

Parental Involvement in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Children: A Focus on Logistical, Emotional, Social-Relational, and Systematic Challenges

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Abstract

It is important to understand that parental involvement improves therapy outcomes, including ABA therapy. Therefore, the study aims to explore the logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic challenges faced by parents in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) therapy for their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Our research niche emerged out of the questions that remained unanswered, including the barriers to access and participation, families' emotional experience, parental social support, and the systematic factors affecting service delivery. Interviews were performed qualitatively with 11 parents of the ASD children who are undergoing ABA therapy. Specific interview questions were created to address the four identified challenges and the effect of those challenges on parental well-being and therapy outcomes. The findings revealed a number of challenges that included time constraints, financial demands, emotional costs, a lack of interaction with therapists and systematic challenges like access to services. Stress and burnout were recorded by most of the parents, indicating that while the costs of ABA therapy can be bearable, the intensity of the therapy may be a burden for most parents to handle. The study has drawn the conclusion that effective ABA therapy necessitates more than parental participation and demands comprehensive support. Some of the recommendations include improving training, reducing logistical burdens, and providing emotional support for parents to ensure their involvement leads to better outcomes for their ASD children.

Keywords: Applied behaviour analysis, autism, challenges, parental involvement, ABA therapy

INTRODUCTION

Applied behaviour analysis (ABA) is a therapeutic intervention that focusses on the principles of behaviourism to improve specific behaviours, such as adaptive learning, communication, and social skills. ABA therapy was first developed by Dr. Ivar Lovaas in the 1960's, has evolved significantly, and has widely offered a prominent therapeutic intervention to help the development of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). According to Hodges et al. (2020), this spectrum is a neurological disorder that impacts communication and social skills and also involves repetitive kinds of functioning. These elements are definitely challenges in the development process of ASD children. Therefore, the role of parents is very important in ensuring that these special children get enough support, such as in school involvement. This is coherent with Epstein (2001), who developed a framework that includes six different types of school involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, making decisions, and collaborating with the community. Research found that children progress at a higher rate when their parent participates in the therapy (Sneed & Samelson, 2022; Froli et al., 2021; Wyatt Kaminski et al., 2008). Increasingly, ABA therapy has taken its place as a base treatment for ASD children (Raches et al., 2019). ABA is a behavioural therapy approach that fosters positive behaviours that benefit ASD children in improving socially significant behaviours and diminishing maladaptive ones (Dixon et al., 2012).

Over the years, evidence has shown that ABA therapy is effective in helping many ASD children to improve their communication, social, and adaptive behaviour (Makrygianni et al., 2018). Considering the outcome of ABA therapy, the involvement of parents in this therapy has been compelling to many researchers. Parental involvement is not only necessary to ensure the maintenance of behaviour change. Nevertheless, parental

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involvement is also to assist in the application of home-based support that is useful in producing positive therapeutic changes for their ASD child (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). Although studies have established that parental participation positively affects children's wellbeing (Wilder, 2023), specific aspects of this involvement, including logistical constraints, emotional impacts, social-relational factors, and systematic barriers, have not been investigated adequately. Therefore, in the study, we use qualitative research methodology to examine the four aspects of challenges—logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic—faced by parents engaged in ABA therapy for their ASD children. Our study shows that despite parents' willingness to assist their children in their development, those challenges appear regularly to hinder the process. Therefore, two research questions are built to know the challenges faced by parents in ABA therapy for their ASD children, which are

- (1) What specific logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic challenges do parents face in raising their children?
- (2) What evidence-based strategies or recommendations from past studies support parents in overcoming these challenges?

Literature Review

Overview of Autism and ABA Therapy

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by deficits in social communication and restricted, repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020), the prevalence of ASD has risen to approximately 1 in 36 children aged 8 years (approximately 4% of boys and 1% of girls) who were estimated to have ASD in the United States (Maenner et al., 2020). Diagnostic criteria include persistent deficits in social communication and interaction across multiple contexts, alongside restricted patterns of behaviour or interests. Early intervention is crucial, and various therapeutic approaches have emerged to address the diverse needs of individuals with ASD. Among these interventions, Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) stands out as one of the most widely recognised and utilised therapies. ABA is grounded in the principles of behaviourism, focussing on modifying specific behaviours through reinforcement strategies (Leaf et al., 2027). Techniques such as discrete trial training and natural environment training are often employed to improve communication skills, social interactions, and daily living skills. A substantial body of research supports ABA's efficacy for ASD children, such as demonstrating significant improvements in skills acquisition (Silva et al., 2023), communication and language development (Ithriyah, 2018), and reduction in challenging behaviours (Sanders et al., 2020). As such, ABA therapy remains a cornerstone in the treatment of ASD children, offering a structured approach to behaviour modification and learning.

Parental Involvement in ABA Therapy

Parental involvement plays an essential role in ABA therapy to assess the degree of skill generalisation to daily settings.

Research has shown that parents' active participation in their child's ABA therapy increases generalisation of behaviours that were taught during therapy sessions towards home and community (Dillenburger et al., 2004). This is important in helping ASD children to generalise the skills they learnt in therapy sessions and apply in their day-to-day activities. To help the development of their ASD child and the effectiveness of applied ABA, various forms of involvement from parents can be practiced. For example, parents who consistently participate in ABA training will benefit them in promoting skill retention and generalisation at home (Heitzman-Powell et al., 2014). Through the trainings, parents can provide support from the aspect of building good and better behaviour, which will definitely help the learning process of their ASD children. Moreover, with good communication and a strong relationship with the therapist, parents can also closely monitor the process and learn about the use of techniques in therapy. This observation and understanding can lead to an improvement in parents self-efficacy to support their child (An et al., 2019). Moreover, parent-therapist regular communication ensures that techniques are implemented based on the child's requirements. This would encourage the robust and multifaceted model for their ASD child (Klatte et al., 2020).

Overview of Autism and ABA Therapy

Parental involvement is an effective determinant of children's learning and also social competencies. Nevertheless, several barriers hinder parents' optimum involvement, such as logistical, emotional, social-relational, as well as systematic challenges. These challenges have been proven by previous research that overcoming these challenges is essential for fostering strong school-family partnerships (Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010). One of the primary challenges to parental involvement is logistical, particularly for working-class parents. Conflicts with time, working hours, transportation, and child care challenges are the reasons why most parents are less involved in their child's school activities (Roy et al., 2004). For example, parents who have multiple jobs or have rigid work hours may find it difficult to attend school meetings or activities, resulting in less engagement in their child's education (Kim et al., 2022). Additionally, the geographic distance between home and school, particularly in rural or underserved communities, can further exacerbate these logistical challenges (Lavalley et al., 2018).

The subsequent challenge addressed in the study after the logistical challenge is an emotional challenge. Previous studies show that emotional factors also play a significant role in limiting parental involvement. In emotional challenges, this is related to when parents may feel inadequacy, anxious, or frustrated to be involved in the education process of their child, particularly if they have negative schooling experiences (Wu et al., 2022). Sometimes parents with a low educational background have a lack of confidence or a feeling that they are not competent enough to support their child academically (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). This sense of disempowerment sometimes demotivates them to interact with teachers and school staff (Affuso et al., 2023). Apart from the logistical and emotional challenges, the next challenge is from

the aspect of social-relational, which is related to difficulties in communication and cultural mismatch between parents and school staff. In this situation, teachers may misinterpret a lack of parental involvement as disinterest rather than understanding the structural or emotional barriers families face (Jones & Palikara, 2023). Factors such as an unwelcoming school environment, unclear school systems, and exclusion from decision-making processes are among the challenges that can be linked to the social-relational challenges (Bennouna et al., 2021). Also, research by Lareau (2018) shows that the conflict of interest based on economic differences may cause an imbalance in parental and teaching authority over the relationships between teachers and parents. At a broader level, systematic challenges such as school policies, institutional practices, and educational inequalities can further hinder parental involvement. Schools may unintentionally perpetuate exclusionary practices by not accommodating the needs of diverse families, including those from low-income or immigrant backgrounds (Clark & Kjellstrand, 2024). Structural inequities in education systems can marginalise certain groups, creating an environment that is not conducive to fostering robust parental involvement (Coley et al., 2024).

METHOD

Research design

This study uses a semi-structured interview method because the study participants consist of various experiences and backgrounds, which can help the researcher understand the perceptions of the study participants in more depth and detail. Personal information and responses will be kept confidential and anonymised to protect participants’ privacy. Participation was voluntary, with participants free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Data collection method

The interview aimed to identify challenges faced by parents sending their children for ABA therapy. It involved 11 parents via Zoom or Google Meet from November to December 2023, lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour. The analysis included data transcription, screening, theme building, coding, and result display. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify patterns within the data. The coding process involved multiple stages, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to refine the themes systematically. To enhance the study's rigor, independent validation of the coding process was conducted through peer review or inter-rater reliability checks. Parental challenges were categorized into four main themes: logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic.

Sampling

The sample selection is made by the parents who send their children to undergo ABA therapy. The location of the parents is around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Malaysia. The characteristics of the study participants that are required to provide insight into the issue discussed, which is the challenges faced by parents who send their children to undergo ABA therapy, include (a) having a child confirmed by a doctor to have autism spectrum disorder, (b) children aged between 2 and 10 years old; (c) following an ABA therapy program for more than six months, and (d) willing to be research participants for this study. Additionally, the recruitment process for participants was carefully considered to ensure a diverse range of parental experiences. Parents were approached through ABA therapy centers, online support groups, and autism-related community organizations. Invitations to participate were shared via social media, email lists, and direct contact with therapy centers. Beyond geographical location, selection criteria also took into

Table 1. Demographics of parents in the interview								
Participants	Age	Gender	Education Level	Household Composition	Job Sector	Child's Gender	Child's Age	Duration of ABA Therapy
Parent 1	36	Female	Bachelor's	5	Private	Female	8	6 months to one year
Parent 2	28	Female	Diploma's	4	Public	Male	8	Less than 6 months
Parent 3	38	Male	Bachelor's	5	Public	Male	10	More than one year
Parent 4	36	Female	Bachelor's	4	Public	Male	11	More than one year
Parent 5	41	Female	Master's	7	Private	Male	9	6 months to one year
Parent 6	37	Female	Bachelor's	5	Private	Male	9	6 months to one year
Parent 7	39	Male	Bachelor's	5	Public	Male	12	More than one year
Parent 8	49	Male	Bachelor's	6	Private	Male	8	6 months to one year
Parent 9	44	Female	Doctor of Philosophy	6	Public	Male	9	6 months to one year
Parent 10	35	Male	Master's	5	Public	Female	9	More than one year
Parent 11	46	Female	Bachelor's	5	Private	Male	8	Less than 6 months

account the parents' willingness to engage in qualitative interviews, the duration of their child's ABA therapy, and their ability to provide informed consent. Efforts were made to ensure a balance of different socioeconomic backgrounds to capture a broader spectrum of challenges faced by parents in the ABA therapy process. While this sample may not encompass all parents participating in ABA therapy, it offers valuable in-depth insights pertinent to qualitative research.

Study instrument

Interviews were conducted in semi-structured form. The designed interview questions consist of three components, namely (1) the challenges parents face when their children undergo ABA therapy; (2) the impact of the challenges expressed in the overall well-being of both the child and the parents; and (3) effectiveness of ABA therapy.

Ethical considerations

Researchers obtain informed consent that has been sent via email to the parents, ensuring parents understand the study's purpose, risks, and their right to withdraw without consequence. Researchers also ensure the interview environment is comfortable and free from coercion, promoting honest and voluntary participation. Researchers can build confidence and maintain integrity to respect participants' autonomy and privacy.

RESULTS

Demographic Data

This interview included 11 parents aged 28–49: 4 fathers (males) and 7 mothers (females). The parents' average education is a bachelor's degree (7 parents), a master's degree (2 parents), and a PhD (1 female parent). The average household composition for these 11 parents is 5 people. The participant's offspring are mostly male, with 9 boys and 2 girls. The average age of these children is 8–14 years old, with 2 engaging in ABA treatment for less than 6 months, 5 for 6 months to 1 year, and 4 for more than a year.

Logistical challenges

Logistical challenges refer to the difficulties encountered in the planning, implementation, and management of the movement and storage of goods, services, or information within a supply chain (Frazelle, 2020). There are two challenges that have been placed under the theme of logistical challenges, which are time

commitment and emotional challenges.

Time Commitment

The results of the interview show that the challenge of time commitment recorded the most challenges expressed by parents, which is a total of 9 parents. Below are the statements given by Parent 1 and Parent 4 regarding the time commitment challenge.

"Sometimes in a week, we have 2, or 3 daily sessions... so intense and require a lot of coordination with our family's schedule." (Parent 1)

"We have multiple therapy appointments each week, and it takes a significant chunk of our time. It's tough to maintain this routine long-term." (Parent 4)

Parent 1 and Parent 4 have stated that the ABA sessions sometimes happen almost every day for certain weeks. This situation has become a major challenge for them to juggle various responsibilities, including work, household chores, and caring for other family members. Besides, due to the child's tantrum, parents had to be at the therapy centre together with the child and this definitely took the parents' time. Parent 8 made the following statement:

"Sometimes in a week, we have 2, or 3 daily sessions... so intense and require a lot of coordination with our family's schedule." (Parent 1)

Financial Strain

The subsequent challenge arises in the form of finances, as 7 parents have expressed concern that ABA therapy is costly. Parent 3 claimed:

"ABA therapy has been incredibly beneficial for my son, but the cost is overwhelming. We're stretching our budget to its limits." (Parent 3)

Parent 5 added that the expense of ABA therapy depletes their savings and takes funds away from other children's education:

"We're spending so much on ABA therapy that it's affecting our ability to save for other important things, like other children's education." (Parent 5)

There are government-prepared programs in certain countries that aim to lessen the financial burden associated with ABA therapy. Among these initiatives are tax payment reductions provided by the Malaysian government. In Malaysia, the government has allocated as much as MYR 6,000 for parents who work in the government sector to obtain tax payment relief that is included under basic support equipment for self-use, spouses, children, or parents with disabilities (Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri Malaysia, 2023). Although there is assistance in terms of tax relief, Parent 10 stated that he still needs to use his own money to cover the additional expense of ABA therapy.

"I work for the government... I get a tax exemption from the government, but I still have to spend my own money to cover the extra cost." (Parent 10)

Emotional challenges

Emotional challenges refer to difficulties or struggles related to managing and expressing emotions effectively. These can include feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, or stress, which can impact a person's mental health and overall well-being (Palliative Care, 2024). Researchers have collected 2

challenges that fall under the emotional challenges theme, which are stress and burnout and fear and anxiety

Stress and burnout

9 parents have stated that they feel stressed and become completely exhausted when their special children are sent to undergo ABA therapy. Parent 3 stated:

"The emotional toll of seeing my child struggle can be stressful." (Parent 3)

Parent 6 also reported feeling overburdened as a result of his constant thoughts regarding his child's therapy routine and whether or not enrolling him in ABA was a prudent decision. Parent 6 has made this statement:

"I often feel helpless and stressed, wondering if we are doing enough or the right thing by sending my child to ABA therapy." (Parent 6)

According to Fagermoen et al. (2023), parents experience emotional stress when they see their child engage in behaviours that are being corrected or modified that evoke feelings of sadness, frustration, or helplessness. Meanwhile, Parent 9 added that he still sets aside time to assist his child in continuing therapy at home.

"I continue therapy at home as recommended by the therapist but maintaining the commitment while handling other daily tasks often leads to burnout." (Parent 9)

Parents also discussed the stress and burnout they experienced when trying to find a reliable and qualified therapist. As mentioned by Parent 5 and Parent 8:

"Finding qualified and consistent therapists has been a huge challenge, which is stressful for both me and my child." (Parent 5)

"Finding a therapist who has qualifications and fits the budget is not easy... I feel very stressed and almost give up." (Parent 8)

Besides, the lack of support and understanding from friends and family about the demands of ABA therapy can significantly add to the stress of parents. Parent 4 contended that:

"Thinking about the lack of support and understanding from friends and relatives...hmmm... I would become stressed.. sometimes cry alone)

Consequently, social support, such as from family and friends, is necessary for parents of ASD children (Khusaifan & El Keshky, 2021). They help by being understanding, providing help, and standing up for the family.

Fear and anxiety

Parental challenges related to emotions can also be categorized under the theme of fear and anxiety. This can be seen from the interviews with Parent 3 and Parent 6.

"My biggest fear is that ABA therapy might be too rigid or impersonal for my child. It's hard to trust a method you do not fully understand." (Parent 3)

"I often feel anxious about how the therapy might affect my child's emotional well-being." (Parent 6)

Robinson & Yong (2023) suggested that counselling can be beneficial in helping parents process their emotions and develop coping strategies.

Social and relational challenges

Social and relational challenges can be defined as difficulties individuals face in interacting with and forming connections with others. The researcher has obtained 3 challenges that can be placed under social and relational challenges, which are communication barriers, misaligned expectations, and social stigma.

Communication barriers

Research by Pine et al. (2024) indicates that parents who are actively involved in the therapeutic process and communicate regularly with therapists report lower levels of stress and greater satisfaction with the therapy. However, there are 2 parents who have expressed concerns about communication challenges. Parent 4 has given the following statement:

"I felt judged when I asked questions. It seemed like the therapists expected us to know more than we did about ABA therapy." (Parent 4)

Ideally, therapists should create an environment where parents feel comfortable and supported when asking questions. In addition, Parent 6 also stated that:

"Therapists frequently change something without informing us earlier. Communication was lacking." (Parent 6)

Keeping parents informed ensures they understand and can support new strategies or changes in therapy. Providing clear, non-judgemental information and education about ABA therapy can empower parents and improve collaboration (Raulston et al., 2019).

Misaligned expectations

A study by Urkmez et al. (2023) showed that many parents expect their children to change through ABA therapy without them having to do additional activities at home. During the interview, Parents 7 and 10 also provided the following statements.

"I was surprised by how much effort was required from us at home. I didn't realize how involved I would need to be in reinforcing the techniques." (Parent 7)

"We hoped ABA therapy would integrate seamlessly into our daily routine, but it was much more disruptive than we anticipated." (Parent 10)

Parents might expect rapid progress due to the urgency they feel for their child's development. However, ABA therapy is often a long-term process, and quick results are not always feasible.

Social Stigma

A total of 4 parents have given answers about the challenges of social stigma. Parent 2 described having challenges when relatives and friends disagreed with their decision to enrol their child in ABA therapy. The following interview findings demonstrate this.

"When we decided to start ABA therapy, some friends and family members questioned our choice." (Parent 2)

Parent 11 encountered criticism from the community at large, which believes that ABA therapy is a detrimental procedure for children, which caused the parents to feel left out.

"I faced criticism from others who believe that ABA is harmful." (Parent 11)

Historically, ABA therapy has been misused or poorly implemented, leading to negative experiences (Bellon-Harn et al., 2022). Disappointing ABA treatment experiences have caused some parents to discourage other parents from enrolling their children in the program.

Systematic challenges

The Cambridge Dictionary (2024) has defined systematics as something that is done according to a system or method that involves a set of predefined steps or procedures to ensure consistency, reliability, and efficiency in achieving desired outcomes. Systematic challenges are enduring and intricate problems that develop in social, economic, or organisational systems.

Access to services

A total of 5 parents have expressed challenges regarding access to services, which include the lack of qualified therapists, therapy centres that are far from home and the issue of traffic hours when attending therapy. Parent 1 stated:

"Finding a qualified ABA therapist was a challenge due to the long waiting lists in our area." (Parent 1)

In addition, the statement about the challenge of access to services that focusses on the location of therapy was also expressed by Parent 3, who allocated a long time to go to the location of therapy. The statement is as follows:

"We have to drive an hour each way to get to therapy sessions, which is hard with our work schedules and our child's needs." (Parent 3)

In addition, Parent 5 stated that even though the location of the home and the therapy place are close, there are challenges, such as having to deal with road congestion and the location of the therapy place not being very strategic, which makes it difficult to get a car parking space.

"My house is close to the treatment centre, but I constantly get stopped in traffic. When we arrive there, it's hard to locate a parking spot. The location is unsuitable." (Parent 5)

Frank et al. (2023) state that a treatment centre's location may affect accessibility, quality, cost, and the child's and parents' well-being. A treatment centre near home or school may help parents manage their schedules and children arrive for therapy sessions without being fatigued or upset after a lengthy trip.

Quality of services

Effective therapy requires not only a skilled and qualified therapist but also evidence-based practices that are tailored to meet the specific needs of each client (Frank et al, 2020). Yet, there are 4 parents who have reported that the centre of ABA therapy has reduced the quality of the services regarding the therapists qualifications. Parent 10 described it as follows:

"I was shocked to know that some ABA therapists are not registered or qualified enough... this is leading to inconsistent quality." (Parent 10)

Parent 11 echoed the same opinion and expressed concerns about the therapy goal's ability to address the child's particular requirements. This is the statement from Parent 11:

"The therapy goals are sometimes too generic and not suitable to my child's unique needs." (Parent 11)

Quality of service plays a critical role in establishing and maintaining this trust. A high standard of care involves not only professional competence but also empathy, respect, and a genuine commitment to the client's well-being (Fuller et al., 2021).

Recommendation to assist parents in overcoming the challenges

Recommendation in logistical changes

Logistical challenges are one of the main challenges faced by parents. Therefore, knowing how to face this challenge is important for parents managing therapy for their children. One of the recommendations that helps parents with logistical challenges is from the aspect of consistency in therapy schedule (Saccà et al., 2019). Parents who consistently send their children to therapy sessions can help their children feel secure and prepared. In addition, McDonald (2021) study showed that the use of visual schedules or calendars for ASD children can significantly help the ASD child's ability to anticipate

upcoming sessions, reducing anxiety and improving engagement. Furthermore, another recommendation in logistical challenges can be seen in terms of transportation planning. Reliable transport arrangements, such as carpooling with other families, can alleviate stress and ensure timely attendance at therapy (Syed et al., 2013). Parents should also identify alternative routes and methods of travel to account for potential delays, which can disrupt the routine and increase anxiety (Casagrande et al., 2021). Meanwhile, gaining proper contacts with the therapists makes it easy for parents to discuss their child's developments, goals, and any concerns they may have. Keeping a record of session notes, observed behaviours, and assigned tasks can facilitate a collaborative approach to therapy (DiCarlo, 2017). Lastly, optimising the home environment for therapy activities is vital. Creating a designated space with minimal distractions and accessible materials helps reinforce skills learnt during sessions, promoting consistency and focus (Martin, 2016). Together, these strategies empower parents to navigate the logistical challenges of therapy more effectively.

Recommendation in emotional challenges

Facing emotional challenges can be overwhelming for both children and their parents. To ease anxiety before and after therapy sessions, parents can implement calming techniques such as deep breathing, visual aids, or sensory tools. These strategies create a soothing environment that allows children to feel more at ease. Additionally, practicing role-playing scenarios can help familiarise children with therapy interactions, reducing fear of the unknown and increasing their confidence during actual sessions (Elbeltagi et al., 2023). It is crucial for parents to acknowledge and validate their child's feelings about therapy. Letting children know that it's okay to feel nervous or upset helps them understand their emotions. Open conversations about their experiences can foster trust and emotional safety, enabling children to express themselves without fear of judgement (Siegel & Bryson, 2011). Parents should reinforce a growth mindset by celebrating small achievements and progress made in therapy. This recognition encourages children to see challenges as opportunities for growth. Additionally, fostering self-advocacy by allowing children to voice their preferences and concerns empowers them to take an active role in their emotional well-being (Absalom-Hornby et al., 2024).

Recommendation in social-relational challenges

Navigating social-relational challenges can be daunting for parents, but effective strategies can significantly aid their children. Peer interaction is crucial for social skill development. Parents should facilitate opportunities for their children to interact with both neurotypical and neurodiverse peers. Arranging playdates or group activities with familiar friends allows children to practice skills learned in therapy in a comfortable setting, helping to build their confidence and social competence (Fyfe et al., 2021). Family involvement plays a significant role in a child's therapy journey. Engaging family members in training sessions or family therapy promotes a

cohesive approach to learning. When family members understand the goals and methods of therapies such as ABA, they can create a supportive home environment that reinforces therapeutic goals (Dennison et al., 2019). Skill generalisation is essential for lasting social competence. Parents should encourage their children to practice newly acquired skills across various settings, such as home, school, and community. Everyday situations can provide excellent opportunities for practice, such as greeting others or sharing toys, thereby reinforcing learning and building confidence in social interactions (Richman, 2000).

Recommendation in systematic challenges

Parents should engage their insurance coverage by following up on their insurance claims and any related enquiries. Coordination with the healthcare providers, including the doctors, therapists, and specialists, needs to be aligned to have one common approach about the child's treatment (Kogan et al., 2010). It can improve the results and dispel other misunderstandings. Advocacy is critical in ensuring that children get the right education and therapeutic services. Parents are encouraged to attend meetings with teachers and/or therapists to discuss their child's requirements and other plans of action that are to be taken (Klatte et al., 2024). Further, parents can get important resources, assistance, and information about the rights and existing services by communicating with local advocacy organisations to guide the parents through these systems (Trainor, 2010). Preliminary knowledge about ASD and ABA therapy is critical, and parents should try to comprehend the approaches that are used to achieve the goals. Workshops, webinars, or support groups enable the parents to familiarise themselves with other parents, where they share information and that can be crucial in helping in the development of the ASD child (Zuckerman et al., 2015).

DISCUSSION

Our study reveals that parents of children undergoing ABA therapy face significant challenges, categorised into logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic domains. The most notable concern is that logistical issues, such as time management and costs associated with it, limit the parental involvement in ABA therapy. We also see concerns related to stress and burnout due to parents dealing with the pressures associated with balancing the practice of therapy work together with other responsibilities. Furthermore, social-relational issues such as communication barriers with therapists and societal stigma exacerbate these difficulties. The gaps identified in the study call for effective practice and intervention that would understand the problems faced by parents. These results highlight that while parents are eager to support their children's ABA therapy, they are hindered by both personal and systematic challenges. For instance, conflicts in therapy schedules or financial considerations are other legitimate barriers that make it difficult for parents to become involved. This indicates that while ABA therapy is effectively helpful for ASD children, there is a need to consider the structure of the

flexibility of therapy provision to work with the realities of parental life. The stress and burnout found among the parents may also suggest that there is a requirement for some additional coping strategies for parents to remain actively engaged in the therapeutic process.

Our findings support the existing body of research, including Musetti et al. (2021) and Rivero (2022), where the involvement and participation of parents are important in ABA therapy. However, our study goes further by establishing the emotional and logistic burden as key factors, thus, an aspect that has not been explored much in the previous research. Compared to Dowell & Ogles (2010), in which they pointed out that parental involvement might improve therapy outcomes, our findings question this premise, arguing that without sufficient support, the full potential of such participation might not be harnessed. Nevertheless, one limitation of this study is that there were relatively few participants. There were 11 parents who participated in this study and they were from the two states in Malaysia, namely Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. This put some restraints on generalising the results to the wide population. Additionally, as this research is qualitative, it lacks the statistical power that might provide a more generalizable picture of parental involvement in ABA therapy. However, these limitations do not detract from the significance of the findings, which offer valuable insights into the challenges parents face.

These results indicate the need for policymakers and practitioners to establish less rigid and affordable ABA services. It might involve providing therapy, such as telehealth therapy sessions via video call, so working parents can participate in therapy from home during the weekend or after work hours without needing to worry about taking time off from work or arranging childcare. Moreover, therapy can also be done by giving monetary support, such as by offering sliding scale fees or financial assistance programs to help alleviate the cost burden for working parents. This allows parents to access therapy without the added stress of financial constraints. Emotional support systems like counselling or parent support groups could assist in mitigating the burnout felt by the parents, hence helping them to actively participate and see positive results in children who are undergoing therapy. Therefore, it is important to ensure that counseling services and parent support groups are readily available, affordable, and accessible both in-person and online. Besides, facilitating structured parent-to-parent mentorship programs where experienced parents can guide and support those new to the journey. Subsequent studies should examine whether parental stress reduces the benefits of ABA therapy in the long run and whether there are methods of lessening pragmatic and emotional stress. Collecting data from a large and diverse population as well as conducting cross-cultural research would have given a better perspective into these difficulties. Similarly, there can be more studies on how to establish frameworks to integrate better supports for parents.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the challenges parents face in their involvement with ABA therapy for ASD children. The research focused on identifying logistical, emotional, social-relational, and systematic barriers impacting parental engagement. The outcomes of the interviews indicated substantial issues, notably in time commitment, financial pressure, stress, burnout, communication barriers, and restricted access to certified services. Parents were keen as they wanted to support children's development but they faced diverse challenges that limited their involvement in the therapy process. The importance of these findings is in the realisation that each of these difficulties must be overcome to increase the effectiveness of ABA therapy. Therefore, the examination of the factors parents particularly experience recognises noteworthy strengths that pertain to the enhancement of parental participation. It is critical to note that these insights apply not only to enhancing child outcomes but will benefit parents as they do to strengthening the provisions needed for families participating in ABA therapy for ASD children. However, the study has limitations, particularly in its small sample size and geographical scope, focussing primarily on parents within a specific region. These factors may limit the generalisability of the results to broader populations. In addition, this study only focused on the qualitative data collected and may be fruitful for further investigation with the help of quantitative data sets. Future studies could explore these issues in other populations as well as in a different environment. A deeper insight would therefore be provided by extending the scope to comparative studies where effective support strategies for parents in ABA therapy are in question. Therefore, the study encourages a need to incorporate the various challenges parents encounter so that the basis for enhancing parental involvement is used in developing the effectiveness of ABA therapy for ASD children.

Ethical approval: The research includes human participants and the data were collected upon receiving informed consent from the participants.

Consent to participate: The participants were informed the process of research report.

Availability of data: Data are available in the article.

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