

An Affordability Evaluation of Computer-Based Social-Emotional Skills Interventions for School-Aged Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract : The number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has increased approximately 173% during the last decade making ASD the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States. This rise in prevalence rates indeed has an effect on schools. ASD is overwhelmingly the most reported primary special education eligibility category for students accessing special education, at a national average of 61.3%. ASD is regarded as an urgent public health concern at an estimated annual per capita cost of \$3.2 million. Furthermore, considering that ASD is a lifelong disorder estimated lifetime per capita cost reach \$35 billion. The resources available to special education programs are insufficient to meet the educational needs of the 6.4 million students receiving special educational services. This is especially true given that there has been and continues to be a chronic shortage of fully certified special education teachers for decades. Reports indicate that 81.1% of students with special needs spend 40% or more in general education classrooms. Regardless of whether support is implemented in the special education or general education classroom the resource demand is obvious. Schools are actively seeking to implement low-cost alternatives and budget saving measures in response to this demand. In public school settings, programs such as Applied Behavior Analysis are challenging to implement and fund at \$40,000 per student per year. As an alternative, computer-based interventions are inexpensive, less time-consuming to implement, and require minimal teacher or paraprofessional training to administer. Affordability, pricing schemes, availability, and compatibility of computer-based interventions that support social and emotional skill development in individuals with ASD are discussed.

Keywords : affordability, autism spectrum disorder, computer-based intervention, emotional skills, social skills

Conference Title : ICA 2018 : International Conference on Autism

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 27-28, 2018