



Effects of Reciprocal Imitation Training on Social Communication Skills of Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder *

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was firstly to examine the effectiveness of Reciprocal Imitation Training (RIT) on a) imitation of object actions and gestures and b) maintenance of these skills in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Secondly, the purpose was to explore the effectiveness of object and gesture imitation teaching with RIT on motor imitation skills, initiating and responding to initiations of joint attention, play and verbal imitation skills, communicative behaviors and vocabulary, and contextually appropriate use of language. The design of this study was Modified Multiple Baseline Design Across Subjects. The study group consisted of three children with ASD. The results of this study showed that for all subjects there was an increase in the object and gesture imitation. Also, the findings showed that RIT increased motor imitation, verbal imitation, and play skills as well as the frequency of initiating and responding to initiations of joint attention, communicative behaviors, and vocabulary. The results are discussed in line with the literature related to teaching imitation in early childhood period.

Keywords

Autism spectrum disorder
Reciprocal Imitation Training
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Introduction

Because of the role that the imitation skills play in the development of social communication skills in children with ASD (Ingersoll, 2008a; Ledford & Wolery, 2011), they should be supported during early childhood period. In this context, in planning early intervention teaching imitation skills has a vital role. The literature discusses a number of methods which have been implemented in the last five decades to teach imitation skills to children with ASD. These methods include interventions that are evidence based or have been recently developed and are on the way to be regarded as evidence based. One of these intervention methods is the Reciprocal Imitation Training (RIT) (Ingersoll, 2008b), which is a method of teaching imitation skills that in which eclectic intervention techniques based on naturalistic and behavioral approaches, such as Milieu Teaching (Hancock, Ledbetter-Cho, Howell, & Lang, 2016), Incidental Teaching (Neely et al., 2018), an Pivotal Response Treatment (Ventola, Friedman, & Oosting, 2015) are organized in terms of social and communicative reciprocity (Ingersoll &

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