Self-Regulation and School Adjustment of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Hong Kong

Authors : T. S. Terence Ma, Irene T. Ho

Abstract : Conducting adequate assessment of the challenges students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) face and the support they need is imperative for promoting their school adjustment. Students with ASD often show deficits in communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, and self-management in learning. While targeting these areas in intervention is often helpful, we argue that not enough attention has been paid to weak self-regulation being a key factor underlying their manifest difficulty in all these areas. Self-regulation refers to one's ability to moderate their behavioral or affective responses without assistance from others. Especially for students with high functioning autism, who often show problems not so much in acquiring the needed skills but rather in applying those skills appropriately in everyday problem-solving, self-regulation becomes a key to successful adjustment in daily life. Therefore, a greater understanding of the construct of self-regulation, its relationship with other daily skills, and its role in school functioning for students with ASD would generate insights on how students' school adjustment could be promoted more effectively. There were two focuses in this study. Firstly, we examined the extent to which self-regulation is a distinct construct that is differentiable from other daily skills and the most salient indicators of this construct. Then we tested a model of relationships between self-regulation and other daily school skills as well as their relative and combined effects on school adjustment. A total of 1,345 Grade1 to Grade 6 students with ASD attending mainstream schools in Hong Kong participated in the research. In the first stage of the study, teachers filled out a questionnaire consisting of 136 items assessing a wide range of student skills in social, emotional and learning areas. Results from exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with 673 participants and subsequent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with another group of 672 participants showed that there were five distinct factors of school skills, namely (1) communication skills, (2) pro-social behavior, (3) emotional skills, (4) learning management, and (5) self-regulation. Five scales representing these skill dimensions were generated. In the second stage of the study, a model postulating the mediating role of self-regulation for the effects of the other four types of skills on school adjustment was tested with structural equation modeling (SEM). School adjustment was defined in terms of the extent to which the student is accepted well in school, with high engagement in school life and self-esteem as well as good interpersonal relationships. A 5-item scale was used to assess these aspects of school adjustment. Results showed that communication skills, pro-social behavior, emotional skills and learning management had significant effects on school adjustment only indirectly through self-regulation, and their total effects were found to be not high. The results indicate that support rendered to students with ASD focusing only on the training of well-defined skills is not adequate for promoting their inclusion in school. More attention should be paid to the training of self-management with an emphasis on the application of skills backed by self-regulation. Also, other non-skill factors are important in promoting inclusive education.

Keywords : autism, assessment, factor analysis, self-regulation, school adjustment

Conference Title : ICA 2018 : International Conference on Autism

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 27-28, 2018