Autism Spectrum Disorder: Regular Education Teachers’ Perceptions of Inclusion

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Abstract

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), 1 in every 88 children is identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Teachers need to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD in order for their inclusion to be successful. This study examined regular education teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion relative to their training on ASD. Teachers also identified barriers and benefits to inclusion. Implications for educators and school psychologists working with students with ASD are discussed.

Methods

Participants
100 out of a solicited 291 (34%) regular education teachers, K-12, from a large, suburban Mid-Western school district completed a survey online.

Instrumentation
A modified version of The Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS), created by Ji-Ryun Kim (2011) was used for the study.

- The TATIS measures attitudes and beliefs that are critical to the inclusion of students with disabilities.
- The TATIS was modified to focus specifically on attitudes on inclusion of students with ASD.

Original Cronbach Alpha: .905, Revised Scales Cronbach Alpha: .847

Descriptive Statistics

Gender: 74% females, 26% males
Teacher experience: M = 16 years, SD = 8.64
Range: 3 months - 49 years
Grade: Elementary School (47%), Middle School (20%), High School (33%)

8% (N = 8) of teachers have a degree in special education

The Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Inclusion scale (Range possible: 18-72)
- M = 48.02, SD = 5.16
- Range: 37-59

Results

A 4X1 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the impact of regular education teachers’ training (none, low, medium, and high) on attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD.

Conclusions

- Quantitative results indicated that regular education teachers who have some, medium, and high amounts of training reported more positive attitudes towards including students with ASD compared to teachers who reported not having such training.

- These results were consistent with Stoler’s study (1992), which stated that teachers had more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities when they had more special education training.

- Regular education teachers who have no training with students with ASD may gain a more positive attitude towards ASD if training is provided to them.

- The most commonly reported barriers to including a student with ASD are behavior problems. Providing teacher training on behavior management for students with ASD may increase their skills as well as their openness to including students with ASD.

Limitations

- Teachers were asked to estimate the total amount of ASD training they received, which allows for some subjectivity in the responses obtained.

References


Background on Inclusion:

- The theory behind inclusion is that both students with and without disabilities benefit when they are taught in the same classroom with high expectation and positive interactions (Eldar,Talmor & Wolf-Zuckerman, 2008).
- According to the 2008 Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, almost 90% of students with ASD spend at least some time in the regular education classroom.
- It is essential for teachers to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with different needs in order for inclusion to be successful (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009).
- The more severe the disability is, the more negative the teachers’ perception of inclusion (Smith, 2000).
- Teachers with more special education coursework had a more positive attitude towards inclusion. Also, teachers with in-service training on inclusion showed more positive attitudes towards inclusion than teachers without such training (Stoler, 1992).

Barriers to Including Students with ASD:

- A major barrier for the inclusion of students with ASD into the regular education classroom is lack of teacher training and understanding of ASD (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot, & Goodwin, 2003).
- No published studies were found in the USA that examined how teachers’ training on autism related to their attitudes towards the inclusion of children with autism in their classrooms.

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