

Promoting Expressive Communication in Bengali Speaking Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract: Expressive language or communication refers to the natural ability of human being to share their feelings to people which is deficient in children with autism spectrum disorder in most cases. This kind of deficiency decreases the quality of their day to day life. In this regards this study focuses on the ways of developing verbal communication in Bangla speaking children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Interviewing both experts and caregivers of children with ASD through self-administered questionnaire, perception survey and focused group discussions provides valuable information about the influencing factors that promote expressive communication in children with ASD. Various concepts of developing verbalization in children with autism such as involvement of the parents in speech therapy session, peering with typically developed children, joint family concept, training of the siblings on communication and many more ideas have been discussed here. Expert's ideas and suggestions from the stake holders that have been discussed in this study are more or less liked taken from the review of previous literatures.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Expressive communication, Language development, Speech delay.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Speech and language is the most essential tool for any children to express their wants and interests to others. It is no doubt that without any verbal communication it is very difficult to share any ideas or feelings with others. Unfortunately, children with autism spectrum disorder have limitations in their expressive communication as many of them have delayed speech and language development. They cannot

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make people understand their feelings and desires. This failure to express their feelings gradually makes them irritated and depressed. They become mentally shattered which in turn decrease their other developments. That's why developing verbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorder is extremely urgent for the ultimate development of the communication skill.

- 1.2 Nonverbal communication such as eye contact, gesture, posture are another means of communication which are also very poor in children with autism. As a result of having poor verbal and nonverbal communication children with autism cannot be socially healthy. When they cannot express their feelings in any social circumstances, they become nervous and ultimately shut down that affect their future development.
- 1.3 If parents had proper knowledge about monitoring the speech and language development of their children, early diagnosis of autism as well as speech and language delay is possible that in turn would have facilitated early intervention. If children with autism show any sign of delayed speech and language development, management should be started as early as possible by consulting with a speech and language pathologist.
- 1.4 In this regards, searching for the ways to promote speech and language development in children with ASD remains an important area of investigation for their better verbal output. As children with ASD are mostly handled by the parents or caregivers, intervention methods should be applied by them to assure better response. This study has been carried out with a view to improve the expressive communication in children with ASD by the participation of the parents in their speech and language development.
- 1.5 Many ideas about tapping the scope for expressive communication in children with autism have been collected from the previous studies which have been discussed here with the parents group for their opinions. Both focused group discussion and perception survey methods have been carried out to get detailed information from the parents which they have

experienced throughout their journey with the children with ASD. Interviews from the experts have also been taken to reconfirm the applicable methods of intervention to promote the verbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorder.

- 1.6 The ultimate goal of the study was to find out the influencing factors for the development of speech and language in children with autism which can be applied for better outcome. Furthermore, the information from the parents and expert group has been correlated with the results of the previous studies for more validity.

2. Literature Review

- 2.1 Speech and language is one of the major ways to communicate with others. Expressive communication provides children a means to share wants and interests with caregivers, peers and other adults. (Kaiser and Grimm, 2005). Children who are non-verbal have to face a great challenge in their social communication. This weakness in communication causes further demotion in their other field of development. Children with ASD have potentially severe language acquisition difficulties (Boucher, 2012) resulting from various factors, including impaired social pragmatic skills (Baron-Cohen et al, 1997) and lexical extension and categorization difficulties (Gastgeb et al, 2006).
- 2.2 Young children with disabilities are likely to display speech and language delay, which are especially common for children with ASD (Zager et al, 2012). In this circumstance, this is very important to take an initiative to promote verbal communication among children with autism spectrum disorder. Previous studies have suggested that intensive interventions that highlight natural cues for communication, reinforce communicative behaviors with related items, and provide multiple opportunities to communicate across the day are necessary for the improvement of verbal communication in children with speech and language difficulties (Schreibman et al, 2015). These ideas have been discussed with the parents group and their views and suggestions are taken in

order to apply these methods to improve their speech and language.

- 2.3 Young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often demonstrate delays in their expressive communication, impacting their ability to independently function in typical environments. Some of the studies showed that individuals with ASD who develop expressive language during early childhood experience better outcomes later in life. (Justin et al, 2016). Therefore, examination of naturalistic language interventions (NLI) remains an important area of investigation. In this regards the study deals with some natural intervening methods of promoting speech and language in children with autism with the stakeholders in order to apply these methods of intervention on Bangla speaking children with ASD.
- 2.4 The social partner in communication also plays a key role in the quality of social interactions with someone who is deaf or blind and has an intellectual disability (Damen, 2015). When a person's social partners do not adjust their way and mode of communication properly, test scores could easily underrate a person's true ability.
- 2.5 Although there has been a dramatic increase in the educational resources available to parents of young children with autism in recent years (Dawson, 2013), it is still too difficult for parents to find practical, evidence based resources regarding how to work with their young child (National Autism Center, 2011). The vast majority of research in this area has focused on training parents to implement procedures (Roberts and Kaiser, 2011) for better verbal output. It is established that parents are more likely to successfully implement intervention strategies that are feasible and meaningful (Bailey et al, 1986).
- 2.6 "An Early Start for Your Young Child with Autism" is written by highly accomplished authorities in the field of autism who explain some of the latest evidence-based strategies for intervening with young children who have autism. The authors make a unique contribution to the parent literature by explaining how parents

can leverage existing parent-child interactions into productive and manageable learning opportunities. The book specifically seeks to teach parents how to improve the skills of attention, social motivation, use of gestures, imitation, turn taking, toy play, babbling, arousal, and sensory sensitivities. Parents are taught how to improve these behaviors by using a mixture of developmental and behavior analytic strategies within already occurring daily activities like mealtime or bathing.

- 2.7 From the previous studies we know that, many of the interventions share common components, such as responsive interaction strategies to promote positive interactions among adults and children (Lane et al. 2016; Schreibman et al. 2015). Much of the early research on improving expressive language development in young children focused on articulation of single words that were reinforced with unrelated items (e.g., child says, “car” and receives a piece of candy; LeBlanc et al. 2006). As the early childhood field progressed, a call for more naturalistic interventions emerged (Sandall et al. 2005). In this regard, additional research is needed to identify the extent to which the mentioned prerequisite skills, environmental conditions, and use of language expansions facilitate the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of verbalizations in children with ASD.
- 2.8 As a whole it can be assumed that verbalization of children with ASD demands appropriate skills of the teachers and caregivers (Lieberman and Yoder, 2012). For this reason, parent’s views and suggestions have been discussed in this study to initiate and promote expressive communication among children with ASD.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The objective of the study was to analyze the relation between the development of speech and language in children with ASD and the factors influencing these improvements.
- 3.2 To achieve the goal, a perception survey through a self-administered questionnaire was conducted among 73 parents of children with ASD who have speech delay from two renowned

specialized schools in Chittagong city between January and March 2018. The questionnaire was constructed both in Bangla and English language for better understanding of the participants and the answers were accepted in both languages. To ensure at least 73 responses, the researcher administered the questionnaires to approximately 79 respondents. The respondents were selected purposefully on the basis of availability. The average response rate of the parents of the children with ASD was more than 90%.

- 3.3 The perception survey questionnaire was semi-structured with two major parts. The first part deals with the personal details of the participants while the second part deals with the attributing statements. Likert Scale has been used for calculating the response rate.
- 3.4 Moreover, a focused group discussion with the parents provides more detailed idea about their concept regarding the influencing factors for enhancing the verbal communication among children with ASD. Two parents group from two specialized schools took part in the FGDs in different time. All of them were satisfied with their respective Special School and the effort provided by the Special Educators. However, the FGDs had been carried out following the FGD Guide and the summary of discussions shared by the two FGD groups has been discussed in the result section.
- 3.5 On the other hand, interviews with four experts in this sector strengthened the validity of the results from the perception survey and focused group discussion. Interviews were conducted face to face and over telephone. The researcher contacted with many experts in this sector but only four of them responded positively. In depth interviews were taken to get the most effective suggestions regarding promotion of expressive communication in children with ASD.

4. Results and Data Analysis:

- 4.1 Triangular method such as combination of perception survey, focused group discussion, expert interview and review of literatures has been applied to get a more acceptable result.

4.2 Summery of the perception survey study

The perception survey has been taken from 73 parents to observe their views. It has five attributing statements which reflect the influencing factors promoting verbal communication in children with ASD. The responses of the perception survey study have been calculated using the Likert response scale which is described in the following table.

Table 1: Demonstrating the attributing factors of the perception survey.

Serial no	Topic of the statement
1st	Children with ASD will have better verbal output if parents and siblings talk more with them.
2nd	Children with ASD will have more Expressive Language if Parents play with them with different objects and talk about their functions while playing.
3rd	One to one communication between children with ASD and the special educators improves verbal expression
4th	Children in joint family have better speech development than children in nuclear family.
5th	Children with ASD talk more when they need anything.

Table:2 Illustrating the results of the perception survey study

No of statement	Likert Response Scale					Mean value (out of 5)
	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	
1st	0X1=0	0X2=0	6X3=18	35X4=140	32X5=160	4.36
2nd	0X1=0	8X2=16	11X3=33	31X4=124	23X5=115	3.95
3rd	0X1=0	0X2=0	9X3=27	33X4=132	31X5=155	4.30
4th	0X1=0	2X2=4	5X3=15	31X4=124	35X5=175	4.36
5th	0X1=0	0X2=0	12X3=36	18X4=72	23X5=115	3.05

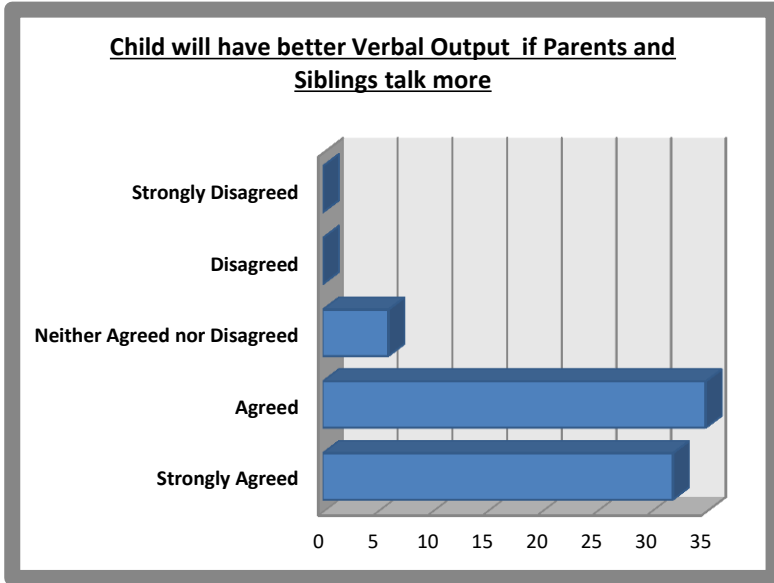


Diagram 1: Response rate of perception survey on statement 1

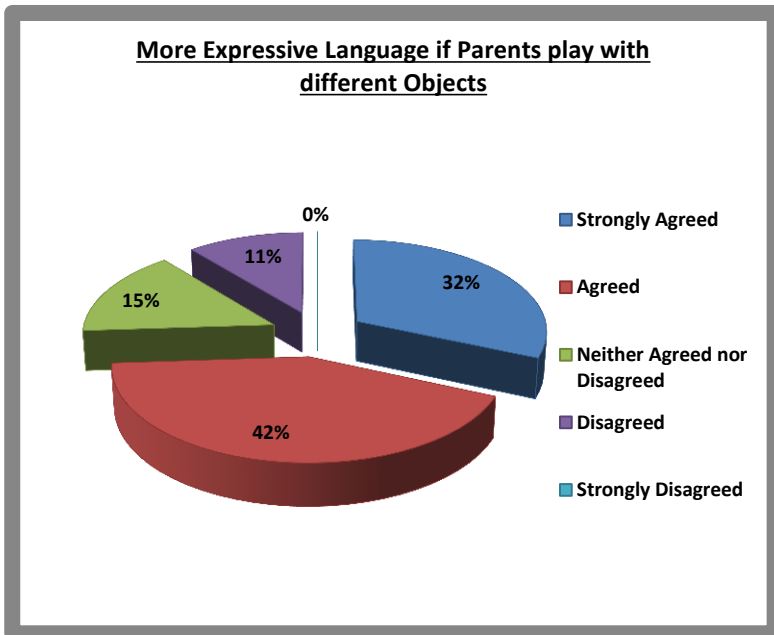


Diagram 2: Response rate of perception survey on statement 2

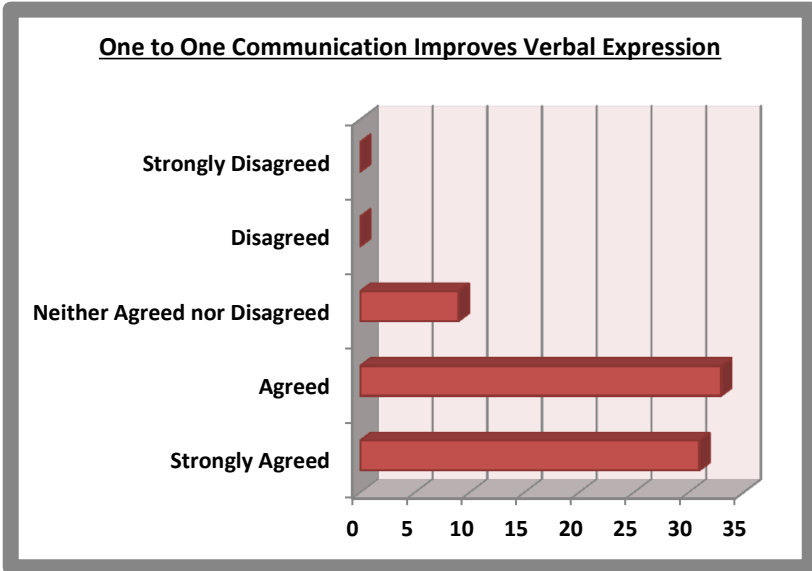


Diagram 3: Response rate of perception survey on statement 3

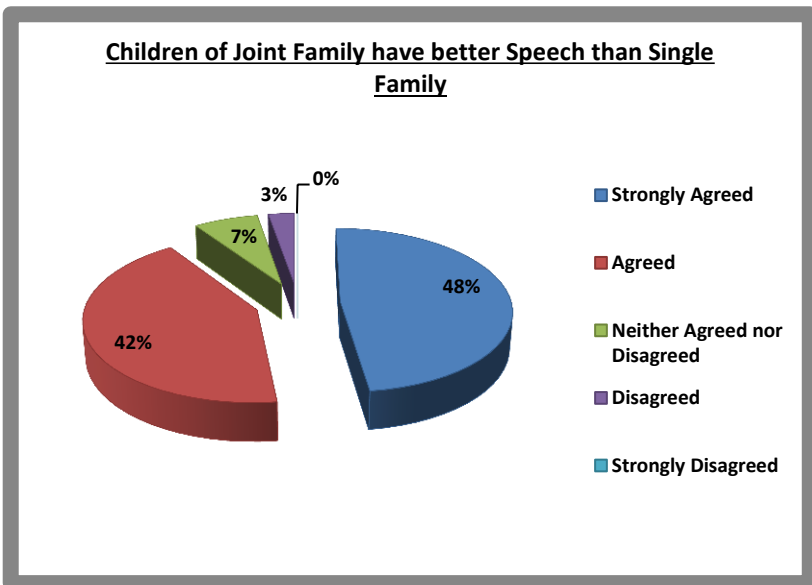


Diagram 4: Response rate of perception survey on statement 4

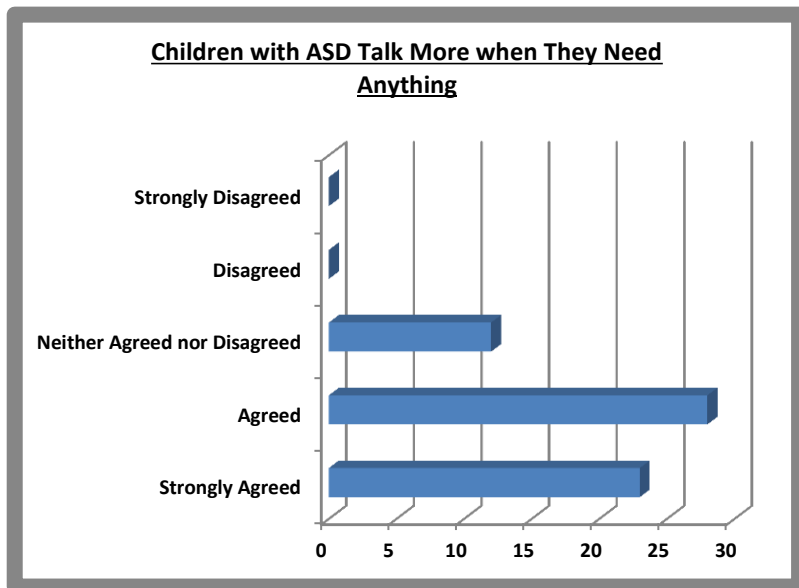


Diagram 5: Response rate of perception survey on statement 5

4.3 Summary of the FGDs with Parents Group-1

On the other hand, focused group discussion with the parents group provided in depth ideas about the topic of discussion. Most of the parents were discussing about the importance of giving time to their children with ASD. They wished if they could give more time to their children with ASD, they might have better expressive communication. They also shared an interesting point that their children with ASD talked more when they needed anything. But if they got the thing before asking, their verbal demand decreases. Attention based playing with Lego, drawing and rhyming were also recommended as helping tools. Reinforcement, modeling and picture description were also advised by some of the parents for the development of expressive language in their children with ASD.

4.4 Summary of the FGDs with Parents Group-2

FGD-2 was held at PROYASH, Chittagong with the caregivers of the children with ASD. Everyone participated voluntarily and made the FGD effective and meaningful. Discussion was conducted following the FGD guide. The responses were almost similar as FGD-1. Many of the

participants shared about the adverse effect of the electronic devices that delayed the SLD of their children. On the other hand, some of the participants were appreciating the positive effects of the joint family. As a whole both of the FGDs were informative that enriched researcher's knowledge and experience.

4.5 Summary of the Experts' Interviews

Interviews with the experts were conducted face to face and over telephone. The researcher contacted with many experts in this sector but only four of them responded positively. In depth interviews were taken to get the most effective suggestions regarding promotion of expressive communication in children with ASD. All of them gave first priority to the early diagnosis and intervention to overcome the speech delay in children with ASD. But the truth is that most of the Bengali children with ASD are lately diagnosed. As a result, the rate of speech and language development is slower due to delayed starting of the intervention. Another important suggestion was about giving training of both caregivers and special educators on speech and language development in children with ASD. One of the experts gave importance about inclusive education for better verbal output. All of them agreed on creating a positive and learning based environment for proper expressive communication in children with ASD. Interview from the experts made the results of the study more reliable and valid.

5. Discussion

- 5.1 The objective of this study was to find out the views and opinions from the stakeholders about the possible ways to improve the verbal expression of their children with ASD who have speech delay. Moreover, interviewing the experts and reviewing the previous studies gave the same results that increase the validity of this study. Perception survey and a focused group discussion among the parents of children with ASD gave the researcher in-depth ideas and suggestions.
- 5.2 The attributes affecting the improvement of expressive communication exhibited by the family members are considered while analyzing the answers of the questionnaire. Regarding interactions with the special children at home to improve their speech and language most of the parents stated that, to develop

verbal communication in children with ASD all the family members should interact more and more with them. Playing, rhyming and singing with them may also help language acquisition in children with ASD. Some of the participants thought that working on attention by one to one communication with parent and special educators may initiate speech and language development in children with ASD. Some parents also believed that entertaining the child with rhythmic sound production may help in language acquisition. Some of them advised colorful picture books and storytelling for the development of their verbal communication.

- 5.3 Children with ASD have poor social communication as they cannot share their feelings with others. But they can copy others. So siblings can play important role in the speech and language development in children with ASD. Some of the participants gave idea about playing of making different objects with paper and talk about their functions to help learning language. More conversation with siblings while playing can help to improve expressive communication in children with ASD. Some of the participants advised to train the siblings about SLD so that they can train their sibling with ASD. Children having no siblings reported a slower rate of SLD than children having one or more siblings.
- 5.4 Parents also shared an interesting point that their children with ASD talked more when they needed anything. But if they got the thing before asking, their verbal demand decreases. This theory can be applied to their speech therapy session. Attention based playing with Lego, drawing and rhyming were also recommended as helping tools. Reinforcement, modeling and picture description were also advised by some of the parents for the development of expressive language in their children with ASD. On the other hand, some of the participants were appreciating the positive effects of the joint family.

6. Conclusion

In closing, it can be said that difficulty in verbal communication in children with ASD can be prevented by taking appropriate approaches

which initiate and increase their speech and language development. Some of these influencing factors for language acquisition and development have been discussed with the stakeholders as well as the experts in this sector to get their views and opinions. For example, interaction with family members, one to one communication, joint family perception, learning through playing have been suggested by the stakeholders whereas early diagnosis and intervention, a learning based environment for both parents and special educators, inclusive education system have been advised by the experts in this sectors. Last of all the Government may build and enhance their training capacities by ensuring required number of qualified instructors, infrastructure facilities including required seminars, workshop, or practical lab facilities, etc to enrich the knowledge of the parents and the special educators regarding speech and language development in Children with ASD.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 If special educators and parents are trained on speech and language development by qualified instructor through workshops and seminars, only then effective therapy could be provided most of the time in a day that might enhance the early recovery from difficulties in expressive communication.
- 7.2 On the other hand, as verbal communication in the Children with ASD had a relation with their ability of comprehension, to promote the expressive language, comprehension must have to be improved. So, language comprehension ability in Children with ASD should be another important area of research work to develop this sector.
- 7.3 In total, a general awareness among the stakeholders as well as the government should be raised on early diagnosis and appropriate intervention to develop the speech and language in children with ASD in order to reinforce their communication so that we can turn them into our human resources.

8. Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Prof. Dr. Hakim Arif (Chairman, Dept of Communication Disorders, University of Dhaka), Prof. Dr. Shaheen Akhter (Director, Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorders and Autism,

BSMMU), Dr. Fahmida Akhter, (Director, SPECTRA) for giving their valuable suggestions regarding this topic. Two specialized schools in Chittagong city namely BN Ashar Alo and Proyash are praiseworthy because of their support to the researcher. Most of all parents of the children with ASD are the heart of the research for their active participation and experienced opinions.

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