

GENERAL EDUCATORS ATTITUDE TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IN GENERAL EDUCATION: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract: *General educators attitude towards their student plays a significant role in shaping their students to success. General educators commonly placed in general education setting with most of their students is typical development students and only a few with special needs. General educators commonly associate it with having no or basic experience in handling special need students, hence the poor attitudes towards them. The current scoping review is solely to focus on the effects of general educators attitude towards students with ASD. Three databases searched yielded ten relevant articles. There were mixed findings regarding the impact of having minimum experience in handling special needs students and positive attitudes. In summary, general educators attitude towards the inclusion of students with ASD in general education setting is positive but we highlight the effects to improve general educators attitude so the experience of students with ASD in general education setting is better and acceptable. Further research is needed to study general educators attitude towards other disabilities other than ASD.*

Keywords: *Autism spectrum disorder, General educators, Attitude, General Education, Inclusion.*

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a rapidly growing disorder with many youths being diagnosed with developmental disabilities caused by brain impairments. Youth with ASD commonly graduate in general education settings and have minimum potential in completing post-secondary education or pursuing general education. Past study mentioned that, in educating students with ASD, educators need to professionally train as it is a major challenge for them. Youth with ASD commonly associate with having difficulty in communication, social skills deficits, and repetitive and sensory based characteristics. According to the National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM), students with ASD will be a barrier for education institution and educators as they were different from typical development students.

Ring et al., (2008) mentioned in his past study that, the terms ASD has two different ends with the first one particularly stands form Kanner syndrome which includes low-functionality individuals, while the other ends stand for Asperger syndrome with highly functional individuals. For students with ASD, they are commonly diagnosed with Asperger syndrome or based on the folks term, High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD) that usually enrolled in higher education as they have high functionality and great intellectual ability with least support needed.

Nonetheless, the need to help individuals with HFASD to develop as others is yet being priorities. In context with this review, inclusive education being the main issue for students with HFASD and are general educators able to provide it with the training provided for them. Prior study by (Talib & Paulson, 2015), they mentioned that students with autism are frequently placed in mainstream classes, implying that general educators must be prepared to accommodate the needs of these children.

The rights to provide everyone with proper education have been provided under the authority of Article 12 of the Federal Constitution in Malaysia. (Othman et al., 2022) stated that, for person with disabilities (PwD), PwDs and children with disabilities have their educational rights under Section 28 of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, where they cannot be excluded from general education system regardless of their disabilities. It is vital for everyone to be included in education to enhance their capability, knowledge, and skills aside from assisting them with fundamental work credentials to secure job pathways.

Challenges are not only because of the complex disability that effect brain impairments define as pervasive developmental disorder. Students with HFASD may also need different supports according to their various functioning levels that describes the severity of the disorder. Past study by (Segall, 2008) mentioned that, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition – Text Revision ([DSM-IV-TR] ASD cause them to be socially incapable, having fixation in certain topic or area that interest them and recurring behaviors.

Furthermore, with the increasing prevalence of students with ASD, (Gardiner & Iarocci, 2014) reported that more students with ASD is enrolling into post-secondary institutions and to facilitate their needs, strategies are to be made. Hence, to appropriately provide these students in education, educators need to be knowledgeable relating students with ASD. Preparation for educators to provide inclusive education has been positively seen in special education educators as they are given enough training on how to manage students with ASD. However, for general educators, it is less common for them to receive proper training in educating students with ASD.

Despite these challenges, to meet the law mandates for students with ASD, they are commonly being placed in mainstream education with mostly general educators for co-teaching to provide support needed. Few past studies have highlighted that most general educators lack knowledge and experience in educating students with ASD. (Talib & Paulson, 2015) mentioned that it is crucial for instructors to have proper information and ideas about autism to satisfy the complex academic and social requirements of children with autism. This is particularly vital since some of the remarkable abilities of autistic individuals may cause teachers to overlook their social and academic abilities, leading to teachers' failure to give adequate assistance.

In Malaysian Education Development Plan (MEDP 2013-2025) and the Education Development Plan 2015-2025 (Higher Education), one of the key indicators of performance is emphasizing inclusive education which begin to gain attention (Suhaila Samian & Rohani, 2020). Inclusive education is where special needs students study with typical development (TD) students in a classroom with the same goal in maximizing their potential. Inclusive education is a form of education that provides space for students with learning disabilities like slow learner, mental retarded, down syndrome, and autism to learn together with the TD peers. Educating students with ASD has been a great pressure for educators as it is quite challenging to fulfil the children needs and support. According to The National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM), students with ASD will be a threat for education institutions and educators as the students are different from typical development children.

Literature Review

Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) terms describes best as neurological condition that impairs brains function, which is a complex developmental impairment that commonly manifests in the first three years of life. According to the NASOM, males are four times more likely to have autism than females. ASD does not only crosscut through family income, lifestyle, and education attainment, but also shows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries. Prior study showed that in past years, the prevalence of autism is estimated to increase in one out of sixty-eight infants which develop the disorder and behaviors related to it.

Following the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), autism can only be diagnosed by professional such as, pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and speech pathologists with using the DSM-5-TR guidelines produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). This is to ensure only an accurate diagnosis is made and to avoid inaccurate and wrong treatment given to the children. According to DSM-5-TR, there are few criteria for ASD diagnosis. For instance, the basic characteristic of ASD is when a child has difficulties in social communication and restricted, repetitive and/or sensory behaviors or interests. When diagnosing ASD in children, they might have only one characteristic or in both areas, and having characteristics from early childhood which might not develop until later in their childhood phase.

Furthermore, the diagnosed children are then classified into three different functioning levels that show how much support they need to attain their daily life functions. The functioning levels are varied according to the severity of the disorder diagnosed. According to DSM-5-TR, the first level is when children need support, the second level is when the children need substantial support, and the third level is when the children need very substantial support. These levels

illustrate the numerous ways in which traits of autism have an impact on people's daily life. Some people require a lot of help, while others simply require a little.

The diagnostic specifies the degree of support for each area. This implies that children's support levels for their confined, repetitive, and/or sensory behaviors may differ from those for their social communication abilities. Conversely, it can be that both areas receive the same degree of support. Support levels might fluctuate over time. This occurs when kids mature and experience developmental changes. Changes in family life, such as the birth of siblings, or transfers from childcare to primary school to secondary school are some examples of these adjustments.

According to Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG) by Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia on Management of ASD in Children and Adolescents, early diagnosis, and immediate action of children with ASD is important for best results. This is because the increasing number of children with speech delay and social interaction difficulties lead to inaccurate diagnosis and frequently placed in special education classes without proper treatment. This will increase the risk of the disorder becoming severe and optimal potential of the child is delayed.

Following the definition of ASD which characterized the disorder into communication, behavior, and social interaction impairments, children with ASD are also exposed to vary difficulties and comorbidities. They are also exposed to emotional, attentional, active, thought, behavioral, and medical problems due to having ASD. Comorbidities are critical for early detection as it may cause significant clinical abnormality in children with ASD. Besides that, according to CPG by MOH Malaysia, children with ASD are significantly associates with intellectual disability which cause to they to perform poorly in academic performance. Aside from that, there are also a few other difficulties ranging from sleep problems, epilepsy, gastrointestinal problems, motor coordination, and other psychiatric disorders.

Overview of General Educators Attitude

Educators play a significant role in providing appropriate education for their students whether for special need students or typical development students. General and special education educators are needed to fully equip with sufficient knowledge, positive attitude, and great experience to protect students with HFASD from being bullied by their typical developments peers that might lack of awareness relating to the disorder. However, past studies have reported that many general educators lack experience in managing and educating students with HFASD which has significant impact to their knowledge.

Experience is best described as an event that leaves an impression on someone throughout the process of going through it. Experience builds a great lesson for someone in the process of learning something new to gain better knowledge and understanding. In this study, general educators experience is being assessed to provide an overview of how experience affects successful inclusion in education towards students with HFASD on hospitality course. Prior studies by many researchers reported that general educators commonly have low, or none experience in managing and educating students with HFASD than special education educators. It is proven in a study by (Segall, 2008), that general educators who have minimal experience in educating students with HFASD, have less knowledge relating to the disorder.

Data gathered by (Ballantyne et al., 2021) showed that, with greater experience in educating students with HFASD, it will impact educators knowledge about the disorder. In addition, the

study also highlighted that general educators with mostly less experience reflect on lower knowledge scores due to lack of understanding and awareness towards students with HFASD.

Having solid experience, enough knowledge, and a positive attitude towards students with HFASD helps educators to be fully aware and understand what the disorder is. Despite their expertise, general educators are needed to also be kind, patient and predictable to achieve successful inclusion on hospitality course towards students with HFASD in vocational streams. Consequently, general educators are found to be incapable of providing successful inclusion for students with HFASD due to their lack of knowledge and understanding towards the disorders. A study by (Simó-Pinatella et al., 2023) stated that insufficient knowledge is one of the barriers in providing inclusive education. Knowledge relating to ASD is very crucial for educators as the students might need substantial support to fulfil their need. Students with HFASD are diagnosed with brain impairment which causes them to have difficulty in two main areas which are social communication and interaction and repetitive and recurring behaviors. Next, general educators attitude towards students with ASD is assessed to evaluate the perception of the educators towards these students. Students diagnosed with HFASD are commonly seen with challenging behaviors due to their brain impairment that cause them to behave likewise. This normally impacted educators positive or negative attitude towards students with HFASD because they lack understanding on how to manage their behaviors effectively.

Besides, to properly accommodate these students in vocational streams, educators are needed to be knowledgeable about the disorder and each of their students behaviors. Prior study mentioned that despite the fact all autistic students have common underlying impairments, no two are exactly alike (Talib & Paulson, 2015). For example, one of the students with HFASD might have intellectual ability but also have speech and language impairments which make them to socially communicate and interact with people while others might suffer emotional functioning impairment or displayed restricted interest in certain areas. Students with HFASD that demonstrates restricted behaviour, or repetition of behaviors might have hard times in shifting from normal situations to different situations due to their rigid routines in conjunction with having fixation in interests.

Material and Methods

Study design and protocol

A scoping review method was employed, as this method can be used to identify gaps in existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The main outcome of this scoping reviews was the effect of general educators attitude toward inclusion of students with ASD in general education. Thus, for the effects, the study had to report on the attitude of general educators towards students with autism and the factor of it. For this review, only papers published in English journal article and review paper were included, in line with other eligibility of accessing paper that focus only on general educators, attitude, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), inclusion, and general education.

Formulation of research question

The following research question was created in this study to guide the scoping review: what is the effect of general educators attitude towards the inclusion of students with ASD in general education?

Systematic Searching Strategies

The systematic searching techniques included three phases: identification, screening, and eligibility. These steps were carried out to guarantee a thorough study (Figure 1).

Identification

The first stage of this systematic searching is identification where it was performed to enhance the keywords applied in the search process. At this stage, it is essential to use multiple keywords and databases to avoid retrieval bias. The search for this review were based on the keywords; autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other in line keywords such as high functioning autism spectrum disorder (HFASD), autism, ASD, general education, university, attitude, general educators, inclusion, and experience. The article used was retrieved from several databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Science Direct. This stage had retrieved ten potential articles for the scoping review.

Screening

The second process of this systematic search strategy is crucial where it distinguished between potential and non-potential articles that suit this review paper. For this review paper that focuses on autism spectrum disorder and general educators attitude, minimal relevant past paper was obtained as some of the paper is not relevant to this scoping review conducted. However, ten potential papers are obtained and selected for the scoping review.

Eligibility

The selected twenty-two papers were re-examined to ensure conformity to the selection criteria in the third procedure, which pertains to eligibility. The abstracts were evaluated at this stage to determine the eligibility of the papers. If the article's appropriateness was not clearly expressed in the title, the complete text was skimmed. Consequently, twelve publications were eliminated because they varied from autism spectrum disorder, general educators, attitude, inclusion, and general education settings. As a result, ten papers were eventually chosen for the scoping review.

Data extraction and analysis

The data extraction process was guided by the research question. All data extracted from the selected studies were related to the effect of general educators attitude toward inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings. The indirect impacts were considered upon determining their ability to address the research question.

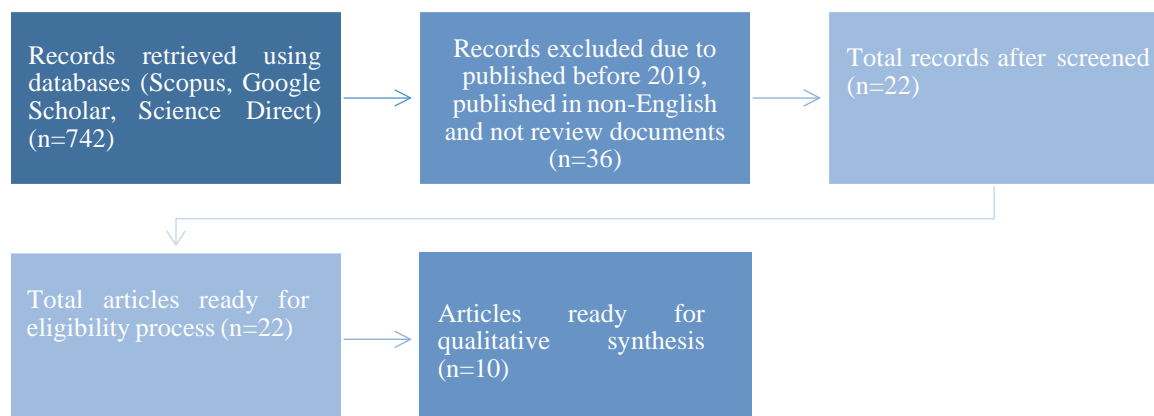


Figure 1: Systematic Searching Strategies for Scoping Review

Results

However, study by (Leonard & Smyth, 2022) mentioned that educators who had training or no did not have significant different attitudes towards inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings. He mentioned that most educators finished their training as part of their professional development journey to finish their degree hence there is no significant relationship between trained educators and their attitudes. Furthermore, a study by (Gómez-marí et al., 2022) showed that educators participating in that study reported to have both negative and positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings. Based on the data obtained, only four educators have positive attitudes towards ASD and their inclusion. While other educator has (Gómez-marí et al., 2022) neutral attitudes as shown by the past study. Different from other scholars, (Gómez-marí et al., 2022) highlighted that, the awareness of inclusion is raise with the training they participate. Different from other scholars, studies by (Russell et al., 2022) showed that factors influencing educators attitudes are not solely due to lack of training as it is not clear whether it relates to the positivity educator attitudes or negative attitudes. This study also highlighted that; self-efficacy of educators has significant relationship toward educators attitudes of inclusion for students with ASD. Educators self- efficacy showed positive relationship based on three past studies where it was assessed. Besides that, in this study it is also mentioned that resources and funding are not necessarily important which relate to students with ASD inclusion.

Discussion

The finding of this scoping review shows that, not all general educators have positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings, but some have neutral and negative attitudes. This finding contrasts with previous study which highlighted that general educators have positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings. A study by (Russell et al., 2022) stated that educators attitudes were influenced by experience and training, personal factors, perceived needs, and students skills. According to his findings, it is mentioned that even though students with ASD is the threat for education institutions due to their disabilities, it is proven that most educators recorded positive attitudes towards these students. Training and experience in handling students with ASD are greatly highlighted by past study to be one of the major influences for educators positive attitudes. Based on all the findings, this review provides an insight on the effects of general educators attitude towards the inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings.

Conclusion

This scoping review on the effect of general educators attitude towards inclusion students with ASD in general education settings signifies that educator positive attitude helps in encouraging these students to be motivated in learning like other typical developments peers. This study concludes that educators attitude does affect inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings. Although issues related to educators experience, training, and knowledge, as well as their impacts on inclusion of students with ASD , emerged as significant, exploration to gain better understanding relating this study. Different views between scholars on whether general educators that were trained or not contribute to their attitude. However, not all general educators have positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with ASD in general education settings which will affect the students motivation to learn in mainstream classroom. The effects of general educators negative attitudes would really affect students with ASD as some of them might need substantial support from caregivers or educators to assist their daily life. Students with ASD commonly associate with social skills and communication deficits hence the negative attitude of the educators will make them demotivated to learn and will not

acquire needed skills. Besides, general educators also influence these students to fully grasp certain skills according to their ability which will help their future and being employed.

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