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## Exploring the Effect of Academic Qualification on Teachers' Knowledge and Awareness regarding Autism at Primary Level

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the effect of academic qualification on teachers' knowledge and awareness regarding autism at primary level. An Autistic person is unable to understand emotional states of others, fails to identify anger or sorrow, they don't feel comfortable while communicating with others. Autistic person doesn't have command over the language, avoids eye contact, fails to use facial expressions and gestures while interacting with others. The study was quantitative in nature and descriptive research design was used. Primary school teachers of Lahore District were the population of this study. Randomly selected 300 primary school teachers were the part of this study. Self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire contained information related to their personal demographics, and statements related to knowledge and awareness about Autism. ANOVA was applied to find out the difference and the results revealed no significant difference in primary school teachers' knowledge and awareness on the basis of academic qualification. Published editorials on drone attacks more frequently than the daily Jang.



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### 1. Introduction and Literature Review

When people hear the word "autism" they think of the disorder which refers to complications with communication, social dealings and imaginative play in kids younger than the age of 3 years (Flynn, 2013). Most of the signs of autism appear before the age of three. Major early signs of autism are: inappropriate playing with toys, strange attachment to objects, poor speech, lack of awareness of danger, they are usually over sensitive or under sensitive to sounds, inappropriate laughing or crying, they feel

difficulty in dealing with changed routines, spins object, show extreme anger for no apparent reason (Agaliotis, & Kalyva, 2011).

This disorder is a matter of debate among many mental health experts because of its unique nature and distinctive presence. In this disorder for at least two years children develop normally and after that they lose some or all of their communication and social abilities (Flynn, 2013).

Autism is a condition in which a person is unable to understand emotional states of others, fails to identify anger or sorrow, they don't feel comfortable while conversing because they don't have command over the language, and they avoid eye contact and fail to use facial expressions and gestures while interacting with others. This research investigates the awareness about autism in primary school teachers of Lahore District. Autism is characterized by severe difficulties in communication, socialization, and behaviour (Klinger, Dawson, & Renner, 2003).

Aslan, (2016) said, "Most of the autistic children are part of the regular education system. For a successful teaching to address the autistic students' needs general educators to understand the phenomena. Precisely, there is a shortage of literature that examines general educators' awareness, self-efficacy, and apprehensions in teaching students with Autism in comparison to special educators." Teachers' awareness in this regard is not being checked (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). General educators' self-efficacy and confidence to deal the students with special needs is big question in regular institutions.

Specially, there is evidence in research that general educators who teach special children are not capable to teach such children (Aslan, 2016).<sup>72</sup> educators' Knowledge and beliefs regarding aetiology were observed and assessed and the findings exposed that teachers in conventional schools have no awareness of Autism and are not trained as compare to special educators(Haimour, & Obaidat, 2013).. Learning difficulties of special students were not being addressed by both special and general educators. Mavroupoulou and Padelidiadu (2000) conducted a study that examined general and special educators' awareness in the context of learning disorder and learning goals for the children with special needs. Sleep and eating problems were rated as the least significant features of Autism by both groups. Psychotherapy was rated as an effective form of treatment for the Autism disorder by both groups (Swaim & Morgan, 2001). Generally comprehensive knowledge of Autism and promotion of instruction in all major deficit areas was strongly recommended by general educators (Sprague & Pennell, 2000).

Constructs of experience, knowledge and attitude towards inclusion, and classroom practices with relevance to autism were studied through Autism Inclusion Questionnaire. Seagal (2008) reported, "Professionals generally show positive attitudes; however, educators demonstrated important misconceptions and lack of knowledge regarding Autism. Further, a significant relationship was found between knowledge of autism and awareness of potential classroom strategies for inclusion, whereas attitudes and awareness of strategies were unrelated." Teachers' knowledge of symptoms, concerns, and self-efficacy in teaching children with autism was investigated by Schwarber (2006). Results indicated that educators did not have clear concept regarding autism. Special educators were expressing higher self-efficacy, good knowledge and were less concerned to teach children with Autism as compare to general educators. Hameed, (2003). Asserted, "Precisely, modern research proposes that general educators are ineffectively prepared to teach children with disabilities. Moreover, general educators obtain limited preparation to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities, and few believed that they have sufficient time, skills, training, or resources necessary for successful inclusion."

## 2. Objective of the Study

- The study aimed to explore the effect of academic qualification on teachers' knowledge and awareness regarding autism

### 3. Research Question

- What is effect of academic qualification on teachers' knowledge and awareness regarding autism?

### 4. Research Design

The study was quantitative in nature. Descriptive research design was used to explore the phenomenon under study. Survey method was used to collect the data.

#### 4.1. Population and Sample

Teachers teaching at primary level in the schools situated in Lahore city were the population of this study. Convenient sampling technique was used to select 30 schools at stage one and at stage two 10 teachers from each selected school were selected randomly. 300 primary school male/female teachers were the part of this study.

#### 4.2. Instrument of the Study

Self-constructed Questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire contained information regarding demographic variables and statements related to knowledge and awareness about Autism. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers to the primary school teachers.

### 5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data is analysed by using SPSS version 17.0. Descriptive statistics are applied to get results, means, and standard deviation was found. ANOVA was applied to find the difference.

**Table 1**

Mean distribution of participants' knowledge and awareness about Autism

St.	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	St.D.
Autism is known as a neuro-developmental disorder.	14.7	47.1	23.5	5.9	8.8	2.62	1.129
Autism is incurable disease .	14.7	44.1	23.5	11.8	5.9	3.26	1.421
Autistic child feel constant deficits in social interaction.	11.8	29.4	32.4	14.7	11.8	1.74	.710
Autistic child shows restricted, repetitive behaviour, and activities.	14.7	44.1	5.15	11.8	23.9	1.82	.626
Autism starts at very early stage of life.	5.9	32.4	32.4	20.6	8.8	2.47	1.107
Autistic children show little potential..	20.6	50.0	17.6	2.9	8.8	2.50	1.080
Autism is a horrible tragedy.	17.6	52.9	23.5	2.9	2.9	2.85	1.841
Autistic child can achieve high in the classroom..	17.6	29.4	35.3	14.7	2.9	2.94	1.071
Autism is a girls' disease.	5.9	52.9	26.5	8.8	5.9	2.29	1.115
Autistic children show puzzling and disturbing behaviours.	20.6	50.0	17.6	2.9	8.8	2.21	.880
Autistic students usually talk very fast.	17.6	52.9	23.5	2.9	2.9	2.56	1.050
Autistic students usually show aggressiveness in the classroom.	17.6	29.4	35.3	14.7	2.9	2.56	.960
Children with Autism repeat what others say.	5.9	52.9	26.5	8.8	5.9	1.53	.861
Autistic children can learn with normal students.	5.9	50.0	32.4	8.8	2.9	2.76	1.103
Autistic students are taught by visual aids.	5.9	50.0	23.5	14.7	5.9	2.56	1.304
Positive reinforcement is given to autistic students	17.6	30.2	32.4	11.8	8.10	2.38	1.012
Fine-motor deficits is addressed through special support	20.6	32.4	26.5	17.6	2.9	2.50	.922
Autistic students are taught social skills.	11.8	26.5	26.5	23.5	11.8	2.97	1.108
Picture are used to help autistic students	38.2	40.1	11.8	2.9	7.1	1.82	1.218
Strategies for managing obsessions and compulsions are used for autistic students.	8.8	60.6	17.6	2.9	10.1	2.18	.869
Autistic student's parents are asked for support.	17.6	25.3	41.2	5.9	10.5	2.35	.716
In a normal classroom autistic students can easily learn	14.7	55.9	23.5	2.9	2.9	2.24	.849
Autistic student's behavior can be modified.	26.5	44.1	23.5	2.9	2.9	2.12	.812
Normal and autistic students cannot be taught through	14.7	44.1	32.4	2.9	5.9	2.41	.946

same strategies.

I try all the possible strategies to teach autistic students.	20.6	44.1	26.5	2.9	5.9	2.29	.988
I focus on one concept per day for autistic students so they can easily learn.	8.8	44.1	32.4	11.8	2.9	2.56	1.031

Table 1 presents the results related to 3<sup>rd</sup> factor which is awareness regarding autism and the results are not different from first two factors. Most of the participants are expressing that they are not aware with this learning difficulty because mostly responses are under strongly disagree, disagree and neutral. This shows that 44% participants disagreed that Autism is known as a neuro-developmental disorder while 9.3% participants disagreed that Autism is known as a neuro-developmental disorder and 12.7% participants are unsure about it. It can be concluded from participants' response that 44% participants think that Autism is incurable disease and 41.6% participants think that Autism is incurable disease while 25.3% participants are unsure whether autism can be cured or not.

It can be said that 43.4% respondents are well aware that autistic a child feel constant deficits in social interaction while 6.6% respondents are not aware that Autistic child feel constant deficits in social interaction and 3.9% respondents are unsure. Similar results can be deduced from the table given above and it is apparent that with most of the statements respondents are disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Majority of teachers are not using the strategies stated in the questionnaire because their responses are falling in strongly disagree, disagree or neutral so it can be said that they have lack of awareness in this regard. It can be said that 45% respondents disagreed that communication strategies are used for autistic students while 7.6% respondents agreed that communication strategies are used for autistic students. It means that 43% participants disagreed that strategies for managing obsessions and compulsions of children use for autistic students while 9% participants agreed that strategies for managing obsessions and compulsions of children use for autistic students.

It can be concluded that 46.7% teachers disagreed that paraprofessional support and collaboration with parents of autistic students is a strategy to teach autistic students while 3.6% teachers agreed that paraprofessional support and collaboration with parents of autistic students is a strategy to teach autistic students. A sharp look of table given above can tell us that teachers are not using supportive strategies for students with learning difficulties.

**Table 2**

One Way ANOVA on total scale to find out the difference on the basis of qualification

Between Groups	130.678	4	32.670	1.669	.184
Within Groups	567.792	29	19.579		
Total	698.471	33			

One way ANOVA was applied to find out the difference between groups on the basis of Qualification and it can be depicted from the statistics in the table given above that no significant difference is found between groups on total scale because the significant value is greater than .05.

**Table 3**

One Way ANOVA on each statement to find out the difference on the basis of qualification

Statements		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Btw Groups	.573	4	.143	.259	.902
Autism is known as a neuro-developmental disorder.	Within Groups	16.045	29	.553		
	Total	16.618	33			
Autism is incurable disease	Btw Groups	1.612	4	.403	1.032	.408

	Within Groups	11.329	29	.391		
	Total	12.941	33			
Autistic child feel constant deficits in social interaction.	Btw Groups	3.114	4	.779	.638	.640
	Within Groups	35.386	29	1.220		
	Total	38.500	33			
Autistic child shows restricted, repetitive behavior, and activities.	Btw Groups	4.761	4	1.190	.832	.516
	Within Groups	41.504	29	1.431		
	Total	46.265	33			
Autism starts at very early stage of life.	Btw Groups	3.262	4	.815	.683	.609
	Within Groups	34.620	29	1.194		
	Total	37.882	33			
Autistic children show little potential.	Btw Groups	16.244	4	4.061	4.746	.005
	Within Groups	24.815	29	.856		
	Total	41.059	33			
	Btw Groups	3.532	4	.883	1.162	.348
Autism is a horrible tragedy.	Within Groups	22.027	29	.760		
	Total	25.559	33			
Autistic child can achieve high in the classroom	Btw Groups	11.815	4	2.954	3.487	.019
	Within Groups	24.567	29	.847		
	Total	36.382	33			
	Btw Groups	4.522	4	1.130	1.268	.305
Autism is a girls' disease.	Within Groups	25.861	29	.892		
	Total	30.382	33			
	Btw Groups	2.330	4	.583	.763	.558
Autistic children show puzzling and disturbing behaviors.	Within Groups	22.140	29	.763		
	Total	24.471	33			
	Btw Groups	11.190	4	2.798	2.805	.044
Autistic students usually talk very fast.	Within Groups	28.927	29	.997		
	Total	40.118	33			
	Btw Groups	16.223	4	4.061	2.746	.001
Autistic students usually show aggressiveness in the classroom.	Within Groups	24.815	29	.855		
	Total	41.059	33			
Autistic students are taught by visual aids.	Btw Groups	8.473	4	2.118	1.918	.134
	Within Groups	32.027	29	1.104		
	Total	40.500	33			
Positive reinforcement is given to autistic students	Btw Groups	10.803	4	2.701	2.052	.113
	Within Groups	38.167	29	1.316		
	Total	48.971	33			
social skills are taught to Autistic students	Btw Groups	.633	4	.158	.138	.967
	Within Groups	33.132	29	1.142		
	Total	33.765	33			
Fine-motor deficits is addressed through special support	Btw Groups	1.235	4	.309	.334	.853
	Within Groups	26.795	29	.924		
	Total	28.029	33			
Strategies for managing obsessions and compulsions are used for autistic students.	Btw Groups	4.596	4	1.149	1.638	.192
	Within Groups	20.345	29	.702		
	Total	24.941	33			
Normal and autistic students cannot be taught through same strategies	Btw Groups	4.821	4	1.205	1.415	.254
	Within Groups	24.708	29	.852		
	Total	29.529	33			

One way ANOVA was applied on each statement to find out the significant difference in teachers' knowledge and awareness on the basis of academic qualification and it can be observed that difference exists in only two statements. The statement "Autistic children show little potential" has significant value of .005, and f value 4.746 and it can be said that there is significant difference and in statement "Autistic students usually show aggressiveness in the classroom" f value is 2.746 and significant value is .001 and it also indicates significant difference between groups. No significant difference was found in all the remaining statements.

## 6. Discussion

The result of analysis and findings show that there is a dearth of awareness or training regarding autism among teachers. Teachers were asked about their knowledge and awareness related to autism and if look at the results related to descriptive analysis we will find that mostly the participants are disagreeing. A study investigated the knowledge of 504 senior pre-service teachers and the findings indicated that pre-service teachers possess inadequate knowledge regarding autism (Rakap, et al., 2016).

A research was conducted to find out teachers' knowledge about autism with reference to level of education and Significant differences was found in teachers' knowledge about autism on the variable understudy. Humphrey and Symes (2013) studied the attitudes, experience, and knowledge of teachers teaching in secondary school about the inclusion of children with autism in mainstream high schools. They revealed, "Participants had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with autism. In addition, compared with teachers, administrators reported higher levels of self-efficacy towards students as well as in handling their behaviour."

Mavropoulou and Padeliadou (2000) asserted, "Teachers were aware of autistic spectrum disorders and that autism was not always associated with intellectual disabilities. However, it appeared that teachers were confused about the causes of autism as well as about the appropriate educational practices." The findings of another study suggest that teachers need to know about autism because the study demonstrated that teachers know more about learning disabilities than autism in their scenario (Kalyva, 2010).

A study conducted in the context of Pakistan explored the knowledge and perceptions of teachers and revealed that teachers do not have an adequate knowledge of autism for certain reasons. The study suggests appropriate training for teachers in this perspective (Ayub et al. 2017).

Lodhi et al. (2016) said, "Many teachers were not sufficiently qualified or didn't have the ability to detect the potential existence of learning difficulties. Furthermore, the majority of the teachers stated that students with learning disabilities should study in mainstream schools with special educators, while most of them were found to use effective classroom management techniques, such as provision of more time for task completion, placement of students at the front of the class, but also involvement of the students in discussions." Knowledge and perceptions of teachers were examined by the researchers and they found that current programs are not fulfilling the need of teacher training in special perspective of autism (Toran, et al., 2016).

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

In present scenario teachers are expected to teach with more innovative techniques or in case of autistic children an enormous patience is also required on a part of teachers. Schools should take care of teachers CPD and provide opportunities for that purpose. If we all want to tackle autism, everyone should play their part in awareness program for autism.

It was concluded that teachers had no awareness or training about Autism. Schools were also not organizing any training courses or workshops for their teachers that particularly focus on autism or

enhance their knowledge about autism. The unwillingness of teachers to explore something new is also a big problem that exists in our society. Most of the people/teachers because of their traditional norms are not willing to accept the fact that autism can be treated in main stream schools, because they have a typical mind set of comparing autism with mental retardation.

There is a lack of training opportunities for teachers provided by their schools. There is an intense need to conduct such training programs for teachers in order to encounter the more advanced challenges like autism. For example if a teacher is not trained or have does not enough knowledge about autism, than how he/she would be able to deal with such students in a class, as a result they label these students as slow learners etc.

Availability of resources and their easy accessibility are also very important for improving quality of learning. In case of autistic students, it is more important because as the researcher discussed previously, most of them had speech or behavioural issues, they also had limited vocabulary. Different types of resources like flash cards or A/V aids etc. would increase their understanding level. But as the findings shows these resources were limited in numbers or teachers were not allowed to utilize them without permission.

This research indicates and highlights the importance of creating awareness regarding autism in our society. It will help to understand autistic children and to prepare them to participate in daily life as a productive member of a society instead of pushing them to dark alley. It is an important challenge for our society to remove the stereo-typical image of autism from the society or make people understand that autistic people are not mentally restarted or cannot be treated, rather they have behavioural issues that need to be understood.

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