

Running head: EDUCATORS ROLE IN PREPARING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

## **Educators Role in Preparing Students with Autism to Have Successful Transitions after High School**

**Ayman Bawakid**

**Special Education Department Umm Al Qura University**

### **Abstract**

This literature review seeks to (a) Examine the needs for students with autism in order for them to have a successful transition after high school to communities. (b) Find the educators' role to help students to meet those needs. It identifies some of the major challenges that students with autism face during the transition from high school to the community and suggest possible solutions that could help to meet these challenges. Three critical areas that were discussed (a) social skills (b) employment for students with autism (c) access to post-secondary programs. The questions that were addressed in this paper are: What are the needs for students with autism to have a successful transition after high school? How could educators help students to address these needs during high school?

*Keywords:* Transitions, autism, high school, employment, post secondary, social skills, challenges after high school

Imagine an 18 years old student who just graduated from high school. This student is preparing for transition to his community, with employment or postsecondary in his future. This student is fully aware of some of the challenges he has such as: he faced some difficulty in most of the social situations, also he has difficulty with communication skills and expressing his feeling and he has repetitive and restricted activities, interests, or behaviors. Additionally, This student might need some accommodations to complete tasks (Leyfer et al,2006). What do you think the options after high school will be for that student? Do you think any of these options will be easy for him access? There are many challenges students with autism face during their school years. Those challenges will not disappear after high school so it is not something that would appear in specific setting (Zamora, Yang, Farmer, & Clark, 2013). Autism is genetic problem so it has not been discovered yet a cure that would make this disability disappear ( Mehling, M. H,& Tassé,2016 ) . However, there are some strategies and medicines as needed that would help the individual with autism to meet his or her needs.

Students with autism usually face a lot of difficulty during the transition from high school to college or to work setting as a result of the area of this disability, an appropriate interventions needed to be provided for them during school years (Duncan & Bishop, 2013). There are many important needs for students with autism to consider during high school. Their teachers may have a significant role in ensuring their students have a successful transition after high school. Employment, independence, participation in society and the importance of being healthy are considered when successfully transitioning to adulthood (Burch, 2018). As such, the key areas of transition for students with autism are education, employment, community living, and community integration (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Therefore, three common areas that students with autism will need help with during high school in order to have a successful transition into their communities which are: learning social skills, employment, and access to post-secondary programs.

### **Social skills**

The need for appropriate social skills and interactions with others are important for students with autism to have a successful transition to communities. According to Klin et al. (2007) lack of social skills plays a very important part for individual with autism to have successful transition to communities. The social difficulties that students with autism face often include difficulties starting or joining in social activities, understanding the viewpoints of others and expressing verbal feelings (Bellini & Hopf, 2007). They may want to develop their friendships and romantic relationships with others but it may be limited due to lack of or in appropriate communication skills (Klin, et al, 2008).

According to Kanne et al., (2011) many people with autism have difficulty making and keeping friends. They usually have trouble understanding the feelings of others. In addition, according to Klin, et al. (2010) many have difficulty using and understanding nonverbal communication. Those characteristics should help educators to understand that a social skill is one of the major things that students with autism should have in order to have a successful transition after high school to communities. There are a lot of literatures that discusses social skills for students with autism in the area of transitions and the educators' role in improving those skills, which included in the following.

### **Improving social skills**

Since Individuals with autism often have difficulty with social interactions and communication, it is really important for students with autism to learn how to gain some of the social skills in order to help them to participate in the society. Banda & Grimmer (2008) in their study described the importance of the social skills to participate in the society. In meta analysis, they describes 13 studies that were undertaken to determine the suitable strategies for enhancing social interaction skills and reducing negative behaviors among autistic individuals during transitions . Banda & Grimmer (2008) found that the

findings from all the studies indicate that the availability of individualized support among the individuals plays a major role in enhancing their social interaction skills.

Additionally, Hendricks and Wehman (2009) reviewed many articles related to transition from high school to adulthood in the areas of education, employment, community living, and community integration. In the area of community living and social skills, they encourage educators to help students with autism to take their education in community environments where the student could interact with other people. This will ensure the student has opportunities to socialize in the community and learn applicable skills.

Continuing in the area of improving social skills, another solution that could help educator to improve social interactions and communications for students with autism is participation in group sports, physical activity, and games. Those things will have great impact on enhancing this area for students with autism. According to Kunzi (2015) “Research strongly supports that participation in group sports, physical activity, and games improves social skills”. Also He strongly encourages educators to make the intervention more effective, integrating a group of physical activities with some social intervention strategies can be used to improve the social area. According to Kunzi (2015) helping students with autism to gain social skills will prevent some of the secondary conditions related to poor social interactions and communications with others that students may get if he or she had poor social skills. Also Kunzi (2015) in his study supported the fact which includes having social skills for student with autism will be one of the main reasons to have smooth transition to communities.

In addition, Video modeling is helpful to enhance social skills (Alzyoudi, 2015). Alyzyoudi used a sample of 5 students each student improved their social skills using the video modeling, thus causing improvements in social interaction and communication skills for all 5 students. Therefore, he encourage educators to use video modeling to enhance social skills for student with autism.

### **Improved quality of life for students with autism**

Biggs (2016) supported that participation in the society not only helps the student with autism to live independently, but also increases their quality of life and helps them to have higher levels of wellbeing. Biggs (2016) article examines the health status and wellbeing of a group of 389 youths who have autism or intellectual disability. The findings indicate that the individuals with such conditions have lower than the normative psychological wellbeing and social support. The students who engaged in community activities and religious faith had higher levels of wellbeing. The study points out that the availability of special educators and service providers to guide the youth is essential for the enhancement of their transitioning processes. The author used a large number of participants and an advanced application to evaluate the variables, due to those things, educators and researchers can make predictions because it's highly reliable.

### **Employment**

Literature discusses transition in many areas of life; one critical component is the problem of employment for individuals with autism (Taylor and Seltzer, 2011). One of the options for students with autism after high school is to have a job which is not easy things for individuals with autism. Though employment can be challenging for people with Autism, it is a strong predictor of a successful transition. One of the main reasons making it challenging is the low rate of employment. According to Barnard, Harvey, Potter & Prior (2001), individuals with high-functioning autism experience higher levels of unemployment than their typically developing peers. This is an international problem, affecting every country. Taylor and Seltzer (2011), have reported there were three major countries included: United States, United Kingdom and Canada have a poor rate of employments for students with autism, so one of the problems researchers could see here is that even if a great transition program was created that will help students with autism to meet all the needs they need in order to have a successful transition after high school and help them to get all the necessary needs that they need to gain in order to get jobs, we will still not be able to control the employment rate nor to force companies to hire those

individuals with autism in any level . However even if we do not have control to the employment rate and the employment rate was poor , there are still numbers of individuals with autism who is being haired and have some kind of jobs that would meet their need so it's imperative that we train students with Autism for employment opportunities . There are a lot of literatures that discusses employment for students with autism in the area of transitions in many different aspects, which included in the following.

### **Challenges and difficulties for students with autism in the area of employment**

There are many challenges that students with autism face when they transition to work. Sterling, Turner & Jordan (2007) address some of these challenges, examining the various challenges that adolescents face while transitioning to different classes and later to work environments. According to Sterling et al. (2007), such challenges include the difficulties of forming social relationships, communication and aggression among others. Based on the study findings, such challenges can be effectively addressed through the use of visual supports, behavioral guidance and the development of clear activity schedules to ensure that the learners can clearly follow the outlined tasks without difficulty. The authors in this study conclude that previous research concerning how to address transitioning to work difficulties among autistic students has proved insufficient. They therefore suggest that further studies should be undertaken to facilitate the development of more strategies of supporting the students especially during the development of positive relationships in school and at work.

Neary a, Gilmore & Ashburner (2015) in their study outline the difficulties of students with autism who graduated from high school in Australia. The authors in the study conclude that there are lacks of post-school services for many individuals who are capable of integrating with the society many of them because of that are facing difficult conditions such as: unemployment or underemployment, social isolation, mental health difficulties and poor quality of life. Neary a et al. (2015) in their article describes the

post-school conditions and service needs in the area of employment for older teenagers and adults with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. The results of the study indicated that the majority of young people lived in the family home and were unemployed. Of those who worked, 56% had unskilled jobs. The result shows that the unemployed young people generally wanted to work and those who were employed were often dissatisfied because they wanted to work more hours, or because they wanted a job that was more fulfilling and meet with their interests. The findings of the study suggest that post-school outcomes for this group are very poor, and that existing services are not meeting their needs. Many young people with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder are clearly struggling with the transition to employment. Adult needs such as employment, independent living and social integration within the community are difficult for most of those students.

Wehman et al. (2016) address some of the challenges for students with autism .They examine the key challenges experienced by adults with autism disorder in employment contexts. Such difficulties include the need to communicate effectively and interact positively with colleagues. The authors suggest that such problems can be addressed at early stages as the students prepare to transition from school to work environments. The provision of supported employment services has also been cited as a meaningful way of improving the individuals' employment achievements. The use of data collected in 2009-2014 to evaluate the effectiveness of the employment support services confirms that the programs are helpful in addressing the challenges associated with the Autism Spectrum Disorder condition in the workplace. The study findings and recommendations are useful in the development of advanced solutions to the transitioning challenges encountered by Autism Spectrum Disorder individuals.

Part of this problem relies on the educational system for students with autism. So the educational system should provide students with activities that would help them to get employment opportunities. Taylor & Seltzer (2011) address this problem in their study. Their article analyzes the educational and career activities undertaken by autistic students



as they transition from high school to work. The researchers used a sample of 66 adolescents who had recently completed their high school courses. Based on the findings, the individuals with autism spectrum disorder had low rates of employment indicating only 56% of them worked in sheltered workshops or day activity centers. Therefore they conclude that the current educational system has been ineffective in preparing autistic students for transitions to suitable employment opportunities. However, the study does not offer the specific challenges that the students encounter in their work environments.

### **Solutions for transition to employment for individuals with autism**

In term of employment, one of the things that students with autism need is a various types of support as Baric et al. (2017) discussed in their article. This article focuses on the analysis of traits among students with autism spectrum disorder as they move from high school and later to work environments. The researchers mainly focus on identifying trait variations and the necessary forms of support among 15 students from Sweden who have recently gained job opportunities. According to the findings, the students who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder need various types of support from educators, including occupational transition preparation that should be provided from educators in school and practical training in safe work environments during school and after school. The findings indicate that the students received such forms of support during transition from school to work. The researchers conclude that it is essential for autism spectrum disorder students to undergo effective orientation processes while transitioning to high school and work settings so that they can easily adapt to the new environments.

There are many methods to help students with autism to increase their employment opportunities (Burke, Andersen, Bowen, Howard & Allen ,2010) . Burke et al. 2010 article focuses on the evaluation of two instructional methods that may be employed to increase the employment options for learners with autistic conditions as they transition from school to work. The researchers evaluated the effectiveness of a

vocational training program in enhancing the ability of students to transition from school to work easily. The second program that was evaluated during the study was the 'performance cue system'. The findings indicate that the performance cue system in which student received behavioral skills training from educators proved more satisfactory in increasing the employment opportunities for autism spectrum disorder. It is, thus, concluded that educators should adopt the system to ensure that their students can easily access desirable employment options following the possession of outstanding behavioral skills

It is true that we need to help and support individuals with autism for employment opportunities but it is also important to consider the support for individuals with autism who are already in their work environment. According to Gal, Landes & Katz (2015) it is important to accommodating the needs of students with autism who are already in a work placement and help them to receive positions that match their conditions. The Gal et al (2015) article focuses on determining the validity of the Autism Work Skills Questionnaire (AWSQ) in distinguishing between individuals with autism disorder and those with normal developmental processes. The AWSQ facilitate the examination of autism signs through the evaluation of sensory and work performance elements. The authors select two groups of participants aged 20-40 whereby 102 had typical developmental processes while 37 individuals had autism signs. The findings indicated significant variations in work performance and sensory skills. The authors suggest that it is essential for educators to conduct similar tests among the employees to ensure that those with high function autism spectrum disorder receive positions that match their conditions. The study offers a meaningful strategy that applied by educators through which students can receive sufficient attention from their employers during transition.

Using supportive programs help students with autism to transition from high school to college and can also help with the transition to a work environment .White et al. (2016) in this article seeks to justify the need for the development of consumer-informed programs to support the needs of autistic students as they transition from high school to

college and later to work environments. The authors describe the various steps involved in the establishment of such programs, including readiness assessment and family-centered decision-making. The authors elements of the programs include life skills coaching, social integration, and guided transition. The article is valid for the development of support programs for autism spectrum disorder students as they transition since it offers a step-wise approach to the same. The use of a wide range of credible reference makes it more reliable for use in practical settings.

There are some helpful strategies for individuals with autism that educators could provide and manage. Those strategies would help them during transition to a work environment .Lee & Carter (2012), describe seven elements that would help students to have successful transitions from high school to work placement. Those elements included:

- 1- Individualized strengths-based transition services and supports; which mean special education and transition services must be individually designed to reflect the unique needs, strengths, interests, and preferences of each student. Also the transition planning need to start early enough so it must begin no later than the first Individualized Education Program (IEP) in effect when a student turns 16 and should be reviewed and updated annually. The student must be invited to planning meetings, and recommended practices contend that students should have meaningful opportunities and preparation to assume leadership roles.
- 2- Positive career development and early work experiences; which mean preparing students with autism for the world of work and help them access to a combination of career development experiences during middle and high school which will provide opportunities to acquire important work skills and values, inform their vocational decision making, and shape their career aspirations for the future .
- 3- Meaningful collaboration and interagency involvement; which mean making strong linkages between students and needed services as well as among various service providers themselves in a given community which will ensure that the

- needs and opportunities identified during transition planning will adequately addressed and delivered in coordinated ways.
- 4- Family supports and expectations; which mean that a family has a very important role, they represent a prominent and enduring source of support in the lives of transition-age youth with autism. Their role starts from early age and continue until the child reach adulthood. For example in the early age they can help shaping their children's career identities and during the adulthood they can provide emotional and instrumental supports that have positive impact on the individual with autism
  - 5- Fostering self determination and independence; which mean help individuals with autism to direct their futures; have control over how they live their lives, where, and with whom; and have authority over the resources that support them. According to the authors; constructs such as empowerment, self-advocacy, and self-efficacy all contribute to greater self-determination and can ultimately enhance students' long-term career success.
  - 6- Social and employment-related skill instruction; which mean helping individual with autism to learn some of the social and emotional skills.
  - 7- Establishing job-related supports. Which mean helping them in the steps to find jobs and most importantly helping them to find job that would fit with their ability and following with them after they get the job.

### **Postsecondary education**

One of the major things that students with autism would need in order to have a successful transition after high school is the enrolling into post secondary program. It is important for educators to identify the support services for young adults with autism that they need in order for them to be able to enroll and study in college (Carnevale et al., 2010). Also according to Taylor & Seltzer (2011) study, only 14% of their study included students with autism in a post secondary program, the study included 66 young adults with autism spectrum disorders who had recently exited the secondary school system. It

is difficult for students with autism to continue in a post secondary program due to the challenges they face that related to their disability. For example students with autism have difficulty with independent living skills which plays an important role during the college years. According to Bal, Kim, Cheong & Lord (2015), students with autism struggles with independent living skills. Also the most difficult challenges that students with autism face during transition to college is the social communication. According to Adreon & Durocher (2007) the most challenging area in the college setting for students with autism spectrum disorder is adjusting to the social demands. Even though we know that the most challenging area is the social communication, there are other important areas that educators need to consider that has great impact on the students with autism such as: Independent Living Skills, Self-Advocacy, Academic Supports and accommodations and higher order skills. There are a lot of literatures that discusses postsecondary education for students with autism in area of transitions in many different aspects, which included in the following.

### **Challenges for students with autism during transition to Postsecondary education**

There are many challenges students with autism face during transition to college Hewitt (2011), discussed some of the challenges students with autism may face during to transition to college. Her article provided an overview of the challenges and forms of support that are necessary for adolescents with autism disorders as they transition to college. The challenges associated with the condition include poor social skills and aggression. The author emphasizes the need for continued family support and individualized programs by special educators to facilitate smooth transitioning processes. The introduction of programs to cultivate high order and problem-solving skills has been outlined as a vital strategy in the provision of transitioning support to the students. The article offers detailed analysis regarding the transitioning challenges among the autistic adolescent and the suitable forms of support from both parents and educators.

Adreon & Durocher(2007) discussed other challenges and needs for students with autism during their transition to college. Their article assesses the transition needs of

students with HFSAD in college. At the beginning of the article, the authors seek to outline the diagnostic criteria, symptom presentation, and treatment processes for such learners before proceeding to the identification of the transitioning challenges. Such difficulties relate to socialization, communication, independent living skills, self-advocacy, as well as academic functioning. The authors conclude that it is essential for educators to ensure that the support programs developed to address the transition challenges among HFSAD students should be effective in matching their needs. The study proves highly reliable for use in the formulation of support programs and understanding the students' needs following the inclusion of additional information regarding the HFSAD condition.

Also Hewitt (2011) in his article talked about some of the factors that could lead students with autism to have some challenges in the college setting .Those challenges includes: social communication Impairments, problem-solving, higher order planning and preparing for the college environment. Also the author confirmed in his article that social challenges are very difficult to deal with for students with autism in the college environment. However other factors related to executive functioning and higher order planning is also very important to consider in their college placement. She also talked about the kind of support and consideration students with autism need in college to have successful transition including: Social-emotional considerations, understanding the college environment and executive functioning .Finally the author emphasized the importance of working on the skills and the support the students with autism would need during the later years of secondary education, prior to attempting the transition to college.

Elias & White (2018) highlight some of the difficulty from the parent's perspective that student with autism spectrum disorder face during transition to a post-secondary education program. They investigated the challenges and needed supports among adults with autism spectrum disorder, from parents' perspectives. The results of the study suggest that, in the context of transition into postsecondary education, students with autism spectrum disorder, in general struggle with social tasks and skills of daily

living. Specifically, in the social area, parents reported that their students have hard time creating relationship with others. The article highlight that parents identify the social difficulty the students with autism have as something will prevent their student's success in the post secondary setting. In conclusion the authors identify primary needs and challenges faced by students with autism spectrum disorder, as identified by their parents, relate to social skills training and opportunity, emotional and tangible independence training, and self-advocacy-related skills.

White et al. (2017) discussed some of the challenges that students with autism spectrum disorder may face during transition or during studying in a post secondary program. The authors in this study used a mixed methods study to identify the needs for autism spectrum disorder students who are in college or enrolling to college program, by the three primary groups: parents, educators, and the students with autism spectrum disorder. The authors in this study took the perspectives from all of the three groups on how to best support these students in achieving academic and social success in college. They reflect on challenges in many areas, including emotion regulation and stress management, socialization, transition to adulthood/independence, intimacy, and academic demands. The authors grouped these specific areas into three major categories which include social needs, self-determination needs, and self-regulation needs. The authors conclude with that developing students' skills in all three of these area (socialization, self-determination, and self regulation) should positively impact readiness for transition and adjustment to college, for secondary and postsecondary students.

### **Solutions for successful transitions to postsecondary program for students with autism**

In this study Alverson, Lindstrom, & Hirano (2015) used a qualitative, cross-case design, to investigate the high school to college transition experiences of young adults with autism. The authors did interviews with young men with autism, their families, former high school teachers, and support personnel. They found that participants



identified multiple challenges, especially in the areas of social skills, communication, and executive functioning skills in their post secondary education setting. Also they found that those are created challenges from high school that continued into post secondary education setting. The authors in this study identified five themes that could influence the successful transition from high school to college, which are: (a) internal source of motivation to attend college, (b) high levels of disability awareness, (c) intentional family supports, (d) coordinated transition planning, and (e) clear post school goals.

There are many important areas we need to consider for students with autism in order to have successful transition to postsecondary program. Roberts (2010) in his article provides educators and transition support personnel with a range of topics to consider when working with students with autism spectrum disorder and their families to develop a comprehensive transition plan. These topic areas include career exploration, academic goal setting and preparation, assessing and knowing learning styles, self-advocacy skills, reasonable accommodations, academic supports, interagency collaboration, technology, and time management skills. According to author this list should be considered as a guide from which to begin taking steps toward achieving successful transition, including high-school-level training and education. Finally the author emphasizes that it is very important in transition plan to include action steps and identify the persons or agencies responsible to completing the action steps in order to help students to increase the student opportunity to have successful achievement and successful transition from high school to the post secondary education.

### **Conclusion**

There are a lot of things that students with autism need in order to have a successful transition after high school, but there are also several challenges. This literature review talked about three common areas that students with autism will need help at during high school in order to have a successful transition into their communities



which are: learning social skills, employment skills, and access to post-secondary programs.

The first area is social communication and social skills. It is the most difficult challenge that student with autism face during transition from high school to communities. There are many methods educators could use to help students with autism to improve their social skills, some of these area are: helping students with autism to take their education class in community environments where the student could interact with other people which will improve the students social skills. Participation in group sports, physical activity, and games will have a great impact on the students and finally using video modeling could help students to learn some of the social skills that he might need in order to have successful transition.

The second area is employment skills. there are many difficulties and challenges students with autism faced during transition to the work placement those challenges included : social relationships, communication and aggression among others, the lack of post-school services, need to communicate effectively and interact positively with others and needs for accommodations in the workplace. The educators' role for those problems are: providing a visual supports, behavioral guidance and the development of clear activity schedules to ensure that the students can clearly follow the outline tasks without hardships, occupational transition preparation in school and practical training in safe work environments and using development support programs.

The third area is access to post-secondary programs. There are many difficulties and challenging areas for student with autism that they face during transition to the postsecondary program, those challenging included: poor social skills and aggression, difficulties related to socialization, communication, independent living skills, self-advocacy, as well as academic functioning and problem-solving, higher order planning and preparing for the college environment. The educators' role for those problems are

effective support programs, Social-emotional considerations, understanding the college environment and executive functioning.

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