

Lived Experiences of Parents Using Speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Wenefredo E. Cagape, EdD, PhD^a, Honey Rose Ladylee M. Dela Cruz^b, Jonelyn P. Mission^c
 Catherine L. Rubillar^d, Maria Riena D. Saturos^e, Jineth D. Taniongon^f, Rosie Lyn G. Tuba^g

^a cagapefred@gmail.com/ ^b hrlmdelacruz01587@usep.edu.ph/ ^c jpmission01582@usep.edu.phc /
^d clrubillar01831@usep.edu.ph/ ^e mrdsaturos02049@usep.edu.ph/ ^f jdtaniongon01813@usep.edu.phc /
^g rlg tuba01812@usep.edu.ph

^aOIC – College President, City College of Davao, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

^bCollege Registrar at Davao De Oro State College Main Campus, Compostela, Davao De Oro, 8803, Philippines

^cOffice Clerk at LGU Compostela, Davao De Oro 8803 Philippines

^dSHS Teacher III at Catalunan Pequeño National High School, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

^eJHS Teacher at Catalunan Pequeño National High School, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

^fAccounting Clerk at Terminal Facilities and Services Corporation, Davao City, Davao del Sur, 8000, Philippines

^gAdministrative Coordinator at Hackett Security Agency, 726 Veloso St., Barrio Obrero, Davao City, Davao Del Sur 8000, Philippines

Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) poses difficulties in social communication and behavior, especially for families with nonverbal children. Speech therapy shows promise as an intervention to enhance communication skills in nonverbal children with autism. However, there is still a gap in understanding the experiences of parents actively involved in this therapy. This qualitative research aims to explore the intricate affairs of parents utilizing speech therapy to improve communication skills in their nonverbal children with ASD. The objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of their journey and uncover the coping mechanisms employed by these parents. By grounding the study in Symbolic Interactionism and nativistic theory, it delves into the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and rewards associated with speech therapy. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design and case study approach, the study involves a participant with ASD, their family, teachers, and therapists. Ethical considerations prioritize participant confidentiality and well-being. The results highlight the impact of speech therapy on the child's communication skills, the challenges faced, coping strategies, and community support. The insights reveal the significance of collaboration among parents, therapists, and support systems, emphasizing the integration of therapy into daily life.

Furthermore, the perspective of a sibling provides unique insights into the advantages and challenges of living with a sibling with ASD. Overall, this study offers a profound understanding of the family's journey, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts, communication, and the transformative power of therapy beyond its core principles. The findings provide invaluable insights for families, therapists, and communities, shedding light on the human aspect of ASD and the necessity for extensive support.

Keywords: Autism, Speech Therapy, Communication, Children with ASD, Parents' Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Philippines

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by a range of challenges in social communication and behavior, often presenting unique hurdles for families, particularly those with nonverbal children. Among the various interventions available, speech therapy has emerged as a promising avenue for enhancing communication skills in nonverbal children with autism. While studies have explored the effectiveness of speech therapy, there remains a notable gap in understanding the lived experiences of parents actively engaged in this therapeutic process.

This qualitative research endeavors to delve into the intricate tapestry of the experiences of parents who have embarked on the journey of utilizing speech therapy to foster communication skills in their nonverbal children with autism.

By exploring the nuanced narratives of these parents, we aim to provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of their journey. Furthermore, this research seeks to unravel the coping mechanisms employed by parents as they grapple with the demands and expectations associated with speech therapy. Through these insights, we aspire to contribute not only to the academic discourse surrounding autism and speech therapy but also to inform practical interventions and support systems that can enhance the overall well-being of families raising nonverbal children with autism. The knowledge garnered from this study is poised to resonate with clinicians, educators, and policymakers alike, fostering a more empathetic and practical approach to supporting families in their pursuit of improved communication skills for their nonverbal children with autism.

1.1. Related Literature

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is a diverse neurodevelopmental disorder, and it is scientifically characterized by a lack of socialization skills, an absence of creative playing, expressive and receptive language, and repeated behavioral and specific patterns, desires, and actions. The key characteristics of autism were based on three pillars: Dysfunction in both social and non-social situations can result in inadequate or improper socialization. Rigidity and perseverance involve both stereotypic actions, such as meaningless repeated actions and resistance to adapt (Calkin, 2020). Researchers have shown that children with autism are also struggling in various ways, such as socializing, communication, and cognitive processing that cause hearing incentives to be attended, imitated, controlled, and understood. Children with autism require alternate means of communication. The sensory prompt could be in the form of pictures, cards, symbols, written sentences, or tangible and subjective examples of the natural world (La Roche, Bush, & D'Angelo, 2018).

Age of manifestation. In children with autism, language loss commonly occurs very shortly when the kids reach age two. According to studies from parents of autistic children, 25 percent began producing speech around 12 months and 18 months before they lost language. Many trials and studies have shown that language and speech disorders have had sufficient impact on other aspects of development to play a significant role in improving communication with ASD children by developing successful therapies (Mehlenbacher, 2017).

PECS vs. SGD. The relative effectiveness of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) vs. a speech-generating instrument (SGD) was discussed as a single-topic longitudinal study for the acquisition of skills to request three primary children with extreme autism. The results showed an improvement in stressful output for all participants through both intervention processes (Koegel, Bryan, Su, Vaidya, & Camarata, 2020).

Effective Techniques to Enhance Communication Skills. Therefore, the vibrant need for initial and functional communication instruction for children with ASD was created. It will be impossible to choose the most effective technique for a single

ASD child between parents and the psychiatrist in an environment where multiple communication training interventions are possible. Children with ASD have numerous characteristics and issues, so it could be hard to say which intervention is better for a specific individual or related to diagnosis and which children would benefit from augmentative and alternative communication. On the other hand, the responses of different ASD children remained different to interventions, so it is challenging to reach one approach to intervention decisions (Alzayer, Muharib, & Wood, 2020). As the reactions of multiple ASD children have been different from treatments, one solution to intervention decision is rugged to come up with. Language instruction explored speech and comprehension difficulties and complications and aimed to enhance oral, nonverbal, and social communication. The key aim was to encourage individual cooperation in more appropriate and effective ways. There would be differences in communication and language disorders; others would not be able to communicate, and some would not speak, nor could they speak and understand the physical reactions and facial gestures as they engage with others (Doak, 2018).

Preliminary Checklist. An SLP pathologist evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the individual's comprehension and then established specific objectives before beginning language-speaking therapy. The main goals of the treatment were to enhance linguistic abilities, to acquire non-verbal skills such as signals or expressions, and to interact by alternative methods (e.g., pictures and technology) (HICHOOR, 2019).

Practical Communication. There have been several ways to improve practical communication skills. This system (PECS) has been considered a unique training and development method designed to circumvent speech problems to teach functional speech to children with autism and associated intellectual disorders. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) was recognized and accepted. Its conjectural foundations are based on the applied study of actions and alternatives and increased connectivity (Vento-Wilson, 2019).

PECS as a curriculum. PECS was recognized as a curriculum for manual education for children about the use of a clinical and school communications method dependent on an exchange; it was the traditional choice for care with Nonverbal ASD children. This technique has many benefits compared to the practices of imitation (both verbal and gestural) and symbolic collection. The device started by swapping the one primary symbol and then progressed gradually into the form of the phrase. The machine also emphasized that the request utility was established earlier than its ability to address fundamental questions or to make various observations (Kurniawan, 2018). Although training in functional communication and speech production may be seen as the priority of the PECS programs, it was established that it was a precious advantage. Persons who were nonverbal or spoke small wanted a contact device they could quickly start to use. You may know about the picture exchange communications scheme whether you are in special education or have a child with an autism diagnosis (PECS) (Hu & Lee, 2019). It was accepted because of its evidence-based practice and because it succeeded when applied in accordance. For objects, behaviors, and other individuals to be sought, PECS offered a very valuable methodology and applied behavior analysis theory to include and encourage social interactions. PECS began with random requests and moved to answering questions about things in the environment (Ferreira et al., 2017). It was also important to consider that while PECS was initially designed for younger learners with autism but was eventually used with a wide range of learners of all ages with different cognitive, physical, and communication issues and difficulties (Raja, Saringat, Mustapha, & Zainal, 2017).

Other Techniques to Enhance Communication. Additional techniques, such as manual signs, voice generators, naturalistic language training, and linguistic modelization, were contrasted with PECS intervention. Several trials have shown some tests that PECS works better than sign and symbol and that there is still little consideration behind PECS processing interference for speed and verbal stimulation techniques with time-delay. The study's result is parallel to emphasizing the value of broad support networks, the transformational power of communication, and the necessity of teamwork. By sharing these firsthand accounts, the study sheds light on the personal aspects of ASD and offers invaluable insights for families, therapists, and communities at large (Gavrilov, 2019).

Challenges of the family. Assisting an adult with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may lead to stress in the family, but it can also foster resilience and personal development. There is still a dearth of research shedding light on how typically developing siblings navigate their distinct sibling relationships as adults (Noonan et al., 2018).

Related Studies on Coping Mechanisms. Moreover, Wright et al. (2010) conducted a study delving into how mothers perceive coping strategies to manage their parenting stressors. They engaged in detailed interviews with 11 mothers to explore the methods these mothers use personally to cope. Through coding these interviews, the researchers identified several coping strategies, including "me time," planning, understanding the power of knowledge, sharing responsibilities, breaking free from labels, and acknowledging moments of joy. The insights from this study could offer valuable support to mothers of children with ASD. Additionally, they could serve as informative guidance for pediatric therapists assisting children with ASD and their families. The said study is related to the present because it also aims to identify the coping mechanisms of parents with ASD children.

Another study akin to the current research is the work by Grey I., Lynn E., and McClean B. (2010) titled "Parents of Children with Autism: Another study akin to the current research is the work by Grey I., Lynn E., and McClean B. (2010) titled "Parents of children with autism: experiences of education service provision in the Republic of Ireland." This study delves into the experiences of parents concerning educational approaches for their children with autism. The researchers conducted fourteen interviews: seven with parents whose children attended a school offering Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI) and seven with parents whose children received standard statutory education within a specialized class for autistic children linked to a mainstream school. This class, aligned with the prevailing guidelines from the Department of Education and Science, employed various approaches.

Through thematic analysis of responses from a 30-item interview, six key themes emerged: resource availability, assessment methods, communication, staff training and qualifications, inclusion and integration, and the experiences and roles of parents. The responses indicated a contrast in parental experiences concerning providing educational services between the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) and non-ABA schools, with parents expressing higher overall satisfaction with the ABA-based school.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To describe the lived experiences of parents in using Speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
2. To identify the coping mechanism of parents in using Speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

1.3. Theoretical Lenses

This study is guided by Symbolic Interactionism by Herbert Blumer, 1969, which states that a person's behavior is a product of constant social interaction. (Havens J., 2021) That the colors, symbols, and words can provoke different behaviors. It's a socially constructed

perspective, a shared character by society, the meaning that the community gives to a particular event or social interaction that passes from generation to generation through language. (Nickerson C., 2023) This social cognitive theory helps the researchers understand the lived experiences of parents who have a non-verbal child with ASD who is undergoing speech therapy to enhance the child's communication skills in a way that, through communication, they can adapt, adjust, and modify how they behave and react to society. Raising a non-verbal child with ASD is challenging because not only does the child need special care, but the parents also need to cope with the surroundings to enhance their family's well-being. SI helps in identifying the social influences within the family, community, and teachers, and it guides us, the researchers, to coin the lived experiences of the parents in using speech therapy to enhance the communication skills of their non-verbal children with ASD.

Another theory that guides our study is the nativistic theory by Noam Chomsky; children acquire language structure appropriate for their age naturally as they grow, if they manifest otherwise most likely they would need to improve through therapy. Combining words, phrases, and sentences lets them convey messages to others (Xavier A., 2020).

1.4. Schematic Diagram

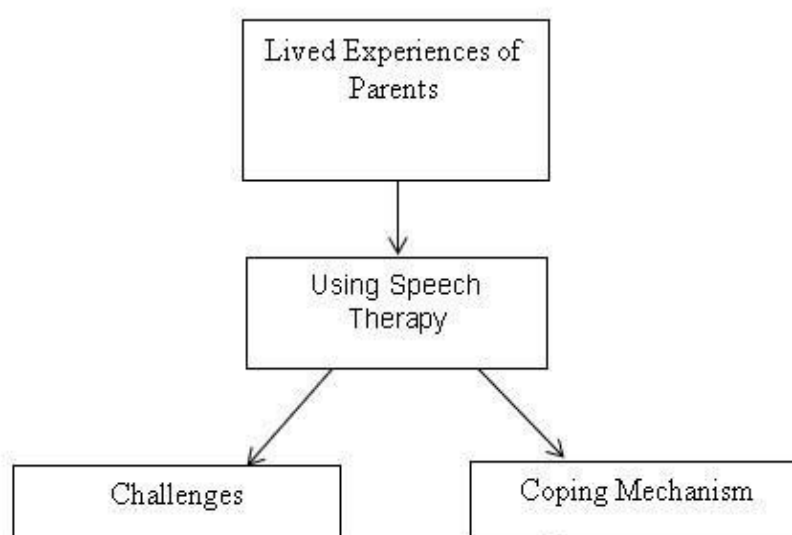


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram

This schematic diagram showed the representation of the components of parents' lived experiences using speech therapy to enhance communication skills in nonverbal children with autism spectrum disorder. Most of the studies state that using speech therapy for nonverbal children with ASD highlights the challenges, coping mechanisms, and rewards of this intervention. Overall, this schematic diagram is the basis of the researcher's investigation of student's perceptions and experiences.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

This research study aims to uncover the lived experiences of Parents Using Speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of parents using Speech Therapy in handling a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder?
2. What are the challenges and coping mechanisms faced by parents using Speech Therapy in handling a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

2. Research Design and Methodology

The researchers use a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of parents raising children with autism, and it also involves a case study. The main aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive and in-depth insight into the real-life experiences of a child with autism. It delves into the lived experiences of a child's nonverbal communication with Autism Spectrum Disorder from the perspective of parents, teachers, and therapists in using Speech Therapy to Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and identifying their coping mechanisms in using speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills in Nonverbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

As Yin (2003) pointed out and cited by Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study design is appropriate in several situations:

1. When research attempts to answer "how" and "why" questions.
2. When researchers are unable to change the behavior of the individual participants in the study.
3. when there is a desire to consider contextual issues because they are deemed relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.
4. When there is a doubt to distinguish the incident from the surrounding context.

The chosen research methodology is the main aim of the study to elucidate the communication skills necessary to meet the needs of the child, by identifying strategies that can enhance their communication abilities.

2.1. Participants of the Study

The research team has engaged one participant and three key informants, each with unique background:

Eoin (pseudonym) is a 15-year-old diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Speech Language Delay. He attends occupational therapy and is enrolled in a SPED school in Davao City. His focus areas include listening, memory retention, task completion, and communication skills.

Farah, the child's mother, is a dedicated full-time mother to his son who stopped her job to give full attention to his child. Romy, the child's father, is dedicated to his work to support his son who stopped from her job to give full attention to his child. His older brother Eric is currently studying and at the same time helping his mother to take care of Eoin.

The interview questions centered around the interactions of these informants with the participants. Extracting responses from these three informants yielded 120 significant statements,

revealing three prominent themes derived from their experiences in supporting and working with the participant.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

In this qualitative research, the researchers prioritized ethical concerns to safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Steps were taken to ensure that the participants' identities remained anonymous in the reports, preserving their privacy. The researchers were considerate of the participants' daily routines, ensuring minimal disruption caused by their involvement in the study and prioritizing their well-being. Before participation, informed consent was diligently obtained, offering comprehensive details about the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature. A consent form, accompanied by a permission letter outlining key study components, was provided for participants to sign, signifying their comprehension and willingness to engage. Upholding confidentiality was a core commitment for the researchers, with a pledge not to disclose any participant names in publications or presentations. These ethical measures were implemented to avert potential harm and safeguard the collected data from unauthorized access, thereby upholding the study's integrity.

3. Results and Discussion

The researchers conducted a thorough interview process to delve into the unique experiences of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Informed by relevant literature and guidance from experts in the field, the interviews were conducted with the parents and siblings of a child receiving speech therapy for ASD. Their candid conversations shed light on the support they received from their community and schools, the impact of speech therapy, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they utilized. Notable discoveries emerged, particularly about the strong support from various sources such as financial aid, which significantly aided the family's journey, workshops, and support groups. This made them feel less alone and helped them comprehend ASD.

Impact of speech therapy: Following speech therapy, the child's speech and communication abilities considerably improved. He started to converse more, was better at listening to and answering questions, and even started participating in different activities like singing competitions and reciting poems.

Problems encountered: The child's attention span, handling tantrums, and maintaining interest in therapy activities were among the difficulties that the parents and siblings highlighted.

Coping strategies: The family reminds themselves of their child's future, reaches out to other parents who have gone through similar things, and focuses on their love and patience for him.

Including therapy techniques: The child's therapist advised on how to include fundamental therapy strategies in day-to-day activities by having the child complete tasks, teach them the alphabet, and engage in social interactions.

Additional insights: To ensure the child's success, the family stresses the value of cooperation between parents, therapists, and other support systems. The viewpoint of the sibling emphasizes the particular difficulties and benefits, such as a heightened appreciation for life's little pleasures that come with having a sibling with ASD. Important things were considered; this data offers a deep and complex insight into the experiences of families coping with ASD and the benefits of speech treatment for improving social engagement and communication abilities.

4. Conclusion

The study stresses the value of incorporating skills into everyday life, going beyond individual therapy. The child's therapist was an excellent resource for ideas on how to work basic therapy exercises into daily activities, such as learning the alphabet while doing chores or interacting with others at the park. This smooth integration promoted a more all-encompassing approach to therapy and guaranteed steady improvement.

The cooperation of the child's parents, therapists, and other support networks was essential to their success. The importance of open communication and a common goal for the child's growth is highlighted by the study. This concerted effort enhanced the therapeutic effect and laid the groundwork for sustained advancement.

Lastly, the story is given an extraordinary depth by including a sibling's point of view. Their observations highlight a greater appreciation for life's small moments and the significance of celebrating individual diversity, as well as the difficulties and benefits of having a sibling with ASD.

In conclusion, this study provides a nuanced view of a family's journey with ASD, going beyond the principles of speech therapy. It highlights the necessity of teamwork, the transforming potential of communication, and the significance of extensive support networks. The study illuminates the human side of ASD and provides priceless insights for families, therapists, and communities at large by sharing these lived experiences.

5. Recommendation

The family with a child in speech therapy for ASD has been grateful for the support they have received from the community and schools. Financial aid, workshops, and support groups have been instrumental in their journey. As a result of speech therapy, the child has experienced positive outcomes, including improved communication skills and increased participation in activities.

However, the family also faces challenges such as the child's attention span, tantrums, and keeping them engaged in therapy. To overcome these obstacles, the family remains focused on the future, connects with other families in similar situations, and relies on love and patience. The therapist recommends integrating therapy strategies into the child's daily activities. Collaboration between the family, therapists, and support systems is crucial for effectively supporting the child with ASD. From the sibling's perspective, there are unique challenges and benefits, such as a greater appreciation for life's small joys. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of families dealing with ASD and underscores the effectiveness of speech therapy in improving communication and social engagement.

5.1. Recommendations for future study

1. Expound on the particular abilities and tasks:

Although the literature suggests combining therapeutic exercises into everyday activities, further information regarding the precise abilities addressed and the activities employed would be helpful. Giving specific examples would allow other families and professionals to apply these tactics.

2. Examine the efficacy of various integration techniques:

The study emphasizes the importance of the therapist's suggestion of activity-based activities. Could subsequent studies examine the effectiveness of various integration techniques, such as child- or parent-driven approaches? Analyzing the effects of different methods may provide more direction for modifying therapy to meet the needs of each patient.

3. Examine the sibling viewpoint in more detail:

The sibling's perspective is mentioned in passing in the book, but learning more about their experiences could provide insightful information on sibling relationships in families with ASD. Investigating the advantages and disadvantages of sibling relationships and methods for encouraging constructive interactions may be vital for supporting families.

4. Analyze the effect on long-term results:

Even though the study highlights consistent progress, it would be helpful to check in with these families to ascertain this comprehensive strategy's long-term effects. Does this approach help people with ASD and their families make steady progress and live better lives?

5. Examine applications that go beyond ASD:

Although the study focuses on ASD, other treatment methods may find value in integrating skills into everyday life and encouraging cooperation across support networks. Subsequent investigations may examine the applicability of these methodologies in different contexts, which could result in broader advantages for society.

Added things to think about:

Future research endeavors may explore the extent to which technology aids in integrating skills into routine tasks. Investigating how cultural and socioeconomic characteristics influence families' access to resources and support networks would be beneficial. Research may also concentrate on creating efficient curricula that provide professionals, including therapists, with the necessary abilities to apply integrated therapeutic approaches.

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