



Long Paper

Communication in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Qualitative Study of Mothers' Perspectives

Olga J. Domingo

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Laguna University, Philippines
pc.bac@lu.edu.ph
(corresponding author)

Saralie V. Estrito

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Laguna University, Philippines
saralie.estrilo@gmail.com

Kathleen Faye J. Decena

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Laguna University, Philippines
decenak9@gmail.com

Mariane C. Mercado

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Laguna University, Philippines
mercadomariane4@gmail.com

Date received: February 21, 2024

Date received in revised form: May 9, 2024; June 15, 2024

Date accepted: June 20, 2024

Recommended citation:

Domingo, O. J., Estrito, S. V., Decena, K. F. J., & Mercado, M. C. (2024). Communication in children with autism spectrum disorder: A qualitative study of mothers' perspectives. *Puissant*, 5, 2314-2335.

Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore mothers' perspectives on communication of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) specifically to (1) describe the communication of children with ASD; (2) determine the strategies mothers used to promote their children's communication; (3) determine mothers' expectations on their children's communication; and (4) recommend a plan of action to the school. Limitations of the study were discussed. Purposive sampling was employed to explore the communication strategies of mothers



through the lens of Social Learning Theory. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, and data analysis followed a thematic approach. Verbal communication, touched-based communication, and pointing were the means of communication for children with ASD. Mothers utilized communication strategies such as verbal input, augmentative and alternative communication, and linguistic mapping. They expect their children to express themselves effectively and establish connections with others. Hence, it is recommended that the Department of Education develop and implement standard training programs for special education teachers on individualized communication interventions and strategies, the local school provides after-school programs to create opportunities for communication and social interaction and offers training sessions and resources to teachers and staff, partner with local autism organizations and professionals, and mothers attend trainings and workshops to support their children.

Keywords – Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Communication, Communication Strategies, Verbal Input, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Linguistic Mapping

INTRODUCTION

The exchange of messages between two individuals constitutes communication. It is possible to do this nonverbally or vocally. Two-way communication, or interaction, occurs when two individuals react to one another.

American Psychological Association (2023) defines autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) as any one of a group of disorders that usually start in the preschool years and are characterized by a range of limitations in social communication and social interaction, including challenges with social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communication behaviors, and social relationships, as well as confined and repetitive patterns of interests, behaviors, or activities.

Most individuals with autism struggle with the following: communicating with others, starting conversations, replying to others, or using conversations to educate others or just to be friendly, having empathy and understanding for others, and engaging in daily activities related to family, school, work, and social life (Understanding and developing communication, n.d.).

Certain children with autism exhibit delayed language development, while certain adults with autism do not speak at all. Other channels of communication must be established in those situations. They may employ some of the following methods: gestures, crying, putting a hand where they desire, examining the desired object, achieving, employing images, uncomfortable actions, echolalia, or mimicking the speech made by others (Understanding and developing communication, n.d.).

In the Philippines, the prevalence of autism has been increasing, highlighting the need for

support and resources for families (Jaymalin, 2014; as cited in Lucero, 2018). The Autism Care Act of 2017 aims to address these needs by creating a national roadmap and increasing awareness about autism as a national health issue says that autism is a highly variable neurodevelopmental disorder that first appears during infancy or childhood, and generally follows a steady course without remission (Senate of the Philippines Legislative Digital Resources, 2017). Given the scarcity of information on communication strategies employed by Filipino mothers of children with autism, understanding their experiences and insights can inform effective communication strategies for other mothers facing similar challenges. By examining the experiences of mothers at Crisanto Guysayko Memorial Elementary School in Nagcarlan, Laguna, valuable insights can be gained to support mothers in raising and communicating with their children with autism, ultimately improving their overall well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Development in Autism Spectrum Disorder

According to the National Institute of Mental Health – USA (2024), autism spectrum disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave.

The term "spectrum" refers to the variability in the way ASD symptoms manifest and how severe they are, as well as in the abilities and functioning levels of those who have the disorder (Autism Research Institute, n.d.).

People with ASD often also have language difficulties, and about 25% to 30% of children with ASD either fail to develop functional language or are minimally verbal. The ability to communicate effectively is an essential life skill, and difficulties with communication can have a range of adverse outcomes, including poorer academic achievement, behavioral difficulties, and reduced quality of life (Brignell, 2018).

Studies on the development of autistic children's communication have reportedly taken speech things seriously. The early vocalizations and consonant inventories of weakly verbal children are emphasized as important aspects of eventual expressive language capacity. Saul and Norbury (2020) examined the expressive language development of 27 minimally verbal autistic children between the ages of 2 and 5 over the course of a year.

According to Rapin et al. (2019), children with ASD also struggle with syntactic development and finding ways to put meaningful words together. When semantic investigations are conducted on ASD children, the results vary. Additionally in the study by Eigsti et al. (2021), they struggle to comprehend verbs that pertain to mental states, such as knowing, thinking, and remembering.

For children with autism, it may feel like the deck is stacked against them. For starters, a

conversation usually begins non-verbally with eye contact—something many people with autism struggle with. If the child is older, his/her language skills may be tested when the verbal part of social communication commences with greetings and small talk; social niceties he/she may not “get.” Other nuanced elements of social interaction and communication like tone of voice, facial expressions, and “appropriate” gestures may come naturally to neurotypical individuals; but for those with autism spectrum disorders, these communication skills may have to be learned (Loftus, 2021).

When it comes to language skills, some children with ASD are ahead of their neurotypical peers. These children may possess a vocabulary beyond their years, or use language in a formal, almost business-like manner. Often these children are skilled at memorizing the rules of language, they may therefore be particularly good at spelling and learning new words. However, the application and everyday use of language for social interaction could be challenging for them (Loftus, 2021).

With a focus on verbal and nonverbal communication, communication strategies have been used in healthcare situations throughout history for both developmental and therapeutic processes for children with ASD. ASD affects 30% to 50% of kids, and these kids may use communication in a variety of ways throughout their lives despite not ever developing verbal speech skills (Dawson-Squibb et al., 2019).

For children with ASD, social communication skills are a difficult set of abilities that are challenging to develop (Balasubramanian et al., 2019). To learn and develop relations, it is essential to have communication skills, including verbal and nonverbal language. However, communication abilities are generally poor in autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) patients. Most of them have issues with language, communication, and social engagement. Additionally, there is a connection between language development at later developmental stages and children with ASD's nonverbal communication abilities (Ingersoll & Gergans, 2019).

According to the National Institutes of Health (2024), children with ASD may struggle to acquire language skills and comprehend what other people are saying to them. They frequently struggle with nonverbal communication as well, which includes eye contact, facial expressions, and hand gestures. Some ASD children may not be able to speak or use language, while others may have extremely limited speaking abilities. Even as adults, they struggle to recognize complicated emotions, organize, and communicate emotions, and make eye contact with others (Akcamus et al., 2019).

The most defining aspect of autism, which is also known as a developmental disability, is the difficulty in building relationships, which is the fundamental component of communication. Lack of language development is the main characteristic of autistic children. Although speech does develop in kids with ASD, there may not be much or no functional language use. They may have trouble differentiating items because of their inadequate mimicry of noises and movements (Tepeli & Karadeniz, 2013 as cited by Yücesoy and Bağlama, 2020).

Communication Experiences of Families with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism has its particularity in the important signs of changes in a child's communication, interaction, and behavior. The symptoms start in the first few months of life; however, more noticeable traits are manifested around the age of three. Among the perceived signs, difficulty with speech and understanding, infrequent eye contact, and repetitive movements stand out (Carvalho, 2021).

Parents have lifelong anxiety and stress because they believe that their children with ASD should be protected and supported throughout life. Family-centered care guides nursing practice: assessment of the parents' coping styles and burden of care is relevant to addressing the comprehensive needs of parents with children with autism. Once it has been identified that families, in particular mothers, experience significant distress, it is important for nurses working with these families to use strategies to help alleviate some of the distress.

Having a family member diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) has a profound impact on the whole family system. A growing body of literature provides insight into the experiences of parents of people with ASD, particularly parents of children with ASD. Sibling experiences varied across the sample. Some experienced a need to protect their autistic siblings with many feeling a strong sense of responsibility for them. Others battled with guilt and maintenance of independence and some adults described being judged by professionals concerning their caring responsibilities suggesting an ongoing burden for some. Many autistic siblings had significant needs that directly or indirectly affected their neurotypical siblings' well-being (Leedham et al., 2020).

Parents of children with ASD have significant psychological distress, high levels of stress, frequent physical and mental burnout, and insufficient coping skills. In terms of factors that affect the coping of parents, caregiver burden, and coping strategies, the subject should be investigated further in different groups. It may be suggested that the stratification of the coping strategies of the parents of children with autism is determined by assessment tools and that solutions for parents should be developed to reduce the burden of care (Bozkurt et al., 2019).

Many interventions for young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are parent-mediated (either in one-to-one sessions with a therapist or as a member of a parent group) whereby a trained practitioner shares therapeutic strategies with the parent, who is then encouraged to use these strategies with their child outside the session. Through video-aided observations and facilitative questioning, therapists coach parents to increase their 'synchrony', that is, to carefully observe their child's communication and interaction and to adapt their communication style to interact with their child with enhanced sensitivity and responsiveness (Leadbitter et al., 2020).

Parents highlighted the importance of openness and honesty when talking about autism,

as well as the need to tailor discussions to individual children's needs (see also Smith et al., 2019).

Parents revealed that having a child with autism not only affected their parenting role but defined how they lived, often describing "living in their own world." A general theme of isolation and loneliness emerged, and parents expressed difficulty preserving their sense of self. In trying to achieve a sense of normality, they focused their energy on maintaining a routine in family life (Rabba et al., 2019).

As a result of behavioral, interaction, and language deficits, children with ASD are highly dependent on parents and caregivers. In turn, parents and caregivers may deal with the burden of physical and emotional suffering as they need to be fully dedicated to these children, with numerous responsibilities and overloading tasks. Thus, caregivers may experience feelings of anguish, fear of unexpected happenings, and even fear of judgment by third parties (Carvalho, 2021).

It can be challenging to interact with a child or grandchild with ASD. But it is one of the most important things you can do to help that child learn. Research shows that early, frequent, and loving involvement of family members is one of the best ways to help children with ASD (Default - Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024).

Living with autistic children can have positive and negative aspects. Among them, social isolation stands out as a negative aspect, as families are deprived of social contact and attending certain events and gatherings due to the unexpected behavior of the child and due to fear of judgment by third parties. As a positive experience, it appears that although the family faces daily struggles in caring care for the child, feelings of affection and dedication are significantly expressed. Thus, individualized care is essential to meet the needs of each autistic individual, together with family support, combined education, leisure, and embracement, so that self-sufficiency and autonomy may be possible in the care of the autistic child. The family environment is the first in which individuals with ASD come into contact and socialize with other people. The family has the potential to be ahead of the needs of their child, thus assuming active roles in the care and development of the autistic child (Carvalho, 2021).

When you are raising an autistic child or children, working on positive family relationships is as important as taking care of any other aspect of your family life. That is because positive family relationships help children feel secure and loved, which gives them the confidence to explore their world, try new things and learn, make it easier for your family to solve problems, resolve conflict and respect differences of opinion, and give children the skills they need to build healthy relationships of their own. Strong and positive family relationships are enjoyable for their own sake – it just feels good to be part of a warm and loving family. You can strengthen your family relationships by focusing on relationships with your children and other family members, focusing on your family's strengths, and building your family's resilience (Raising Children Network, 2020).

If you can find ways for your children to spend time doing fun things together, this is good for their relationships too. This is about finding activities that suit a range of abilities and ages. It's also important to nurture your relationship with your typically developing children by spending quality time just with them. This can be as simple as going for a walk together, reading a book at bedtime, or doing a special activity now and then. Quality time gives you the chance to see things from your children's points of view. It sends the message that your typically developing children are important to you too (Raising Children Network, 2020).

However, some children with ASD may love to keep talking with family members, friends, and even strangers about a topic they are obsessed with. The problem is that they may talk about it too long. Or they may talk only about that one subject. This can push other people away (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024).

If you are a parent or grandparent of a child with ASD, it can be heartbreaking if you feel like you just cannot connect with him or her. Many children can learn to communicate and interact. Healthcare providers and mental health experts have learned a lot about how to break through to these children (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2024).

Children with ASD may not be able to understand your nonverbal communication. They may not react to your smile or frown; they take things literally. You need to be careful to say exactly what you mean.

Furthermore, educational professionals can become familiar with the potential struggles and difficulties that families of children with ASD might encounter. They can lessen parent stress and help their children make meaningful progress through the interventions that they provide. Because interactions with school staff can be an additional source of stress for some families, professionals should listen to them, communicate frequently, and be responsive to their concerns and input. Keep in mind that teachers should communicate about the child's positive behaviors and not just about his or her challenging behaviors (IRIS Center, n.d.).

Teachers can further support families by helping them find an appropriate support network. Some groups or networks offer support and services to families of children with ASD (e.g. Autism Support Network). Many parents express great satisfaction when they can create networks with other parents with children of similar ages and abilities, and these associations often lead to lifelong friendships (IRIS Center, n.d.).

Communication Strategies for Children with Autism

Simple adjustments to the environment and style may facilitate communication for children with ASD. For children with ASD, the visual route is typically their preferred sensory pathway, and visual adaptations can help them absorb concepts more clearly. Images of items, films of actions or processes, timelines, or models of behavior are examples of visuals (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the same study articulated that the most important aspect of receiving communication from children with ASD is giving them enough time to assimilate information and come up with a response. It is important to take into account how children with ASD communicate. They might not be aware of personal space at all, make little to no eye contact, mispronounce words or idioms, or be unable to anticipate the appropriate response.

Every child should be able to communicate in some capacity, and they should not be deprived of this right because they do not use speech. Teaching nonverbal skills to communicate can sometimes lead to verbal communication; the child who can communicate a need or control his/her environment may have the motivation to improve communication by verbalizing needs (Loftus, 2021).

Parents of nonverbal children with autism may worry extensively about whether their child can communicate his/her needs. It is therefore encouraging to observe results from studies (Wodka et al, 2019) indicating that non-verbal children can acquire verbal skills later, with some reaching encouraging levels of fluency in adolescence (Loftus, 2021).

Synthesis

Related literature and studies clearly show that there are triads of difficulties in autistic children: difficulties in social relationships, impairments of communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behavior. According to studies, children with ASD show developmental problems in communication, expressive and receptive language, social interaction, and behavioral skills. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2023) says that typical communication and social behaviors are typically the first warning signs of autism.

People with ASD often also have language difficulties, and about 25% to 30% of children with ASD either fail to develop functional language or are minimally verbal (Brignell, 2018).

Having a family member diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) has a profound impact on the whole family system. A growing body of literature provides insight into the experiences of parents of people with ASD, particularly parents of children with ASD (Leedham et al., 2020). Parenting plays a significant role in building good communication and relationships within a family, especially in terms of children's social communication. A positive parent-child relationship is essential for a child's healthy growth, especially for those children with autism.

Living with children with autism can have positive and negative aspects. Among them, social isolation stands out as a negative aspect, as families are deprived of social contact and attending certain events and gatherings due to the unexpected behavior of the child and due to fear of judgment by third parties. As a positive experience, it appears that although the family faces daily struggles in caring care for the child, feelings of affection and dedication are significantly expressed (Carvalho, 2021).

Understanding sensory limitations is an important component of effective communication with children who have ASD (Vaz, 2019). Simple adjustments to the surroundings and communication style may facilitate communication. The most important aspect of receiving communication from children with ASD is giving them enough time to assimilate information and come up with a response. It is important to take into account how children with ASD communicate.

According to Bozkurt et al. (2019), in terms of factors that affect the coping of parents, caregiver burden, and coping strategies, ASD children should be investigated further in different groups like caregivers and siblings. It may be suggested that the stratification of the coping strategies of the parents of children with autism is determined by assessment tools and that solutions for parents should be developed to reduce the burden of care.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological descriptive research design as this approach is suitable for obtaining an in-depth, holistic understanding of the communication strategies that mothers use for their children with autism. To further enhance the understanding of the participants' experiences, a phenomenological research approach was utilized to explore and analyze the gathered data. It is regarded as fit for the nature of the present study as it aimed to understand the essence of being a mother of children with autism examining participants' experiences through their perspectives.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Crisanto Guysayko Memorial Elementary School (CGMES). Formerly known as Nagcarlan Elementary School which was established in 1920, it was renamed Crisanto Guysayko Memorial Elementary School (CGMES) in the early 1960s in memory of civic-spirited citizens of the community who donated a part of the land where the school stands now. CGMES offers Special Education (SPED) to help students with special needs learn in a child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and motivating environment for effective learning. The school aims to comply with the Department of Education's prescribed curriculum to provide quality education to all its students, including those with special needs.

Respondents of the Study

The selected participants of the study were full-time mothers who had enrolled their children at CGMES. There were only fifteen (15) Filipino mothers with children diagnosed with autism from the school, however, two (2) mothers participated in the pretest stage to improve the semi-structured interview guide questions. As a result, these two mothers were not included as final respondents in the study. The final 13 Filipino mothers with children

diagnosed with autism became the final respondents who joined the actual study. Data saturation was used as the basis for sample size.

Data Collection

The research instrument was validated and pretested. Pretesting was made by providing the 2 mothers (not part of the actual study) with children with autism research instruments for them to give comments to improve the said instrument. After revising and improving the research instrument, the researchers sent an interview request letter with consent to the participants. The researchers let the participants choose the most convenient date, time and place for them to have an interview. Unless the participants requested or chose otherwise, the researchers conducted the house-to-house interview to build rapport. Only then was the purpose of the study discussed. All the participants had the same set of questions from the interview, with follow-up questions for clarification or to gather further information. The researchers kept on gathering data until the yielded data were integrated.

Moreover, the entire interview was recorded through voice recording and note-taking. All researchers served as interviewers. However, one researcher took the lead in the interview. Their rights as participants were discussed; a consent form was completed by them.

Ethical Issues

Before the formal interview, the researchers assured the participants of their confidentiality and informed them about their right to withdraw at any time they wish.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data. Researchers studied the data, made codes, searched, and reviewed the themes, and defined and named the themes. The answers that were collected from the interview were transcribed and organized into different codes and themes to establish meaningful patterns. The researchers analyzed and determined the meaning of the gathered data about the purpose of the study.

RESULTS

Communication of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Verbal Communication

Based on the findings, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) used various modes of communication to express their needs and desires like verbal communication, touch, and pointing. Verbal communication, despite being challenging for some children with ASD, is still

a major mode of communication observed by the mothers in their communication patterns. Some children with ASD use phrases, sentences, or single words to express themselves verbally.

Parents of children with ASD described the communication of their child using verbal communication. They mentioned that their children have difficulty with their speech development and language skills, which can result in incomplete or broken speech. “Sinasabi naman niya sa ’kin ‘pag may gusto o kailangan siya. Yun nga lang, hindi maayos ang kaniyang pananalita ba. Parang putol, hindi buo. *(He lets me know when he wants or needs something, but his speech is not very clear and he is unable to articulate complete words.)*,” as narrated by Gie, 52 years old, mother of an 8-year-old child with ASD. “Nakakapagsabi naman siya, pa isa-isa minsan kaunti lang parang sentence, pero hindi talaga laging ganon, at intindi ko na naman agad yun.” *(He can express himself, even if it's just one word at a time or a short sentence, but it's not consistent, and I can immediately comprehend what he's trying to say.)*, said Haez, 37 years old, mother of a 5-year-old child with ASD.

Touch

The use of touch as a means of communication can also be observed in the statements provided by the mothers. For instance, Cisca mentioned that her child tends to touch or pull her hand when he wants to communicate something. “Kung mayroon s'yang gusto o gustong sabihin, hinahawakan o hinihila niya yung kamay ko.” *(When he wants something or needs to communicate, he reaches out and takes hold of my hand.)* Mel also reported that her child communicates by touching or tapping her hand when he wants something. “Ang anak ko kasi alam ko na may gustong sabihin o may kailangan siya kapag kinukutkot nya yong kamay ko.” *(When my son rubs my hand, I understand that he has something to say or needs assistance.)* Similarly, Dona's child is described as “hands-on,” which suggests that touch may be an important mode of communication for him. As Cris mentioned, her child's use of touch may depend on his mood, and Chie, 33, with a 7-year-old child with ASD, reported that her child may touch her when he is feeling lazy or does not want to speak. “Yung sa anak ko naman minsan hinahawakan ako, ano siya e depende sa mood kasi minsan maiksi ang pasensya nya, pag tamad ayaw nya nagsasalita sya.” *(Occasionally, he touches me, but it depends on his mood. He has a short attention span and often prefers not to talk.)*

Pointing

Pointing is another mode of communication by their children with ASD. Three of the mothers mentioned that their children tend to communicate through pointing. It is a way for their children to communicate their needs and wants when they have difficulty with verbal communication. It allows their children to indicate specific objects or actions that they need or want.

Strategies Mothers Used to Promote Children's Communication

There were three (3) ways in which mothers promote their children's communication skills: verbal input, alternative and augmentative communication strategies, and linguistic mapping.

Verbal Input

Four (4) of the participants answered that they use verbal input as a means to explain things to their children in a way that they can understand. Mothers mentioned that they try to engage their children in one-on-one conversations, using simple language, and speaking in a way that is easy for their child to understand. "Sa kanya ang ginagawa ko para maintindihan niya yung sinasabi ko, ipapaliwanag ko lang. Kakausapin ko siya sa gusto kong mangyare, tuturuan ko siya kasi sa kanila talaga kailangan mo lang talagang kausapin, mauunawaan at mauunawaan ka naman niya basta kausapin mo siya." (*My strategy is to communicate with him in a way that he can understand. I explain things to him, teach him, and engage in conversations with him. I firmly believe that communication is the key to understanding each other.*), said Gie, 52, with an 8-year-old child with ASD. They also mentioned that they make an effort to maintain their child's attention during these conversations. "Salita lang, verbal din. Kausapin ko siya ng kami lang dalawa. Hangga't na sa akin pa yung attention niya, kakausapin ko siya ng kakausapin para kahit papaano magawa niya ding umusap." (*I use words, and verbal language when I talk to him. I make sure that I have his attention and talk to him one-on-one. This way, he can also communicate his thoughts and feelings.*), said Dona, 39, with an 8-year-old child with ASD. By doing so, they hope to encourage their children to communicate more effectively and to be more confident in their communication skills.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication Strategies

On the use of alternative and augmentative communication strategies to promote their children's communication skills, mothers were using toys or coloring books to aid in communication, using figures or visual aids to demonstrate concepts, and utilizing speech-generating devices or other equipment recommended by therapists. Mae, 33, with an 8-year-old child with ASD, expressed: "Itinuro sa akin nung therapists niya yung paggamit ng mga laruan na makakatulong sa kaniya, meron kasi silang ganun o kaya mga colorings ganun." (*Her therapists have taught me how to use her toys to help her since they have features such as colors that aid her in her development.*)

One mother mentioned using pictures and a small board to help her child with ASD communicate, while another talked about practicing spelling with her child using figures. "Nagstart na rin siya mag speech therapy. 'Pag nasa bahay, ayun gumagamit kami nung mga pictures kasi sabi nung therapist niya, malaking tulong 'yun, so bumibili kame ng mga ganun tsaka yung maliit na board ba, kapag di ako masyadong busy, ayun ginagamit ko yun sa kanya, susulatan ko tapos tuturo ko base sa natutunan ko dun sa mga napapanood ko din, ganun." (*My child has also started speech therapy. When we're at home, we use pictures as a reminder*

from his therapist, and it has been a huge help. We buy materials like small boards to aid in teaching him. When I'm not busy, I use these materials and base my teaching on what I learned from the videos I watched.), said Lyn, 36 with an 8-year-old child with ASD. Additionally, one mother mentioned utilizing speech-generating devices, which can provide a means of communication for children who have difficulty speaking or using verbal language. "Pinagtetherapy namin. Tapos pinapa doctor, tapos yung mga suggestion ng mga therapists so inaapply ko. Yung mga equipment na kailangan, halimbawa ayan mga device na speech-generating, yung mga ganun na kahit papaano kaya ng budget." (We underwent therapies and consulted with doctors, and I implemented the suggestions given by therapists. We were able to afford the necessary equipment like speech-generating devices.), told Rina, 28 years old, with a 6-year-old child with ASD.

Linguistic Mapping

Another way was the use of linguistic mapping. Linguistic mapping is another strategy that mothers use to promote their children's communication skills. This strategy involves repeating the child's words or phrases while expanding on them to help the child learn new vocabulary and sentence structures.

The mothers in the study reported that they repeat and add to the words or phrases their child uses, which helps expand their child's vocabulary and understanding of language. The first mother, Cess, repeats what her child says and adds to it with an exaggerated effect to get her attention. "Ang ginagawa ko 'pag kinakausap ko siya inuulit ko yung sinasabi niya pero may dagdag na tapos uulitin ulit niya. Eh sa ganong way ba e nadadagdagan yung mga words na nababanggit niya which is malaking tulong na talaga at sumasaya kami pag ganon. Halimbawa sinabi na "Mommy fish" sabihin ko lang "Oh wow, there is a fish". Pag ganon kasi sila kinakausap mas nagiging familiar siya sa ibang word tapos sa susunod nasasabi na niya." (What I'm doing is, when I talk to him, I repeat what he says but I add more words to it, and then he repeats it again and again. This method has helped him add more words to his vocabulary, and we are really happy about it. For instance, if he says 'Mommy fish', I respond by saying, 'Oh wow, there is a fish', and by doing so, he becomes more familiar with other words, which he eventually learns to say on his own.), articulated by Cess, 27, with a 6-year-old child with ASD. Mel, the second mother, 40 years old, with a 9-year-old child with ASD, also uses a similar strategy by adding words to what her child says, such as "beautiful flower." Finally, Cris, the third mother, 38 years old with an 8-year-old child with ASD, also uses linguistic mapping by adding words to her child's phrases to help her learn new words and phrases.

Mothers' Expectations for Their Children's Communication

Express and Communicate with Others

When asked what expectations they have for their children's communication, most of the mothers have a common expectation for their child's communication: the ability to express

themselves and communicate effectively with others. They value their child's ability to communicate not only for practical purposes, such as expressing needs and wants but also for socialization and making connections with others.

Mothers are hoping that their children with ASD can express and communicate effectively not just for practical purposes but also for socialization and making connections with others. “Ano, di na ako nangangarap ng malaki. Ang sa akin lang e yung maiexpress niya yung sarili niya at matuto siyang mai-communicate sa iba yung gusto niyang sabihin.” (*I don't dream big anymore. It's enough for him to be able to express himself and learn to communicate what he wants to say to others.*), said Gie, 52 years old, with an 8-year-old child with ASD.

Many of the participants also have a common expectation for their child's speech progress, which is for them to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively using words. The mothers expressed that they are not necessarily looking for their child to have perfect or advanced language skills, but rather for them to be able to produce words express themselves clearly, and improve their speech later on. Cisca, 33, mother of a 9-year-old child with ASD, shared her thoughts: “Ang sa akin ay kahit simpleng makapag-produce sya ng words o maicommunicate niya ng ayos yung gusto niyang sabihin. Yun lang. Doon lang. Okay na okay na ako.” (*For me, it's enough if he can simply produce words and communicate effectively what he wants to say. That's all I need.*) Mel, 40, mother of a 9-year-old child with ASD, added: “Isa lang, masabi niya yung mga nararamdaman niya, yung gusto at mga ayaw niya. Makapag-salita siya ng maayos kahit paunti-unting words lang masaya na 'ko don.” (*The only thing I want is for him to be able to express his feelings, likes, and dislikes. Even if he can only speak a few words, I'm content with that.*)

DISCUSSION

Communication of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Some children with autism may be able to use phrases and sentences to express themselves, while others may rely on single words. It is important to note that while verbal communication can be a challenge for children with autism, they still can communicate their needs and desires. According to Gürbüz et al. (2020), the majority of children with ASD demonstrate deficits in both verbal and nonverbal communication skills. However, many of the children with ASD were still able to communicate their needs and desires to some extent, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. They support the notion that while communication difficulties are common in children with ASD, they still can communicate their needs and desires, and interventions and therapies can help improve their communication abilities and quality of life.

It is important to note that touch-based communication can be highly individualized and may vary in different situations or moods. The use of touch as a means of communication in children with autism is supported by the study of Kaur and Singh (2021). The study highlights

that children with autism may have difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication, but touch can serve as an alternative mode of communication for them. The authors found that touch-based interventions, such as massage therapy and touch communication, can improve social and communication skills in children with autism.

Pointing is another mode of communication by their children with ASD. This is supported by the study of Hinckson et al. (2021), in which it was found that nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, and body movements, was the most common mode of communication among children with ASD. However, verbal communication was also present, and children with ASD used words, phrases, or sentences to communicate.

Strategies Mothers Used to Promote Children's Communication

There were three (3) ways how to promote their children's communication skills: verbal input, alternative and augmentative communication strategies, and linguistic mapping.

The results indicated that mothers of children with ASD tend to use verbal input as a communication strategy to promote their children's communication skills. They also highlighted the importance of mothers' use of simple language and frequent repetition of words and phrases to support their children's communication development. They emphasized that using short, clear sentences and avoiding complex language can help children with ASD better understand and process information. This strategy is related to the discussion of Ozturk et al. (2020), which stated that verbal input was one of the most commonly used strategies, with mothers using simple language and engaging their children in one-on-one conversations to promote effective communication.

Alternative and augmentative communication strategies suggest that visual aids and hands-on learning can be effective tools for children with ASD who struggle with verbal communication. These devices can range from simple picture-based communication systems to more advanced technology that generates spoken language.

Rose et al. (2019) mentioned that Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) interventions, such as picture exchange communication systems, communication boards, and speech-generating devices, can improve communication skills and reduce communication difficulties in children with ASD. AAC interventions can also increase social interactions and reduce problem behaviors associated with communication difficulties. It also highlights the importance of individualized AAC interventions based on the child's communication needs, preferences, and abilities. It also emphasizes the importance of involving parents and caregivers in AAC interventions and providing training and support to ensure successful implementation.

McKenzie and Scott (2019) support the findings that mothers of children with ASD use verbal input as the primary communication strategy and also use augmentative and

alternative communication strategies to support their children's communication skills.

According to the study by Sumi et al. (2022), linguistic mapping for individuals with ASD involves a multifaceted approach to understanding pragmatic impairment (PI) in social communication, which is a central symptom of ASD. Studies emphasize the importance of comprehensive mapping of PI, which is facilitated by constructing annotation schemes and corpora to visualize and quantify occurrences of PI in spoken language. Additionally, research suggests that music-assisted programs can attract the attention of individuals with ASD to speech, potentially improving communication skills and language development.

Mothers' Expectations for Their Children's Communication

This expectation of mothers for their children to communicate was similar to one of the parent's perspectives on communication that was discussed in the study by Babb et al. (2021). The study found that parents expect their children to communicate effectively and have meaningful social interactions with others. Parents reported frustration and concern when their child does not communicate their needs, wants, or feelings. Additionally, parents expressed the desire for their child to have age-appropriate social skills and be able to build and maintain relationships with peers.

According to Kogan et al. (2021), parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) identified communication as one of the most important areas in which they wanted to see improvement in their child. Specifically, parents expressed a desire for their child to make progress in expressive language, receptive language, and social communication.

Action Plan

After analyzing the collected data and reviewing the study's findings, the researchers developed a recommended action plan that schools and mothers, or parents, can use to improve their communication strategies with their children with ASD.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

Children with ASD can still communicate their needs and desires through verbal, touch-based, and pointing communication. They experience difficulties with speech and language skills, resulting in incomplete or broken speech. However, they could still communicate their needs and desires verbally, although to varying degrees. Touch-based communication, which may be individualized and mood-dependent, could also serve as an alternative mode of communication for children with ASD. Similarly, pointing could also be used particularly in situations where they may be overwhelmed or when communicating with someone who may not understand their verbal language.

The study explores the communication strategies used by mothers to promote their children's communication skills such as verbal input, augmentative and alternative communication, and linguistic mapping. Mothers use one-on-one conversations, simple language, and attention maintenance to engage their children in verbal communication. They also employ alternative communication strategies such as visual aids, speech-generating devices, and toys. Linguistic mapping, which involves expanding upon the child's language skills, is also an effective strategy.

Moreover, mothers have two main expectations for their children's communication: to communicate effectively and to have speech progress. Mothers emphasize the importance of their children's ability to express themselves, not only for practical reasons but also for socialization and building connections with others. They also value their child's ability to communicate their needs and desires to others, even if it is just a little. Additionally, mothers desire for their children to have age-appropriate social skills and be able to build and maintain relationships with peers.

Schools can take the necessary steps to achieve this by providing training and resources for mothers and families, extending school hours or providing after-school programs, and creating opportunities for communication and social interaction.

The researchers proposed several recommendations. Initially, the Crisanto Guysayko Memorial Elementary School officials, faculty, and staff should extend school hours for SPED students to provide more time for communication and social skill development, organize regular school-wide events and activities that promote communication and social interaction among students with and without ASD, and provide resources and training for teachers and staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of ASD and effective communication strategies.

Furthermore, mothers should attend training programs and workshops offered by schools and local autism organizations to learn effective communication strategies for their children, use individualized communication interventions based on their child's needs and preferences, and encourage and support their child's efforts to communicate, even if progress is slow.

The Department of Education should develop and implement standardized training programs for special education teachers on individualized communication interventions and strategies for children with ASD, and encourage schools to establish partnerships with local autism organizations and professionals to provide resources and support for families of children with ASD.

IMPLICATIONS

This study lies in its ability to provide valuable insights and implications in several areas. Firstly, the findings shed light on the communication patterns and strategies used by mothers

of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This can contribute to the development of effective communication interventions and support programs for families and educators working with children with ASD. Secondly, the study highlights the crucial role of mothers in promoting their children's communication skills. This finding emphasizes the importance of involving and empowering mothers as active participants in their child's communication development process. Thirdly, the research underscores the significance of effective communication for socialization and building connections with others. This understanding can guide interventions and support programs aimed at enhancing social skills and facilitating meaningful social interactions for children with ASD.

In conclusion, this research can contribute to the understanding of communication in children with ASD, highlight the role of mothers in promoting their children's communication skills, emphasize the importance of effective communication for socialization, provide recommendations for schools to improve communication strategies, and suggest areas for future research. These have practical implications for professionals, educators, and policymakers involved in supporting children with ASD and their families, ultimately aiming to enhance their communication abilities and overall well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers are grateful to **Almighty God**, who bestowed on them the courage and strength to successfully conduct this research. Also, this would not be possible without the support, patience, and guidance from their teachers, family and friends, research participants, and LU and Crisanto Guysayko Memorial Elementary School (CGMES) administrators.

FUNDING

The study did not receive funding from any institution.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest among the co-authors regarding topics or resources covered in this study.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the paper and voluntarily agreed to the terms with full consent before taking part in the conduct of this study.

Ethics Approval

The Laguna University Research Ethics Committee duly approved this study after it conformed to the local and international accepted ethical guidelines.

REFERENCES

- Akcamus, M.C., Acarlar, F., Kaysili, B.K., Alak, G. (March 2019). Examination of the relationship between gestures and vocabulary in children with autism spectrum disorder at different language stages. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(5), 777-791.
- American Psychological Association. (2023). *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. <https://dictionary.apa.org/autism-spectrum-disorder>.
- Arthur-Kelly, M., Sigafoos, J., Green, V., Mathisen, B., & Arthur-Kelly, R. (2019). Issues in the use of visual supports to promote communication in individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31(18), 1474–1486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638280802590629>.
- Autism Research Institute. (n.d.). *What is Autism?*. Retrieved from <https://autism.org/what-is-autism/>.
- Babb, K. A., Buzzell, E. M., & Borrie, S. A. (2021). Parent Perspectives of Communication: Implications for Early Identification and Intervention of Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(5), 1681-1693. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04700-2>.
- Balasubramanian, L., Blum, A. M., & Wolfberg, P. (2019). Building on early foundations into school: Fostering socialization in meaningful socio-cultural contexts. In R. Jordan, J. M. Roberts, & K. Hume (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Autism and Education* (pp. 134–253).
- Bozkurt, G., Uysal, G., & Düzkeya, D. S. (2019). Examination of Care Burden and Stress Coping Styles of Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 47, 142–147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2019.05.005>
- Brignell, A., Chenausky, K.V., Song, H, Zhu, J., Suo, C., Morgan, A. T., and Cochrane Developmental, Psychosocial and Learning Problems Group (2018). Communication interventions for autism spectrum disorder in minimally verbal children.
- Carvalho, M. C. S. de. (2021, December 15). Experiences of Family Members of ChildrenwithAutism.<https://opennursingjournal.com/VOLUME/15/PAGE/367/FULLTEXT/>.
- Dawson-Squibb, J., Davids, E. L., Harrison, A. J., Molony, M. A., & De Vries, P. J. (2019). Parent Education and Training for autism spectrum disorders: Scoping the evidence. *Autism*, 24(1), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319841739>.
- Eigsti, I.-M., de Marchena, A. B., Schuh, J. M., & Kelley, E. (2011). Language acquisition in autism spectrum disorders: A developmental review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 5(2), 681–691. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2010.09.001>
- Gürbüz, S. B., Erkovan, E. Ü., & Yurtsever, N. (2020). Verbal and nonverbal communication abilities in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(8), 2987-2996. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03998-2>

- Hinckson, E., Carbone, V., & Barton, E. E. (2021). Nonverbal and Verbal Communication in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism Research and Treatment*, 51(7), 2211-2220.
- Ingersoll, B., & Gergans, S. (2019). The effect of a parent-implemented imitation intervention on spontaneous imitation skills in young children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 28(2), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2006.02.004>.
- IRIS Center. (n.d.). *Page 5: Working with Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/asd1/cresource/q2/p05/>
- Kaur, J. L., & Singh, C. E., (2021). A systematic review of sensory-based communication interventions for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism Research*, 13(5), 727-742. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.229>
- Kogan, A., Mirenda, P., & Shefcyk, A. (2021). “It’s all about communication”: Parent perspectives on intervention priorities for young children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(4), 1194-1207.
- Leadbitter, K., Macdonald, W., Taylor, C., & Buckle, K. L. (2020). Parent perceptions of participation in a parent-mediated communication-focussed intervention with their young child with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism*, 24(8), 2129–2141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320936394>
- Leedham, A. T., Thompson, A. R., & Freeth, M. (2020). A thematic synthesis of siblings’ lived experiences of autism: Distress, responsibilities, compassion, and connection. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 97, 103547. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2019.103547>
- Loftus, B. Y. A. (2021, December 23). *Communication Problems and Children with Autism*. *Autism Parenting Magazine*. <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-children-communication-problems/>
- Lucero, J. A. (2017). Raising children with autism spectrum disorder: A study on parenting styles and techniques. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science*, 3(8), 48-53. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.20018.71368>
- McKenzie, K. B., & Scott, S. (2019). An exploration of communication strategies used by mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(7), 2838-2851. doi: 10.1007/s10803-019-03949-4.
- National Institutes of Health. (2024). *Autism*. Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/autism>
- National Institute of Mental Health – USA. (2024), *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd>.
- Ozturk, Y., Akdogan, O., & Gokdogan, S. (2020). Maternal Strategies to Improve Communication in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 50(5), 1585-1597.
- Raising Children Network. (2020, December 10). *Positive relationships in families with autistic children*. Retrieved from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/family-relationships-asd>
- Rabba, A. S., Dissanayake, C., & Barbaro, J. (2019). Parents’ experiences of an early autism diagnosis: Insights into their needs. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 66, 101415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2019.101415>

- Rapin, I., Dunn, M. A., Allen, D. A., Stevens, M. C., & Fein, D. (2019). Subtypes of Language Disorders in School-Age Children with Autism. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 34(1), 66–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87565640802564648>
- Rose, T. A., Swain, N. R., & Wainer, A. L. (2019). Augmentative and alternative communication and autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 22(2), 78-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17518423.2017.1412920>
- Saul, J., & Norbury, C. (2020). Does phonetic repertoire in minimally verbal autistic preschoolers predict the severity of later expressive language impairment? *Autism*, 24(5), 1217–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319898560>
- Senate of the Philippines Legislative Digital Resources. (2017). Autism Care Act 2017. <https://issuances-library.senate.gov.ph/bills/senate-bill-no-1433-17th-congress-republic>.
- Smith, I. C., Cox, B. E., & White, S. W. (2019). Helping parents with the initial diagnosis of autism: Parent-informed guidance for clinicians. *Evidence-based Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 4(3), 296–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23794925.2019.1626781>
- Sumi K., Kazuaki H., Vo Phuong L., Manabu S., Ryuichi I., Kentaro I., Kazuhiko N. (2022, February). Toward mapping pragmatic impairment of autism spectrum disorder individuals through the development of a corpus of spoken Japanese. <https://typeset.io/papers/toward-mapping-pragmatic-impairment-of-autism-spectrum-1mu1tl8i>
- Stanford Medicine Children’s Health. (2024). *Interacting with a Child Who Has Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Retrieved from <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=interacting-with-a-child-who-has-autism-spectrum-disorder-160-46>
- Tepeli, Y. & Karadeniz, H. (2013). Examination of Receptive Language Skills of Autistic and Typically Developing Children in Terms of Different Variables.
- Vaz, I. (2019). Improving the management of children with learning disability and autism spectrum disorder when they attend hospital. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 36(6), 753–755. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2010.01144.x>

Author Biography

Saralie V. Estrito is from Nagcarlan, Laguna, and is a consistent honor student from first year to 4th year in the tertiary level. Though a young mother, she graduated Cum Laude in Class 2023. She was the Vice-President of their academic organization, Communication Circle, and writer in their student newsletter, The Communicator. Their group won the best in thesis and best student research presenter awards in their department during the 3rd Research Colloquium at Laguna University.

Katleen Faye J. Decena is a native of Sta. Cruz, Laguna who earned a degree in Bachelor of Arts in Communication, won best in thesis and best student research presenter awards in their department during the 3rd Research Colloquium at Laguna University. She is an active member of their academic organization, Communication Circle. She sings, plays volleyball, and plays drums and guitar.

Mariane C. Mercado is from Nagcarlan, Laguna who earned a degree in Bachelor of Arts in Communication, and won best in thesis and best student research presenter during the 3rd Research Colloquium at Laguna University. She has been a passionate student writer since elementary and joined different writing competitions during her high school days. She also completed the internship program at Nagcarlan, Laguna's Office of the Vice Mayor where she worked as an administrative assistant and writer. Doing community service has always been in her heart. She is also an active member of their academic organization, Communication Circle.

Olga J. Domingo earned a BS in Agricultural Business, an MS in Development Communication, and a Doctorate in Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños. A pioneer faculty, she is the Program Chair of the Bachelor of Arts in Communication. She is an active member of different communication organizations like the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE) and the School Press Advisers' Movement, Inc. (SPAM, Inc.) where she is currently an elected officer.