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Systematic Literature Review of Experiences and Supports for Students with ASD Post Hoc: Findings Regarding Diversity and Implications for Research and Educator Preparation

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Revised**Abstract**

The following post hoc analysis examines cultural and/or linguistic information from a previous systematic literature review of 24 studies investigating demographic information, encounters, assists and suggestions of study participants enrolled in post-secondary education institutions with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The analysis and discussion of results appeal for the need to not only include and focus on diversity but to refocus on cultural consciousness. Implications and future directions for research and for educator preparation programs are proposed.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, cultural and linguistic diversity, transition, educator preparation, cultural consciousness

Systematic Literature Review of Experiences and Supports for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder Post hoc: Findings Regarding Diversity and Implications for Research and Educator Preparation

The rise in the number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) transitioning into colleges and universities is rising (Jackson, et al., 2018). We are seeing this trend across the United States and globally (Anderson, et al., 2017). An interesting question to note, however, is that as programming and supports are increasingly being discussed in the literature, are the populations representative of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) populations who also have the ASD diagnosis, being discussed in these studies? Thus, this post hoc of a systematic literature review conducted regarding encounters and assistance for students with ASD in post-secondary education (PSE; Davis et al., 2021) provides some initial insight into the lack of cultural and linguistic considerations. Discussion of these considerations and significance of transition planning, particularly for students with ASD, set the stage for the current investigation that analyzes the manuscripts for demographic information as well as academic/non-academic supports. The results lead to suggestions for moving beyond the characteristics and behaviors associated with ASD and developing cultural consciousness to be embedded in research and practice. Because educators can serve as the catalysts for CLD students with ASD and their families exploring PSE opportunities, it is important to consider practical implications for educator preparation programs tasked with training future educators to serve increasingly diverse student populations.

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations for Students with ASD

The literature suggests that there has been over- and under- identification of CLD populations with various diagnosis and special education eligibility categories (Hartzler &

Snyder, 2017; Tincani et al., 2009). Although identification of ASD is overall increasing (Jackson et al., 2018), the identification in CLD populations is often under recognized (Nowell et al., 2015). Tincani and colleagues (2009) suggested the under-representation could potentially be due to lack of timeliness in identifying student and/or family views regarding disability. In another study, researchers argued the under-representation could be due to reasons such as lack of access to health care and inequitable practices when diagnosing students from CLD backgrounds (Nowell et al., 2015).

Recent studies have indicated a rise in the number of students with ASD attending PSE institutions (Jackson et al., 2018). However, besides best practices for assisting with transition of CLD students (e.g., Suk et al., 2020), research focused on CLD students with ASD transitioning to PSE is extremely limited.

Transition Planning for CLD Students

Just like our society, today's schools are becoming increasingly diverse. Every year, teachers are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of students who come from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, research suggest that poor post-school outcomes for this student population especially those with disabilities, lags behind of their typical peers (Greene, 2011). Therefore, transition services for CLD students with ASD must be strengthened to ensure their successful transition to post-school environment, including high education. As such, it is critical for researchers and practitioners alike to identify practices and resources that educators can utilize to support effective transition planning for students with ASD from diverse backgrounds.

Current literature highlights recommendations for practicing cultural responsiveness that includes: (a) reflecting on one's cultural values; (b) emphasizing the importance of diversity; (b)

engaging families, community stakeholders, and cultural organizations; (c) practicing cultural reciprocity; (d) considering cultural and religious events; and (e) promoting trust when collaborating with families (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Suk et al, 2020). These culturally responsive practices can be implemented in transition planning for diverse students with ASD (and other disabilities) and facilitate educators' professional growth.

Students with ASD Considering Higher Education

Higher education has a huge impact on the future of all young adults, including those with ASD. By offering learning experiences, opportunities to advance education, preparation for a future career, and the potential for increased financial independence, PSE has become a desired outcome for many students with and without disabilities. Like their typical peers, students with ASD are increasingly pursuing PSE: an estimated 43% of post-secondary students with ASD participate in higher education after leaving high school (Chiang et al., 2012), and the number of students with ASD in higher education is likely to grow (Gelbar et al., 2014; Kuder & Accardo, 2018). As result, their college readiness becomes a critical issue for the students, their families, and educators who are called to support post-school goals and aspirations of their students. It is also imperative that educators provide information about available post-secondary options and processes, support student autonomy, and help them make important decisions (Rowe et al., 2018). Therefore, transition planning for CLD students with ASD must be improved and educators play a key role in the process.

Method

A systematic literature review had been previously conducted analyzing the designated manuscripts (Davis et al., 2021), focused on experiences and supports that exist for students with ASD attending PSE. As a post hoc to the systematic literature review, the same 24 manuscripts

were analyzed for demographic information that specifically included cultural and/or linguistic information, cultural and/or linguistic experiences reported by the study participants, culture and/or language academic and non-academic supports reported, and any cultural and/or linguistic recommendations.

Analysis focused on culture, defined as race and/or ethnicity. Language was defined as the native language of the study participants. The articles were split between the two investigators and analyzed. Six articles (25%) were analyzed by both investigators to determine inter-rater reliability rate, which was at 100% agreement.

Results

The 24 examined studies were conducted globally and included the United States, Ireland, Australia, Belgium, Canada, England and the Netherlands. As indicated in Table 1, the PSE participants in the studies had the following diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders Not Otherwise Specified. Thirteen studies (24%) made no mention of cultural or linguistic demographic information of the research sample. The remaining 11 studies (45%) included racial (including multiracial) and ethnic demographic evidence of the study participants related to culture, including one study that also indicated English being not the native language. None of the studies indicated cultural or linguistic experienced by the participants. Only one study (4%) mentioned cultural nonacademic support in regard to "personal space" and related culturally biased implications. Finally, four studies (17%) mentioned cultural implications in their recommendations.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

Discussion

Cultural and Linguistic Findings

As indicated in the results, less than half the examined studies reported any cultural demographic information, with only one study including native language information. Even fewer studies indicated any cultural or linguistic supports or recommendations, with one study indicating that cultural factors could impact instruction with personal space while interacting, and four studies offering recommendations with reference to culture. Two studies indicated the need to include and analyze ethnicity as future research implications, one study recommended two-year institutions may be a better match for students with ASD due to the student population being non-conventional, and lastly, one study discussed how worldview may impact experiences and interactions of students with ASD in PSE settings.

Moving from Clinical Elements to Fostering Cultural Consciousness and Practice

Granted, limitations of this post hoc study included a small sample size of examined studies. In addition, the studies were selected based on a recent systematic review and were not specifically investigating cultural or linguistic variables. However, as important as the scientific component may be, this brings to light the fact that investigators may be solely looking at the clinical components and perspectives (Sue et al., 2019) associated with students with ASD in PSE settings. This demonstrates the need to move beyond the medical model and approach into integrating cultural awareness and practice by researchers and practitioners. This further calls for expanding cultural competency and fostering cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016) for research investigators as well as current and future educators involved in transitioning CLD students with ASD. As Azzopardi and McNeill's (2016) model brings to the forefront, the multifaceted cultural systemic implications indicating the need for moving beyond support by actively encouraging enrollment of CLD students with ASD in PSE institutions as well as

including this student population in research investigations that would translate into evidence-based findings to increase their positive PSE outcomes.

Limitations

A number of limitations to this study must be acknowledged. First, only a limited body of literature was examined based on research of Davis et al. (2021), which extended the foundational systematic research in the area of PSE for students with ASD by Gelbar et al. (2014) and Anderson et al. (2018). Another limitation is that the rigor of the studies was not systematically evaluated. Also, given the intended scope of this study, it is possible that recent publications addressing important topics on CLD students with ASD in higher education were not included.

Implications

Study Implications

Practice and Research

Despite such limitations, this study has several implications for practice and future research. First, this study adds to the limited research literature on PSE for CLD students with disabilities and especially those with ASD. Employing systematic analysis of current literature, this study offers practical recommendations for consideration by educators and other stakeholders. Further, this study's findings might offer suggestions for researchers focusing on transition to PSE for students with ASD who come from diverse backgrounds.

Context, Families and Service Providers

Next, this study highlights the need for educators, researchers, and policy makers to consider educational, economic, and cultural context when working on supports for CLD students with disabilities transitioning to post-school environments. Another implication that

emerges from this study is the need to expand PSE research to address not only the needs of CLD students with disabilities, but also their families and those who serve them.

Implications for Educator Preparation Programs

Developing Cultural Consciousness and Practices

In addition to implications for educators and researchers, this study also has implications for PSE professionals participating in educator preparation programs. These PSE professionals are responsible for cultivating cultural awareness and culturally responsive practices among pre-service teachers and adequately prepare them to enter the field of education. To advance and shape future teachers, PSE institutions should consider some of the best culturally responsive transition practices that include understanding cultural biases, intentionally collaborating with families and other stakeholders, empowering students to be active agents in their education and life, and supporting teachers' professional development (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Green, 2011; Suk et al, 2020). Educators would benefit from becoming aware about their own view on cultural diversity, practicing cultural sensitivity and reciprocity, considering cultural and religious events when creating lessons, developing culturally responsive IEPs and transition plans for their students, and building trust when working with CLD students and families. Because cultural competency training is generally not emphasized or offered by school districts (Gothberg et al., 2019), embedding culturally responsive pedagogy and strategies in all teacher preparation courses will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for CLD students with disabilities while in school and beyond. These are steps in moving towards cultural consciousness.

Future Directions

Research

Given the paucity of studies focusing on CLD students with ASD, the need for additional research is highly important. First, additional research is needed to expand the scope of investigation to include CLD with ASD and other disability categories. Future research should also explore the impact of gender and neurodiversity in promoting success for CLD students in PSE and other post-school settings.

More research is needed to investigate effective strategies and practices to support CLD students with ASD and other disabilities in PSE settings. It is also critical to determine how to integrate culturally conscious transition planning, promote teacher competence, and foster successful transition to post-school environments for CLD students with disabilities. Because CLD students with ASD comprise a highly heterogeneous group, teachers and other school professionals will also benefit from studies focused on translating research to practice exploring strategies for meeting the needs of these students.

Finally, future research should include studies that provide insight into professional development and training for educators. One example would be to study perceptions of educators and pre-service teachers on transition practices for CLD students with disabilities. Future research is also necessary to investigate evidence-based transition practices and the impact of early transition in promoting post-school success for CLD students.

Educator Preparation

Preparing future educators in appropriate nondiscriminatory identification of CLD students with ASD and with other disability categories early on is essential (Tincani, et al., 2009). It is recommended educator preparation programs should develop targeted partnerships with school districts and other community entities that provide effective services to diverse communities and who operationalize cultural consciousness in their assessment processes,

interventions, and services. This assists with appropriate early identification and intervention services for students and their families and may allow future educators to learn and work through this model.

Furthermore, educator preparation programs should place students interested in transition in these same diverse school districts that partner with PSE institutions that are providing effective transition and intervention support services. These practical experiences should focus on moving beyond cultural competency and emphasize the practice of cultural consciousness, operationalizing this model in working with CLD students with ASD and/or other disabilities both in secondary and post-secondary settings.

Conclusion

PSE outcomes for CLD students with ASD continue to pose concerns for researchers, practitioners, students, and their families. The results of the post hoc analysis indicated a need for both researchers and current/future educators to move beyond the clinical aspects of a disability, as found with the current study of CLD students with ASD in PSE settings. Although the fields typically start from this standpoint, due to increased diversity in our schools and PSEs, there is a call to action. Scholars and practitioners must develop knowledge and skills beyond mere awareness and/or acknowledgement of diversity to cultural consciousness in investigations and in actual application with students (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Baumgartner, et al., 2015; Buchanan, et al., 2021; Gothberg et al., 2019). The call exists to strengthen transition planning and supports for CLD students with ASD to improve their education outcomes and overall quality of life. Increasing awareness among professionals and enhancing PSE system of support are important considerations for improving PSE experiences and outcomes for CLD students with ASD.

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Note: References preceded by an asterisk (*) denote the studies included in the review.

Table 1**Cultural and/or Language Demographics, Experience, Supports, and Recommendations for Students with ASD**

Study and Country	Settings	N	Diagnosis	Reported Cultural and/or Language Demographics	Cultural and/or Language Experiences	Cultural and/or Language Academic & Non-Academic Supports	Cultural and/or Language Recommendations
Accardo et al. (2018) USA	University	23	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Alverson et al. (2015) USA	University, community college	5	AS	Ethnicity (Caucasian, multiracial)	None reported	None reported	None reported
Anderson et al. (2018) Australia	University	48	AS	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Bell et al. (2017) Ireland	Institutions of higher education	6	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Bolourian et al. (2018) USA	University	13	ASD	Ethnicity info was reported in demographic: African American (2), Asian (1), Caucasian (8), Latino (2), multiracial (0)	None	None reported	None reported
Cai & Richdale (2016) Australia	University, TAFE	23	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
English (2018) UK	University	1	Autism	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Gurbuz et al. (2019) UK	University	26	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Hartwell et al. (2017) UK	University	28	HFA and AS	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Hillier et al. (2018) USA	University	52	ASD	Ethnic data: Caucasian (45), Hispanic (4), Asia (2), African American (1)	None reported	None reported	None reported
Jackson et al. (2018) USA, Canada, UK	University, community college, transition	56	ASD, HFA, AS, PDD-NOS	Ethnic data: White (45), Hispanic (2), Black (1), Asian (4), Mixed/other (4)	None reported	None reported	None reported

Jansen et al. (2017) Belgium	Institution of higher education	43	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Koegel et al. (2016) USA	University	3	ASD	Ethnicity: Caucasian (2), Middle Eastern (1),	None reported	None reported	None reported
Lucas & James (2018) UK	University	12	N/A	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
McLeod et al. (2019) USA	University, community college	95	Autism	Race: Black, Hispanic, Asian, Mixed Race, Other race;	None reported	None reported	Two-year PSE setting may be less threatening due to environment having non-customary and underprivileged peers
McMorris et al. (2018) Canada	University	45	ASD	Ethnicity: (European-Canadian) 73%	None reported	None reported	Increasing sample size to explore how ethnicity impacts contacting and usage of services
Roberts & Birmingham (2017) Canada	University	9	HFA	Ethnic backgrounds: Caucasian (6), Japanese (1), Chinese (1), Sri Lankan(1); English is second language (1)	None reported	None reported	Exploring matching mentors with mentees based on ethnicity
Sayman (2015) USA	Community college	1	ASD	Caucasian (1)	None reported	None reported	None reported
Schindler et al. (2015) USA	University	11	AS	Caucasian (9), African-American (1), Hispanic (1)	None reported	None reported	None reported
Shmulsky et al. (2017), USA	University	23	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Spiers (2016), UK	University	7	Autism	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Tops et al. (2017), Netherlands	University	26	ASD	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Weiss & Rohland (2015), USA	University	23	ASD	None reported	None reported	When training in communication, personal space may be culturally latent	Worldview may impact perceptions and interfacing
White et al. (2016), USA	University	8	ASD	Primarily Caucasian (5), Other 1	None reported	None reported	None reported

Note: ASD= Autism Spectrum Disorder; AS=Asperger's Syndrome; HFA=High Functioning Autism;

PDD-NOS= Pervasive Developmental Disorders Not Otherwise Specified; N/A=Not Available;

TAFE=Technical and Further Education