

Difficulties and Recommendations for the Implementation of Learning in Regular Classrooms among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in China

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Abstract: Developmental disability, known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is brought on by variations in the brain. People with ASD struggle with repetitive activities or interests, as well as communication and social engagement. Nowadays, there is an increasing number of children with ASD in China. They are gradually gaining public attention on the improvement in their societal situation from all aspects. Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) is the most direct and effective way for children with ASD to overcome social communication barriers and integrate into society. However, educational problems related to LRC arose as well. In this paper, the author studies issues in the implementation of LRC among children with ASD and gives recommendations accordingly. Conclusions can be drawn that issues lie in teachers' professionalism, family education, school culture, and social prejudice, and achieving a high-quality implementation requires the joint efforts of schools, society, and the government.

Keywords: learning in regular classrooms, autism spectrum disorder, autism education, school education, family education

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a common pervasive developmental disability that is usually diagnosed in infancy and childhood. ASD has several obvious symptoms: communication disorder, social barriers, intellectual disabilities, and fixed hobbies [1].

According to the Report on the Development of Autism Education and Rehabilitation Industry in China (II), the incidence of autism in China is approximately 1%, which means that among the 1.3 billion population, there are at least 10 million individuals with ASD, including over 2 million children aged 0-14. As more and more ASD people have been diagnosed, China has paid more attention to this group. The Guiding Opinions on Strengthening Learning in Regular Classrooms for Disabled Children and Adolescents at the Stage of Compulsory Education also points out that "Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) is an important way to protect the right of disabled children to education." LRC for children with ASD means that in the context of integrated education, children with ASD can be enrolled in regular classes at regular schools. This is an opportunity for regular schools to give full play to their environment and curriculum advantages. It is also a way of integrating general education with special education to educate children with ASD [1]. With China's increasing

emphasis on the education of special children, research on educational interventions, such as integrated education, for children with ASD is also gradually increasing. However, China still faces challenges in integrated education that combines LRC with special education.

This paper analyzes problems of the implementation of LRC among children with ASD from the perspectives of teachers, parents who have children with ASD, schools, and society. Then, the author proposes corresponding suggestions, hoping to provide ideas for educational interventions for children with ASD.

2. Difficulties Faced by Children with ASD Learning in Regular Classrooms

2.1. Teachers' Lack of Professionalism

The Regulations on Education for Persons with Disabilities clearly state that it is necessary to improve the quality of education and actively promote integrated education for people with disabilities. This requires teachers to provide necessary support and effective teaching for students [2]. In fact, during the implementation of LRC, the professionalism of teachers greatly impacts the effectiveness of regular classes for students with ASD. According to the survey, 70% of teachers lack professional knowledge in education for students with ASD and the ability to communicate with them. Due to the lack of professional resources for ASD teachers, the training hours for regular teachers in schools are relatively insufficient, the training frequency is relatively low, and the training content is relatively simple, resulting in teachers' lack of professional knowledge and communication skills to deal with students with ASD [1]. This leads to some problematic behaviors of children with autism in the classroom, such as tantrums and screams. If these behaviors are not timely intervened and corrected by the teacher, it will ultimately lead to the disruption of the class order and the inability of students with ASD to integrate into the classroom, making it even more impossible for students with ASD to learn knowledge in the classroom. Therefore, the lack of professionalism among teachers in regular schools has led to a low-quality integrated education for students with autism [2].

2.2. Parents' Weak Awareness of Family Education and a Lack of Communication with Schools

Among all kinds of education for children with ASD, family education plays a crucial role, since children with ASD spend most of their time at home. Research has found that in most families that have students with ASD, parents and other family members have weak awareness of family education. Some families place their hopes on drug rehabilitation, while others overly rely on school education. For these parents, there are mainly two issues. Firstly, they lack communication with the school, so they are unaware of their children's situation at school and their learning content. When their children return home, parents cannot cooperate with the school and provide their children with enough after-school support. Secondly, parents tend to ignore children's family education. Because home is the main place for children with ASD to live, a lack of intimate interaction with family members can prevent children from establishing good relationships with their families, and also deprive them of an opportunity to develop social skills. Moreover, most families of children with ASD face financial difficulties and lack an understanding of theoretical knowledge related to ASD and its rehabilitation, resulting in the inability of children with ASD to receive good family education in their families [3].

2.3. A Culture That Lacks Inclusion

At the school level, the main problem is that the school culture is not inclusive enough for students with ASD. According to school survey data, 70% of parents agree that a good classroom atmosphere has a positive impact on children with autism, but it is not easy for ordinary students to fully embrace

classmates with ASD [1]. Due to the insufficient understanding of children with ASD, their classmates may have misunderstandings and biases toward them. As a result, bullying and rejection may be the follow-up questions that bring psychological impact to students with ASD. Meritocracy is the main ideology of schools in China. Children who are anticipated to perform well receive extra help from teachers. Therefore, if teachers do not think students with ASD will succeed, they will not put much effort into teaching them, and as a result, these students will not do well [4]. Moreover, parents in China are also fanatical advocates of meritocracy. They would hold an opposing attitude to any elements that would affect the grades of their children, including classes with students with ASD. Consequently, it is difficult to form a good classroom atmosphere with interactive effects, and various parties' biased opinions toward students with ASD can affect the effectiveness of education.

At the social level, China's current policies and regulations have begun to increase efforts in education, social security, and other aspects for children with ASD. However, there is still a lack of detailed and targeted strategies, and government subsidies are currently unable to fully cover people with ASD. Besides, the public's awareness of ASD is also insufficient. Research has found that there are misconceptions about the public's perception of autism groups. A survey has pointed out that the public's current acceptance attitude towards the ASD population is mostly stopped at the level of imagination. In this reality, most people still do not want to accept individuals with ASD, believing that they are disabled. At the same time, it is also hard for students with ASD to find a job, integrate into society, and be accepted by others [3]. These kinds of difficulties can result in the fact that people with ASD cannot survive in society by themselves and need to rely on their family for the rest of their life, which become a burden for their families and bring economic difficulties to families.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Recommendations to Teachers

In regular schools, there are areas where integrated education teachers can be improved. Firstly, regular training on integrated education for students with ASD should be provided to teachers. Comprehensive field experiences of teachers in specially chosen classrooms with students with ASD must be a part of teacher preparation programs. Additionally, these fieldwork opportunities must be directly related to coursework [5]. The training content should include the learning characteristics and individualized needs of students with ASD. Moreover, there is a need to consider including the additional working hours and teaching into the assessment and promotion of teachers' professional titles, so as to ensure that the workload of teachers is minimized and their motivation is increased to the greatest extent possible [6]. Secondly, teachers need to use special educational methods. It is clear that each student with ASD will respond to educational methods differently; some methods will work better for some students than others. Therefore, it is essential that a range of strategies be made available to serve the diverse needs of students with ASD [5].

3.2. Recommendations to Parents

It is obvious that parents and families play an essential role in the education of children with ASD, especially in their independent living skill teaching, personal hygiene training, and academic tutoring. Therefore, parents offer extra support and increase the intensity of interventions by adding to the number of hours of instruction and practice that students with ASD receive. Interventions that involve parents and other family members also help students with ASD generalize and maintain gained abilities linked to long-term beneficial outcomes. Nefdt, Koegel, Singer, and Gerber stated that because naturalistic teaching techniques (e.g., pivotal response treatment) are carried out in settings that are familiar to parents, parents may pick them up fast. Parents can start to learn some professional

knowledge related to ASD and maintain close contact with schools, so they can provide consistent support to their children.

3.3. Recommendations to Schools

A survey among 246 children with ASD in China indicated that there were only 6 school-age children out of 83 who learn in regular classrooms, accounting for 7.23%. Although the state stipulates that regular schools should admit students with ASD who are able to study in school, most schools still refuse children with ASD to enroll, and LRC students do not receive targeted training [7].

Currently, there are many intervention and treatment methods for children with autism worldwide. Sports intervention, as a significant therapeutic measure, has been widely confirmed. Compared to other intervention measures, sports intervention is a low-cost approach, which not only facilitates the implementation of LRC but also greatly reduces the burden on the family [8]. Through music therapy education at schools, the auditory and other senses of students with ASD can be stimulated, thereby awakening their sense of autonomy and perception of the world. Additionally, their observational and social skills can be practiced through play therapy education [9].

What is more, schools should build a harmonious atmosphere and prevent the occurrence of bullying behavior on campus. Adults must continually be on the lookout for instances of disrespectful and bullying behavior. Students with ASD need detailed training about the behaviors that constitute bullying and what they should do if they find themselves in those situations. Students with ASD also need to be persuaded consistently that it is not their fault that they are being bullied and be provided with psychological counseling [5].

3.4. Recommendations to the Chinese Government

For the future development of people with ASD, the Chinese government can encourage the universities to establish more majors related to special education, develop comprehensive talent cultivation plans, and cultivate more high-quality teachers in special education to resolve teacher resource scarcity. Targeted measures can also be taken to improve the social status and treatment of teachers engaged in special education, such as raising the standards of treatment for special education teachers, setting extra allowances, increasing the proportion of outstanding commendations for teachers engaged in special education, and increasing the number of such teachers enrolled, in order to attract more people to join the special education industry [3].

In addition, the Chinese government can mobilize more funds to develop ASD technological intervention industry and the medical intervention industry. The development of technologies such as Speech-Generating devices (SGD), social robots, Virtual Reality (VR), and Spatial Information Technology (SIT) can be improved, especially the development of VR. VR technology has achieved good results in specific fear therapy and emotion recognition therapy for people with ASD. Compared to traditional therapies, VR provides a more realistic and dynamic stimulating social scene platform for most ASD patients, which is not limited by time, space, or personnel. In a realistic platform, VR technology will stimulate the interest of people with ASD and encourage them to bravely adventure and explore in a virtual social environment [9].

4. Conclusion

LRC is a significant method to help people with ASD to study and integrate in society. However, it is obvious that LRC in China is far from being mature. The problems of professional teacher resources, the cooperation between parents and school, the school culture and curriculum, and social biases still exist in implementing LRC among children with ASD in China. There is a need to pay great attention to these issues and resolve them through efforts from all parties. The root cause of these problems is

the lack of knowledge and understanding about people with ASD and social biases. Considering that most people do not understand this group, a series of problems can appear, such as being ignored by teachers, excluded by classmates, rejected by schools, and marginalized by society. To make LRC more effective for students with ASD, the following recommendations can be considered. First, providing training to teachers can guarantee the professionalism of teaching syllabi and the diversity of teaching techniques. Second, parents should cooperate with schools to conduct some after-school education. Ultimately, as long as groups of ASD can be understood, accepted, noticed, and cared for, the future life of them will be gradually improved. In terms of limitations, many of the difficulties ASD children encountered were not mentioned in this paper due to the word limit, and the solution also needs to be improved to better fit the situation of Chinese children with ASD.

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