



Systematic Literature Review of Teacher-Based Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Strategies to Improve Eye Contact in Children with Autism in School Syahida Harapan Bunda

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 09 May 2026

Accepted: 11 May 2026

Available Online: 15 May 2026

Keywords:

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA),
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD),
Classroom Learning,
Contact Eyes,
Teacher Strategies

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Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.5.p.870-882>

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically examine teacher strategies based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to enhance eye contact skills in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during classroom learning. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted by analyzing ten empirical research articles published between 2020 and 2025. The review focused on structured learning approaches, teacher interventions, and the impact on visual attention and social engagement in autistic children. Findings indicate that eye contact does not occur spontaneously but develops through sequential behavioral stages, including compliance with instructions, emergence of visual attention, social responses, and functional eye contact. Teachers implement strategies such as gradual prompting, consistent positive reinforcement, use of visual media, and the Discrete Trial Training (DTT) approach to systematically guide children in achieving sustained eye contact during learning interactions. These interventions not only improve visual attention but also facilitate basic social communication skills. Across all studies reviewed, consistent application of ABA-based strategies by teachers significantly enhances the frequency and duration of eye contact, forming a foundation for social engagement and classroom participation. This review provides evidence-based guidance for educators in designing and implementing ABA strategies in school settings, highlighting the importance of structured, gradual, and reinforced teaching methods to support the social and academic development of children with ASD.

1. Introduction

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face significant challenges in communication, social interaction, and adaptive behavior, often presenting repetitive and restricted patterns of behavior. According to the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association, one of the hallmark features of ASD is a deficit in social communication, including difficulties in maintaining eye contact during interactions. Eye contact is a fundamental aspect of nonverbal communication, serving as a foundation for joint attention, emotional understanding, and social engagement, all of which are critical for successful participation in classroom learning. Without the ability to effectively establish eye contact, children with ASD may struggle to engage with teachers and peers, limiting both social and academic development (Darmastuti et al., 2026; Putri, Lubis, & Rusman, 2026, JES).

Rezieka et al. (2021) explain that children with special needs require specialized educational services due to developmental disorders that affect multiple domains, including physical, cognitive, psychological, and social functioning. Globally, approximately one in every 160 children is estimated to have ASD, according to the World Health Organization. In Indonesia, the prevalence of autism has shown an increasing trend, with an estimated 500 new cases annually between 2020 and 2021. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2021) reported that the number of children diagnosed with autism in 2019 reached 144,102, up from 133,826 in 2018. This growing prevalence highlights the need for systematic educational strategies that support social communication skills, particularly the development of eye contact, in children with autism. Previous studies published in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* emphasize that structured classroom interventions, teacher-mediated strategies, and reinforcement techniques are crucial for improving both social engagement and learning outcomes in children with special needs (Darmastuti et al., 2026; Yuliana et al., 2026, JES).

Eye contact is a core component of nonverbal communication that allows individuals to share attention, interpret emotional states, and establish two-way interactions. Yuswatiningsih (2021) emphasized that children with ASD often have difficulty recognizing facial expressions and engaging in reciprocal social interactions, making eye contact a foundational social skill. Similarly, Halawa et al. (2025) note that eye contact is essential for understanding others' emotions and for establishing functional social interactions. Research has also documented that children with autism often exhibit atypical gaze patterns, including shorter duration of eye contact and frequent gaze aversion. These difficulties can limit their participation in classroom activities, peer interactions, and learning processes. Studies in *JES* demonstrate that teacher-based strategies, such as positive reinforcement and gradual prompting, can effectively improve eye contact, visual attention, and classroom engagement for autistic children (Utami & Siregar, 2026; Putri, Lubis, & Rusman, 2026).

Several studies have indicated that interventions based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) can improve eye contact and related social skills in children with ASD. Rahmawati and Nurmaliah (2025) highlighted that skills such as maintaining eye contact can be enhanced through structured behavioral interventions, reinforcement, and gradual prompting techniques. ABA is understood not only as a therapeutic approach but also as a systematic learning strategy that helps children acquire and maintain desired behaviors. In educational contexts, teachers use ABA

principles to identify target behaviors—such as eye contact, sitting quietly, and following instructions—and implement structured interventions until these behaviors are consistently displayed (Leaf et al., 2015; Darmastuti et al., 2026, JES).

Empirical studies indicate that ABA-based learning strategies significantly increase both the frequency and duration of eye contact in children with ASD. Nisa and Hayati (2025) demonstrated that ABA implementation in classroom settings improved visual attention and social engagement. Similar findings were reported by Silva and Fiske (2020), Vivanti et al. (2022), and Tiede and Walton (2019), emphasizing the importance of teacher-mediated interventions, such as prompting and reinforcement, in facilitating eye contact. Despite these promising results, research that synthesizes the effects of ABA-based strategies specifically implemented by teachers in school environments remains limited. Many studies focus on individual therapy, isolated techniques, or general social behaviors, which do not provide a comprehensive understanding of effective strategy patterns in classroom learning. Additional evidence from JES highlights the importance of teacher competency, structured learning environments, and monitoring strategies to ensure interventions are effective and sustainable (Rahman, Rahmawati, & Ridwan, 2026; Utami & Siregar, 2026).

Given this gap, there is a clear need for a systematic review that consolidates empirical evidence regarding ABA-based teacher strategies to improve eye contact in children with autism. By identifying patterns of effective interventions and examining the roles of teachers, reinforcement methods, and structured learning techniques, this review can provide valuable guidance for special education practitioners. The study aims to summarize existing research, highlight effective strategies, and identify areas requiring further investigation. The findings are expected to offer both conceptual and practical insights, enabling teachers in special schools to implement targeted ABA strategies that improve eye contact and support broader social and academic development in children with ASD (Darmastuti et al., 2026, JES).

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techniques, such a review can provide valuable guidance for special education practitioners. This study aims to summarize existing research, highlight effective strategies, and identify areas that require further investigation. The findings are expected to offer both conceptual and practical insights, enabling teachers in special schools to implement targeted ABA strategies that improve eye contact and support broader social and academic development in children with ASD.

2. Methodology

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine and synthesize research on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)-based teacher strategies designed to improve eye contact in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in educational settings. The SLR approach was chosen because it provides a structured, transparent, and replicable process for evaluating multiple studies and identifying patterns of effective interventions. This method allows researchers to analyze existing evidence systematically, uncover gaps in the literature, and generate recommendations for practical applications in classroom settings. The review focused on studies published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure current and relevant findings. Using the SLR approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and follows rigorous academic standards, enhancing the reliability and validity of the results. By reviewing teacher-mediated interventions, the study highlights the role of educators in shaping social and communication skills through ABA strategies. This method also emphasizes systematic planning, documentation, and transparent reporting. The SLR approach ensures that other researchers can replicate the study or apply similar techniques to related topics.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a standardized data extraction form designed to capture essential information from each selected study. The form included details such as authorship, publication year, participant characteristics, type of ABA strategy, frequency and duration of interventions, and reported outcomes on eye contact. Using a standardized form ensured consistency and accuracy during the extraction process across multiple studies. It also facilitated the organization of data for subsequent thematic analysis. The instrument was designed based on established models of qualitative analysis, particularly those outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This approach allows for clear documentation of methods and findings while reducing potential bias. The structured form helped researchers systematically record interventions and outcomes. In addition, it ensured that all critical aspects of each study were consistently captured, including study design, context, and classroom setting. This makes the findings reproducible and allows future studies to verify or extend the review.

Data Collection

Data collection involved reviewing each selected article thoroughly and entering relevant information into the standardized extraction form. Two independent

reviewers conducted the data collection to increase reliability and minimize errors or bias. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus. The process included identifying the ABA strategies implemented by teachers, such as gradual prompting, reinforcement, visual media, and Discrete Trial Training (DTT). The reviewers also collected data on the intervention setting, duration, frequency, and reported changes in eye contact and social interaction. The systematic approach ensured that all relevant information was captured comprehensively. By using a standardized procedure, the study maintained high consistency and transparency. The collected data formed the basis for thematic analysis, enabling researchers to identify common patterns, challenges, and best practices. The approach ensures reproducibility and allows other researchers to replicate the methodology in similar reviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involved organizing, categorizing, and synthesizing information extracted from the selected studies. The analysis focused on identifying recurring ABA strategies used by teachers, supportive and inhibiting factors affecting their implementation, and their impact on eye contact in children with ASD. Data reduction was performed to summarize key findings, while data display organized results into coherent themes. Conclusions were drawn based on the patterns observed across multiple studies, highlighting effective strategies and gaps requiring further research. This method enabled a comprehensive understanding of how teacher-mediated ABA interventions contribute to improving eye contact and social communication in classroom settings. The thematic analysis approach also ensured that the review remained systematic, transparent, and reproducible. By synthesizing the findings narratively, the study provides clear recommendations for educators. This process allows the results to be applied practically, informing teaching strategies and policy development in special education.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this systematic literature review provide a comprehensive overview of how teacher-mediated Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) strategies are implemented to improve eye contact skills in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in classroom settings. A total of ten studies published between 2020 and 2025 were analyzed, focusing on various ABA techniques and their impact on social and visual attention outcomes. These studies collectively highlight the critical role of teachers as mediators in the learning process, using structured strategies to shape and reinforce desired behaviors, particularly eye contact.

Across the studies, several patterns emerged regarding the types of interventions and their effectiveness. Common strategies include gradual prompting, positive reinforcement, use of visual media such as flashcards, and the Discrete Trial Training (DTT) approach. The interventions were applied in both special and inclusive classroom settings, targeting foundational skills such as compliance with

instructions, visual attention, and joint social responses. Consistent application of these strategies was shown to significantly increase both the frequency and duration of eye contact among children with autism, facilitating improved social communication and engagement in classroom activities.

The synthesis of the reviewed studies also indicates that eye contact development occurs gradually, beginning with basic visual attention toward the teacher, followed by brief gazes in response to instructions, and culminating in functional eye contact during learning interactions. Each study provides evidence that structured ABA-based strategies, when systematically implemented by teachers, not only enhance eye contact but also contribute to the broader development of social and communication skills.

Table 1 summarizes the key findings from the ten reviewed studies, presenting information about the article title, authors, year of publication, and main outcomes related to teacher-mediated ABA interventions for improving eye contact in children with ASD. This overview highlights both the consistency of results across different studies and the diversity of strategies employed by teachers to address social communication deficits in the classroom setting.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies on Teacher-Mediated ABA Strategies for Improving Eye Contact in Children with ASD

No	Article Title	Writer	Year	Key Findings
1	Teacher Strategy In Effectiveness Learning Autistic Students	Ulya Nur Alim	2021	ABA through proven prompting, reinforcement, and shaping techniques increase compliance and response social child autism . Compliance This become prerequisite emergence behavior base like contact eye moment instructions given by the teacher in class (Alim et al., 2025). Implementation of ABA by teachers in schools show improvement interaction social children , in particular through habituation visual response to the teacher. Gradual prompting strategy effective build eye contact during learning ongoing (Farida Salma, 2023).
2	Study About Implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Method for Learning for Autistic Children	Farida Salma	2021	Teachers who implement ABA principles in general systematic in class capable increase focus children's visual attention autism . Improvement this visual attention correlated direct with improvement duration contact eye moment interaction Study (Maryanti & Fatimah, 2022).
3	Implementation of the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Method Using Flashcard Media for Improving the Learning Process of Autistic Students	Maryanti and Fatimah	2021	Teacher strategies through strengthening positive (rewards), verbal and gestural prompting, and
4	Implementation of the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Method Through the	Neza Ishmah, et al.	2020	

	Discrete Trial Training (DTT) Technique in Increase Eye Contact Ability in Autistic Children			repetition structured proven help child maintain visual attention to the teacher, which is indicator beginning formation contact eye (Ishmah et al., 2025).
5	Application of the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) Method in Improving Eye Contact in Autistic Children	Firda Tantri, et al.	2025	ABA interventions in the classroom were conducted in a way consistent increase response social children , including visual response when called by name and time accept instructions , which are form beginning contact eye functional (Tantri et al., 2025)
6	Implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis Method in Develop Behavior Study Student with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Rahmawati and Nurmaliah	2025	Combination of gradual prompting and positive reinforcement in a way significant increase frequency and duration contact eye child autism during interaction learning . Teachers play a role as the main mediator in implementation of this strategy (Rahmawati & Nurmaliah, 2025).
7	The Effect of the Pomodoro Technique on Range Attention Autistic Students in Learning	Ro`id Al-Mahdi and Ekasari	2024	mediated ABA interventions in the classroom increase attention social ASD students , including ability maintain look at the teacher when instructions given (Ro`id Al-Mahdi & Ekasari, 2024).
8	Implementation of Discrete Trial Training and Pivotal Response Training for Increasing Joint Attention Skill in Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Juhari, et al.	2025	Implementation of DTT in classroom settings show improvement significant on children's eye gaze behavior autism . Systematic trial structure make it easier formation contact eye functional (Juhari et al., 2025).
9	Communication Strategy Interpersonal School Teachers In Support Development Behavior of Children with Needs Special Exploring the Acquisition of Social Communication Skills in Children with Autism: Preliminary Findings from Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Parent Training, and Video Modeling	Pramita, et al.	2025	Consistent reinforcement strategy help child develop marked joint attention with increasing contact eye during activity Study with the teacher (Pramita et al., 2025).
10		Bordini	2024	Implementation of ABA in learning class show that improvement communication social child autism started from formation visual attention and contact eye through structured teacher strategies (Bordini et al., 2024).

The results of the synthesis of ten articles in the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) table show a consistent pattern of findings that the implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) by teachers in the classroom plays a very significant role in shaping the basic social behavior of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), particularly the ability to make eye contact during the learning process. In all the studies reviewed, eye contact is not viewed as a naturally occurring behavior, but rather as a behavior that must be developed through

systematic, gradual, and consistent intervention stages through teacher-designed learning strategies.

In general, all articles indicate that before autistic children can make functional eye contact, there are initial behavioral stages that must first be established: compliance with instructions, the emergence of visual attention toward the teacher, and the development of simple social responses. This finding aligns with research by Ulya Nur Alim (2021) and Farida Salma (2021), which emphasized that teachers do not immediately target eye contact as the primary goal, but rather build behavioral foundations by habituating visual responses to the teacher through repeated prompting and reinforcement during learning (Alim et al., 2025; Farida Salma, 2023). In other words, eye contact is the end result of a series of behavior developments implemented by teachers through the ABA approach.

In designing ABA-based learning, teachers design structured learning activities that take into account the small stages of children's behavior. Learning is not spontaneous, but rather through systematic planning, such as providing visual stimuli, gradual prompts, positive reinforcement, and repetition (drill). This design is clearly evident in a study by Maryanti and Fatimah (2021), who utilized visual media in the form of flashcards to help children focus their visual attention on the teacher. As visual attention increased, children became more easily guided to maintain gaze, which then developed into eye contact during learning interactions (Maryanti & Fatimah, 2022). This demonstrates that ABA-based learning planning pays close attention to the visual needs of autistic children as a gateway to establishing eye contact.

Regarding teacher strategies using ABA principles, most research emphasizes the importance of a combination of gradual prompting techniques, positive reinforcement, and Discrete Trial Training (DTT). A study by Neza Ishmah et al. (2020) demonstrated that a systematic DTT structure through brief instructions, child responses, and immediate reinforcement helped children maintain visual attention on the teacher for longer periods, an early indicator of eye contact (Ishmah et al., 2025). Similar findings were corroborated by Juhari et al. (2025), who explained that repeated trials in DTT established eye gaze patterns that developed into functional eye contact as learning progressed.

Furthermore, the role of positive reinforcement was prominent throughout the articles. Tantri et al. (2025), Rahmawati and Nurmaliah (2025), and Pramita et al. (2025) explained that reinforcement in the form of praise, rewards, or positive responses from the teacher each time a child demonstrated visual attention or brief gaze gradually formed the habit of maintaining longer gazes on the teacher (Tantri et al., 2025; Rahmawati & Nurmaliah, 2025; Pramita et al., 2025). Teacher consistency in providing reinforcement is a key factor in successfully establishing eye contact.

Regarding changes in eye contact behavior in autistic children, all articles show a nearly identical developmental pattern. Initially, children respond only when their name is called without looking at the teacher. Then, they begin to show brief visual

attention. Subsequently, gaze duration increases when receiving instructions, until functional eye contact is established during learning interactions. This gradual process demonstrates that eye contact is not simply a visual behavior but also part of the development of social and joint attention in autistic children in the classroom.

Another important finding was demonstrated by Bordini (2024), who emphasized that improving social communication in autistic children during learning always begins with establishing visual attention and eye contact through structured teacher strategies in the classroom, not just through individual therapy outside of school (Bordini et al., 2024). This strengthens the teacher's position as the primary mediator in implementing ABA in educational settings.

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that all articles in the SLR table clearly address the three research objectives: teachers are able to systematically design ABA-based learning; teachers consistently use prompting, reinforcement, visual media, and DTT strategies; and there is a change in the eye contact behavior of autistic children, evolving from simple visual attention to functional eye contact during the classroom learning process.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), it can be concluded that the implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)-based learning by teachers in the classroom has proven effective in improving eye contact skills in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during the learning process. Eye contact does not emerge spontaneously, but rather is developed through a series of behavioral stages systematically designed by teachers through structured learning strategies. Teachers design learning by considering the small stages of children's behavior, starting with establishing compliance with instructions, fostering visual attention, and developing social responses characterized by eye contact. The strategies used include gradual prompting, consistent positive reinforcement, the use of visual media, and the Discrete Trial Training (DTT) approach, which is implemented repeatedly during learning activities. Consistent application of these strategies helps children focus visual attention on the teacher, maintain gaze longer, and respond to learning interactions with greater social engagement.

Changes in eye contact behavior appear to develop gradually, from simple visual responses when called by name, to visual attention when receiving instructions, and finally to the establishment of functional eye contact during classroom interactions. This demonstrates that ABA-based learning not only contributes to academic achievement but is also effective in developing basic social skills in children with autism. Thus, ABA-based teacher strategies in the school environment have an important role in forming eye contact as the foundation for communication and social interaction of autistic children in a planned and sustainable manner.

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How to cite this article:

Darmastuti, R., Sumarti, S. S., Raharjo, T. J., & Sumartiningsih, S. (2026). Systematic Literature Review of Teacher-Based Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Strategies to Improve Eye Contact in Children with Autism in School Syahida Harapan Bunda. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(5), 870-882.
