

CURRENT SITUATION OF DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS SKILLS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS VIA ART THERAPY IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Self-awareness is an important group of skills from the model of social-emotional learning which is extremely necessary for children. In this study, we present the result of a survey from 385 teachers at inclusive preschools and primary schools in Viet Nam on the development of self-awareness skills for children with ASD 4-8 years old via art therapy or art experience. The survey results show that some of the teachers are properly aware of the goal of developing self-awareness skills through art therapy for children with ASD 4-8 years old. The actual results also indicate some requirements for learning and teaching self-awareness skills through art therapy for children with ASD 4-8 years old. This result contributes to providing useful information in building a measure of self-awareness skills through art therapy for children with ASD 4-8 years old in inclusive schools in Vietnam. Art therapy can be an effective tool in developing self-awareness skills for children with ASD, in the condition that early intervention must be set up methodically and professionally. Finally, the role of teachers is a concern because they are the main in supporting children with special needs.

Keywords: art therapy, self-awareness, SEL, Social-emotional skills, special education, Children on the Autistic Spectrum, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve the goal of inclusive education, there is a current focus on special education models that emphasize collaboration. This approach is being implemented to ensure that all students have equal access to education regardless of ability. Therefore, the directions of close specialized coordination to optimally develop learning ability and limit core defects are studied from overview to in-depth to support children with an autism spectrum disorder. Art therapy is a new concept in Vietnam, but artistic experiences have had a unique appeal to children of all ages for centuries. Based on a survey of preschool and primary school teachers, we analyzed the current status of developing self-awareness skills for children with autism spectrum disorder through art therapy in inclusive schools. After conducting research, it was discovered that art therapy could positively impact students in schools. This approach shows promising results in enhancing their overall educational experiences. Children with autism spectrum disorder can develop self-image, emotions, interests, and individual abilities. At the same time, the teacher's role is significant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past centuries, scientists debated Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and its importance in one's success - the 20th and 21st centuries are open spaces for specific scientific research about the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ). Today, to achieve outstanding achievements in career and life, people have to practice skills: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills (the CASEL 2013 social-emotional learning model). Children with autism spectrum disorder are not outside the trend.

According to the self-perception theory of Daryl J. Bem (1972), behavior creates attitude. Individuals can recognize their mental states, including emotions, attitudes, etc. Partly based on the ability to infer through self-observation of the behavior or the circumstances that give rise to the conduct of oneself, they conclude and change their mental state. Self-awareness is a skill that develops gradually over time. It starts with the formation of self-beliefs, personal traits, and knowledge. First, you believe in yourself (I can do it). As you grow, you become more aware of your personality traits, such as having short hair. Eventually, you start to recognize your psychological and social attributes. For instance, you may see yourself as a cheerful person with many friends (Damon and Hart, 1988). Fenigstein et al. (1975) said that self-awareness is a three-dimensional structure that includes: individual self-consciousness (individuals have thoughts about themselves), self-will common sense (individuals are concerned with what others think of them), and social anxiety (problems outside the self and of a social nature that cause stress).

Building on those results, CASEL (2003) - Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, was founded by Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, and associates. CASEL lays the foundation for Social-emotional-Learning SEL and systematically sets criteria, grouping the necessary skills into an educational framework. Self-awareness is a person's understanding of himself, including emotional awareness, self-image perception, and awareness of abilities, interests, and dreams.

The development of self-awareness skills follows the rule of individual development, but self-awareness is not a skill that can be taught simply through direct instruction. This skill is required to allow students to interact with their environment (Wehmeyer and Shogren 2008). Several studies have indicated difficulties with self-awareness in individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). For instance, individuals with ASD may experience challenges monitoring their emotions or self-intentions, have limited ability to consider themselves in relationships, and find it hard to feel like they belong in social situations (Lombardo and Baron Cohen, 2010).

Dr. Hans Asperger, an Austrian pediatrician, described the condition of autism as having "autistic psychopathy," which referred to self-focus and personality disorder. However, the aspect of "personality disorder" is no longer used as Autism and Asperger Syndrome are not considered personality disorders nor are they associated with psychopathic or anti-social behavior. Dr. Asperger observed extreme self-focus in individuals with Autism and characterized it as "egocentric in the extreme." These early studies helped identify that Autism is linked to personal ego and social impairments, which can range from mild to severe. The principles of self-awareness are used to explain ego abnormalities in people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

As per the theory of mind (ToM), a person's behavior is expressed based on their mind. It is said that one's ability to recognize their own beliefs, desires, intentions, and feelings will ultimately determine their behavior. Having a theory of mind gives individuals the advantage of seeing the difference in their thoughts and behaviors and those of others. (Chris Frith and Uta Frith, 2005). Studies showed that individuals with ASD had a limited perception of their

mental states; however, they also had severer difficulty perceiving other people's mental states (Frith, 2003). Studies on ToM and ASD have shown that individuals with ASD are deficient in their theories about their own and other people's minds. This deficiency caused disorders of executive function (Hughes, Russell, and Robbins, 1994) - manifestations of abnormalities in the mechanism of action of the frontal lobes (Shallice, 1988).

In addition, art therapy is a method of psychological therapy based on the process of artistic activities such as drawing, modeling, dancing, and moving. The process of working on mediating tools has projected thoughts, perceptions, and psychological states that sometimes children cannot express verbally. This method has been studied worldwide since the 1970s with representatives: Selfe. L (London, 1977, 1983), William. D (1998), Dubowski (1984) and has now been developed into many scientific therapy programs for children with autism spectrum disorders at prestigious organizations such as The American Art Therapy Association (since 2015), The Arts for Autism Foundation of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

In Vietnam, art therapy has only been discovered in recent years. Authors Nguyen Thi Minh Hang (2007), Tran Thi Minh Duc (2009), Duong Thi Hoa (2016), Ngo Ba Cong (2017) studied the relationship between painting and children's psychology in general. Still, there is no research on art and painting - as a product of art therapy or other products, such as clay figurines and plastic toys for children with an autism spectrum disorder. In 2016, author Nguyen Thi Minh Anh and her colleagues first published the article "Combining art therapy with activity therapy in supporting children with special needs," in the September Special Education Journal. The authors analyzed that the initial object of art therapy is people with psychological disorders; when extended to children with autism spectrum disorder, the mediating material has become an essential factor that affects their emotions. In a safe environment, children show difficulty coping with or controlling specific materials. Thanks to that, children regulate feelings, receive and solve developmental tasks, and approach common social problems.

Studying the use of art therapy to develop self-awareness skills for children with an autism spectrum disorder in Vietnam will offer valuable insights into the methods and considerations for teaching this content to students with autism spectrum disorders at inclusive schools. This research will explore this area's roles, characteristics, and trends, laying the groundwork for further investigation.

METHODOLOGY

To gain insight into the situation, we surveyed 420 preschool and primary school teachers across several cities in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, Hanoi, and Da Nang. Out of those, we received 385 valid responses, 94 from primary school teachers and 291 from teachers at inclusive preschools. Thirty-five responses were deemed invalid due to incorrect subjects. More detailed information about the survey sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: An overview of the research objects

Information about research objects		Quantity	%
City of work	Ho Chi Minh	93	24.16
	Hai Phong	241	62.60
	Ha Noi	8	2.08
	Quang Ninh	2	0.52
	Bac Giang	1	0.26
	Da Nang	5	1.30
	Nghe An	1	0.26
	Ha Tinh	2	0.52

	Thanh Hoa	1	0.26
	Yen Bai	6	1.56
	Nam Dinh	4	1.04
	Hai Duong	1	0.26
	Cao Bang	3	0.78
	Dien Bien	3	0.78
	Vinh Yen	2	0.52
	Vung Tau	1	0.26
	Binh Phuoc	5	1.30
	Ninh Thuan	6	1.56
Gender	Male	16	4.16
	Female	369	95.84
Age	Under 30	168	43.64
	From 30 to 40	172	44.68
	Over 40	45	11.69
Education	Special Education	9	2.34
	Primary Education	52	13.51
	Vietnamese language and literature teacher education	9	2.34
	English Language Teacher Education	21	5.45
	Mathematics Teacher Education	16	4.16
	Art Education	6	1.56
	Preschool Education	270	70.13
	Social Work	1	0.26
	Nurser	1	0.26
Time teaching a class with students ASD (years)	Under 3	259	67.27
	From 3 to under 5	89	23.12
	From 5 to under 10	25	6.49
	Over 10	12	3.12
Time working in the education sector (years)	Under 5	81	21.04
	From 5 to under 10	130	33.77
	From 10 to under 20	136	35.32
	Over 20	38	9.87
TOTAL		385	100

Research method: a survey by questionnaire, interview, and mathematical-statistical methods. The questionnaire survey includes the following principal contents:

Part 1: Basic information of survey objects including age, gender, city of work, education, time of teaching children with autism spectrum disorder, and time working in the education sector.

Part 2: Survey teachers' assessment of self-awareness skills in preschool children with ASD (12 contents), and primary school students with 14.

Part 3: Survey teachers' perceptions of self-awareness skills and the current status of organizing activities to develop self-awareness skills through art therapy at an inclusive school (9 questions).

The answers to the questions are pre-designed into five levels (5 points - Likert scale) for teachers to choose from, with the number of points increasing from low to high; the lowest score is one, and the highest is 5. Besides, qualitative auxiliary answers are used to check the

accuracy of the selected levels. The results were evaluated on five levels using IBM SPSS Statistics 22. The distance value is calculated by dividing the Likert measure into five parts: Distance value = (Maximum – Minimum) / 5 = 0.8.

This creates value segments:	1.00 – 1.80: Never
1.81 – 2.60: Rarely	2.61 – 3.40: Sometimes
3.41 – 4.20: Usually	4.21 – 5.00: Always

SPSS Statistics 22 was used for research data processing, including Anova tests, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, and mean, standard deviation, percent, and frequency calculations.

RESULTS AND FINDING

From the survey, we obtained a data table reflecting the status of self-awareness skills of children with autism spectrum disorder at two school levels: preschool and primary school, presented in Tables 2 and 3. In Table 2 and Table 3, the level of self-awareness in primary school children with autism spectrum disorder achieves the general mean of 2.525, while the available mean of preschool children is 2.482, which is the lower of the scale. Thus, children with autism spectrum disorders at the primary level are assessed to have a relatively higher self-awareness than preschool children, but the difference is insignificant. The coefficient of variation CV ($CV = S.D / \text{Mean}$, S.D: standard deviation) is only from about 0.266 to 0.384 < 1. That is, the standard deviation is smaller than the mean, the data part fluctuates slightly on average, and the responses of the respondents are low divergence.

The mean of self-awareness ranges from 1.372 to 3.287 among primary school children with ASD. Which "Know how to make plans to achieve your dreams" is the lowest (Mean= 1.372, S.D = 0.528). The three criteria that are assessed to have the highest level of awareness are, respectively, "perceive yourself as useless in your family, class, friends." (Mean= 3.287, S.D= 0.875), "knowing what you like: food, toys, friends, tasks" (Mean= 3.181, S.D= 0.816), "knowing what you hate: food, toys, friends, tasks (Mean= 3.160, S.D= 0.846). A notable observation is that the most frequently evaluated criterion pertains to a child's negative perception of their self-image. The distinction between preschool and primary school integration settings is highlighted by the varying levels of social-emotional skills among children with ASD and their peers. This is particularly noticeable at the primary level. Children between the ages of 6-12 were believed to be in stage 4 - diligence and inferiority (Industry vs. Inferiority) based on Erik Erikson's theory of 8 stages of psychosocial development. It is, therefore, understandable for children with ASD to exhibit this self-image awareness.

The mean of self-awareness ranges from 1.893 to 3.065 among preschool children. "Action to express desire" is the lowest (mean= 1.893, S.D = 0.950). The three criteria with the highest level of awareness are, respectively, "knowing what they dislike: food, toys, friends, and tasks (mean= 3.065, S.D=0.968), "knowing what you like: food, toys, friends, tasks, (mean= 3.062, S.D= 0.970), "identify your emotions in school situations (mean= 2.797, S.D= 0.9632). It is easy to see that the highest mean is only at level 3 (sometimes). Whether at preschool or primary school age, children with ASD rarely or never express, act, or plan to follow their dreams. They often show interest awareness (what they like and dislike). Identifying and expressing one's emotions in school settings is fundamental to social-emotional growth. It is a common subject in the preschool curriculum in Viet Nam. Therefore, this is also an activity in which a child with autism spectrum disorders learns to integrate better than other self-awareness content. Preschool provides a learning environment where children can develop their social skills through various collective, group, and individual activities. Educators can

utilize this opportunity to encourage the development of interconnected aspects of self-awareness in young children. This approach can assist in cultivating emotional awareness and overall self-awareness from an early age, benefiting their personal growth.

Table 2: Self-awareness status of students with ASD in primary schools through teacher assessment

Self-awareness skill		Level										MEAN	S.D	Rank
		1		2		3		4		5				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Emotional awareness														
1	Be aware of how you feel when you do something wrong	2	2.1	26	27.7	46	48.9	19	20.2	1	1.1	2.904	0.777	5
2	Be aware of how you feel when you are praised and praised by others	3	3.2	22	23.4	44	46.8	24	25.5	1	1.1	2.979	0.816	4
3	Be aware of how you feel when you do useful things for others, like helping friends or sharing toys with friends.	5	5.3	31	33	45	47.9	11	11.7	2	2.1	2.723	0.822	8
4	Be aware of your feelings when you don't help, and share the joys and sorrows of your loved ones.	22	23.4	51	54.3	18	19.1	3	3.2	0	0	2.021	0.747	11
Self-image awareness														
5	Perceive yourself as an important person in your family, class, or group of friends.	8	8.5	74	78.7	10	10.6	2	2.1	0	0	2.064	0.525	10
6	Perceive yourself as useless in your family, class, or group of friends.	4	4.3	13	13.8	30	31.9	46	48.9	1	1.1	3.287	0.875	1
Competence awareness														
7	Your strengths (what subjects you are good at, what you can do well)	7	7.4	22	23.4	40	42.6	25	26.6	0	0	2.883	0.890	6
8	Your weaknesses, (What subjects you are not being good at, what you cannot do)	6	6.4	26	27.7	40	42.6	22	23.4	0	0	2.830	0.863	7
9	Realize your mistake when you make a mistake	11	11.7	35	37.2	37	39.4	11	11.7	0	0	2.511	0.852	9
10	Know how to plan, and set goals for yourself before specific tasks	61	64.9	27	28.7	6	6.4	0	0	0	0	1.415	0.612	13
Interest awareness														
11	Know what you like: food, toys, friends, tasks...	3	3.2	15	16	38	40.4	38	40.4	0	0	3.181	0.816	2
12	Know what you dislike: food, toys, friends, tasks...	4	4.3	15	16	37	39.4	38	40.4	0	0	3.160	0.846	3
Desire awareness														
13	Know your desires like who you want to be, what you want to do	15	16	64	68.1	13	13.8	2	2.1	0	0	2.021	0.622	12
14	Know how to make plans to achieve your dreams	61	64.9	31	33	2	2.1	0	0	0	0	1.372	0.528	14
MEAN												2.525	0.757	

*F: Frequency, %: Percent

Table 3: Self-awareness status of kids with ASD in preschool through teacher assessment.

Self-awareness skill		Level										MEAN	S.D	Rank	
		1		2		3		4		5					
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
Emotional awareness															
1	Identify your emotion in school situations.	27	9.28	85	29.21	103	35.40	72	24.74	4	1.37	2.797	0.9632	3	
2	Identify your emotional level in school situations	53	18.21	104	35.74	85	29.21	45	15.46	4	1.37	2.460	1.0040	7	
3	Know how to reduce negative emotions and increase positive emotions	101	34.71	95	32.65	72	24.74	19	6.53	4	1.37	2.072	0.9887	11	
4	Understand your emotional characteristics	80	27.49	128	43.99	56	19.24	23	7.90	4	1.37	2.117	0.9469	9	
Competency awareness															
5	Your strengths (what you can do well)	52	17.87	76	26.12	95	32.65	66	22.68	2	0.69	2.622	1.0446	4	
6	Your weaknesses (not being good at something)	55	18.90	92	31.60	77	26.50	64	22.00	3	1.00	2.546	1.0637	6	
7	Realize your mistake when you make a mistake	51	17.53	95	32.65	110	37.80	31	10.65	4	1.37	2.457	0.9473	8	
8	Persevere to the last step of the assigned task	57	19.59	73	25.09	99	34.02	55	18.90	7	2.41	2.595	1.0766	5	
Interest awareness															
9	Know what you like: food, toys, friends, tasks...	24	8.25	53	18.21	98	33.68	113	38.83	3	1.03	3.062	0.970	2	
10	Know what you dislike: food, toys, friends, tasks...	22	7.60	56	19.20	99	34.00	109	37.50	5	1.70	3.065	0.968	1	
Desire awareness															
11	Answer questions about your desire,(who you want to be, what you want to do)	81	27.84	120	41.24	71	24.40	18	6.19	1	0.34	2.100	0.891	10	
12	Action to express that desire (Ex: want to be an artist --> Painting)	125	43.00	94	32.30	51	17.50	20	6.90	1	0.30	1.893	0.950	12	
MEAN												2.482	0.984		

*F: Frequency, %: Percent

In part 3, we analyze the reliability by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the question: "What is the concept of self-awareness?". Expected answer: Self-awareness is the ability of an individual to accurately understand his or her feelings, needs, wants, interests, personality, strengths, and weaknesses. We evaluate observed variables (QN2 and QN3) – used as similar statements about the original concept but with different scopes and objects. High Cronbach's alpha values indicate that response values for each participant across a set of questions are consistent. That is, the more similar the observed variables are, the more similar they can represent the properties of the parent factor. The following results:

Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items		
.890		2		

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
QN02	2.128	.650	.809	.
QN03	1.926	.500	.809	.

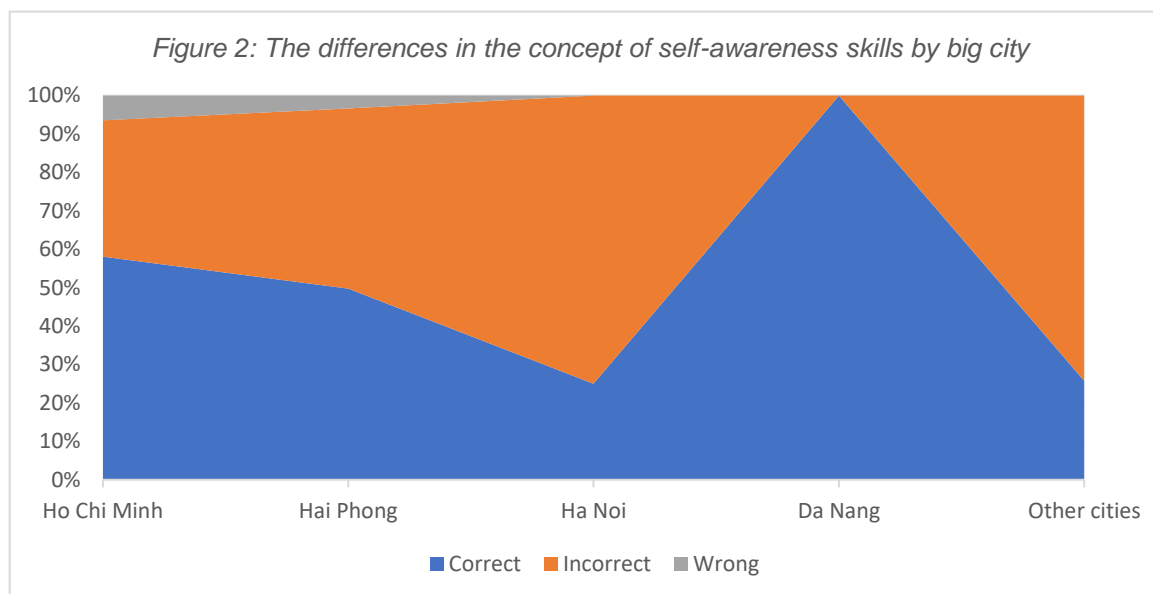
Figure 1: Cronbach's alpha coefficient

The test results show that: (1) the reliability coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha scale of the question is $0.890 > 0.6$ and (2) all observed variables correlate with item and total. It is greater than 0.3. Thus, the scale is reliable, and the observed variables have good explanations for the teacher's perception of self-awareness.

We also used the Anova test, the index $\text{Sig} = 0.000 < 0.005$ shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' answers on the perception of self-awareness skills by region and city. The correct answers were complete as expected, while the incorrect answers were accompanied by conceptual confusion in the observed variables (QN02, QN03). Combining frequency statistics and the percentage of correct selection combinations, we have the following detailed table:

Table 4: The differences in the concept of self-awareness skills by big city

City of work	Answer						MEAN	S.D	Sig
	Correct		Incorrect		Wrong				
	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Ho Chi Minh	54	58.06	33	35.48	6	6.46	1.48	0.619	0.000
Hai Phong	120	49.79	113	46.89	8	3.32	1.54	0.563	
Ha Noi	2	25.00	6	75.00	0	0.00	1.75	0.463	
Đà Dang	5	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1.00	0.000	
Other Cities	9	25.72	26	74.28	0	0	1.74	0.400	



The graph above showed the difference in the percentage of respondents. Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh had a large number of survey participants, while Hanoi, Da Nang, and other cities had a small number of respondents.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) is the largest city located in the south of Vietnam. This is a megacity. It is also the center of Vietnam's economy, culture, entertainment, and education. Ho Chi Minh City had a higher percentage of correct answers (58.06%) than Hai Phong City (49.79%). At the same time, the percentage of people who answered incorrectly in Ho Chi Minh City (35.48%) and the rate of people who answered wrong (6.46%) were lower than in Hai Phong (46.89% and 3.32%). In the same trend, small cities in remote areas such as Cao Bang and Dien Bien had a low percentage of correct answers (25.72%). This fact partly reflected the current status of teachers' perception of developing children's self-awareness skills. In big cities, teachers have easy access to modern technology. They soon understood the importance of social-emotional learning and incorporated it into their teaching content more often.

Regarding the status of developing self-awareness skills at inclusive schools, the mean ranged from 2.691 to 3.790 at a fairly average level (sometimes to often). This partly shows the importance of art experience in general and elements of art therapy in particular in developing self-awareness skills for children with autism spectrum disorders at inclusive schools. Accordingly, 79% assumed that it is essential to organize activities to develop cognitive skills for children with ASD at inclusive schools. 46.8% of teachers said the school had scheduled these activities regularly, and 14.5% said they organized them very often.

When asked about the extent to which teachers implement the elements of art therapy in developing self-awareness skills, 44.2% of teachers chose the usual level, and 1% chose the always level. "Setting aside time for personal assistance to foster children's creativity." The mean of this content is the highest at 3.301. Other contents, in turn, ranked lower. Still, the difference was not significant: "using pictures and colors as intermediate objects to describe emotions and status of ASD students" (mean=3.265, S.D=0.7889), "using symbols in pictures as a metaphor for real situations" (mean= 3.101, S.D=0.8402), "using the process of exposure to artistic tools (brushes, paper material) to regulate the senses of children with autism" (mean=3.132, S.D=0.8137).

Table 5: Situation of developing self-awareness skills for children with ASD at inclusive schools

Survey content		Level										MEAN	S.D
		1		2		3		4		5			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
	Teachers' opinions on the need for cognitive development activities			1	.3	79	20.5	305	79.2			3.790	0.4144
	Frequency of organizing awareness activities	18	4.7	60	15.6	71	18.4	180	46.8	56	14.5	3.509	1.0658
	How often do teachers use elements of art therapy												
1	Setting aside time for personal assistance to foster children's creativity	16	4.2	30	7.8	165	42.9	170	44.2	4	1.0	3.301	0.7988
2	Using pictures and colors as intermediate objects to describe students with ASD feelings and states	8	2.1	51	13.2	164	42.6	155	40.3	7	1.8	3.265	0.7889
3	Using symbols in pictures as a metaphor for real situations	14	3.6	69	17.9	173	44.9	122	31.7	7	1.8	3.101	0.8402
4	Using the process of exposure to artistic tools (brushes, paper material) for sensory conditioning for children with autism	12	3.1	61	15.8	184	47.8	120	31.2	8	2.1	3.132	0.8137
5	Using the dialogue process after art creation to help students better understand themselves	56	14.5	103	26.8	137	35.6	82	21.3	7	1.8	2.691	1.021
MEAN											3.256	0.820	

*F: Frequency, %: Percent

In particular, the content "using the dialogue process after art creation to help students better understand themselves" has the lowest mean: 2,691. Teachers occasionally or rarely do this process. This requires a lot of communication, verbal interaction, and spoken language, while many studies show that children with ASD are accompanied by language disorders or delayed language development. They rarely complete this learning task.

DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

About the Teachers

According to the survey, teachers have expressed concern about the self-awareness levels of children with ASD in inclusive schools, as their self-awareness capacity appears quite low. Self-awareness in primary school children with ASD is higher than in preschool, but the difference is insignificant.

Some teachers have an incorrect perception of self-awareness skills. There is a difference in frequency and percentage by city, ranging from 35% to 83%. Through direct interviews, it was discovered that several preschool teachers lack a clear understanding of what it means for a child to have an autism spectrum disorder. There is often confusion between different types of children with special needs. These teachers expressed a strong interest in receiving specialized and methodical training in special education to enhance their ability to support their students effectively.

Teachers are people who interact and teach directly to children daily. At preschool age, children consider teachers as idols, guides, and role models for them to follow. At the same time, teachers in inclusive schools also have the opportunity to observe many different types of children, including children with autism spectrum disorders and children without disorders. So that, they know how to guide children to the concept of being themselves, being active, and being good at self-awareness skills. Teachers play an extremely important role in the development of children's self-awareness skills. There has been a call for collaboration between families, schools, and society to support children with autism spectrum disorders. The aim is to promote inclusive learning and holistic development.

About Children with ASD

Typically, ASD remains a concept of useless self-image in the eyes of friends and teachers. This predicts that children with ASD do not understand themselves enough. They did not have a supportive environment to encourage and show children positive emotions and excitement. Children with ASD are rated higher in their ability to know what they like or dislike and, at the same time, identify their feelings in school situations, but rarely or only occasionally act to express their dreams. This is a characteristic of children with ASD that teachers need to pay attention to and propose appropriate methods to arouse their potential.

About Art Therapy for Developing Self-Awareness Skills

In terms of goals, developing self-awareness skills for children with ASD is important to most teachers who hold regular sessions in their schools. The teachers have also incorporated various aspects of art therapy in occasional to regular classes to enhance the children's self-awareness. Moreover, it is crucial to select methods that are appropriate for the child's proximal development zone and align with their current ability level.

In terms of content, during classroom lessons, teachers have applied (informally) elements of art therapy such as: setting aside time for personal assistance to foster children's creativity, using pictures and colors as intermediate objects to describe students with ASD feelings and states, using symbols in pictures as a metaphor for real situations. Depending on each school's level of interest and facilitation, the frequency of teachers' applications is dissimilar. These contents have not yet been included in the formal curriculum, so it largely

depends on the educators' skills, knowledge, and flexibility. Besides, it is easy to see some specific content such as: "Using symbols in pictures as a metaphor for real situations" is difficult. Teachers need to have psychology knowledge, need to be trained, or have the support of psychologists to apply correctly and effectively.

In terms of organization, the Preschool teacher is quite liberal while Art therapy is a structured process. Teachers need to develop a specific schedule of activities. Group activities are different from individual therapy for children with ASD. Teachers need to develop many individual therapeutic activities before children can participate in group activities with the same teaching goals. To do this, teachers need to understand: the characteristics of ASD children's unique abilities, and core difficulties of children.

In terms of evaluation, it can be seen that art therapy or creative activities are sub-contents embedded in the main lessons. Teachers need to actively grasp and understand the process to plan periodic assessments of children's self-awareness skills development. Because children at this age develop rapidly in thinking and cognition, the recommended assessment schedule is 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year.

In general, in recent years, children with autism spectrum disorder have received more attention in inclusive schools. Many teachers are aware of individualized education plans and are more interested in expanding their knowledge of children with autism. Along with the wave of life skills development, social-emotional learning (SEL), children with autism also need to be strengthened because they are also the country's future generation. Art therapy promises to be a powerful tool in developing children's self-awareness skills in the early years of life at schools. To do it properly and effectively, the teacher is the focus and the child is the center.

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