

Behavioral Responses of Children with Autism to Animated Visuals

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study explored the behavioral responses of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to animated visuals based on the experiences of teachers handling learners with autism in selected schools from Buug to Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay during the School Year 2025–2026. Ten Special Education (SPED) and inclusive classroom teachers participated in the study through semi-structured interviews to determine how animated visuals influence learners' attention, participation, engagement, and classroom behavior. Findings revealed that animated visuals positively affect learners with autism by improving attention span, classroom participation, motivation, communication, and task engagement. Teachers observed that learners became more focused, responsive, and cooperative during lessons using animated materials. Animated visuals also supported comprehension and encouraged social interaction among learners. However, challenges such as over stimulation, limited technological resources, internet connectivity problems, and preparation time were identified. The study concludes that animated visuals are effective instructional tools for learners with autism when used appropriately and supported with proper classroom management strategies. The findings emphasize the importance of developmentally appropriate and sensory-sensitive instructional materials in inclusive and SPED classrooms.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, animated visual, behavioral response, SPED learner, inclusive education

Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition characterized by difficulties in communication, social interaction, behavior, and sensory processing. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2022), children with autism often demonstrate repetitive behaviors, short attention spans, and challenges in maintaining classroom engagement. Because of these characteristics, teachers continuously seek instructional strategies that can effectively support learning and behavioral development among learners with autism.

One instructional strategy commonly used in Special Education (SPED) and inclusive classrooms is the use of animated visuals. Animated visuals include videos, moving images, interactive presentations, digital animations, and visually stimulating instructional materials that capture learners' attention and

increase engagement. Research suggests that children with autism respond positively to visual-based instruction because many of them are visual learners who benefit from structured and predictable learning environments (Quill, 2018).

Visual learning strategies help learners with autism improve focus, communication, memory retention, and participation during classroom instruction. Mesibov, Shea, and Schopler (2015) explained that visual supports are effective in helping learners with autism understand routines, follow instructions, and reduce disruptive behaviors. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) emphasized the importance of inclusive instructional practices that address the unique learning needs of children with disabilities.

In many classrooms, animated visuals are increasingly integrated into teaching because they provide multi-sensory stimulation that supports learners' motivation and comprehension. Teachers handling learners with autism observed that visual materials encourage participation and improve behavioral engagement during lessons. However, despite the benefits of animated visuals, challenges such as over stimulation, lack of technological resources, and limited teacher training still exist.

This study investigated the behavioral responses of children with autism to animated visuals based on the experiences of teachers from selected schools in Buug, Diplahan, Kabasalan, and Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the behavioral responses of children with autism before, during, and after the use of animated visuals?
2. How do animated visuals affect learners' attention, participation, and engagement?
3. What observable learning behaviors are demonstrated by learners with autism when animated visuals are used?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter in using animated visuals during instruction?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research was appropriate because the study focused on understanding the experiences and observations of teachers regarding the behavioral responses of children with autism to animated visuals.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in selected schools from Buug, Diplahan, Kabasalan, and Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay during the School Year 2025–2026. These schools offer Special Education (SPED) and inclusive education programs for learners with autism.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of ten teachers handling learners with autism in SPED and inclusive classrooms. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they had direct experience in teaching children with autism and using animated visuals during classroom instruction.

Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a semi-structured interview guide entitled “Behavioral Responses of Children with Autism to Animated Visuals.” The interview guide included questions focusing on:

- Behavioral responses before, during, and after the use of animated visuals
- Learners' attention, participation, and engagement
- Observable learning behaviors
- Challenges encountered by teachers in using animated visuals

Data Gathering Procedure

A formal request was sent to school administrators and participants before conducting the study. After approval, online interviews were conducted with teachers handling learners with autism. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality of responses was ensured.

The researchers gathered data through recorded online interviews using guide questions. Responses were transcribed and organized for analysis.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers identified recurring themes, patterns, and common experiences from the responses of participants. Themes were categorized according to the statement of the problem.

Findings and Discussion**Emerging Categories on Behavioral Responses of Learners with Autism to Animated Visuals**

Thematic analysis of the participants' responses revealed four emerging categories regarding the behavioral responses of learners with autism to animated visuals: (1) improved attention and focus, (2) increased participation and engagement, (3) positive learning behaviors, and (4) challenges encountered during instruction.

Improved Attention and Focus

Teachers observed that before the use of animated visuals, many learners with autism demonstrated short attention spans, destructibility, repetitive behaviors, and limited classroom participation. Some learners appeared uninterested during lessons that relied heavily on lectures and printed materials.

One participant stated:

“The learners usually lose focus quickly during traditional discussions, but they become attentive once visuals are introduced.”

During the use of animated visuals, teachers observed increased eye contact, improved attention, excitement, and active participation among learners. Students became more engaged in classroom discussions and activities.

A teacher shared:

“When animated videos are shown, learners become more responsive and cooperative during activities.” After the use of animated visuals, learners demonstrated improved retention of concepts, better communication responses, and increased willingness to participate in follow-up tasks.

These findings support the study of Quill (2018), which emphasized that visual strategies improve communication and engagement among learners with autism.

Effects on Attention, Participation, and Engagement

The findings revealed that animated visuals significantly improved learners' attention and engagement. Teachers explained that colorful moving images and audio-visual presentations effectively captured students' interest, especially during Science and language activities. Teachers observed that learners became more participative through answering questions, following classroom instructions, participating in group activities, and responding verbally and non-verbally. One participant mentioned, “Animated visuals help learners stay focused longer compared to traditional teaching methods.” The findings align

with Mesibov et al. (2015), who explained that visual supports improve focus and reduce behavioral difficulties among children with autism.

Learners became more active in answering questions during classroom discussions when animated visuals were used. Teachers observed that students showed greater willingness to respond to simple and guided questions after watching animated instructional materials. The visuals helped learners better understand concepts, making them more confident in expressing their ideas and answers during activities.

Teachers also observed improvements in learners' ability to follow classroom instructions. Animated visuals provided clear demonstrations and step-by-step presentations that helped learners understand directions more easily. As a result, students became more cooperative and were able to complete classroom tasks with less assistance from teachers.

In terms of group participation, animated visuals encouraged learners with autism to engage in collaborative classroom activities. Teachers noted that students became more interested in interacting with classmates during games, role-playing, and group tasks connected to animated presentations. The visual materials created a more engaging learning environment that promoted social interaction and cooperation among learners.

Furthermore, learners demonstrated increased verbal and non-verbal responses during instruction. Teachers observed that students attempted to imitate words, gestures, and actions presented in animated videos. Some learners responded through eye contact, facial expressions, pointing, nodding, and simple verbal communication. These responses indicated improved engagement and communication skills during classroom activities.

The findings align with Mesibov et al. (2015), who explained that visual supports improve focus and reduce behavioral difficulties among children with autism.

Observable Changes in Learning Behavior

Teachers observed several positive learning behaviors when animated visuals were integrated into instruction. These included increased task completion, improved comprehension, better memory retention, enhanced communication attempts, and increased imitation and social interaction. A participant explained, "Learners tend to imitate actions and repeat vocabulary words after watching animated instructional materials." Teachers also noticed that students became more confident in participating during classroom activities. The findings support UNESCO (2020), which highlighted the importance of inclusive instructional practices that encourage participation and engagement among learners with disabilities.

Teachers observed increased task completion among learners with autism during activities that used animated visuals. Learners became more motivated to finish classroom tasks because the visual presentations captured their attention and sustained their interest throughout the lesson. Compared to traditional teaching methods, students showed greater willingness to complete worksheets, follow activities, and participate in learning exercises after viewing animated instructional materials.

Improved comprehension was also evident among learners during discussions and follow-up activities. Teachers explained that animated visuals simplified difficult concepts through colorful images, demonstrations, and step-by-step presentations. Because of this, learners were able to understand lessons more easily and respond more accurately to classroom questions and tasks.

Teachers further observed better memory retention among learners with autism after exposure to animated instructional materials. Learners were able to recall vocabulary words, classroom routines, and lesson concepts more effectively after watching animated presentations. The combination of visual and auditory

stimulation helped reinforce learning and improved learners' ability to remember previously discussed topics.

Enhanced communication attempts were also noticeable during classroom instruction. Teachers observed that learners became more willing to express themselves verbally and non-verbally after engaging with animated visuals. Some students attempted to repeat words, answer questions, use gestures, or initiate simple conversations related to the lesson. These behaviors indicated increased confidence and engagement during classroom interactions.

Moreover, teachers noted increased imitation and social interaction among learners with autism. Students imitated actions, facial expressions, and gestures demonstrated in animated videos and classroom activities. Learners also became more cooperative during group work and interactive tasks, showing improved willingness to interact with classmates and teachers. These findings suggest that animated visuals can support not only academic learning but also social and behavioral development among learners with autism.

Challenges Encountered During Instruction

Despite the positive outcomes, teachers encountered several challenges in using animated visuals. Some schools experienced limited access to technology such as projectors, laptops, televisions, and stable internet connectivity. These limitations affected the consistent use of animated instructional materials during classroom lessons.

Teachers also reported that preparing animated materials requires time and effort. Many participants explained that searching for appropriate videos, editing presentations, and designing engaging visual materials demanded additional preparation outside regular teaching responsibilities. Teachers emphasized that selecting suitable animated content for learners with autism requires careful planning to ensure that the materials match the learners' interests, abilities, and instructional needs.

Another challenge observed by teachers was that some learners became overstimulated by excessive sounds or movements in animated presentations. Bright flashing images, loud sounds, and fast-moving animations sometimes caused learners to become distracted, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed during lessons. One teacher shared, "Some learners become overwhelmed when the animation contains too much sound or movement." Teachers noted that learners with sensory sensitivities may react negatively to overstimulating visual materials, which can interrupt learning and classroom participation.

Technical issues also sometimes interrupted lessons using animated visuals. Teachers experienced problems such as unstable internet connectivity, malfunctioning projectors, unavailable devices, and power interruptions. These technical difficulties affected the smooth delivery of lessons and occasionally caused delays or disruptions during classroom instruction. As a result, teachers needed to prepare alternative instructional materials whenever technical problems occurred.

In addition, teachers explained that not all animated materials are appropriate for learners' developmental levels. Some videos contained complex language, rapid transitions, or content that learners with autism found difficult to understand. Teachers emphasized the importance of selecting developmentally appropriate, simple, and sensory-sensitive animated materials that match the learners' cognitive and behavioral needs. Carefully chosen materials helped ensure that learners remained engaged without becoming confused or overstimulated.

To address these challenges, teachers simplified visual presentations, selected age-appropriate materials, minimized excessive sounds and movements, and incorporated sensory breaks during instruction. These

strategies helped create a more supportive and effective learning environment for learners with autism.

Conclusion

The study explored the behavioral responses of children with autism to animated visuals based on the experiences of teachers handling learners with autism in SPED and inclusive classrooms. Findings revealed that animated visuals positively influenced learners' attention, participation, engagement, communication, and overall learning behavior. Teachers observed that learners became more focused, responsive, cooperative, and motivated during classroom instruction when animated materials were used. Animated visuals also supported comprehension, social interaction, and classroom participation among learners with autism. Although challenges such as over stimulation, limited technological resources, and technical difficulties were encountered, the study generally showed that animated visuals are effective instructional tools that support the behavioral and educational development of children with autism when appropriately selected and properly implemented in the classroom.

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