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Social Skills Deficits of Students with Autism in Inclusive Schools

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Abstract

This research was twofold: (a) to sample the incidence of autism among students in kindergarten, primary and secondary levels (b) to identify the most frequently occurring social skills deficits among autisms at each of the grade levels. Survey research was used and the data were collected from teachers of 145 autistic students in inclusive schools. The research tool was a social skill survey form, covering three aspects of social skills, (a) self control, (b) communication with others, and (c) playing and working with others. The questions at the early childhood level totaled 38 items, at primary level 70 items and at secondary 67 items. Research found that most autistic students in inclusive schools were boys (78.62%). The most frequently observed deficits in social skills of autistic children at each grade levels were Not sharing toys/ articles that they are interested in, Not able to play a role in a story with beginning, progression, and ending and Doing activities or playing alone during leisure time or at lunch time.

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Keywords: primary level, incidence, twofold, leisure time or at lunch time.

1. Introduction

The Constitution of The Kingdom of Thailand 2007; The National Education Act, 1999; and Amendments 2002 (Second Issue); and the Education for the Disabled Act, 2008 each state that all individuals have an equal right for basic education of not less than 12 years, which is to be provided by the government with good quality and free of charge. The right applies to the disadvantaged, the disabled, and those suffering hardship, providing life-long free education for the disabled. Autism is a specific diagnosis included under the broader term, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). In addition to autism, Asperger's, Rett's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive development disorder not-otherwise-specified are part of ASD. All conditions included in ASD fall along a continuum in each area of development ranging from severe problems to above average abilities. No facial

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characteristics or other physical features thought of as an invisible disability. Persons with ASD are characterized by problems in three areas of development: communication, social skills, and patterns of behavior or range of interests, all of which result from neurological impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Research Council, 2001). Presently, students with ASD are enrolled in regular education with an increasing trend owing to the aforementioned Acts. However, it has been found that ASD students in inclusive schools do not usually succeed, primarily due to a lack of social skills (Uthairattanakit, 2002). The problems frequently found include lack of understanding of social regulations, absence of interest in the surroundings or surrounding people, and inability to build social relationships with their peers. All of these raise difficulty in relationships with others. Thus, education for ASD in inclusive classrooms must involve academic, social and emotional skill integration of normal students and ASD in order that they can develop mutual learning.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 To sample the incidence of autism among students in the educational system of Khon Kaen Province, Thailand.
2.2 To survey problematic social skills of students with autism in inclusive classrooms

3. Research Methodology

Survey research was conducted and informants were comprised of teachers of 145 ASD students at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of the academic year 2008 in inclusive schools, Khon Kaen Province. The research tool was a social skill survey form, covering three aspects of social skills, (a) self control, (b) communication with others, and (c) playing and working with others. The questions at the early childhood level totaled 38 items, at primary level 70 items and at secondary 67 items. The data were analyzed into frequencies and percentages.

4. Research findings

- 4.1 To sample the incidence of autism among students in the educational system of Khon Kaen Province, Thailand found that

In 2008, 145 students with autism were enrolled in inclusive schools, Khon Kaen. Most of them were boys (78.62%). The highest proportion (55.86%) was studying at the primary level, while the lowest proportion (7.59%) was at the secondary level. Findings related to gender distribution were consistent with previous findings, where the ratio of boys to girls with autism was reported as 4.5:1. (Trankasombat, 2002; Jennifer A. et al., 2004). In the present study the ratio of boys to girls was found to be 3.8:1. Results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Numbers and percentages of students with autism classified by basic information

	Basic information	Number (n=145)	Percentages
Sex	Males	114	78.62
	Females	31	21.38
Educational levels	- Kindergarten 1-3	53	36.55
	- Primary (Grade 1-3)	50	34.48
	- Primary (Grade 4-6)	31	21.38
	- Secondary (Grade 7-9)	11	7.59

- 4.2 To survey problematic social skills of students with autism in inclusive classrooms found that

The ten most frequently observed problematic social skills behaviors reported by teachers using the instrument from 4.1 of the study. Behaviors are ranked from highest to lowest

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