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Learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the  
teaching process: the case of Nia Foundation Joy Center

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Sara Merissa, entitled Learning and teaching difficulties of autistic children the case of Nia Foundation Joy Jenter and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Degree of Master of Social work complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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### *Abstract*

*The study aims to explore the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process. To this end, qualitative case study research design was employed in order to have an in depth understanding of the issue. The study area selected was Nia Foundation-Joy Center for children with autism. The study employed an in-depth interview, focus group discussion and observation to collect data. The finding of the study shows that the children with autism have learning problems related to their social behavior, communication and attention problems and insistence on maintenance of sameness. The study also reveals that the teachers face challenges of managing behaviors of the children, like repetitive and stereotypic behaviors in the teaching process. Lack of parents' cooperation is also the other challenge the teachers mentioned. The study reveals that good parent teacher cooperation enhances the effectiveness of the programs. The study also shows that the teachers employ reinforcement as the main technique of teaching the children. They also use visual methods of teaching and storytelling. This study has the implication of showing the gap of the right to education of children with autism and forwarding recommendation to the ministry of education and other interested bodies work on schools to provide education for children with autism.*

*Key words: children with autism, teaching, learning problems*

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Annex

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### **Acronyms**

ABA: Applied Behavior Analysis

ACWRC: African Charter on the Welfare and Right of the Child

AD: Asperger's disorder

APA: American Psychiatrist Association

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

CRC: The Child Right Convention

CDC: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders

PDD: Pervasive Developmental Disorder

PDD-NOS: Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified

ToM: Theory of Mind

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

Autism is defined as a multifaceted developmental disorder which involves impediments and difficulty in social relations, language and a variety of emotional, cognitive and sensory abilities (Greenspan and Wieder, 2006). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders defines autism as a disorder which consists of difficulty in social relations communication and repetitive ways of behavior and its start is before the age of three(American psychiatric association, 1994).According to the diagnostic and statistical manual communication impairment have an effect on both verbal and non verbal skills there may also be lack of or setback in developing verbal language. The other character of individuals with autism is insistence on sameness or being worried about changes. It was in 1943 that Leo kanner for the first time explained about autism in a piece of writing that incorporates case study of 11 children. (Corsello, 2005). Before Kanner gave a name for the disorder Haslam described about a child with autism who was admitted to Bethlehem asylum in 1799. And in 1925 a four year old child with autism was studied at John Hopkins hospital(Bettelheim, 1967). Bleuler also used the term autism in describing some form of social withdrawal that he observed in schizophrenia then both Kannerand Asperger borrowed the word in their work. (Cotugno, 2009) According to Cotugno (2009) autism spectrum disorders are considered as the subcategory of pervasive developmental disorder consisting autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified.

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Autistic disorder being at one end incorporate lower functioning individuals Asperger's disorder at the other end consists of higher functioning individuals and pervasive developmental disorder- not otherwise specified fall in the middle of the two.

In Ethiopia there is lack of awareness on the existence of such kind of disorder. Children with autism are deprived of their right to education and rehabilitation due to lack of awareness most children are even prohibited to get pleasure from day light. ( Nia foundation,2012) according to Nia foundation in Ethiopia children with autism are even locked behind doors when parents get it difficult to manage their behavior. Currently there are no studies made on the prevalence of autism in Ethiopia however according to estimation made by Nia foundation we can have 530,000 children with autism and related developmental disorder (Ibid). So far, there are only two centers for children with autism Joy center and Nehemiah. Both centers are established by the mothers of children with autism.

This thesis contains six chapters. Chapter one provides information on background of the study, general and specific objective, research question, significance, operational definition and limitation of the study. Chapter two reviews literatures by different authors on issues related to the study. Chapter three deals with method of the research, research design, sampling and data collection method. Chapter four discusses findings of the study then the next chapter discusses the findings of the study. The last chapter puts conclusion and social work implication of the study.

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## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

This research focused on learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process with special emphasis on Nia foundation Joy Center for children with autism. Various researches have been conducted on children with autism.

According to Meron(2009) raising a child with autism is a distressing and difficult task for the family parents also agree on the issue that social relationships and activities becomes difficult to the child when he grows up. She also indicated that parents face difficulty in playing and spending a longer time with their children.

Eveslage (2012), in her study school *social workers' perspectives on working with children with autistic spectrum disorder* explained the need for equipping social workers with education and training on autism spectrum disorder that would help them identify the characteristics of children with the disorder.

Teaching students with autism have a positive outcome on their social interaction ability and teachers have a great influence (Mwakalinga, 2012). The findings of this study show that teachers need to be patient in teaching students with autism in order to bring about change. Herbert (2003) discusses many therapeutic intervention strategies for children with autism for example the author explains that their communication problem and lack social skill of relating with others limit them in play so play therapy is considered as crucial part of the therapeutic and educational process.

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Senait (2012) in her study discussed pre and post diagnosis experience of mothers and their coping mechanisms. The study discloses that participants compared their children's diagnosis of autism with death of their children and it also shows that participants have used isolation as a coping mechanism.

On the other hand, the study by Bezawit( 2013) explores the challenges in raising children with autism spectrum disorder. The finding of the study reveals the economic, psychological and social challenges of raising children with autism.

As we can understand from the above studies, the first study focuses on autism and family, which shows the difficulty of raising an autistic child for a family. And the next focuses on the role of social workers' in dealing with children with autism. The study conducted by Mwakalinga is on howteachersimpact on the development of social interaction of children with autism and it is somehow related with the theme of this study but still it is not in the context of Ethiopia. Herbert also focused in her study on the effect of nature or natural environment on health condition with special emphasis on individuals with autism. the two last studies of Bezawit and Senait reveals the challenges in raising children with autism spectrum disorder and the lived experience of mothers with autistic children respectively.

Specifically, this study focused on the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process, with special emphasis on Nia foundation Joy Center for children with autism. The study shows how different behaviors of the children affect learning. It also indicates the challenges the teachers face in the teaching process.

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### **1.3 Research question**

1. What are the learning problems of children with autism?
2. What are the challenges encountered in the teaching process?
3. What are the techniques of teaching?

### **1.4 Objective of the study**

#### **1.4.1 General objective**

The objective of this study is to find out the learning problems of children with autism and challenges in the teaching process.

#### **1.4.2 Specific objective**

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To obtain information about the learning problems of children with autism.
2. To figure out the challenges in the teaching process.
3. To discover the techniques of teaching of children with autism.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The first objective of the study is figuring out learning problems of children with autism. Hence, identifying learning problems creates awareness to parents of children with autism on the importance of special education for their children. Realizing learning problems would also inform curriculum designers and special need educators the need to have curriculum specifically designed to meet educational needs of children with autism.

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The other objective of this study is to figure out the challenges of teaching children with autism this would create awareness on the challenges teachers face in teaching children with autism. In return, this would have an implication for the concerned body that teachers for children with autism need to be given special training on how to teach. Those who aim to work on the wellbeing of vulnerable children particularly on children with autism will have the insight on the need to have special way of teaching when providing educational access to the children.

Identifying techniques of teaching of children with autism is the other objective of the study. Therefore, identifying the techniques would provide information on the ways of teaching desirable for the children.

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

In Ethiopia, there are two centers for children with autism Nehemiah and Nia foundation joy center. This study will be conducted in Addis Abeba at Nia foundation Joy center for children with autism and other developmental disorders which is found around *Sarbet*.

### **1.7 Limitation of the study**

In the study there was time constraint which prevents more detailed than it is now. The constraint of the study was, parents are already tired of interviews and questionnaires so it was difficult to get participants of the study

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### **1.8 Operational definition**

- **Autism:** Pervasive developmental disorder characterized by the physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual impairment of the child.
- **Asperger's disorder:** High functioning autism
- **Learning and teaching:** Includes both academic and other skills such as social interaction and communication

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITRATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a brief history and overview of autism in order to offer basic understanding on the disorder. It also reviews different literatures on the issue of learning problems of children with autism and the challenges encountered in the teaching process. It also provides information on the techniques of teaching used in teaching children with autism.

#### 2.1 History of autism

According to Gallo (2010) a Latin term *autismus* was first used by a Swiss psychiatrist called Eugen Bleuler in describing some symptoms of schizophrenia. The term *autismus* originated from the Greek word *autos* which mean self and the English translation is autism (Ibid). From this we can understand that the meaning of autism describes one of the symptoms of autism that is being alone or in their own world. Then in 1943 Leo Kanner wrote a paper with a title “Autistic disturbances of affective contact”. In this paper Kanner described about the cases of eleven children who have difficulties of social interaction and language (Ibid). The characteristics of children observed by Kanner include “Extreme autistic aloneness”, “Anxiously obsessive desire for the preservation of sameness”, “Excellent rote memory”, “Delayed echolalia”, “over sensitivity to stimuli”, “Limitation in the variety of spontaneous activity”,

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“Good cognitive potentialities” and “Highly intelligent families”

.(Happe,2009,pp.8)

Almost all the characteristics observed by Kanner are the same as the current characteristics of autistic children.

Then in 1944 in Austria Hans Asperger published a paper with the title “Autistic psychopathology” in which he explained about four boys who have difficulties in making friends, two sided conversation and do not have the ability to understand others (Gallo, 2010).

Both Kanner’s and Asperger’s descriptions have many similarities including the term “autistic” they use to name their patients, the preference of the term shows their common belief that the child’s social problems were the most significant and typical attribute of the disorder.( Happe, 2009)

## **2.2Diagnostic criteria**

Turkington (2007,pp.29) defines autistic disorder as a severe developmental disorder popularly known as autism which has an impact on communication and establishing relationship with other people and reacting properly to the surrounding.

The Diagnostic and statistical manual for mental disorders fourth edition describes the features of autistic disorder as:

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*The essential features of autistic disorder are the presence of markedly abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication and a restricted repertoire of activity and interests. (American psychiatric association, 1994, pp.66)*

Cutgno(2009) describes Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD) as a neurologically-based disorder which has an impact on growth of social, behavioral and language/communication area. He also explains that Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder (AD) and Pervasive Developmental Disorder- Not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) are included under Autism spectrum Disorder it being categorized under Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders fourth edition(DSM-IV)* classifies Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder -Not Otherwise Specified, Rett's Disorder and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder under Pervasive Developmental Disorder. According to Cutgno (2009) Rett's and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder are related with step by step loss of functioning and other skills that have formerly been gained within the first few years of life and also with serious mental retardation. Autism spectrum disorder is also defined as an enduring developmental disability that affects on how people understand what they hear, see or sense which in turn impairs social interaction communication and behavior.(Alberta learning,2003) Clikman and Ellison(2009) describes the main features of the disorder as impairment in social interaction abilities, communication problems, stereotyped interests behavior and activities.

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As we can gather from the definition given by different author common features of autistic children are impairments in social interaction, communication and repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior and activities.

With regard to diagnostic criteria the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) puts it in the following manner:

Diagnostic criteria for autistic disorder (American psychiatric association, 1994, pp.70-71)

- A. A total of six( or more) items from (1),(2) and (3), with at least two from (1) and one each from (2) and (3);
  - 1. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following;
    - a. Marked impairment in the use of multiple non verbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures and gestures to regulate social interaction.
    - b. Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level.
    - c. Lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment interests or achievements with other people( e.g. by a lack of bringing, showing or pointing out objects of interest)
    - d. D. lack of social or emotional reciprocity.
  - 2. Qualitative impairments in communication as manifested by one of the following

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- a. Delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language ( not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture mime)
  - b. In individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in ability to initiate and sustain a conversation with others.
  - c. Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language.
  - d. Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level.
3. Restricted and repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities manifested by at least one of the following.
- a. Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus.
  - b. Apparently inflexible adherence to specific non functional routines or rituals.
  - c. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerism( e.g. hand or finger flapping or twisting or complex whole- body movement)
  - d. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.
- B. Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas with onset prior to the age 3 year: (1) social interaction (2) language as used in social communication or (3) symbolic or imaginative play.

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- C. The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's disorder or childhood disintegrative disorder.

### 2.3 Etiology

Even though there is no certainty as to the exact cause of the disorder there are various justifications suggested by different scholars.

Happe( 1994) describes that Bethlehem was the developer of the “refrigerator mother” theory which suggests that a child turns out to be autistic as a result of maladaptive response to threatening and unloving environment . However this cause is considered as a myth by Happe and others and it was proved to be wrong.

According to Turkington (2007) there is no single cause of autism but current researches relate the cause to biological and neurological differences in the brain. He also provides for various causes of autism suggested by researchers these include *heredity, immune system disorder, vaccinations and environmental problems*. According to Veague (2010) scientists in Autism Genom project identified five or six primary genes and around 30 secondary genes that they consider are involved in the development of autism. The aim of the scientists in the project is specifying autism “susceptibility genes” this means they are searching for genes that contribute to autistic behavior, the more a person has these genes the more serious the autistic behavior turn out to be. In explaining environmental causes for autism Veague(Ibid) classified the road to autism into two, one is that idiopathic, that is to say the cause is unknown and the secondary, genetic or environmental abnormalities might cause autism.

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This indicates that in the idiopathic path the cause of the disorder is not known at all. Whereas, in the secondary path the cause is either genetic or some environmental problem. The causes of secondary autism comprise experience of German measles (rubella) during pregnancy and thalidomide (drug developed in 1950 given to reduce pain and distress during pregnancy). Environmental causes such as thalidomide and German measles are identified to cause autism in some children however it is not known whether genetic issues are involved or not. With regard to socio economic status as a cause of autism he concludes that it is an “equal opportunity” situation. He explains that autism is found at all socioeconomic levels. This means, being very rich, poor or at the middle could not be a reason for autism. In other words economic status of people does not have any relation with autism. (Ibid)

#### **2.4 Prevalence**

According to National Health Statistics report (2013) based on parent reported autism spectrum disorder in school aged U.S children the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in 2011-2012 among school children between the ages of 6-17 was estimated to be one in fifty. And the same report shows that school aged boys were reported to have autism more than four times as likely as school aged girls.

As to Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2014) in 2010, the general prevalence of Autism among the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) sites of USA was 14.7 per 1000 one in sixty eight children aged eight years.

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In Ethiopia there is no statistical evidence as to the extent and prevalence of the disorder. However, according to Nia foundation (2012) estimation it is expected that there is the same prevalence with other countries because autism is found in all without differences in race, ethnicity, social status and other criteria, so in USA if one in every 115 children is diagnosed with autism in Ethiopia with a population of 80 million it is estimated that there are around 530,000 children with autism.

## **2.5 Developmental characteristics of children with autism**

Children with autism have different impairments or difficulties such as social interaction difficulties, communication difficulties, repetitive stereotyped forms of behavior and interests and problems related to sensory and motor functioning. Under this section the researcher will review different written materials on the issue of impairments of autistic children.

### **2.5.1 Social behavior**

Social skills are things that we can learn simply because we are part of the society and we are living in it, however children with autism have difficulty learning these skills. Difficulty in social functioning is said to be the core attribute of autism, children with autism have a problem in reciprocity, initiating communication, maintaining eye contact, sharing pleasure, and understanding the interest of others (Turkington, 2007). These difficulties of initiating and maintaining communication sharing happiness and other feelings with people have a great impact on the social interaction of children with autism with others.

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Halliwell (2003) also explains that children with autism are unable to act in accordance with the rules that are commonly known by the society. Simply by being a member of a community where we live in, we become accustomed to lots of norms of the society. For example, if we take a simple example we know that we don't have to shout in the library when nobody thought us to do so. The problem with children with autism is they have no idea of what is acceptable or forbidden in a society unlike other kids.

According to Edwards (2008) individuals with autism frequently appear aloof and uninterested. However, he also confirms that many other people with autism want friendship but still they may not know how to do it properly. The other problem of autistic individuals is lack of understanding of the concept of personal space they have no idea that getting too close makes another person uncomfortable Gallo calls them "*space invaders*"(Gallo,2010)

### **2.5.2Communication development**

Matson (2009) in his book entitled *applied behavior analysis for children with autism spectrum disorder* provides for communication impairments of each of the three types of autistic spectrum disorder that is for autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. Individuals with autistic disorder often use language for the purpose of asking for what they want rather than for social or dialogue purposes and they simply repeat words (Ibid). Individuals with Asperger syndrome are not late in spoken language. However they lack the skill of having a proper communication.

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They also have problem in the proper usage of grammar gesture and facial expressions and do not wait for turns in conversations.

Individuals with PDD-NOS have a better communication skill than people with Asperger syndrome they often concentrate on certain distinctive topics they may not also take pleasure in having conversation they also become worried and uncomfortable when engaging in social communication (Ibid). Individuals with Asperger syndrome can suffer from various kinds of complexities in identifying and make use the wider techniques of communication. These include literal understanding of language , when unclear messages are transmitted they are unable to use other skills to interpret the real meaning of the message, difficulties in starting sustaining and reporting conversation and avoiding eye contact(Halliwell, 2003).

It is known that individuals with autism have difficulty in developing spoken language they may not even develop spoken language however most of them are unable to use their language to communicate efficiently (Silver, 2005).

Other communication problems faced by some autistic children are talking in a high pitched voice, using robot like talking, not responding to what other people say or talk and difficulty of using pronouns properly . On the other hand some very brilliant autistic children may be able to talk well in some topics o f their interest and many others have good abilities of reminding for fresh information and have good communication skill though not to a normal capacity stage (Turkington, 2009).

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Happe( 1994,pp.32) also put communication impairments of people with autism as follows:

- *delay or lack of development speech without any compensating gesture*
- *failure to respond to others' speech ( the child doesn't orient to his own name)*
- *stereotyped and repetitive use of language*
- *pronoun reversal( saying "you" for "I")*
- *idiosyncratic use of words, and appearance of neologism*
- *failure to initiate or sustain conversation*
- *abnormalities of prosody( pitch, stress, intonation)*
- *semantic/ conceptual difficulties*

Edwards(2008) in his book *providing practical support for people with autism spectrum disorder* explains that his child is good at having conversation with people however the main problem relies on communicating besides he is also able to read but he is not able to say a word about what he has read. He also explains that people with autism have difficulty in giving attention to one thing when there are lots of things around to take their attention. They are also unable to take in much information at a time and process information quickly.

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### **2.5.3 Insistence on maintenance of sameness**

According to Turkington( 2009) very little change in any routines such as meal time, dressing style or time of going to school might be quite distressing for children with autism. Unlike the normally developing children who become interested in new things such as playing materials autistic children insist on sameness. Hollander (2003) also explains that they mostly show little interest in looking around the environment and may rather repeatedly look at or handle a certain object.

Cotugno (2009) describes the response of autistic children to behavioral change or flexibility as a *state of heightened arousal* which is described as an increase in anxiety by other literatures. He explains that it is based on the consideration of cognitive and behavioral inflexibility as a reaction to a request or claim for change, resulting state of arousal, generating increased stress, and creating a state of disequilibrium and suffering.

### **2.5.4 Problems in relation to affect and attention**

Autistic individuals express their feelings in odd ways and their emotions may be too much to the extreme and exaggerated or may be comparatively stable or minimal.(Schreibman, 2005). Schreibman goes on to describe that the affect may be rather incompatible to the situation in that the child laughs when someone is injured or cry when a birth day gift is given. Clinical observation of children with autism shows that they exhibit high autonomic reactivity especially in new circumstances, as well as a difficulty in self regulating this reactivity (Withman, 2000).

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Attention difficulties are frequent in children with autism with the estimates of the problem as high as 64% (Whitman, 2000).

Whitman explained that even though they can simply be distracted at times they focus on immaterial cues for a longer period of time. Attention in autistic children has been described as changing between states where the individual is incapable to attend to information presented at the same time a state where the individual is incapable to focus on any significant part of information (Frith, 1989 as cited in, Cutugno, 2010)

### **2.5.5 Unusual patterns of behavior**

The characteristics of most autistic children with is ritualistic, obsessive, repetitious and stereotyped which may involve gross and fine motor behaviors or highly complicated verbal rituals. The gross- motor level includes movements such as hand flapping, rhythmic body rocking, jumping and sinning. And the fine-motor level includes behaviors such as wiggling, gazing, eye crossing and saliva swishing (Schreibman, 2005). Whitman (2000) also describe repetitive, restricted activities and patterns of behavior as the most interesting and major characteristics of autism. He further describes them as odd and even weird in nature may be due to the fact that their origin and function is not known. The other behavior of autistic children is echolalia which refers to repeating of words or phrases other people say is the other behavior that children with autism show. Echolalia could be delayed or immediate echoing would be an exact copy of what has been said however, there will not be direct or indirect reply, confusing the person whether they understand the question or not. (Gallo, 2010)

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Halliwell (2003) describes their over sensitivity to stimuli like sound, smell, taste or touch. He describes that their sensitivity to taste and smell might have an effect on their eating and their over sensitivity to touch might affect their physical closeness with other people. The other unusual behavior of autistic children is self-injurious behavior. Matson (2009, pp.157) explains that *“self-injurious behavior has been reported in clinical documentation and in research literature that it takes a variety of forms like self-hitting, head banging, self-scratching, self-pinching, eye gouging, self-kicking, hair pulling and many others.”* Engaging in such behavior obviously causes many physical damages. In relation to this Schreibman (2005) describes self-injurious behavior may cause minor injurious like bruises and major injurious like brain damage. He also mentioned the case of one little boy who died of a brain damage caused by his self-injurious behavior.

## **2.6 Learning problems**

Learning problems of children with autism are very much related to other impairments such as communication and social interaction discussed in this section. Research indicates that as many as 75% of individuals with autism have a problem in relation to learning, up to 40% showing severe to profound learning disability (Fombonne, 2003). Students with autism face difficulties when learning to read which includes problems in relation to attention, lack of motivation and problems with word decoding (Vacca, 2007). He further explained that due to lack of social interaction the student may lack the inspiration to please others or unrewarded by praise as a result appears to be resistant to praise.

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The other learning problem of children with autism is lack of theory of mind that is the inability to recognize that others can see and know what we see (Siegel, 2008).

Lack of theory of mind is the inability to recognize that others have their own state of mind (Schreibman, 2005). And this has a significant effect on teaching learning process because children with autism lack the ability to recognize that others can observe what they observe.

Siegel (2008) explains another learning problem specific to children with autism that is lack of interest to be like peers or friends and this inhibits learning in a group-based setting. He goes on to describe the effect of communication impairments on learning, when we say communication it incorporates both the verbal and non verbal ways of interaction. When a teacher teaches in a classroom she/he uses both verbal and non-verbal ways of communication however children with autism are unable to realize the gesture, facial expression and other things used by the teacher consequently it is hard for them to get the idea of the teacher. Siegel(2003) in *helping children with autism learn* states that repetitive behaviors influence their ability to master other new things. Organizing information is the other kind of impairment he considered and it includes *playing with things the same way over and over*, this relates to lack of motivation to remake things that the child is seeing or practicing. The other difficulty he described is difficulty *with responding to new things* somehow, this difficulty can be considered as a problem of how fast the brain of individuals with autism can take in.

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The other is *impaired ability to reconstruct a semblance of his world through play* this is related with the inability of using language specially in understanding action words, adjectives and adverbs. The other kind of impairment which can affect learning is executive dysfunction. According to Maryland state department of education autism task force report (2004) inability of imitation is one of the impairments associated with executive dysfunction which includes imitation of series of movements and figurative movements. This has an impact on the ability of learning complex fine motor skills such as writing.

According to Chilvers (2008) children with autism are mostly interested in technical process mechanisms figurative and factual ways of learning however, they cannot go along with the normal school curriculum.

With regard to learning problems of children with autism in a normal class room setting with other typically developing children Chilvers (2007, pp.32) explained that *because of poor understanding of social rules in a class room or the inability to follow series of instructions, to name but a few, autistic children are often regarded as rude or 'trouble makers' at school.* They may also insist on finishing a certain activity when other students finish and pass on to other new things and the use of abstract language may not be easy to interpret which results in recurrent misunderstanding. (Ibid) According to Moyes(2002) frequent complaint of teachers about children with autism in their classroom is the inability to pay attention.

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She further explained that children with autism do not focus on a given activity either because of their language processing abilities, their need for an alternative method of presentation or sensory processing problems.

## **2.7 Teaching children with autism social interaction**

Social interaction impairment is one of the challenges of children with autism. Typically developing children normally act or interact according to social rules and regulations however when it comes to children with autism they need to be thought about the obvious rules followed by other members of a community. Wilczynski (2008) and colleagues review four types of intervention mechanisms that have been used to teach social skills for children with autism. The first one is an antecedent intervention which comprises three types (social stories, priming and self management) which are used to promote social skills. Social stories are used to increase the child's consciousness of the environment, social cues and social instructions (Ibid). Alberta Learning (2003) also suggests the incorporation of social rules in social stories to help students with autism understand social rules. It also puts social stories as one way of teaching children with autism. And states that in order to be effective in using social story it should describe a condition from the viewpoint of a student, direct the student to perform the proper behavior and should use the voice of the student i.e. the "I" perspective. In relation to reinforcement as a method of teaching Moyes (2002) states that punishment teaches children with autism they have done something wrong but it does not teach them what behaviors are good enough. However, reward teaches them what behaviors are desirable.

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According to Perko&Mclaughlin(2002) the use of positive reinforcement have been revealed to inspire them to learn self-help skills, school related behaviors, language and many others. They also explained that in order to increase positive or proper behaviors it is important to identify reinforcement that would help these process. There are three types of reinforces that are used for children with autism these are edible, social reinforce and sensory (Foxx, 1982, as cited in,Perko& Mclaughlin,2002).

The other one is self management in which the child is thought to modify and supervise his or her own behavior (Heward, 1987 as cited in Wilczynski.et.al, 2008). The second one is peer mediated intervention which involves teaching normally developing peers to take on particular behaviors to support the student attain the targeted social skills. The other one is pivotal response training, pivotal behaviors includes behaviors such as sharing joint attention and establishing proper eye contact which are basic in developing more complex language and social skills. Once these skills are developed it is easy to develop other complicated social goals such as friendship and relationship with peers.

In explaining about pivotal response teaching Volkmar and colleagues (2008) confirmed that pivotal response teaching is planned to be implemented by family members so that children with autism like normally developing children have learning opportunities throughout their waking hours in contrast to being thought only few hours of a day (Wilczynski, *et.al* 2008).

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The last intervention or teaching method reviewed by Wilczynski and colleagues is video modeling and computer instruction which involves taping a short video sequence of the child with autism, a normally developing peer or an adult performing the desired social skills and then showing to the child the video before social opportunities.

According to Nikopoulos&Keenan (2006) video modeling has been used for the last three decades in various ways and situations in amalgamation with other behavioral procedures or not. In 1982 Steinborn and Knapp were the first to report empirical evidence on the use of video modeling as a treatment procedure for children with autism. (Nicolopoulos&Keenan, 2006). The authors list various publications on video modeling which shows efficacy of the strategy.

Other ways of teaching social skills suggested by Alberta learning (2003) include using visuals, peer support group, teaching self monitoring skills, using social skills training groups, teaching basic social rules, support friendships and using integrated play groups. Using visuals involves providing tangible and fixed depiction of behaviors which can be used to teach and prompt various social skills. Broun (2004) states that Oelwein method of teaching that is visual methods of learning are effective in helping children with autism. Meadan. et.al. (2011) also explained that parents, teachers and other professionals should first assess the child in order to decide which type of visual representations fits a child. In creating visual supports teachers can use diverse methods to offer support including the use of real objects, photographs, line drawings or words (Sussman, 1999, as cited in, Meadan.et.al, 2011).

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Besides, children with autism are described as visual thinkers who think in picture rather than language, pictures are their first language and words are their second language (Grandin, 1999, as cited in, Vacca, 2007).

The other method of teaching described by Alberta Learning (2003) is peer support which helps students with autism to gain social skills however teachers may need to be engaged in interpreting non verbal languages and explaining which tasks are difficult for a student and how to help. Self monitoring involves teaching students to monitor their behavior in order to gain positive reinforcement. Social skill training groups is based on the assumption that students with autism may benefit from social skills training in a small group set-up. Social skills training programs normally involve assessments teachers can use to specify skills for training. Teaching social rules associated with given situation helps to act in accordance with social context and reduces stress and reliance on improper coping behaviors.

## **2.8 Teaching communication**

Communication is the other challenge of children with autism. Volkmar and colleagues (2008) pinpoint milieu teaching as a naturalistic teaching method focusing on social skills and communication. It focuses on teaching in the circumstance of continuing habitual activities equally at home and in school following the child's guide and providing natural consequences for communication (Volkmar.et.al, 2008).

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Some examples of environmental arrangements in milieu teaching include putting a material of interest within sight but out of reach of the child, giving materials that require help, giving small amount of something he needs so that the child open communication to get what he needs.( Kaiser.et.al.1993 as cited in Volkmar.et.al, 2008).

## **2.9The role of parents in teaching children with autism**

Developing and executing effective education plan those are important for children with autism spectrum disorder involve collaboration of parents (Alberta learning, 2009). It also states that joint parent-school relationship is based on parents and teachers understanding of each other's view points and realities. It is important for parents to have a clear understanding of their child's school program, the roles of staff members and how individual classrooms meet the various needs of all the students. The Ontario ministry of education (2007) states that involvement of parents will improve program planning and help in the planning of educational goals, methods, and motivational techniques that is most suitable and effective for a student. It goes on to explain that the learning process for a student with ASD is enhanced when the same skills and concepts are reinforced in both the home and school environments.

Moyes (2002) indicates the involvement of parents in discussing the team approach where parents and educators meet to discuss problem behavior of autistic children.

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## **2.10 Challenges of managing behavior**

We have seen above various characteristics of autistic children which include problems in relation to social behavior, communication problems, restrictive, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior and some others. Under this section we are going to see how these behaviors affect or influence teaching.

In defining the behavior of insistence on sameness of children with autism Turkington(2009) explains that very little change in routines are quite distressing for autistic children. A sudden request to move on to a new activity or environment causes autistic students distress and anxiety (Moyes, 2002). She also discussed that some behaviors such as hand flicking are distracting for teachers while parents insisted that such behaviors may serve some purpose for the child.

On the other hand, the study of Lindsay.et.al (2013) found out that understanding and managing behavior of autistic children is one of the challenges of including children with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream class room. On the other hand Vacca (2007) explained that autistic children have a very exceptional set of challenges that necessitates a parent or a teacher to have a lot of patience. She further explained that sometimes children with autism can be very cooperative however most of the time they have problems in relation to attention, lack of inspiration to read and have problems figuring out the rules of grammar and reading when compared to other children.

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Besides, Perko & McLaughlin (2002) described decreasing challenging behavior as one problem of schooling children with autism. They explained that this is important because children with autism have some kind of extreme behaviors which interrupt the learning process.

Moyes (2002) in explaining echolalia (repeating words) she said children with autism repeat words or phrases in order to help them process what has been said. Tonge (2005) similarly explained that echolalia may be quite irritating but for the child it may help him understand what has been said. Moyes further explained that they may respond to questions very slowly or may not respond to the question at all. In relation to social behavior she explained that they have difficulty in using and understanding social cues and gestures, sometimes they do not know how to express their feelings when they are angry so they may act aggressively. In relation to this Vacca (2007) explained that a child may lack the ability to express properly what he exactly feels like hunger and other feelings and may end up being aggressive. He also explained that a child may not be able to control some feeling and lack the knowledge of social rules this results in trying to obtain attention improperly or preferring to be alone.

### **2.11 The right to education**

Children are entitled with various forms of right such as the right to life the right to express their opinion freely and other rights. The right to education is one of the rights given to children. Various international and national legislations provide the right to education of children.

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When we specifically come to children with autism due to their social interaction communication and other impairments they need to be provided with special education. Article 26(1) of the UDHR states that " *Everyone has the right to education*". Article 11 of African Charter on the Welfare and Right of the Child (ACWRC) provides the right to education of children. Article 11(1) stipulates that " *Every child has the right to education*" Article 11 (2) (a) also states that: " *The promotion and development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*".

As stated under article 11 every child has the right to education so children with autism are also entitled with the right to education. Furthermore article 13 of the charter provides for the right of those with mental and physical disabilities in the following manner " *Every child who is mentally and physically disabled shall have the right to special measure of protection in keeping with his physical and moral needs and under conditions which ensures his dignity, promote his self reliance and active participation in the community.*"

As we have seen in the above literatures autistic children have some kind of mental disability consequently they have the right to special measure of protection which is supposed to include education. Then article 13(3) (e) gives special attention to children who are disadvantaged by imposing responsibility on the states to take measures to ensure their equal access to education. Hence children with autism can be considered in this category. Article 28 of the Child Right Convention states that all children have the right to a primary education, which should be free.

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It also states that the convention places high value on education. In relation to the right of children with disability article 23 of the convention stipulates that children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support, as well as all the right in the convention, so that they can live full and independent lives.

When we come to national legislations the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution article 36 provides for various rights of the child however it doesn't specifically mention the right to education. The revised family code of Ethiopia under article 260 put the responsibility of guardian with regard to education in the following way "*The guardian shall ensure that the minor be given general education or professional training commensurate with his age and ability.*" As discussed earlier in this chapter autistic children have learning difficulties so this article makes the guardian responsible to ensure that education is given in line with the child's ability. Article 9(4) of the constitution states that "*All international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are integral part of the law of the land*" From this article we can understand that ratified international agreements are put in equal footing with the law of the land. For this reason international instruments ratified by Ethiopia such as the UDHR, CRC and ACRWC are part of the law of the land. So children with autism are entitled with the rights provided under the above international instruments.

### **2.12 Interventions for children with autism**

The literatures in the above sections provide characteristics of children with autism that necessitate intervention.

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Some of which are social behavior impairments, communication impairments and restrictive repetitive and stereotyped behaviors.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is an evidence based approach to challenging behavior backed by four decades of successful intervention research (Baer, Wolf, and Risley 1968, as cited in Wilczynski et al., 2008). Matson (2009) also describes that most of the behavioral characteristics of autism has been dealt with by applied behavior analysis. For this reason applied behavior analysis is discussed here under.

### **2.12.1 Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)**

Ivar Lovaas at the University of California, Los Angeles was the first in autism treatment research. In 1960's and 1970's he started working with children who exhibit speech delays and interpersonal difficulties (Wilczynski et al., 2008). The authors describe it as a type of therapy used based on the theory that a rewarded behavior has the probability of being repeated than a behavior which is not given due consideration. According to Rasmussen (2007) in 1987 Doctor Lovaas after studying 59 children with autism and the best method of teaching them he found out that 19 children who received forty hours week of one-to-one therapy had shown best result and almost half of them became similar with their peers by first grade. Applied behavior analysis requires a therapist one-on-one thorough work with a child 20 to 40 hours a week and it is the most effective for children with autism (Turkington, 2007). Behavioral approach of intervention uses the influential tools of operant conditioning to treat symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (National research council, 2001).

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Keenan (2006) also describes it is a therapeutic approach which depends on the evaluation of strength and need of individuals and their life situations.

## **2.13 Theories of autism**

Under this section the study will look at cognitive theories of autism.

### **2.13.1 Theory of Mind (ToM)**

The theory emerged by watching that autistic children are unable to take part in imaginary play (Happe, 1994). One of the main attribute of autism is lack of understanding of another person's state of mind and in severe instances they may not even have the idea of mind at all (Cohen, 1995). This kind of impairment has been known as lack of theory of mind or 'mind blindness' and though it recount to some of the social impairments in autism it is not the reason for these behaviors (Bogdashina, 2006). Children with autism have difficulty of social reciprocity as in the case of toddlers which consequently causes deficit of theory of mind.

According to Schreibman (2005) The ability to understand that others have their own belief, thinking and perspective, which we call theory of mind, normally develops around the age of 1<sup>1/2</sup> to 2 years before this age children are *egocentric* and they only consider their opinion and think that others opinion is the same as theirs. This *egocentric* behavior decreases as the child gets older.

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So children who pass through the normal stages of development develop the ability to understand that other people have their own belief and thought as they grow older where as the case of autistic children is different in that they don't develop this ability as they grow up.

### **2.13.2 Weak central coherence theory**

UtaFrith developed the theory of weak central coherence in trying to give explanation for the characteristics of autism which are not social and could not be related to lack of theory of mind. The theory concentrates on cognition a distinction that is both shortfall and strength in autism (Bogdashina, 2006). He goes on to state that the theory predicts that individuals with autism will have impairments in integrating information into a higher level of holistic information, that is they may do good in entrenched figure tests but find it hard to see the entire picture. It is believed that, the theory of week central coherence accounts for the typical islets of abilities in autism and the inability to give attention to significant information and ignore immaterial information which leads to incapability to make sense and to see meaning in everything (Frith, 1989/2003, as cited in Bogdashina, 2006).

According to Scheribman (2005) UtaFrith and her colleagues hypothesize that autistic children lack *a drive for central coherence*. This drive is that people who pass through normal development process should combine and arrange environmental information in order to fully understand a certain situation.

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When person does or say something he doesn't want to, most of the time we can understand his/her exact feeling by reading facial expression or other things. However Autistic children do not have the ability to do so, hence this is what is considered as lack of drive to central coherence. Based on this theory Frith predicted that autistic children would be good at tasks where attention to restricted information- comparatively gradual processing- is beneficial but poor at responsibilities that entail the recognition of worldwide meaning. (Happe, 1994)

### **2.13.3 Executive function deficits**

Autistic individuals lack the ability to hold back improper replies when communicating with other people or monitor reactions while giving response to others which is considered as executive functioning (Rotatori.et.al, 2001). Normal individuals are able to hide their feelings in instances where telling what they exactly feel would hurt other individual's feelings however autistic individuals tell what they exactly feel because of the fact that they are unable to separate themselves from the immediate environment and hear internal representation. The other executive function deficit is the difficulty in planning approaches to accomplish a certain goal. (Shreibman, 2005)

According to Bogdashina (2006), executive functioning refers to the incapacity to free the mind of direct situation and circumstance to show behaviors through mental models or internal representations. He also adds that the executive functioning theory can simply account for the deficiency of flexibility and the firmness showed by people with autism, their trouble in planning, and their challenges with starting and finishing actions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter demonstrates the method of research used in the study. It explains the study area, research design, study population and eligibility criteria, sampling technique, data collection instruments, method of analysis and ethical consideration

#### 3.1 Study area

The study was conducted at Nia foundation Joy center for children with autism and other related developmental disorder. It is located in the capital city of Ethiopia Addis Ababa around the area commonly called *sar bet*. It is a native, nonpolitical, non religious and nonprofit making foundation established in 2002 and got its legal recognition by the ministry of justice as a local humanitarian NGO in January 2006 (Nia foundation, 2012).

Jojo was eight years old boy when he was first diagnosed with autism his elder brother Billal who was thirteen years old and growing up in America. Billal had the intention to help children in Ethiopia hence; he gave all he had to contribute for the establishment of Joy Center for children with autism. According to Nia foundation the name joy center is derived from the name Jojo and also it has the meaning of joyful place. Joy center for children with autism and related developmental disorder is among the five main programs carried out by Nia foundation and it is the main and biggest program of the rest which are *Yagebagnal*,

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woman for leadership, Youth empowerment, empowering women with different abilities (Nia foundation, 2012). The center is mainly concerned with mixing of children with autism into community by working strongly with the children their nuclear and extended family and the community as whole.

Children who are eligible to join the center are between the age of 3 and 22 and diagnosed with some form of autism. Accordingly, children who receive service at the center are classified into three, those who have severe, classic and mild autistic disorder. And they are provided with various services based on the level of their disability. They get various therapies such as sensory, occupational, audio- visual and speech. There are also different playing and teaching materials for them. One of the materials used for teaching alphabet is *Abogida phonetics* which is produced by ZemiYenus the founder of the foundation.

With regard to the interaction of parents and the center there is a communication book in which they exchange information about the children since the children are not able to communicate. Besides there is family support group monthly meeting on which parents discuss about their children and to support each other. Almost all the children are autistic except for two children with another disorder accepted at the commencement of the center. In order to join the center first parents have to come with an evidence of the diagnosis of their child with autism. Then after, the child will be diagnosed at the center again. The center has one professional neurologist who visits the children; since some of them are epileptic he gives medication when it is needed.

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He also gives counseling for the parents. The center also has communication with other doctors to whom the children go for medication.

Since the research is on learning and teaching difficulties of children with autism the center is considered the appropriate place to conduct the research. Besides the center is pioneer for children with this kind of disorder and also it is one of the two centers available in the country. More over the researcher had some information about the center because of the fact that the researcher's cousin is autistic and learns there.

### **3.2 Research design**

According to Creswell (2007) one of the several reasons to employ qualitative research is when we need multifaceted, thorough understanding of the subject. And this thorough understanding can be obtained by directly discussing with people by going to their place of work or home (Cresswell, 2007). He also adds that we conduct qualitative research when we need to study a group. The study aims at looking for a detailed understanding of the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process by directly going to the center and discussing with the teachers and parents. Hence, qualitative research method was employed.

Among qualitative research approaches the study employed case study method. Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a surrounded system that is a setting or context (Cresswell, 2007).

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Unlike other research methods like phenomenology which describes the lived experience of individuals of a certain concept or phenomenon, grounded theory which aims to generate theory, case study research was considered as appropriate for the study since it involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a surrounded system. Collective case study method was employed so that it could help to demonstrate the issue.

### **3.3 Study Population and Eligibility criteria**

Hancock & Algozzine (2006) in case study method of research suggests for the selection of key participants in the circumstances whose knowledge and opinion may provide significant information with regard to the research questions. Currently there are 80 children, among which 16 are female and 64 are male, receiving service at the center. And there are 39 teachers providing service. The participants of the study were parents of children with autism between the age of 29 and 40. The other participants of the study were teachers of children with autism at the center.

### **3.4 Sampling technique**

The study employed purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is sometimes called judgmental or deliberate sampling. And in this type of sampling items for the sample are selected intentionally (Kotharri, 2004). Accordingly five parents were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study and their verbal fluency which helped to obtain enough information.

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The other participants of the study were teachers who have two and above years of experience and were able to provide enough information on the issue. Hence, three teachers with two years of experience and two with ten years of experience were involved in the individual interview. Another five teachers, with two and above years of experience were involved in the focus group discussion. They were chosen based on the information from the responsible body at the center about the year of their experience. A total of ten teachers and five parents participated in the study. The number of participants involved in the study was considered enough to provide the needed information on the issue studied.

### **3.5 Data collection instruments**

In this study both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data are those collected anew and for the first time and are original in nature. And secondary data are those which have previously been collected by somebody else and passed through statistical process (Kotharri, 2004). There are various forms of data collection Creswell (2007) explained that in a case study research data collection is normally wide drawing on several sources of data. Hence this study employed interview, observation and focus group discussion in order to collect primary data. Different studies, journals, books were reviewed for the purpose of collecting secondary data.

#### **3.5.1 Interview**

In order to obtain detailed information on the issue the study employed an in-depth interview.

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Kothari (2004) lists advantages of conducting personal interview, some of which are obtaining detailed information, keeping away misinterpretation of questions by making the interview language adaptable to the level of ability or education of the respondents. An in-depth interview guide was prepared in a way that addresses the specific objectives of the study. Before conducting the interview the researcher built relationship and rapport with the participants. Then they were briefed about the purpose of the study and consent form was signed. The interview was tape recorded, with the permission of the participants, not to lose any information told and notes were also taken. The interview was conducted in the compound of the center for the convenience of parents and teachers.

### **3.5.2 Observation**

Observation was the other method of data collection used in the study. According to Kothari (2004) observation specially suits for studies which involve subjects who are unable to give verbal expression of their feelings due to several reasons. In this study children with autism are not able to give verbal expression of their feelings so the researcher believed that observation is preferable. Structured observation was used in the study. After obtaining the permission of the concerned body and the teachers the researcher prepared an observation checklist that helped to record the information obtained through observation and was involved in observing the teaching and learning process for about two weeks.

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### **3.5.3 Focus group discussion**

According to Morgan (1997) focus groups offers access to information that is not acquired through either individual interview or participant observation. In this study onefocus group discussion was conducted with five teachers which helped to obtain information that was not obtained through interviews and observation. In this study the researcher served as a moderator of the focus group discussion.

The focus group discussion was conducted at the compound of the center for the convenience of the participants. First, Participants of the study were briefed about the purpose of the study that is finding out learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process. Then the discussion was tape recorded with the permission of the participants.

### **3.6 Method of analysis**

According to Cresswell (2007) analysis strategies of data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis then reducing the data into theme through the process of coding and presenting the data.

With regard to analysis of qualitative case study Cresswell (2007) suggests for the description of the case complete view of the facts in the case. Hence in the study the facts of each case were described. In this study, the process of analyzing commenced right after every interview and also after all the information was collected. The data collected through interview was transcribed to English.

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Then categories were used to develop themes and sub themes.

### **3.7 Ethical consideration**

To gain support from participants a qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study, explain the purpose of the study and doesn't engage in deception about the nature of the study (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, participants were given clear information about the purpose of the study before they engage in any kind of interview. Berg (2005) defines confidentiality as the effort of making the study participants unknown in the study record and anonymity implies making the participants stay unnamed. As Berg explains that in most qualitative researches anonymity cannot be maintained since the researcher knows the name of the participants. So the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the participants.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study in line with the objectives of the study. The chapter first, presents the demographic information of participants and then the major findings of the study. Then the analysis procedure of the findings of the study identifies major themes and sub-themes. Accordingly, the major themes identified were learning problems, challenges in the teaching process and techniques of teaching. And the sub-themes under the first theme are social behavior challenges, communication and attention problem and insistence on sameness, under the second theme problems of managing behavior and challenges in relation to parents' cooperation are included. The subthemes under the last theme are reinforcement and visuals and stories

Participants of the study were five parents, five teachers and another five focus group participant teachers who have been working at the Center for more than two years. The teachers were all females and the parents were four mothers and a father. Focus group participants were two males and three female teachers. Fictitious names were used to present the information given by the respondents.

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**4.1 Background information of teachers**

Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Educational level	Year of service at the center
Roza	Female	24	Single	Nursing degree	Two years
Saba	Female	27	Single	Teaching diploma	Ten tears
Helen	Female	28	Single	Degree in management	Ten years
Lidiya	Female	25	Single	Nursing diploma	Two years
Meron	Female	25	Single	Grade 10	Two years
Nardos	Female	24	Single	Nursing diploma	Two years
Hailu	Male	27	Single	Degree in accounting	Two years and half
Dawit	Female	22	Single	Degree in sociology	One year
Liya	Female	25	Single	Nursing diploma	Two years
Hana	Female	26	Single	Nursing diploma	Two years

#### 4.2 Background information of parents

Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Educational level	Sex of the child	Age of the child	Year of stay at the center
Melaku	Male	43	Married		Male	9	Six months
Zahra	Female	40	Married	Grade 8	Male	21	Eleven years
Meseret	Female	35	Married	Grade 11	Female	14	Ten years
Nejat	Female	42	Married	Second year drafting student	Male	10	six months
Marta	Female	29	Married	Grade 12	Male	7	One year

#### 4.3 Learning problems of children with autism

##### 4.3.1 Social behavior challenges

Teachers explain that social behavior challenges of children with autism have an effect on learning both social skills and academics. The participants described the effect of social behavior challenges of children with autism in different ways. One participant Saba, explained that “children with autism are not aware of the normal social cues of the society so, they might go away while learning or they may not give you answers when you ask them”

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She goes on to explain that:

The children have park program in which they learn how to buy things, how to pay and receive changes. In this program, they also learn how to use café and restaurant services. During these programs people might hit them because they may not act in accordance with the expected social rules of the society.

With this regard Helen had the following to say:

Children with autism have no idea of the acceptable and forbidden acts of the society so, when we go outside to teach them how to use café or restaurant services they might go and eat another person's cake or meal. And when entering to supermarkets they may want to take all the things in there with them, so they mess up the supermarket. They do not mind in whatever way others respond to the situation.

This behavior is related with the children's inability to recognize that others have their own state of mind. This has also an implication that the children do not consider the emotion of other people rather they act in accordance with their interest.

Lidiya also described how social behavior challenges affect the learning process of children with autism. She said "a child may shout or you may hear very wired voices in the middle of class this disturbs the process of learning." The participants described that while teaching normally developing children they may not disturb the class in such a way, because their teachers punish them and they know that it will offend their teacher.

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When it comes to children with autism they do not take these things into consideration.

Similarly, focus group participants also described that lack of knowledge of social cues and rules have an impact on learning. In relation to this issue, one focus group participant said:

While you are teaching a child may want to go to the rest room so, he may go out of the class without obtaining the permission of their teacher. But we teach them what they have to do and through time they get used to it.

#### **4.3.2 Communication and attention problems**

The participants explained that, the other problem of children with autism that affects learning is the problem of communication and paying attention. As they explained, most of the children are non-verbal. Roza one of the participants explained the effect of communication problem on learning as: “most of them are non-verbal even those who can speak do not use language as a means of communication.” In explaining this condition, Meron had the following to say “the girl that you saw her singing is a very talented singer she can sing every song she listens perfectly without any difficulty but surprisingly, she does not communicate.”

Helen in addition explained that:

They do not use verbs, adjectives and pronouns properly for example; they say he/she is coming in order to say I am coming.

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The other thing is, they may not understand what I am trying to tell them and I may not also understand what they are trying to say as a result, they become upset in the process so this is one of the challenges of teaching children with autism.

Saba also expressed that “even the verbal children do not use language as a means of communication rather they repeat words and use language for their own sake not for communicating.

The other two participants Lidiya and Meron also explained that problem in relation to communication is also a major learning difficulty of children with autism. Lidiya assured that: “When you give them instruction rather than performing the instruction they may repeat the word you say. For example, if you say ‘come here’ rather than coming he repeats the phrase again this is one obstacle of teaching children with autism.” Meron also had the following to say with regard to communication problem:

Giving series of instructions at a time is impossible; you have to give a step by step instruction. For example, if you tell him to come and drink water he will not be able to perform the instruction because for him the instruction is complicated. To make it easy first, you have to say ‘come’ and then ‘drink water’.

They also explained that communication is a major problem in teaching children with autism. Saba assured that:

When you tell them to do something, the message may not reach their brain immediately it may take longer than the usual.

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If you are rushing it is hard for them to catch you hence, you have to communicate slowly and wait until the messages is received then, if they do not respond you have to repeat it again and again.

With regard to communication problem, Helen had the following to say: “in the process of teaching or when you even talk with people you normally use verbal and non-verbal (body language) like gestures and facial expressions however, these expressions may appear to be very confusing for them”

In addition, the focus group participants also raised similar issues in relation to communication. One participant said:

Normally developing children do things when you tell them to do so for example, when you order them to come they do that while children with autism they may not even understand the word ‘come’ so you need to take time to teach them things like this.

The other participant also had the following to say: “the basic problem is communication if they were able communicate everything would have gone in an easy way but now it is us that we have to help them to grasp everything. It is their nature and we are trying our best to help them improve.”

This indicates that if the children were able to communicate it would have been easy for them to learn different things. So, communication is seen as the major problem of the children.

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In addition, the participants stated that paying attention is the other problem of children with autism. All the participants explained that paying attention is the main thing in the teaching learning process. In relation to this Roza stated “while teaching or showing them to do some things they may not even look at you at this point you need to repeatedly show them until they performs the instruction.” With regard to the need for repetition, in order to teach something Saba noted: “when you teach a new thing for a child at first he may not remember a single thing but when you repeat that thing time and again he will have the knowledge of that thing through process.”

The teachers described that for children with autism learning takes a longer time than the time we take for typically developing children, this is due to the problem of paying attention. Meron also stated that “unlike normally developing children autistic children need to be taught for longer period of time in order to catch something new. They cannot be changed all of a sudden rather they need repetition. Therefore, this is one of the challenges of learning of children with autism. With this regard, Helen also added the importance of repetition in order to teach new things.

Regarding the issue of attention, one focus group participant stated:

While you are teaching them they can easily be distracted if there is some noise around so, in order to help them to pay attention we avoid things or sounds that can distract their attention. The other thing is, they have short memory so you have to make repetitions to help them learn.

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This implies that, the children have a problem of paying attention which has an impact on learning. Paying attention is a major thing in learning and teaching process because it is difficult for a person to grasp new things unless he/she pays attention.

#### **4.3.3 Insistence on sameness**

All participants of the study explained that the behavior of insistence on sameness affects the opportunity of learning new things. In explaining this behavior of children with autism, Helen explained that “children with autism insist on sameness, they even do not want to change the chair they sit on today the next day. They also want to play the same game over and over. Saba also added a point with regard to this issue in the following way: “If they play football today they also want to repeat it the next day and their insistence on sameness prevents them not to learn new things in life”

Helen also added a point regarding this issue, she stated that “the children always prefer to do the same thing they know over and over rather than new things for example, if I use a certain logo to teach him today then the next day he wants to repeat the same thing the next day because he already get used to it but I should force him to use another logo.”

Two participants Lidiya and Saba reflected that teaching new things is not an easy task. Lidiya stated that:

In order to teach a new thing for children with autism first it is good to start from what they know.

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For example, if I teach them 'A' today then the next day in order to teach them 'B' I should start from 'A' since he is familiar with it he will be excited then I will continue with 'B'. If I simply start from 'B' it is new so it is not easy to teach him.

Saba also had the following to say, with regard to insistence on sameness:

They do not want to change their classroom their chair and everything but I will teach them to get used to changes. For example, if the TV in their room is not working I will tell them that we have to move to another class to watch movie. I also use reward to make them change something they do not want to.

#### **4.4 Challenges in the teaching process**

##### **4.4.1 Problems of managing behavior**

All the participants talk about the passion they have for teaching children with autism, they also explained that the kids are very sweet. One of the participants Helen who has worked at the Center for about ten years expressed the sense of stewardship she has for the children from God and parents. The teachers also explained about the challenges in the teaching process in different way, Roza had the following to say:

Teaching children with autism is not an easy job that is the main reason why we are given various trainings on how to teach them. The trainings help us to understand their behavior so, before passing to teaching we first work on their behavior.

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Some of them might be very restless and some others might be very calm therefore, we first work to bring them to the normal state. Of course, sometimes it is overwhelming but more than anything else it gives you satisfaction and spending your time with them makes you lead a very peaceful life because they have pure soul.

In the same way, Saba also said "Teaching children with autism needs patience and it is a job that you do it for your moral. When they first join the center we pass very challenging moments while working on their behavior."

All the participants mentioned restlessness as an obstacle of teaching. Teaching a child to sit down for couple of minutes is a very big deal for the teachers. Helen noted that "children with autism have the problem of restlessness so before teaching them anything we first have to teach them to sit down step by step first for five minutes then fifteen, it goes on like that. In this compound, if a child learns to sit down for 30 minutes we celebrate that." Roza also added a point on this, she said "unless a child sit down you cannot teach him anything so first you have to work on that" in relation to restlessness Lediya explained that

In teaching typically developing students you can immediately teach them alphabets like A, B, C... and or counting numbers. When it comes to children with autism, before passing to teaching them any academics we first have to work on undesirable behaviors of the children these include spitting, restlessness, body rocking beating and others especially,

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if a child cannot sit down calmly it is hard to move on other activities.

Meron also had some more points with this regard:

Children with autism most of the time engage in behaviors like rocking their body, flapping their hands and scratching their friends and teachers. And most of them prefer to be alone rather than being with their peers. Therefore, we first have to work on these behaviors in order to pass on teaching other things. Working on these behaviors might take longer or shorter than expected. For example, in order to make him stop spitting I may plan it will take me two months but it may take one month or more than two months.

In explaining the problems of managing behavior Helen said: “When they first join the center we pass very hard time. We do not mix them with the existing students because we first have to work on their behavior” she also added the following:

The other thing is, before passing to any activity it is important to identify what kind of things upset a child and what he does at that moment. They may express their anger by biting or scratching you or in some other way. The thing is I have to understand what makes him angry and in what way he expresses it.

Focus group participants as well, mentioned similar things on the issue of managing behavior. They explained that teaching autistic children requires lots of patience and tolerance.

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In the same way with the above participants focus group participants stated that basically, they have to work on the behavior of the children before passing to teaching.

One participant stated.

There are some students who prefer to be alone rather than making friends and being with others. Some others are very restless they even go out of the class while you are teaching. Therefore we first have to work on their behavior.

The other participant said “a child might cry in the middle of the class when you do not even know what exactly happened to him. Hence, you have to understand such kind of behaviors.”

#### **4.4.2 Challenges in relation to parents’ cooperation**

Participants of the study expressed that if there is good parent teacher cooperation the children will change in short period of time. In relation to this issue Helen noted:

If families and teachers work together on a child it is likely that the child can change within short period of time. We have communication book that enables us to communicate with the families of every child. For example, this week if I am working on his behavior of body rocking I will let the families know through the communication book so that they will also work on that. When parents fail to do that it discourages you and if they comply, then the child can get rid of that behavior easily.

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Roza also explained it this way: “when a child comes to school I may prohibit him to do some undesirable things but then, when he goes home if he is allowed then, I have to work on that again.” Saba also added that the same thing applies in teaching academics.

Meron and Lidiya expressed that teaching children with autism requires persistence and patience. They said if you are someone like who loses hope so easily then you are not able to do it.

Meron assured that:

You cannot bring about change at once and alone it requires longer time and parents’ cooperation. We do not expect them to grasp everything at once. If I show them a certain alphabet today the next day they may not remember a single thing but, you have to try it persistently without losing hope. They do not respond immediately to what you teach them it is because of the disorder so you have to be patient.

Confirming the issue Lidiya had the following to say:

We have a strong belief that they can learn we have confidence in them that is why we do not give up but unless parents are involved in the process it would make the way very hard. Teaching children with autism most of all requires persistence and hopefulness.

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When we teach them something we do it with full hope that they can do it and they really can. Above all teaching them gives you a mental satisfaction.

With this regard, focus group participants also explained that in order to be effective cooperation of parents has a paramount importance. In explaining the importance of cooperation of parents one participant raised a different idea. She said

Actually parents' cooperation is very important but I suggest that it would be good if there could be an opportunity to make them spend their full time at school rather than sending them home. As far as I am concerned if they can spend more time at school it would be easy to bring about change so easily.

Another participant said that "for example, this week you might work on a particular behavior of a child and maybe he is improving but then when he comes to class on Monday spending the weekend at home, he might get back to the same thing again. So in order to be successful we need parents."

#### **4.5 Teaching techniques**

The participants described similar approaches of teaching all of them explained that children with autism are different from one another so we work on each of them separately. And they added that rewarding and using visual support is very important in teaching them.

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#### **4.5.1 Reinforcement**

All the participants confirmed that rewarding is the main approach of teaching. They explained that when the children perform instructions or do things in a desirable way they are rewarded with things or activities they like most.

Helen expressed the importance of reward in the following way:

Reward is our best method of teaching. For example, they may ask for something they need badly, at that point you tell them in order to get that they need to perform a certain activity, then they perform the desired activity immediately. If you hug them or appreciate them with a loud voice like 'good job' then that is a reward for them.

Lidiya also explained about the situation of one of her students as: "he likes going out so when he asks for it I will tell him that he will be allowed if he performs a certain activity then you do not know in what pace he finishes." The other two participants, Roza and Saba also added that children with autism like appreciation. Roza said "if you are beautifully dressed the verbal ones tell you that you are beautiful today and the non-verbal touches the new things he noticed like earrings." Saba also stated "by rewarding them you will be able to let them do what they do not want to do. For example, the girl who likes singing will be allowed to listen to music and sing if she obeys the instruction of her teacher."

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Likewise, focus group participants also said that they use reward as a method of teaching. One participant explained that:

The students have different kind of interest for some of them going out of class for some minutes make them happy and for some others playing with a toy make them happy so accordingly, we allow them to do what interests them as reward after performing the instructions we give them.

#### **4.5.2 Visuals and stories**

The study found out that the teachers use various methods of teaching but before passing to teaching assessment of the children has to be done first. Roza describes the situation as follows

When a child initially joins this center the first thing we do is assessment. We do the assessment on every child what are the behaviors of the child; on what kind of behaviors do I have to work on? Is it on sensory motor skills? Is it on how to feed? Is it on the way of clothing? These things have to be identified first then we set a goal for each of them. After achieving our primary goals then we move on to set another plan.

The teachers expressed, after assessment is done on the needs of each child then they pass to teaching them accordingly. The participants explained using visuals like pictures, depictions and showing the children to do something by doing it themselves first are used to teach the students.

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Helen expressed it in the following way:

The children need a real thing to learn. So, in order to help them learn we use pictures, depictions and logos of different things like animals. The other thing is for example, in teaching students self-help each student has its own basket on which their name is written. The basket contains cleaning materials like tooth brush and paste, soap, towel for each student. This serves two purposes, one is looking at his name written on the basket helps him to remember his name so that he can respond to his name the other thing is they can learn the issue of ownership since their name is written on it they do not exchange each other's material.

The other four participants also confirmed that, using visual ways of teaching are effective for children with autism because they can easily understand real and tangible things. Saba explained it as follows

It is hard to teach them unless you show them real and tangible things in the self help program we teach students how to make bed, how to put their clothing properly. In doing so, we do not only tell them that they have to put their clothes properly rather we do it by showing them for this purpose we have bed and clothes at the center.

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Lidiya also stated “I have a student who is afraid of dogs so to teach him that he should not fear dogs I will first show him the picture of a dog and I will tell him that it does not hurt and then I will take him to a real dog then show him that it does not hurt by touching it myself, then I would let him do it.”

The other two participants added that first the behavior of the child has to be studied in order to set a goal. Sabastated “the behavior of children with autism varies widely you cannot have the same plan for all of them. Lidiya also added that, “normally we use pictures and depictions to teach them.

All focus group participants also explained the same thing in relation to teaching them through showing real and tangible things. One of the participants said “ if you want to teach a child how to brush his teeth you do not simply tell him that he has to brush his teeth and give him the tooth brush rather, we show him how to do it.”In a similar way, they explained about the animals that the children are afraid of, they said they give them a lesson that the animals does not does not hurt by showing them when they touch them. With this regard, another participant suggested for electronic animal toys for the purpose of teaching.

The other thing participants explained is that they use stories to teach them focus. Regarding this Lidiya said “we use reading stories as a means of teaching them paying attention. After reading a single line of a story I ask them what I read immediately the verbal students who are listening attentively can give response. This also helps to identify who is good at paying attention.”

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Helen added “story reading is also used to teach the students that we have to listen when people talk and gives value to that”

#### **4.6 Description of cases**

All parent participants of the study explained that they had healthy pregnancy and delivery period. One of the participants Melaku, explained pregnancy and delivery period of his wife in the following way:

My wife was very healthy during the period of her pregnancy and she gave birth in a very well known hospital, but during the delivery there was some problem caused by one of the nurses and I was told to bring charge against her but because my child was healthy at the moment I didn't give it concern at the time.

In contrary to the above participant, the other three Zahra, Nejat and Meseret explained that they had a very healthy pregnancy and delivery too. However, Marta expressed that the first three or four months of her pregnancy were very difficult. Marta explained it as “The first three or four months of my pregnancy were difficult. I was not even able to eat any food because I used to get sick a lot. The pain was beyond my capacity but after four months I was healthy and the delivery was also normal”

With regard to noticing symptoms, all the participants except for one noticed that there was something wrong with their child's behavior but they were not able to tell what exactly it was. The behaviors they initially noticed in their children are similar Marta said:

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First, I thought that his problem was hearing but lately I found out that he does not have this kind of problem. He was also late to utter some words but my relatives told me that boys start talking lately and I thought that his problem was only speaking or language then I tried holly water but things did not change.

Melaku also said “when I observe my child he doesn’t speak like other kids, he doesn’t respond too many things so at first I thought that he has a problem of hearing but I made sure that he does not have such problem by dropping things at his back.”

Zahra expressed the early ages of her child in the following way: “my child had epilepsy starting from three months he also started to walk at the age of 2<sup>1/2</sup> years but I used to carry him on my back for ten years” Nejat similarly, explained that she knew that her child had something wrong and she said she was not able to figure out what the problem was and did not heard of autism before. Unlike others, in explaining the growth of her child Meseret explained that “my daughter had a very normal growth like other kids but after two years she started to show some odd behaviors like crying continuously, banging herself on the wall and her growth started to slow down”

#### **4.6.1 Difficulties of the children**

Participants of the study described similar types of difficulties. With regard to self injurious behavior participants explained that their children lack the ability to express their feelings so most of the time they become upset and involve in self injurious behaviors such as banging with a wall and other things. Other than that, participants explained that their children involve in body rocking shouting and other things.

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Zahra expressed it as: "my child hurts himself very much he bangs with a wall and floor he scratches and pinches himself and me, you can see the scars, I still have them on my hands. He shouts in a wired voice" Marta also explained his self injurious behavior she said that he used to bite his hands, I think it is when he failed to express his feelings. He had the scars until recently." Melaku also explained that when his child gets upset he scratches and beats his little brother.

The other behavior of children with autism explained by the participants is restlessness. Zahra expressed it in the following way "my child doesn't even have the guts to sit for a minute he is restless." Marta also explained it in the following way:

When I go for visiting to my relatives' house I take him but then, because he is restless I cannot spend a moment with them rather I keep on watching him. Even, at home he is restless one day he went out of home and he got lost I spent the whole day looking for him then finally I found him with police men at their office.

Similarly, the other two participants Meseret and Nejat also confirmed that their children have a very restless behavior. Nejat expressed it as follows "he does not sit for a moment without doing anything or focusing on something. For example when I try to let him do his homework he does not give attention and he leaves me without doing anything" Furthermore parents talked about the repetitive behavior and insistence on maintenance of sameness.

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Marta expressed it as follows: “he always insists on doing the same thing over and over. He has his favorite clothing he always wants to wear that he does not want to change even if I make him wear another thing he goes back and wear that cloth.” Nejat, explaining about repetitive behavior she said: “he plays the same way time and again with the same materials for hours. Sometimes he plays by filling a cup with a soil and he does that for several hours some other times he plays for hours by folding papers at their edge.”

With regard to social behavior, all the participants explained about the failure of their children to comply with social rules of the society. Marta had the following to say: “when we go for birthday celebration or another ceremony because he has no clue of any social rules he goes to a place where food is prepared and pick anything he likes he does not mind what people would say about it.” Zahra and Meseret also expressed that they have difficulty of using bus and taxi services due to the behavior their children show.

The other thing mentioned by all the participants is the problem of communication. Three participants described that their children are non verbal, Zahara said “my child is totally non- verbal but he listens to the instructions you give him.” In the same way Nejat also stated “even though he is not able to speak he listens very well and receives instructions.” Melaku also expressed the condition of his child in the same way with the above two participants.

In contrary to the explanation of the above participants, the other two Marta and Meseret expressed that their children are verbal Meseret had the following to say:

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My child repeats words that she heard you saying. She even may repeat words she heard before days. Other than that, she uses language not for communication but to ask for what she wants for example, if she needs water she says 'water' if she is hungry she says '*injera*'. Furthermore, she counts numbers and alphabets.

Marta explained the condition of communication of her child as follows:

He says words repetitively once he heard it. The other thing is, he uses language to tell you what he wants but he does not use verbs and nouns properly. If he wants to play he says 'he wants to play' rather than saying 'I want to play'. At first, it might be confusing but when you get used to it you can understand him easily. When relatives come home and ask him who they are, he tells them either their name or the name of someone in that family. But he does not make conversation but he tries to respond to your questions.

In relation to learning, they all agreed that because of their difficulties they need a school setting different from the normal school. Melaku explained the situation of his child in a school with typically developing children as follows:

Because of his self injurious behavior I took him to yekatit hospital then he was given a medication which helped him to reduce it to some degree. With full hope that he can join and learn in a regular school, we took him to school then he started class. But the problem was as the teachers told me; he shouts or laughs in the middle of class. So he used to disturb then the teachers took him outside and play with him.

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The thing is, because the school he joined was a regular school there was no one who can treat this kind of behavior. Then someone told me about joy center then after waiting for sometime he joined the center and now he has shown many improvements.

With this regard, Marta had the following to say

Before my child was diagnosed with autism, believing that he would start talking at least when he spends time with his peers he joined a regular school. However, he used to disturb the class by beating other students and other things. And the kids used to make fun of him. Then after sometime he joined another school with his younger brother however while his brother learns like other kids he used to do the same thing he did in the previous school. Finally, the teachers advised me that I do not have to spend money anymore because learning in that school did not bring him any change so I took him out of that school. After waiting for a year he lastly joined joy center and now he has shown lots of improvements.

The other two participants, Nejat and Zahra explained that their children at first joined a school for mentally retarded children. Both of them stated that the schools were not able to address the problem of their children because they said autistic disorder is different from other disorders in the schools. Nejat said “before joining joy center he attended a school for mentally retarded children but because his condition is different and severe they were not able to bring about change.

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Now it has been ten years since he joined the center and he has improved a lot he knows how to feed himself and he is changed.”

In the same way with others, one of the participants Meseret stated that her daughter was diagnosed at the age of four. Meseret explained about the improvements of her child as follows: “it has been ten years since my child joined, she has improved a lot she can feed and dress herself very well. Her communication is also better now, if she is thirsty she asks for water.”

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**Description of parents' experience**

Parents	Pregnancy and delivery period experience	Parents' Presumption before the diagnosis	Challenging behavior of the child	Learning experience of the child in another school
Marta	3 or 4 months painful pregnancy period. Normal delivery	Hearing and language problem	Self injurious behavior, repetitive behavior insistence on sameness, restlessness, ignorance of social cues & rules	Left out of two schools due to his challenges and difference from other kids.
Nejat	Normal pregnancy and delivery	Noticed something was wrong. But could not figure it out.	Restlessness, insistence on sameness, ignorance of social rules	Attended a school for mentally retarded. The programs did not fit with him
Melaku	His wife had normal pregnancy had a problem during delivery	Hearing problem	Injuring one self and others, repetitive behavior, isolation	In the school he attended the teachers used to take him out of class b/c they did not know what to do with
Zahra	Normal pregnancy and delivery	Could not figure it out	Injuring himself and others, repetitive behavior	He was different from others in the school. The program did not fit him.
Meseret	Normal pregnancy and delivery	Related to evil spirit	Isolation, insistence on sameness	

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the key findings of the study on the learning problems of children with autism, the challenges in the teaching process and the techniques of teaching used will be discussed in relation to the available literatures on the area.

#### **5.1 Learning problems of children with autism**

The findings of the study reveal that the children with autism do not act according to the normally accepted social rules of the society. The participants of the study mentioned standing or smiling in the middle of the class as examples of failure of the students to act according to the social rules. Moyes (2002) describes that students with the disorder may be socially inappropriate with people and may have difficulty maintaining eye contact and reading social cues. She further confirmed that, it is obvious that problems with teachers and peers may happen due to social language differences. This implies that the children's inability to act according to the socially accepted rules of the society have its own impact on learning.

The teachers also reported that whether in the park program or in the class room they act in line with their interests rather than bothering about the response of other people or their teachers. The study also shows that the parents also noticed the negligent behavior of their children toward others.

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With this regard, Siegel (2008) confirms that social impairments related with autism affects learning one of which is lack of social and emotional reciprocity. Siegel further explained that, the result of being negligent about others response is that the child's inspirations are initially to please himself with comparatively less worry for others' goal if they conflict with his own. Lack of theory of mind is one of the main autistic learning deficits (Ibid). Cohen (1995) describes lack of theory of mind which is the inability to understand others state of mind and in severe cases the being unable to understand the existence of mind at all as one of the main features of children with autism. This indicates the children's failure to understand about other people's responses of their action affect learning.

The study also reveals that, the children do not use language to ask for what they want rather than as a means of communication with other people besides it was also indicated that the children are not able to catch long and fast instructions. Parents also indicated for the same kind of problem with regard to the issue of communication. The study also found out that the verbal children do not use action verbs and adjectives. Siegel (2008) asserts that there is communicative autistic learning deficits, severely affected, and young children with autism have major hearing processing problem (the sound moves fast without catching a single or two nouns). He also stated that, children with autism have the problem of using language as a means of communication to express their feelings and opinions. This has an implication that the children's difficulty in following complicated instructions is one learning problem of children with autism.

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The findings of the study also show that, the children have the problem of paying attention in the teaching learning process. The participants of the study explained the need for repetition in order to teach something new. On the other hand, one participant also reported in the study that her child never gives her attention in trying to let him do his home works. Children with autism exhibit unusual patterns of attention and these have an impact on communication, social development and achievement of academic skills (Alberta learning, 2003). On the other hand, Moyes( 2002) explained that teachers mostly complain on the problem of paying attention in the classroom. She explained that they appear to be unfocussed due to the difficulty of language processing, sensory processing problem or due to a need for a different method of presentation. This implies one of the challenges of learning of the children with autism is related with the problem of paying attention.

The study also reveals that, both teacher and parent participants mentioned that the children insist on sameness. The teachers explained that their insistence on sameness makes it difficult for them to learn new things. It was also reported that, the children are mostly happy to do and learn familiar things rather than new things. And parents also described that their children want to play the same kind of game over and over. Dealing with autistic learning deficits Siegel (2008) describes that most children prefer to play with new toys however; children with autism remain comfortable with the same known toys. He further stated that, this behavior limits the amount and diversity of learning experiences the child will be likely to try to find out by his own.

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Chilvers (2007) in discussing about the challenges of children with autism in an inclusive classroom setting explained that children with autism may keep on doing a certain task while their peers has moved on to another task . Moyes(2003) as well explained that, students with autism may become anxious when suddenly asked to move on to a new environment or to a new task. This indicates that the children's behavior of insistence on sameness influences their ability of learning new things.

## **5.2 Challenges in the teaching process**

The study reveals that the teachers need to work on the challenging behavior of the children like flapping hands, rocking their body, restlessness and others before passing on teaching them. The study also shows that, the above behaviors were observed at the time of conducting the study. Parents also explained about the difficult situation in the schools their children attended before joining the center. It is also stated that, the main reason why training is given to them is due to the difficulty of managing and understanding the behavior of the children.

The teachers also reported that teaching children with autism is an overwhelming task that needs persistence. According to Vacca (2007) due to the exceptional challenges children with autism exhibit a parent or a teacher needs to have lots of patience. In the study of Lindsay.et.al (2013) the participants (teachers in an inclusive class room) reported that teachers considered that they do not have enough information about autism spectrum disorder, especially with specific ways to work with a child in a class room and how to deal with a child when a behavioral explosion occurs.

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They also confirmed that it is hard to involve students with autism in lessons due to the specific interests they have and their disturbance when requested to do something else. Moyes (2003) in her book described that she has been approached by parents who describe the situation of their child in classroom, they explained, teachers said some behavior of their child are distracting and they want to stop that. She raises an example of a family who complain that their child's finger flicking behavior help ne to relax but his teacher insisted that this

behavior impeded his ability to pay attention. Perko&McLaughlin (2002) also confirmed the need to work on disruptive behaviors that interrupt the learning process. This indicates that, participants of the study face challenges of managing behavior in the process of teaching.

The study also reveals that, the teachers need cooperation of families in order to be successful in teaching the children. For this reason, the teachers mentioned that they have monthly meeting with parents in which they discuss about the condition of the children. Furthermore, the teachers reported the difficulty of teaching a student if there is no effective parental involvement. The study made by Lindsay.et.al (2013) shows that the teachers who participated in the study noted the challenges of parental engagement in the child's schooling which reserved their access to the supports which could have facilitated their improvement. It is also suggested that developing and implementing an educational program which are useful for children with autism requires collaboration of parents (Alberta learning, 2003).

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Besides, a participant in the study of Mwakalinga (2012) explained poor cooperation of parents as one challenge of teaching children autism.

She further explained that, in her school parents failure to attend meetings discourages her and makes it hard to follow up the situation of the child at home. This implies the success of the participants in teaching their students is influenced by the level cooperation of parents.

### **5.3 Techniques of teaching**

The study reveals that teachers use reward as the major technique of teaching. Allowing the children to engage in activities they love, letting them to play with toys they prefer most are among the major ways of rewarding. For instance, the participants pin point the experience of a girl who has been rewarded with listening music and singing for implementing the instructions of her teachers due to the fact that she enjoys music. In relation to this, Moyes(2002) suggests that rewarding enables to teach children with autism which behaviors are acceptable and it is important to constantly identify what types of rewards are most successful for each student. And she suggests that, the rewards can be foods, materials such as toys, social rewards like smiling and activity-type rewards such as watching movie and having free time. Wilczynski.et.al (2008) describes Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) as a therapy based on the theory that a rewarded behavior has the probability of being repeated than a behavior which is not given due consideration. Perko&Mclaughlin (2002) also explain that positive reinforcement has been revealed to motivate children with autism learn self-help skills, school related behavior, language and

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many other skills. This has the implication that rewards the teachers use are significant in teaching the students positive behaviors and also other skills.

The study also found out that, the teachers use visual methods of teaching. The study reveals that the teachers use various tangible and real objects or materials to teach them self help skills such as washing tooth brushing and others. According to Alberta Learning (2003) visual ways of teaching are the most effective ways for teaching children with autism. And they range from real objects to face smile and color and black white pictures. Meadan.et.al (2011) also describes visual supports such as real objects pictures and visual task analysis and others as a method of teaching. This has the implication that, the real objects and visual aids the teachers use for their students are useful.

The study also reveals that, the teachers use reading stories as method of teaching paying attention. The participants also indicated that story reading is also used as a means of teaching on how to establish communication with people. Literatures suggest that, social stories are used to provide information for the child about social cues or rules that we want the child to learn. They can also be used to teach various targeted skills such as conversation, play skills and pivotal behaviors (Plimley.et.al, 2007, Alberta learning, 2003, Wilczynski.et.al, 2008). This has an implication that the teachers used stories for limited purposes but literature suggests that they can be used to teach various skills other than those mentioned by the participants.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATION**

#### **6.1 Conclusion**

The study attempted to explore the learning problems, challenges in the teaching process and the techniques of teaching used by teachers at Nia foundation Joy center for children with autism. The findings of the study show that the participants consider social behavior challenges, communication and attention problems and insistence on sameness are the major difficulties children with autism at the center.

Parents who participated in the study also explain that these and other behaviors like repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior are the major difficulties of their children. Two parents also asserted that these behavioral challenges of their children denied them the opportunity to learn at regular schools with typically developing children. In addition the findings of the observation also confirm that the children exhibit those behaviors mentioned by the participants of the study.

The study also reveals the participants indicated that they need to work on the various challenging behavior of the children which can affect teaching and learning before passing on to teach students academic and various social skills. The study also found out that all teacher participants of the study asserted the significance of cooperation of parents and teachers in order to be effective in teaching the children.

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The study also indicates that the teachers in the study use reinforcement as the main method of teaching. The participants stated that reinforcement or reward is the best method to help students learn new things. It was also found out that the participants use visual methods of teaching like pictures, logos, real and tangible objects and considered them as effective ways of teaching children with autism.

## **6.2 Social work Implications**

The findings of the study have various implications to social work.

This study shows that, children with autism have learning problems related to their behavioral and other challenges; teachers also come across challenges in teaching children with autism. This study can serve as a springboard for research to be conducted in areas related to educating children with autism.

According to the estimates of Nia Foundation there are more than 500,000 children with autism in Ethiopia and there are only two centers for them. Besides the finding of the study show that children with autism have learning problems. Besides parent participants of the study also reported the inability of their children to attend classes with typically developing children. On the other hand the findings of the study show that the teachers explained that teaching children with autism is an overwhelming and difficult task. They also added that training is given before they start teaching and continually in certain period of time. Different international instruments ratified by Ethiopia including the CRC and national instruments provide that every child has the right to education.

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The study indicated the need for training in order to teach children with autism. Having only two centers and the estimated number of children with autism ministry of education should be involved in providing training for teachers in order to teach children with autism. The other thing is in order to reach all children with autism the ministry of education should collaborate with governmental and private schools to develop courses that address the challenges of autistic children. The finding of the study shows that parents encountered a problem while trying to enroll their children in regular schools due to their behavior and the teachers' lack of awareness on how to handle children with autism. Therefore social workers should facilitate training programs for teachers on autism. Social workers also need to work in collaboration with Special needs department of Addis Ababa University on the individual education program.

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**Informed consent form**

**Dear respondent**

I am Sara Meresssa social work extension master program student at Addis Ababa University. Currently I am conducting a study on the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process. The purpose of the study is to explore the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process. I have asked you to participate in this study because you are a teacher of children with autism. Your participation in this study is totally based on your will hence you can refuse or withdraw from the study anytime you want.

The interview will be conducted at the compound of Nia foundation Joy Center for not more than an hour. The interview will be recorded so that I can write it down later. The study will give general understanding on the learning problems of children with autism and the challenges in the teaching process.

All information which will be collected during the interview will be kept confidential. And information about you used in the final report will be kept anonymous so that you will not be recognized.

If you agree to the terms above, please put your signature.

Signature .....

Learning problems of children...

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All information which will be collected during the interview will be kept confidential. And information about you used in the final report will be kept anonymous so that you will not be recognized.

If you agree to the terms above, please put your signature.

Signature .....

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### **Interview guide for teachers**

Sex

Age

Educational status

Marital status

Year of service at the center

1. For how long did you serve as a teacher of children with autism?
2. How do you (teachers) understand children with autism?
3. Tell me about the learning problems of children with autism.
4. Tell me about the challenges you face in the teaching process.
5. How do social interaction impairments of children with autism affect the teaching learning process?
6. How do communication impairments affect the teaching and learning process?
7. How do the repetitive and stereotyped interests and activities impact the teaching learning process?
8. How does the behavior of autistic children affect the teaching learning?
9. What other methods do you suggest to be useful in teaching children with autism?
10. What additional support do you get within and outside the school?
11. What are the teaching materials you often use or prefer to have in teaching?
12. How do staffs help each other to enhance the learning and teaching process?

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### **Interview guide for parents**

Sex

Age

Marital status

Educational status

Age of your child

Sex of your child

Year of stay of your child at the center

1. Tell me about the period of pregnancy and delivery of your child.
2. Can you tell me about the process of diagnosis of your child?
3. How do you describe your initial response to the diagnosis and how was it disclosed?
4. What were your initial assumptions of the disorder before the diagnosis?
5. Tell me about the challenges your child faced in schools before joining Joy Center.
6. How do you see the access of learning centers for children with autism in Ethiopia?
7. Tell me about the process you have gone through to make your child join this Center.
8. What are the major challenges of your child?
9. Tell me about the improvements your child showed after joining the Center if there are any.
10. Tell me about the possibility of teaching your child in a school with other normally developing children.
11. How do you see the school activities/programs for your child?
12. What additional materials / professional support do you need?
13. What are the challenges of raising a child with autism?

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### **Interview guide for focus group participants**

1. Tell me the learning problems of children with autism?
2. How does the behavior of children with autism affect learning?
3. Tell me about the challenges of teaching children with autism.
4. How does the behavior of children with autism affect teaching?
5. What are the techniques of teaching you often use at the center?
6. What additional methods or materials do you suggest to be used at the center?
7. How do staffs help each other to enhance the teaching and learning process?

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**Observation check list**

Observed behaviors	yes	No	Comment
Making eye contact		✓	
Insistence on sameness in playing with toys and other activities	✓		
Repetitive speech and behaviors	✓		The observer observed that when the teachers give instruction to a student he/she repeats the same thing. most of them are non-verbal.
Use of facial expressions and gestures		✓	
Motor patterns and activity level			Most of them have problem in relation to movement but there are few who do not have any problem with movement
Interaction of children with the observer			Some of them come and talk with the observer some others did not even notice the existence of the observer.
Repetitive and stereotyped behaviors		✓	Some children were involved in hand flapping, body rocking or other non functional movements.

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### **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that, this thesis is my original work and had not been presented for a degree in any other University, and that all sources of material used for thesis have been dully acknowledged.

Full name .....

Signature.....

Place: Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Date of submission: .....

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a University advisor.

Full name .....

Signature.....