

A Review of the Effects of Multimodal Interventions in the Rehabilitation Department of a Class III Grade A Hospital on the Enhancement of Social Skills in Autistic Children

Ye Zeng¹

¹ Longgang District Maternity & Child Healthcare Hospital of Shenzhen City (Longgang Maternity and Child Institute of Shantou University Medical College), China

Correspondence: Ye Zeng, Longgang District Maternity & Child Healthcare Hospital of Shenzhen City (Longgang Maternity and Child Institute of Shantou University Medical College), Shenzhen, Guangdong, China.

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Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that severely affects the social interaction and communication abilities of children. Social skills deficits are one of the core symptoms of ASD, which have a significant impact on the quality of life and future development of autistic children. Multimodal interventions in the rehabilitation department of Class III Grade A hospitals have emerged as a promising approach to address these social skill deficits. This review article comprehensively examines the existing literature on the effects of multimodal interventions on the social skills of autistic children. It first introduces the background and significance of studying social skills in autistic children. Then, it delves into the concept and components of multimodal interventions, including behavioral therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other related modalities. The review also analyzes the mechanisms through which multimodal interventions enhance social skills, such as improving communication, promoting emotional recognition, and facilitating social interaction. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness of these interventions based on various research findings. Finally, the article concludes by summarizing the current state of research, pointing out the limitations of existing studies, and suggesting directions for future research. Through this review, it is hoped to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of multimodal interventions in improving the social skills of autistic children and contribute to the development of more effective rehabilitation strategies.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Social skills, multimodal interventions, rehabilitation department, Class III Grade A hospital

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities [1]. According to recent epidemiological studies, the prevalence of ASD has been increasing globally, with estimates ranging from 1% to 2% of the general population [2]. Among the various symptoms of ASD, social skill deficits are particularly prominent and have a profound impact on the daily lives and future prospects of autistic children.

Social skills are essential for human beings to establish and maintain relationships, communicate effectively, and function appropriately in social settings. For autistic children, the inability to develop normal social skills can lead to social isolation, difficulties in making friends, and challenges in academic and vocational settings. Therefore, enhancing the social skills of autistic children has become a crucial goal in the field of autism research and intervention.

In recent years, the rehabilitation department of Class III Grade A hospitals has played an increasingly important role in providing comprehensive rehabilitation services for autistic children. Multimodal interventions, which combine multiple therapeutic approaches, have emerged as a promising strategy to address the complex social skill

deficits of autistic children. These interventions typically include behavioral therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other related modalities, each of which targets different aspects of social skills development.

The purpose of this review article is to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the effects of multimodal interventions in the rehabilitation department of Class III Grade A hospitals on the social skills of autistic children. By synthesizing the findings of previous studies, this review aims to identify the key components and mechanisms of multimodal interventions, evaluate their effectiveness, and suggest directions for future research.

2. Multimodal Interventions for Autistic Children

2.1 Behavioral Therapy

Behavioral therapy is one of the most widely used modalities in the treatment of ASD. It is based on the principles of learning theory and focuses on modifying behavior through positive reinforcement and punishment. In the context of social skills training, behavioral therapy typically involves teaching autistic children specific social behaviors, such as eye contact, turn-taking, and appropriate social responses, through structured activities and exercises.

One of the most well-known behavioral therapies for ASD is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is a comprehensive approach that uses a variety of techniques, such as discrete trial training, natural environment teaching, and token economy, to teach social skills and other adaptive behaviors [3]. Research has shown that ABA can effectively improve the social skills of autistic children, including communication, social interaction, and play skills [4].

2.2 Speech Therapy

Speech therapy is another important modality in the treatment of ASD. It focuses on improving the communication skills of autistic children, including speech production, language comprehension, and social communication. Speech therapists use a variety of techniques, such as speech exercises, language games, and social stories, to help autistic children develop their communication skills.

In addition to traditional speech therapy, there are also some specialized approaches that have been developed specifically for autistic children, such as Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). PECS is a communication system that uses pictures to help autistic children communicate their needs and wants. AAC, on the other hand, includes a variety of communication devices and techniques, such as communication boards, speech-generating devices, and sign language, that can be used to supplement or replace speech [5].

2.3 Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy is a holistic approach that focuses on helping autistic children develop the skills they need to perform daily activities, such as self-care, dressing, and feeding. In the context of social skills training, occupational therapy can help autistic children improve their sensory processing, fine motor skills, and social interaction skills.

Occupational therapists use a variety of techniques, such as sensory integration therapy, fine motor exercises, and social skills groups, to help autistic children develop their social skills. Sensory integration therapy, for example, aims to help autistic children process sensory information more effectively, which can improve their social interaction and communication skills. Fine motor exercises, on the other hand, can help autistic children develop the dexterity and coordination they need to perform social skills, such as shaking hands and using utensils [6].

2.4 Other Modalities

In addition to behavioral therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy, there are also some other modalities that have been used in the treatment of ASD, such as music therapy, art therapy, and play therapy. These modalities can provide a creative and engaging way for autistic children to express themselves and develop their social skills.

Music therapy, for example, uses music to help autistic children improve their communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation skills. Art therapy, on the other hand, uses art materials to help autistic children express their emotions and develop their creativity. Play therapy, which is based on the principles of play, can help autistic children develop their social skills through play activities [7].

3. Mechanisms of Multimodal Interventions in Enhancing Social Skills

3.1 Improving Communication

One of the key mechanisms through which multimodal interventions enhance social skills is by improving communication. Behavioral therapy, speech therapy, and other modalities can help autistic children develop the skills they need to communicate effectively, such as speech production, language comprehension, and social communication. By improving communication skills, autistic children are better able to express their needs and wants, understand the communication of others, and engage in social interactions.

3.2 Promoting Emotional Recognition

Another important mechanism through which multimodal interventions enhance social skills is by promoting emotional recognition. Autistic children often have difficulties in recognizing and understanding the emotions of others, which can lead to social misunderstandings and difficulties in establishing relationships. Behavioral therapy, speech therapy, and other modalities can help autistic children develop the skills they need to recognize and understand the emotions of others, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. By promoting emotional recognition, autistic children are better able to empathize with others and respond appropriately to social situations.

3.3 Facilitating Social Interaction

Multimodal interventions can also facilitate social interaction by providing autistic children with opportunities to practice social skills in a supportive and structured environment. Behavioral therapy, occupational therapy, and other modalities can help autistic children develop the skills they need to interact with others, such as eye contact, turn-taking, and appropriate social responses. By providing opportunities for social interaction, autistic children are better able to develop social relationships and improve their social skills.

4. Effectiveness of Multimodal Interventions

Numerous studies have delved into the effectiveness of multimodal interventions in enhancing the social skills of autistic children, employing a diverse array of research designs such as randomized controlled trials, single-case designs, and observational studies. These different research approaches each offer unique insights into the impact of multimodal interventions, and collectively, they contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their efficacy.

In the realm of randomized controlled trials, which are often considered the gold standard in research for establishing causal relationships, several notable studies have provided compelling evidence of the benefits of multimodal interventions. For instance, a randomized controlled trial conducted by Smith et al. [8] meticulously compared two groups of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). One group received a combination of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and speech therapy, while the other group received only speech therapy. The results of this study were remarkable, as the children in the group that received the multimodal intervention, which combined ABA and speech therapy, demonstrated significant improvements in various aspects of their social skills. These improvements were manifested in enhanced communication abilities, increased frequency of appropriate social interactions, and better engagement in social activities compared to those who received speech therapy alone. This finding underscores the potential synergy between different therapeutic modalities in addressing the complex social skill deficits of autistic children.

Another influential study by Schreibman et al. [9] employed a multimodal intervention approach that incorporated behavioral therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. The researchers carefully designed a comprehensive intervention program tailored to the specific needs of autistic children, with the aim of promoting social skills development. Through a series of structured activities and exercises, the children in this study were provided with opportunities to practice and refine their social skills in a supportive environment. The results of this study showed that the multimodal intervention was effective in improving the social skills of the autistic children. Specifically, the children demonstrated improvements in areas such as eye contact, turn-taking, understanding of social cues, and the ability to initiate and maintain social interactions. These findings further emphasize the importance of a holistic approach that addresses multiple aspects of social skills through a combination of different therapeutic modalities.

Single-case designs have also played a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of multimodal interventions. These designs allow for in-depth analysis of individual children's responses to the intervention, providing detailed insights into the specific mechanisms through which the intervention impacts social skills development. For example, in some single-case studies, researchers have closely monitored the progress of individual autistic children over time, tracking changes in their social behavior, communication skills, and emotional regulation.

These studies have often revealed that multimodal interventions can have a significant positive impact on the social skills of individual children, with some children showing remarkable improvements in their ability to interact with peers and family members.

Observational studies, on the other hand, have provided valuable real-world data on the effectiveness of multimodal interventions in natural settings. These studies involve observing children in their everyday environments, such as schools, homes, and community settings, to assess the impact of the intervention on their social behavior. Observational studies have shown that multimodal interventions can lead to improvements in the social skills of autistic children in real-life situations, such as increased participation in group activities, improved communication with others, and better social integration.

Overall, the results of these diverse studies have converged to show that multimodal interventions can be highly effective in improving the social skills of autistic children. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of multimodal interventions may vary depending on a multitude of factors. One of the key factors is the age of the autistic child. Younger children may be more responsive to certain types of interventions, as their brains are still in a more plastic state and more amenable to learning and change. For example, early intensive interventions that combine multiple modalities may have a greater impact on the social skills development of young autistic children compared to older children.

The severity of the autism also plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of multimodal interventions. Children with more severe autism may require more intensive and individualized interventions to achieve significant improvements in their social skills. In some cases, a combination of multiple modalities may be necessary to address the complex needs of these children. Additionally, the specific components of the multimodal intervention can also influence its effectiveness. Different therapeutic modalities may target different aspects of social skills, and the optimal combination of these modalities may vary depending on the individual needs of each child.

The implementation of the intervention is another crucial factor. The quality of the intervention, including the training and expertise of the therapists, the fidelity of the intervention delivery, and the consistency of the intervention over time, can all impact its effectiveness. A well-implemented multimodal intervention that is delivered with high fidelity and consistency is more likely to produce positive outcomes in terms of social skills improvement.

In conclusion, while the evidence overwhelmingly supports the effectiveness of multimodal interventions in enhancing the social skills of autistic children, it is essential to consider these various factors when designing and implementing such interventions. By taking into account the individual characteristics and needs of each child, as well as ensuring the high-quality implementation of the intervention, we can maximize the potential benefits of multimodal interventions and help autistic children achieve better social outcomes.

5. Limitations of Existing Studies

Despite the promising results that have emerged from research on multimodal interventions aimed at enhancing the social skills of autistic children, it is crucial to acknowledge and carefully consider the various limitations inherent in existing studies. These limitations not only impact the interpretation of the current findings but also highlight areas that require further attention and improvement in future research endeavors.

First and foremost, a significant limitation across many existing studies is the relatively small sample sizes employed. In research, sample size plays a pivotal role in determining the generalizability and reliability of the findings. With small sample sizes, the results may be more susceptible to random variation and chance factors, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions that can be applied to a broader population of autistic children. For instance, in some studies focusing on specific multimodal intervention approaches, the number of participants might be limited to a few dozen children. This restricted sample size can lead to inflated effect sizes or false positive results, as the data may not accurately represent the diverse range of characteristics and responses among the entire population of autistic children. Moreover, small samples may not adequately capture the full spectrum of autism severity levels, ages, and comorbid conditions, thereby limiting the external validity of the study findings.

Secondly, the majority of existing studies have utilized short-term follow-up periods. Social skills development in autistic children is a complex and often slow process that occurs over an extended period. Assessing the effectiveness of multimodal interventions only in the short term may not provide a comprehensive understanding of their long-term impact. For example, a study might evaluate the changes in social skills immediately after a few months of intervention but fail to track the children's progress over several years. It is possible that initial improvements observed in the short term may not be sustained or may even decline over time, or that additional

benefits may emerge only after a more extended period of intervention and practice. Without long-term follow-up data, it becomes challenging to determine whether the gains in social skills achieved through multimodal interventions are truly lasting and have a meaningful impact on the children's overall quality of life and social integration in the long run.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, multimodal interventions in the rehabilitation department of Class III Grade A hospitals have emerged as a promising approach to address the social skill deficits of autistic children. These interventions typically include behavioral therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and other related modalities, each of which targets different aspects of social skills development. The mechanisms through which multimodal interventions enhance social skills include improving communication, promoting emotional recognition, and facilitating social interaction.

Numerous studies have shown that multimodal interventions can be effective in improving the social skills of autistic children. However, there are still some limitations in the existing studies, such as small sample sizes, short-term follow-up periods, lack of standardization, and failure to control for other factors. Therefore, future research should focus on addressing these limitations and developing more effective and standardized multimodal interventions for autistic children.

In addition, future research should also explore the long-term effects of multimodal interventions on the social skills and quality of life of autistic children. By doing so, we can better understand the role of multimodal interventions in the treatment of ASD and develop more effective rehabilitation strategies to improve the social skills and well-being of autistic children.

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