

Characteristics of children with autism that affect their performance in the classroom

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Characteristics of children with autism that affect their performance in the classroom

Abstract:

This study will focus on which behaviors of students with autism cause the most problem for classroom teachers. The subtopics that will be addressed are about a general idea of the students with autism, their characters, their performances and attitudes in the classroom, behavior problems of students without disabilities, and the classroom teacher definition of problem behavior. Community, school, and families need more awareness about the students with autism because they have some characters and behaviors that might be dangerous and affect them and affect individuals around them. In addition, many relatives in Saudi Arabia have asked about students with autism; as a result, this work will try to find accurate answers of their questions. Moreover, this would help educators assist the students with autism and their families in Saudi Arabia. Scientists define the term autism spectrum disorder as a group of challenges behaviors, social skills, speech nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors, with differences between them (What Is Autism? 2018). Each student with autism has different characters and different issues. The behaviors students with autism sometimes have are mostly property destruction, physical aggression, self-injury, stereotypy, and tantrums. Such behaviors can put these young children at risk for exclusion from social, educational, family, and community activities.

Keywords: Characteristics of children, autism, performance in the classroom.

Introduction:

This paper will focus on which behaviors of students with autism cause the most problem for classroom teachers. The subtopics that will be addressed are about a general idea of the students with autism, their characters, their performances and attitudes in the classroom, behavior problems of students without disabilities, and the classroom teacher definition of problem behavior. Community, school, and families need more awareness about the students with autism because they have some characters and behaviors that might be dangerous and affect them and affect individuals around them. In addition, many relatives in Saudi Arabia have asked about students with autism; as a result, this work will try to find accurate answers of their questions. Moreover, this would help educators assist the students with autism and their families in Saudi Arabia. Scientists define the term autism spectrum disorder as a group of challenges behaviors, social skills, speech nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors, with differences between them (What Is Autism? 2018). Each student with autism has different characters and different issues. The behaviors students with autism sometimes have are mostly property destruction, physical aggression, self-injury, stereotypy, and tantrums. Such behaviors can put these young children at risk for exclusion from social, educational, family, and community activities (Lord & McGee, 2001). The behaviors that students with ASD may have could be a reaction to sounds and things they see or feel (Characteristics, 2018). Also, in the classroom, if a student occurs one of the behaviors mentioned above,

he/she may face academic problems because the challenging behaviors could prevent the student from paying attention and following instructions. Meanwhile, the student could distract his/her peers' attention. Therefore, we, as educators, need to know efficient ways to help us solve or reduce the problems that students with autism have; this can help them achieve better skills academically and socially.

In addition, autistic students in the classroom need more services than other students such as an individualized educational program. Some specialists that can help students with ASD are occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, and other specialists. Early diagnosis is important to get an appropriate intervention early and get the needed services, for example, any autism-related sensory, speech, language, feeding and motor issues.

The age that a child could be diagnosed as having autism symptoms is two months and in some cases 18 months (Autism therapies and supports, 2018). Students with disabilities are more likely to have behavior problems than those who are nondisabled (Fauth, Platt & Parsons, 2017). Some general education teachers may not know the right way of how to deal with behavioral problems of students with autism. Also, if students with a disability like autism, the problem behaviors can probably effect on the students' academic and social improvements, but nondisabled students can control themselves more, and the teachers can solve their problems effortlessly because educators probably faced the same problem before. For example, a study shows that if a class has students with disabilities that will effect on the

students who nondisabled; some students simulate their peers with disabilities and obtain some behavior problems from them (Bailey, 2015). Moreover, students with disabilities sometimes do some unacceptable reactions to get attention, and they know that they will get it; and, schools with teachers have to make a safe environment to teach all students self-control, manage their behaviors to prevent further behavior problems (Dwyer, 1997).

Teachers and principals said that autistic students face many communication and social problems that could produce behavior problems in the classroom (Stokes, Thomson, Macmillan, Pecora, Dymond & Donalson, 2016). Scientists provide a checklist for autism behaviors (ABC); it includes sensory behaviors such as poor use of visual discrimination when learners seem not to hear so that a hearing loss is suspected. Sometimes it shows no “startle response” to loud noise. Also, sometimes-painful stimuli such as bruises, cuts, and injections evoke no reaction; often will not blink when bright light is directed toward eyes. Additionally, students with autism frequently have no visual reaction to a “new” person and stare into space for long periods of time. In the term of relating behaviors, a child with autism frequently does not attend to social/environmental stimuli, has no social smile, not responsive to other people’s facial expressions/feelings, actively avoids eye contact, resists being touched or held. Moreover, a child with autism is flaccid when held in arms, is stiff and hard to hold, does not imitate other children at play, and has not developed any friendships. In the concept of body and object use behaviors,

they whirl self for long periods of time, do not use toys appropriately, insist on keeping certain objects with them, rock self for long periods of time, flap hands, walk on toes, biting the hand, etc. These behaviors are distractive and need immediate intervention (Autism Behavior Checklist).

For this research, survey will be the research design used. Under this research design, questionnaires will be used as the method of collecting data on the more common characteristics of students with autism, behaviors and challenges in educational settings, and comparison between the problem behaviors of students with autism and their peers without disabilities. The questionnaires will be handed out to special education and general education teachers who deal with students with autism in inclusive classrooms.

Literature Review:

The behavior exhibited by children with autism makes it a great challenge for teachers to effectively perform their duties. It further has an effect on the non-disabled children in the same classroom. In a research conducted by Saggars, et al. (2016), the authors argued that autism spectrum disorder has adverse effects on students and their teachers. In the study, the scholars explained that students with autism have social and emotional problems that degrade their academic performance (Saggars, et al., 2016). As a result, Alzrayer and Banda (2017) argued that students with autism need more help and services at school since they face difficulties in understanding and following rules, tasks, jocks, and the big problems they face in communicating and relating with their

peers and teachers. As such, the scholars pointed out that their condition is likely to bring about more challenges between them and their teachers (Alzrayer & Banda, 2017). Ashburner, Ziviani, and Rodger (2008) agreed with this analogy and explained that students with autism might not respond or give the expected reaction when the teacher engaged them in class activities. However, those students might be anxious, appear aggressive, and portray repetitive movements in the classroom. The teacher, on the other hand, will be held back concerned and confused not knowing what action he or she should take (Ashburner, Ziviani & Rodger, 2008).

In another study, Cassady (2011) argued that some of the behaviors of students with autism affect other students include disrupting their work, insulting them, and lack of cooperation. As such, he argued that children with autism might cause trouble for children without disabilities in the classroom (Cassady, 2011). In a similar study by White, Keonig, and Scahill (2007), the scholars stated that focusing on assisting students with autism would also yield numerous benefits to the nondisabled children in the classroom as they might have a more conducive and suitable environment.

In a classroom setting, a teacher is responsible for the students' affairs. A teacher ensures that all is well mainly through observing and engaging the students. However, as explained by

Rovira (2014), achieving this becomes a huge challenge especially when dealing with children with autism. Children with autism refrain from any form of eye contact with the

teacher or other children. As a result, the teacher cannot effectively observe them and tell their current state (Rovira, 2014). In their journal, Schilling and Schwartz (2004) pointed out that the repetitive behaviors by children with autism might become a challenge for teachers. A teacher might not know for a fact whether the child is playing or facing anxiety. The two authors explained that most teachers are not well trained on how to deal with children with autism (Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). As such, they may not know how to respond accurately in different situations.

A study by Conroy, et al. (2004) showed the trait of children with autism of not forming connections with others affects both teachers and the other children without disabilities. By not forming attachments, a child with autism may make other children feel as if they are being excluded; it may also delay the relationship with the classroom teacher (Conroy, et al. 2004). When it comes to safety, Kasari, Freeman, and Paparella (2006) pointed out that students with autism might pose a threat to themselves and others. Students with autism do various things like excessively scratching themselves or pulling their hair since it feels nice and acceptable for them (Kasari, Freeman, & Paparella, 2006). They may easily hurt themselves in the process. Further, as discussed by Reichow (2012), they lack empathy for other people. As such, they may do things that may hurt other children without disabilities physically or mentally.

- Method:**- Participants:**

The research makes use of both teachers and students as the subjects of the study. The selected teachers observe the students' behavior and fill the questionnaires handed to them based on their assessment. Four autistic students were used as the subjects. For confidentiality purposes, their real names are withheld in this research. The four are referred to as student 1, student 2, student 3, and student 4. Students 1 and 2 are in first grade, student 3 is in second grade while student 4 is in third grade. The four students can also be grouped based on their gender with all of them being male except student 3 who is a female.

- Setting:

The research collects data by providing the developed survey questionnaire to the teachers of respective classrooms as well as special education teachers. The data collected will shed more light on the common characteristics of students with autism, challenges faced by autistic students, and the challenges faced by their peers without disabilities. The aim of observing students from different levels is to determine if an individual's academic level has an impact on an autistic individual's behavior or not. Teachers will observe the students for three weeks. Every day they will have to spend with them a maximum of three hours in their classroom. As they observe, the teachers will mark the behavior and activities of the students.

Intervention

If a student behaves in a manner that poses a challenge to the teacher and bothers other students, the teacher can try to control that by threatening to prevent him or her from something that the student likes to do. For example, if student 1 repeats a word over and over when the other students perform a task, the teacher will come to the student and tell him to stop. If he does not respond, the teacher should react by informing the student that they will not play outside with their friends but will instead stay in the classroom. When student 1 repeats the behavior every time during the observation days, the teacher has a mandate to stop him and prevent him from the act.

In another condition, whenever Student 2 feels uncomfortable, he starts to hurt himself.

As such, during the observation and survey, the teacher notes that the student's condition is not good due to his behavior. The teacher reacts by trying to stop him and informs him that a continuation of the behavior will result in a failure to read him a story. After few minutes, student 2's behavior slows down and starts to stop.

Student 3 is in the second grade. She is destructive when angry or when she does not want to do a task. When students are busy tackling mathematics activity, she gets really angry when the teacher asks her to do the activity. As a result, she starts to screaming and throwing everything on the ground. Since this student loves reading stories, the teacher tells her that if she does not stop throwing tantrums, she would not be allowed to do so to read today unless she

changes her behavior. The teacher puts a mark on the survey list. Student 4 is in the third grade. He likes to draw but hurts others by biting, hitting, and kicking them. When the teacher observes him, he notices that the boy hurts other students as they play or engage in other activities together. The teacher alters his behavior by preventing him from drawing and informing him that every time he hurts someone in future he will be prevented from drawing.

Data Analysis

When we get the results from the teachers, we find that the results show a positive reaction from the students. To analyzing the data we will compare the results with another study which the author used the extinction procedures to prevent the problem behaviors that the autistic students show in the classroom. The extinction procedures are an intervention that makes the unwanted behavior less or stops the behavior by ignoring the student if he/she does so (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). We will compare these two types to find out what is most effective to prevent unfavorable behaviors for autistic children in the classroom by preventing them from something they prefer or by ignoring the behavior. For example, at the school and during the break time Jon screams when he stays alone for a while and teachers always come over to him and ask if he wants something or if he is ok. Jen gets what he needs every time when he screams; he wants to get social attention from the teachers. When he is screaming and get what he wants in every time, he would repeat it over and over even if he does not need necessary things (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007).

If the teachers ignore him and they know he does not want something important, that will help to reduce the behavior then stop to do it.

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