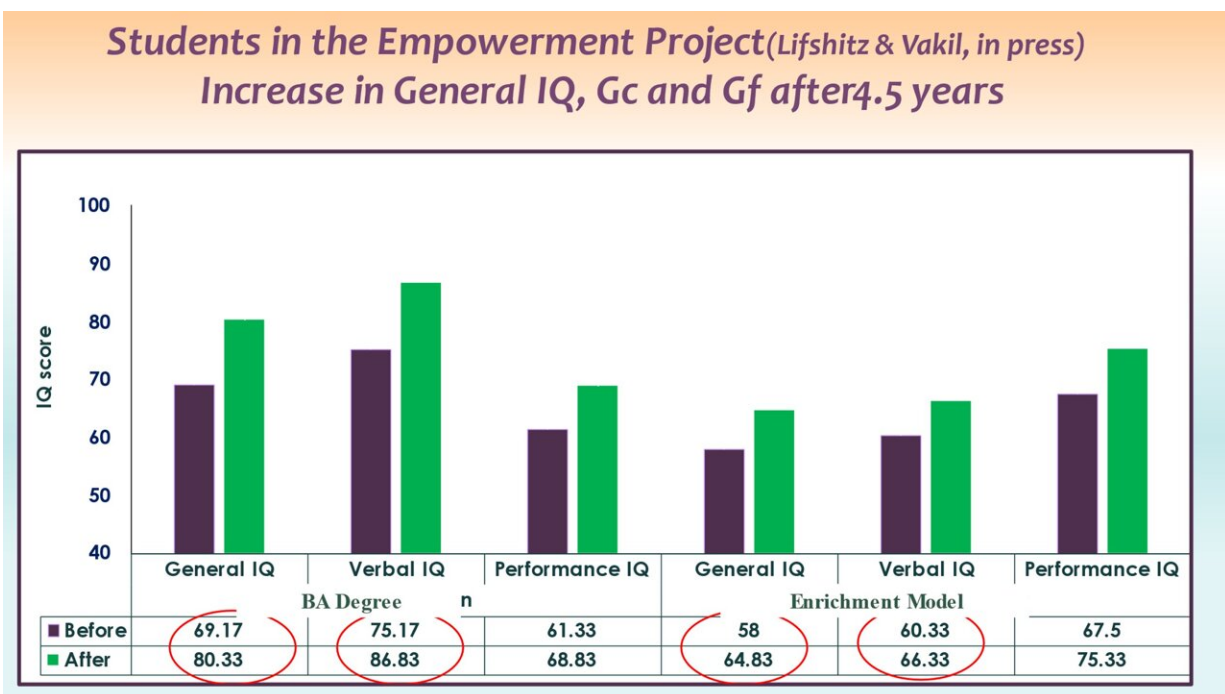


Study: Postsecondary university education improves IQ of adult students with intellectual disability

May 15 2023



Post-secondary education (PSE) has a potential for improving the IQ of adults with mild intellectual disability (ID), according to a new Bar-Ilan University study. The study examined the impact of PSE on students with mild ID who study in a university-based program, known as the Empowerment Project, at the Bar-Ilan University Faculty of Education. The study sample included 24 participants, divided into 12 students with ID who participate in the Empowerment Project and 12 adults with ID with the same background, who did not participate. The results were published in the European Journal of Special Needs Education. The findings revealed significant IQ improvement among the

12 adults after four-and-a-half years of participation in PSE compared to those with the same intelligence level and lifestyle who did not participate in PSE. Their IQ remained stable. Photo: Graph illustrating increase in general IQ among adult students with ID participating in Bar-Ilan University's Empowerment Project. Credit: Prof. Hefziba Lifshitz, Bar-Ilan University

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The Empowerment Project, a first-of its-kind program established by Prof. Hefziba Lifshitz, is based on her Compensation Age Theory, which postulates that chronological age, as opposed to mental age, plays an important role in determining the cognitive ability of adults with intellectual disability.

Lifshitz and colleagues at Bar-Ilan University have determined that

intelligence in ID individuals reaches its peak at around 40-45 years old, providing a window of opportunity for additional, meaningful education and enabling ID adults to develop and maximize their potential later in life.

The Empowerment Project serves 120 adults with all levels of [intellectual disability](#): mild-moderate as well as severe-profound, providing college-level courses adapted to their needs. The most academically capable students in the program can earn a bachelor's degree. All 12 students participating in this study began their studies in the 2014-2015 academic year.

The Weschler Adult Intelligence Test was administered during the third year of study. A second test was administered four-and-a-half years later. "We know that our [project](#) contributes to the improvement of cognitive ability, but I was curious to examine whether it would influence their intelligence," says Prof. Lifshitz. "Among those students studying for a BA, IQ recorded the second time exceeded the cutoff point of the ID definition, which is between 70-75. They reached 80, and some higher. This is an amazing development."

Though some more and some less, IQ increased in all of the PSE participants, according to Lifshitz, who conducted the study with Dr. Shoshana Nissim, Dr. Chaya Aminadav, and Prof. Eli Vakil from Bar-Ilan University.

The Empowerment Project is the first in the world to open adapted enrichment college for [students](#) with severe-profound ID who require extensive support. Due to physical handicap they cannot attend university in person, so the Project offers courses on-site in their day care centers.

Next month, six of the 120 will become the first group of adults with ID

in Israel to fulfill all the academic requirements for a bachelor's degree. It is believed that only three additional ID individuals in the world have received the same degree to date.

Prof. Lifshitz says that in addition to their IQ improvement, their self-esteem is also much higher. This can be seen in how they carry themselves and in their body language. And on the university campus they feel like insiders rather than outsiders.

More information: Hefziba Lifshitz et al, Postsecondary University Education Improves Intelligence of Adult Students with Intellectual Disability: A Preliminary Study, *European Journal of Special Needs Education* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2023.2177944](https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2023.2177944)

Provided by Bar-Ilan University

Citation: Study: Postsecondary university education improves IQ of adult students with intellectual disability (2023, May 15) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-postsecondary-university-iq-adult-students.html>

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