

Access to Quality Education of Children with Autism in Lahore: A Perspective of Teacher and Parents

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Abstract

Purposely the intentions behind the study were to identify the problems related to educational accessibility, investigating teachers' technical capacity for delivering adequate instruction to the students with autism and the provision of professional support to those teachers. With the help of the research findings the researchers were able to explore diverse kinds of educational requirements along with social and psychological problems of those children. Self-constructed inventories were used for data collection. Inventory statements were open-ended to get the detailed replies of respondents. A total number of 15 school teachers and 15 parents of students were conveniently selected from the schools of autism spectrum disorder. After getting the responses the researchers interpreted each response within all possible technical sound boundaries. It was concluded that the children with autism were encountering with a number of social and psychological problems which were creating hindrance for the smooth and effective execution of educational programs and lack in collaboration was also found among teachers, other professionals and the parents.

Key Words: Access Quality Education, Autism, Parents Perspective, Teachers Perspective

Introduction

School going children face many problems few of those are: access, financial resources, teacher's behavior, authentic assessment and conduct of peer group. When our focus is on children with disabilities then the scenario of problems become different in depth and breadth and also varies from disability to disability. The topic under research covers the identification of the educational problems of children with autism. This is very obvious while a professional involves in-field experience. According to the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic Manual (2013) autistic disorder is known as Pervasive Developmental Disorder, which restricts three major areas of development. Those areas are; delayed / abnormal communication patterns, social interaction and repetitive behaviors and interests.

According to Autism Society of America (1994) due to the problem of autism the child usually encounter's with many issues in critical areas of developmental milestones such as; vocal & other communication domains, socialization and related personal interactional problems, imaginary/creative play and also low to higher levels of concerns in sensory processing.

While Sonia (2008) reflected the situation of Pakistan and stated that there is very a limited number of research based publications accessible for the academic professional. Consequently, the academic professionals do not have in-depth

understanding of the educational problems of diverse learners and the resources to cope with the problematic situations. One of the main reasons is no uniformity in our education system. Another root cause is much variation in the organizational configuration of the institutes and different kinds of curriculums for supporting understudies with uncommon requirements.

Susan (2005) revealed that among such children who on a spectrum of autism naturally demonstrate many variations among the same disability. This is similar to the individual differences among all human beings. As per the assessment findings and diversity within one single disability there also requires a structured intervention program for every individual.

Similarly Jordan (1999) found that children with autism have irregular patterns of cognitive abilities and weak areas. In the result of such irregularities their education suffers a lot. Young children and grown person with autism share similar characteristics with other disabilities. Those features can be: rote memory, problems with the theory of mind and problem-solving challenge. In 1997 Baron Cohen established that students with autism do not understand any other person's points of view, beliefs and emotions. These students also encounter with difficulty in predicting and making judgments about others' thoughts and feelings. Because of such characteristic, they can't differentiate between fantasy and facts.

Sheuerman and Webber (2002) reported that students with autism have a problem in retrieving information. Students with autism spectrum disorder mostly use one problem-solving strategy and without a guarantee of success. According to Susan (2005) those children may have unusual responses to people and objects and they do not use suitable words or gestures. The children who are on autism spectrum face difficulty to play in a typical manner by following rules of games. These children are also going through some sensory issues and without a proper plan of intervention they cannot work in a noisy environment. They don't like to touch by others and don't give eye contact to the other persons. Among these, some other inabilities make it difficult to accomplish academic targets. Similarly, in few researches conducted in Pakistan Saira, Maryam and Azeem (2012) and Faiza and Azeem (2011) reported that teachers repeatedly shared that it is very challenging to meet the sensory and educational needs of the students with autism. A teacher should need to be aware of the student's learning needs, learning patterns and behavioral characteristics. These learning characters or styles can guide the instructors for further educational planning which can facilitate transition planning of such learners.

Saira, Maryam and Asmaa (2012) reported few identical strategies regarding learning patterns of ASD that visual scheduling and picture exchange communication method is very helpful for coping autistic problems during their training. Elliot & Gresham (1993) conducted research with similar focus and concluded that working in pairs be beneficial in teaching because these children not only have problems with communication but also suffer from the problem of socialization. By facilitating peer interaction, the teacher can help these students for interacting with peers and making friends.

Rhiannon Luyster, Jennifer Richler and Susan Risi(2005) conducted research on multiple groups of children. In which they selected 351 children with autism

spectrum disorders, 21 children with developmental delays, and 31 children with typical development. For the purpose of data collection they conducted interviews of caregivers (i.e., the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised) and described the children's early acquisition and loss of social-communication milestones. They found a significant minority of children with autism who were without word loss exhibited a comparatively similar pattern of loss of social-communication skills which was not observed in the other two groups of children.

Saira, Maryam and Asmaa (2012) also pointed out that involvement in the strategic process of friendship fostering definitely helps them to become more included in the mainstream environment. In the Pakistani scenario, parents are in trouble with choosing the appropriate school for their children with autism. Like many other disabilities in the past the students with autism spectrum disorders were kept separate from the regular peers and get them admitted in the classes of students with mental retardation. But if we take a view of the past few decades we observe that the trend of mainstreaming children with autism has become increased.

There are many private schools in Lahore that are providing academic, social and communication services to children with autism. The services provided at those schools are lacking in quality education and other social setup services. The assessment procedures are not sufficient and appropriate in these schools. So if the assessment is not according to the individual disability needs then it is very obvious that the educational services and educational plans will also be poor and unauthentic. The class teacher can't read the child properly and can't assess his/her educational needs and learning styles (Saira, Maryam & Azeem 2012; Faiza & Azeem, 2011).

So, on the basis of above mentioned local and international research studies the focus of the current research was to explore the educational problems of the children with autism so the professional can make suitable arrangements for the provision of all required facilities better than before. Major objectives of the study were to investigate already provided teaching training and support to the teachers of autistic children, to investigate the educational requirements of children with autistic disorder, identification of social and psychological problems of such children and discover the problems related to educational accessibility. The researchers collected data through self-constructed inventories from conveniently selected 15 school teachers and 15 parents of students with autistic disorder from different schools of autism in Lahore. The developed inventories were different in statement structure but the purpose was the same; one for the parents and the other one was for the teachers.

The purpose of the development of inventories was to get detailed responses. Both were bilingual so that the respondents easily understand the point and reply properly as per the demands of authentic information.

The indicators of research were assessment, admission access, curriculum, socialization patterns, communication patterns and repetitive behaviors and interests of these children. The open-ended research questions for teachers were:

- 1- What are the different assessment tests you used for children with autism?

- 2- How many members add to the admission committee to solve the admission related issues of the children with autism?
- 3- What are the basic considerations at the time of admission of children when you get history from parents?

Parent's research questions of the study were:

- 1- Do you have complete information of IEP/individual assessment of your kids or not?
- 2- What is the level of your information about your kid's IEP meeting in a school when you attend the meeting?
- 3- According to you whatkind of educational issues are sought out through parentteachers meetings?
- 4- Tell me briefly about the basic issues or problems you face during admission of your kid in a school for children with autism?

Methodology and Results of the Study

After data collection, the collected data were analyzed through NVIVO software version 12. Through software make themes and after this code it.

After running NVIVO the researchers were able to reveal many surprising facts reported by the teachers and the parents of the children who were going through with the problem of autistic disorder. Many of those students were enrolled and studying in schools for many years. The findings also reflected the level of commitment and collaboration among teachers and the parents. Through below reported findings there will develop an insight towards the current quality of academic and other required services to those students.

Teacher's Responses on Inventory

- 1- What are the different assessment tests you used for children with autism?**

Seven participants out of fifteen reported that they use childhood autism rating scale (CARS), Sensory Therapy, PECS and ABLLS. Teachers use portage guide, childhood autism rating scale (CARS) and ABLLS. Five participants out of fifteen teachers suggested that they do not use any test for the assessment of children with autism. They use those tests through which they can assess the mental ability of children with autism. Three participants out of fifteen reported that these test are taken by psychologists. Those tests are related to the child's educational and psychological problems and how to resolve these types of issues.

2- How many members add in the admission committee to solve the admission related issues of the children with autism?

Eight participants out of fifteen expressed that Psychologist, Co-coordinators, Teachers, Parents and Special educationists that were the members of the committee. Four participants out of fifteen suggested that Psychologists, Class teachers, Speech therapist, Clinical psychologists, Parents, School staff, Educational psychologists and Principal that were the members of the committee. Three participants out of fifteen reported that these were two members. School teachers were the members of that committee.

3- According to you whatkind of educational issues aresought out through parent teachers meeting?

Ten participants out of fifteen replied that presenting complaints, birth history, medical history, family history, child's personal history, educational history, psycho-social assessment, milestones/developmental history and child's family set up these things are considered while taking a history from the parents of children with autism. Three participants out of fifteen teachers reported that about behavior, socialization, speech and language information these things are considered while taking a history from the parents. Two participants out of fifteen reported that the parents of children with autism are giving true and correct history.

Parent's Response to Inventory

1- Do you have complete information about IEP/individual assessment of your kids or not?

Eight participants out of fifteen discussed that such information is given to their child that is about a child's related education, psychological problems; type of problems and its solution for the IEP and self-assessment of the children with autism. They also told that communication skills, and social and self-help skills for the IEP and Self-assessment of the children with autism. Provide any information to their child for the IEP and Self-assessment of the children with autism. Five participants out of fifteen reported that such information is given to their child that is about a child's educational, behavioral assessment, learning problems their solutions and curriculum of kids for the IEP and self-assessment of the children with autism. Parents reported that such information is given to their child that is about cooperation for the IEP and self-assessment of the children with autism. Two participants out of fifteen reported that such information is given to their child that is about their child's IEP and Self-assessment and it is suitable for the program. Parents reported that such information is given to their child that is about simple tasks like colors, words and body parts recognition for the IEP and Self-assessment of the children with autism.

2- What is the level of your information about your kid's IEP meeting in a school when you attend the meeting?

Six participants out of fifteen reported that in their child's IEP meeting such information is given that is related to areas of problems, objectives of IEP, action plan, material and placement. Parents s reported that in their child's IEP meeting such

information is given that is related to how to work with child, teaching methodology and how to control the objectives of the educational plan. Five participants out of fifteen purposed that in their child's IEP meeting such information is given that is related to their child's current conditions, achievements and about their child's future planning. They also said that information is given that is related to how to solve the academic and behavioral issues of the children with autism. Four participants out of fifteen stated that in their child's IEP meeting such information is given that they use at home. Parents reported that in their child's IEP meeting such information is given that is related to the weekly report, how to solve their behavioral issues and discussed future plans for the children with autism.

3- According to you what kind of educational issues whose solution you sought out through parent teachers meeting?

Eight participants out of fifteen reported that there is no parent's teacher association in their schools for children with autism. Such issues are addressed which are how to deal with kids, which things help more, diet plan, the arrangement of supplementations and parent counseling with the help of parent teacher association. Five participants out of fifteen reported that such issues are addressed that are according to children's educational, behavioral needs and issues with the help of parent teacher association. Two participants out of fifteen stated that such issues are addressed which are how to work at home with the child with autism. The issues that are addressed with the help of parent teacher association provide benefits for the child with autism.

4. Tell me briefly about what basic issues or problems you face during admission of your kid in a school?

Nine participants out of fifteen reported that they faced such problems at the time of admission that is related to the children with autism diagnose, assessment, educational services and proper schooling. Parents reported that they do not face any problem at the time of admission. Five participants shared that they faced late admission issues because general education schools refuse their kids and they did not find good special schools in Lahore. One participant reported that she faced many issues at the time of admission but if the teachers work with their child and provide teacher aids at school with their child the admission issues will resolve because after awareness about disability there are many schools that are ready to admit disabled students in their schools.

Conclusion

On the basis of data analysis and interpretations from the inventories the following conclusions were proposed:

The results showed that the teachers were experienced in teaching children with autism. The teachers and parents of children with autism were showing their some collective capacity to fulfill the educational needs of those children to some extent. The children with autism had lots of social and psychological problems that affect their education. The educational accessibility was one of the critical issues. Furthermore; the parents were not provided with any solution at the time of getting

admission in general education schools. Comparison among respondents belonged to different schools showed that the respondents of Lahore Cambridge School (Pervarish) and Autism institute of Pakistan were more aware of the educational problems of children with autism.

Implications for Practice

On the basis of the major findings and conclusions there must be suggested a few implications for practice at schools:

Private school administrators should provide scholarships/financial assistance for improving the admission rate of children with autism. School administrators should provide the parents with training facilities, who are lacking in managing autism and other co-morbid conditions. School administrators should establish PTA (Parent Teacher Association) to solve the educational problems of the children with autism. Teachers should investigate and discuss issues with parents that are related to their child's home and classroom behaviors as well. Teachers should try to use verbal cues in the classroom according to the situation for those children who have communication problems and have limited vocabulary. Teachers and parents should discuss the, educational, psychological and other child's related complaints with each other. Parents and teachers should collaborate to solve the educational and psychological problems in school and at home as well. Parents should provide their child's medical history to the school

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