

# Effective Educational Inclusion for ASD Students

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of inclusion is still a contentious topic in the domains of education and psychology. Despite the controversy presented, according to the U.S. Department of Education, over the last two decades, the number of students with learning disabilities educated in general classrooms has increased substantially. Because of the huge expansion in inclusive programs, some have concluded that "full inclusion with co-teaching" is currently the preferred model of service delivery for kids with learning disabilities in most parts of the United States. For educators, it seems to be a positive term that embodies special needs students in regular classrooms, but it might quite difficult to provide an inclusive atmosphere for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Since there are many commonly held concerns about this action, this paper will examine several effective methods and accommodations to help perform a successful inclusion in educational settings. Throughout this paper, the focus will be placed on some general characteristics of ASD students, a comparison between different classroom environments, as well as teaching styles and implementations. This review demonstrates that, when done correctly, purposeful inclusion can help students with ASDs and other disabilities achieve academic and social success.

**Keywords:** *Inclusion, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, Disabilities, Evaluations*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given the rising number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in classrooms nowadays, more and more educators are becoming familiar with it, rather than seeing it as a complicated disability. ASD is a neuron-developmental condition that causes children to be hypersensitive to sensory stimuli [1]. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the period between 2009 to 2017, about 17% of children whose ages range from 3 to 17 years old were diagnosed with a developmental disability. This means that about 1 in 6 children are considered ASD students. Though the causes of ASD are not certain, the strongest factor seems to be genetics. ASD can lead to significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. It encompasses many conditions at the same time: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise defined, and Asperger syndrome [2].

People are concerned with providing suitable care for ASD children in terms of education. Whether or not to

include autistic students in regular classroom settings soon become one of the most controversial issues among psychologists over time in the domain of special education. The discussion is full of complexity as it is strongly related to schools, parents, and most importantly, students themselves. For educators, the word *inclusion* seems to be a positive term that embodies special needs students in regular classrooms, but providing an inclusive environment for students with ASD can contain a significant amount of barriers.

Since ASD has different types and levels, accessing training, challenges in comprehending varied viewpoints and requirements, interacting with differing stages of disabled students, and lack of resources and organizational structures all serve as barriers to integrating special needs students into mainstream classrooms. Thus, full inclusion may not always be sufficient to meet the requirements and demands of most students with learning disabilities. Teachers often instruct large bodies of students in regular classrooms, hence they usually have heavy workloads and limited time to collaborate with the students. Furthermore,

acceptance among peers is also an issue of concern. Research has found that “students with ASDs are twenty times more likely to be excluded and three times more likely to experience bullying than any other group of children”[3]. Certain school activities, such as social interactions, chaotic or disorderly environments, intensive sensory stimulation, and unexpectedly altered schedules, may be particularly challenging for students with ASD. All of the above may lead ASD students to an instant breakdown. They might explode into tantrums and fierce resistances at any given time[4], and their explosive behaviors will very likely affect class operation. If not included, students with special needs can choose to receive support from special education centers. Special education classrooms are led by direct services from special education teachers (SET) and other related services professionals. It allows children to spend time with their classmates through integrated or inclusive activities that are guided by the IEP.

Children with autism all have unique needs. To succeed in a full inclusion, the involvement of teachers and parents must help to accommodate the needs of students. Teachers must continue to adopt flexible and individually designed teaching approaches that best suit individual students rather than a group of disabled children. The inclusion should only be created if it works best for the students and allows them to experience a purposeful and appropriate education.

Thus, the aim of this article is to provide effective methods and accommodations for inclusion through the discussion of two main aspects: regular classrooms and special education. The two sides will highlight the issue of whether ASD students should be taught in regular classrooms, and a discussion on how to appropriately involve them in regular education settings.

## **2. ASD STUDENTS**

Coined by Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist, autism was originally derived from the Greek word "autos," which means "self." It refers to a severe social disengagement signaling an isolated self [5]. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability characterized by impaired social communication and interaction skills, motor difficulties with restrictive repetitive behavior, memory issues, intense sensory stimulation, and impulse control deficiencies.

ASD is diagnosed at three levels, each indicating a different degree of severity and need for support. Level 1 refers to high-functioning autism in general, suggesting that the patient's social communication and interaction skills, as well as repetitive behaviors, are only visible in the absence of support. Even with support in place, the patient's social and communication skills, as well as repeated habits, are nevertheless visible to the casual observer at Level 2. Level 3 indicates the requirement for

extensive assistance, commonly known as severe autism. Patients with severe autism have impaired social and communication abilities, as well as daily repetitive behaviors. Overall, this lifelong developmental disability can result in impaired social communication and interaction skills, restrictive repetitive behavior, and intense sensory stimulation.

The content of the curriculum and the fast pace expectations in regular classrooms can easily frustrate students with ASDs. Frustration can lead to feelings of inferiority, behavioral issues, or it might lead directly to students shutting down and not trying at all[5]. Various classroom activities, noises, or even changes in routines could lead to an instant breakdown in ASD students' behaviors. They might explode into tantrums and fierce resistance at any given time [4]. Their explosive behavior will very likely affect and become a distraction for the rest of the class. This unpredictable situation is where it makes inclusion challenging and questionable. Active engagement in the environment is another major challenge for students with ASDs. Students with ASDs frequently enter "their own worlds," missing out on critical learning opportunities[6]. When disengaged, students with ASDs may engage in repetitive verbalizations or bodily motions such as rocking in their chairs, flapping their hands, or roaming around the classroom [6]. As a result, special care must be paid to students with ASDs. Furthermore, most children, regardless of age, want to fit in with their peer groups. However, students with ASDs may be harmed in mainstream classrooms, and peer acceptability is also a source of concern. According to research, students with ASDs are twenty times more likely to be ostracized and three times more likely to be bullied than any other group of children [3]. It is well known that children with special needs experience hard times making friends, socializing, and addressing problems in social situations. As a result, there's a high possibility that a hostile classroom environment will form for all students.

## **3. FRAMEWORK**

### ***3.1 Teaching Methods***

Teaching methods play an essential role in both special and regular education. It refers to the interactions between teachers and students by adopting various means, which is composed of a whole set of methods guided by teaching principles to achieve the education purpose and realize the teaching content [7]. Teachers should use appropriate teaching methods that best suit clear targets and fully comply with results to facilitate knowledge transmission [8].

Special education teaching techniques aim to increase the level of special education, further defend the disabled's right to education, assist the disabled in developing holistically and better integrating into society,

and enable the disabled to share the fruits of reform and development and realize a happy life in the process of building a well-off society holistically[9]. Furthermore, reducing or even curing stereotypical behavior of the disabled by some special teaching methods. Under this special teaching mode, they will take initiative to communicate with others and integrate into society. Some special education schools in China have set up an education and rehabilitation department for autistic children, and teachers will develop individualized training programs for these children for education and rehabilitation means. Therefore, special education schools have become the main front for the education and rehabilitation of autistic children[10]. According to the characteristics of ASD students, the teaching methods of special education may serve as an appropriate approach for them to get on well with this society and acquire social skills such as communicating effectively with others. This special method can also impact positively on ASD students by gaining easy access to solve problems such as social disorders, abnormal emotions, and sensory maladjustment.

Regular education, on the other hand, aims to help children develop ethically, intellectually, physically, artistically, and laboriously in a holistic manner; enable children to obtain more high-quality resources, win at the starting line, to improve their academic performance and learning ability, and to obtain a better future [11]. One of the most prevailing types of teaching methods for special needs students in regular education is inclusive education. In an inclusive environment, ASD students are allowed to study and live with their peers in a mainstream classroom. From a social perspective, autistic children may gradually integrate into regular learning and reduce the social discrimination against them. From the perspective of ASD students, they can receive an education equitably and contribute to their development in the social and cognitive spheres [12].

Comparing teaching methods between special and regular education, including ASD students in regular classrooms seem to be a better way for improving their overall aspects of the capacity and ability to develop comprehensively.

### **3.2 Education Evaluation**

The process of determining corresponding goals, constructing a scientific index system, systematically gathering information, theoretical and practical analysis, and assessing the effectiveness and educational status of the school system using objective value standards is referred to as education evaluation [7]. Before a student enrolls in special education, multiple assessment methods should be used to gain a better knowledge of the student's situation. The results obtained through the evaluation classify special students with different needs, making special education more targeted and efficient.

ASD students can meet children in a similar situation to themselves in the class, and learning together as a whole can provide them a sense of belonging, which is beneficial for their future growth and academic performances.

The significance of the educational evaluation of special education is as follows. In the first place, children need to be identified as special children through formal evaluation procedures before they can legally receive special education. Secondly, teachers can collect relevant information from the aspects of basic ability or subject field, to judge the current ability or achievement level of children and understand their individual special educational needs. Thirdly, to obtain special funds, preferential policies, and facilitate the management, special children need to be properly classified and given appropriate educational placement [13]. Last but not least, an important purpose of the evaluation is to provide teachers with sufficient information to formulate individual education plans and provide corresponding services.

Educational evaluations are also significant in regular education as a means of evaluating, regulating, ensuring, and enhancing teaching quality [14]. It can determine the quality and degree of teaching work, identify difficulties in teaching work, and suggest improvements. It also encourages construction and schools to modernize educational concepts, define development direction and objectives, and deepen teaching reform. The past educational evaluation practice in China has fully proved that the school has significantly improved the teaching level through the evaluation, and achieved the purpose of ensuring and improving the teaching quality. The evaluation methods of regular education are complex and specific since it permeates the entire education field. At the end of each teaching stage, a certain way is taken to assess the learning of students.

This is a positive approach for ASD students to keep on track with their situation. Do they get along well with their classmates around them? How much knowledge they can master? This allows for the prompt identification of problems and the development of a series of effective solutions to solve them. It also helps ASD students better integrate into and benefit from regular classrooms.

### **3.3 School Environment**

To better include ASD students in classes, we need to consider the school environment and staff sides as well. Every student needs to enter school to gain the chance to study. However, there can be several difficulties for ASD students to study as normal students. As a result, the environment of the school is important for them. Teachers, classmates, and the types of equipment in school can all exert influence on ASD students [15]. A

regular classroom can help ASD students to learn more efficiently and develop their abilities. At the same time, they can contact normal students.

Meanwhile, ASD students are considered to be in specific classrooms as well. It is commonly believed that students with disabilities should receive special education rather than being included in normal classroom environments. Schools that are established for disabled students can protect them well, which means they won't have to suffer through discrimination from other peers. And the facilities in the school are more suitable for them to use. Schools can hire psychological counseling teams that can provide additional support for individuals who need help. The courses at school are more fit for ASD students to study and the difficult curriculums are more suitable for the students with disabilities.

According to ASD experts, the early years of school, specifically preschool through sixth grade, are crucial in reaching children and laying the groundwork for their lifelong learning and general well-being [16]. Therefore, ASD student families must decide whether they want their kids to be taught in a regular classroom or a special education center. Parents are being asked to conduct research and speak with instructors in the public and private sectors to determine the best educational path for their children.

### **3.4 Staffs**

Not only does the school environment play an essential role to educate ASD students, but staff members are detrimental as well. Teachers are the direct subjects ASD students could contact in their educational surroundings. They are significant for they have the responsibility to communicate with ASD students and assist them to form contact with others. One of the most fundamental changes that must be made in order to help special needs students in schools that are both effective and inclusive is the teacher's role. Most teachers instruct large bodies of students in regular classrooms, hence they often have heavy workloads and limited time to collaborate with the students. They may doubt their abilities and general levels of uneasiness rise quite dramatically [17]. Thus, they need to be qualified in how to teach and cooperate with special needs children. They need to know how to communicate with ASD students.

Teachers in specific schools usually are well-trained. They are professional in establishing communication with disabled students, and they have more energy and patience for every student in the class. Teachers are the main point for ASD students' education and are able to bring positive effects to disabled students.

## **4. COMPARISON BETWEEN REGULAR AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

### **4.1 Regular Education**

#### **4.1.1 Teaching methods**

So far some common teaching methods are conducted in the regular classroom around the world: formal teaching method, question-and-answer method, practicing, discussion, demonstration method, and so on [7]. It is undeniable that teaching methods are also influenced by a nation's culture, the orientation of values, and even the education mission. These effects can be specifically reflected in teaching styles. From a perspective of teaching styles, formal teaching is still prevalent in Chinese regular classrooms [18]. The teaching style of many courses is still based on formal teaching, and the participation of students and the interaction between teachers and students have not been received. Knowledge is imparted by teachers, whether in courses in science, humanities, or arts. In the teaching process, they are more likely to emphasize authority, especially a teacher's authority. And the students only passively accept the content in their textbooks, also there is no opportunity for them to have a question. Moreover, the teachers adopt uniform teaching methods and do not pay close attention to the interest of students, and the differences in knowledge and ability between students. In America, in regular classrooms, they emphasize students' engagement. In many regular courses in the USA, teachers require their students to participate in classroom activities. Although there are also formal lectures where students passively listen and take notes, many courses take the form of discussions and asking questions. Even in some classes, students are asked to give oral presentations to illustrate the process of collecting information and writing.

#### **4.1.2. Evaluation**

Teaching evaluation is the process of evaluating the main body describing and grasping the factual materials of teaching and making value judgments on the whole and part of teaching activities according to certain standards [7]. In most regular classrooms, according to the evaluation effect, the evaluation methods can be divided into three types. Diagnostic Assessment, Formative Evaluation, and Summative Evaluation. Diagnostic evaluation is a way of evaluating students' cognition, ability, and more before a course of study. For example, before entering the school, the teacher will ask students to do some simple tests to assess their learning ability. And before class, teachers are more likely to ask for some knowledge that the students had learned to assess their mastery of knowledge so that teachers can make a good arrangement of this lesson.

### *4.1.3 School Environment:*

Multiple benefits can be demonstrated by providing inclusive educational practices to students with ASDs, including access to more advanced learning than they would likely receive in segregated, special education settings, as well as the development of stronger social skills through interactions with their classmates [3]. Under an inclusive setting, students with disabilities may give off more effort into their academics because they are trying to follow the pace with the rest of the class. This motivation benefits all students and allows teachers to see that all of them have potential and unique strengths. Studies with disabilities proved that students in regular classrooms have earned higher grades in all areas of academics. Improvements in standardized testing, school attendance averages, and independent learning have all been observed in these students[4]. Furthermore, under an inclusive environment, special needs students are able to maintain a sense of acceptance and belonging to a larger group, in the meantime providing them opportunities for peer modeling and motivation[4]. Peer collaboration can be established when students enjoy working with, helping, and interacting with one another when given the opportunity. Based on Mann's belief, by educating children from various backgrounds together, they would learn to appreciate and respect one another [4]. Inclusion can serve to teach empathy and acceptance, as well as provide opportunities for children with autism to socialize with peers their own age [19]. Students with ASDs who were integrated into inclusive classrooms had higher confidence levels, found it easier to form friendships with regular peers, had higher positive self-esteem and set higher academic goals for themselves[4].

## **4.2 Special Education**

### *4.2.1 School Environment*

Special education has evolved into a myriad of sophisticated and difficult-to-understand services during the last four decades. Special education goes beyond the standard definition of "schooling" for regular kids [20]. The major goal of special education services is to give individuals with special needs access to mainstream learning as well as the independent living skills they need to survive in society without relying on others, allowing them to build a sense of success and self-sufficiency. It functions as a classroom for students with special needs who are in the same age group as them, as specified by state rules. The system often follows a chronological continuum. Toddlers as well as many preschoolers receive services privately in their homes. Placement occasionally occurs in special education classrooms or a combination of special education and general education classes for school-age students with disabilities [20]. Adolescents and young adults with disabilities would be educated to prepare for the transition from high school to

the workplace in community living or vocational settings. Students with learning difficulties who meet special education criteria will receive support from an Individualized Education Program once they have been accepted into a special education program (IEP). This program is specifically planned to outline what is best for the student and created for students to accommodate their individual needs with the involvement of their parents [21]. The IEP would specify the type of assistance children will get, as well as assistive technologies such as braille books and speech-generating equipment that may be required for optimal instruction. It would also specify how students will be transported to and from school. Within a relatively smaller range of classroom settings, Individualized attention and educational adaptations to fit individual learning styles would be available to students. Public schooling, private tuition-based schooling, homeschooling, and private tutoring are the five types of special education alternatives [22].

### *4.2.2 Teaching resources*

Many special education materials have been developed to complement learning and development outside of the traditional classroom setting. Millions of children with special needs have benefited from specialized options such as therapy, special education tutoring, and assistive technology[23]. Therapies, like other special education resources, have changed dramatically over the last few decades. Occupational and physical therapy, animal therapy, music theory, and art therapy have all been popular therapy alternatives for children with exceptional needs in recent years. These specialized therapies can help guide and education students toward success. Due to the rapid development of technology and the increase in classroom sizes, the demand for special education tutoring has soared over the last twenty years. Children used to meet one-on-one with a special education tutor at their home or in a public environment. But the problem is that it would be difficult for students with special needs to establish a new relationship with people, which may lead to a low teaching efficiency[23]. Fortunately, technology assisted in breaking down this barrier. Online special education tutoring eliminates the issues common with face-to-face tutoring and has become more prevalent nowadays. Students can learn everything from the alphabet to pilot training through special education applications. ABC Mouse, for example, is a program utilized at Special Education Resource to help children who are having difficulty learning letters learn to read [23]. There are thousands of instructional tools available, in addition to the therapies, special education tutors, and assistive technology mentioned above. The alternatives are limitless, from full-time online special education programs to additional classes targeted to help individuals with specific special needs [23].

### 4.2.3 Teaching methods

Based on individuals' requirements, the skills they are required to learn may include self-care, daily living skills, and functional academic skills such as reading, writing, or mathematical skills. For teachers to effectively impart this knowledge, supportive services and appropriate teaching approaches are necessary. There are various teaching methods used in the field of special education for gaining skills for individuals with special needs. "Forward chaining and whole skill teaching is some examples of these methods. Physical help, verbal cues, modeling, etc, are also used in teaching individuals with special needs"[24].

### 4.2.4 Staff/faculty

Special education teachers (SETs) have an important and challenging role in special education classrooms since they are responsible for a variety of responsibilities and must address various issues at the same time. They often collaborate with teacher assistants, psychologists, and parents to accommodate the requirements of each student with disabilities. SETs are surrounded by more difficult, intense, and demanding conditions compared with mainstream teachers. Many SETs are under considerable stress due to heavy workloads and administrative tasks. They must document the progress of each student and work under the threat of litigation against parents' expectations. Because of the intensity, sensitivity, vulnerability, and commitment involved, relationships with impaired students are far more complex in regular education. Children with special needs require unique and clear instruction to help them achieve their highest potential and strive to progress beyond their limitations. Observation of inadequate classroom practices and a lack of teacher abilities in developing environments that serve the needs of students with behavioral issues were indicated in special education classroom settings [25]. Therefore, SETs need particular abilities to practice unconventional teaching methods. They must have a better grasp of the student's specific requirements and the ability to accommodate them. Teachers must be able to provide a nurturing educational atmosphere that encourages learning, understand atypical developmental traits, evaluate tasks, and keep up with current relevant teaching methods [26].

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Inclusive classroom atmosphere

Teachers' proactive engagements and attitudes are important for inclusion. Extra attention should be paid to the students with disabilities to better avoid exclusions. They should always be aware of what is going on in the classroom and be on the lookout for bullying or feelings

of insecurity. Teachers are advocated to create an embracing community where students of different backgrounds can collaborate with each other. In the community, teachers are able to consistently track students' processes and make timely adjustments. Teachers must be able to share their opinions and concerns about the implementation and management process with ease [4]. Meanwhile, free communication and friendship formation among students must be seen as an essential expectation. When teachers feel comfortable around the students, students would spontaneously feel accepted. Acceptance is an important element in making all students, especially those with disabilities, feel welcome and comfortable in the classroom. It's also the finest place for students to learn and grow intellectually and socially.

### 5.2 Flexibility

An integrated learning curriculum, classroom arrangement, and assisted facilities all should embody flexibility. Preparing a diverse curriculum enables teachers to meet the needs of students at various learning levels. The design and implementation of the curriculum are open to students if they need additional support[4]. Therefore, accommodations for students with learning disabilities must be made, such as reducing workloads or written work. To make education meaningful, all students should be challenged with a way to make their learning successful and attain desired progress for their individual learning.

In addition, flexible classroom arrangements such as seating or desk arrangements would also motivate students to some extent to learn more effectively. Considering the physical limitations of students with ASD particularly, implementing assistive hearing devices or visual supports can help students with ASD hear more clearly and better express their preferences and emotions. Visual cards and video or visual social stories can also be used to demonstrate how to communicate effectively with classmates and teachers for students with ASD [19]. Teachers can also utilize tactics such as "priming" students with visual or textual schedules so they know what to expect, keeping them regulated eventually [19]. Teachers may need to use computers, self-correcting materials, or other technology to deliver content effectively. Teachers must remain flexible throughout the integration process, taking into account that changes will occur in a variety of ways, but these changes will help teachers to meet the requirements of students with ASD and other difficulties [4].

### 5.3 Inter-schools collaboration

Given the fact that many schools lack funding and skilled and experienced teachers, the training of school teachers is beneficial to raising educational standards and

enhancing overall teaching quality. For the ultimate success of disabled students, schools should be willing to collaborate with one another. Teachers and administrators should also be willing to provide constructive support and leadership for a more inclusive environment. Schools can regularly organize autism rehabilitation training experts to guide teachers and academic exchanges and encourage teachers to participate in professional skills training in various rehabilitation institutions[10]. This may allow for more frequent co-teaching. Many secondary level schools began to recruit special education teachers and other teachers majoring mainly in education and rehabilitation, medicine, psychology, and child rehabilitation. Special education teachers appear to have gained techniques, adaptations, and accommodations to support kids with special needs since they are more experienced and specialized in certain curriculum areas [4].

#### ***5.4. Refined and targeted evaluation methods***

It is essential to develop individual educational plans for students with ASD because the characteristics of their physical and mental development in them are distinctive from those of regular students[27]. Assessment of students should be continuous and vary should be able to provide a true picture to see each children's progression. Formulating a new evaluation mechanism can meet the standards of correctly understanding the strengths and weaknesses of every student, and reasonably evaluating students' abilities from the perspective of development, as a result, promoting their healthy growth. This requires teachers to have a full comprehension of the characteristics of ASD students. For instance, some children with ASD might stand out in the areas of arts or programming. Therefore, teachers should evaluate them not only in the form of test papers but with a more comprehensive, appropriate, and reasonable evaluation plan based on their respective strengths. This evaluation system would be created with the goal of focusing on the best interests of students and creating a welcoming atmosphere for academic achievements.

#### ***5.5 Building teacher-parent relationship***

The active involvement of parents is an important element that could contribute to the successful implementation of inclusion. Parental involvement with students with special needs is critical to the student's and program's success. Parents should become active advocates for their children and be prepared to provide support to classroom instructors whenever feasible because they have been fully informed along the process. Throughout the school year, clear objectives and goal setting should be communicated between the instructor and the parents[4]. Parents should be aware of this and feel free to share their thoughts and concerns. In this way, the teachers would possess a clear view of each student,

especially the ones who need extra help. By communicating with the classroom teachers, parents are able to obtain a clearer understanding of their children and offer them as much assistance as possible.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Students with unique needs, such as ASD, must be integrated into standard education settings, which is a difficult but necessary endeavor. This problem will continue to be a popular topic in the field of special education, but decisions should be made based on the needs of individual children rather than a group of students with disabilities. Regular and special education environments have distinguished evaluations and outcomes. When it comes to successfully integrating inclusion into the regular classroom, schools must be willing to contribute their efforts to improve their students. In this way, the process of inclusion can be beneficial to all parties involved. If it is in the best interests of the children, inclusive environments should be developed, and the students themselves should be the most essential consideration while making this vital decision. Even if it contradicts their own beliefs, parents should consider what is best for their children. The support, attitudes, teaching methods, and willingness to collaborate with teachers are critical to the effective inclusion process. Having students with special needs in regular classrooms may add to the workload for teachers, but the benefits far outweigh the additional time spent on class arrangements and modifications. Inclusion should only be implemented if it benefits the student and allows them to experience an appropriate and purposeful education.

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