

The Impact of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPS) on Academic Progress in Autistic Students: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of individualized education plans (IEPS) on academic progress in autistic child. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability receives specialized instruction and related services.

The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data from a purposive sample of the parent, siblings, and teachers of the learner. Thematic Analysis was employed to identify and interpret the patterns' themes and meanings emerging from participants. Additionally, our research highlights that the success of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) greatly depends on aligning its objectives with the lifelong learning path of the student. This involves active participation from all stakeholders. The clarity in understanding the purpose and goals of each stakeholder plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of the IEP. Importantly, the focus is on developing practical academic skills that go beyond theoretical knowledge and have real-world applications, seamlessly integrating them into the student's educational journey. By instilling competencies with tangible, lifelong relevance, we contribute to a more meaningful and lasting educational experience, ultimately raising the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The study highlights the impact of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPS) on academic progress in autistic students. This paper advises future researchers to provide a comprehensive understanding of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPS) and its impact to academic advancement, shedding light on how these plans should be effectively implemented for all stakeholders.

Keywords: *Individualized Educational Plan (IEP); Academic Progress; Autistic; Theoretical Knowledge; Real-World Application*

1. Introduction

An individualized educational plan (IEP) is a plan that teachers and parents develop to help a child with learning disorders and other types of disabilities succeed in school. IEP teams typically use formal assessments to determine how the child is doing and establish a baseline of performance. The plan is different for each child and may include one-on-one classroom aides, individualized tutoring sessions, special classroom materials, or a modified schedule.

According to Zhao (2017), academic achievement refers to the actual performance of students' mastery of academic knowledge and skills as demonstrated through examinations after systematic knowledge and skills learning. Both cognitive ability and self-discipline have been key factors affecting students' academic achievement (Liang et al., 2020). Self-discipline has become one of the key factors governing students' academic achievement, especially since schools adopted online instruction following the outbreak of COVID-19 (Schulz, 2021). However, it is not clear how cognitive ability and self-discipline work together to influence students' overall academic achievement. Also, planning, an important factor influencing academic achievement (Cao and Cao, 2004), has rarely been examined alongside cognitive ability and self-discipline for its impact on academic achievement.

In the study of Zauderer (2023), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are indispensable tools in providing tailored educational support for children with autism. These comprehensive plans are meticulously crafted to address the unique challenges and learning needs of each individual. This plays a critical role by setting specific and measurable goals, encompassing various aspects like academic achievements, communication skills, social interaction, behavioral

management, and more. Within these plans, specialized services, accommodations, and interventions are outlined, which can range from assistive technology to personalized teaching methods and therapy sessions. What makes IEPs particularly significant is its collaborative nature involving parents, teachers, specialists, and sometimes the students themselves, ensuring a holistic understanding of the child's needs. Regular monitoring and review allow for adjustments to be made, ensuring the plan remains dynamic and effective.

Moreover, Parker (2022) added that IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) are personalized educational blueprints designed to meet the specific needs of children, particularly those with autism. They're developed through a collaborative effort involving parents, teachers, and a team of professionals with diverse expertise. This process integrates assessments and evaluations to identify the child's strengths, challenges, and learning style. The team sets measurable goals spanning academic, social, and behavioral domains, and determines the necessary services and strategies to support the child's progress. This collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive plan that addresses the child's unique requirements, fostering a supportive environment for their education and development.

This study is to explore the effectiveness of IEP on the academic progress of the autistic child. It can help us identify the impact of IEP in terms of the academic progress of the autistic child. However, we conducted the study to help autistic children develop their full potential in academics through Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) and to identify the effectiveness and sustainability of the plan.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) on the academic progress of students diagnosed with Autism (ASD). Recognizing the unique educational needs and challenges faced by autistic students, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the implementation of personalized IEPs influences their academic development. The primary objective is to enlighten educators, policymakers, and stakeholders about the efficacy of IEPs in improving academic results for autistic students, to foster the development of more inclusive and specifically tailored educational approaches.

1.2. Review of Related Literature

According to Parker (2022) Individualized Educational Plans (IEPS) are personalized educational blueprints designed to meet the specific needs of children, particularly those with autism. They're developed through a collaborative effort involving parents, teachers, and a team of professionals with diverse expertise. This process integrates assessments and evaluations to identify the child's strengths, challenges, and learning style. The team sets measurable goals spanning academic, social, and behavioral domains, and determines the necessary services and strategies to support the child's progress. This collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive plan that addresses the child's unique requirements, fostering a supportive environment for their education and development.

Findley et. al., (2022), assessed the quality of transition Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with autism in their final year of high school due to concerns about poor postsecondary outcomes for these students. The analysis of 20 students' IEPs revealed that, on average, there were 3.1 IEP goals and 1.6 postsecondary goals. Goals primarily focused on academics, learning/work, and communication skills, with employment being the most common postsecondary goal. However, there was a lack of goals related to social skills and independent living in many IEPs. Additionally, the study found inconsistencies between present performance levels, IEP goals, and postsecondary goals, indicating a gap between federal law requirements and best practice recommendations.

The studies show that personalized plans called Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) are crucial for students with autism. These plans, created through teamwork among parents, teachers, and professionals, tailor education to meet each student's unique needs. When it comes to transitioning from high school, there are challenges like missing goals for social skills and independent living, pointing to the need for more comprehensive planning. The research also reveals differences in outcomes based on factors like disability and race, highlighting the importance of inclusive practices. It emphasizes that IEPs should be regularly checked and adjusted to stay effective over time. Overall, the findings stress the need for a collaborative, inclusive, and flexible approach in education plans to ensure success for students with autism.

Moreover, Zauderer (2023), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are indispensable tools in providing tailored educational support for children with autism. These comprehensive plans are meticulously crafted to address the unique challenges and learning needs of each individual. This plays a critical role by setting specific and measurable goals, encompassing various aspects like academic achievements, communication skills, social interaction, behavioral management, and more. Within these plans, specialized services, accommodations, and interventions are outlined, which can range from assistive technology to personalized teaching methods and therapy sessions. What makes IEPs particularly significant is its collaborative nature involving parents, teachers, specialists, and sometimes the students themselves, ensuring a holistic understanding of the child's needs. Regular monitoring and review allow for adjustments to be made, ensuring the plan remains dynamic and effective.

Lastly, Hughes et. al., (2023) examined the individualized education programs (IEPs) of adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) regarding transition goals, services, and changes in special education classification over time. Using data from a population-based surveillance cohort spanning 2002 to 2018 in the U.S., 322 adolescents with ASD born in 2002 were analyzed at ages 15–16. Findings revealed that 92% had an IEP with a transition plan, but disparities were evident. Those without intellectual disability (ID) were more likely to have postsecondary education and employment goals, while only 41% had postsecondary living arrangement goals. Discrepancies were noted in mental health service provision based on race and disability status. Over time, the percentage of adolescents classified under autism increased from 44% to 62%. The study emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts involving educators, families, and adolescents to address disparities and enhance transition planning for ASD adolescents to better prepare them for adulthood.

1.3. Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges you've encountered in implementing the IEP?
 - 1.1 Can you provide an overview of the individualized educational plan (IEP) designed for the autistic student in your class?
 - 1.2 How did you differentiate instruction to meet the unique learning needs of the autistic student?
 - 1.3 Were there any challenges in translating the IEP into practical teaching strategies?
2. How did you monitor the academic progress of the autistic student throughout the IEP implementation?
 - 2.1 What assessment tools or methods were used to track the student's achievements?
 - 2.2 Were there regular meetings or communication channels to discuss the student's progress and adjust the IEP accordingly?
3. How did the IEP contribute to or impact the student's engagement and motivation in the academic setting?
 - 3.1 Did you receive feedback from the student/parents/ teachers/specialists/stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the IEP strategies?
 - 3.2 Were there any adjustments made to the IEP based on feedback or observed progress?
 - 3.3 Can you share any specific successes or milestones you observed in the student's academic journey during the IEP implementation?
 - 3.4 As the teacher/parent/specialist/stakeholders, can you say that the use of IEP is effective for the autistic student's academic progress? Why or why not?

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological method. The word "phenomenon" is defined as an observable fact or event. A series of extraordinary or unusual things are called "phenomena" (Proofed, August 2022). Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon (DELVE-March 16, 2022).

It also helps us understand what is like to experience a specific situation or life event. This approach 'studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity including linguistic activity' (Smith, 2016).

2.2. Key Participants

The study may involve purposive sampling to recruit participants who have experience the impact of Individualized Educational Program (IEP) of an autistic child. Participants may be recruited from family, tutorial teacher, schools, or online support groups.

2.3. Data Collection

The researcher will use one or more data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews (IDI). In-depth interviews are a common method for phenomenological research because they allow participants to explore their experiences in detail. The researcher may use purposeful sampling to encourage participants to share their experiences and perspectives about the impact of IEP on academic progress of an autistic child.

This study selected descriptive phenomenology as the research paradigm for the proposed study because the research questions were concerned with gaining insight into the lived experiences of teachers and parents who have been part of academic progress of an autistic child.

Overall, the methods used in a phenomenological study of the impact of IEP on academic progress of autistic child will be focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. The study will use

qualitative research methods to explore the subjective experiences of parents and develop an understanding of the meaning they construct around their child's disability.

Moreover, these were the things to be considered before, during, and after the conduct of the interview. Bracketing was done before the conduct of the interview. This was intended to avoid researchers' biases toward the process and result of the research. The participants were given prior consent to be signed as per the agreement. During an interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the informant as the interview process. These include consent, time allocation for an interview, and audio or video documentation. In addition, the safety health, and interview guide protocols were also observed by the researchers. Maximum of forty-five (45) minutes for interview per informant. The recorded answers were transcribed and translated after the conduct of the interview.

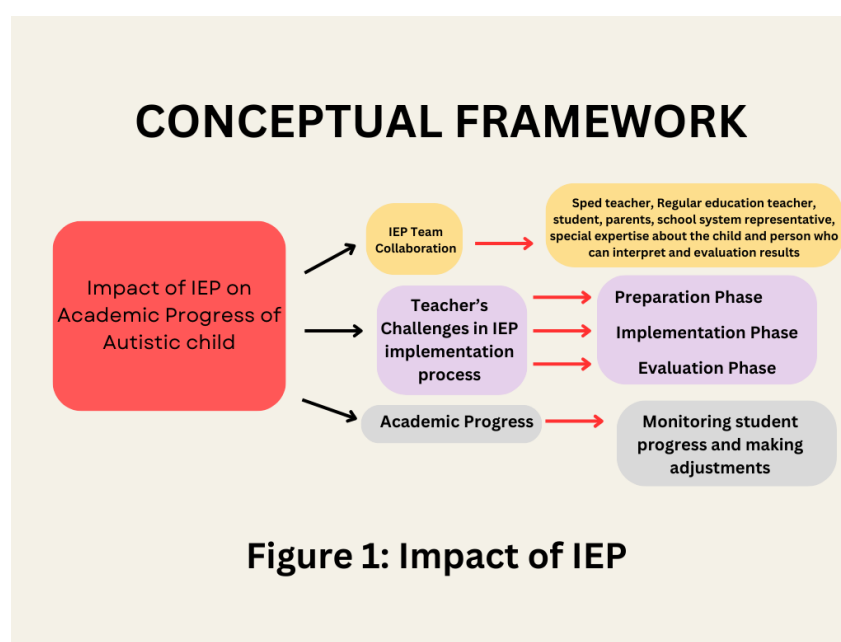
2.4. Data Analysis

The researcher will analyze the data collected using Conceptual Map or other qualitative analysis methods. The Conceptual map is a diagram or graphical tool that visually represents relationships between concepts and ideas to organize the data and identify key themes.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Prior consent was given to the participants. This form contains relevant information about the study. We respect the privacy of the respondents and maintain the standards of honesty, responsibility, competence, and credibility. All the data are kept with secrecy between the researcher and the participants.

3. Results and Discussion



The diagram shows three (3) categories of the impact of IEP on Academic Progress of autistic child: IEP Team, Teacher's Challenges in IEP implementation process and Academic progress of an autistic child.

1.1. Findings

IEP Team Collaboration

The Federal law, called Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines the "IEP team" as a group of people who are responsible for developing, reviewing, and revising the IEP (Individualized Education Program) for a student with a disability. By law, these people include:

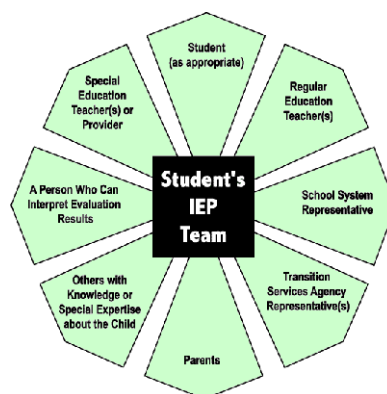


Figure 2: This wheel of IEP Team members, is from US Department of Education, Laws & Guidance, Special Education & Rehabilitative services.

- Who Participates in IEP Team Meetings?
The IEP is developed by a team of professionals, including parents, teachers, and specialists, and is tailored to meet the unique needs of the child.
1. The parents of the student
 2. The student, as appropriate (In Mass. student is invited to attend at age 14.)
 3. At least one regular education teacher of the child, if the student is (or might be) participating in the general education environment.
 4. At least one special education teacher or provider.
 5. A representative of the local public agency (i.e. School Principal, School Administrator) who: knowledgeable about specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, the general curriculum, the availability of local public agency resources.
 6. Someone who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (i.e. School Psychologist, Special Educator Teacher, Speech and Language Pathologist, etc.) who may be another team member.
 7. Other people whom the parents or the school have chosen to invite, who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related service.

Teacher's Challenges in IEP Implementation process

The study revealed that teachers are also thriving hard to implement the IEP to their learners. In which, teachers faced challenges in adapting and implementing the curricula for Special education: creating activities that include all students, balancing different IEP's, incorporating special education sessions with day-to-day activities and lack of resources.

- **Creating activities that include all student-** creating inclusive activities must be designed for every learner. Teacher must address the issues arises that may discourage participation of an autistic child.
- **Incorporating special education sessions with day-to-day activities-** teachers may challenge to plan day-to-day activities when the autistic child may need to be out of the classroom to attend therapy sessions. It is more challenge for teacher to schedule activities since it requires attention to flexibility and in detail.
- **Lack of resources-** it is one of the biggest challenges for teachers in inclusive classrooms, specifically a shortage of special needs educators and teacher aides. Teachers take risk to accommodate all students in the inclusive classroom.

Academic Progress

Step 4: Monitoring Student Progress and Making Adjustments

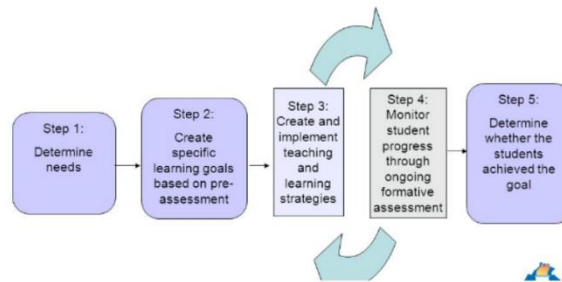


Figure 2: Monitoring Progress

The study revealed that in order to monitor that progress of child with the use of IEP we must follow the steps in monitoring student progress and making adjustments are below:

STEP 1: Determine the needs

STEP 2: Create specific learning goals based on pre-assessment

STEP 3: Create and implement teaching and learning strategies

STEP 4: Monitor student progress through ongoing formative assessment; and

STEP 5: Determine whether the students achieved the goal

Following the selection of a progress monitoring method and setting a goal, there are a few other steps to finish this process. Preparing and gathering the necessary material to complete the probe is a crucial part as well as “a conversation about the nature of the assessment and its intended purposes to make the student feel more at ease” (Rojo, Nozari & Bryant, 2021, p. 3). Students should know that probes are timed and that they may not finish every time. However, as they grow in academic skills, their score will improve. Once this conversation takes place the teacher should administer the probe to collect baseline data. This “allows a teacher to determine a student’s current performance levels; this procedure is done by taking the median of at least two scores from the same kind of measure near the beginning of the course” (Foegen et al., 2017, p. 109). Collecting this baseline data allows for educators to complete the next steps in the intervention process of modifying instruction for students with IEPs.

1.2. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the impact and creating of IEP on academic progress of autistic child. However, IEP team should take part to address the implementation of IEP. Hence, it also needs an attention that teachers have faced challenges in implementing inclusive plan to every learner. Moreover, following the steps of progress monitoring we can see the impact of the plan to an autistic learner. This study provided the IEP team, teachers experienced challenge in implementation and progress monitoring embrace to develop the abovementioned impact and it will aid to help autistic child to have a meaningful and effective Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).

In conclusion, an IEP is a critical tool for children with autism. It provides individualized instruction, accommodations, and support that can help them succeed in school. The IEP should be developed by a team of professionals who are knowledgeable about autism and should include specific goals, services, and accommodations tailored to the child's needs to progress academically. Thus, parents should be involved in the process and kept informed of their child's progress. With the right support, children with autism can thrive in school and beyond.

2. Recommendation

Based on the researcher's framework model of impact that affects academic progress of IEP to an autistic child and the findings of this study, future studies can build upon this study. For example, researching the impacts of how IEP affects the academic progress of autistic child. With the application of Progress monitoring, as described in the study, cooperative and collaboration of the IEP team and addressing the challenges experienced by the teachers will be an eye-opener to understand how IEP accurate and suitable to address the needs of an autistic child.

Additionally, the findings of this study can be used to strengthen the effectivity of IEP to an autistic child. Expanding this research to include other areas of progress monitoring would be beneficial to extend the efficiency for the classroom teachers while monitoring the academic progress of the autistic learner.

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