



RESEARCH PAPER

Teaching Social Skills to Non-Verbal Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Challenges for Special Educationists Working in Private Special Education Institutes of Lahore City

Dr. Hina Fazil^{*1} Dr. Maria Sohail Quarshi² Misbah Tabassum³

1. Assistant Professor, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.
2. Assistant Professor, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. M. Phil Scholar, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)2.37](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)2.37)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

August 30, 2021

Accepted:

December 23, 2021

Online:

December 25, 2021

Autism Spectrum disorder,
Challenges,
Non-verbal,
Social skills,
Special Education

***Corresponding Author**

hinafazil.dse@pu.edu.pk

This study was aimed to find out the challenges of special educationists in teaching social skills to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The population consisted of special education teachers working in special education centers in Punjab province of Pakistan. 75 special educationists working in special education centers selected through random sampling technique as research participants working in the Private special education centers in Lahore City. A self-developed and validated questionnaire was formulated on a Likert-type scale consisting of twenty-five statements for teachers to get responses. The study results showed that most of the teachers were facing challenges in teaching social skills to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder. The study recommended that special educationists encourage the non-verbal children with ASD to initiate the production of sounds using specialized intervention like Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), ABBLES and Links to Language. Special educationists need to plan social skill tasks based on Discrete Trial Training (DTT) individually for every nonverbal child with ASD and prepare the social routine program for each child.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is one of the developmental disorders in which social communication and repetitive behaviors are markedly impaired and it is characterized by difficulties in learning and communicating and inattention and hyperactivity in children (Mwakalinga, 2012). It has been observed that children with

autism spectrum disorder have difficulty coordinating activities and initiating new ones consistently (Syriopoulou-Delli, Agaliotis, & Papaefstathiou, 2018). According to Hill and Frith, they also have difficulty maintaining concentration on tasks that have been assigned to them (2003). According to the International Diagnostic Evaluation of Autism Spectrum Disorders (IDEA), children with autism spectrum disorders have communication difficulties before the age of three, including verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. The symptoms of autism spectrum disorder in children include repetitive behaviors, stereotyped behavior, resistance to changes in the environment or daily routine, and atypical reactions to sensory inputs, among other things (Heward, 2009). Specifically, as previously said, children with autism spectrum conditions lack social skills and interaction because of their unique features. Children with autism spectrum disorder often have difficulties with social skills and social interaction, but the degree of these difficulties varies depending on the age of the child and whether the child has autism (Bellini & Hopf, 2007).

Literature Review

Individuals' social skills are defined as their capacity to act appropriately in each circumstance. A person's ability to communicate successfully with others while simultaneously avoiding inappropriate social reactions has been proposed as a definition of "social skills." According to Diahwati, Hariyono, and Hanurawan (2016), people are more likely to accept someone who has excellent social skills than someone who does not. It is possible that improving social skills can assist a kid in their capacity to establish and retain friends, achieve academic success in school, and explore adult roles such as employee, colleague, and community member. Developing good adult relationships with family members and peers requires the development of social skills as well. It is possible to acquire social skills.

Communication development impairments are key diagnostic criteria for all children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The inability to establish, sustain, and terminate a reciprocal relationship, as well as a lack of interest in connecting with others, was among the flaws identified. Children's ability to grow in speech and language development, which is based on communication, is jeopardized by these communication problems (Tomasello, 2008). As a result, up to a quarter of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) never learn to communicate verbally (Morrier, Hess, & Heflin, 2011). A large number of the youngsters on this list are involved in more severe situations. In addition to the various issues in mental processing that children with severe ASD may have, they may also experience significant language processing impairments that restrict their ability to acquire sound and vocabulary-related information (Brignell, et al., 2018). People who suffer from language processing disorders have difficulty accessing the meanings of words and building a word repertoire (Rapin & Dunn, 2003; Brignell, et al., 2018). As a result, they have

difficulties with both reading and writing. A significant percentage of the population is thus unable to distinguish between spoken words and their matching meanings in context (Cook & Ogden, 2021). However, some children with severe ASD may have trouble controlling and mimicking fine motor movements, such as moving their lips or tongue, which may be frustrating (Ming, Brimacombe & Wagner, 2007). These shortcomings exacerbate their incapacity to communicate in a clear and comprehensible manner. It follows that assisting child with severe ASD develop communicative objectives, language comprehension, and language production must be a high focus in the field of speech, language, and communication therapies (Speaks, 2018).

Children and adolescents who have strong social skills are more likely to be accepted by their classmates and make friends. They are also more likely to have close relationships with their parents and other adults. They are also more likely to deal with problems more effectively, become more engaged in their schoolwork, and perform better academically, according to Hair et al (2004). The development of good social skills is especially important for children with an autism spectrum disorder.

In contrast to normally growing children, those who have autism spectrum disorder need continuous social contact. Badiah, (2018) supports this point of view, saying that it is critical for children to establish good connections with their peers throughout middle and late childhood. Connection with others, dispute resolution, and establishing a feeling of friendship are all examples of good interpersonal skills. When it comes to social competence, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is characterized by impairments such as failing to make eye contact with others. Autistic teenagers, on the other hand, often struggle with sustaining social connections, interpreting and utilizing nonverbal communication (gestures and facial expressions), and contributing to discussions (Bohlander, Orlich, & Varley, 2012; Diahwati, R. Hariyono, & Hanurawan, 2016). Children find it difficult to initiate discussions, form social connections, participate in activities, and grasp the rules of games when they are not given help. Having a limited number of social interactions from infancy forward may result in reduced employment rates as well as a shorter lifespan and significant mental health issues later in life (Strain & Schwartz 2015) (for example, sadness, suicidal thoughts, and anxiety). Peer bullying is a significant issue for children with autism spectrum disorders. It has been suggested that impoverished children may struggle to form connections because of their low language abilities. According to Diahwati, Hariyono, and Hanurawan (2016), those with limited language skills often experience unpleasant interactions and get negative feedback as a result of their limitations. The capacity of a kid to communicate and connect with people may have an effect on both their academic and professional success in the future.

Autistic children often lack social skills, which is a common occurrence (ASD). Clearly, the lack of social skills shown by autistic children limits their ability to engage with others in school and community situations (Landa, Holman, & Mayer, 2007). Autism spectrum diseases are characterized by difficulties in initiating discussions, establishing relationships with others, and engaging in activities (Cook & Ogden, 2021). They will also have difficulty following games and comprehending the rules if they are not provided with the appropriate help. Inadequate social connections throughout infancy may result in decreased job opportunities, less independence, and a shorter life expectancy, to name a few consequences (such as depression, suicidal desires, and anxiety)(Badiah, 2018). Teens and young adults on the autism spectrum are often bullied by their peers (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). Teachers must keep a careful eye on kids' social development, especially those with special needs such as the autism spectrum, to ensure that they develop appropriately. Disability education professionals have a duty to assist disabled students in developing and maintaining social skills with their peers and members of the community (Klin, et al., 2007). A number of social skills intervention techniques, such as hiring normal peers, forming social skills groups, and utilizing video modeling to make social skills more accessible for autistic children, may be used to assist autistic children in their development. Students with disabilities must establish relationships and friendships with their normal schoolmates and classmates to succeed in school. Students with disabilities may benefit from being in a setting that promotes the development of social skills and communication (Landa, Holman, & Mayer, 2007).

Material and Methods

In this section, researchers have given details about the research methodology and procedure to carry out and complete the present study. We have used the quantitative research method to complete the research to know about the challenges faced by special educationists of non-verbal children with ASD. A descriptive research design was applied to complete this study.

Population and Sample Strategies

The study population was comprised of special education teachers of non-verbal children with ASD working in various educational settings in Lahore city. The researchers have selected a sample of 75 teachers of non-verbal children with ASD using random sampling techniques; male and female special educationists working in, private sector and home-based settings of Lahore city were the sample set.

Data Collection Instrument

The researchers have developed a structured questionnaire with 5 Point Likert (0%,25%,50%,75%,100%) scale with a reliability of 0.947 on Cronbach's Alfa for Special educationists to know about various challenges in teaching social skills to non-verbal children with ASD.

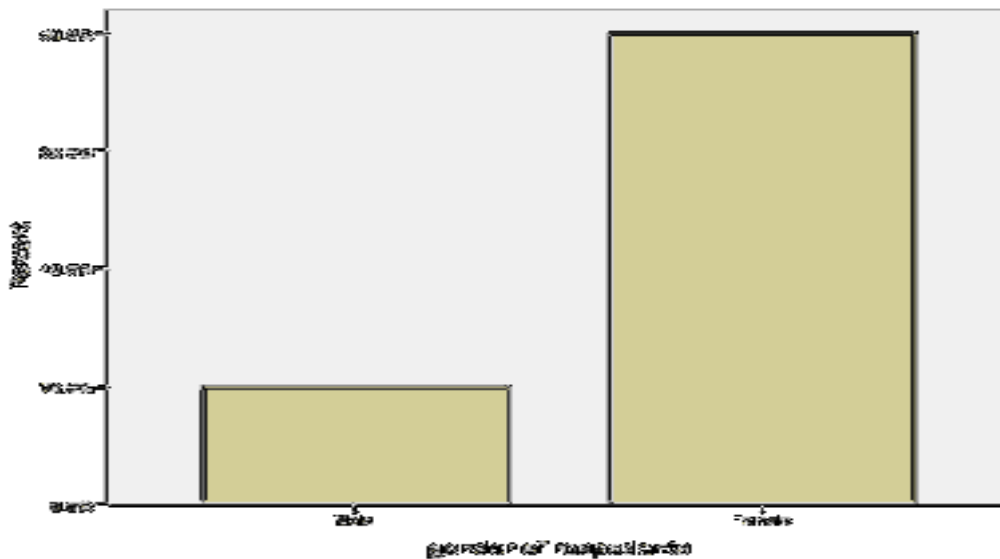
The Procedure of Data Collection

The researchers have collected the data in different ways. 60% of data were collected through visiting different institutes, 20% data were collected through electronic media, and what's App social media collected 20% of data.

Data Analysis and Results

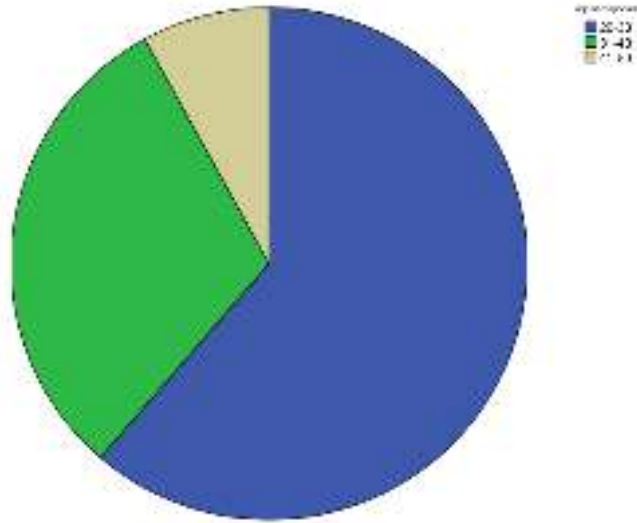
After collecting data, the researchers have assigned the codes as per a pre-decided coding scheme (0%, 25%.50%, 75%, 100%) and enters the data into SPSS version 20. Researchers have applied both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the data and draw results. Results are presenting in the form of tables along with their interpretation.

Results and Discussion



Graph No. 1: Gender of the participants

The graph shows that 20% participants were male and 80% were female in this study.



Graph No.2 Spread of Respondents age

Graph indicates that 61.3% participants were between the age of 20 to 30 years, 30.7% participants were between the ages of 30 to 40 years, 8% were between the ages of 40 to 50 years.

Table No. 1
Qualification of the participants

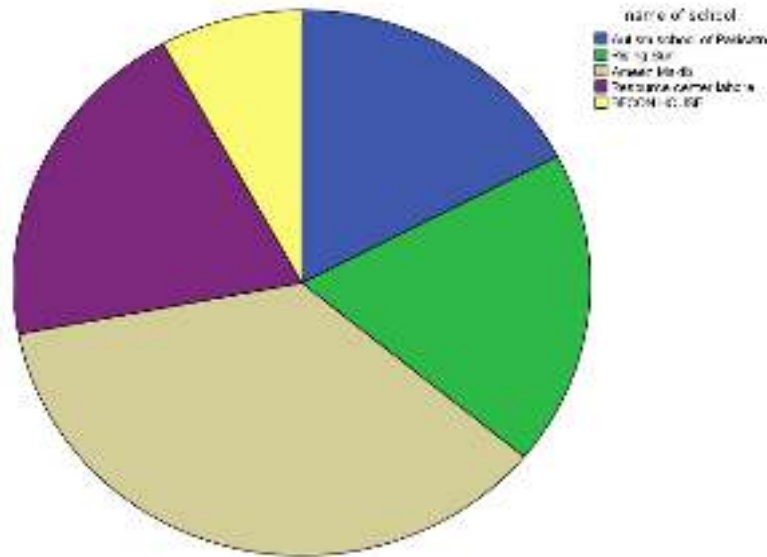
Qualification	F	%
Masters	61	81.3
M. Phil	14	18.7
Total	75	100.0

Participants' replies 81.3% were Master's in special education and 18.7% were M. Phil

Table No. 2
Experience of respondents

Experience	F	%
1-10 years	65	86.7
11-20 years	8	10.7
21-30 years	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0

86.7% of teachers have experience of 1-10 years, 10.7% have 11-20 years, and 2.7% have 21-30years.



Graph No. 3 School wise Distribution of sample

17.3 % participants were from "Autism school of Pakistan," 18.7% of the participants were from "Rising Sun institute", 36 % of the respondent was from "Amen Maktab 20% of the participants were from "Resource center Lahore" 8% of the respondent was from "Bacon house school of Lahore."

Table 3
Gender distribution

Gender	F	%
Male	58	77.3
Female	17	22.7
Total	75	100.0

77.3% participants were male, and 22.7% were female in this study.

Table 4
Age wise distribution of children with Non-vernal ASD

Age	f	%
1-5	13	17.3
6-10	31	41.3
11-15	31	41.3
Total	75	100.0

Table describes that 17.3% were children 1-5 age, 41.3% child was 6-10 age, and 41.3% child was 11-15.

Table 5
Frequency Distribution of Responses

Disability	F	%
Mild	33	44.0
Moderate	31	41.3
Severe	11	14.7
Total	75	100.0

Table depicts that 44.0% disability level of children was mild, 41.3% was Moderate, and 14.7% was severe to profound.

Table 6

Sr. No.	Communication skills	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
1.	It is difficult to teach greetings to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder	1 1.3%	20 26.7%	41 54.7%	10 13.3%	3 4%
2.	It is difficult to teach verbal directions to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	18 24%	42 56%	10 13.3%	4 5.3%
3.	It is difficult to make eye contact with non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder for initiation of communication.	2 2.7%	15 20%	17 22.7%	37 49.3%	4 5.3%
4.	It is difficult to make the non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder responsive on two-way communication.	-- --	18 24%	17 22.7%	35 46.7%	5 6.7%
5.	It is difficult to develop rapport with non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	22 29.3%	20 26.7%	25 33.3%	7 9.3%
6.	It is difficult to teach focus attention to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	17 22.7%	30 40%	24 32%	3 4.0%
7.	It is difficult to take output to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	18 24%	25 33.3%	28 37.3%	3 4.0%

Table 7

Sr. No.	Teaching and Managing emotions	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
8.	It is difficult to teach emotional control to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	-- --	14 18.7%	26 34.7%	26 34.7%	34 45.4%
9.	It is difficult to change the self-stimulatory behavior of the non-verbal children with autism spectrum	-- --	15 20%	27 36%	28 37.3%	30 40%
10.	It is difficult to teach managing aggression to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	-- --	13 17.3%	31 41.3%	22 29.3%	9 12%
11.	It is difficult to teach patience to non-verbal children with an autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	22 29.3%	17 22.7%	29 38.7%	6 8%

Table 8

Sr. No.	Teaching social reciprocal skills	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
12.	It is difficult to teach social reciprocal skills to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	14 18.7%	20 26.7%	30 42.7%	8 10.7%
13.	It is difficult to teach play skills to non-verbal children with an autism spectrum disorder.	2.7%	13 17.3%	25 33.3%	24 32%	11 14.7%
14.	It is difficult to teach how to interact with others to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	17 22.7%	27 36%	20 26.7%	10 13.3%
15.	It is difficult to teach social relations to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	2 2.7%	16 21.3%	25 33.3%	24 32%	8 10.7%
16.	It is difficult to make non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder take part in physical activity.	2 2.7%	15 20%	29 38.7%	19 25.3%	10 13.3%

17.	It is difficult to teach to make friends to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	17 22.7%	22 29.3%	25 33.3%	10 13.3%
18.	It is difficult to teach reciprocal interaction to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder to participate in physical activity.	1 1.3%	8 10.7%	14 18.7%	22 29.3%	30 40.0%
19.	It is difficult to gain attention to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	2 2.7%	20 26.7%	25 33.3%	16 21.3%	12 16%

Table 9

Sr. No.	Teaching mannerism	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
20.	It is difficult to teach table manners to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder	3 4%	14 18.7%	23 30%	30 40.7%	5 6.7%
21.	It is difficult to teach moral values to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	3 4%	4 5.3%	21 28%	22 29.3%	25 33.3%
22.	It is difficult to teach respect to others to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	3 4%	19 25.3%	7 9.3%	22 29.3%	24 32%
23.	It is difficult to teach the skills to play in a group to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	2 2.7%	14 18.7%	7 9.3%	25 33.3%	27 36%
24.	It is difficult to teach to cooperate with others to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	10 13.3%	10 13.3%	26 34.7%	28 37.3%
25.	It is difficult to teach rules about the classroom to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder.	1 1.3%	13 17.3%	10 13.3%	22 29.3%	29 38.7%

Table 10

What are the most common challenges faced by special educationists in teaching social skills to children with nonverbal ASD?

Challenges	N	Mean
Communication skills	75	21.5600
Managing emotions	75	13.7733

Social and reciprocal skills	75	26.3200
Teaching of ethics and manners	75	19.5467

Table No. 10 explains that social problems (mean=26.3200) of nonverbal ASD children are the biggest problem for teachers, then communication (mean=21.5600), ethical problem (mean=19.5467), and managing emotions is the lowest challenge for them.

Table 11
Is there any significant difference in challenges faced by teachers based on their gender?

	Gender of teachers	N	Mean	T	Df	sig
Challenges	Male	15	88.3333	2.414	34.559	.021
	Female	60	79.4167			

The t-value= 2.414, df=34.559 and sig, =0.21 indicate that there is a significant difference in the challenges faced by teachers based on their gender. The male and female teachers are facing the different kinds of challenges in teaching social skills to children under investigation.

Table 12
Is there any significant difference in challenges faced by teachers based on the ages of children with nonverbal ASD?

Age of students	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	sig
Between Groups	22.280	42	.528	.966	.548
Within Groups	17.500	32	.547		
Total	39.680	74			

The F value 0.966, df=74 and P value 0.548 indicate that there is no significant difference in challenges faced by teachers based on the ages of children with nonverbal ASD.

Table 13
Are there any significant associations among challenges faced by special educationists in teaching social skills to nonverbal children with ASD and their qualification and job experience?

Challenges core of Teachers	N	%	Pearson Chi -Square value	Df	Sig (2 sided)
Experience of respondents	75	100	71.563	84	.831

Qualification of respondents	75	100	49.934	42	.187
------------------------------	----	-----	--------	----	------

The values (Chi square value =71.563. df=84and sig=.831) and (Chi square value =49.934 df=42and sig=.187) explain that there are no significant associations among challenges faced by special educationists in teaching social skills to nonverbal children with ASD and their qualification and job experience.

Discussion

This study aims to find out the challenges of special education teachers in teaching social skills to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The teachers face many problems to teach mute children. It's, tragically, the situation that common secondary school in the 21st century appears to have been worked to make life testing and badly designed for somebody who has even the mildest of such issues, all of which oblige autism spectrum disorder (Cook & Ogden, 2021). The findings of this research are that 75% it is difficult to teach reciprocal interaction to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder to participate in physical activity, as well as a majority 75% it is difficult to teach patience to non-verbal children with an autism spectrum disorder and 100% it is difficult to teach rules about the classroom to non-verbal children with autism spectrum disorder. However, it is very challenging to teach the social skills to mute children.

Conclusions

This research concludes that teaching social skills to nonverbal children with ASD was really a challenging task for special educationist and they faced many difficulties in the domains of social, communication, management of emotions, and teaching of ethics and moral values and the biggest among them was teaching of social and reciprocal skills to non-verbal children. The male and the female teachers were facing different kind of challenges in teaching social skills to mute children. Whereas there are no significant associations among challenges faced by special educationists in teaching social skills to nonverbal children with ASD and their qualification and job experience. It is also concluded that there is no significant difference in challenges faced by teachers based on the ages of children with nonverbal ASD.

Recommendations

Following recommendations were made the researchers:

1. Special educationists encourage the non-verbal children with ASD to initiate the production of sounds using specialized intervention like Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), ABBLES and Links to Language.

2. Social stories method will be helpful for special educationists in teaching social skills to nonverbal children with ASD especially asking question, work in group and turn taking.
3. Special educationists can get help from structured programs like TEACHH for teaching rules and manners in a very systematic way.
4. Special educationists need to plan social skill tasks based on Discrete Trial Training (DTT) individually for every nonverbal child with ASD and prepare the social routine program for each child.
5. Special educationists need to implement the strategies to control emotions like aggression, hate, fear, and love according to the needs of each nonverbal child with ASD
6. Special educationists need to make Visual schedules for these students and use visual or written instructions for these students, rather than auditory.
7. Special educationists are recommended to use video modeling technique to teach communication skills, social reciprocal skills, moral values and managing emotions to children with nonverbal ASD.

References

- Badiah, L. I. (2018). The Importance of social skills for autism . *Advances in social science, education and humanities research*, 272.
- Bellini, S. & Hopf, A. (2007). The development of the autism social skills profile: A preliminary analysis of psychometric properties. *Focus on autism and other developmental disabilities*, 80-87. doi:10.1177/1088357607022002080110.1177/10883576070220020801
- Bohlander, A. J. Orlich, F. & Varley, C. K. (2012). Social skills training for children with autism, *Departement of Psychiatry*, 59(1), 165-174.
- Bremer, C. D. & Smith, J. (2004). Teaching social skills, *Addresing trends and developments in Secondary education and transition*, 3(5), 1-5.
- Brignell, A. Chenausky, K. V. Song, H. Zhu, J. Suo, C. & Morgan, A. T. (2018). Communication interventions for autism spectrum disorder in minimally verbal children. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 11.
- Cook, A. & Ogden, J. (2021). Challenges, strategies and self-efficacy of teachers supporting autistic pupils in contrasting school settings: a qualitative study. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*. doi:10.1080/08856257.2021.1878659
- Diahwati, R. R. Hariyono, & Hanurawan, F. (2016). Keterampilan sosial siswa berkebutuhan khusus di sekolah dasar inklusi, *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian dan Pengembangan*, 1(8), 1612-1620.
- Gresham, F. M. Sugai, G. & Horner, R. H. (2001). Intepreting outcomes of social skills training for student with high-incidence disabilities, *Exceptional children*, 67(3), 331-344.
- Heward, W. L. (2009). *Execeptional children: an introduction to specialeducation*. USA: Pearson Education Inc.
- Hill, E. L. & Frith, U. (2003). Understanding autism: insight form mind and brain. *Philosophical transaction: Biological sciences*, 358(1430), 281-289.
- Klin, A. Saulnier, C. Sparrow, S. Cicchetti, D. Volkmar, F. & Lord, C. (2007). Social and communication abilities and disabilities in higher functioning individuals with autism spectrum disorders: The Vineland and the ADOS. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 748-759.

- Landa, R. Holman, K. & Mayer, E. G. (2007). Social and communication development in toddlers with early and later diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64, 853–864. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.64.7.853
- Min, L. H. & Wah, L. L. (2011). Teaching of speech, language and communication skills for young children with severe autism spectrum disorders: What do educators need to know? *New Horizons in Education*, 59(3).
- Morrier, M. Hess, K. & Heflin, L. (2011). Teacher training for implementation of teaching strategies for students with Autism spectrum disorders. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 34(2), 119-132.
- Mwakalinga, J. F. (2012). *Teaching social interaction for learner with autism (a study of how teachers aim to influence development of social interaction for learners with autism)*. Universitetet i Oslo.
- Rapin, I. & Dunn, M. (2003). Update on the language disorders of individuals on the autistic spectrum. *Brain and Development*, 25, 166-172.
- Speaks, A. (2018). *Autism and social skills development school community tool kit*. Autism speaks. Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/autism-and-social-skills-development>
- Strain, P. S. & Schwartz, I. (2015). ABA and the development of meaningful social relations for young children with autism, *Focus on Autism and other developmental disabilities*, 16(2), 120-128.
- Syriopoulou-Delli, C. K. Agalotis, I. & Papaefstathiou, E. (2018). Social skills characteristics of students with autism spectrum disorder. *Int J Dev Disabil*, 64(1), 35-44. doi:10.1080/20473869.2016.1219101