feel valued, and build self-confidence. The inclusive education program at this school plays a crucial role in supporting diversity and treating every child equally. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of more effective inclusive education practices in supporting the independence of students with intellectual disabilities, ensuring a better understanding of the role of teachers and solutions to the challenges faced so that students with intellectual disabilities can develop into more independent and confident individuals, and be able to participate fully and meaningfully in society.

## **2. METHODS**

The research used by researchers is to use a qualitative descriptive approach, this method is used to describe in depth how the subject teacher's efforts in increasing the independence of intellectual disabilities students. In qualitative methods, data is collected through interviews and observations, then analyzed to find relevant patterns or themes (Sugiyono, 2018). The descriptive nature of qualitative research means that the research will try to make an overview systematically, accurately, and factually about a fact, nature, and the relationship between the phenomena under study (Fadli, 2021). Based on the themes and problems that have been described, the researcher will conduct research at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi, which is located on Jend. Amir Machmud Street No. 7b, Cimahi Tengah, Kota Cimahi.

### **2.1 Data Collection Techniques and Guidelines**

The data collection techniques and data collection guidelines used in this study are as follows:

#### **a. Observation**

Observation is directly observing the object of research to get the actual situation objectively. In relation to this (Sukandarrumidi, 2012) describes that the observation technique is the researcher's observation of the object of his research. his research. We can collect data when events occur and can come closer to cover the whole event. The instruments used are in the form of observation sheets, observation guides and recording devices. The observation method can

It produces more detailed data about behavior (subjects), objects or events (objects) than the interview method.

This method is used to collect data related to learning strategies in improving the independence of students with disabilities at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi. The way the observation method works is that the researcher will make direct observations of the intended object in order to obtain data that is in accordance with the research. Observation in this study was used to observe the role of teachers in learning to increase independence for students with intellectual disabilities at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi.

#### **b. interview**

An interview is a way to collect information through communication, namely a conversation between two parties: the interviewer who asks questions and the interviewee who provides answers (Mahardini et al, 2025). interviews are divided into three groups, namely structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews.

into 3 groups, namely structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and *in-depth* interviews. However, the researcher chose to conduct in-depth interviews, this aims to collect complex information.

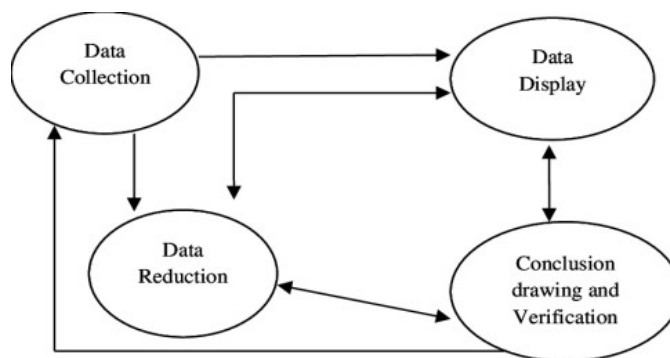
Interviews were conducted using interview guide tools in the form of draft questions. The parties to be interviewed are 3 subject teachers. Interviews are used to explore information and find out in depth about the role of teachers in learning to increase independence for students with intellectual disabilities at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi.

## **2.2 Data Analysis Technique**

In qualitative research, data analysis is carried out before researchers go to the field, during researchers conducting research in the field, until reporting the results of the research. Data analysis starts from the time the researcher determines the focus of the research until the research report is completed. So the data analysis technique is carried out from planning the research until the research is completed.

In this study, the data analysis technique used by researchers used the Miles and Huberman model. Data analysis in qualitative research is carried out during data collection, and after completion of data collection within a certain period. During the interview, the researcher has analyzed the interviewee's answers. (Miles and Huberman.1984), suggest that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and take place continuously until completion. Activities in data analysis, namely, data reduction, data display, and *conclusion drowing/verification* (Sugiyono, 2007).

In data analysis, researchers use an interactive model, whose elements include data reduction, data display, and conclusions drowing/verifying. The flow of data analysis techniques can be seen as shown below.



**Figure 1.** Concept of data analysis flow Miles & Huberman (1994)

The data analysis technique in this study the author used three data acquisition procedures.

### 1. Data *Reduction*

Data reduction is the process of refining data, both reducing data that is considered unnecessary and irrelevant, as well as adding data that is still lacking. The data obtained in the field may be very large in number. Data reduction means summarizing, selecting key things, focusing on important things, looking for themes and patterns. Thus the data to be reduced provides a clearer picture, and makes it easier for researchers to conduct further data collection, and search for it if needed (Sugiyono, 2007).

### 2. Data Presentation / *Display*

By displaying or presenting data, it will be easier to understand what happened during the research. After that, it is necessary to plan work based on what has been understood. In presenting data in addition to using narrative text, it can also be in the form of nonverbal language such as charts, graphs, plans, matrices, and tables. Presentation of data is a process of collecting information that is organized based on the necessary categories or groupings.

Miles and Huberman in qualitative research, data presentation can be done in the form of brief descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flowcharts and the like. He said "the most commonly used to present data in qualitative research is narrative text" (Sugiyono, 2007).

### 3. Data Verification (*Conclusions drowing/verifying*)

The final step in the data analysis technique is data verification. Data verification is carried out if the initial conclusions put forward are still temporary, and there will be changes if they are not accompanied by strong supporting evidence to support the next data collection stage. If the conclusions put forward at an early stage are supported by valid and consistent evidence when the researcher returns to the field to collect data, then the conclusions put forward are credible or reliable conclusions (Sugiyono, 2007).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi which is an inclusive school. The research subjects are subject teachers with a total of 3 subject teachers who are the focus of this research is to find out the role of teachers in increasing the independence of students with disabilities.

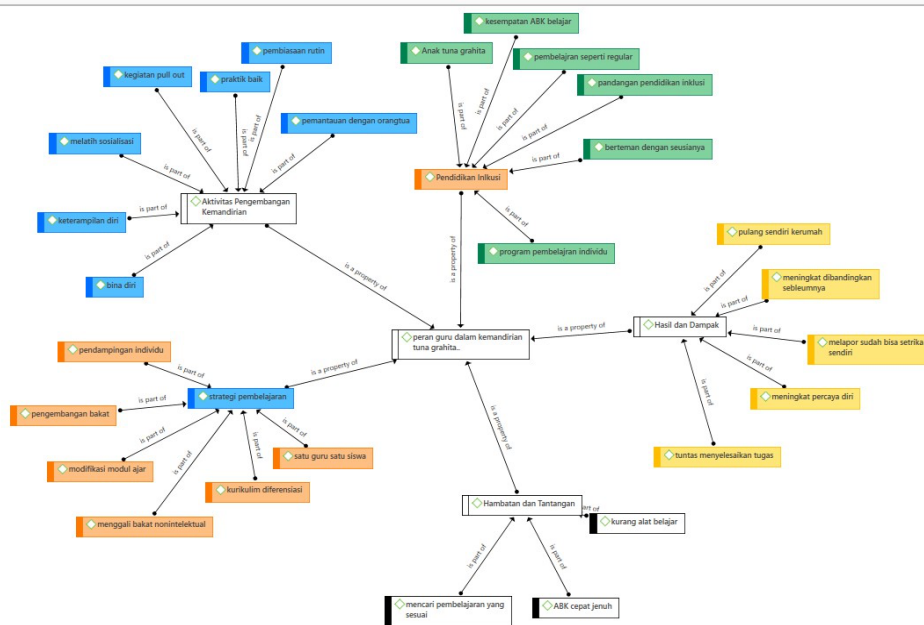


Figure 2. Coding atlas of interview results

#### 3.1. Inclusive Education as a Foundation for Development

Inclusive education is a key element in supporting the independence of learners with disabilities. The program provides equal opportunities for learners to learn like other regular learners, while still considering their special needs. In its implementation, inclusive education focuses not only on academic aspects, but also on developing learners' independence and social skills as stated by the teacher:

Inclusive education is very good because it gives children with disabilities the opportunity to learn together in public schools for children with disabilities, even though they have delays in learning, in public schools they will make friends with their peers.

The teacher acts as a facilitator to ensure that each learner receives learning that is appropriate to their needs and abilities, so that they can learn at a pace and method that is relevant to their potential. Individual learning programs are the main approach in inclusive education to meet the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities. This learning is designed flexibly, by adjusting the materials and activities based on the specific abilities of each learner as stated by teacher i that:

The strategies we have used include providing individual assistance, one teacher for one student, developing IEPs, modifying teaching modules by reducing learning outcomes, exploring non-intellectual talents of children with disabilities such as skills, sports, and reciting the Koran.

Through this approach, teachers are able to provide personal attention and ensure that each learner has the opportunity to develop their full potential. Teachers also work closely with parents to create a supportive learning environment both at school and at home. Learning activities are designed gradually to support the development of learners' independence, from basic skills to more complex abilities, such as socializing and taking initiative in completing tasks. With well-planned and collaborative inclusive education, the independence of learners with disabilities can develop optimally, making them more confident and able to participate in social life actively. This finding supports the view of Sunandar et al. (2025) who emphasize the importance of the participation of schools, families, and related parties in the implementation of independence character education for children with disabilities. The active involvement of teachers in developing and implementing PPI, as well as collaborating with parents, is in line with the recommendations of Salma et al. (2024) regarding the need for teachers who are equipped with skills to manage diverse classes and meet the individual needs of students. The inclusive education approach applied at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi, with a focus on equal learning opportunities and potential development, also reinforces Pamungkas et al.'s argument. (2025) that learners with disabilities have great potential to live independently and contribute to society.

### **3.2. The Teacher's Role in Developing the Independence of the Mentally Handicapped**

Teachers have a very important role in building the independence of students with disabilities. In this study, the role of teachers is identified through independence development activities that are carried out systematically and continuously. One of the main approaches applied is routine habituation. Daily activities such as organizing cleaning themselves, to carrying out simple tasks are done repeatedly to build positive habits. This process requires patience, attention and careful monitoring from teachers and in collaboration with parents, where they ensure each learner gets guidance that suits their individual needs. This is according to what teacher i has done, namely,

Activities that are applied to encourage the independence of students with grahita disabilities, namely training self-help with learning activities to wash school cloths, ironing clothes at home in collaboration with parents, memorizing short letters, learning to cook for Friday blessings, outing class not accompanied by parents, hanging out with friends in class or between classes, frequent communication with children with grahita disabilities.

In addition, teachers also provide socialization stimulation to encourage learners to interact with their environment. This aims to make them understand the importance of social relationships as part of the independence process. Teachers play an active role in training learners' basic skills, such as social skills and self-help, through structured activities. Habituation of routines, implementation



of good practices, and pull-out activities are designed to build an independent mindset in learners. With this approach, learners with intellectual disabilities are accustomed to completing tasks independently and carrying out daily activities without full dependence on teachers or parents. As stated by teacher m, namely,

Conducted in every pull out activity, separate hours with the abk child. Then monitored at home based on parent reports

In addition to building individual independence, teachers also try to improve learners' socialization skills. Activities such as exercises to interact with peers and the community are carried out to help learners understand their role in the social environment as done by teacher l

In PJOK learning, I usually group inclusive and regular students with the aim of training socialization skills and becoming role models for regular students for inclusive students to become peer tutors.

With these activities, learners not only increase their confidence, but also their ability to socialize effectively, which is an important part of independence. The consistent, patient, and dedicated role of teachers is the main foundation in encouraging students with intellectual disabilities to develop into more independent and confident individuals. The implementation of routine habituation and self-help training conducted by teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi strengthens the findings of (Wuryani, 2011) on the effectiveness of integrated learning in improving the independence of children with mild disabilities, especially in self-help skills.

### 3.3. Customized Learning Strategy

Teachers use a variety of diverse and flexible learning strategies to support the learning process of students with intellectual disabilities. These strategies include modifying teaching modules, implementing a differentiated curriculum, and developing learners' talents, both intellectual and non-intellectual talents. Modification of the teaching module is done by adjusting the material, language, tools, and individualized learning assistance approach to make it easier for students to understand the lesson. This approach allows teachers to deliver learning in a way that is relevant and easily accepted by learners according to their abilities. This is as expressed by the three informants, namely teachers i, m and l.

Developing PPIs, modifying teaching modules by reducing learning outcomes, exploring non-intellectual children's talents such as skills, sports, and reciting the Koran.

With an individual approach, direct practice and gradual learning carried out repeatedly.

individual mentoring program for each inclusive student in terms of learning and independence for development that is not only cognitive.

One of the key approaches implemented is individual mentoring using the one-teacher-one-learner method. This approach allows teachers to understand the specific needs of each learner. With intensive mentoring, teachers can identify learners' potential and help them overcome barriers to learning. For example, learners who show interest in certain arts or skills are directed to deepen that talent as part of their self-development.

In addition to providing academic material, teachers also play an active role in developing the special talents of students with disabilities, both intellectual and non-intellectual. This role is realized through facilitating activities that support the development of specific skills such as art, sports, and daily living skills. The learning approach used is flexible and individual needs-based, enabling learners to not only understand lessons more effectively, but also explore and develop their potential optimally. This individualized learning strategy is an important element in encouraging independence and increasing the self-confidence of learners with disabilities. This finding is in line with research results (Atsnan et al. 2024), which emphasize that holistic, collaborative approaches and individually tailored strategies are key in maximizing the potential of students with disabilities in inclusive environments.

### **3.4. Obstacles and Challenges Faced**

Despite the progress made, teachers face various obstacles in carrying out their roles. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of adequate facilities and learning tools to support the learning of students with learning disabilities according to teacher i.

The biggest challenge is the lack of learning tools and teaching media for children with disabilities.

In addition, time constraints are also an obstacle, considering that the process of building independence requires consistent and continuous guidance. Another influencing factor is the diversity of students' abilities, not to mention the easily bored mood of students with learning disabilities, as stated by teacher l.

The biggest challenge is maintaining the mood to want to follow the learning. Because inclusive learners tend to get bored more quickly if they find it difficult.

Of course, students with intellectual disabilities require more intensive attention than others. This obstacle encourages teachers to continue to innovate and find creative solutions in guiding students with disabilities. This is felt by teacher m he said that the biggest challenge is,

When running out of ways to find appropriate learning

The findings regarding these barriers are in line with the issues identified in the literature review, where Salma et al. (2024) highlighted that many schools are not fully prepared to implement inclusive programs effectively and teachers have not received adequate specialized

training. The limited facilities and learning tools found in this study reinforce the points often raised in the literature on the challenges of implementing inclusive education for children with special needs.

### **3.5. Results and impact of independence development activities**

This activity of developing independence in students with intellectual disabilities has shown various positive results. One of them is their increased ability to complete simple tasks independently. This has a big impact on learners' self-confidence, where they feel more capable of getting things done without relying too much on the help of others. In addition, learners are beginning to show the courage to take initiatives and try to overcome challenges, albeit at a simple level,

The development of the children's independence has increased both in terms of their self-confidence and courage.

This progress is an indicator of the success of the approach applied by teachers in supporting their independence. The positive impact of the teacher's role can be seen in several aspects of learners' independence. They are increasingly able to complete the tasks given, report to the teacher after completing the work, and are even more confident in carrying out daily activities, such as returning home more independently. As stated by teacher I,

For students at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Cimahi, we can take an example of one of the students named RY grade 7, who initially went home delivered by his grandfather and now has the courage to mingle home with his peers.

This success is reflected in their improved abilities compared to before, where they are now more courageous to take initiatives, interact with their social environment, and show a stronger attitude of independence. The approach applied by teachers helps learners with intellectual disabilities to develop better and makes them more confident in facing challenges. This finding consistently supports the main goal of inclusive education to facilitate students' independence, as outlined in the introduction. The improvements in task completion ability and self-confidence observed in this study reinforce Pamungkas et al.'s (2025) argument that learners with learning disabilities are more likely to be able to cope with challenges. (2025) that learners with disabilities have the potential to live fully and contribute. The observation of increased initiative and social interaction is also in line with the views of Graces Maranata et al. (2023) who emphasize the importance of meeting the specific needs of children with disabilities to develop social skills and independence. Overall, these results suggest that the systematic and adaptive implementation of the teacher's role, as described in this study, is effective in promoting the independence of learners with intellectual disabilities, confirming the relevance of individualized strategies and inclusive environmental support.

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#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The role of teachers in building the independence of students with disabilities is very significant. Teachers are not only in charge of teaching, but also guiding students through a personalized and flexible approach. One of the main steps applied is the existence of an individual learning program specifically designed to meet the unique needs of each student. This program pays special attention to students' abilities and potential, making learning more effective and relevant. In addition, one-teacher-one-pupil mentoring is a key factor in supporting the progress of intellectual disabilities learners' independence. This approach ensures that each student receives maximum attention, both in terms of academics and independence development.

Success in building the independence of learners with intellectual disabilities is greatly influenced by the implementation of continuous routine activities, inclusive education, and learning strategies tailored to individual needs. These activities are designed to familiarize students with daily routines, such as managing time, completing simple tasks, and interacting with their social environment. The implementation of individualized learning programs and intensive guidance, where one teacher is responsible for one learner with special needs, has a significant positive impact on students' independence. Through this approach, students can receive in-depth attention, allowing them to develop according to their potential and abilities.

The results show a marked improvement in the independence of students with disabilities. Many of them are now able to complete simple tasks without relying entirely on teacher assistance. In addition, students' self-confidence has increased significantly, as they feel able to overcome challenges on their own. The ability to take initiative in completing tasks and interacting with the environment has also begun to appear, which is an indication of the success of the approach taken by the teacher.

However, obstacles such as limited facilities, inadequate learning tools, and the diversity of students' abilities remain a challenge that must be overcome. With a consistent individualized learning program, intensive guidance, and a more innovative approach from teachers, the independence of students with intellectual disabilities can continue to be improved. This improvement not only includes aspects of practical ability, but also builds confidence and social skills that support students in living life independently in the future.

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