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RESEARCH PAPER

Essential Framework for Creating Inclusive English Language Teaching Strategies for Students with ASD

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ABSTRACT

Educators face distinct challenges in designing effective instructional programs for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Despite a substantial body of research highlighting successful methodologies, limited effort has been directed towards integrating these findings into a comprehensive curriculum suitable for broader educational contexts. This paper delineates three types of teaching techniques, social, behavior and academic; substantiated by observed evidence, that should form an integral part of a comprehensive teaching strategies tailored for students with ASD. These components include personalized support and services tailored to both students and their families, systematic instruction methods to enhance learning, structured learning environments that minimize distractions, specialized curriculum content aligned with the unique needs of students with ASD, a functional approach to addressing problem behaviors by analyzing their root causes, and active family involvement in the educational process. The paper not only presents these core components but also offers practical examples of instructional practices that have been empirically validated to effectively support students with ASD.

Introduction

Academic institutions are inherently social environments, and this inherent social nature can pose challenges for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The limitations in their social skills often hinder their academic achievements, as the classroom dynamic demands interactions with peers and teachers (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014). A study conducted by scholars identified a set of ten critical communication skills deemed essential for effective learning within a school context. These skills were derived from teacher perspectives and included abilities such as actively listening to others, following instructions, adhering to rules, demonstrating respect for rules, refraining from interruptions, seeking help from peers, maintaining composure in challenging situations, taking responsibility for behavior, and engaging in prosocial behaviors.

However, the manifestation of these social skills can be particularly challenging for children with ASD due to the core characteristics of their condition. Their difficulties in understanding and responding to social cues and expectations can hinder their ability to effectively navigate these communication skills. Moreover, certain aspects of the school experience itself may exacerbate the symptoms of ASD. The typical classroom environment is often characterized by high levels of sensory stimulation, noise, and interactions (Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). The transitions between different teachers, classrooms, and rules can be overwhelming for individuals with ASD, who often thrive in structured and predictable environments. These challenges collectively contribute to the potential struggle of autistic children to thrive academically within mainstream educational settings.

Research by Fleury, Hedges, and Hume (2014) highlighted the significance of addressing these challenges through targeted interventions aimed at improving social

communication and adaptive behavior in individuals with ASD. They emphasized the importance of incorporating individualized strategies to enhance these essential communication skills, taking into account the unique needs and sensitivities of each child. Additionally, Ostmeyer and Scarpa (2012) stressed the need for tailored classroom environments that minimize sensory overload and disruptions to facilitate optimal learning conditions for children with ASD.

Literature Review

Educational programs tailored to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) stem from a comprehensive process involving data collection and consultations, aimed at determining each student's unique learning profile (den Houting et al., 2019; Keen et al., 2017). For many ASD students, an optimal educational program combines Ontario's academic goals with necessary accommodations, modifications, and alternative objectives that nurture behavioral, communication, social, and functional skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). It is crucial to note that not all students with ASD receive uniform methods or educational programs, as their learning profiles vary widely.

ASD represents a group of intricate brain development disorders characterized by varying degrees of challenges in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors (Berry & Goin-Kochel, 2020; den Houting et al., 2019; Goel et al., 2018; Goldin & Matson, 2016; Rosen et al., 2018; Stout, 2016). These challenges significantly impact an individual's functioning and often persist throughout life (Hwang et al., 2017; Newcomb & Hagopian, 2018; Van Der Miesen et al., 2016). Education serves as the primary form of treatment for individuals with autism (Chiang, 2017).

Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong developmental disabilities that influence sensory perception, social relationships, communication, and behavior (Alberta, 2003). It's evident that autism involves disruptions in nerve development, manifesting through observable behavioral and emotional traits. Many children with ASD desire knowledge, academic success, and opportunities to showcase their intellectual capabilities (McMahon et al., 2016; Rysstad et al., 2020). Consequently, educators have a crucial role in facilitating their learning journey.

Effective teaching strategies are paramount in assisting ASD students in their educational pursuits. Teaching strategies encompass the structures, systems, methods, techniques, procedures, and processes employed by teachers to enhance student learning. In the context of English education, a subject relevant to this study, teaching strategies significantly impact the learning experiences of ASD students. Effective strategies empower teachers to foster competencies in problem analysis, solution identification, and decision-making among their ASD students.

The realm of special education, including ASD and English instruction, has witnessed several studies addressing teaching strategies. Notably, Tichá et al. (2018) suggested strategies like peer-assisted learning (PALS), cooperative learning, direct instruction, and play-based approaches. Lawrence-Brown (2004) recommended differentiated learning using a variety of methods to address the diverse needs of multicultural classrooms. Pertaining to ASD students, three prominent studies provide insights into effective teaching strategies: Liliek's (2018) investigation of Learning Strategies for Autism Children In SLB, Tipton et al.'s (2017) exploration of parent Strategies for educating ASD children, and Murray's (2015) practical teaching strategies for ASD students.

People with ASD frequently dwell in repeated patterns or behaviors

Their challenges in altering these patterns also contribute to their social discomfort. Autistic individuals display these compulsions due to impaired executive functioning

mechanisms. Executive functioning controls behavior, and its deficiency restricts self-regulation capacity in autistic individuals. Unfamiliar or different situations trigger anxiety in autistic individuals, making adjustments particularly difficult for them (Perfitt, 2013). These emotionally taxing situations, or those hindering their compulsive behavior, impede mood regulation and frequently result in behavioral issues.

Moreover, various challenges inherent to autism impact their ability to grasp information like typically developing children, affecting their academic performance. Mimicking and observing behavior pose difficulties for them (Perfitt, 2013). Despite often exhibiting strong visual processing skills, they process auditory and language information more slowly than peers. Following multi-step instructions, organizing materials, and sustaining self-motivation are disrupted due to executive functioning issues (Boyd, 2011). Abstract thinking and understanding others' perspectives are also taxing. Unlike typical children who form a coherent image from different puzzle pieces, some autistic children remain fixated on the individual pieces.

Literacy skills are also compromised in autism, with visual word recognition hindering progress. While cognitive abilities may enable decoding, comprehension falters, and drawing conclusions poses challenges (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014). Struggles with fine motor skills and slow visual-motor responses hinder legible writing. The amalgamation of communication, social, and behavioral struggles directly influences the educational prospects of students with ASD. Schools, being social environments, present initial hurdles for children with autism (Muchetti, 2013). Therefore, interventions must be designed to foster both academic and social success. Incorporating various social, behavioral, and academic strategies in regular and special education settings can enhance the school experience and academic achievement for students with ASD.

Social Techniques

Teachers can integrate strategies into their curricula to facilitate the development of social skills among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Due to limited mimicking abilities and challenges in reading social cues, addressing social skills within predictable contexts is beneficial for students with ASD (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014). This acknowledges their struggle to apply skills across different situations. Consequently, applying social modeling within the classroom setting becomes an effective method. Peers and mentors can aid ASD children in enhancing their social skills. Classroom educators can initiate a similar approach tailored to students' needs, even without a broader school-wide initiative (Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). Practical strategies to boost autistic children's communication skills encompass playful mimicry games and smart computer programs.

Incorporating technology into educational strategies is advantageous for students with ASD who lack imitative abilities. Given their disadvantage in observational learning, autistic students are impeded in acquiring social education through observation, which is beneficial for typically developing children. Employing educators to imitate autistic students' behaviors playfully improves derivative behaviors. Encouraging students to imitate educators' actions triggers emulation in rewarding activities (Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). A study involving nonverbal ASD children indicated that engaging in reciprocal mimicry enhanced their mimicking behavior. Technology, known to assist academic, social, behavioral, and interactional aspects, can also facilitate turn-taking and social interaction (Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). When employed appropriately, computers contribute to enhancing positive social relationships among kids with autism, provided teachers plan for social interaction. Training can mitigate compulsive computer usage, which is common in individuals with ASD.

Behavioral techniques are employed to address challenging behaviors in ASD children that disrupt their education and classroom environment. These behaviors include

difficulty following directions, adherence to classroom norms, and repetitive actions (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014). Customized exposure and response prevention (ERP) techniques, adapted from managing obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), were tested for reducing compulsive behaviors in children with ASD and cognitive deficits (Ostmeyer & Scarpa, 2012). ERP interventions resulted in improvements in time spent on educational tasks, latency in responding to triggers, and delay in exhibiting compulsions. Frequency of compulsive behaviors also decreased. Implementing ERP interventions during the study led to positive outcomes, indicating its potential as a method to address behaviors hampering education.

Incorporating technology like iPads in classrooms emerges as an effective strategy to manage challenging behaviors. A study compared iPad usage with traditional teaching methods for children with autism and challenging behaviors, revealing improved academic engagement with iPads (Neely, Rispoli, & Camargo, 2013). iPads can aid in developing transitional skills, vital for students with ASD transitioning between educational settings. Visual tools, such as iPads, can simplify transitions through visual schedules (Neely, Rispoli, & Camargo, 2013). These findings underscore the potential of technology, particularly iPads, in mitigating challenging behaviors and enhancing educational experiences for students with ASD.

Academic Techniques

While behavioral methods have been employed to reduce disruptive behaviors, educators can also utilize effective educational techniques to unlock the full educational potential of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Strategies can be as simple as incorporating technology to present course content in a unique manner. Given their inclination towards visual learning, individuals with ASD often adapt well to using computers and iPads. Employing technology in conjunction with tactics such as tailored shared reading initiatives, comprehensive teaching, and structured educational environments can enhance the classroom experience for ASD students (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014).

Technology's benefits in fostering social and behavioral skills in ASD children have been highlighted, yet its potential as a teaching aid for educational aptitude is also significant. Much like iPads, computers can pique students' interest and play a comparable role. For students with autism, intelligent use of computers can be highly motivating. Studies emphasize the visual impact of computer use in teaching students with autism (Muchetti, 2013).

Moreover, the integration of technology is seen as a respite from traditional instruction, providing extra support necessary for conventional techniques to be effective. The computer's temporary use reduces stress levels among students by eliminating the necessity for immediate communication, which is often challenging for individuals with ASD (Muchetti, 2013). Additionally, the computer's consistency provides a sense of regularity that may be lacking in human interactions, promoting self-control and confidence during educational tasks.

A secondary approach to enhancing the literacy skills of autistic students involves modified cooperative learning exercises. In shared reading, an adult reads aloud while engaging the student through questions and discussions. Shared reading instances can be tailored to accommodate each autistic student's specific needs, including adapting content, using visual aids, and retaining key elements (Fleury, Hedges, & Hume, 2014). Researchers examined how student interactions and reading abilities of autistic children with limited verbal communication skills were impacted by shared reading led by teachers employing altered content and visual aids (Muchetti, 2013). Four autistic children, aged six to eight, actively participated in collaborative reading sessions led by trained school personnel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper sheds light on the imperative task that educators undertake when developing comprehensive teaching strategies for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The challenges in creating effective instructional programs for this unique population are underscored by the complexity of their needs.

The framework presented in this paper delineates three essential categories of teaching techniques: social, behavioral, and academic. These categories encompass personalized support and services for students and families, systematic instructional methods, structured learning environments, specialized curriculum content, functional behavior analysis, and active family engagement. These elements collectively constitute the core components of effective teaching strategies customized to address the multifaceted requirements of students with ASD.

The synthesis of empirical evidence not only highlights the significance of these foundational elements but also emphasizes their integration within a comprehensive approach. The practical examples provided within this paper serve as tangible manifestations of the theoretical framework, offering educators tangible strategies to enhance their teaching practices for students with ASD.

Ultimately, the findings of this research contribute to the advancement of inclusive education by providing educators, administrators, and stakeholders with insights into the development of holistic teaching strategies. The integration of these foundational elements into instructional planning has the potential to foster a supportive and enriching learning environment for students with ASD, enabling them to achieve their full potential and participate meaningfully in the educational journey.

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