

Attitudes And Opinions of Parents and Teachers About Autism in Turkey

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Abstract: *Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. Bringing up an autistic child is a hard and long journey, but parents have various options and places to turn for help. For example, they can learn and use certain strategies to help communicate with autistic children. Teaching strategies for students with ASD still need to be individualized, and it is fairly important for teachers to realize their expectations of their students. Children with autism often have visual-spatial strengths so teachers can modify their instructional strategies several ways by demonstrating and modelling expected skills. The purpose of this study is to explain the attitudes and opinions of parents and teachers about autism in Turkey. The participants of the study consists of 82 subjects, 42 of whom were parents of children with autism and the remaining 40 were teachers of students with autism. This study was carried out several public and private schools in Konya, by means of interviews and regular conversations with teachers and parents of children with autism, over the period from 03.01.2015 until 04.05.2015. In order to obtain the data, three types of survey questionnaires were employed in this research.*

Keywords: *Autism, parents' ideas, teachers' opinions*

I. Introduction

Autism is referred to as an autism spectrum disorder. It is a neurological disorder that typically appears before the age of three which impacts development in social and communication skills. There are three areas of difficulty which all people with autism share: a) difficulty with social communication, b) difficulty with social interaction, c) difficulty with social imagination. The term autism comes from the Greek word "autos", which means "alone", or it can be translated as a "withdrawal into itself" and "egotistical existence".

Although the term autism came into being in the previous century, what we thoroughly know in relation to its existence had been known much earlier. Autism seems to have its roots in very early brain development but the most apparent signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age. The majority of autistic people have intense special interests, which can change over time and can be anything from art to music. Some autistic people may ultimately be able to work or study in related areas. For others, it will remain a hobby. Childhood Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder defined by the presence of abnormal or impaired development that is manifest before the age of three, and by the characteristic type of abnormal functioning in all three areas of social interaction, communication, and restricted, repetitive behaviour. If teachers at school are familiar with the strategies of support, they can contribute to the adjustment of person with autism in the classroom environment and their socialization with the environment. Teachers try to help teach the students right the first time, reduce the speed of speech, give more time to reply, give short directions, create a habit for a break, tell them what to do instead of what not to do and specify the communication message through behaviour.

People with autism can have very different traits or symptoms; therefore, people think of autism as a spectrum disorder. Some children with autism make no eye contact and seem aloof, while others may show intermittent engagement with the environment and may make inconsistent eye contact, smile, and hug. Besides, children may display varying verbal abilities, ranging from being nonverbal to having advanced speech. The students with ASD have a number of specific needs that can influence their achievement in inclusive settings in different ways. (Keen, 2009). This may contain understanding and effectively working within the classroom environment owing to challenges about filtering trivial information (Wainwright-Sharp & Bryson, 1996).

II. Problem

For the parents who have children with, some level of stress has been experienced. Previous studies have shown that having a child with disability put the parents in a risk of experiencing heightened levels of stress compared to parents of typically developing children (Hendriks, DeMoor, Oud, & Savelberg, 2000; McKinney & Peterson, 1987; Smith, Oliver, & Innocenti, 2001). Baxter, Cummins, and Polak (1995) carried out a long-term research to evaluate parental stress and support variables starting from diagnosis period. They drew a

conclusion from their study that diagnosis of disability was the most stress-inducing life event as regards bringing up a child with disability. Once parents are confronted with the situation of having a child with disability, they experience a sequence of stages identical to those associated with the grieving process, such as reacting with denial, shock, anger, and finally adjustment (Seligman & Darling, 1989).

The definition of problem behaviors is based on whether the behaviors are taken into consideration from the perspective of a child with an autistic spectrum disorder or from the perspective of a parent or teacher. Problem behaviors of children with autistic spectrum disorders are among the most challenging and stressful issues faced by schools and parents in their efforts to provide appropriate educational programs. Problem behaviors such as property destruction, physical aggression, self-injury, and tantrums are major barriers to effective social and educational development. Such behaviors jeopardize children for exclusion and isolation from social, educational, family, and community activities. Besides, problem behaviors may place a burden on families, from preschool to school age. From a teacher's or parent's perspective, problem behaviors include lack of compliance with or disruption of classroom routines, tantrums, destruction of property, and aggression against self or others. However, from a child's perspective, problem behaviors include the inability to understand demands of a classroom or a parent and to communicate his or her needs and wants, severe difficulty in initiating and maintaining social interactions and relationships, confusion about the effects and consequences of many of his or her behaviors, and engagement in restrictive and repetitive behaviors and interests.

A disabled person often faces great difficulties in daily life when it comes to attending school or seeking for work, no matter what their level of functioning is. Some children with autism feel themselves committed to keep a secret that they have such a disability. The presence of a student with autism is very stressful experience for people with autism. Attending school is a rather challenging experience for those with autism, which have difficulties dealing with stressful situations. It is an undeniable fact that a number of people with autism encounter several troubles. Researches point out that, proper and regular training programmes can help people with autism develop and improve the skills needed for learning at school before applying for a job after graduation.

III. Methodology and Findings

The survey for teachers and parents of children with autism is composed of 11 questions, of which one is open type, and the rest 10 are closed type questions. The document analysis and inquiry technique has been used to obtain data. The data obtained from the study was grouped and processed with standard statistical program Microsoft Office Excel 2007. The categorical data differences between the groups were analyzed with χ^2 tests and Fisher's Exact test. As significant the differences have been designated with $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

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IV. Materials and Data Analysis

The study aims to present the attitudes and opinions of teachers and parents about the children with autism in Turkey. The participants of the study consists of 82 subjects, 42 of whom were parents of children with autism and the remaining 40 were teachers of students with autism. This study was carried out several public and private schools in Konya, by means of interviews and regular conversations with teachers and parents of children with autism, over the period from 03.01.2015 until 04.05.2015. In order to obtain the data, three types of survey questionnaires were employed in this research.

Two types of survey questionnaires were used: 1) Questionnaire for teachers of children with autism. It consists of 21 questions, of which two are open type, and the rest 19 are closed type questions. 2) Questionnaire for parents of children with autism. It consists of 11 questions, of which one is open type, and the rest 10 are closed type questions.

The causal method and the method of descriptive analysis was used by making document's analysis. Two types of questionnaire were used.

The information from the research was stored, grouped and processed with standard statistical program Microsoft Office Excel 2007. The categorical data differences between the groups were analyzed with χ^2 tests and Fisher's Exact test. As significant we considered the differences with $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

There are different ways to increase forms of engagement, representation, and expression to better support students with autism. These include supports for routines and procedures, priming, and special interests to enhance engagement; the use of visual organizers and strategy tools for increasing representation; and the use

of structured assignments, task analyses, and choice to improve expression. Provided that teachers utilize these strategies in inclusive settings in harmony with the curriculum and their lesson plans, they may get better results in the classroom. It is essential that teachers take into consideration these methods while teaching students with autism if they aim to promote understanding, independence, and achievement.

Table 1. Parents' Scores on Knowledge Survey

Score (%)	Frequency	% of Respondents
63.5%	1	1.2
67.1%	4	3.5
71.1%	12	12.1
81.2%	16	19.4
89.5%	27	30.4

M=88.3% SD=9.03 Range=61.2% n=42.

As seen in Table 1, it can be said that only a few parents had knowledge about autism, and the remaining did not know what autism is. This shows that parents should be trained about the term autism.

Table 2. Teachers' Scores on Knowledge Survey

Score (%)	Frequency	% of Respondents
53.1%	2	1.7
57.1%	5	4.3
87.2%	13	11.2
76.3%	12	13.7
76.3%	26	28.5

M=77.4% SD=7.04 Range=54.2% n=40.

Table 2 shows that teachers know very little about the definition of autism and how to solve problems in the classroom setting. Teachers should be aware of the methods to teach children with autism with the purpose of raising the achievement of students with autism.

V. Conclusion And Suggestions For Further Research

As a result of analyzing the findings of the study, it was found out that the majority of the teachers and parents lack of knowledge about what autism actually is. 79,2% of the teachers have little knowledge about autism and 62,8% of the parents did not know the exact meaning of autism. There is no statistically significant difference between the answers of parents and teachers. Therefore, there is no positive attitude to dealing with students with autism and teachers and parents thought that children with autism would not be able to complete their tasks at school. From the results we understand that there is no statistically important difference between the answers of teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents had a strong belief that students with autism will complete their work duties better if they were engaged in more physical activities, rather than psychological activities. The study discovered that parents of children with autism should be informed of the need and importance about the requirements of their children and how it affects their child's independence in the daily routines. Besides, the need of organizing special meetings with the teachers, and thus introducing them the process of professional orientation and training for proper and appropriate way of communicating and understanding the behaviour of their colleagues with autism. Suitable classroom environment may contribute to further development of the schools. Future studies can be carried out to assess the needs of children with autism or to verify the results of former studies conducted.

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