

Facilitating Inclusive School Adjustment for Students with Autism: Challenges and Intervention Strategies

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Abstract: Inclusive education, which seeks to ensure equitable opportunities for all students regardless of differences or disabilities, has emerged as a crucial area of focus in the field of education. With increasing numbers of individuals with autism being integrated into inclusive schools, understanding the challenges they face in achieving school adjustment has become a pressing concern. In this article, we comprehensively consider the issue of school adjustment from the aspects of academic, interpersonal, and emotional adjustment, and analyze the literature on the school adjustment of autism spectrum disorder students. We discuss the main adjustment issues that autism spectrum disorder children face in inclusive schools, and provide some effective intervention strategies. The aim of this article is to offer insights and recommendations for improving the quality of inclusive education for autism spectrum disorder students.

Keywords: school adjustment, autism spectrum disorder, inclusive education

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was defined by the DSM-5 in 2013, with three main characteristics: social interaction disorder, communication disorder, and restricted interests [1]. These characteristics can hinder effective interaction with others, and independent thinking. In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has gained traction, as exemplified by the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration, which stipulates that children with special educational needs should have access to mainstream schools with pedagogies tailored to their needs. As a result, more and more people with autism are choosing to attend inclusive schools for their education. However, in the process of receiving integrated education, students with autism may exhibit behaviors and thought patterns that differ from those of neurotypical students. Moreover, schools and parents may overlook social factors, leaving students with autism at high risk of social isolation and rejection by classmates or friends, which can affect their academic performance [2]. Research indicates that children with autism may struggle with school adjustment and social learning difficulties due to their behavioral traits [3].

Academia currently offers numerous definitions of school adjustment, and many scholars have their own perspectives on this issue. One of the first widely accepted theories was proposed by Ladd et al. [4], who defined school adjustment as a student's ability to participate happily in school activities and meet their own needs, while achieving academic success in the school context. This theory laid the groundwork for subsequent research, which refined and expanded the notion of school

adjustment [5]. Chinese scholar Zou Hong posits that interpersonal adjustment is also an indispensable indicator in defining the dimensions of school adjustment [6], whereas Jiang Guangrong et al. argued that school adjustment should include academic adjustment and emotional adjustment as well [7]. Current domestic and international studies examine the degree of school adjustment of students through the dimensions of academic adjustment, interpersonal adjustment, emotional adjustment, and others. Academic adjustment refers to a student's ability to successfully interact with the learning environment and meet learning requirements [8]. The student's drive, aptitude, and engagement with the material are all important factors [9]. Interpersonal adjustment is divided into more detailed categories, mainly classmate relationships and teacher-student relationships [10]. Emotional adjustment includes low self-confidence, high mood swings, and internal difficulties accepting feelings [11]. Based on these theories, this study will investigate the school adjustment of students with autism in three aspects: academic adjustment, interpersonal adjustment, and emotional adjustment.

This paper will examine the school adjustment challenges faced by children with autism in the context of inclusive education. Drawing on a review and analysis of recent literature, the author will identify the school adjustment problems encountered by children with autism in inclusive education across three dimensions: academic adjustment, interpersonal adjustment, and emotional adjustment. Through this exploration, the paper aims to propose countermeasures to address these challenges and provide guidance for researchers interested in advancing this field.

2. The Difficulties of School Adjustment for Students with Autism

School adjustment presents a significant challenge for students with autism, as it involves a range of needs and difficulties that must be addressed. In this section, we will examine the issues faced by students with autism in school adjustment across three key dimensions: academic adjustment, interpersonal adjustment, and emotional adjustment. By exploring these dimensions, we aim to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges experienced by students with autism in school and identify strategies to improve their adjustment outcomes.

2.1. The Difficulties of Academic Adjustment for Students with Autism

Students with autism often face challenges in academic adjustment, particularly in the areas of learning ability, motivation, and classroom participation. Previous research has primarily focused on their writing abilities, and evidence suggests that students with autism struggle with spelling and vocabulary mastery when it comes to writing. They also tend to exhibit poorer writing quality and more pronounced grammatical problems in critical and effective writing tasks [12], which is not limited to introductory education but are also apparent in higher education [13]. Additionally, several studies have found that students with autism may also experience difficulties with comprehension. In inclusive education classrooms, it is common for these students to struggle with understanding text content and summarizing concepts without guidance from the teacher.

In addition, it is noteworthy that students with autism often lack interest and motivation in learning. Due to the insufficient academic support and ineffective teaching strategies for students with autism, they frequently experience stress and lack of motivation to study in school, hindering them from realizing their full potential like their peers [14]. This presents a challenge for students with autism in adapting to school. Research has also shown that students with autism struggle with class participation [15]. They tend to avoid group interactions and do not participate well in classroom discussions. During class discussions, they may not listen well to other students' opinions and may be hesitant to repeat what they have said before [16]. In addition to low class participation, students with autism are pessimistic about classroom activities, and often do not wish to complete assigned

tasks.

2.2. The Difficulties of Interpersonal Adjustment for Students with Autism

Another challenge faced by students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in school settings is their interpersonal adjustment, which involves their relationship and communication with peers and teachers in various social situations and activities. Existing literature mainly focuses on the exploration of teacher-student relationships and peer relationships when researching the interpersonal relationship adjustment of autistic students in school.

Research on the teacher-student relationship component of students with autism has shown that those in inclusive education settings can be overly dependent on their teachers and often require more assistance than their non-autistic peers [17]. They may heavily rely on their teachers for advice and support, and struggle to complete certain activities without help [18]. However, they also have difficulty expressing themselves to their instructors, leading to a lack of clarity in communication between the two. During classroom instruction, students with autism may require more time to comprehend teacher instructions and directions, which can make it more challenging for the teacher and undermine the teacher-student bond. Additionally, students with autism may display an unwillingness to cooperate in teacher-student interactions, such as making inappropriate comments or engaging in physical confrontations with the teacher [19]. Such behaviors significantly impede the development of a strong relationship between teachers and students with ASD [20]. Autistic students may also experience difficulty forming friendships, struggling to express themselves and understand the expressions and words of others. Some may exhibit repeated behaviors that other students find peculiar, leading to exclusion from activities and ostracism instead of forming friendships [21]. Moreover, students with autism are more susceptible to being bullied by their classmates, with research demonstrating that many have encountered verbal bullying and physical hostility from their peers [22].

2.3. The Difficulties of Emotional Adjustment for Students with Autism

Another challenge faced by students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in school settings is their emotional adjustment. Autistic students may struggle to manage their emotions in the school environment, with signs manifesting as hypersensitivity or an overabundance of emotion. During school life, they may experience emotional overload, such as excessive anxiety and anger, which can lead to self-harming behaviors in severe cases, causing stress for both instructors and students [23]. Additionally, students with autism are more emotionally sensitive than their non-autistic peers, making them particularly vulnerable to emotional distress caused by environmental changes such as strong lighting or noise [24]. Furthermore, individuals with autism may experience a lack of self-confidence due to their perceived lack of success compared to other students, leading to fear and low self-esteem in school settings. These issues can often be associated with mental health issues such as depression, significantly impacting the psychological state of students with autism in school [25].

3. School Adjustment Intervention Strategies for Autistic Students

To support students with autism in adjusting to school, intervention strategies can be implemented across three dimensions: academic adjustment intervention strategies, interpersonal intervention strategies and emotional adjustment intervention strategies.

3.1. Academic Adjustment Intervention Strategies

Academic Intervention strategies can be implemented to support the learning of students with autism.

Effective teaching methods can include personalized instruction, designing learning activities based on the individual needs of each student, and incorporating specific graphics and explanations in the classroom. Teachers can also provide personalized guidance and support to students, repeating instruction as necessary to ensure full comprehension of the material. Providing opportunities for practice and self-expression can help teachers identify learning weaknesses and tailor instruction to address them. Additionally, using shadow teachers to assist with teaching tasks can provide extra support for students with autism in the classroom [26]. By implementing these strategies, teachers can help improve the academic adjustment of students with autism in school [27].

Parents play a critical role in academic adjustment interventions for students with autism. They can provide guidance, support, and assistance to help them effectively learn and achieve their academic goals. Parents can work with teachers to ensure that students with autism have the best learning environment [28]. Additionally, parents can give students with autism more security and confidence to help them better cope with academic challenges [29].

3.2. Interpersonal Adjustment Intervention Strategies

The interpersonal adjustment of students with autism in school generally involves adjustment to teacher-student relationships and peer relationships. Currently, intervention strategies mainly involve these two aspects.

3.2.1. Student-teacher Relationship Intervention Strategies

The student-teacher relationship is very important for the students with autism in the school. To improve the quality of relationships between students with autism and teachers, researchers have explored different types, forms, and settings of intervention strategies and evaluated their effectiveness. These intervention strategies included behavioral interventions, educational interventions, social relationship interventions, and psychological interventions. The researchers also considered the impact of environmental factors such as classroom setting (general or special education), teacher experience, and family support on the teacher-student relationship in schools for students with autism and made recommendations accordingly [30].

In some of the existing literature, it is mentioned that effective communication skills play a crucial role in teacher-student relationship intervention strategies. Specifically, when teaching students with autism, teachers should always be attentive to the students' state and encourage them to express their needs when they want to communicate. At the same time, teachers must exhibit sensitivity towards discriminatory comments and behaviors while striving to empathize with students' perspectives. The provision of ample patience and attention to students with autism is essential and may be supplemented by extracurricular activities to promote relaxation and social engagement. Moreover, educators must take an active role in the school lives of autistic students, ensuring that they receive the necessary support and guidance to facilitate their personal growth. Make sure the student with autism and the teacher have ample opportunities to build a strong connection [31].

One of the most common strategies for intervening in teacher-student relationships in autism is self-management. It is worth mentioning that among the existing intervention strategies, there is another intervention strategy mentioned by many researchers, which is "self-management [32]." Self-management aims to help students learn cognitive and behavioral regulation skills, etc., to improve their performance in school and social environments. This strategy typically includes helping students improve self-control, develop correct cognitive patterns, cultivate emotional regulation skills, and improve related social skills. In the process of self-management, if teachers avoid forcibly controlling students with autism and instead respect their wishes and choices while remaining calm and patient when necessary, the teacher-student relationship can be greatly improved.

3.2.2. Peer Relationship Intervention Strategies

Recent research has made progress in understanding intervention strategies for peer relationships among individuals with autism. Effective strategies such as social skills training have been shown to improve social participation and quality of life. Implementing these strategies in schools can promote inclusion and enhance social skills among children with autism [33]. Implementing these intervention strategies in schools can be a practical way to enhance the social skills of children with autism and promote their inclusion in social activities. Within the context of social skills training, the impact of peer-mediated interventions on students with autism should not be underestimated.

Peer-mediated interventions are designed to improve the behaviors of individuals with autism through the creation of friendship relationships [34]. Such strategies are based on social support theory and peer support theory, as well as social isolation theory and self-management theory [35]. The main components of peer-mediated intervention strategies include friendship education and friendship building. Friendship education aims to enhance the individual's understanding of friendship, stimulate their desire for friendship, and help them establish and maintain friendships. Friendship building is to establish and maintain friendships between individuals with autism and others, enabling them to participate in social activities [36]. The implementation of autism peer intervention strategies (i.e., created opportunities for ASD students to work with his/her buddy) can significantly improve the social behavior of individuals with autism, reduce their negative behaviors, increase the number and quality of their friendships, and improve the challenges they face in friendship. Autism friendship intervention strategies help improve the social abilities of individuals with autism and provide effective support for their social participation and social practice [37].

3.3. Emotional Adjustment Intervention Strategies

In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on intervention strategies aimed at improving the emotional adjustment of students with autism in schools. Research has shown that improving the educational environment, reducing the rejection of the learning environment by students with autism (i.e., strong light and noise), and maintaining their emotional stability can all contribute to improving the emotional adjustment of students with autism [38]. Effective emotional intervention strategies for students with autism include educational programs aimed at improving emotional management skills and communication with others, such as school-based professional behavior therapy services, mindfulness training, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and supportive communication, which can help students better adjust to school and get settled on campus. Additionally, after school hours, families and schools can improve emotional adjustment by establishing effective communication mechanisms between schools and parents. The school performance of students with autism can be evaluated through communication between home and school, and positive incentives can be provided to boost their confidence.

Before carrying out emotional adjustment intervention strategies, it is necessary to evaluate the emotional adjustment effects of students with autism to determine whether they can obtain effective results from the strategies. This assessment can help teachers and parents understand the emotional adjustment of students with autism so that more effective intervention measures can be taken. The emotional adjustment effect of students with autism can be observed and measured through their behavior, emotional expression, attention, and learning ability. In this case, parents and teachers can record the student's behavior to track changes in the emotional adjustment of students with autism at different times. The emotional adjustment effect evaluation of students with autism can also be implemented through regular interviews and surveys to collect feedback from students on school emotional adjustment intervention strategies. This information can help teachers and parents understand the actual situation of students and take targeted intervention measures accordingly [39].

4. Conclusion

This literature review has identified the challenges faced by students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in school settings. During the process of receiving education in inclusive schools, students with autism may face a range of challenges, such as weaker academic adjustment performance, difficulty forming positive interpersonal relationships, and significant emotional fluctuations. These challenges can impact the effectiveness of inclusive education for students with autism to varying degrees. By recognizing the diverse drawbacks and needs of students with ASD, teachers and school administrators can provide appropriate instruction and assessment methods, create a positive and inclusive school climate, and offer emotional support and guidance. Parents can also support their children by creating a positive family environment and maintaining good communication with the school. These strategies can promote the academic, social, and emotional development of students with ASD and support their overall well-being. These findings have important implications for the school adjustment of students with autism and may serve as a call to action for educational institutions to provide better support and services.

Future research could also explore the differences in school adjustment for different types of students with autism in order to better provide individualized support and services for different types of students with autism.

5. Limitations

This study conducted a focused review of the main difficulties and common interventions for school adjustment of children with ASD, but this study also has some limitations. First, this review did not cover all relevant studies, so there may be some selection bias. To further expand the horizon, it is suggested to include more studies in the analysis. Second, this review did not conduct a detailed analysis of the effects of various intervention strategies. In the future, meta-analysis can be used to further analyze the actual effects of various interventions for the school adjustment of children with ASD.

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