

Emotion Regulation of Primary School Students with High Functioning ASD: A Social Cognition Approach

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FRAMEWORK

A predominantly social cognition approach (Lam, So, Chan, & Lam, 2010) which involved the activity-based teaching of attributional styles, perspective taking, and self-monitoring strategies were adopted to conduct this intervention programme.

OBJECTIVES

This group intervention aimed to help primary school students with high functioning autism spectrum disorder (ASD) manage their emotional outbursts and adopt adaptive social problem-solving strategies. It was hoped that their social interactions with parents and peers could be improved as a result. Students were guided to (1) recognise their emotions; (2) utilise relevant relaxation techniques; (3) attribute the causes of events; (4) think from others' perspectives; and (5) determine the appropriate responses.

DESIGN & PARTICIPANTS

A six-session social training intervention was designed under the theme of "Superpower Research Programme". Learning goals were packaged as different superpower/skills to promote learning.

- Five senior primary school students (aged 9 to 10) from a local boys' school who had been diagnosed with high functioning ASD were recruited in the intervention as "Trainee Superheroes".
- Lesson contents were delivered through role-playing, discussions, and games, supplemented by real-life scenarios that the students were encountering.
- Parents were also invited to monitor the students' progress in relation to the lesson contents.



MEASUREMENT

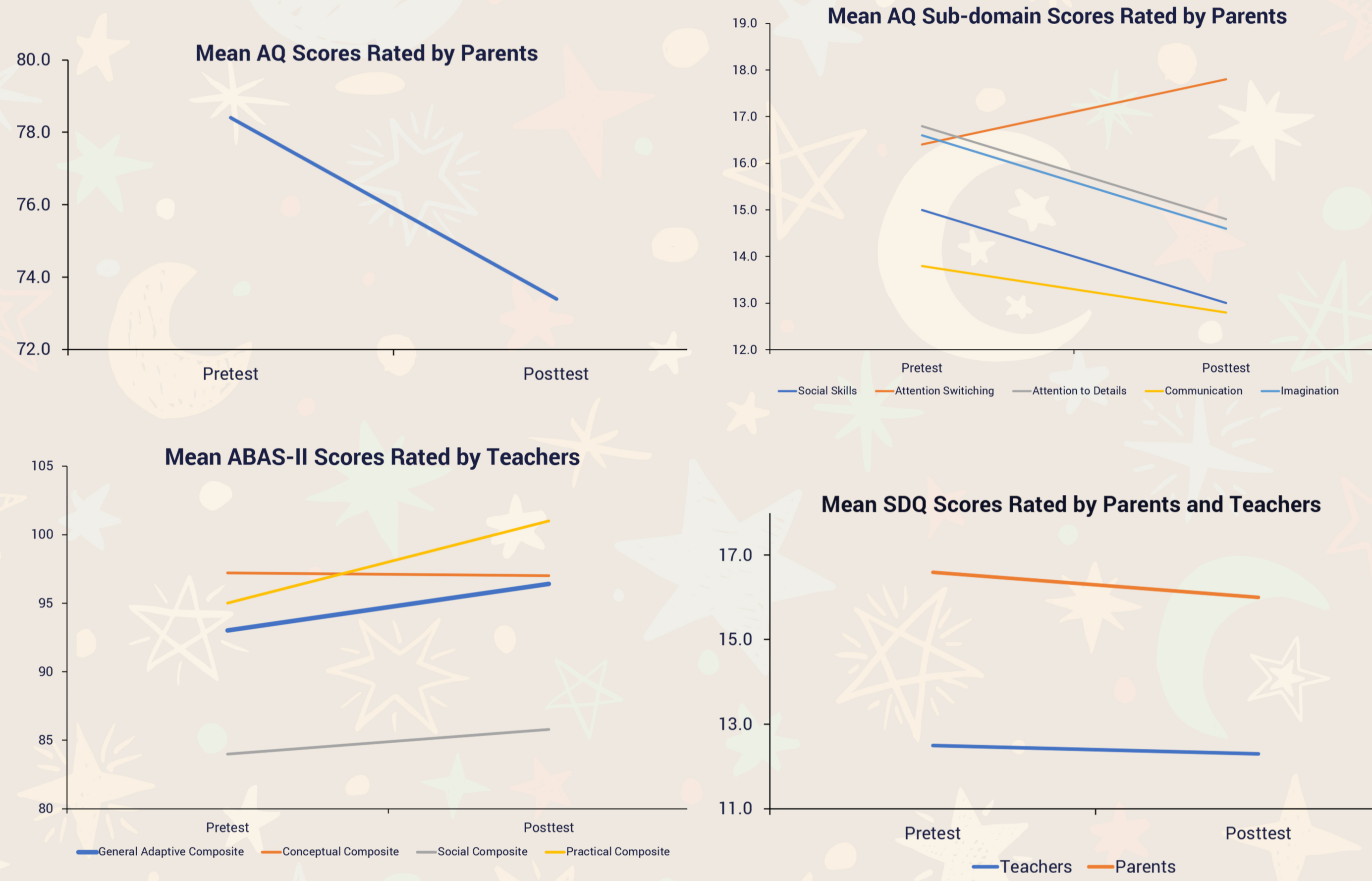
A pre- and post-test design was used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The following assessment tools were used.

- The Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ) was completed by parents to measure the degree to which the students possessed symptoms typical of the autistic spectrum in the areas of social skills, attention switching, attention to detail, communication and imagination. Higher scores represented that the students displayed more prominent autistic features.
- The Adaptive Behavior Assessment System Second Edition (ABAS-II) (Chinese Edition) was administered to the parents and teachers to assess the students' adaptive functioning at home and in school in the domains of learning, social, and practical skills. Higher General Adaptive Composite (GAC) scores represented higher overall adaptive functioning.

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was administered to the parents and teachers to assess the students' emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/attention, and peer relationship problems. Higher difficulties scores represented the problems displayed were more severe.

RESULTS

Pre- and Post-test analyses of parents' and teacher's ratings suggests observable and promising improvement in the students' social functioning. Decreases in manifested autistic features and problem behaviours were also observed.



DISCUSSIONS

- The results show that the autistic features of the students declined while their social functioning improved. This suggests that the intervention programme was an effective one.
- Note that the improvement in the student's adaptive functioning was not observed by parents. One possible reason is that the teaching scenarios used were all school-specific. Scenarios related to the home setting may help generalise the skills to the home environment.
- Notable improvement in emotion regulation was observed by the programme instructors during the training sessions though the decreases in the SDQ difficulties scores reported by parents and teachers were modest. More role-playing with varied scenarios and real-life application may help generalise the skills to other settings.

CONCLUSION

- The current intervention programme was effective in reducing the manifested autistic features and enhancing the social functioning of students with ASD.
- Parents and teachers are encouraged to use the teaching materials from this programme to continue to train the students at home and in school to maximise the generalisation of the skills learned to various settings.

REFERENCE

Lam, S.F., So, A., Chan, W. M., & Lam, M. (2010). Social cognitions and social skills program. Hong Kong: Department of Psychology, Hong Kong University. [林瑞芳、蘇惠安、陳韻文、林鳳茹 (2010)。《社交思考與技巧課程》香港大學心理學系。]

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