

The development of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities : A theoretical-analytical study

تطور عمليتي الإدراك والتخيل لدى الطفل المتخلف ذهنيا بدرجة خفيفة
دراسة نظرية تحليلية

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Abstract:

This study addresses the development of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities, as fundamental cognitive functions essential for symbolic thinking and creativity for constructing symbolic thinking and fostering creative abilities. The research stems from the challenges associated with limited cognitive and linguistic capacities, which restrict the diversity of sensory and symbolic experiences and consequently affect the nature of mental representations and levels of abstraction in this population. The study focuses on analyzing the characteristics of perception and imagination, as well as the developmental stages they undergo in children with mild intellectual disabilities compared to typically developing peers.

It also highlights the main difficulties that limit their development, such as limited linguistic resources and difficulties transitioning from concrete to abstract concepts. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the pivotal role of targeted educational activities-such as symbolic play, drawing, illustrated stories, and practical simulations-in enhancing the integration of perception and imagination and supporting cognitive and creative development. The study concludes that systematic pedagogical investment in these processes opens broader avenues for the cognitive and social integration of children with mild intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: perception, imagination, mild intellectual disabilities

1. Introduction

Perception and imagination represent fundamental higher-order cognitive processes through which humans construct mental representations and engage with both concrete and abstract aspects of reality. While perception enables individuals to form mental models of objects and events, imagination facilitates the creative recombination of these models, generating novel insights and solutions applicable to real-world contexts. These processes thus serve as essential foundations for symbolic thinking, the cultivation of creative skills, and the enhancement of learning capacities (Al-Aisawi,, 2003, p.114).

Children with mild intellectual disabilities, however, encounter specific cognitive constraints that distinguish them from typically developing peers. These limitations affect their ability to engage in abstract thought, complicate the formation of mental images, and challenge the transition from concrete experiences to abstract representations. Whereas a typically developing child can draw on prior experiences to enrich imaginative processes, children with mild intellectual disabilities tend to rely

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predominantly on immediate sensory impressions, which are often difficult to transform into complex symbolic forms (Nasr El-Din, 2010, p.22). As a result, the trajectories of perception and imagination in this population exhibit distinct patterns in terms of content, complexity, and abstraction (Nofal, 2017, p.86).

Language, functioning as a central medium for structuring thought and constructing meaning, is intimately connected to the cognitive abilities of children with intellectual disabilities. Constraints in vocabulary and slower word acquisition limit the diversity of mental representations, reducing the scope and richness of imaginative expression. Nonetheless, research suggests that a carefully structured educational environment, combined with targeted pedagogical interventions, can foster the development of perceptual and imaginative capacities in line with the children's abilities (Qahtan, 2006, p.32).

Given these considerations, investigating the development of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities is crucial. Such research not only clarifies the cognitive profile of this population but also highlights differences from typically developing peers, thereby informing educational strategies that accommodate their unique needs and promote both cognitive and social inclusion. Accordingly, the present study seeks to understand the nature and developmental patterns of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities, diagnose the cognitive challenges that hinder the growth of these capacities, and explore suitable educational interventions. The study ultimately aims to propose pedagogical approaches that support the cognitive and creative development of these children, while enhancing their inclusion in educational and social environments that respect and respond to their specific needs and abilities.

2. Perception and Imagination as Higher Cognitive Functions

Perception and Imagination form the pinnacle of the cognitive hierarchy, representing higher-order functions upon which the most complex mental processes depend, such as symbolic thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Perception is defined as the mental process through which sensory information from the environment is received, organized, interpreted, and linked to prior knowledge to construct meaning. Imagination, on the other hand, refers to the ability to generate mental images and experiences not directly present in the physical environment, and it constitutes an essential tool in learning, abstraction, and creativity (Baddeley, 2018).

2.1. The Concept of Perception and Imagination

2.1.1. Perception: Perception is defined as the mental process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets sensory stimuli from the environment to build a coherent mental representation of the external world (Atkinson & Hilgard, 2001, p.112). Perception is thus a cognitive activity that goes beyond the reception of raw sensations to transform them into meaningful constructs. It is closely linked to attention, memory, and previous experiences that give perceptions functional significance in an individual's life (Neisser, 2014, p.27). In the field of special education, perception constitutes a cornerstone of cognitive development, as it allows the child to lay the foundational representations upon which higher processes such as imagination and abstract thinking are subsequently built.

2.1.2. Imagination: Imagination is defined as a higher-order cognitive ability that enables the individual to create mental images and representations that are not directly present in reality or sensory experience (Kosslyn, 1994, p, 89). It is a cognitive process based on reorganizing and recombining prior perceptions in new ways, allowing the creation of hypothetical or symbolic scenarios that pave the way for innovative and creative thinking (Piaget, 1972, p.115). Imagination is a central function in childhood, enabling the child to transition from direct sensory levels to more complex symbolic and abstract levels, playing a crucial role in developing linguistic, social, and problem-solving abilities.

2.2. The Developmental Dimension of Perception and Imagination

From a developmental psychology perspective, perception is considered a prerequisite for constructing mental representations that in turn feed imagination. The development of imagination depends on the maturation of sensory perception, attention, and working memory, which are higher executive functions enabling deeper information processing (Miller & Cuttler, 2021). Research indicates that children progress through successive stages in the development of perception and imagination, beginning with direct sensory perception and advancing to the ability for abstract symbolic thought.

2.3. The Neurological Dimension

Neuro-scientific studies show a close interrelation between brain regions responsible for sensory perception-such as the visual and auditory cortices-and areas linked to imagination, such as the Default Mode Network, confirming that imagination is not an independent process but an advanced extension of perceptual mechanisms (Benedek et al., 2020).

2.4. The Importance of Perception and Imagination for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

For children with intellectual disabilities, weaknesses in executive functions hinder the effective integration of perception and imagination. This limitation restricts their ability for symbolic learning and problem-solving, as well as their cognitive flexibility in adapting to new situations. Understanding the nature of perception and imagination is therefore essential for designing educational strategies that support the development of these functions and enhance the child's cognitive and social autonomy (Jarrold et al., 2022).

2.5. Educational Applications

Educational applications vary, including sensory games, drawing, storytelling, and practical experiments that provide opportunities to transform sensory stimuli into mental images suitable for abstraction. Employing multi-sensory activities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) is an effective strategy for supporting cognitive development, as it contributes to building a broad network of knowledge and experiences related to mental representation and imagination. (Abbasi et al., 2024, p.23)

2.6. Nature and Development of Perception and Imagination in Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

Today, mild intellectual disability is broadly understood not merely as a deficit in intelligence, but as a complex disability affecting multiple aspects of development, especially higher-order cognitive processes that underpin learning and adaptation. Perception and imagination, as core cognitive processes, are directly influenced by limitations in cognitive and linguistic abilities, affecting how children with intellectual disabilities mentally represent both tangible and abstract aspects of the world. Perception enables individuals to recall mental images of objects and events, while imagination allows the reconstruction of these images to generate new meanings, forming the basis for symbolic and creative thinking.

Understanding the characteristics of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities is essential for identifying the distinctive ways these cognitive processes manifest under constraints in symbolic capacity, and for examining how this shapes patterns of perception and interaction with the world.

2.6.1. Characteristics of Perception (Mental Representation)

- **Limited Mental Scope:** Perception in children with intellectual disabilities is often marked by low levels of abstraction. Their mental representations tend to remain closely tied to concrete, tangible experiences, showing limited flexibility beyond direct sensory input (Abed, 2014, p.23).
- **Representational Function:** Although more rudimentary compared to typically developing children, perception remains a key mechanism for constructing mental images of the surrounding world, guiding behavior and knowledge acquisition (Piaget, 1972, p.178).
- **Reliance on Direct Sensory Experience:** Perceptual processes predominantly depend on immediate sensory input, with the mind reorganizing and interpreting these initial concrete experiences.
- **Relative Nature:** Perceptions vary from one child to another, depending on the severity of intellectual disability and the degree of social interaction, reflecting both individual and social dimensions of cognition.
- **Relative Stability with Limited Change:** Although accumulated experience can influence perceptual representations, the rate of change is slower in children with intellectual disabilities compared to typically developing peers (Piaget, 1972).
- **Practical Function:** Perception primarily serves practical purposes, including basic interpretation, simple organization of experiences, and limited decision-making, rather than functioning as a tool for complex abstract reasoning (Quadri et al., 2024, p.21).

2.6.2. Characteristics of Imagination

- **Limited Free Creativity:** Restricted symbolic abilities in children with intellectual disabilities often limit the potential for free creative thought, leading them to reproduce sensory experiences rather than create novel and complex images.
- **Simple Synthetic Nature:** These children can combine different elements to form new images, but this synthesis generally occurs at a basic level, merging familiar components rather than generating intricate or original scenarios.
- **Limited Flexibility:** Imagination in this population is generally confined to concrete reality, with limited openness to hypothetical or abstract possibilities due to reduced abstraction skills.
- **Restricted Symbolic Nature:** Limitations in language and symbolic understanding restrict the ability to reinterpret reality or transform it into symbolic or metaphorical forms.

- **Emotional Connection:** Imaginative activity is often closely tied to immediate and simple emotional responses such as joy or fear, rather than complex representations of the self or the external world.
- **Limited Prospective Function:** The ability to use imagination for planning or forecasting is underdeveloped, although it can improve through structured educational interventions.
- **Educational Dimension:** Imagination remains a vital tool for cognitive development when nurtured through practical exercises, illustrated storytelling, and symbolic play, thereby supporting the growth of both creative and symbolic capacities (Nofal, 2017, p.76).

3. Differences between Children with Intellectual Disabilities

3.1. Differences between Children with Intellectual Disabilities and Typically Developing Children

Recent literature in developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience indicates that children with intellectual disabilities differ from their typically developing peers in several cognitive, behavioral, and linguistic domains. These differences are not only reflected in performance levels on traditional intelligence tests but extend to the nature of perceptual processing and imagination.

3.2. Differences in Perceptual Processes

Perception represents the primary gateway to learning. Typically developing children possess greater ability to process sensory information quickly and accurately, whether in the visual or auditory domain. In contrast, children with intellectual disabilities show slower rates of selective attention and difficulties in distinguishing between similar stimuli (Vicari et al., 2018). This perceptual weakness directly affects their ability to construct clear mental images, forming an obstacle to the development of imagination as a higher cognitive process.

Studies have shown that visual and auditory working memory - an essential component of perception- is less efficient in children with intellectual disabilities, reducing their ability to retain and integrate sensory stimuli (Henry & Bettenay, 2020). However, some research has shown that certain children in this group possess relatively stronger visuospatial skills compared to their linguistic skills, opening avenues for educational strategies that rely on visual media (Nader-Grosbois & Mazzone, 2021).

3.3. Differences in the Use of Imagination

Imagination, as the ability to form mental images and symbolic representations, also differs between typically developing children and those with intellectual disabilities. Typically developing children engage in complex imaginative play from early stages, using symbols to embody roles or unreal events. Children with intellectual disabilities, in contrast, display less capacity for engaging in symbolic play and free imagination, and their imaginative activities are often limited to direct reality or repetitive patterns (Lewis & Boucher, 2021).

Experimental studies confirm that these children lack the cognitive flexibility needed to generate new images or innovative scenarios, limiting their creativity and their ability to plan and solve problems. However, structured interventions such as illustrated stories or guided symbolic activities have shown notable improvement in their imaginative use (Craig & Tzuriel, 2022).

3.4. Implications for Linguistic and Social Development

Differences in perceptual and imaginative capacities are clearly reflected in the linguistic and social development of children with intellectual disabilities. Typically developing children use language as a key tool to expand their imagination, whereas children with intellectual disabilities face difficulties in acquiring vocabulary and producing complex sentences, limiting their ability to express or share their mental images with others (Abbeduto & Kasari, 2020).

Additionally, limited imagination affects social skills; imagination facilitates empathy and anticipation of others' feelings, abilities that are often underdeveloped in children with intellectual disabilities. Thus, enhancing perception and imagination constitutes a central educational goal not only for academic learning but also for social integration.

3.5. Developmental Stages of Perception and Imagination in Children with Intellectual Disabilities Compared to Typically Developing Children

Recent studies reveal that the development of perception and imagination in children with intellectual disabilities progresses more slowly than in typically developing children, due to cognitive and linguistic constraints that limit the speed and efficiency of information processing and abstraction. These differences require a supportive educational environment employing visual media, symbolic play, and guided activities to compensate for developmental gaps.

The following table summarizes the main developmental stages of perception and imagination, highlighting the differences between children with intellectual disabilities and typically developing children, outlining key characteristics of each stage, and suggesting directed educational activities to support perceptual and imaginative growth:

Table 1 illustrates the stages of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities and the related educational activities

Stage	Approx Age	Perception Characteristics	Imagination Characteristics	Supportive Educational Activities
Direct Sensory Perception	0-3 yrs	Primary mental images via touch and sight	Almost absent	Simple construction games, object exploration
Early Symbolic Perception	3-6 yrs	Simple visual representations	Early simple visual imagination	Picture cards, drawing familiar objects, simple role play
Early Imagination	4-7 yrs	Linking sensory elements	Initial limited scenarios	Drawing simple events, acting short stories
Limited Advanced Imagination	7+ yrs	More complex images tied to concrete experiences	Combining multiple images to produce simple ideas	Interactive picture stories, simple art projects, complex role play

This framework clearly demonstrates that differences in perception and imagination are not only quantitative but fundamentally qualitative, reflecting distinct modes of cognitive processing in children with intellectual disabilities compared to typically developing children. Such distinctions underscore the necessity of educational planning grounded in the developmental stages of perception and imagination for this group. This approach is essential to foster balanced cognitive and creative growth, address specific learning needs, and reduce developmental gaps between the two groups.

4. The Role of Language in Building Mental Representations in Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Language is not merely a means of communication; it is a central cognitive tool that contributes to organizing thought, forming abstract concepts, and constructing mental representations. For children with

intellectual disabilities, language represents a major challenge, as it is directly linked to their ability to express mental images and retrieve cognitive experiences (Abbeduto & Kasari, 2020).

4.1. Language as a Medium for Thinking

According to Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky, 1986), language is the primary tool that enables the child to construct mental frameworks related to time, space, and causal relationships. Children with intellectual disabilities often face difficulties in acquiring language and developing vocabulary, which impacts their ability for symbolic and abstract thinking.

4.2. Language's Contribution to Supporting Abstract Representations

A rich vocabulary and complex linguistic structures allow the child to organize information and link it to mental images. Both written and spoken language enhance the child's ability to build symbolic mental representations that assist in problem-solving and making imagination-based decisions (Miller & Cuttler, 2021).

4.3. Language Difficulties Associated with Intellectual Disabilities

Studies indicate that children with intellectual disabilities often suffer from limited vocabulary and difficulties constructing complex sentences. This limits their ability to accurately express mental representations and affects their academic and social achievement (Schalock et al., 2021).

4.4. Educational Applications to Enhance Language and Mental Representations

Various educational strategies can be adopted to strengthen this relationship:

- **Guided sensory activities:** Linking linguistic concepts with sensory stimuli such as shapes, sounds, and tangible materials.
- **Learning through symbolic play:** Using roles, illustrated stories, and educational drama to enable the child to use language while imagining.
- **Visual and auditory support:** Relying on visual media such as pictures, cards, and videos to support linguistic learning and connect it to mental representations.

4.5. Educational Dimensions

Enhancing language in children with intellectual disabilities goes beyond vocabulary development. It extends to building cognitive strategies that enable them to formulate complex ideas and mental constructs, thereby contributing to the integrated development of their perception and imagination.

5. The Main Challenges Hindering the Development of Perception and Imagination in Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

5.1. Perceptual Challenges in Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

Perception is a higher cognitive process that enables the formation of mental representations of objects, events, and relationships, serving as a foundation for the development of abstract concepts and symbolic thinking. However, children with mild intellectual disabilities face several challenges that hinder the optimal development of this process, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Limited linguistic and symbolic resources:** Language is the main mediator enabling the child to transform sensory experiences into mental representations. In children with mild intellectual disabilities, limited cognitive and linguistic abilities lead to cognitive gaps that negatively affect the accuracy and richness of mental representations of objects and abstract relationships (Al-Aisawi, 2004, p. 184).
- **Difficulty in transitioning from concrete to abstract concepts:** These children often rely on concrete experiences, making the comprehension of higher abstractions a significant challenge, especially in understanding temporal concepts (e.g., before/after, yesterday/tomorrow) and spatial relationships (e.g., right/left) compared to typically developing children (Nashwati, 2011, p.101).
- **Dependence on direct experience:** Limitations in processing abstract information reduce the ability to form representations of events or objects that are not directly experienced, thereby narrowing the perceptual and conceptual world compared to typically developing children.
- **Difficulty in forming coherent conceptual relationships:** Integrating partial concepts into unified mental representations often proves challenging. For example, when a child thinks of "rain," their concept may be limited to "water falling from the sky" without linking it to "clouds" or "weather changes," reflecting limitations in symbolic and cognitive representation. (Wu, 2024, p.77).

5.2. Imaginative Challenges in Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities

Imagination refers to the ability to reorganize mental representations creatively to generate new ideas or scenarios. Challenges specific to imagination include:

- **Limited narrative imagination:** The construction of coherent mental stories is often restricted.
- **Weak symbolic imagination:** Children may find it difficult to imagine inner dialogues or symbolic interactions due to a lack of linguistic and cognitive resources.
- **Constraints on verbal innovation:** Generating metaphors or symbolic imagery is difficult because of limited higher cognitive experiences that normally support creative thinking.
- **Dependence on visuo-motor imagination:** Their imagination is often expressed through drawings, practical enactment, or manual creativity.

- **Educational example:** When asked to imagine "a trip to the moon," typically developing children produce rich, sequential scenarios, while children with mild intellectual disabilities may produce a simple drawing or mention elements directly linked to their experience.

5.3. Cognitive Differences between Children with Mild Intellectual Disabilities and Typically Developing Children

- **Typically developing children:** Perception and imagination are rich and multifaceted due to the integration of sensory, linguistic, and visual inputs, providing a broad foundation for symbol formation and understanding causal and temporal relationships.
- **Children with mild intellectual disabilities:** Perception remains largely sensory and concrete, while imagination is limited in terms of verbal symbolism and abstraction. However, these children often show notable strengths in visuo-spatial imagination and motor creativity when provided with adequate support.

From an educational perspective, children with mild intellectual disabilities benefit from multi-modal teaching strategies focusing on images, models, practical experiences, and symbolic play, which compensate for cognitive limitations and support the development of both perceptual and imaginative abilities.

6. Possible Educational Strategies to Support the Relationship between Perception and Imagination in Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Contemporary research in special education and cognitive psychology indicates that enhancing the relationship between perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities requires adopting structured educational strategies that take into account the cognitive, linguistic, and sensory characteristics of this group (Jarrold et al., 2022; Salama, 2005). Structured interventions and guided activities represent the optimal path to developing these higher cognitive functions, as they integrate visual aids, sensory experiences, and linguistic activities, thereby ensuring integrated development of perception and imagination.

6.1. Basic Educational Strategies

6.1.1. Use of Concrete and Gradual Media

-Employing models, manipulable shapes, and sensory activities helps facilitate the transition from direct experience to perceptual understanding and symbolic imagination (Salama, 2018).

-This approach allows children to reorganize previous mental images and generate new meanings, thereby enhancing symbolic thinking. (Patti, 2024, p.56).

6.1.2. Intensive Visual Engagement

- Visual media such as pictures, illustrated cards, diagrams, and videos help transform abstract concepts into concrete images that are easier to understand and remember.
- Studies have shown that reliance on visual representation enhances perception and imagination in children with intellectual disabilities (Marschark & Spencer, 2015).

6.1.3. Integrating Symbolic Play with Sensory Activities

- Engaging children in role-playing everyday situations expands their perceptual experiences and allows integration into imaginative processes.
- This can be achieved through simple role-play games, simulating daily situations, or using educational scenarios related to real life.(Chen et al. 2024, p.187)

6.1.4. Activity-Based and Experiential Learning

- Practical activities allow the child to connect concepts with real-life experiences, thereby enhancing mental representations.

Practical examples:

- Arranging daily events to teach the concept of time.
- Motor activities to illustrate spatial concepts (up, down, behind, in front).
- Simple science experiments to explain causal relationships.

6.1.5. Integrating Language in Educational Activities

- Language is a key tool for developing perception and imagination, so vocabulary and clear sentences should be integrated during learning activities.
- Encouraging the child to express mental images using the language they possess (Baddeley, 2018).

6.1.6. Use of Digital Media and Assistive Technologies

- Digital technology provides rich educational environments with images and motion, such as augmented reality and virtual reality applications, allowing children to experience complex concepts interactively and creatively (Nergis, 2021).
- These media enable children to learn independently and support their abilities in perception and imagination.

6.1.7. Repetition and Variety of Activities

- Frequent exposure and activity variety enhance perceptual abilities and develop cognitive flexibility (Youssef, 2006).
- Using varied activities ensures the development of different aspects of perception and imagination.

6.1.8. Multisensory Integration

-Combining visual, motor, and tactile experiences enriches the symbolic repertoire and compensates for limitations in abstract thinking.

6.1.9. Continuous Assessment

-Monitoring indicators of symbolic thinking and abstraction skills enables educators to evaluate the effectiveness of activities and adapt interventions to meet individual needs (Miller & Cuttler, 2021,p.110).

6.2. Role of Teacher and Family

-The success of educational strategies depends on cooperation between teacher and family.

-The teacher innovates flexible methods relying on sensory and visual interaction, while the family represents the first natural environment for reinforcing perception and imagination through daily activities, storytelling, and symbolic play.(Giaouri, 2025, p.191).

Table 2 Illustration of strategic activities

Educational Strategy	Goal	Practical Examples	Expected Outcomes
Concrete and Gradual Media	Support transition from sensory perception to abstraction	Models, construction toys, illustrated cards	Enhancement of mental representations
Intensive Visual Engagement	Support perception and imagination	Pictures, diagrams, videos	Faster understanding, better memory retention
Symbolic Play with Sensory Activities	Integrate sensory experience with imagination	Role-playing daily life situations	Expansion of symbolic repertoire
Activity-Based Learning	Connect concept with real-life experience	Motor activities, science experiments	Increased understanding and abstraction
Language Integration	Develop symbolic expression	Clear sentences, stimulating questions	Improved expression and abstraction ability
Digital Media	Enrich experiences	Virtual reality applications	Stimulated creativity and abstraction
Repetition and Variety of Activities	Enhance cognitive flexibility	Multi-sensory activities	Development of perception and imagination
Multisensory Integration	Enrich symbolic repertoire	Visual, motor, and tactile activities	Improved perception and imagination
Continuous Assessment	Adjust interventions	Monitoring developmental	Improved individual performance

		indicators	
Teacher-Family Cooperation	Ensure continuity	Home and institutional activities	Sustainable developmental support

(Note: Table Prepared by the researcher, 2025, based on Salama, 2005, pp 215–228)

Thus, it becomes clear that systematic educational strategies are key to enhancing the relationship between perception and imagination in children with intellectual disabilities. Intensive visual engagement, experiential learning, language integration, and the use of digital media, together with teacher-family support, create a rich and stimulating educational environment (Salama, 2005; Baddeley, 2018; Jarrold et al., 2022). These strategies enable children to develop complex mental representations, enhance symbolic thinking, and increase cognitive flexibility, contributing to the development of their creative and social skills. Through systematic integration of these approaches, sustainable perceptual and imaginative growth can be achieved, supporting their cognitive independence and adaptability to new challenges.

7. Conclusion

The study of the development of perception and imagination in children with mild intellectual disabilities highlights the pivotal role of structured and guided educational interventions as essential tools to support their cognitive and symbolic growth. The theoretical analysis confirms that these children face distinctive challenges related to delayed cognitive maturity, limited linguistic resources, and weak abstract thinking abilities, which constrain their capacity to form coherent mental representations and elevate them toward higher levels of symbolic and creative thinking.

Guided educational activities emerge as a fundamental means to compensate for these limitations Educational tools that rely on visual, sensory, and motor media provide rich opportunities to expand sensory perception, develop skills in constructing mental representations, and enhance the ability to reorganize mental images in flexible and innovative ways Symbolic play, role-playing, creative drawing, coloring, mind mapping, and practical simulations not only enhance perception but also support imagination, foster cognitive flexibility, and enable children to solve problems creatively in real-life situations.

Thus, these interventions enable children with mild intellectual disabilities to move from direct sensory experiences to more abstract and symbolic forms of imagination, enriching their understanding of causal and temporal relationships and strengthening their ability to predict outcomes and express ideas in diverse ways. This investment in educational strategies contributes not only to cognitive growth but also to boosting self-confidence, improving social communication, and facilitating integration into educational and social environments.

However, this study acknowledges the limitations of its theoretical framework, as it is restricted to analyzing literature and concepts without direct field testing, which may limit the generalizability of its conclusions to different educational settings. Therefore, it is recommended that these efforts be complemented by future field research employing experimental and exploratory methods, involving larger and more diverse samples of children with intellectual disabilities of varying degrees, and examining the long-term impact of educational interventions. It is also advisable to expand studies to include multiple educational and cultural contexts, with the aim of developing practical, scientifically based educational models that enhance the development of perception and imagination and support the social inclusion of children in inclusive educational environments.

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