

EFFECT OF ROUTINE HYGIENE PRACTICES ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN PUBLIC SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN MATETE SUB COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Children with autism spectrum disorders have challenges in hygiene and socialization practices. Lack of social appeal, good grooming and cooperation with peers defrays companionship, group work and peer learning in the affected children. To modify the health practices in autistic children in their early stages of growth and development is to improve their social appeal, interaction and peer learning in schools. The purpose of this study is to assess the effect of training in routine hygiene practices on academic performance of children with autism disorders in public special schools in Matete Sub County. The study sought to determine the extent to which routine training in cleaning the body procedures have influenced children with autism spectrum disorders' academic performance in public special schools in Matete Sub County. The study employed Skinner's Classical conditioning theory to propose that behavior can be changed through classical conditioning of learners. It used a Mixed Methods Approach to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data on the effect of routine cleaning of the on academic performance of children with autism spectrum disorders in public special schools in Matete Sub County. The researcher targeted nine head teachers and 168 teachers in nine special schools. Census was used to sample the head teachers while 50 (30% of 168) teachers were selected randomly. A split- half split testing technique was used to test for a reliability index in one special unit within the Sub County. Piloting of the instrument yielded 0.85 Cronbach's reliability index. This met the Cronbach's reliability threshold of $\mu \geq 0.7$. Face and content validity was ensured by the supervisors from the department.. This study used a questionnaire to collect data from teachers, interview schedule and an observation check list to collect data from the nine head teachers and the learners respectively. Data was analyzed thematically and converted into frequencies. Interview results were transcribed verbatim. The study established that not all teachers in public special primary schools in Matete Sub County carry out routine training in washing of the body for children with autism spectrum disorders in public special schools in Matete Sub County. It was concluded that lack of this training might have contributed to the dismal performance in class activities. The researcher recommended that more resources should be put in to intensify routine trainings in washing of the body to make the learners more appealing to others so as to improve learning through group work and collaboration in school activities.

Key Words: Routine Hygiene Practices; Academic Performance; Autism Spectrum Disorders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Autism disorder is a social and emotional challenge that affects the behaviours of human beings. An individual with a social and emotional challenge demonstrates withdrawn behavior Appleby (1). In early 1965, the Society for Autism in America was formed to look into the welfare of learners with autism disorders. The membership of this society comprised of parents of the children, government agencies and the representatives of children autism. This organization was formed to advocate for the welfare of autistic children that include their progress in education and modification of their health habits (2).

In Africa, autism is widely ignored yet is loudly pronounced in scholarly books and conferences. There are a lot of stereotypes that associate children with autism in Africa. They range from witchcraft to bad omens (3). Many assume that children with autism are an embarrassment to the society hence uncared for and neglected. (4) Autism studies in Africa indicate that disabilities of intelligence are the commonest occurring conditions diagnosed among the autistic children in African societies. The continent lacks elaborate means of developing this kind of learners yet they are entitled to educational achievements just like the rest of the children in the society (5).

Early training of Children with autism spectrum disorder have shown that these learners can be helped to develop life skills necessary to help them comfortably fit in the society. Inculcation of personal hygiene in these children creates a sense of neatness in their work output in class and later in their adult lives. (6) Suggest that when these children are young, they should be taught basic principles of good hygiene as a form of non formal education (7). Autistic children display very little enjoyment in interactions with others (8). Yet social interaction is very important in socializing learners and promoting peer learning. However, with routine training on how to clean their body such as teeth, body trunk, hand washing and combing hair these children can improve their hygiene and socialize easily with teachers and their peers.

Documentary evidence show that many learners with autism spectrum are faced with numerous challenges in learning due to antisocial health habits. Ignorance in good grooming and lack of training in procedures of cleaning their bodies have warded off their potential friends and colleagues. This has made it difficult for the children to associate freely in class and outside class. Absence of social appeal, good grooming and cooperation with peers defrays companionship, group work and peer learning in growing children. To modify the health practices in autistic children in their early stages of growth and development is to improve their social appeal, interaction and peer learning in schools. Education being a human right, all children whether able or disabled should be helped to access it. The attainment of Kenya's vision 2030 is hinged on achievement of education goals as a social pillar of this Kenya's ambition. It is therefore important that efforts are made to enable all children in Kenya access education. Specifically, this study sought to assess the extent to which training of children with autism disorders in cleaning of their bodies has affected their academic performance in public special schools in Matete Sub County.

This study employed Classical conditioning⁽⁹⁾ to propose that behavior can be changed through classical conditioning of learners. He postulates that by persistently using positive rewards to award good performance and negatively rewarding undesirable behaviour, learners can be trained to achieve desirable habits that can enable them fit in the larger society.

(ibid) point out that inculcation of skills in children can be practiced and reinforced in homes and at schools by both caregivers and teachers. Autistic Children need more interventions and routine practices in learning, acquiring and maintenance of skills for good hygiene. Routine practices can provide opportunities for acquiring desirable hygiene skills critical to other developmental areas⁽¹¹⁾. It is also acknowledged that regular practices can lead to acquisition of permanent habits⁽¹²⁾. Therefore regular health practices can be effective tools to modifying hygienic behavior. a study by⁽¹³⁾ report that although Autism is a condition characterized by challenges in social behavior of an individual, verbal, both verbal and non verbal presentation and repetition of events, learners of this type can be trained to excel in schooling activities.

Some studies have categorized the disorder in different types. They categorize autistic people as aloof, passive, active but odd and stilted. The aloof type is often illustrated as the child in a glass bell. The passive type typically remains outside social interaction and observes others without personally taking the initiative to join in a game. The odd type is the child who talks to everyone and makes several enquiries about identities and personalities of people who are strange to them. The stilted type is very rigid and inflexible. In playing with other children, the stilted child will typically very difficult in controlling, abiding by rules and only accepts playing in his/her own rules.

However, training routinely in cleaning procedures of children with autism should be done always to help control infections and maintain good hygiene. It must be part the child's daily activities⁽¹⁴⁾. It is a general way of removing contaminations, germs and discharges from the body such as sweat, blood and mucus. The procedure of cleaning the body depends upon the nature of the children. Children with autism require a lot of care and guidance on how to remain clean. Although teaching children with Autism spectrum disorder about grooming and personal hygiene can be intimidating tasks can be broken down into smaller, manageable parts. This can help a parent or a teacher to monitor progress so that both can realize success⁽¹⁵⁾. It is important to come up with traditions of cleaning regularly for the learners to muster the skills in cleaning⁽¹⁶⁾

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

The researcher used a Mixed Methods Approach to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data on the effect of routine cleaning of the on academic performance of children with autism spectrum disorders in public special schools in Matete Sub County. The researcher targeted nine head teachers and 168 teachers in nine special schools. Census was used to sample the head teachers while 50 (30% of 168) teachers were selected randomly. A split- half split testing technique was used to test for a reliability index in one special unit within the Sub County. Piloting of the instrument yielded 0.85 Cronbach's reliability index. This met the

Cronbach’s reliability threshold of $\mu \geq 0.7$. Face and content validity was ensured by the supervisors from the department.. This study used a questionnaire to collect data from teachers, interview schedule and an observation check list to collect data from the nine head teachers and the learners respectively. Data was analyzed thematically and converted into frequencies. Interview results were transcribed verbatim.

The researcher used frequency tables so as to establish the extent to which routine training in washing of the body has affected the academic performance of children with autism spectrum disorders in public special primary schools in Matete Sub County. This information was triangulated with the analysis from the thematic responses during interviews with the head teachers and activities observations made on learners from the observation check list.

The routine training in washing of the body in this study were the procedural practices carried out in the normal way persons take baths of various parts of the body. The teachers were required to respond to the items relating to how they routinely train autistic children in cleaning their bodies. Their responses were recorded in the table 4.4

Table 1 Routine Training in Washing and Academic Performance

Item	Respondent	RESPONSE				Total
		Yes	%	No	%	
My routine training in washing of a face has not only helped LWASD maintain their faces clean but also improved their academic performance.	Teachers	28	47.5	31	52.5	59
My routine training in washing of a head has not only helped LWASD maintain their faces clean but also improved their academic performance.	Teachers	20	33.9	39	66.1	59
My routine training in washing of neck region has not only helped LWASD maintain their neck regions clean but also improved their academic performance.	Teachers	18	30.5	41	69.5	59
My routine training in washing of chest and back have not only helped LWASD	Teachers	23	39.0	36	61	59

maintain their chests and backs clean but also improved their academic performance.

My routine training in washing of hands has not only helped LWASD maintain their hands clean but also improved their academic performance.	Teachers	29	49.2	30	50.8	59
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My routine training in washing of legs has not only helped LWASD maintain their legs clean but also improved their academic performance.	Teachers	23	39.0	36	61	59
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Analysis in table 1 showed that out of 59 teacher who responded to the call, Only 28(47.5%) teachers agreed that their routine training of children with autism spectrum disorders in washing of faces has not only helped maintain these learners faces clean but also improved their academic performance. 31 (52.5%) reported that their routine training in washing of faces of learners with autism spectrum disorders has not helped them maintain their faces clean nor improve their academic performance. 41(69.5%) teachers did not agree that their efforts in the training has helped the children maintain cleanliness in their neck regions and consequently improve their academic performance. 23(39.0%) reported that their routine training for children with autism spectrum disorders in washing of their chest and back regions of their bodies not only helped them maintain their chests and backs clean but also improved their academic performance.

36(61.0%) reported that this kind of training had not improved the cleanliness of the children’s chest and back regions of their bodies and neither improved their academic performance. 29(49.2%) reported that their routine training for learners with autism spectrum disorders in washing of hands had always helped the learners maintain their hands clean and improved their academic performance. 30(50.8%) report that this kind of regular training has neither improved cleanliness nor academic performance . 23 (39.0%) noted that their routine training in washing of legs has not only helped learners to always maintain their legs clean but also improved academic performance. 36(61%) teachers did not agree with this suggestion. Given the opinions of the majority in general, teachers in public primary schools in Matete Sub-County have not fully impressed training routine learners with autism spectrum disorders in washing of their bodies. This might have had a negative bearing on the academic progressions of the learners’ in these schools.

During the interviews, most head teachers remarked “learners with autism disorders are very unique in their approach to learning. They grasp an activity easily if it is done repeatedly. However, their concentration span is very short and requires a lot of patience to learn. Teachers need to be very resilient in their pedagogical approaches in class”. This observation by the head teachers is in agreement with most of the reviewed scholars who aver that children with autism can be trained to acquire life skills through repetitive actions. It was also observed that although the children concentration on class activities, their hygiene practices tended to disrupt their focus and collaborations on activities for learning.

The study concluded that not all the teachers of learners with autism spectrum disorders in Public Special Primary Schools in Matete Sub-County train the children on how to wash their bodies. This has affected peer and collaborative learning associated with socialization abilities. Therefore their ability to progress academically has been impaired. The researcher recommended that more resources should be put in to intensify routine trainings in washing of the body to make the learners more appealing to others so as to improve learning through group work and collaboration in school activities.

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