

Social Skills and Adaptive Behavior among Children with Autism From the Teachers perspective of regular Schools teachers

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Abstract: Undoubtedly, the integration of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into mainstream schools and their inclusion alongside neurotypical peers contributes to significant positive psychological and social outcomes for children with autism. Such inclusion supports the development of cognitive, emotional, psychological, and linguistic growth. These children receive appropriate educational programs in specialized classrooms while benefiting, as much as possible, from available resources and an adapted classroom environment within regular schools.

Academic inclusion involves educating children with autism in settings that closely resemble the general educational environment, allowing them to participate and interact with their peers in recreational, athletic, and artistic activities. In general, the aim of inclusive education is to meet the unique educational needs of children with disabilities within the framework of mainstream schooling, using tailored methods, curricula, and instructional tools, all delivered by qualified and trained educational staff.

This study seeks to explore the extent to which children with autism, enrolled in mainstream schools, acquire social skills and adaptive behavior—two critical pillars for academic success and social development. The exploratory phase of the study also aims to identify the characteristics of the sample population in order to define and refine the hypotheses of the main research study.

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1- Introduction

A child with autism spectrum disorder suffers from difficulties in many skills due to attention deficit, lack of focus, and communication difficulties, which also affect social interactions with their environment. Here, the school, represented by educators, teachers, and peers, plays a role in creating a social communication environment through in-class and extracurricular activities, fostering interactions with typically developing peers. This helps children with autism spectrum disorder acquire social skills, which are reflected in their adaptive behavior, cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic development. Hence, our interest in studying social skills, particularly, to help this group achieve better school adaptation.

Children with autism spectrum disorder are at the forefront of special needs groups, being less able to adapt socially and behave in different social situations. Therefore, caring for children with autism spectrum disorder does not stop at enrolling them in special schools, but extends to helping them achieve adaptive performance in various social situations, supporting their future independence. In this context, the problem is more severe for autistic children as they often do not receive any organized or intentional services, and are sometimes misdiagnosed as intellectually disabled. The centers that care for them are rare and mostly depend on private efforts. IQ scores alone are not an accurate criterion for classifying and enrolling these children; thus, an adaptive behavior scale is needed for precise and comprehensive diagnosis, as each group has a unique adaptive performance profile (Mohamed, 2003).

Adaptive behavior is a broad concept that, in addition to daily living skills, includes communication (reading, writing, verbal expression), social interaction, and personal conflict resolution. It also covers motor skills such as the ability to climb stairs, throw a ball, and hold a pen or scissors correctly.

Adaptive behavior is affected by the characteristics and symptoms of autism to varying degrees. Research shows that most people with autism, regardless of intellectual disability, face challenges in this area compared to typically developing individuals. By being with their typical peers in mainstream schools, they receive guidance to acquire adaptive skills and adjust to their peers in a relatively typical manner.

Modern guidance emphasizes providing care for children with autism disorder to stimulate their cognitive and physical abilities as much as possible, achieve school adaptation, and help them adapt to their environment as fully as possible, considering their special needs.

Educational inclusion aims for academic and social integration of children with autism disorder and typical children in regular classrooms. This allows academically integrated children with autism to interact with their typical peers, which boosts their self-confidence, helps them build new social relationships, and acquire adaptive skills that facilitate community integration.

There is no doubt that integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into mainstream schools, and involving them with their typical peers, leads to positive psychological and social outcomes, enhancing cognitive, psychological, emotional, and linguistic development. These children receive appropriate educational programs in special classes, utilizing available means and preparing the regular classroom environment. Academic inclusion involves teaching autistic children in an environment similar to the regular educational environment, allowing them to participate and interact with their typical peers in some recreational, sports, and artistic activities. In general, inclusion aims to provide the special educational needs of children with disabilities within the regular school, according to educational methods, curricula, and teaching tools delivered by qualified and trained staff (Suleiman, 2012, p. 440).

Methods of integrating autistic children differ from one country to another, depending on resources, the nature and degree of the disorder, ranging from placing them in a special

class attached to the regular school to full integration in the regular classroom, with the necessary services provided.

Based on the above, this study aims to define what is needed both theoretically and practically. This is the preparatory phase the researcher undertakes to define and understand the target sample and the means to obtain the information needed for the research. To understand the social skills and adaptive behavior of autistic children, their performance in several important areas must be assessed, such as visual communication, attention, social interaction (knowing roles, participating in classroom activities, etc.).

1.1.Objectives of the Study:

The study aims to identify the extent to which school-aged autistic children in mainstream schools acquire social skills and adaptive behavior, which are essential for academic success and social development. The exploratory study also aims to identify the characteristics of the sample to set and refine the study hypotheses for the main research.

1.2.Importance of the Exploratory Study:

The significance of the current study is that it highlights the most essential skills for the school inclusion of children with autism, namely social skills and adaptive behavior, within the context of their education in a regular environment alongside typical children and teachers. This requires investigating the eligibility of autistic children for success and behavioral stability in the regular school environment, and their ability to meet their psychological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs through direct interaction with typical individuals. This study focuses on examining, analyzing, and discovering the presence or absence of these skills to make future decisions about enhancing them if present or imparting them through specialized training programs. Therefore, our exploratory study is important for various bodies and institutions in the sectors of national solidarity and education, contributing to improving the quality of life for these children.

1.3.Study Terminology:

-Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 defines autism as a persistent deficit in a child's social communication skills, characterized by abnormal and delayed development of basic psychological functions related to social, linguistic, and sensory skills, as well as stereotyped and routine behaviors and specific interests, with symptoms appearing in early developmental stages (APA, 2013).

This disorder is also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) due to the diversity and severity of symptoms. According to the DSM-5, autism includes a group of conditions previously classified separately, such as Asperger's syndrome and childhood disintegrative disorder (Al-Muhairi, 2015; p. 29).

- School Integration:

Ahmed Al-Khalil (2013) defines integration as enrolling a child with special needs with typical students in mainstream schools, providing necessary needs and materials to help them adapt, learn, and stay in the regular class as long as possible (Al-Sharif, 2018, p.155).

Andokukie and Goblibkouffinan define integration as the temporal, educational, and social inclusion of qualified non-typical children with their typical peers, according to a continuous plan and educational method, requiring clear responsibility among the administrative and teaching staff (Mustafa Al-Qamash & Naji Al-Saayda, 2000, p. 25).

- Social Skills:

According to the World Health Organization, social skills are the individual's abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that allows them to effectively deal with daily life demands.

Elena Faghali defines social skills for autistic children as the child's ability to communicate and interact with peers with tact, respect, intelligence, and the ability to handle

situations whether positive or negative, enjoy dialogue, and accept others without stubbornness, isolation, loneliness, or shyness. (Al Jazeera Net, 2021)

The operational definition of social skills is the autistic student's ability to communicate and interact with peers in the school environment, measured by the total score on the relevant scale items.

Social skills also encompass a range of behaviors contributing to an individual's performance in their environment, such as conversation skills, social tact, listening, flexible participation, verbal and non-verbal communication, imitation, and modeling. These skills ensure positive living within a specific socio-cultural framework. However, autistic children are characterized by cognitive deficits and obsessive, negative, abnormal interests, which may hinder their integration in the school environment. Thus, the difficulties autistic children face in various environments (home, school, broader community settings) lie in social isolation and lack or absence of interaction with others, hindering the development of social competence. This is especially burdensome in school, which requires many skills for academic success and social integration (Allen, Boyle et al, 2020).

It is the child's ability to interact with others, express positive and negative emotions, and regulate emotions in social situations as appropriate to the context (cited from Osama Farouk, Al-Sayed Kamel, 2013, p. 239).

-Adaptive Behavior:

Adaptive behavior is a set of complex and critical skills and behaviors for living independently and balanced within the environment. Life skills, social skills, and communication/language skills are key pillars of adaptive behavior. Many clinical studies have shown a significant weakness in this behavior among autistic children, hindering their ability to invest their abilities and develop knowledge to live appropriately for life's demands (Tamm, Day et al, 2021).

Assessing adaptive behavior in children with ASD requires focusing on a set of cognitive-perceptual processes related to social interaction skills and communication skills that must be included in their intervention program. Weakness in adaptive behavior leads to integrated autistic children in mainstream schools adopting a more negative approach toward learning, and being more self-isolating compared to classmates and teachers, affecting their motivation for productivity and personal development. They do not benefit from supportive educational and recreational activities, resulting in academic, social, and communication weaknesses, as well as general functional performance deficits (Losada-Puente, Baña, 2022, p.2).

Shabiro & Batshaw (2002) define adaptive behavior as a set of social skills that help individuals in daily life, including a variety of behaviors such as effective communication and interaction with others (Shabiro & Batshaw, 2002, p.187)..

2- Method and Tools:

2.1. Study Approach :

The researcher believes that the nature of the research dictates the approach. Since we are studying social skills and adaptive behavior in school-aged autistic children in mainstream schools, the researcher used the descriptive-analytical method, which is suitable for this study as it focuses on obtaining data from the research community to describe and explore the studied phenomenon. This method enables the researcher to provide a comprehensive description and accurate diagnosis of the actual situation.

2.2. Study Sample :

The study sample consisted of four shadow teachers in some Libyan public schools. The sample characteristics were represented across various educational institutions in Libya. The targeted institutions in the study are: Abu Salim, Al-Zawiya, Janzour, West Al-Zawiya, Sorman, Al-Ajilat, Hay Al-Andalus.

2.3. Study Tools :

-Clinical Interview:

A direct conversation between the researcher and the research sample, used to gather necessary information for the study. It is an important tool in awareness research and helps in a deep understanding of the subject and analyzing individuals' experiences.

Observation:

A method to obtain information, gain experience, and understand scientific phenomena accurately.

2.4. Study Time and Place :

- Time Frame :

The study was conducted in February 2025 in some public schools integrating children with autism disorder with typical children in the following educational districts: Abu Salim, Al-Zawiya, Janzour, West Al-Zawiya, Sorman, Al-Ajilat, Hay Al-Andalus.

- Location :

The schools are located in the western Libyan cities, from the capital to the far west.

2.5. Study Procedure :

After the issuance of Resolution No. 665 of 2008 by the Libyan Ministry of Education regarding the assignment of education for students with disabilities in public schools (Administration of Education and Integration of Special Categories), permission was obtained from the administration at the Ministry of Education regarding the specified education districts. The schools were contacted for the researcher's visit to those integrating students with autism spectrum disorder. The researcher surveyed the number of students to select the study sample and led a team of four special education shadow teachers cooperating with the researcher to learn about the study community and achieve the objectives. The researcher confirmed the presence of the sample in the targeted public schools.

3- Results and Discussion

Based on my interviews with shadow teachers accompanying children with autism disorder in the schools I visited, their evaluations were as follows:

Table (1): Shadow Teachers' Evaluations

Shadow Teacher	Specialization	Child	Age	Gender	Social Skills	Adaptive Behavior
Teacher 1	Special Ed.	1	12	Male	Medium	Medium
		2	15	Male	High	High
		3	14	Male	High	Medium
		4	13	Female	Low	Low
		5	15	Female	Medium	Medium
Teacher 2	Psychology	1	16	Male	High	High
		2	12	Male	High	Medium
		3	13	Male	Medium	Medium
		4	13	Male	Medium	Medium
		5	16	Male	High	High
Teacher 3	Psychology	1	12	Female	Low	Low
		2	14	Female	Medium	Low
		3	14	Male	High	Medium
		4	15	Male	High	High
		5	14	Male	High	Medium
Teacher 4	Social Work	1	15	Male	High	High
		2	14	Male	High	Medium
		3	12	Male	Medium	Low
		4	13	Male	Medium	Medium
		5	14	Male	High	Medium

After fieldwork and collecting data from the sample, percentages and cross tables were used, and the following results were reached:

Table (2): Children with Autism in Schools by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	16	80.0%
Female	4	20.0%
Total	20	100.0%

Table (3): Children with Autism in Schools by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
12 yrs	4	20.0%
13 yrs	4	20.0%
14 yrs	6	30.0%
15 yrs	4	20.0%
16 yrs	2	10.0%
Total	20	100.0%

Table (4): Children with Autism in Schools by Social Skills

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	2	10.0%
Medium	7	35.0%
High	11	55.0%
Total	20	100.0%

Table (4) shows that the average level of adaptive behavior among children with autism disorder in schools was the highest at 55.0%, the high level was second at 25.0%, and the low level was 20.0%.

Table (5): Children with Autism in Schools by Adaptive Behavior

The level of children with autism disorder within schools		Adaptive behavior						Percentage
		Low		Medium		High		
Social Skills	Low	2	10%	0	00%	0	00%	20.0%
	Medium	2	10%	5	25%	0	00%	55.0%
	High	0	00%	6	30%	5	25%	25.0%
Total		4	20%	11	55%	5	25%	100.0%

Table (5) shows that the majority of children have high social skills, and this is shown that 55% have a high level of social skills, and other children with 35% have an average level of social skills, while only 10% have low social skills.

The table also shows the distribution of children's levels according to adaptive behavior, where the average level was the highest in adaptive behavior by 55%, and the high and low level of adaptive behavior of children are no different from each other, the first 25% of those who have high adaptive behavior, and the second only 20% of children have low adaptive behavior.

The results of the table show that low social skills are followed by low adaptive behavior at 10%, with the relative absence of medium or high adaptive behavior, this indicates a strong positive association between social skills and adaptive behavior at the low level below other levels.

The table also shows that the average social skills and the average adaptive behavior of children represent the largest percentage within the category of medium social skills by 25%, which indicates the tendency of children with medium social skills to conform to moderate adaptive behavior, and the average social skills and low adaptive behavior in children came by 10%, from this it is clear that although most of those with medium social skills have moderate adaptive behavior, some still show low adaptive behavior.

Children with high social skills and adaptive behavior were also found to be the largest group in the high social skills category at 25%, indicating a strong positive association between high social skills and high adaptive behavior.

High social skills and average adaptive behavior of children show that a large proportion of those with high social skills still show only moderate adaptive behavior at 30%, not high.

The results also indicate the importance of high social skills in the absence of low adaptive behavior, i.e. children with high social skills do not have low adaptive behavior and is clear from the percentage of 00.0%.

Based on the results, it is clear that the increase in social skills is associated with the tendency of adaptive behavior to increase as well. Children with low social skills exclusively exhibit low adaptive behavior and are evident from the 10% below other levels that had no relative luck. Children with high social skills tend to have medium or high adaptive behavior as evidenced by the ratio of the high level of social skills with the average level of adaptive behavior of children at 30%, and the percentage of high level of social skills with a high level of adaptive behavior 25%.

Through the presence of the researcher with the children for three months, she notes the targeted children and takes all the positive and negative notes while following up the development that the autistic child reaches through his presence in the public school.

Here the researcher reaches the availability of the study sample in public schools in addition to the possibility of applying the scales to the sample and that what she has done will help her in the applied side of the research, and reached to identify many of the skills acquired by children with autism disorder within the school in addition to the clear behavioral adaptation through the researcher's observation of children for three months. The Algerian environment is no different from the Libyan environment, this has been referred to by many Algerian studies, such as the study (Karima Jaaz Laila Zarqane) entitled Training needs for social interaction skills among children with autism disorder and their relationship to some variables 2022, where it reached significant differences in favor of children with mild autism disorder (targeted for integration into public schools) This means that they have better social interaction skills than medium and severe, and the study (Masouda bin Ras 'Karima Makousi) entitled Successful Integration of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder In the special sections (a case study in the special section of Khalil Abdelkader Makhamdeh Ouargla Primary School) that the integration of autistic children gives them different skills and the integration plays on making other students accept them and thus a sense of comfort and safety within the school. The study (Mounir Bashata 'Abdelkarim Yahyaoui) found the effect of academic integration on the acquisition of social skills in the autistic child (a comparative 2021 The results of the study confirmed that the academic integration environment had a key role in adapting autistic children at all social levels and helps to acquire psychological compatibility that helps later adapt at the academic level.

4- Conclusion

Through this exploratory study, the researcher found that the study sample exists in public schools implementing the educational integration program for children with autism. This aligns perfectly with the researcher's goal for conducting her study.

Suggestions/Recommendations

- . The researcher proposes the development of a program specifically designed to enhance the social skills and adaptive behavior of children with autism.
- . Improving the educational environment to make it suitable and supportive for children with autism.

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