



Exploring the Perceptions of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities on the Sa3ee Rehabilitation and Employment Initiative in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose This study explores the perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services of the Sa3ee initiative for the rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities. It seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by people with intellectual disabilities as beneficiaries of vocational rehabilitation and employment and transitional services at post-secondary school age. **Methodology** The research employs a qualitative approach that was deemed to be the most appropriate approach for this type of study, of which the literature review shows there was previously only a small number, especially in the context of the Arab world. The research tool used was semi-structured interviews with a sample of four individuals with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh, who had benefited from the rehabilitation and employment services provided by the Sa3ee initiative.

Findings The results show that the interviewees perceived certain opportunities and positives in the initiative, the most important of which were the moral support and positive attitude of their family towards their child with intellectual disabilities. Nevertheless, the results show that challenges also exist, most notably the lack of laws that oblige the training of individuals with intellectual disabilities during the secondary school years. **Implications to Research and Practice** The study recommends that there should be further research on transition, rehabilitation, and training services, together with research conducted from the viewpoint of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

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Introduction

As the world continues to fight the perceptions, prejudices, and inequalities associated with people living with disabilities, countless organizations and initiatives have been formed to address the same. Among the numerous initiatives, the Sa3ee is one of the leading programs aimed at creating community awareness of the functional rights of persons with disabilities, highlighting the abilities and skills of persons with disabilities in the functional field of society, establishing training programs before and after joining the labor market, creating suitable job opportunities for people with disabilities in various sectors, and ensuring their continuity of work and develop their capabilities region (Sa'ai for Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities, 2022). The Sa3ee initiative was launched on 1/1/1439 AH (09/21/2021 in the Gregorian date), and its beginning was a volunteer team at the hands of specialists in the Riyadh region (Sa'ai for Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities, 2022).

The community initiatives that are designed to rehabilitate and employ individuals with disabilities that are reliant on the efforts of the local community aim to invest in the abilities of people with disabilities by providing rehabilitation services and programs to furnish them with the necessary functional and professional skills that will enable them to make their own decisions, to join the labor market, and to live independently. Rehabilitation services for people with disabilities in general, and those with intellectual disabilities in particular, must be provided at an early stage of such individuals' lives, and focus on developing their professional values, such as a love of work, respect for laws, and time management, and should emphasize the training of professionals and specialists to enable people with intellectual disabilities to acquire these skills (Alsaud, 2014). These rehabilitation services must also consider the principle of sustainability by evaluating the quality of the services provided, and the quantity of the productivity of the individuals who benefit from them, to reduce the risk of these individuals leaving their place of employment. As Almalky (2018) noted, it is necessary to promote the role of the family and the school in guiding and meeting these services, to create a successful transition process that enables people with intellectual disabilities to retain their jobs for the long term. The rehabilitation services provided by the Saudi Ministry of Education to prepare individuals with intellectual disabilities to join the labor market at the secondary school stage focus primarily on academic skills, rather than on the professional skills necessary for entering the labor market. Consequently, the study conducted by Allaqani and Aldakhil (2019) recommended that there is a need for both the relevant individuals and the institutions to participate in the planning process of transitional services, and a need to focus on vocational education and training over academic training.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2011) reported that approximately 15% of the world's population, namely more than 1 billion people, have some form of disability. Meanwhile, a survey of individuals with disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) demonstrated that among those of working age, namely those aged 15 years and over, in total 71.1% reported that they experienced mild difficulties, with 73.8% of the males and 68% of the females surveyed making this claim. In addition, according to the General Authority for statistics (2017), across all the regions of the Kingdom, approximately 19,428 individuals have Down syndrome.

These statistics show a considerable percentage of people of working age in the KSA have Down syndrome. This highlights the importance of the present study, the aim of which was to emphasize the need to provide rehabilitation and training services for people with intellectual disabilities at the rehabilitation stage, and to highlight the need to ensure that there is coordination between the providers of such services. This study argues that these services, which are provided by government schools and community institutions, should focus on rehabilitation and vocational training, rather than academic training, and that the provision of these services should be intensified at the post-school age stage, to prepare these individuals adequately with the professional skills necessary for employment. Moreover, the study recommends that they should be tailored according to the beneficiaries' individual needs and abilities.

A report issued by the General Authority for Statistics (2020) highlighted the need to reduce the high unemployment rates in the KSA, demonstrating that these rates increased by 15.4% in the second quarter of 2020, a rise that the report attributed to the impact of the coronavirus crisis, which had dire consequences for people with disabilities. In addition, Bradley (2020) claimed that the current crisis will affect the budgets of service providers significantly, causing long waiting lists for these services, and a significant shortage of staff. Meanwhile, the study conducted by Almalky (2020), which reviewed 27 previous studies undertaken in the American context, highlighted the importance of employing individuals with disabilities to provide them with a source of income that enables them to contribute to the national economy. This aspect of support is currently lacking in the services provided by Saudi government educational institutions, whose role ends when students with intellectual disabilities graduate from secondary school, generally with insufficient preparation for engaging in the labor market. However, despite all these studies providing in-depth information on the current state of people living with disabilities, not much attention is paid to how the people living with disabilities perceive these community-based initiatives. This research addresses this gap by elucidating the perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services of the Sa3ee initiative for the rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities.

Literature review

Developed countries, such as the KSA, are conscious of the need to address the rights of people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, and to provide the appropriate services to support them, such as establishing governmental and private centers for the provision of all academic, medical, and social services, together with rehabilitation and employment services. Article No. 28 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities states the need for the Member States to recognize the rights of individuals with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including sufficient food, clothing, and housing, paying attention to the continuous improvement of living conditions, and taking appropriate steps to preserve, promote and provide these rights without discrimination based on disability (Bisset, 2020).

There is, therefore, a need for the social protection of such individuals, in particular ensuring that they have an equal opportunity to access all public and private services that meet their needs, related to their disability, and to ensure that they benefit from poverty reduction programs and can obtain aid from the state to cover the expenses related to their

disability, including rehabilitation programs that encompass training, advice, and care. Moreover, the article also requires that individuals with disabilities benefit from housing programs and have access to retirement programs upon the end of their employment service (Bisset, 2020; Heland-Kurzak, 2020). Similarly, as Della Fina et al. (2017) explained, Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities highlighted the need to enhance job opportunities and the career advancement of individuals with disabilities, and the importance of promoting assistance in finding and retaining work and supporting self-improvement, noting the necessity of employing people with disabilities in the public sector, and of motivating such workers and enhancing a positive view of themselves and their work. The authors explained that this, in turn, enriches the experiences of such workers in the labor market, and they emphasized the need to strengthen vocational rehabilitation programs and to ensure job retention.

Meanwhile, in terms of the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, WHO defined community rehabilitation as a philosophy and strategy that falls within the framework of local community development that seeks to achieve the rehabilitation, equal opportunities, and social integration of all persons with disabilities, and that is implemented through the concerted efforts of persons with disabilities themselves, their families, local communities, and the relevant health, educational, professional, and social bodies (Balbay, 2020; Duke & Osim, 2020; Hajjar, 2020; Shaheen & Al-Nawawi, 2009).

The rehabilitation of people with disabilities should follow general principles that must be applied when planning rehabilitation programs, including the fact that the rehabilitation must suit the needs and abilities of the disabled individuals concerned, and that it is a form of social security and safety (Alnasr, 2015). Such programs should integrate professional, medical, social, psychological, and educational services that encompass the needs, interests, level of education, and work experience available to an individual with a disability. They should also employ an approach that emphasizes the principle of heeding individual differences, along with the need for the family and the disabled individual themselves to participate in the design of appropriate programs, as well as providing job opportunities to such individuals, an aspect that contributes significantly to the success of the rehabilitation process. The process of qualifying the individual concerned generally undergoes the following three stages: the first stage is an initial acquaintance session between the client and the rehabilitation consultant, and it is a diagnostic evaluation stage; the second stage ensures the client's readiness for change, and marks the start of the qualification process, including an assessment of their critical thinking and logical skills, and involves the analysis and merging of the information gathered during the previous stage, together with clarifying the client's interests and desires regarding their career preferences. The third stage is the implementation, in which the client commences a training programs for a real profession, and includes consultations between the client and the service provider to encourage and reassure them (Chan et al., 2015).

The review of the extant literature in this field found that several studies conducted in the Arab context, as well as those conducted in other contexts, discussed rehabilitation services and vocational training, although there was a notable scarcity of the use of qualitative methods to explore the qualifications, vocational training, and transport services provided from the viewpoint of individuals with intellectual disabilities as the

beneficiaries of these services, especially in the Arab world in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular. The key studies that addressed the subject of the present research are presented in Table 1.

However, it is noteworthy that as much as these studies have provided indispensable information that has helped build on the current research, none of them addressed the perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services of the Sa3ee initiative for the rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities. In this regard, the current study builds on these studies and aims to close the gap.

Table 1

Key studies in the field of rehabilitation services and vocational training for individuals with disabilities

Researchers	Aim	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
Della Fina et al. (2017)	Provide proposals for improving the transition from youth to adulthood for people with intellectual disabilities.	Four groups in three different cities, comprised of 32 education and social work professionals, persons with intellectual disabilities and their families.	Qualitative approach	No stable and systematic plan to guide the procedures, provide timeframes and distribute responsibilities between professionals and services. Participants stressed the need for a clear action plan that supports young people and their families, and the need for coordination between the school and transitional service providers. The study highlighted the importance of the success factors of the transition plan and listed the most important in the view of the participants, as follows: 1 - the existence of an individual transition plan, 2 - vocational training, 3 - self-determination skills, 4 - cooperation with agencies, 5 - social skills, 6 - parental participation, 7 - academic skills. The study found that the services were not suitable for most learners with disabilities and did not meet the expectations of the parents. It reported that is difficult to accommodate persons with disabilities in the post-school labour market, because they are not professionally qualified.
Aldossary (2016)	Identify factors that affect transition success. The most important factors affect the sex change and teaching experience.	In total, 86 individuals, constituting 9.8% of the study community, estimated to be 877 teachers in all intellectual education programmes in Riyadh.	Survey method	
(Mpofu, 2018)	Explore the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities.	In total, 30 parents of learners with disabilities (15 males and 15 females).	Survey method	
(Almalky, 2018)	Study the perceptions of teachers of students with disabilities regarding the components, benefits, and barriers to the implementation of community vocational education.	All special education teachers working in all secondary schools that offer programmes for students with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh.	Survey method	Teachers reported positively on the benefits of community vocational education, although they also reported certain barriers to its implementation.

Researchers	Aim	Sample	Methodology	Key findings
Kaya (2018)	Examine the relationship between demographic factors, vocational rehabilitation services, and employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities.	This study included 8,320 occupational rehabilitation participants with intellectual disabilities.	Survey method	The study found that young people with intellectual disabilities whose level of education is high are more likely to gain competitive employment. Job-related services, such as employment and on-the-job support, were positively linked to employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities. There are obstacles related to the students, and to the teachers' level of competence, to the family, and finally to those associated with community institutions. The study recommended that people and institutions should participate in the planning process for transitional services and focus on vocational education and training over academic training.
Allaqani and Aldakhil (2019)	Identify the obstacles to the application of transitional services for people with minor intellectual disabilities at secondary school level.	In total, 24 teachers of students with intellectual disabilities in the secondary school of the complex at Zulfi.	Descriptive approach Analytical	Five elements of successful planning were identified: 1 - the use of a special education specialist, 2 - preparation for development, 3 - communication between employees and family, 4 - family participation, 5 - planning activities.
McCausland et al. (2019)	Determine the extent to which community integration is included as a goal within person-focused plans for adults with intellectual disabilities and assess how successfully community integration goals are achieved as part of the individual-centered planning process. Identify the key factors, including the enablers and barriers, to achieving community integration goals.	In total, 17 individuals with intellectual disabilities randomly selected as a framework for determining the required number, from a key sample of 169 individuals who completed the path programme. The final sample of the study comprised seven individuals.	Case study approach	The obstacles to achieving the goals were identified as follows: 1- the lack of availability of specialist staff in the United States, 2- insufficient resources to support integration, 3- insufficient support for community funding, 4- lack of transportation, 5 - changing health conditions.
Almaliki (2020)	Determine the reality of including transitional service elements in the individual educational programme, and its importance to people with intellectual disabilities.	In total, 72 teachers involved in middle and secondary rehabilitation.	Descriptive approach Survey	Teachers understand and work on the importance of including transitional service elements in the individual educational programme, with a difference in average responses for gender and years of experience.

Methodology

Research design

This study explored the perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services provided to them by the Sa3ee initiative for the rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities by examining the challenges they faced in obtaining transportation services and vocational rehabilitation services, and the opportunities that enabled them to obtain these services. Accordingly, the approach deemed to be most appropriate for conducting this research was the phenomenological qualitative approach. Generally, the qualitative approach is defined as a type of scientific research, which assumes the existence of facts and social phenomena that are built through the viewpoints of individuals and groups participating in the research" (Qandalji & Iman, 2018), and typically employs research tools such as semi-structured interviews to gather data related to the research question(s).

The phenomenological qualitative approach focuses on examining the lived human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved. It is usually used to describe the meaning that experiences hold for each subject, thus making it the most suitable research design to understand the perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services of the Sa3ee initiative for the rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities. Again, the phenomenological qualitative approach enabled the researcher to be flexible and open and to obtain an understanding of the participants' experiences, and thereby to embody reality, as well as providing both the researcher and the participants with a wide scope for defining this reality and its features (Alqarini, 2020).

Research Sample

In this research, sampling is the selection of a portion of the population, the people living with disabilities), which will be a representation of the whole population. A research sample of 5 participants was selected for this study using the simple random sampling method, under probability sampling. The simple random sampling method enabled the researcher to define the population size, assign a random number to participants, and select a sample of 5 participants by running a random number generator. This sampling method was used because it gives each participant an equal chance to be selected, thus reducing bias. The five individuals used as samples were people with intellectual disabilities who had benefited from the rehabilitation and employment services provided by the Sa3ee initiative in the city of Riyadh in the period between 2018 and 2021. However, semi-structured interviews were conducted with only four out of the five participants who were nominated in advance; the fifth participant was excluded, due to lack of time and data saturation.

Research Instruments and Procedure

Because the participants had intellectual disabilities, the most suitable research instrument was oral interviews. Thus, in semi-structured interviews, the interview was an oral questionnaire through which the researcher collected information. The difference between an interview and a questionnaire is that the examinee is the one who writes the

answer in the questionnaire, while the researcher himself writes the examinee's answers in the interview. The researcher employs this form of an interview to overcome the subject's reservations, and with people who prefer not to complete a questionnaire, and with children and illiterates (Atwan & Youssefm, 2018).

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, and precautionary measures in place at the time the research was conducted, there were prohibitions to use face-to-face interviews with the study participants. Hence, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions via electronic means (Kandilji, 2019). Specifically, the program Zoom was used to conduct the audio, video, and written communication with the participants.

To determine the appropriate number of questions that would address the main axes of the research topic and achieve the study's objectives, the researcher reviewed previous studies conducted in the same field, namely those discussed in the literature review. The interview format was subsequently designed to include several statements that represented the interview axes, with questions formulated for each axis. To test the validity of the research questions, a pilot study was conducted with a sub-sample of the participants to test the appropriateness of the questions and ensure their integrity, objectivity, and suitability for achieving the research objectives.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA, according to the descriptive coding method, in which the responses of the participants are summarized under simple sentences that represent the key information. To justify the results from the software, a manual coding process was also used, as described in the findings section. The discussion of the results in the next section includes an assessment of the similarities and differences in the responses and references the findings of the previous literature conducted in the field under the three axes, for the purpose of clarity, and to assess the matter concerned as fully as possible.

Findings

This section presents findings in the order of the study's axes: first, family support and participation; second, the participation of individuals with disabilities in planning their transition process; and third, communication and sustainability. Before elucidating the findings, interview transcripts were prepared and used to extract the key themes. The transcripts helped to put qualitative data and information into a text-based format, thus making the data easier to analyze. They also allowed data analyst to become more immersed into the data they have. The transcripts were prepared by selecting the most suitable transcription method (the use of software), transcribing the audio (using the Microsoft 365 software), adding speaker designation and time stamps, clarifying the transcript where needed, and lastly, proofreading the transcript. Given that this was a descriptive study, a coding procedure was also used. The coding procedure was made autonomous using a thematic analysis software, meaning that there was no need to set up themes or categories in advance or train the algorithm. However, after this process, a manual coding process was used to check the credibility and validity of the MAXQDA software. Here, the data analyst chose to use inductive coding, read through the data to get

the general idea, assigned the first set of codes, went through the data line-by-line to code as much as possible, categorized the codes and figured out how they fit into the coding frame, and lastly, identified which themes came up the most – and acted on them. The most prominent themes were love, like, hate, enjoy, bad, and good.

When the participants in the present study, who had benefited from the services and programs provided by the Sa3ee initiative in the KSA, were asked about the role of their family's support in activities such as enrolling them at vocational training institutes, or on training courses, either during or after their secondary school stage, two of the participants indicated that they were offered no support at that stage or afterward by their family or educational institution. As one of the participants said, "No, no, not once, or anything." The failure of these families to support their disabled children in this context, whether within or outside the home, may have been due to their lack of awareness of the importance of such support at the secondary and post-secondary stages. In contrast, the families of the participants who did provide support were more aware of their needs at this stage of their education. Teachers and specialists emphasize the importance of family participation in the training of individuals with disabilities. Figure 1 depicts that about one-third of the participants were supported by their families while a majority were not.

This result is consistent with the findings of the study by McCausland et al. (2019), which reported that insufficient support and funding was one of the obstacles to disabled individuals achieving the goal of community integration, which is a core aspect of the transition planning process for such individuals.

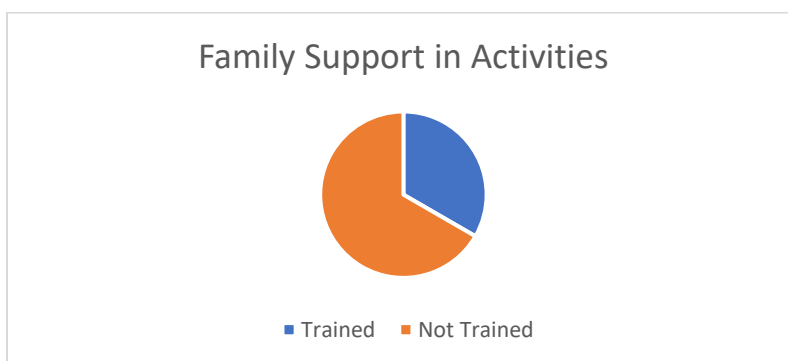


Fig 1: Family support in activities.

When the participants in the present study were asked about the employment-related training they received at secondary school stage, an important stage in their education, and a crucial turning point in their young adult lives, it was suggested that decision-makers should enact laws requiring the training of persons with intellectual disabilities for at least a full year during their final year of secondary education. Two of the participants reported that they received no training opportunities at this stage of their schooling, and although they were aware of the importance of training during this period, their needs were not met. One of the participants explained, "No, I did not undertake training. No, by God, they are supposed to want us to, but they do not. There was supposed to be training in the secondary stage. By God, I would like to practice many things, frankly, I mean, in my

opinion, I love professional photography.” One received training while the fourth participant could not remember.

Figure 2 exhibits employment related training at secondary school stage. Two participants did not receive any training, one participant was trained, and one could not remember whether they received training at that stage.

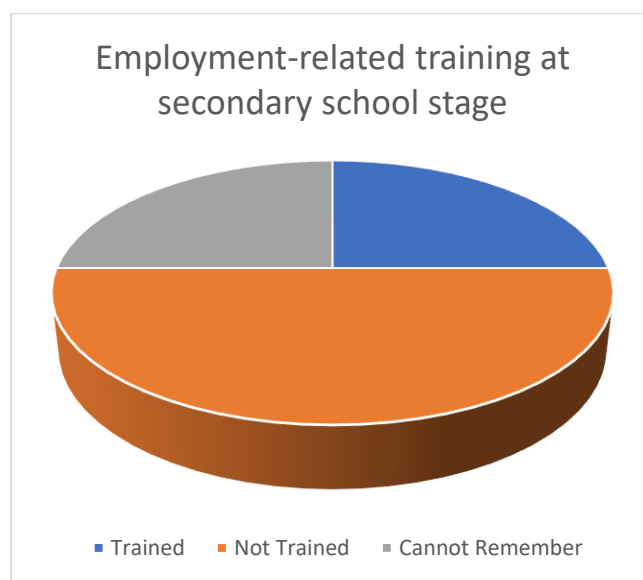


Fig 2: Employment related training at secondary school stage.

All four participants indicated the need for cooperation between the school and the training institutions, explaining that it was key for benefitting them in providing them with skills and experience that prepared them adequately for the labor market. The lack of formal cooperation between schools and training institutions was also highlighted by Pallisera et al. (2014), who emphasized the noticeable lack of continuity in communication between the school and after-school services in the context they explored, as the Spanish community organizations in their study that provided rehabilitation services and training for people with intellectual disabilities were independent of the education system.

Discussion

Training, support, and family participation

This study's findings echoed those of a number of previous studies conducted in other contexts, such as those by Alrummana et al. (2018); Friedman and Nye-Lengerman (2018); Kaya (2018); McCausland et al. (2019), reflecting the importance of the role that support, training, and family participation played in preparing individuals with intellectual disabilities for the labor market in the early post-school stage. Overall, these studies found that a lack of insufficient degree of material support can have a significant impact on large families, or those with a low income, who are unable to bear the cost of training courses or programs. In addition, some of the studies reported that certain families can display

negative attitudes towards training institutions, entities, or individuals, believing that they employ disabled individuals for reasons of pity, or to exploit them to obtain access to government facilities for employers.

A study conducted by Alrummana et al. (2018) recommended that there should be further research into the roles of workers, and their level of knowledge of the importance of transitional services. This is reflected in the scenario when the participants in the present study did receive support from their family in the training process, whether in the form of practical training or support in their participation in theoretical training programs, it had a positive impact on them. As one of the participants noted, when explaining that he had attended short training courses outside the home, with the support of his family, "My mother is the one who is most interested in my training. She was talking about work experience and took me to the North Riyadh Institute that my sister introduced me to."

The findings of this study demonstrated the significant impact of the moral and psychological support provided by their family to the participants, which was reflected positively in their level of self-acceptance and inspired their future aspirations to obtain successful employment. This concurred with the study conducted by Kaya (2018), which found that functional services, such as training and support, are positively associated with successful employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities. Indeed, several previous studies reported that training, support, and family participation are among the most important components of transition plans for such individuals, as is the guarantee of providing suitable transitional services that are compatible with their needs. In their study, Friedman and Nye-Lengerman (2018) highlighted the significance of pre-employment transitional services but argued that they lack specificity and focus only on general skills, such as problem-solving, safety, compliance, interpersonal relations, and dress codes, and lack vocational training.

In summary, the findings of both the present and previous studies indicated that family participation in supporting their children with intellectual disabilities, including their training and participatory activities, is of paramount importance for the successful rehabilitation and training of such individuals, for planning their transition from school to the workplace, preparing them for the labor market, and ensuring their continuity in employment. This is because family participation in all its forms enables those with intellectual disabilities to access training and rehabilitation opportunities, and thus employment, while its absence can be a significant obstacle. For this reason, the Sa3ee initiative focuses on the family as the first partner in a disabled individual's training, rehabilitation, and employment.

Participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities in transition planning

The findings of the present study regarding the role of individuals with intellectual disabilities in their transition planning to some degree reflected those of previous studies, such as those by Allaqani and Aldakhil (2019); Kaehne and Beyer (2014); Pallisera et al. (2014), although these differed in some respects. The assessment of these findings was important for determining the core practices that should be applied in the Saudi education context with people with intellectual disabilities at the secondary school stage and to identify the benefits of the training and rehabilitation services and programs approved by the Sa3ee initiative. The findings demonstrated the importance of employment policies and

practices at the secondary school level that focuses on the interests of individuals with disabilities and provide quality training at an early stage.

In contrast, another participant reported that he did receive vocational training during the secondary-stage, and participated in a training program at the Panda supermarket during the second term of the third grade of secondary school, an opportunity that he praised, explaining that it was of great benefit to him, enabling him to obtain skills and work experience

I was trained in the second term of the third qualifying class. They trained me to arrange the refrigerator and to check the dates [on the produce]. If [they had expired], we would put them on the floor. The course was good. We used to go on the bus [under a teacher's supervision] ... My sister and I went together. By God, I forgot her name, but she is learning how to turn an easy job and such a business.

It should be noted that the participants who received training opportunities during the secondary school stage of their education did so during the second semester for graduates of the qualifying stage, although some of the older participants received no such opportunities when they were at this stage of their schooling. There is no requirement for such training in either the previous versions of the Regulatory Guide for Special Education, or in the current version, issued in 2016-2017. However, in recent years some special education departments in the KSA have made individual efforts to form a partnership with The Industrial Secondary Institute to provide training programs for people with intellectual disabilities. This may explain why some of the older participants in the present study did not receive training opportunities, while one of the students who graduated in 2020 underwent a training program at their local Panda supermarket.

Moreover, the participants' responses confirmed the focus of secondary-stage education on academic skills, rather than vocational training. These findings supported the recommendation of Allaqani and Aldakhil (2019) that disabled individuals and the relevant institutions should participate in the planning process for transitional services, and that these should focus on vocational training, not academic education. All the participants in the present study who underwent training programs reported that they acquired functional skills, providing evidence that the Sa3ee initiative focused on practical functional training, and concentrated primarily on their beneficiaries' fields of interest, and the areas in which they wished to train and seek employment. Indeed, the beneficiaries were asked in an interview about their interests, before joining the Sa3ee initiative programs, in order that they would be assigned to an appropriate training program that usually culminated in their employment. The need for this approach was confirmed by the study conducted by Pallisera et al. (2014) that reported the lack of suitable alternatives for individuals with intellectual disabilities at the secondary education stage for meeting their personal and professional training needs.

In summary, both the present and previous studies found that the participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities in their transition planning is important for its success, as the skills acquired as a result of undergoing appropriate training, such as goal-setting, decision-making, self-organization, and problem-solving, together with practical training in the professions and trades in which these individuals are interested, assist in developing a strong, balanced, and capable personality, able to set goals, make career

decisions, and take responsibility for those decisions without the need to depend on others, and thereby enhances their ability to integrate effectively in community activities, and to live independently.

Communication and sustainability

The participants in this study highlighted the need for cooperation between the school and training institutions, and the benefits of such partnerships, unanimously agreeing on the positive impact of the pioneering role of the Sa3ee initiative. This was because it met their needs in providing quality training that considered, as far as possible, their interests and wishes, according to their abilities, offering applications and services to assist in the rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities. These opportunities were mainly governed by student choice, and usually culminated in their employment. Moreover, the success of the Sa3ee initiative highlighted the urgent need for better training to be available at the secondary school level. These findings concurred those of the studies conducted by McCausland et al. (2019); Pallisera et al. (2014); Pallisera et al. (2018) and Almasry (2017).

Since communication, coordination, and cooperation between secondary education institutions and vocational training institutions were found to be lacking in the current situation, the present study explored the challenges and obstacles that can affect the quality and effectiveness of communication and cooperation between education and training institutions. The findings demonstrated that educational institutions in the KSA should develop communication and cooperation strategies with vocational training institutions, to create sustainable job opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, as all the participants expressed a desire for such cooperation. Moreover, they highlighted the need for an institution that provides training opportunities for secondary-stage students with intellectual disabilities.

This echoed the findings of the study conducted by Pallisera et al. (2018), which stressed the need for coordination between schools and transitional service providers, and for consistency in their approach. In addition, the four participants in the present study agreed that the Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Special Education in the Department of Education, should work in partnership with the Sa3ee initiative to develop training provisions. They highlighted the benefits they received from the quality training provided that was suitable for their needs, expressing the desire that their peers might also benefit from such training. As one of the participants explained, "What was Zain to train us, because there is a presence. They train us. Zain's

The findings of the present study regarding the axis of communication and sustainability therefore demonstrated that Saudi educational institutions and training institutions generally lack the crucial element of cooperation and communication, and that the Sa3ee initiative also lacked effective communication with the beneficiaries of its services after they were employed, which created a challenge in gaining the trust of the beneficiaries. This lack of cooperation was found to be one of the primary obstacles affecting the continuation of the participants in their jobs, and their job retention in the long term. In addition, it can be argued that cooperation between the relevant institutions, together with communication between them and their beneficiaries following their employment would help in protecting them from harm and assist in creating job

opportunities that meet the social, environmental, and economic requirements of the participants, which are the main pillars of the principle of sustainability.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications

This study explored the views of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding the services provided by the Sa3ee initiative for rehabilitation and employment, namely the provision of training and rehabilitation for individuals with intellectual disabilities and preparing them for the transition from secondary education to the post-school, workplace stage, ensuring that their involvement in the labor market was considered and addressed. The study aimed to identify the most prominent challenges currently present in the process and to indicate the most important opportunities and benefits for the individuals with intellectual disabilities who undertake such training and rehabilitation.

One limitation of this study was the small number of participants used. This is because it can be challenging to obtain access to individuals with intellectual disabilities and to survey their views, it is crucial that their voices and opinions are heard by the decision-makers in the Ministry of Education in the KSA. This study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data from the sample, an approach that benefitted the quality of the outcomes of the study. It is anticipated that future researchers and providers of rehabilitation and training services will benefit from this study's findings and the recommendations provided. It should be noted that in the approach to this research, according to the researcher's professional duty, the study strove to address its goals and demonstrate the importance of the fact that individuals with intellectual disabilities are able to claim their rights and participate in the enactment of legislation and policies that ensure their participation in all social aspects of society. Specifically, that these policies ensure their transition from secondary level education to the labor market in a manner that meets their aspirations for positive career prospects, personal autonomy, and good quality of life.

One implication that can be drawn from this study is that all those working in the field of the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities, including researchers and specialists, have a responsibility to these individuals to acknowledge their right to receive training and the qualifications necessary to undertake employment, to support their empowerment and participation in strengthening the national economy of the KSA and achieving the Kingdom's Vision 2030. However, further research should be done to elucidate how the relationship between people living with intellectual disabilities and service providers at Sa3ee affects the success of the whole process.

Conflict of interest disclosure statement

We do not have any interests that might be interpreted as influencing the research. Additionally, this manuscript has not been submitted to any other journal, nor is it under consideration for publication with any other entity.

Ethical conduct statement

That Internal Review Board (IRB) approval for the use of human subjects was granted prior to the conduct of the research and guidelines were adhered to throughout the research process.

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