

A Study on the Challenges that Students with Autism Face in Educational Environments

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Abstract

The number of children suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is increasing rapidly; our educational system is struggling to meet the needs and requirements of these students. Among teachers from the general classroom there is growing awareness regarding the strategies that can be incorporated to ensure positive gains for students suffering from ASD, still in this arena there is continuous need of professional development. The various challenges that these students with autism face in educational environments has been addressed in the literature review. Strategies related to practical social, behavioural, and academics that teachers can implement within their classrooms in order to enhance the educational experiences and performance of students with ASD has been suggested.

Keywords: Autism, Education, Academic Strategies, Social Strategies, Behavioural Strategies.

Introduction

Fleury et al., (2014) mentioned that over the past few years the number of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are included and participate in mainstream classrooms has increased. The teachers are given additional responsibilities to meet the academic, social and behavioural needs of these students. Apparently, the needs of these students with ASD are not appropriately met. Many teachers from general education are still not aware about the a) what are the characteristics that are associated with ASD affect the performance of students, b) academic profiles of individuals suffering from ASD across the areas of content, c) interferences found are successful in improving the outcome of academics of individuals suffering from ASD as per Fleury et al., (2014). As Muchetti, (2013), due to lack of awareness among teachers regarding educating and treating students with autism they are found most of the time disengaged from learning activities and spending time alone. According to Manti, Scholte, and Van Berckelaer-Onnes (2013) on the other hand it has been found that when these students ASD were provided with proper education showed improvement not only in academic learning and functional language but also in communication, adaptive skills, and socialization whereas many of them can be more productive in a more generalized if they take better advantage of their skills and abilities.

To address the academic, social and behavioral strategies of teaching is the purpose of this literature review in that can be incorporated to enhance the educational experiences of students suffering from ASD. The strategies that have been discussed are practical and can be easily applied in both the general and special education environment of learning. Additional research was done to find out which methods can be best for each individual with ASD, It is necessary to make sure that teachers are aware about the initiatives that are needed to create a positive difference in the lives of the students (Muchetti, 2013). Regardless of the age students with ASD can easily use these strategies and can be modified as per the individual requirements and needs all through out their school years. Common issues that are associated with academic, social, behavioral challenges that most of the students with ASD face have been addressed in these strategies.

The strategies have been divided into three arenas of academic, social, behavioral interventions, as these three domains are inter-related



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there is still some overlap among them and affect each other directly. As Boyd, Woodard, & Bodfish, (2011) stated repetitive behavior decrease When social skills of these students improve Decrease In repetitive behaviour leads to increased engagement in activities of learning which directly impacts knowledge acquisition (Muchetti, (2013). Relationship between the impact of improved academic learning and social abilities has been noted thus academic performance of students will directly improve when their social skills will improve as per Fleury et al.(2014). As Ostmeier & Scarpa, (2012) stated social abilities of the students with ASD directly impact how with their peers they interact and form relationships. Emotional well-being and confidence of students drastically improve if their relationship with their peer is good it also contributes in improved engagement and also improved academic performance.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Affects Student Performance

As per the report of Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (2015), ASD is a neuro-developmental disorder that usually affects the ability of a person to communicate and to interact socially with others. Challenging or repetitive behaviour are exhibited by people with ASD. Autism always does not affect the cognitive ability of an individual. As autism is a spectrum – disorder each person with ASD is affected differently and exhibit varying degrees of severity. As per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015), one out of 68 children is affected by ASD. People from various - socio-economic, racial, ethnic backgrounds are affected by this disorder in comparison to females it affects males five times more (Centers for Disease Control and Preventions, 2015) mentioned that the exact cause of autism is still not known, but few factors definitely increase the risk of autism, such as existing family history and children who are born to parents of older age.

(Jacklin & Farr, 2005) mentioned that Children with ASD experience difficulties in their ability to communicate and to interact with others effectively (Muchetti, 2013). Around 30-50% of children with ASD have minimum verbal ability upon entering school. Fleury et al., (2014) most experience impairments in expressive and receptive communication. Jacklin & Farr(2005) stated that individuals with ASD struggle in social context as they are not able to interpret social cues. People with ASD, are often found to be feeling socially awkward, thus leads to being rejected by their peers and at times they become victims of bullying and teasing (Ostmeier & Scarpa, 2012). A child's emotional well-being is directly affected by these circumstances. Children with ASD who function highly the ongoing cycle of experiences makes them feel increased depression and anxiety due to their incompetence with the society thus in turn their increased depression and anxiety leads to their social- incompetence.

Fleury et al., (2014) stated that schools can be considered as social environments one can perceived this as a problematic issue for children who are socially-impaired. As per Ostmeier & Scarpa (2012), Autistic children displayed Poor academic

performance as their social inabilities impact their ability to learn within a classroom. Elliot and Gresham conducted a survey research on teachers and assembled a list of at least 10 social skills that will facilitate successful learning that occur within the classroom: "pay attention to what others are saying, following rules, following steps, asking for help, ignoring distractions, staying calm, taking turns, doing nice things for others and taking responsibility for one's own behaviors Ostmeier & Scarpa (2012) cited. Students with ASD quite often experience difficulty in adhering to these social skills. Additionally, in some aspects related to the school experience might aggravate the characteristics presented of ASD. For instance, generally a classroom is crowded and noisy. In majority of the schools among teachers and classrooms there are frequent transitions, mostly with different mixture of peers and with different rules (Fleury et al., 2014). All of these challenges might prevent students with autistic from getting engaged in learning.

Repetitive behaviour or routines are found in these individuals with ASD so they feel social discomfort. Individuals with repetitive behaviour are accredited to the impairment of their executive functioning system. Behavior of an individual is regulated by Executive functioning system, its impairment compromises with the self-regulating behavioral ability of an autistic individual.

As these autistic students experience anxiety and discomfort in new or changing situations they find it difficult to adjust with the transitions (Perfitt, 2013). As Boyd et al., (2011) mentioned situations that are highly stress ful or any situation that prevents their repetitive routines or behaviour, severely affects their capability to handle their emotions and thus results in their disruptive behaviour.

Children with autism experience deficits in observational learning and imitation (Field et al., 2010). They quite often have high visual, auditory and linguistic processing skills (Fleury et al., 2014). The earlier stated impairment to their executive system of functioning inhibits them from being able to process the multiple step directions, maintaining the organization of their materials and to sustain being self -motivated. As per Ostmeier & Scarpa, (2012), they often find it difficult to generalize information across varied settings and to view the situation from the perspective of other person. Children with autism may not be able to view the entire picture but in the completed picture can see the individual puzzle pieces (Frith, 1989). As cited in Jacklin & Farr, (2005), A normal child views the entire completed puzzle comprised of individual pieces of puzzle while an autistic child will view the individual pieces as he finds it difficult to view.

As per Muchetti, (2013), Autism also affects the literacy skills of the child as most of the children with autism are not able to progress past sight recognition of word. As stated by Whalon & Hart (2011), These autistic children depend upon their cognitive abilities and are able to decode text but face issues in understanding what they actually read as with their decoding abilities their ability to read

comprehension does not match. They also find it difficult to make inferences (Jacklin & Farr, 2005). As they have poor visual-motor speed and fine motor skills they find it difficult to hold pencil, to write and their writing becomes hap hazard by (Fleury et al., 2014)

The combination of social, behavioral, and Communicative impairments have direct effect on chances of the students with ASD to excel academically. When compared to normally developing children, children with autism enter the educational system (school) already at a disadvantage. This is the reason why support is needed to motivate to promote the success of students with as both socially and educationally. Within both the mainstream and special education classrooms there is need of implementing numerous social, behavioural, and academic strategies to assist students with ASD and to contribute towards creating positive experiences for them at school environments.

Social Strategies

In order to cultivate the social skills of autistic student' educators within their strategies can implement strategies. As Jacklin & Farr,(2005) stated, these children with autism have limited skills of imitation and are not able to pick up on social interactions, social cues literally there is need of teaching them. As per Fleury et al.,(2014), for students with autism Social skills are the most effective as within their natural environment they are taught and expected to demonstrate. This approach recognized that many of the autistic students across various settings do not possess the ability to generalize skills. As per Ostmeier & Scarpa, (2012), students with ASD are not able to exhibit the social skills they learn outside school such as playground, home to a particular situation within school. Within a school environment the social skills taught are most appropriate and effective. Educators and peer models are successful in helping students with ASD to increase their social skills. As per the needs of the children educators can initiate individualized peer modelling program. Social skills of students with autism can be enhanced by engaging them in playful imitation games and by using strategic classroom computer applications as practical strategies within the school environment can be implemented.

Children with ASD lack skills of imitation that affects their capability to learn skills by observing others (Fleury et al., 2014) Children who develop normally for them the effective method of social learning is observation, thus places students with autism at disadvantage at large.

If the teacher imitates the behaviour of the autistic child in a playful manner this way he can effectively encourage the imitative behaviour from students with ASD. Children can copy the behavior their teacher imitates thus it will be helpful for them to learn the behavior and skills they need for the desired actions. A study was conducted by Field (2010) on 20 non-verbal children with ASD to determine how an imitative adult can impact the imitative and social behavior of the children. In the results it was confirmed that impaired imitation skills are present in

children with ASD, the child can display social imitations only when an adult is engaged in imitative behaviour with the child. Taking into consideration that higher percentage of imitative behavior was displayed by children when they were being imitated. Teachers, parents should play games such as reciprocal turns of imitation to enhance the ability of the children to imitate. Autistic children can learn new skills by the strategy of imitation thus it will aid in increasing their cognitive and social development.

Behavioural Strategies

At times Problematic behavior is exhibited by Children with ASD thus it inhibits their own learning and also the other students of the class (Ostmeier & Scarpa, 2012). As per Boyd et al., (2011), Probable instances of problematic behaviour can be such as finding difficulty in listening and following instructions, difficulty in abiding by the rules of classroom, and demonstration of repetitive behaviour can also cause disturbance. If they are restricted to exhibit their feelings, repetitive behavior they feel stressed and this may lead to aggression, severe irritability, self-injury or other repetitive and problematic behaviour". Students with autism who experience such sort of behaviour are encouraged to partake in academic studies (Fleury et al., 2014).

A study was conducted by Boyd, Woodard, and Bodfish (2011) to determine if adapted exposure and response prevention (ERP) interventions that are required for treating obsessive compulsive disorder will be effective in retreating repetitive behaviour of children with ASD who also have intellectual disabilities. In the results it was seen that after the ERP interventions, the time period during which the participants were engaged in academic tasks, the amount of time they took delayed their engagement with the stimulus triggered, and for how long they went without displaying the repetitive behaviour all increased throughout the duration of the study. Also for how long the repetitive behavior displayed were decreased. The results of the findings are promising as additionally to the desirable outcomes, how to conduct the ERP interventions teachers were taught during the study. To ensure the effectiveness of ERP as a strategy for treatment Future research is necessary for regulating behavior that interferes with learning.

In terms of technological interventions, that can assist the student with ASD, as a new and effective technological intervention the usage of iPads is emerging for lessening challenging behaviour in the class by Neely, Rispoli, Camargo, Davis, & Boles, (2013). With the traditional paper/pencil teaching methods usage of iPads was compared by Neely, Rispoli, Camargo, Davis, and Boles (2013) for two male participants with autism and who displayed challenging behavior. Higher levels of academic engagement were shown by both the students while using iPads, In comparison to traditional methods of teaching. For the participants, the iPads performed as motivational factors and the tasks didn't appear like academic "work," although the participants were completing the same academic demands. These days in majority of the educational settings usage of iPads

has become common and their informed usage is appropriate and easy to implement.

Academic Strategies

In order to decrease undesirable behaviour ;behavioral strategies have been applied educators to accommodate students with ASD in reaching their academic potential can also implement formal academic strategies. Some of these strategies can be as simple as using technology to present in a different way the learning material. As individuals with ASD learn visually they generally respond well while using iPads and computers. In the classroom other than integrating technology, detailed instruction, adapted shared reading programs, and structured learning environments are few of the strategies that can be implemented.

As per Muchetti, (2013), the literacy skills of students with autism, can be enhanced by adapting shared reading activities. In shared reading an adult loudly reads to a student while engaging the student through a series of questions and discussions. In order to meet the individualized needs of students with autism the activities of shared reading can be modified. Like shortening the amount of text, while maintaining the plot, the main elements that are important-age-appropriate literature can be used by Fleury et al., (2014).

A study was conducted by Muchetti (2013) to examine that whether the shared reading activities that are led by teacher with visual supports, modified text and objects that affect student engagement and the reading comprehension of the children with ASD with limited ability to communicate verbally. In the activities of shared reading with trained classroom teachers four children with autism between the ages of six and eight years participated. It was found that for all four participants during the intervention phase, Student engagement and reading comprehension increased. The findings of the study were found to be promising as they illustrated that we can engage children with autism in early literacy activities that have been implemented to meet their needs, their reading comprehension abilities in the process can also be enhanced. For many autistic students reading comprehension is an issue therefore to enhance their literacy skills classroom teachers can implement adapted shared reading activities methodologies.

In the third strategy, for students with autism detailed instruction is very much important in order to acquire new academic skills. As each and every student learns step by step individually Visual supports and verbal prompting are often used. While teaching the contents of academics teachers are required to provide- "proper and clear explanations of the skill or task sequence, guided practice, modeling, and multiple opportunities to practice them independently and to apply the learned knowledge "by Fleury et al.(2014). Chances are there that students will learn successfully when skills are taught incrementally and eventually independently will be able to execute the skills learnt.

Muchetti (2013) establishing structured learning environments have proved to be effective for making conditions that will help in improving the

academic development of students with ASD. Teaching strategies of a special education school located in Netherlands were studied by Manti, Scholte, and Van Berckelaer-Onnes (2013), in order to determine which methods are best suitable in promoting attainment of academic knowledge. Teachers can create written schedules that will help them to follow and learn because they struggle to organize schedules.

Conclusion

A variety of strategies that will assist educators when planning for students with ASD has been compiled in the literature review. In order to examine the interventions already existing and to determine additional strategies there is need of further research that will be beneficial in making the educational settings for children with autism more conducive. The quality of school experiences, engaging and employing the students in inclusive education, social relationship and living independently can be improved by additional research. Individuals with autism will excel if such things are improved. In order to make the students capable and enable so that they contribute towards the society we teachers have to make efforts for that. Social, behavioral, and academic skills a student will learn with a positive attitude and approach if we provide educational environment that fulfill their needs. Students will excel academically if strategies are incorporated that fulfill their individual needs.

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