

Perceived Knowledge of Educability and Social Acceptability of Children with Autism among Culturally Diverse Parents in Lagos State

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Abstract

This study therefore assessed the knowledge of, educability, and social acceptability of children with autism among culturally diverse parents in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study employed descriptive survey research design. The sample size was 100 parents whose children with autism purposively selected based on availability and willingness to participate in the study. Autism Awareness Scale (AWS) with reliability coefficient of 0.79 was the instrument used to collect data. Data collected were analysed using percentage, mean score, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression. The results revealed poor knowledge, negative attitudes towards education and social adaptability of their children with autism. The results further revealed significant relationship between social acceptability and perceived educability of autistic children, joint influence of cultures of the parents, level of education of parents, occupation of the parents, marital status, gender and age on perceived educability of children with autism. It was recommended that increased effort at campaign and awareness through mass media sensitization and frequent workshop to intimate public of the causes, characteristics and how to deal and relate with people with autism.

Keywords: Culturally-diverse Parents, Social Acceptance, Autism, Parents of children with Autism.

Introduction

Historically, students with disabilities have always been segregated from their parents, siblings, peers, even from society as a whole. The diverse nature of disabilities often compounds the social alienation of this group of individuals. Besides, having a child with a pervasive developmental disorder such as autism, with associated challenging behaviour and other complex needs, is likely to have an impact upon family life such as challenge of parenting, sibling interactions and social life of the concern parents and siblings. Autism, according to IDEA (2004) is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally manifest before age three associated with repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences which adversely affects a child's social and educational performance (as cited in Dahle, 2003). However, misconception of autism in children is gradually receiving attention.

The estimated prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has increased

considerably since the early epidemiological studies of 10 in 1000 for autism and 27.5 in 10,000 for autism spectrum disorders (Fombonne, 2003). The prevalence rate of autism in children varied a great deal from one region of the world to another. One out of every 68 children has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders in United States of America (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2014). However, statistics capturing autism in children are not easy to come by in Nigeria. It was also reported that the cases of autism spectrum disorders has continue to increase with more cases found in children less than three years old (CDC, 2014; Faras, Ateeqi & Tidmarsh, 2010; Webb, Jones, Kelly & Dawson, 2014). Specifically in Nigeria, children with autism are usually confused with developmental disabilities such as intellectual challenges, emotional problems, deafness and or other associated difficulties and sometimes spiritual problems that need spiritual intervention. A recent study of ASD cases in African countries including Nigeria has shown that cases of children with ASD were usually reported late in their childhood (Bakare & Munir, 2011). The late reporting of autism cases has been attributed to poor knowledge, lack of early diagnoses and adequate health care and insufficient experts for detection of

incidence of autism (Bakare & Munir, 2011).

Due to the multifarious characteristics of autism in children, it can pose peculiar challenges to teachers in a conventional school setting as well as their parents. Individual with autism spectrum disorders experience difficulties in three domains such as reciprocal social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication as well as stereotyped and repetitive behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The severity of disability varies from person to person and in degrees from mild to profound. Thus, individual with mild autism poses verbal language but demonstrates idiosyncratic social interaction, extremely conservative in changing routine activities and may exhibit behaviours odd to other people around him (Klin, McPartlan & Volkmar, 2005). On the other hand, individual with profound autism may be non-verbal or echolalic, avoid social interaction, become extremely upset when his routine is altered, demonstrate self-injurious behaviour and spend long time engaging in repetitive behaviour (Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2006). This wide range of behaviour can grossly confuse parent, teachers and caregivers and can lead to misunderstanding.

List of studies investigated the perception of parents regarding the education of their children with autism spectrum disorders with different range of severity (Wesling, 1996; Hodapp, Freeman & Kasari, 1998; Lovitt & Cushing, 1999; Wesling & Plateute, 1999). A study by Starr, Foy and Cramer (2001) on perceptions and satisfaction of parents with autism spectrum disorders regarding the education of their children. The results revealed that the parents were satisfied with education of their children. These means the participants have fair knowledge of the problems of their children and understand what education could influence in the lives of these children. Unfortunately, reports regarding knowledge of parents of children with autism in Nigeria remain scanty if not scarce though the findings by Odunsi, Preece and Gerner (2017) regarding knowledge of autism spectrum disorders among teachers revealed low and moderate knowledge. Hence, if teachers have this insignificant understanding of autism spectrum disorders, it imperative to infer that parents of children with autism with little or no awareness of this disability will demonstrate poorer knowledge and this may affect the perception of education of their children negatively.

According to Audu and Egbochuku (2010), most parents, because of lack of awareness, hide their autistic children at home because of the fear of being stigmatized or discriminated against. Even worse, some of the mothers have taken to spiritual healing and healers, which has resulted to death among some of these children with autism spectrum disorders (Audu & Egbochuku, 2010; Bakare & Munir, 2011). This is an indication of poor perceptions of some parents towards education of their children with autism and their social integration in homes and society at large. The role that stigmatization, discrimination, or lack of awareness about autism spectrum disorders played in parental response, especially in public advocacy and seeking services for children was crucial (Chukwueloka, 2016).

The socio-cultural beliefs about disability, especially in a country like Nigeria may also influence parent perceived education and social integration of children with autism at home (Chukwueloka, 2016). There were no clear explanations why mothers could not bond as a cohesive unit and advocate for their children. For instance, Lamorey (2002) has indicated that parents' beliefs about the nature of the disabilities of their children affect the way they seek help and socialise with their children with disabilities. This could have accounted for the ways parents perceive their disabled children and their education in Nigeria. In addition, the level of their education might also be potential factor that can influence the way parents perceive the benefit of education for psychologically and socially disabled individuals.

Several studies have been conducted to explore the knowledge of parents, teachers and caregivers about autism and perceived benefit of children with autism in social and cognitive behaviours. The results of these studies have yielded some pattern of correlation in some western countries. However, in Nigeria, little attention has been paid on the issue of autism and some children with this problem because of relatively new and scanty information about this disability. This study therefore investigated perceived knowledge of, educability and social acceptability of autistic children among culturally diverse parents in Lagos state.

Research Questions

The research questions answered in the study were

stated below.

1. What is the level of knowledge of parents about autism?
2. How do parents of autistic children perceive the education of children with autism?
3. How do parents of children with autism perceive social acceptability of their children?

technique was used in the selection of the samples. The children of the parents sampled demonstrated traits of autism ranging from mild to severe degree of social and psychological impairments such as unwillingness to talk, respond to facial cue, poor language composition or total inability to speak and poor cognitive behaviour. The targeted locations where the parents or respondents were chosen were the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Idi-Araba and Lagos State Teaching Hospital, Ikeja.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between social acceptability and perceived educability of children with autism.
2. Culture of the parents, level of education of parents, occupation of the parents, marital status, gender and age do not have combined influence on the perceived educability of children with autism.

Autism Awareness Scale (AWS) developed by the researchers was used to collect relevant data from the selected respondents. The AWS has two sections, namely Section A and Section B. Section A contained items that seek information on gender, level of education, ethnic background, occupation and marital status of parents or guardians. Section B gathered information on the knowledge of autism, perceived educability and social acceptability of children with autism. The AWS contained 30 items with a 4-point rating scale. The AWS was subjected to face and content validity by experts in the field of psychometrics. Thereafter, the AWS was pilot tested and reliability coefficient of 0.79 was derived after exposing it to cronbach alpha reliability method of ensuring internal consistency.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study consisted of parents of children with autism in Lagos State. The sample size of 100 parents whose children are autistic were used to gather relevant data. Purposive sampling

Result

Research Question 1: What is the level of knowledge of parents about autism?

Table 1: Parents' Knowledge of Autism (in percentage)

SN	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Autism is a mental disease that affect children	2	7	46	45
2	Diagnosis of Autism in a child does not impact the siblings/other family members of any child with autism	11	43	36	10
3	Individuals with Autism do not experience emotion	31	43	18	8
4	I believe there is no cure for Autism	46	35	13	6
5	Most individuals with Autism have an extraordinary ability	23	27	34	16
6	Autism is caused by carelessness	13	31	44	12
7	Autism is common in Nigeria	1	9	55	35
8	Autism is not a barrier to positive achievement	37	18	27	18
9	Children with autism do not function like normal human beings	60	29	11	
10	Autism does not affect the child-parent relationship.	5	33	34	28
Average		22.9	27.5	31.8	17.8

The result from Table 1 indicated that the average percentage of respondents with *strongly agree* which had an average of 22.9% and *agree* which had an average of 27.5%. Conversely, *disagree* had an average of 31.8% and *strongly disagree* had an average of 17.8%. This implies that parents' knowledge of autism is 49% (which is the summation of disagree and strongly disagree), while 51% (when *agree* and *strongly agree* are summed)

those not have a knowledge of autism. This study further revealed that parents of children with autism have poor knowledge of autism.

Research Question 2: How do parents of children with autism perceive the education of their children with autism?

Table 2: Response on Perceived Educability of Children with Autism (in percentage)

SN	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
11	I think education cannot help my child with autism to adjust in life and situations.	31	19	37	13
12	I believe efforts by teachers, parents and other bodies to help Autistic child will be a waste of time and total failure.	18	37	24	21
13	There is no teaching method in schools that can help children with autism.	14	44	28	14
14	I think children with autism cannot go to school	15	22	35	28
15	There are teaching methods in special schools for the children with Autism but I believe not all are effective in helping them to learn	29	45	16	10
16	I believe education is not necessary for children with autism	19	22	36	23
17	Child with autism has a particular gift or talent that could be developed through education alone.	11	27	48	14
18	Education is a way of making children with autism feels loved and useful.	3	16	29	52
19	I believe educating child with autism is just a waste of time and resources.	18	31	22	29
20	Child with autism performs well in activities that interests him/her.	1	38	39	22
Average		15.9	30.1	31.4	22.6

Table 3: Response on to Social Acceptability of Children with Autism (in percentage)

SN	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
<i>Social Acceptability</i>					
21	People in Nigeria think Autism in children is a sign of punishment from God for sins committed.	39	23	27	11
22	People think Autistic children are gifted and special people who can make an impact in the society.	20	39	33	8
23	Autism in children is an abomination to people in this part of this part of the world, which should be societally accepted.	12	26	36	26
24	Autism in children is as a result of witches and wizards or black magic.	10	36	28	26
25	Children with autism are problematic and should not be accepted in our society.	8	27	38	27
26	Children with autism bring disgrace to the family social status.	19	42	26	13
27	Autism in children prevents them from having friends	56	22	18	4
28	I believe siblings and extended families associate well with child with autism.	10	59	27	4
29	I believe that children with autism bring bad luck	4	26	40	30
30	Going out with my children with autism is shameful	23	31	32	14
Average		20.1	33.1	30.5	16.3

Table 2 showed that that the average percentage of respondents with *strongly agree* was 15.9%, while that of *agree* was 30%. Besides, the opinion of the respondents who *disagree* and *strongly disagree* was 31.4% and 22.6% respectively on the perception of parents on the educability of children with autism. This implied that 46% of the respondents believed (who *agreed* and *strongly disagreed*) that children

with autism can be educated while 54% of respondents (who had *disagree* and *strongly disagree*) do not shared the opinion of educating children with autism.

Research Question 3: How do parents of children with autism perceive social acceptability of their children?

Table 4: Correlation Analysis for Social Acceptability and Perceived Educability

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-calculated	r-critical	Remarks
Perceived Educability	100	26.07	6.81	98	0.66	0.202	Reject
Social Acceptability	100	24.29	6.53				

p < 0.05

Table 4 reveals that the r-calculated value of 0.66 resulted as a relationship between social acceptability and perceived educability of autistic children. The r-calculated was greater than r-critical value of 0.202, given 98 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which states that there is

significant relationship between social acceptability and perceived educability of autistic children.

Research Hypothesis 2: Culture of the parents, level of education of parents, occupation of the parents, marital status, gender and age do not have combined influence on the perceived educability of autistic children.

Table 5 shows the quality of prediction of the dependent variable as represented by R with the value 53.8%. This represents a good prediction of perception of educating children with autism through the independent variables: ethnic group,

occupation of parents, educational qualification, gender, age and marital status. The proportion of variance in the perception of autistic children that can be explained by the independent variables was 29%.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	416.26	6	69.377	6.322	.000 ^b
	Residual	1020.49	93	10.973		
	Total	1436.75	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Knowledge on Autism

b. Predictors: (Constant), Culture of parents, Occupation of Parent, Educational Qualification, Gender, Age, Marital Status

Table 6 shows that the overall regression model as represented by F-ratio 6.322 is a good for the data. The table shows that the independent variables

statistically significantly predict the perceived educability of children with autism ($F(6, 93) = 6.322, p < .005$).

Table 7: Independent Variables Coefficients
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.
		Coefficients	Std. Error	Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	22.939	2.635		8.705	.000
	Age	-1.018	.550	-.207	-1.849	.068
	Gender	.309	.702	.041	.440	.661
	Occupation of Parents	2.121	.561	.345	3.780	.000
	Educational Qualification	.602	.558	.101	1.079	.283
	Marital Status	-.652	.772	-.096	-.845	.400
	Culture	-.263	.559	-.043	-.470	.639

a. Dependent Variable: Knowledge on Autism

Table 7 shows the extent to which perceived educability of autistic children vary with Age (-0.207), Gender (0.041), Occupation of Parents (0.345), Educational Qualification of Parents (0.101), Marital Status (-0.092) and Culture (-0.043). This indicates that age, marital status and ethnic group varies negatively with the perceived educability of autistic children, while gender, occupation and educational qualification vary positively. However, only occupation of parents (with $p < 0.05$) has significant positive relationship with perceived educability of autistic children. This means that the higher the education qualification of parents, the more likely they tend to educate autistic children.

Discussion of Findings

The findings based on the research question 1 revealed evidence of poor knowledge among parents of children with autism. The poor knowledge of these parents can be attributed to lack of education negative perception of and attitude towards disabilities. The result corroborated the findings of Audu and Egbochuku (2010) that most parents, because of lack of awareness, hide their children with autism at home because of the fear of being stigmatized or discriminated against. Lack of awareness among parents of autistic children came

out poor knowledge of this disability, because autism is sometimes perceive as intellectual disability, emotional disturbance and hearing impairment amongst others. The study of Odunsi, Preece and Gerner (2017) regarding knowledge of autism revealed that most teachers who were supposed to be the custodian of knowledge demonstrated poor knowledge of this type of disability and so, parents having poor knowledge of their children disability might not be out of place. This might be the reason why parents report the case of their children with autism very late as observed by Bakare and Munir (2011) and that attitude has been attributed to the immediate cause of poor knowledge among parents.

The finding based on research question 2 revealed that parents of children with autism do not believe in the education of these children. This is because of fact that parent of children with autism perceived that their children could not gain from educational activities, because of the perceived poor performances in socio-cognitive activities as mostly demonstrated in form of deficit in verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction and extremely conservative in changing routine activities. This finding seems contrary to the study by Starr, Foy and Cramer (2001) on perceptions and satisfaction of parents with autism spectrum disorders regarding the education of their children. The results revealed that

the parents were satisfied with education of their children. This means that the participants have fair knowledge of the problems of their children and understand what education could influence in the lives of these children. The difference in the finding could be attributed to the fact that studies were conducted in different environment and regions. Nevertheless, the finding of research question two opened new frontier to more research and intervention on cases of autism in Nigeria.

The finding based on research question 3 revealed that parents of children with autism do not believe in the ability of their children to effectively socialise. This could be attributed to a number of challenges faced by children with autism, which could be non-verbal or echolalic, avoiding social interaction, becoming extremely upset when his routine is altered, demonstrating self-injurious behaviour and spending long time engaging in repetitive behaviour (Starr, Foy, Cramer & Singh, 2006). Audu and Egbochuku (2010) noted that most parents hide their children with autism at home because of the fear of being stigmatized or discriminated against. Sometimes some parents have resulted to taken their children to spiritual healing homes and healers, which have resulted to death of some of these children (Audu & Egbochuku, 2010; Bakare & Munir, 2011).

The study also revealed significant relationship between perceived social acceptability and educability of children with autism and that all the independent variables jointly influence perceived educability of children with autism. The relationship between social acceptability and education of children with autism demonstrated strong link between socialisation and education. In effect education is socialization and socialization is education. This finding revealed why lack of education has influenced the way people relate with individuals with disabilities most especially in Africa. The finding lends credence to Audu and Egbochuku (2010) submission's that most parents, because of lack of awareness hide their autistic children at home

and may not allow them to go to school or interact with people around them. This seriously has implication on the potential of these children. Furthermore, the joint influence of all the independent variables corroborated the findings by (Odunsi, Preece & Gerner ; Chukwueloka, 2016 ; Bakare & Munir, 2011; Lamorey, 2002) who all reported in their different studies the influence of cultures of the parents, level of education of parents, occupation of the parents, marital status, gender and age on the ways parents perceived benefit of autistic children in education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is on perceived knowledge, educability and social acceptability of children with autism among culturally diverse parents in Lagos state. The results revealed poor knowledge, lack of interest in the education of their children and negative perception of social acceptability of this group of children. It further revealed relationship between social acceptability and perceive educability and joint influence of cultures of the parents, level of education of parents, occupation of the parents, marital status, gender and age on the ways parents perceived benefit of autistic children in education.

The implications of these are that parents of these children need enlightenment about the situation of their children so as to know how to cope with them. More public awareness should be created through media sensitization and frequent workshop to intimate public of the causes, characteristics and how to deal and relate with people with autism. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to report the case of their children with autism as early as possible for early and proper intervention.

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