Parents’ Perceptions on Social Skills Functioning of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Preliminary Study

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Research Highlights

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects social communication, social interaction and sensory sensitivities. Social skills is one of the common deficits displayed by children with ASD. However, the level of impairment exerted by children with ASD relies on the disorder severity. Social skills are critical to successful social-emotional, communication and cognitive development. Specific social skills deficits include difficulties in initiating interactions, maintaining social reciprocity, sharing attention, taking another person’s perspective, and inferring the interests of others. In this study, social skills consists of social awareness, social cognition, social communication, social motivation and autism mannerism. This study aimed to uncover the conceptualization of social skills from parents’ perspective, thus providing indication of education around the topic of ASD.

Research Objectives

The first objective was to examine the signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder particularly children with ASD. Generally, the common signs of ASD in children with ASD are lack of social skills, difficulties in social communication, poor social reciprocity, avoidance of eye contact, poor verbal skills, sensory problem and lack of interpretation skills. The secondary objective was to identify the responsiveness of social skills of children with ASD based on the perceptions from both parents. The third objective was to identify the interventions suggested by parents to help their children with ASD in enhancing social skills functioning at home. Overall, this research looked into the parents’ perceptions towards social skills exerted by children with ASD.

Methodology

The qualitative design was adopted in this study in order to determine the perception of parents towards social skills displayed by the children diagnosed with ASD. Interview approach was employed with semi-structured layout to gather the data. The participants were
selected by using the purposive sampling method amongst parents who have children diagnosed with ASD. The interview sessions probed into several integral aspects and views, such as (1) ASD symptoms, (2) functions of social skills, and (3) recommended interventions practiced at home. Additionally, probing strategy and other flexible methods were employed during the interview sessions to gain information. All interview sessions were recorded and transcribed and the transcriptions were discussed with the parents for clarification and accuracy of details. The interview transcriptions coded using N-Vivo.

Results

The interview data revealed several common features related to ASD, which are lacking in social initiation, limited eye contact, poor social communication, dysregulated emotions, and poor response towards social cues (Moss, Howlin, Magiati, & Oliver, 2012). Participants’ perceptions were interpreted in seven main themes, namely (i) Characteristic of ASD (ii) Social Awareness, (iii) Social Communication, (iv) Social Cognition, (v) Social Motivation, (vi) Autism Mannerism and (vii) Approaches. The children with ASD showed the signs of Autism, which led to some outcomes in social interaction (Runcharoen, 2014), communication (Mody et al., 2017), behaviour (Lindsay, Proulx, Scott, & Thomson, 2014), play skills (Carrero, Lewis, Zolkoski, & Lusk, 2014), poor social responses as well as sensory issues. The results also showed that some approaches suggested by participants have helped the children with ASD in social skills at natural setting such as at home. The strategies were recommended to improve the social skills amongst ASD-diagnosed children, particularly at house. These strategies include peer-mediated (Yeo & Teng, 2015) and play interventions (Carrizales, 2016), as well as use of social stories (Ozdemir, 2010) and visual placards.

Findings

Children diagnosed with ASD displayed discrepancies in social skills, particularly in communication, social motivation, social awareness, autism mannerism, and social cognition. Children with ASD are often over-focused in their own surrounding and unaware when approached for social reciprocity. For communication skills, the children with ASD exhibited variances in development of expressive language (EL) and non-verbal communication.
(Kasari et al., 2014). For instance, Children with ASD used body gestures to communicate with parents. Besides, Theory of Mind (ToM) is deprived amidst most children suffering from development issues, thus could be linked with ‘under-developed’ mind in understanding feelings, stances, beliefs, and behaviour displayed by others (Fletcher-Watson, McConnell, Manola, & McConachie, 2014). Within the social motivation context, learning experiences and social inputs are deprived of ASD children, thus affecting social cognition. Few interventions suggested by parents to enhance children’s social skills at home were discussed.

References


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