



Perspectives of Teachers and Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder on the
Importance of the Parent-Teacher Relationship

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Name: Kate Fitzgibbon

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Susan Kennedy- Killian

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Student No.: 14334584

Name: Kate Fitzgibbon

Supervisor: Dr. Susan- Kennedy Killian

Dissertation title: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum

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Declaration

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Abstract

‘One in every 65 students or 1.5% of the school’s population has a diagnosis of ASD which is approximately 14,000 students’ (NCSE, 2016, p. 32). This statistic highlights the number of students reported on the autism spectrum in Ireland. This study explores perspectives of teachers and parents of children with ASD on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship. A qualitative, constructivist approach using one-to-one semi-structured interviews was the chosen methodology to conduct this study as it was considered the most appropriate means to gain insights into the participant's perceptions, experiences, and attitudes.

The study’s main research questions focus on exploring teachers’ and parents’ perceptions on the importance the parent-teacher relationship and on factors that support and hinder the development of this relationship. The research participants included three parents of primary school children with ASD, three special education teachers working in a special class and three teachers working in a mainstream primary school.

The main findings of this study indicate that there is a need for regular, informal communication between the parent and teacher of a child with ASD to support the child’s needs and the parent-teacher relations. Parent-teacher relationships are reported in the study as supporting the child’s academic and behavioural outcomes, alleviating parental stress, encouraging parental involvement in the child’s education, acting as a bridge between home and school, particularly for non-verbal children. It emerged from the findings that having multiple communication platforms and a positive school ethos supported the development of the parent-teacher relationship. This study highlights barriers to the development of this relationship while identifying the factors that can encourage the

establishment of a parent-teacher relationship. Recommendations are made for encouraging the development of the parent teacher relationship and areas for future research are identified.

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List of Abbreviations

APA – American Psychiatric Association

ASC- Autism Spectrum Condition

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder

CPD - Continuous Professional Development

CEICANRC - Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, National Research Council

DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DEH – Department of Health

DES – Department of Education and Skills

DSM-5 - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition

EPSEN - Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

HSCL- Home School Community Liaison

ICD-11- International Classification of Disease, Eleventh Revision

IEP – Individualised Education Plan

MERC - Marino Ethics in Research Committee

NCCA – National Council of Curriculum and Assessment

NCSE – National Council of Special Education

PDD- Pervasive Developmental Disorder

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENO - Special Education Needs Organiser

SERC - Special Education Review Committee

SESS - Special Education Support Service

SET – Special Education Teacher

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

UNICEF - United Nation's Children's National Emergency Fund

UNESCO - United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WHO - World Health Organisation

Interview Participant Abbreviations

P1 – Parent Interview One

P2 – Parent Interview Two

P3 - Parent Interview Three

SET1 - Special Education Teacher Interview One

SET2 - Special Education Teacher Interview Two

SET3 - Special Education Teacher Interview Three

T1 – Mainstream Teacher Interview One

T2 – Mainstream Teacher Interview Two

T3 – Mainstream Teacher Interview Thr

Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores perspectives on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for parents and teachers of children on the autism spectrum. This chapter introduces the study and provides an outline for the chapters that follow. The chapter presents the aims and purposes of this study while also drawing attention to the research questions that frame the approaches taken in the methodology. Finally, it provides a summary of the outline of this research in order as it is presented.

Aims and Purpose of the Study

- To explore the perceptions of parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on the importance of the parent- teacher relationship.
- To determine the factors that contribute to a positive, open relationship between parents and teachers of children with ASD.
- To outline any existing barriers that can impede the development of the relationship.

Research Rationale

The areas of special education and parent-teacher relationships were chosen for this research project for several reasons. I have had valuable experiences of working with children with ASD. These interactions have instilled a desire in me to learn more about supporting children with ASD in educational settings. 'One in every 65 students or 1.5% of the school's population has a diagnosis of ASD which is approximately 14,000 students' (NCSE, 2016, p. 32). This statistic from the NCSE (2016) influenced me to choose ASD as the area of study as I hope to enhance my understanding in this area. As I come to the latter stage of my professional teacher training, I believe that my ability to sufficiently support children and

parents of children with ASD will be called upon over the course of my teaching career. I believe that developing a relationship with parents is a fundamental aspect of supporting the child. 'Children and young persons with ASDs need continuity of approach provided by parents and professionals working together from the beginning, to meet the challenges presented by this group' (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2001, p. 28). I hope to gain a deeper insight into supporting these families through engaging with the parents and teachers of children with ASD to develop an understanding of their views and opinions on the importance of the parent- teacher relationship.

Research Questions

This study explores the perceptions of parents and teachers on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD. In addition to this, the research desires to explore perspectives on factors that support and hinder the development of a positive parent-teacher relationship. The key research questions are as follows:

What are the perspectives of teachers and parents of children with ASD on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship?

What factors support the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

What factors hinder the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

Overview of Methodology

This study, which uses qualitative data collection tools, was informed by constructivist thinking. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection tool to gain responses of three parents of children with ASD, three special education primary school teachers (SET) and three mainstream primary school teachers on the importance of

the parent-teacher relationship. A thematic analysis approach was utilised to explore and analyse the findings of the interviews.

Outline of Research

Chapter one introduces the research study. It highlights the rationale, aims and purpose of the study, provides an overview of the methodology applied to the research and presents an outline of the research as a whole.

Chapter two provides a brief context for the study in relation to primary school education for children with ASD in Ireland. This chapter then provides a review of academic journals and articles that focus on the relationship between teachers and parents of children on the autism spectrum.

Chapter three justifies and describes the methodological approach to the research. It presents the data collection tools and data analysis approach used in this study and outlines ethical issues relevant to the study.

Chapter four presents and discusses the findings that emerged from analysis of the interviews with the participating teachers and parents of children with ASD. The key findings of the study are discussed in detail in relation to the literature.

Chapter five concludes the study. It offers a summary of the findings of the research and identifies possible recommendations for further future studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This review of the literature includes relevant background information on ASD by including a brief explanation of ASD, terms used to refer to ASD, the prevalence of ASD in Ireland, the process for being diagnosed with ASD with reference to DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2019), primary school educational options for children with ASD in Ireland and finally, the impact of a diagnosis of ASD on the family. Following this, the chapter focuses on literature relevant to the main research questions by exploring literature about the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for children with ASD, factors that support the development of that relationship, and factors that hinder the development of the parent-teacher relationship.

Background Context

There are different terms used in literature when referring to autism such as: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), a person with autism, an autistic person, pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), high functioning autism and Asperger's syndrome (Kenny, Hattersley, Molins, Buckley, Povey & Pellicano, 2016). Throughout this chapter, the term ASD will be used when describing autism as it is the term used in the key diagnostic manuals and the term used by the DES and the NCSE.

Prevalence rates of ASD in Ireland. NCSE released a report in relation to the education of children with ASD which found that 'one in every 65 students or 1.5% of the schools population has a diagnosis of ASD which is approximately 14,000 students' (National Council of Special Education [NCSE], 2016, p. 32).

Diagnostic manuals. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) is one of two standard references

used by psychologists and other healthcare professionals for diagnosing mental and behavioural conditions including ASD, the other of which is ICD-11 (World Health Organisation [WHO] , 2019). ASD is defined as a ‘developmental disorder, and its behavioural manifestations vary with age and ability’ (Frith, 1991, p. 2). According to the diagnostic manuals (APA, 2013; WHO, 2013), there are two specific diagnostic criteria that must be present when diagnosing ASD. Firstly, a child who has ASD must display ‘persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts’ (APA, 2013, p.1). Secondly, the child must present ‘restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities’ (APA, 2013, p.1). DSM-5 lists three different levels of ASD that relate to the severity of the child’s diagnosis and the level support that is required for that child. Level One being the lowest level of severity and Level Three being the highest level requiring the most support.

The International Classification of Disabilities and Related Health Problems, 11th Edition (ICD -11) is another key diagnostic manual referred to by health care providers and policy makers in relation to recording and categorising conditions and factors that can have an influence on health (WHO, 2019). ICD-11 defines ASD as ‘persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication by a range of restricted, repetitive, and inflexible patterns of behaviour and interest which typically occurs in the developmental period’ (WHO, 2019, 6A02). It must be noted that the ICD-11 is still in draft form therefore, the DSM-5 is the main diagnostic manual for ASD.

Dyad of Impairments. Formally referred to as the Triad of Impairments (Wing & Gould, 1979), Jordan (2008) uses the term Dyad of Impairments to describe the characteristics or behaviours that may be present in children with ASD. Dyad of Impairments

is the term used in the key diagnostic manuals (APA, 2013; WHO, 2019), which comprises of impairments in social communication and interaction and restrictive repetitive patterns of behaviour (APA, 2013; Powell and Jordan, 2007; Jordan, 2003).

Traits of ASD. Children with ASD often have ‘difficulties in interpreting verbal and non-verbal expressions and gestures, confusion with semantic and pragmatic aspects of language (DES, 2006, p.5). Furthermore, children with ASD can tend to misinterpret facial expressions and potentially display inappropriate facial expressions themselves such as smiling when another expresses sadness or anger (Hardy, Ogden, Newman, & Cooper, 2015). ‘Echolalia’ can be a trait presented in verbal children with ASD when they often repeat sentences and phrases they have heard during interactions and conversations with others which have insignificant meaning or relevance to the conversation (Sterponi & Shankey, 2014). All the above traits can make communication with others very difficult for children with ASD. Thus, it highlights the need for regular, clear contact between the parent and teacher to accommodate the needs of a child with ASD.

Provision of education for children with ASD. The DES (2006, p.7) acknowledged that ‘no distinct or separate provision was made in the Irish education system for children with ASDs’ for the most part of the 20th century’. The provision of education for children with ASD in Ireland has expanded and developed positively over the past number of years (NCSE, 2016). Children with ASD can avail of education through mainstream classes, special classes, special schools, & home-tuition (NCSE, 2016). It can be argued that students with special educational needs (SEN) should be included in mainstream schools unless their SEN requires more supported placement thus placing them in a special class or school (NCSE, 2015). Although many people use the term ‘ASD unit’, it is advised by the NCSE that schools

should 'use the term 'special class' instead of the term 'unit' which has medical rather than educational connotations '. (NCSE, 2016b, p. 2). In a recent NCSE (2019, p.38) progress report, it was found that, through consultations with schools and educational professionals; 'all students with SEN could, and perhaps should, be educated with their peers in mainstream classes. In this report, the NCSE (2019) encourages the integration of students with SEN into mainstream classes to provide children of all abilities with the opportunity of a mainstream educational experience.

Home-tuition is another form of educational provision for children with ASD. A DES circular (2019) explains that 'children with SEN, who are aged 4 years and over, may avail of Home Tuition where a school placement is not available as confirmed by the NCSE, through the local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)' (DES, 2019, p. 5).

Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is a commonly used term in special education literature. The United Nation's Children's National Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2017, p.2) defines an inclusive education as an 'education system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements'. There have been several reports and statements that have had an influence on the provision of education for learners with ASD. In 1993, the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) produced a report considering exceptionally abled or gifted students. The SERC (1993) provided recommendations for the provision of these children in the Irish education system; 'provision for pupils who are exceptionally able or talented should continue to be made in the context of the provision made for the generality of more able pupils within mainstream schools' (p. 2). The Salamanca Statement of 1994 was an integral standpoint in inclusive

education. It amplified how those with SEN 'must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child pedagogy capable of meeting these needs' (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994, p. viii).

ASD is highlighted as a SEN in the classroom. According to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs [EPSEN] Act (2004), SEN is defined as follows:

restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (p.7).

Experiences of Parents with a Child with ASD

Parental stress. A number of studies highlight that parents of children with ASD report more psychological distress and mental issues, such as depression in comparison to parents with children of other developmental disabilities and typically developing children (Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2005; Estes, Munson, Dawson, Koehler, Zhou, & Abbott, 2009). Ennis-Cole (2019) reveals parental views on their biggest challenges of having a child with ASD were 'repetitive behaviours, aggression, noncompliance, communication, scheduling, social problems, and anxiety' (p.19).

Reactions to a diagnosis. When a child is diagnosed with ASD, it can be a difficult time for parents and families. Legg & Tickle (2019) explain that parents want to 'keep the 'normal' status of their child due to the perceived threat that the label could lead to prejudice and discrimination' (p. 1898). Some parents feel that a diagnosis may be viewed as their child's behaviours to be a result of inadequate parenting (Legg & Tickle, 2019). There may be times where parents 'may not be ready to accept the diagnosis' of their child

(Jordan, 2002, p.25). Parents can experience a range of feelings when their child is diagnosed with ASD such as feelings of relief that their dispositions of their child's behaviours have finally been acknowledged or a sense of grief that their child's life may not be as presupposed (Wachtel & Carter, 2008; Waizbard-Bartov, Yehonatan-Schori, & Golan, 2019). This may prove to be a challenge for teachers when trying to communicate with parents and develop a parent-teacher relationship as parents may 'confront sadness, anger, disappointment, or other complex emotions' (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, National Research Council, [CEICANRC], 2001, p.32).

Importance of the Parent-Teacher Relationship for a Child with ASD

The findings from the literature in relation to the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD include the following: it supports academic achievement and behavioural outcomes for the child, clearly sets the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) targets, alleviates parental stress, encourages parental involvement and bridges the gap for non-verbal children. These findings are explored in the sections that follow.

Support academic achievement and behavioural outcomes for the child. Garbacz, McIntyre & Santiago (2016) suggests that the quality of parent-teacher relationships can support children with ASD's academic and behavioural outcomes. In support of this, Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2009) define parent-teacher relationships as 'a child-centered connection between individuals in the home and school settings who share responsibility for supporting the growth and development of children' (p. 61). When constructing the IEP, a multidisciplinary approach is recommended for supporting a child with ASD's needs (Strunk, Leisen & Schubert, 2017). This relates to all professionals working alongside each other for a common goal by sharing all information to support the educational outcomes for a child.

Clear setting of IEP targets. The IEP is discussed in detail later in this paper. The IEP needs to be considered in terms of home, school, and the classroom but is not a legal obligation (NCSE, 2006). The parent-teacher relationship aims to create targets specific to the child by using the perceptions of all who are involved with the child (Jenkinson, 2007).

Alleviates parental stress. As previously mentioned in this chapter, a diagnosis can bring about stress and anxieties in families of children with ASD (Bianco, Ozturkb, Basadonnea, Mazzonia, & Venutia, 2018). A goal of the parent-teacher relationship is to professionally coordinate with home and school to discuss academics and behavioural goals while also continuing to offer support and help (Williams, Williams & Ullman, 2002). This relationship of parents and teachers should allow the parents to feel supported and united with the education system so that they know they are not alone in educating their child with ASD (Garbacz et al., 2016).

Encourages parental involvement. Jordan and Powell (1995) contend that parental involvement in the learning and teaching of children with ASD is imperative to foster consistency between all environments for the child. Parental involvement in their child's education is reported as having a greater impact on the child's learning than variables such as social class, level of parental education or parental income (Jackson and Harbison, 2014). The DES (2017) suggests that parental involvement is a 'critical factor in enhancing outcomes' for children with SEN (p. 23). Overall, parental engagement is ultimately enhanced when parents are aware of their children's strengths and needs and are involved in regular reviews of progress (DES, 2017). Llamas and Tuazon (2016) highlight the idea of parent-teacher relationships to promote parental willingness to be involved in their child's school and learning.

Bridging the gap for non-verbal children. Parent- teacher relationships should be 'based on mutual respect and trust for each other' (Sucuoğlu, & Bakkaloğlu, 2017, p. 1190). The Special Education Support Service (SESS) (2007a) recommends that parents and teachers are encouraged to actively build trust, celebrate pupil success, and to come together to plan and facilitate the child's learning. Trust between the parent and teacher is essential especially for children with ASD who are non-verbal. (Goh, Whitaker, Feldman, Cull, Hoyte, Algermissen, McSwiggan-Hardin, Kugelmass & Peterson, 2013). In non-verbal children with ASD, auditory processing abilities are frequently disrupted, and communication is difficult with others (Goh et al., 2013). This further highlights the importance of the parent-teacher relationship (Sucuoğlu, & Bakkaloğlu, 2017).

Supports to the Parent-Teacher Relationship

As reported in the literature, supports for developing a positive parent-teacher relationship between parents and teachers of children with ASD include: a positive school atmosphere, regular communication, having a range of communication methods and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL).

School atmosphere. Deal and Peterson (2009) state that 'school must be an open system' and 'parts of the school culture must reach out and connect with parents' (p.184). The parent-teacher relationship is reported as relying on an open, welcoming culture to invite parents into the school especially for parents of children with ASD (Barton & Moody, 1981).

Regular parent-teacher communication. Parent-teacher communication is an essential component of successful family-school partnerships (Azad, Marcus, Sheridan & Mandell, 2018). Azad, et al., (2016) maintain that effective parent-teacher communication

involves problem-solving concerns about students. This communication should ultimately contribute to the development of a relationship that reflects the best interest of the teacher and parent to support the child's education (Sucuoğlu & Bakkaloğlu, 2017). Communication is an integral part of the relationship between the parent and teacher of a child with ASD (Ekayani, Afsari, Muvariz, Iqbal, & Sanggusti, 2016). This regular, clear communication from home to school can ultimately contribute towards accommodating the child's needs (NSCE, 2014).

A range of parent- teacher communication methods. Methods of home-school communication that will be discussed in this section include home-school communication diaries, face-to-face meetings, IEP, phone calls, and technological platforms. Communication should be regular and informative (Kraft & Dougherty, 2012).

Home school communication diary. The home-school communication diary is a source of communication that informs parents of the child's day-to-day progress relating to their behaviour, mood, and events (Jordan, 2002, p. 47). It is reported that it is critical that when informing the parent of daily events, the teacher incorporates the use of positive words into their communication (Ekayani et al., 2016). Jordan (2008) highlights that there should be two positive statements for every negative statement when reporting home incidents to the parent. Home-school diaries are considered as an opportunity for parents and teachers to interact indirectly but are essentially described as being honest about outbursts and daily achievements (Jordan, 2008).

Parent- teacher meetings. As highlighted in the literature, parent-teacher meetings should be organised to 'plan for the next stage of the child's learning' (Macgiolla Phádraig, 2005, p. 98). Parent- teacher meetings allow for a face-to-face interaction enabling both

parties the opportunity to exchange their own perspectives and experiences with the child such as the parent outlining circumstances at home and the teacher providing insight into school progress academically and socially (Macgiolla Phádraig, 2005).

Individualised education plan. IEP is a document specific to a child with SEN. An IEP focuses on ‘learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve those goals’ (NCSE, 2006, p. 4). The construction of an IEP requires a meeting of all individuals involved with the child: teachers, parents, educational psychologists, Special Needs Assistants (SNA) and other relevant personal agencies (NCSE, 2006). All partners involved in the child’s education can provide beneficial input to contribute towards the IEP. The IEP is a ‘working document’ and it should be ‘useful, available and easily understood by all who are dealing directly with the student’ (NCSE, 2006).

Phone calls. Phone calls are a two-way communication method that are commonly used by teachers to discuss concerns or answer questions (Graham-Clay, n.d). Phone calls can have a range of benefits such as highlighting any changes in the immediate environment and fostering the partnership between home and school (Gustafson, 1998).

Technological platforms. Graham-Clay (n.d) claims that technology has proven effective as a communication tool for parents of students who have severe disabilities. It is reported that using technology with parents can often encourage more ‘meaningful conversations about a child’s day at school’ (Gauvreau & Sandall, 2017, p.4). ‘Seesaw’ is a commonly used technological platform by teachers to share information about a student’s daily progress and promotes student driven digital portfolios and parent communication (Seesaw website, 2020). It is argued that some parents may have a preferred method of

communication with their child's teacher. Ultimately, it is vital for a teacher to have a range of methods to contact parents.

Home School Community Liaison. The HSCL is a scheme implemented by the DES to 'attempt to combat educational disadvantage and aims to improve outcomes for students indirectly by focusing directly on salient adults in their lives' (Weir, Kavanagh, Moran & Ryan, 2018, p. 11). The HSCL Scheme plays a vital role in the development of the relationship between the parents and teachers (DES, 2005).

Factors that Hinder the Development of the Parent-Teacher Relationship

As reported in the literature, barriers to developing a positive parent-teacher relationship between parents and teachers of children with ASD include: time, insufficient teacher training, impact of transport, parental views and experiences, reluctance to involve parents, and a lack of understanding of cultural context.

Time. According to Murray, Finigan-Carr, Jones, Copeland-Linder, Haynie & Cheng (2014) and Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli & Selcuk (2016), 'work and scheduling issues' were the most common barriers perceived to communicating with the teacher and engaging in parental involvement at school.

Insufficient teacher training. (Azad, et al., 2018) assert that many initial teacher training programmes provide a lack of training on how to develop a relationship with parents. This can act as a barrier to communication and ultimately, developing a trustworthy relationship. These programmes refer to more student-teacher interactions as opposed to teacher-parent (Azad, et al., 2016). It could be concluded that, the inability to deal with parents appropriately may hinder the teacher's self-efficacy and confidence in initiating these interactions with parents (Azad, et al., 2018).

Impact of transport. DES (2011) highlight that a child is eligible for the transport scheme if they 'have SEN arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability' and are 'attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit' (p. 2). Although this scheme is an excellent support service for families and children with ASD, it can be argued that travelling to and from school via the transport scheme can have a negative effect on the parent-teacher relationship. Lunenburg (2010) refers to 'physical barriers' imposed by the physical distance between people at home and at school (p.4).

Parental views and experiences. Negative school experiences of parents can also constitute a barrier in their communication with teachers (Ozmen, et al., 2016, p. 31). Hornby & Lafaele (2011) state that parents often prefer teacher specific invitations to become involved in their child's education so that they feel their input is valued and welcomed. Conaty (2002) highlights that often parents from lower socio-economic areas are more likely to have a view of teachers as more educated, knowledgeable, and superior to them. This can impact parental self-efficacy which may result in parents being more reluctant to get involved with the child's education and thus, being reluctant to develop a partnership with the school (Conaty, 2002).

Conclusion

This literature review provides a background on ASD in relation to the terms used to refer to ASD, the prevalence rates of ASD in Ireland, the process of diagnosis of ASD with reference to the key diagnostic manuals DSM-5 and ICD-11. The chapter presents the primary school educational options available for children with ASD and a brief insight into the impact of a diagnosis on a family of children with ASD. This chapter then explores the

literature that is relevant to the main research questions of this study such as the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD, the factors that support the development of this relationship and the factors that hinder the development of the relationship. The next chapter will provide an overview of the chosen methodology chosen to undertake this research study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This section of the paper describes the approach and methods taken when conducting this study. It outlines the objectives and the aims for the study and discusses the tools that were employed for data collection. This chapter also outlines the rationale for choosing these data-collection tools and reviews the methods chosen to achieve the requirements of this study. The chapter also highlights the ethical issues and limitations relevant to the study.

Aim and Purpose of Research

The main aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of parents and teachers of children with ASD on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship. The research intends to highlight the factors that support the development of the parent-teacher relationship of parents and teachers of children with ASD while also exploring the factors that hinder the development of this relationship.

Research Rationale and Researcher Positionality

As mentioned previously in the introductory chapter, my desire to learn more about supporting children with ASD derived from a range of experiences of working with these children and learning about ASD in my initial teacher education. As reported in the literature, Garbacz, McIntyre & Santiago (2016) highlight that a positive parent-teacher relationship can support the achievement and development of children with ASD. The NCSE (2016, 15th July) noted that there is improvement needed in 'teacher knowledge, skills and understanding of autism' to best support children in their schools. Furthermore, I want to develop a better insight and understanding in supporting children with ASD and their families through this study.

Research Approach

A qualitative approach has been taken in this study. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) describe a qualitative researcher as one who studies 'things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, phenomena in terms of meaning that people bring them' (p.37). It is important to value all different candidates and what they can bring to the research (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, this study is informed by a constructivist approach. Creswell (2018) regards a constructivist approach to research as one that sees meanings and perspectives of participants as 'varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas' (p.46). I believe that a constructivist view of the research correlates appropriately with the research questions.

Research Questions

In this study, the research aims to gain an insight into perspectives of parents and teachers of children with ASD. The main research questions associated with this study are as follows:

What are the perspectives of teachers and parents of children with ASD on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship?

What factors support the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

What factors hinder the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

Sampling

Purposive and convenience sampling are used in this study. When selecting individuals to partake in this study, a criterion-based selection was implemented (deMarrais &

Lapan, 2004). This relates to ‘constructing a list of characteristics or attributes the participants in the study must possess’ (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 59). The parental participants required for this study needed to be parents of children with ASD in primary school. The qualified teachers who participated this study need to have experience of teaching a child with ASD. The interviews took place in a private, small enclosed room within a local sports clubhouse. This made the interview time and place more accessible and convenient for the parents.

According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2017, p.2), the advantages of convenience sampling can be described as ‘affordable, easy and the subjects are readily available’. However, convenience sampling can carry disadvantages. It is likely to be biased and that the researcher does not know how well a convenience sample will represent the population regarding the traits or mechanism under research (Etikan et al., 2019).

An advantage of purposive sampling is it ‘concentrates on people with particular characteristics who will better be able to assist with the relevant research’ (Etikan et al., 2019, p.3). Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, (2013) believe that purposive sampling is most suitable for conducting qualitative research. Similar to convenience sampling, purposive sampling can be highly prone to researcher bias (Palinkas et al., 2013).

Research Design

The research participants included three parents of primary school children with ASD, three special education teachers working in a special class in a mainstream primary school and three teachers working in a mainstream primary school. It is important to note that none of the teachers interviewed taught any children of the parent participants in the study. The table on the next page outlines the profiles of each participant

Table 1: Teacher Participant Profile

Participant	Class/ Level	Experience	Worked in Mainstream	Worked in Special Class
Teacher 1 (T1)	2 nd class	5 years	Yes	No
Teacher 2 (T2)	5 th class	7 years	Yes	No
Teacher 3 (T3)	Junior infants	2 years	Yes	No
SET 1 (SET1)	Junior and middle class (4-8)	4 years	Yes	Yes
SET 2 (SET2)	Middle class (7-9)	3 years	Yes	Yes
SET 3 (SET3)	Junior class (5-7)	2years	Yes	Yes

Table 2: Parent Participant Profile

Participant	Age of child	Is child in Mainstream or Special Class	Years child is diagnosed with ASD
Parent 1 (P1)	5 years	Mainstream	1 year
Parent 2 (P2)	7 years and 9 years	Mainstream	2 years and 4 years
Parent 3 (P3)	6 years	Special Class	2 years

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools used in the study included a literature review and semi-structured interviews.

Literature review. Prior to engaging in the interview process of this study, I engaged in a review of the literature. The themes that were constructed from the literature review helped to formulate the questions for the interviews. I analysed a range of special educational journals while also engaging with literature reflecting on parental experiences of their partnership with educational settings. Creswell & Creswell (2018) affirms completing a literature review can 'provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings' (p. 66).

Semi- structured interviews. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) regard interviews as a method in which it obtains 'in-depth knowledge from participants about a phenomenon or experiences' (p. 52). Interviews mainly require 'personal interaction' therefore, 'engagement of the participant and strong interpersonal skills of the interviewer are essential' (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p.179). According to Kvale (1996, p.6), an interview is a 'conversation that has a purpose and structure'. Kvale (1996) outlines that there are seven stages of the interviewing process when engaging in qualitative data gathering such as: thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting (p.81).

Kvale (1996) offers an insight into the thematising and designing stage of the interview process. Kvale (1996) suggests formulating your 'what' and 'why' for the research to aid planning the design of the study. In addition to this, (Kvale, 1996) recommends following an 'interview guide' employing a reflective approach while interviewing the participants. Seidman (2006) reiterates the argument of using an interview guide. However, they must be used cautiously, and interviewers should avoid manipulating their participants

to respond to that area (Seidman, 2006 p. 92). Kvale (1996) explains the next stage of the interview process is transcribing the data from tape to writing to prepare for the analysis stage. The analysing stage of the interview process requires deciding on a suitable data analysis method. Finally, Kvale (1996) outlines the last two phases of the process: verifying and reporting. Verifying the data in the interview looks at the 'consistency and reliability' of the results and the reporting stage ultimately, presents the findings of the interview in a readable way (Kvale, 1996, p. 88).

However, interviews can carry limitations. Rossman & Rallis (2012) contend how interviewees may be 'unwilling or uncomfortable' to reveal all that the interviewer wants to explore (p. 179). This was a concern prior to interviewing parents with children of ASD as it is a very personal experience and can impact families in different ways. I provided the parents with a list of questions prior to the interview and explained that they did not need to answer any question they were uncomfortable with. Interviews can produce large volumes of useful information, but it must be acknowledged that findings can be time-consuming to analyse (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 179). Implementing an interview allows the researcher to gather a range of insightful perspectives from participants however, these semi-structured interviews were of a 30-minute duration. This resulted in many hours of transcribing of findings.

It is important to eradicate any 'leading questions' when constructing an interview. Kvale, (1996, p. 158) acknowledges how leading questions can 'inadvertently shape the content of an answer'. As this study is of an explorative nature, the questions were shaped as open-ended to allow the interviewee to express individual experiences. Open-ended questions do not 'presume an answer' (Seidman, 2006, p. 84).

Piloting the Study

This study was piloted prior to conducting the interviews. The participants of this study were not involved in the piloting stage of the interviews.

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis relates to the process of bringing order and structure to collected data to allow one to construct meaning from the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Robson & Marshall (2016) describes thematic coding analysis as a way of categorising data so that all elements of the data have a specific theme. This study follows the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis model.

The first stage of the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis process is the familiarisation of the findings. This was done through first transcribing the interviews. Denscombe (2003) confirms how transcribing the findings can bring the researcher closer to the data and that it can contribute to the understanding of the findings. Following from this, Braun and Clarke (2006) advise on the generation of the individual codes from the findings. Robson et al., (2016) identifies this as organising the findings by combining text together and labelling it using a word or term. The next stages of the analysis involves searching for and reviewing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This relates to classifying the findings into relevant themes. Lastly, the researcher defines the themes and produces the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Table 3: Stages of the Thematic Analysis Process

Stages of Braun and Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis Process	How these stages were applied in this study:
Stage One: Familiarisation of Findings	For this stage, I read the findings several times and then transcribed the verbal findings of the interviews into writing. I noted any initial ideas that were relevant.
Stage Two: Generating Initial Codes	I began coding my findings during this stage. From analysing my transcriptions, main topics and ideas became apparent.
Stage Three: Searching for Themes	The key themes were highlighted during this stage. I collated different codes into the relevant themes.
Stage Four: Reviewing Themes	At this stage, I reviewed the themes that emerged from the findings to see if they were relevant to the research questions. I reviewed the codes in relation to the themes.
Stage Five: Defining and Naming Themes	This stage further analysed the themes of the findings and the titles for each theme were created based on the findings.
Stage Six: Producing the Report	This is the final stage of the analysis. I referred all themes back to the research questions and literature to produce a report on the findings of the interviews.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Validity, Reliability, Triangulation and Bias

Validity, reliability, triangulation, and bias were important elements I considered when conducting this research.

Validity. Cohen et al., (2007) highlight validity as an integral element effective research. Validity is improved through participant ‘honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 132). The small sample size can often be a threat to the external validity of the study. Trochim & Donnelly (2006) highlight that external validity relates to the way in which conclusions of the study are applied and held outside the context of the study. For this study, I did not make any generalisations of findings that emerged from the interviews. The perspectives of the interviewees are highlighted as individual to their experiences.

Reliability. Cohen et al., (2007) explains reliability to be a ‘fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting’ (p. 149). To enhance the reliability of this study, I selected qualified teachers that had experiences of working with children with ASD and parents of children with ASD. Furthermore, when reviewing literature, I specifically looked at literature that reflected my research questions.

Triangulation. According to Yeasmin & Rahman (2012), ‘triangulation is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods’ (p.156). The triangulation of data can support the validity of the study (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). To improve the validity of this study, I interviewed nine individuals to gain different perspectives on the importance on the parent-teacher relationship. Triangulation relates to ‘two or more methods of data collection’ to contribute to the validity (Cohen et al., 2007, p.

141). I engaged in a literature review and conducted semi-structured interviews to improve the validity of the research.

Bias. Bias can be defined as a ‘deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication which can cause false conclusions’ (Simundic, 2013, p. 12). I tried to minimise bias in this study by providing open, non-leading questions during the interview and allowed time for the participant to respond to the question without giving any of my own opinions or comments.

Ethical Considerations

Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Bell (2011) highlight some concerns for researchers when initiating a study such as: negotiating access, confidentiality, and informed consent. I have briefly outlined these concerns and how I approached them prior to the interviews.

Negotiating Access. Prior to the commencement of this study, I applied for level 1 ethical approval to the Marino Ethics in Research Committee (MERC) and ethical approval was granted. This stage of the study highlighted the ‘procedures and information about participants so the extent to which you place participants at risk in your studies can be reviewed’ (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147). Permission was required from the two school principals to carry out the study with teachers. I presented a letter of information to these principals to outline the intentions of the study explaining that participants and the school name would be kept anonymous. A copy of these letters can be found in Appendix A.

Informed Consent. Informing consent when initiating a study is a fundamental element of the research process. As advised in the literature, all participants of this study were provided with a letter of consent and a letter of information to outline the aims,

requirements, and a statement explaining they were free to withdraw at any time (Cohen et al., 2011).

Confidentiality. During the transcribing stage of the study, I used pseudonyms to support confidentiality and anonymity. A researcher holds a 'duty of trust to the participant to use the privileged data appropriately' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.62). Seidman (2006) highlights that any documentation collated during the research process must be stored securely to ensure the rights of the participants are adhered to.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study relate to the convenience, small sample size that was selected for the interviews. The time constraint associated with the study also proved as a limitation. The limitations of the study are discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research approach taken in this study, showing how the research questions were explored through a constructivist research approach using semi-structured interviews to gather perceptions of teachers and parents on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD. The chapter demonstrated how a thematic analysis approach was applied to analyse the gathered data. The next chapter highlights and discusses the findings of this study.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter intends to discuss and interpret the main findings of the research that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The nine interviews that were conducted presented an array of findings that both correlated and reputed the literature that was reviewed in chapter two. The findings were analysed through a thematic analysis approach. This chapter will present an answer to the research questions posed for this study. The research questions are as follows:

What are the perspectives of teachers and parents of children with ASD on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship?

What factors support the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

What factors hinder the development of this parent-teacher relationship?

Finding One: The Importance of the Parent-Teacher Relationship for Parents and Teachers of Children on the Autism Spectrum

The following findings were noted in relation to the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for children with ASD: it supports academic achievement and behavioural outcomes for the child, clear settings of targets in the IEP, alleviates parental stress, encourages parental involvement and bridges the gap for non-verbal children. These findings are expanded on in the sections that follow.

Supports behavioural outcomes and academic achievement for the child. In this study, participants reported believing that one of the main goals of the parent-teacher partnership was to support academic achievement and behavioural outcomes for the child. This finding is in line with Garbacz, McIntyre & Santiago's (2016) point about how a

relationship between home and school is associated with improved success in behavioural outcomes for a child with ASD. Mainstream teacher one (T1) commented on the ability to establish and consolidate the classroom routines when the parent and teacher worked alongside each other. T1 stated “we were working on starting the child’s work as soon as the lesson began so the parent did this at home too. If the child hears it from both angles, it makes a big difference”. In a special class setting, routines seemed to be at the forefront of the learning for a child with ASD. Parent three (P3) revealed “we used a teddy bear to symbolise the transition to using transport as they hated it. The teacher implemented it in school and then we implemented the same when taking the bus into town”.

In addition to this, teachers involved in this study expressed how the parent-teacher relationship contributed to academic achievement. Special education teacher one (SET1) stated:

we were working on identifying colours and encouraging using verbal language. We said to the parents simply when the child is getting dressed or anything, pointing and saying colours over and over to repeat ‘blue’ ‘red’ ‘yellow’ so that it was being worked on in class, the yard, the playground, the bedroom.

Clear setting of targets in IEP. The drawing up of clear objectives and outlining progress of the IEP was an area that was discussed from a point of view of teachers and parents. By having an open relationship, mainstream teacher three (T3) highlighted that:

IEPs will progress and develop with contribution from both aspects of the child’s life. The communication is crucial, so paperwork is up to date: reports, psychology reports, things the child is attending outside of school like counselling appointments. You can find out the child’s interests to help motivate them in class”. This view correlates with the

guidance of the (NCSE, 2006) in that children's academic goals and targets can be developed only with the input of everyone involved with the child's day. This can be defined as a multi-disciplinary approach.

Alleviates parental stress. Chapter two draws attention to the different challenges faced by parents of children with ASD. Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher (2005) illustrate that parents often present a great deal of psychological distress with having a child with ASD. However, the parents that were interviewed in this study explained how having the teacher on-side and knowing they supported them contributed to alleviating some of their stresses. P3 explained "during our meetings, we often bounce ideas off each other like 'oh this isn't working for us, have you tried...'. It's just nice to know you're not alone". Parent two (P2) outlined the support provided for parents saying: "my child's first teacher couldn't have done enough. She always seemed to do extra courses on autism and always checked in with us as parents. I'll never forget that". Parent one (P1) reiterated this point:

I didn't know how to act when my child was diagnosed, but the teacher just respected us as humans and acknowledged that we were doing our best. I just want to have that relationship with the teacher. My child struggles with toileting issues and I want to be able to say that to someone who is comfortable with that and respects my child's privacy.

This finding is supported by similar views in the literature (Garbacz et al., 2016; MacGiolla Phádraig, 2005) in which the authors argue that schools should offer continued guidance and support for parents of students with ASD.

Encourages parental involvement. The parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD can contribute to encouraging parental involvement in schools according to parents that participated in this study. P2 reported:

I joined the parent's council in our school in junior infants. I just wanted to get to know the school and the community. It was from conversations with the teacher that it was brought up because I'm not from here originally and didn't know many people.

This perspective of parents is congruent with the literature of Llamas and Tuazon (2016) in relation to how parents become 'comfortable when the education system requires their involvement in school activities' (p.2).

Bridging the gap for non-verbal children. Teachers interviewed reported believing that forming a relationship was paramount for trusting each other as SET 1 outlined saying:

in my setting, communication is limited. Three out of six children are non-verbal. If you cannot communicate with the parent and the parent cannot communicate with you, it will not solve any issues and will not benefit the child. The child can't express things that happened in school that day.

Special education teacher two (SET2) amplified this point by saying:

a child could be upset for the whole afternoon and the parents don't know why. There could be a simple solution to it about filling in the gap of what happened that day. The parents trust us, and we trust them here that we're always doing what's best for the child.

This perception of trust is supported in the literature of Sucuoğlu, & Bakkaloğlu (2017) who highlight that building trust is an integral element of the relationship for parents and teachers of children with ASD especially for children who are non-verbal.

Finding Two: Parent and Teacher Perceptions on Factors that Support the Development the Parent-Teacher Relationship

The following findings were noted in the study in relation to parent and teacher perceptions on factors that support the development of the parent-teacher relationship: school atmosphere, regular communication, having a range of methods of communication, and the Home-School Community Liaison Officer. These findings are expanded on in the sections that follow.

School atmosphere. The findings from the interviews exposed that the participants shared similar views about how the open atmosphere of the school fostered parental inclusion and contributed to developing a positive relationship with the teacher as acknowledged by mainstream teacher two (T2) who stated:

working in this school has definitely supported it. We constantly bring parents in for assemblies, school trips, into the class to give presentations to speak to the children. We've a very open culture where parents and teachers are always communicating. If you are in a school that values parental involvement, it makes it easier.

P2 also reported holding this view stating that in their child's school:

they're very open to anything in this school which is really good from a parental point of view. We are very lucky. We educate everyone together... our parents, teachers, parent council and student council. The principal really pushes a positive, open door policy here.

These perceptions of teachers and parents interviewed correlates with Deal and Peterson's (2009) beliefs that schools should reach out and connect with parents in order to support the children.

Regular communication. Both teachers and parents emphasised regular communication and interaction with each other as being an integral part of developing their relationship. SET2 highlighted: "I used to just chat to parents casually after school or in the morning. It might have only been regular short conversations mixed in with a few formal meetings". P1 supported this point saying:

we keep our communication open. At this stage now because my child is older, we have a bit of a signal in the line like a thumbs up, a nod to say, 'today was good yeah'. But if needed we'll arrange a meeting.

This perspective correlates with the literature of Kraft & Dougherty (2012) who propose that 'regular teacher-parent communication provides parents with information about their child's performance in school that they might not otherwise have access to' (p.6).

Having a range of methods of communication. It was deemed an important factor in the relationship of parents and teachers that there was more than one option available to communicate with each other. SET3 highlighted this point:

we've email address' in this school for parents to access us. That was good because I was not depending on phone calls from the parent. For a while, I implemented a communication journal with a little note to inform the parent of the child's day.

Similarly, SET1 noted:

we use a lot actually. Communication diaries, the communication app, informal and formal ways. We get photographs on the app so we can use it for oral language development during the day. Regular IEP meetings, informal meetings at the classroom door, phone calls.

P1, however explained how they used to have difficulty with interactions such as these saying:

the phone calls used to freak me out initially because I thought there was something wrong and I'd be reluctant to answer. As we have got to know the school better, it is just emails, casual chats. The communication diary is great because it is clear and to the point, easy to read and friendly.

These attitudes of parents and teachers correlate with the literature of the (NSCE, 2014) which maintains that it is important to have a range of communication platforms to work alongside parents and carers of children with ASD.

HSCL. HSCL was acknowledged as an aspect of the school community that had contributed to the teacher-parent relationship. P1 explained:

the HSCL organises an autism parent support group in this school. It's fantastic! We all discuss our worries and how were coping with it, especially those who are older members of the school. We give advice to the new parents and it is so lovely. But the HSCL offers input on behalf of the teachers and what they are working on, what they implement in school. I suppose it gives two perspectives on it.

T2 also supported this point highlighting:

our HSCL is great for bridging the gap between parents and teachers. They do a lot of work on both sides by organising things like parenting workshops where teachers and parents can both go.

Finding Three: Parent and Teacher Perceptions on Factors that can Hinder the Development of a Parent-Teacher Relationship

The interviews produced an insight into the participants attitudes towards the barriers and impediments that were presented to teachers and parents when establishing a relationship. The following findings were noted in the study in relation to parent and teacher perceptions on factors that hinder the development of the parent-teacher relationship: time, insufficient initial teacher education, parental experiences and values, and the school transport scheme. These findings are further discussed in the sections that follow.

Time. Finding 'time' to communicate and meet with each other was one factor common to both teachers and parents that proved difficult when developing a relationship. T2 explained this noting:

Time mainly. Like I said, you are busy in school. They are busy at home. You've a class to teach. In my experience, most parents are open to talking, Mostly, parents are willing to have the meetings but it's not that easy.

P3 also highlighted this point stating:

I think it's hard. To be honest, I think the school does plenty for us. But I do feel like I would love more regular meetings as it is only twice a year formally. The teacher has

enough to be doing! There's so many things on, it's hard to find the time to arrange other meetings in the year.

This viewpoint of parents and teachers reflects similar ideas to the work of Ozmen et al., (2016) where teachers and parents both agreed 'work and scheduling' were challenges that impacted their relationship and communication. However, SET1 reported believing the opposite, a point which repurposes the literature saying: "I don't think there are any major barriers to the relationship. We all try our best and I think we do enough, there's plenty of meetings and anything that is necessary, we deal with it efficiently."

Insufficient initial teacher education. Some teachers interviewed reported feeling inadequately equipped to support children with ASD from their initial teacher education, and in addition to this, reported that dealing with parents was also a concern for them. This ultimately stood as a barrier for these teachers when they were teaching as newly qualified teachers (NQT) and were developing relationships with the parents of children with ASD as SET3 claimed:

In college, we had one SEN lecture for three years and it covered a range of needs. Very theory based not practical. In terms of supporting SEN, I didn't feel ready at all when I left college. I learned on the job. And in terms of dealing with parents with children with ASD, I found that quite difficult at the beginning. I didn't think I was doing enough or the right thing. I doubted myself a lot and only with experience, I became comfortable in dealing with them.

Azad, et al., (2018) argues that initial teacher education programmes lack training for supporting parents and children with SEN. An earlier study by Azad et al., (2016) also

supports this finding, highlighting how this lack of training can hinder younger teacher's perception of their own self-efficacy to adequately support these families.

Parental experiences and values. The findings revealed that some teachers and parents felt that when a parent has had a negative personal experience of school, it could have a detrimental impact on the development of a positive parent-teacher relationship. T2 shared thoughts on this saying:

I do think that it can come down to the parent's values and perspectives and then having to build up a relationship around that. If the parents' maybe left school early or didn't really value school themselves, it can be a tough situation you find yourself in because you're not really on the same page. It's hard to establish routines within the child and can create confusion.

This attitude is paramount with (Ozmen, et al., 2016) with the understanding that negative parental experiences and values of school can affect the idea of establishing a positive parent-teacher relationship. However, P3 contradicted this point and other literature on the subject (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) disclosing that:

no matter what you as a parent really believe is right for your child, you need to meet in the middle with the teacher. At the end of the day, they often know what is best for and they have their best interests at heart I believe.

School transport scheme. The DES (2011) explains that a child with SEN is eligible to availing of the transport scheme such as using a bus or taxi as a support to attend school. There were mixed views for teachers in relation the impact of a child using the school transport scheme on the relationship with parents of children with ASD. As reported in the

literature, Lunenburg (2010) highlights that physical barriers such as the physical distance between the parent and teacher can impact the parent-teacher relationship. Reputing the literature, SET1 stated that the use of the school transport scheme did not have a negative impact on the parent-teacher relationship explaining:

the children use a taxi and it's brilliant. It works well when you have a good relationship with the parent and there is trust there. I don't think it has a negative impact; I find it is better. Often, I get stuck at the door chatting to parents and it might interrupt the morning routine and set off the children.

However, in contrast to SET1's point and agreeing with the literature of Lunenburg (2010), SET2 reported that:

it definitely does impact it if there may have been a behaviour or incident in school and it's hard not to see the parent. It might water it down a bit. You might not get to call them as soon as it happens whereas if you saw them straight away, you'd discuss it. When you've to pass on the information through an email, the tone may come across wrong and it might seem that you are putting blame on someone that you do not mean to.

Other Findings

Relationship with the SNA. Although this may not have been relevant to the research questions, one teacher and one parent brought up the importance of their relationship with the SNA in supporting a child with ASD. The parent-teacher relationship was viewed as a 'whole-school relationship'. The understanding of a relationship with the SNA was more prevalent in the special class setting as explained by SET1 who claimed "we all work as one team here. If the parents see that it's everybody: myself, the two SNAs, the external supports... then it makes it easier".

P1 outlined the importance of the relationship between the parent and the SNA saying: “the SNAs here are amazing, they’re like second mothers! I’ve gotten to know my child’s SNA so well this year”.

The SNA is perceived to be a very important part of the relationship with the school to support a child with ASD.

Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the findings that have emerged from interviews conducted for the research study. The parents and teachers perceptions were analysed through the use of a thematic analysis which highlighted findings in relation to: the importance of the parent-teacher relationship for a child with ASD, the factors which contribute to the development of this relationship, and factors that may hinder the development of a positive parent-teacher relationship. The next chapter seeks to provide a summary of the findings of this study and recommendations for future study and practices.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusions

The concluding chapter to this study summarises the main findings of the research in relation to the research questions whilst also highlighting findings that emerged from the study that, although not relevant to the research questions are worthy of further research. The chapter discusses the implications of the findings, makes recommendations for further research, and highlights the limitations of the study.

Summary of the Main Findings

The study's main research question explored the perceptions of parents and teachers of children with ASD on the importance of parent-teacher relationship. Participating teachers and parents of children with ASD reported believing that having a positive parent-teacher relationship supports academic achievement and behavioural outcomes for the child, helps make clearer IEP targets, contributes to alleviating parental stresses, and encourages parental involvement in the school.

With regard to the second research question which focused on perspectives of factors that support the development of the parent-teacher relationship, the participating parents and teachers provided perceptions and insights into these factors. There were a range of views highlighted. Firstly, the atmosphere and culture of the school played a role in the parent's perception of the development of a relationship. It was found from the findings that having a school that was open and positive supported parental involvement and consequently helped parents and teachers develop a partnership. Both teachers and parents believed that regular communication and having an array of communication methods available such as: meetings, home-school diaries, IEPs, phone calls, technological platforms were crucial elements of developing their positive relationship. From discussing

different perspectives and gaining insight into the parent's lives of having a child with ASD and the teacher's careers of working with children with ASD, it was fascinating to reveal some of their views. A common response that emerged from the findings was the influence of the HSCL on their lives. The HSCL was seen to act as an advocate for both teachers and parents. The HSCL was reported as offering supports such as: 'parents' councils, parent support groups, workshops' to support and aid the parents in the school with children with ASD.

Finally, the study explored findings relevant to the third research question which focused on exploring the factors that can hinder the development of a positive parent-teacher relationship. These findings presented parents' and teachers' perspectives on the barriers and challenges that they had faced when trying to communicate and develop a positive parent-teacher relationship. These barriers included: finding time to meet, insufficient initial teacher education, the impact of the school transport scheme on communication, and parental experiences and values. Some teachers had similar views on these barriers, but it was interesting to note that some participants' opinions differed in relation to the impact of the school transport scheme on the parent-teacher communication and relationships

Other Findings

It was reported in the study that the relationship with the SNA was deemed to be an integral aspect of the child's educational success. Participants in this study recognised the role of the SNA in the parent's relationship with the school, and in supporting a child with ASD.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is important to note that this study was of a small-scale research nature. In future, if time constraints allowed, a possible study would include an increased number of participants and would explore the perceptions of all the school community (teachers, parents, HSCL, SNA, principals, psychologists, OT) on how the whole school relationship can have an important impact on the learning and development on a child with ASD. An additional area to be investigated could be a review of the initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers in Ireland so as to examine teacher competency in dealing with parents of children with SEN and to explore the modules in place at present in relation to sufficiently equipping teachers with this skill. I would have possibly liked to put in place some sort of intervention to improve or encourage parent-teacher relationships for children with ASD and then to further examine the views of participants prior and following the intervention.

Limitations of the Study

Methodological decisions were made based on ethical considerations and the time-frame available for this study. The sample size presents limitations in terms of the generalisability of the findings. The spectrum of needs of children with ASD can range depending on the child, therefore, limitations of this study include difficulty in generalising the research findings as they only represent the perceptions of the participating parents and teachers. The inherently short period of time in which the research took place over was an additional limitation of the study. It is hoped that future research, as noted in the section on recommendations for future study, will work to offsetting these limitations.

Implications of the Findings

Despite the limitations and difficulties presented, the research study completed was a positive research experience overall. It has drawn a light upon the need for regular, informal communication between the teacher and parent of a child with ASD. The findings from the research undertaken supports the need for an open, positive relationship between the parent and teacher of a child with ASD. Although there were a number of challenges indicated that may impact on the development of the relationship between a parent and teacher of a child with ASD, there were also several factors reported that can aid the relationship in a positive way.

Final Comment

From engaging in this study and reflecting on my journey as a researcher and teacher, I have a newfound degree of empathy and respect for the families of children with ASD. From discussing their experiences through conducting interviews with parents, I see that they are remarkable in what they do for their children, and it has made me even more aware of the importance of my role as a teacher in communicating with them and supporting them.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter provides an overview of the main findings from this study. The research finds that the relationship between a parent and teacher of a child with ASD is undoubtedly very important. This study has demonstrated that although there are an array of barriers to developing a positive parent-teacher relationship, there are many factors that can contribute to the development of a positive relationship.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Principal Letter of Information

17 February 2020

Dear Principal,

My name is Kate Fitzgibbon and I am a final year student in the Professional Master of Education in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project. I am writing to you to ask for your cooperation with my research study that investigates the importance of the partnership between the parent and teacher of children with autism. The research project involves learning more about the perceptions of teachers and parents of children with autism on the importance of their relationship.

To gather my data for this study, I would like to request your permission to interview teachers in your school on this topic. The interview would last for 30-40 minutes and would be recorded on audiotape. I hope you will be willing for your school to participate in this study as your teachers' responses would be an important and valued part of the study. If you agree for your school to participate in the study, the teachers will remain strictly anonymous; their names and the school's name will not be attached to any of the information provided. All participants may discontinue participation in the study at any time, should they wish to do so. The recording will be kept in a secure location and on an encrypted device without names attached to it. The recording will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. The data will then be transcribed by myself and the data will be destroyed when all the college requirements have been met.

There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. The participants will be asked to sign forms indicating agreement to participate in the study.

This study has been approved by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated and of immense value to this work.

Yours faithfully,

Kate Fitzgibbon

(You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.)

Appendix B: Letter of Information for Teachers of children with ASD

17 February 2020

Dear Teacher,

My name is Kate Fitzgibbon and I am a final year student in the Professional Master of Education in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project. I am writing to you to ask for your cooperation with my research study that investigates the importance of the partnership between the parent and teacher of children with ASD. The research project involves learning more about the perspectives of teachers and parents of children with ASD on the importance of their relationship.

To gather my data for this study, I would like to request your permission to interview you on this topic. The interview would last for 30-40 minutes and would be recorded on audiotape. I hope you will be willing to participate as your responses would be an important and valued part of the study. If you agree to participate in the study, your participation will remain strictly anonymous; your name will not be attached to any of the information you provide. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time, should you wish to do so. The recording of the interview will be kept in a secure location and on an encrypted device without your name attached to it. The recording will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. The data will then be transcribed by myself and the data will be destroyed when all the college requirements have been met.

There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating agreement to participate in the study.

This study has been approved by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated and of immense value to this work.

Yours faithfully,

Kate Fitzgibbon

(You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.)

Appendix C: Letter of Information for Parents of children with ASD

17 February 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Kate Fitzgibbon and I am a final year student in the Professional Master of Education in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project. I am writing to you to ask for your cooperation with my research study that investigates the importance of the partnership between the parent and teacher of children with autism. The research project involves learning more about the perceptions of teachers and parents of children with autism on the importance of their relationship.

To gather my data for this study, I would like to request your permission to interview you on this topic. The interview would last for 30-40 minutes and would be recorded on audiotape. I hope you will be willing to participate as your responses would be an important and valued part of the study. If you agree to participate in the study your participation will remain strictly anonymous; your name and your child's name will not be attached to any of the information you provide. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time, should you wish to do so. The recording of the interview will be kept in a secure location and on an encrypted device without your name attached to it. The recording will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. The data will then be transcribed by myself the data will be destroyed when all the college requirements have been met.

There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating agreement to participate in the study.

This study has been approved by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated and of immense value to this work.

Yours faithfully,

Kate Fitzgibbon

(You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.)

Appendix D: Letter of Informed Consent

Statement of Consent:

Research study: The importance of the partnership between parents of children with autism and teachers.

Please read the questions below and indicate whether or not you would be willing to participate in the study as described.

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information sheet.	☐	☐
I understand what the study is about and what the results will be used for.	☐	☐
I consent to being interviewed and having the interview audiotaped.	☐	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary,		
And I can withdraw at any time.	☐	☐
I understand that my name will not be used in connection with this study or its		
Findings.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the above study.	☐	☐

Print name of Research Participant: _____

Signature of Research Participant: _____ Date: _____

Print name of Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Teacher

Introductory Piece:

Hi there. My name is Kate and I am a final year student in the PME course in Marino Institute of Education. I just want to firstly thank you for coming along today and agreeing to helping me out with my thesis. It is greatly appreciated, and your input today is highly valued towards my research. My thesis is based on teacher's and parent's perceptions of the importance of their relationship in relation to children with ASD. This is something I am very passionate about and my aim is to gain a better insight into supporting children with ASD in my own classroom alongside their families.

Questions for teachers:

1. How many years' experience do you have working with children with ASD?
2. Have you worked in mainstream, a special class or a special school?
3. What education and training did you have at college that helped you work with children with ASD? Do you feel it was sufficient?
4. What do you think is the role of the child's parent in the child's learning at school?
5. Do you think the relationship between the teacher and the parent of a child with ASD is important? Why?
6. What have you found does support or would support this relationship?
7. In what way does this relationship impact on a child with ASD's learning at school?

These Questions are specifically about working with children with ASD:

1. How often do you communicate with the parents of children with ASD? Do you communicate on a daily basis with parents of children with ASD?
2. In what ways do you communicate with parents of children with ASD? Are there any forms of communication that you use other than face to face meetings?
3. Have you used home-school diaries to communicate with parents of students with ASD? Do you find these helpful?
4. In your opinion, what is the best method for communication with parents of children with ASD?

5. How often would you meet with parents of children with ASD? Do you find that this is sufficient?
6. In your opinion, what are the barriers presented to you that prevents you from communicating with parents of students with ASD?
7. Do you think there could be anything put in place to make communication with these parents' any easier?
8. Are there any strategies that you employ in the class for children with ASD that are transferred to the home, for example, visual timetables?
9. How do you share information with parents on these strategies?
10. Has the school implemented any sort of interventions to encourage better teacher-parent partnerships throughout the school year? If so, what are they? E.g. teacher-parent workshops
11. Do you think it is important to communicate regularly with the parent of a child with ASD? Why?
12. Do children with ASD in your class use a school bus? If so, how does this impact your communication with the parents?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not already discussed today?

Closing piece:

Okay great! That is our interview finished now. Again, I just want to thank you for all of your input today. I really appreciate you taking the time for being here with me today and I have gained a great insight into the importance of the partnership between the parents and teachers in relation to a child with ASD.

Appendix F: Interview Questions for Parent

Introductory Piece:

Hi there. My name is Kate and I am a final year student in the PME course in Marino Institute of Education. I just want to firstly thank you for coming along today and agreeing to helping me out with my thesis. It is greatly appreciated, and your input today is highly valued towards my research. My thesis is based on teacher's and parent's perceptions of the importance of their relationship in relation to children with ASD. This is something I am very passionate about and my aim is to gain a better insight into supporting children with ASD in my own classroom alongside their families.

1. What age is your child?
2. As a parent, what do you think is your role in your child's learning at school?
3. Do you think the relationship between the teacher and the parent of a child with ASD is important? Why?
4. In what way does this relationship impact on your child's learning at school?
5. What have you found does support or would support your relationship with the class teacher?
6. How often do you meet with your child's teacher?
7. How often do you and your child's teacher communicate with each other? Do you communicate on a daily basis?
8. In what ways do you and your child's teacher communicate with each other?
9. Are there any forms of communication that you use other than face to face meetings?
10. For pickups and drops off to school, who collects your child?
11. Do they use a school bus?
12. If so, how does this impact your communication with the class teacher?
13. Do you and the teacher use home-school diaries?
14. Do you find them helpful?
15. What is your preferred method of communication with your child's teacher?

16. As a parent, do you think that there are there any barriers that might impact developing a relationship with a teacher or communicating with them?
16. Has the school implemented any sort of interventions to encourage better teacher-parent partnerships throughout the school year? If so, what are they? E.g. teacher-parent workshops
17. What are the type of things that you and your child's teacher discuss in relation to your child's day?
18. When or if your child has changed teacher, how was information passed over?
19. Do you have regular parent-teacher meetings?
20. When and how often did you meet with the school to construct your child's IEP?
21. Do you think it is important to communicate regularly with your child's teacher? Why?
22. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not already discussed today?

Closing piece:

Okay great! That is our interview finished now. Again, I just want to thank you for all of your input today. I really appreciate you taking the time for being here with me today and I have gained a great insight into the importance of the partnership between the parents and teachers in relation to a child with ASD.