

Peer-Mediated Support Strategies for Enhancing Social Interaction Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Public Primary Schools, Migori County, Kenya

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Abstract

A fundamental feature of social life is social interaction, or the ways in which people act with other people and react to how other people are acting, which is a deficit in learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Public Primary Schools in Kenya. It sought to establish peer-mediated strategies enhancing social interactions of children with Autism in Migori County, Kenya. The objectives were: peer-mediated strategies currently used by teachers, the extent to which play activities enhance social interactions of children with ASD, the influence of peer buddy approach on social interactions of children with ASD, the effect of peer networks on social interactions of children with ASD, and investigation of peer implemented pivotal response training on enhancement of social interactions in children with ASD. Observational Learning Theory was adopted and a descriptive survey design in this study. The sample size constituted 30% of target population: 10 schools, 10 head teachers and 37 assistant teachers. Thirty-four children with Autism and 64 typically developing peers also participated in this study. Five Educational Assessment and Resource Centre coordinators from each Sub-County education office in Migori County and 5 parents of children with Autism also participated in the study. The sampling techniques used in this study were stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Mixed method approach was used to gather data. The research instruments used were questionnaires, interview schedule, Focus Group Discussion, and observation checklists. Piloting of the study was done at Senye Primary school in Nyatike Sub-County and analysis of instruments revealed a reliability of 0.80. Validity of the instruments was judged by the experts. The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The main techniques used to analyze the data were Predictive Analysis Software (PASW) formerly Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22 and Chi-Square. The major findings of this study were that peer-mediated strategies such as play activities, peer buddy approach, peer networks, and peer-implemented pivotal response training, enhanced social interactions of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This study recommended that: Ministry of Education should develop programmes to ensure retention of children with Autism in public primary schools and initiate a competence-based curriculum that allows children with Autism to learn at their own pace and interest; parents of children with Autism should be trained on peer-mediated strategies to use with their children to enhance social interactions at home; the findings of this study should inform active formulation of policies and legislation relevant to the plight of children with Autism; Teacher Training Institutions and Universities should incorporate in their curriculum peer-mediated strategies enhancing social interactions in children with Autism to promote inclusion. Further research should be carried out in all counties in Kenya on peer-mediated strategies enhancing social interactions in children with Autism. In addition, further research should consider other areas of functioning in children with Autism. A similar study should be conducted in special schools serving children with Autism in Kenya.

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