



Reflection of Emotional State of Seven Year Old Autistic Child through Drawings: A Visual Discourse Analysis

Sidra Haroon^{a*}, Shumaila Ahmad^b, Shaista Ghazanfar^c

^aLecturer, Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

^bLecturer, Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

^cLecturer, Division of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of English, University of Education, Lahore.

*Email: Sidra.haroon@umt.edu.pk

Abstract: The present study shows how a young person with autism can use pictures to communicate his emotional states. This is illustrated by a case study that focuses on six specific emotional states exhibited by a young person with autism. This review provides a comprehensive overview focusing on the history, theories, and implications of autism. A qualitative approach is then used to assess viewing and learning of images for children with autism. The variables examined in this study included happiness, anger, resentment, playfulness, boredom, and enjoyment. Using this study, the study intends to investigate the improvement in the emotional status of children with autism. It also helps to see how those kids express themselves through pictures. The course will look at the patterns and patterns in the images, and relate them to six different emotional states. The findings will link theories to the emotional state of the autistic child. It will discuss the importance of nonverbal communication in understanding the emotional well-being of a child with autism. These strategies will have a positive impact in better understanding their meaning and improving their quality of life. This study helps to improve the lives of children with autism by emphasizing the importance of drawing to better understand their emotional state. This study will help teachers, clinicians and parents to provide better definitions of nonverbal communication in autistic children. The study will examine trends and patterns in the images and relate them to six distinct emotional states. The results will tie many people's thinking to the emotional state of children with autism.

Keywords: Emotional state, Autistic child, Drawings, Visual discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The neurodevelopmental disorder known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is characterized by limited or repetitive behaviors, problems with social interaction and communication, among other things. It is estimated that one in 54 children in the U.S. suffers with ASD, highlighting the need for greater understanding of this population and their unique emotional experiences. Although people with ASD often struggle with identifying and expressing their emotions, research has shown that non-verbal communication can improve his or her overall well-being.

Furthermore, nonverbal communication can also be a useful tool for their mental development. ASD affects people's cognitive abilities in a variety of ways, including difficulties in feeling and expressing emotions. Because people with autism have complex emotions and have difficulty communicating directly, their communication problems make it difficult for them to express their feelings.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Caregivers need to understand and respond to emotional needs, but many lack the necessary idea as to how to understand the emotional state of the autistic children so as to cater them. This gap in knowledge can make it difficult to support a autistic child's development, especially when it comes to emotional balance. Children with autism can express themselves powerfully through drawing, giving the caregivers a glimpse into the inner world of the autistic children. But if viewers aren't aware of how important these images are, they can ignore or write them off. To remedy this, parents and other adult caregivers of the autistic children need to view art as a medium of expression and actively support and communicate their artistic endeavors. Seeking professional advice can help parents understand their child's emotional needs and provide appropriate support. Caregivers can help children with autism communicate and manage their emotions more effectively by providing a nurturing environment that recognizes and values their child's expression.

1.2 Significance of Research

It is important to examine the emotional state of children with autism because it enhances our knowledge of their specific needs and experiences. With a better understanding of their patients' inner lives, clinicians, educators, and caregivers can effectively provide focused support to improve overall quality of life. Staff can provide resources and intervention that can effectively addresses emotional challenges of the autistic children. The overall goal of this research is to enable caregiver of the autistic children to approach the emotional experiences of the autistic children with greater enthusiasm and confidence through methods and therapies that not only encourage empathy and relatedness but also help in making the autistic children express themselves exclusively.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- a) To examine multimodal aspects of drawings by child with autism.
- b) To explore common features in pictures of child with autism.
- c) To explore whether the emotional state of the autistic children are reflected in the drawings.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the multimodal aspects of drawing by autistic child?
2. What are the common features of drawing by autistic child?
3. How does a child with autism express emotional states through his drawings?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Drawings a Tool for Communication

Drawing is a communication tool that provides a special way to express one's emotional state. Drawing is like having a unique emotional language. Drawing allows people to express themselves in ways that language cannot. If one has trouble finding the right words, a pencil works. You can guess what's going on in their hearts and minds based on their images, the colors they use, and the shapes they create. Through the power of color, people can communicate the depth of their emotions and feelings. Happiness, sadness, joy, disappointment, anger and frustration are all represented by letters on a piece of paper. The choice of colors and the degree of shading add clarity and provide gateways to an unexpressed sensory world. People can communicate through the complex emotional fabric of identity, finding comfort in this visual language that provides a bridge between themselves and the outside world

2.2 Drawings in Revealing the Emotional State of an Autistic Child

Drawing is a powerful and meaningful way to express the emotional state of children with autism. Many children

with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may find it difficult to verbally express their feelings. However, young children often find a nonverbal way to express their feelings, thoughts, and observations through drawing.

Children with autism have difficulty communicating using traditional methods, making it difficult for therapists, teachers and caregivers to understand their sensory experiences. Drawings provide a unique window into inner world of the children with autism, allowing them to visualize the emotions that may be difficult for them to express verbally. Anxiety, anger and excitement are just a few of the emotions that can be expressed through the color scheme, brushstroke intensity and overall structure of the artwork

Children with autism are often able to express themselves through pictures, allowing them to speak freely in a flexible way. Repeating shapes, color preferences, or aspects of their drawings can provide important clues about their emotional state. For example, a sudden change in the color scheme or the appearance of certain symbols may indicate a change in a child's mood or the passing of an important event in their life (Papangelo, 2020).

Additionally, pictures help children with autism interact with others around them. By interacting with a child's images, parents, teachers, and therapists can enhance their understanding about the child's feelings and experiences. This strengthens the bond between the child and their support system, in addition to facilitating an understanding of the young person's emotional state.

2.3 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

It's a neurodevelopmental condition which causes the challenges for daily life and restrictive practices. ASD is diagnosed by the specific criteria provided in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Individuals with this disorder often exhibit a wide range of symptoms and functional dysfunction, highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the disorder. The most important aspect of understanding these symptoms, and the emotional need of the children with autism is through the drawings which can help us better understand the emotional state of children with autism. ASD usually begins before the age of 3 years and lasts a lifetime, although symptoms can improve. Some patients show symptoms even at the age of 12 months, while others show no symptoms for 24 months. Adolescents and young adults with ASD may struggle with friendships, communication, and understanding social norms (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

Healthcare professionals may identify coexisting conditions such as anxiety or ADHD, which are common in patients with ASD.

2.4 Historical Background

There has been research going on since years to improve the life of autistic children. Different experts have defined autism in many different ways. "Autism" refers to severe withdrawal symptoms in schizophrenic patients (Bleulet, 1908). American child psychiatrists found traits in 11 children such as socialization, resistance to change, heightened sensitivity to stimuli, and other unique traits. The 1940s saw many theories about the causes of autism. Bruno Bettelheim put forward the idea that cold training is a major factor leading to autism but Bernard Rimland, a parent of an autistic child and a psychologist, disagreed with this theory, arguing that neural factors contribute to autism He then published a book in 1964 challenging the prevailing view of autism (Mandal, 2023).

Autism was once confused with psychosis but people are becoming more aware of it in the 1970s. Asperger's work was translated into English and published in the 1980s to give his work some recognition. At the same time, autism began to be more widely recognized because its causes range from genetic to parental to neurological. Lorna Wing and Christopher Gilberg identified disruptive communication, communication difficulties, and ambivalence, the so-called "three wings," in the 1980s and a new phenomenon, "systemic power," in the 1990s. Ole Ivar Lovas researched this topic and helped by providing early intervention and intensive treatment. In addition, he also published some wonderful books to help individuals with autism understand their emotional state. These theories and observations have provided a fundamental understanding of the complexity of this problem and the difficulty in understanding its causes and effects.

2.5 Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is difficult to diagnose because there is no specific medical diagnosis; Instead, they should look at behavior and progress. It can be used for early detection at 18 months and can provide a reliable

diagnosis for up to 2 years. Unfortunately, many people wait until later—sometimes not as teens or adults—and their disease is diagnosed. This hold-up can prevent early intervention and support needed for people with ASD. It is important to recognize and understand the importance of early recognition and understanding in order to provide needed support to individuals going through the challenges of ASD, as delaying diagnosis can prevent access to critical support the mouth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Researches have been done to understand ASD. Studies looking at genetic and environmental factors in ASD as well as their causes can be found in the literature. Neuroanalysis has also described anatomical and functional changes in the brains of individuals with ASD. Psychosocial research describes the experiences of people with autistic skills and abilities as well as social interaction issues. The co-occurring conditions, treatments, and impact of ASD on affected individuals and their families have been identified through research. This part of the study provides a basic understanding of the current state of knowledge regarding ASD.

2.6 Autistic Child Treatment in Pakistan

Like many other countries, Pakistan has increased awareness and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), developing specific services and interventions that address the special needs of those with autism Effective management requires hearing the importance of treatment underneath, and variety to address the unique challenges faced using individuals with autism strategies. Behavioral therapy is an integral part of autism treatment programs in Pakistan. A subcategory of occupational therapy, cognitive integration therapy, is widely used to help people manage emotional experiences, reduce sensitivity to stimuli, or reduce exploratory behaviors commonly associated with autism. School programs for people with autism are on the rise in Pakistan. Inclusive classrooms and special schools target classrooms specifically designed to meet the needs of students with autism. These programs typically include sensory classrooms, qualified teachers with autism experience, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Schools aim to have a compassionate and meaningful learning environment as long as it supports learning and socialization. Developing successful strategies requires knowing the cultural context of autism. Developmental problems are generally stigmatized, access to interventions is limited, and diagnosis is delayed therefore, community awareness campaigns are needed to address misconceptions and community participation programs are needed to promote awareness campaigns.

Therapeutic approaches incorporate cultural sensitivity, including cultural norms and practices common to Pakistan. Understanding the importance of family support in dealing with autism, clinicians often work together with families. Traditional customs and beliefs are sometimes incorporated into the process to ensure care is culturally appropriate for the family. Even with progress, Pakistan still faces challenges in providing a comprehensive autism program. Barriers still include lack of skilled physicians, financial constraints, and low levels of knowledge in some areas. Job training programs, community outreach programs, and policies seeking to integrate autism awareness and support into the larger health care system can be used to address these issues. Autism interventions in Pakistan are changing, reflecting a greater understanding of the value of individualized care for people with ASD Some interventions include educational programs, occupational therapy, lectures speech therapy and behavior therapy (Bareera, Mansoor, Muneeba, and Faiza, 2022).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This research focuses on expressive art theory and multimodal analysis. Expressive art theory explains how art forms can be used to express communicative tendencies, and recommends that pictures can serve as communicative tools for children with autism to express their emotional state. By using these, the study aims to investigate and explain the meaning of the drawings by autistic children as a way of expressing the internal feelings of emotional well-being of individuals with autism.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

A case study approach is used in accumulating the data. Data was accumulated through observations by means of analyzing the drawing activities given below with special focus on different emotional states. This manner included distinct sessions of observations wherein drawings were used to interpret the emotional states of autistic infant. The

drawings were used to take a look at the inner feelings of child with autism.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling strategy used in this research is purposive. Multiple observations of the emotional state of autistic individual are done by considering all main factors such as different emotional situations.. Moreover, this research was conducted through consent by considering the privacy and confidentiality of the child's parents.

3.4 Nature of Data

The first set of data consists of drawings made by a child with autism. These images were then used to study and analyze the child's inner feelings and emotional state. This study used qualitative analysis to identify trends, patterns and variations in the drawings, while different dimensions were used to examine all aspects covered by this study.

3.5 Research Ethics

Ethics were considered central to this study, and the confidentiality of the child in care was respected. The parents and legal guardians of the child with autism were informed, and their consent was taken at each stage. They were informed about the purpose, procedure, and potential risks of the study. Furthermore, privacy and rights were respected and maintained throughout the research process including data collection, analysis and reporting. This study adhered to ethical principles and presented the findings in a manner that did not expose the child's identity.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Happy Mood

Figure 1



The analyzed drawing was drawn by a young child with autism when he was in a happy mood. Applying the framework of multimodality theory to this artistic project allowed the researcher to examine the different communication strategies used by the child and gain insights into how interests are expressed. Visually, in this image, the researchers found bright and shiny colors such as bright red and bright blue which are often associated with happiness and positivity. The child's use of curved lines and flowing shapes creates a sense of fluidity, lightness and harmony, adding to the joy. These elements give visual music a corresponds to the observer. The order and spatial arrangement of the picture is also important for understanding the child's point of view. The child may have deliberately placed objects in specific locations, thus emphasizing the importance of a particular message. The spatial structure reflects the child's sensory balance and ability to visually inspect a picture. This beautifully composed list shows her attention to detail and desire to communicate her interests through visual means. In multimodality theory, it is important to consider whether or not the image contains lexical text features. These art forms include calligraphy, lines or text. However, in this particular image, it seems to rely solely on visual communication, without any verbal features.

4.2 Anger

Figure 2



This image was drawn by autistic child when he was angry. The researcher examined the image through the lens of multimodality theory. Visually, the drawing highlights several symbols that express feelings of anger. The pictures contain dark and intense colors, such as deep red or solid black, which reflect the emotional state of the child. These colors can evoke emotions and expressions of anger. The use of lines and shapes in the painting contributes to its overall tone. The child represents his anger with sharp lines. Such sharp lines may reflect agitation. In addition, the boy used rectangular and irregular shapes. The spatial organization of the image is also important for understanding the child's perspective. The placement and composition of a child's art reflects the intensity of his anger. The stories are crowded and tightly grouped, conveying a sense of emotional turmoil. It can cause anxiety or imbalance, and is intended to highlight the child's experience of anger. Through his art, the child effectively expresses his anger and allows others to empathize and relate to his emotional experience. Analysis of drawings by a child with autism within the framework of multimodality theory led the researcher to examine the communication strategies used in the artwork. Analysis of visual, and spatial features provided researcher gained insight into children's expressions of anger.

4.3 Frustration

Figure 3



This painting was created by the autistic child experiencing frustration, and the researchers paid close attention to his artistic style. Analyzing the drawing through the lens of multimodality theory allowed the researcher to examine

the ways in which the child communicates and expresses frustration. The picture shows many signs of despair and frustration. Color choice plays an important role in expressing a child's frustration. The painting consists of muted, dull colors, such as brown and gray, and reflects the emotional state of the child. Additionally, the way the child used lines and shapes in the drawing helped communicate the overall message. He used exaggerated wavy lines to express his frustration. The way things are arranged in pictures can also reflect a child's frustration.

4.4 State of Playfulness

Figure 4



This drawing was made by an autistic child in a play situation, whose creation was closely observed by the researchers. Visually, the drawing displays several qualities that reflect the child's playfulness. Bright and beautiful colors like bright yellow and green dominate the picture and reflect the child's happy energy. These colors evoke feelings of happiness and convey feelings of energy. In addition, the use of lines and shapes in the painting contributes to its overall tone. The boy uses flowing lines, dynamic and energetic lines to represent his play. The composition of the drawing, the placement of objects reflect the play style of the child. The placement and arrangement of objects in children's art emphasizes the fun nature of his play.

4.5 Boredom

Figure 5



This sketch was created by the autistic child at a time when he felt bored and wanted friends, the researchers closely followed his creative process analyzing the sketch through the lens of multimodality theory. The child's

choice of colors reflects his emotional state, with muted or dull tones predominating, symbolizing his lack of interest in his surrounding and a need for socialization. The use of lines and shapes in the drawing contributed to its overall tone. The autistic child used thin lines and placed the objects in a scattered manner in the drawing. Each object looks like a child, which reflects autistic child's need to social. Other than this, colors are not very dark reflecting a sense of isolation.

4.6 Excitement

Figure 6



This picture was drawn by the autistic child when he was playing with his new Spider-man toy. Visually the autistic boy used bright and energetic colors like bold reds and blues to represent spider-man. These colors reflect a sense of energy and excitement and capture the child's excitement for his new toy. The boy used sticky tubes to show Spider-man's agility and movement. Additionally, the child used visual concepts such as Spider-man's mask and web patterns to represent the spider-man's well known features. The character was drawn in the middle of the picture which reflect that child was taking spider-man as the central character even when playing.

5. Conclusion

Research into the role of images in the communication of emotional states in children with autism has yielded significant findings. First, understanding six different emotional states through the artworks of children with autism provided important new insight to the autistic child's inner emotional world. The result of the current study imply that drawings can be a reliable way to understand the emotional state of children with autism by consistently revealing the specific patterns associated with each emotional state. This study has also shown that children with autism use pictures as a means of communication. Pictures provide a space for nonverbal communication and expression, helping them to express emotions that would otherwise be difficult to express verbally. The combination of width of lines, selection of colors and placement of the objects in the image emphasize emotional state of the children with autism.

References

- Screening and diagnosis of autism*, (2022). Retrieved from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/screening.html>.
- Bellini, S. (2017). *Drawing process in children with Autism*. Retrieved from Your Therapy Source:

- <https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog1/2017/08/07/drawing-autism/>
- Bhattacharyya, D., Bohannon, L. S., Davis, A. M., Falckytter, T., Ming, X., Gutiérrez, J., et al. (2021, March 19). *Drawing reveals hallmarks of children with autism*. Retrieved from Displays: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0141938221000159>
- Dr. Ananya Mandal, M. (2023). *Autism History*. Retrieved from News: <https://www.news-medical.net/health/Autism-History.aspx>
- Dr. Colin, T. (2021). *What is autism? signs, symptoms & what causes autism*. Retrieved from patient.info.: <https://patient.info/doctor/autistic-spectrum-disorders-pro>
- Guldborg, K., & Pringle, A. (2006). Experiencing and exploring participation and provision for children with autism in mainstream primary schools: "Give him the quietest room in the school". *Cognition, International Journal of Cognitive Education and Multimedia.*, 7(2), 162-176.
- Human Figure Drawings in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Possible Window on the Inner or the Outer World*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Brain Sciences: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7344444/>
- Maham, Bareera, Mansoor, A. F., Muneeba, & Faiza. (2022). *Autism Spectrum Disorder In Pakistan: A Review: Autism Spectrum Disorder. . Pakistan Journal of Health Sciences*.
- Papangelo, P., Pinzino, M., Pelagatti, S., Fabbri-Destro, M., & Narzisi, A. (n.d.). *Human figure drawings in children with autism spectrum disorders: A possible window on the inner or the Outer World*. Retrieved from Brain sciences: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32585879/>
- Pringle, A., & Guldborg, K. (2020). Autism. *Children with autism can express social emotions in their drawings*. 24(1), 80-92.
- What is Autism?* (n.d.). Retrieved from Autism Speaks.: <https://autismspeaks.org/what-autism>