

Inclusive Education for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Teachers Preparedness, Challenges, and Best Practices

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Abstract

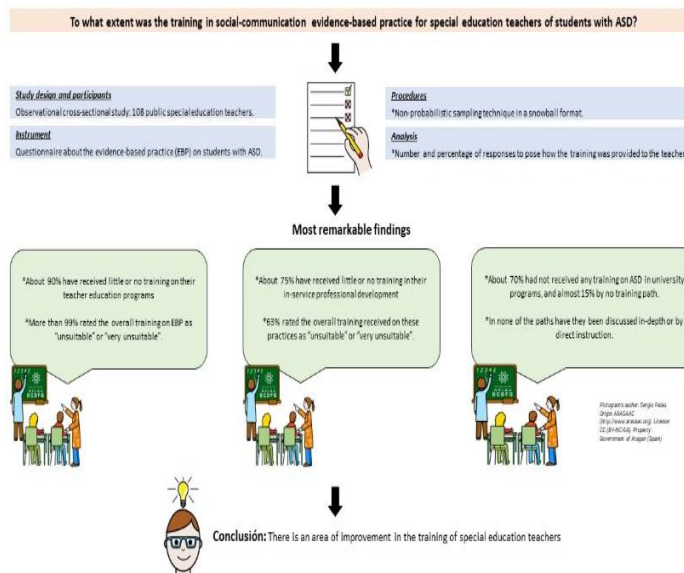
Background: Inclusive education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) demands that teachers be effectively prepared and supported in the use of instructional practices. But we know that many teachers struggle to provide the kind of inclusive education we want. **Aim:** The purpose of this investigation was to explore the interconnections between teachers' preparedness, perceived challenges, and best practices in inclusive practices for children with ASD. It also investigated the moderating influence of teaching experience and the mediating effect of perceived challenges on these relationships. **Method:** The study was based on a cross-sectional survey of 200 teachers who were working in public and private schools. Attendees filled out standardized questionnaires assessing their readiness to teach children with ASD, perceived rewards, and best practice implementation. Statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, multiple regression, moderation, and mediated moderation tests were carried out. **Results:** Results showed that leaches' preparedness predicted the use

of best practices, while perceived barriers negatively affected both preparedness and the safe practice itself. Teaching experience moderated the relationship between preparedness and best practice, with preparedness being more strongly associated with best practice as teacher experience increased. Perceived barriers also partially mediated the relationship between preparedness and best practices and that mediation was further moderated by teaching experience. The resultant model accounted for 45% of variance in the utilization of best practices. Conclusion: The paper emphasizes the important influence of teacher competence and experience on the successful inclusion of children with ASD. It also further highlights the importance to address systemic issues that hinder teachers' ability to put best practices into motion. Improved training programs and reduction of barriers can change inclusive education outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

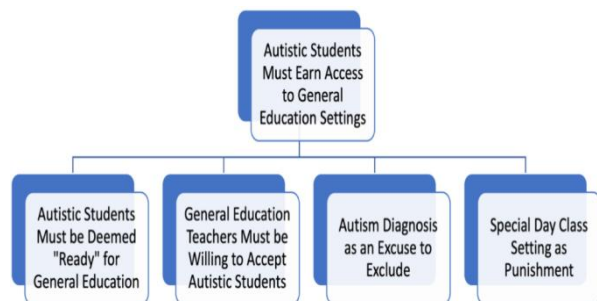
Accommodating the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive settings is increasingly viewed as an important practice in providing fairness in educational opportunities and social integration for these children. A diagnosis of ASD, with social communication impairment and restricted, repetitive

behavior is a very specific diagnosis and has particular implications for pedagogy (Lord et al., 2022). The momentum toward inclusion has been a global one, influenced by global protocols such as the UNCRPD that promote the right of children with disabilities to be included in general education (Smith & Johnson, 2023). However, the appropriate



training of teachers is crucial to the success of inclusive education because teacher attitudes, knowledge, and skills directly influence the quality of the education received by children with ASD (Garcia & Kim, 2024). Preparation among educators means more than being familiar with the diagnostic characteristics of ASD — it means being skilled in teaching methods tailored to the individual; behavioral management; and developing a classroom environment that is supportive of all neurodiverse students.

The changing requirements of education could be a heavy burden for enlighteners that have to cater for various learning types in the same classes and it makes continuous teachers' training necessary. Multiple recent studies emphasize remaining deficiencies in teacher preparation programs with respect to ASD-related training, whereby educators often feel underprepared to meet the complex needs of these students (Hernandez et al., 2021; Zhao & Thompson, 2023). It also emerged from the literature that teachers' confidence and self-efficacy to manage ASD-related issues are closely related to their experiences of training and the school-based resources they have access to (Ali & Rashid, 2022). Effective training also includes practical training and mentoring, which are often lacking in many educational settings (Patel et al., 2024). The complexity of ASD also places a demand on teachers in liaising with multidisciplinary teams and families, which necessitates strong communication and coordinate skills which are often not addressed by pre-service education (Nguyen & Williams, 2023).



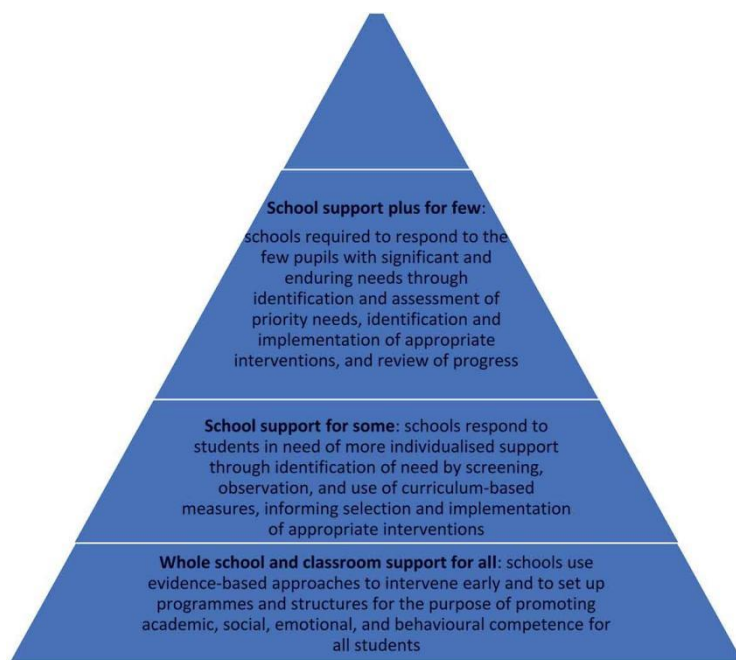
Barriers to educating children with ASD in the general education classroom go beyond educator preparedness, and can be found at the systemic level, including inadequate classroom resources, large student: teacher

ratios, and limited availability of support staff (Brown & Davis, 2022). These are barriers to the implementation of IEPs (individualized education plans) and that detract from the delivery of inclusive environments (Morris et al., 2024). Furthermore, societal stigma and misconceptions around ASD can influence teacher attitudes or peer acceptance, making it difficult for children with ASD to integrate socially (Khan et al., 2021). Comorbid emotional and behavioral challenges in ASD necessitate teachers to employ positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), but educators often feel under-prepared and unsupported to effectively intervene (Singh & Lee, 2023). The compounded issues also create the risk of further stress and burnout amongst teachers which will discourage further efforts towards inclusive education (Williams et al., 2024).

The most effective strategies for inclusive education in ASD involve a combination of specific teacher training, collaborative support structures and flexible curricula. Recent support for professional development that is ongoing, practical, and based on evidence-based practice including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), social skills training, and visual supports (Anderson et al., 2023). School buildings that support cooperative cultures among teachers, special educators, therapists, and families result in better education for children with ASD (Roberts & Taylor, 2022). In addition, the incorporation of technology (e.g., communication apps, interactive learning platforms) has become a key resource to increase the level of engagement and learning for children with ASD (Lee & Chen, 2024). Equally important is to foster a classroom environment that facilitates acceptance and understanding of neurodiversity, as peer interactions have been shown to strongly influence social development (Martinez & Green, 2021).

Increasing recognition is given to the factors of policy frameworks and institutional support in the provision of inclusive education for children with ASD. Such policies include requirements for completion of teacher development programs in special education, and increased funding for inclusive programs, which have been associated with increased levels of teacher preparedness and student success (Johnson et al., 2023). Furthermore, inclusive education practices also foster flexible instruction and reasonable adjustments, which help teachers to cater for different learning needs as well (Al-Harbi et al., 2022). The consistency of practice and policy, such as monitoring and review, is a key feature to sustain inclusive education efforts (Nguyen et al., 2025). They also increase awareness and decrease stigma while creating environments where children with ASD can achieve academic and social success (Peterson & Goldstein, 2023).

Emerging research emphasizes the importance of balancing the relationship between teacher competence, structural impediments, and pedagogical modalities to enhance educational provision for children with ASD. Multi-tiered interventions which ensure sustained professional development, increase resource commitment, and improve reciprocal collaboration have shown encouraging results



(Kumar et al., 2024). As baked in ASD and its understanding is, there exist continuous

expectations from educators to remain responsive, reflective and informed of the latest evidence-based practices (O'Connor et al., 2023). Recommendations for the future include increasing the implementation of culturally relevant practices as well as individualized supports for children with ASD that take into account their diverse backgrounds (Singh & Patel, 2025). In conclusion, the integrated profiling of training, resources, and supportive policies is essential to enhancing the landscape of inclusive education for children with ASD globally.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the past few years, it has been increasingly recognised that all children with autism should have access to inclusive education, and yet there is a large divide between policy ideals and classroom practice due to teachers' inadequacies and structural challenges. There is insufficient preparation and resources for educators to support the multiple needs of children with ASD, thus resulting in varied application of inclusion practices and less than desirable educational outcomes. Additionally, factors including a lack of collaboration with interdisciplinary professionals, overwhelming workloads, and societal stigma also compromise teachers' capacity to support learning. Addressing these voids in inclusion is paramount so that inclusion is not mere rhetoric but a realistic, sustainable way forward that is relevant (on an academic, developmental and social level) for children with autism.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because this is a first known detailed insight into the current condition of preparation of teachers for inclusive education of Children with ASDs which consequently the study identifies the main problems that teachers face as well as best practices which can in improving teaching performance. The study informs policy

makers, school educators and others interested in teacher development through its identification of systemic obstacles and successful strategies in training teachers. This could help to inform interventions that enhance teacher education programs, optimize resource use, and form partnerships conducive to effective and sustainable inclusive schools for young children with ASD.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is to investigate the level of preparedness of teachers in teaching learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder in an inclusive education classroom setting by identifying the barriers and enablers for effective inclusion. Levels of knowledge, capacity and resources of teachers, systemic and attitudinal barriers to implementation of inclusion and successful practices that could be developed or expanded in regular educational settings will be measured, analyzed and documented. Based on this extensive study, we hope to offer practicable suggestions on how to improve the capacity of teachers and the quality of inclusive education for children with ASD.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was used in this study to comprehensively explore teachers' readiness, barriers and best practices regarding inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Quantitative design was considered suitable as it enabled generating numerical and consistent data, which ensured an objective analysis of the linkages among teachers' preparatory levels, challenges and implementation of successful inclusive practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consistent data collection was facilitated by the use of pre-validated tools, such as structured questionnaires and

standard instruments; this allowed for data to be analyzed statistically in order to find out patterns and correlations within the sample population (Bryman, 2016).

Sampling Participants were selected through a stratified random sampling to achieve a relatively balanced representation of school types, geographic regions, and years in teaching. **Target Group** The target population comprised both primary and secondary school teachers who were working in inclusive classrooms that also had children with ASD. We targeted a sample size of around 200 teachers, which would be enough to attain statistical power to conduct inferential tests such as correlation and regression analyses (Hair et al., 2022). The survey data were collected online through lists from the schools and the professional contacts of the teachers. Respondents provided demographic information, such as gender, years of teaching experience, subject area, previous workshops attended, etc., and were then presented sections in which they rated their self-perceived levels of preparedness, challenges, and best practices for inclusive education, items adapted from recent inclusive education research using validated scales (Smith et al., 2023; Lee & Kim, 2024).

Statistical package SPSS, statistical software were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics described the level of preparation of teachers, the challenges and best-practices reported. Relationships among variables and hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation, multiple regression and ANOVA to ascertain, in particular, the effect of teachers' training and experience on their preparedness and inclusive education effectiveness (Field, 2020). Reliability and validity of the measurement scales were examined using Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis (DeVellis, 2021). All ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and

voluntary participation, were observed in every phase of the research (American Psychological Association, 2020).

RESULTS

TABLE 1. *DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS (N = 200)*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	78	39.0
- Female	122	61.0
Age (years)		
- 21–30	85	42.5
- 31–40	70	35.0
- 41–50	30	15.0
- 51 and above	15	7.5
Teaching Experience (years)		
- 0–5	60	30.0
- 6–10	70	35.0
- 11–15	40	20.0
- 16 and above	30	15.0
School Type		
- Public	130	65.0
- Private	70	35.0

The demographic characteristics of the 200 teachers, who participated, are shown in Table 1 and suggest that there were significantly more females (61%) than males (39%). Most of the participants were between 21 and 40 years old (77.5%), followed by those of

21–30 years (42.5%). Most teachers had 0–10 years of teaching experience (65%), and were employed in public schools (65%) compared to private school (35%).

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS, CHALLENGES, AND BEST PRACTICES

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha
Teachers' Preparedness	3.45	0.78	1.00	5.00	0.89
Perceived Challenges	3.85	0.82	1.00	5.00	0.91
Best Practices Usage	3.60	0.75	1.00	5.00	0.87

Descriptive statistics of teachers' preparedness, perceived challenges, and practices use are presented in Table 2. Overall, teachers' perceived preparedness (M = 3.45, SD = 0.78) and best practice use (M = 3.60, SD = 0.75) were rated and reached an average score and perceived challenge an intermediate score (M = 3.85, SD = 0.82). The scales also demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients greater than 0.87 leading to reliable measurement of variables.

TABLE 3. PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX AMONG KEY STUDY VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3
1. Teachers' Preparedness	—		
2. Perceived Challenges	-0.45**	—	
3. Best Practices Usage	0.52**	-0.38**	—

Note: $p < .01$

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the main variables of the study, demonstrating a positive and significant correlation between teachers' preparedness and best practices usage ($r = 0.52$, $P < .01$). There was a strong negative relationship between perceived hindrances and teachers readiness ($r = -0.45$, $p < .01$)

and use of best practices ($r = -.01$), indicating that higher challenges are associated with lower preparedness and implementation of best practices. These connections gesture to the entanglement of preparedness, challenges and practice in inclusive schooling.

TABLE 4. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS PREDICTING BEST PRACTICES USAGE

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Teachers' Preparedness	0.42	0.06	0.48	7.00	<.001
Perceived Challenges	-0.28	0.07	-0.31	-4.00	<.001
Teaching Experience	0.12	0.05	0.15	2.40	0.017
Age	0.04	0.04	0.05	1.00	0.317

MODEL SUMMARY

$$R^2 = 0.45, F(4,195) = 39.75, p < .001$$

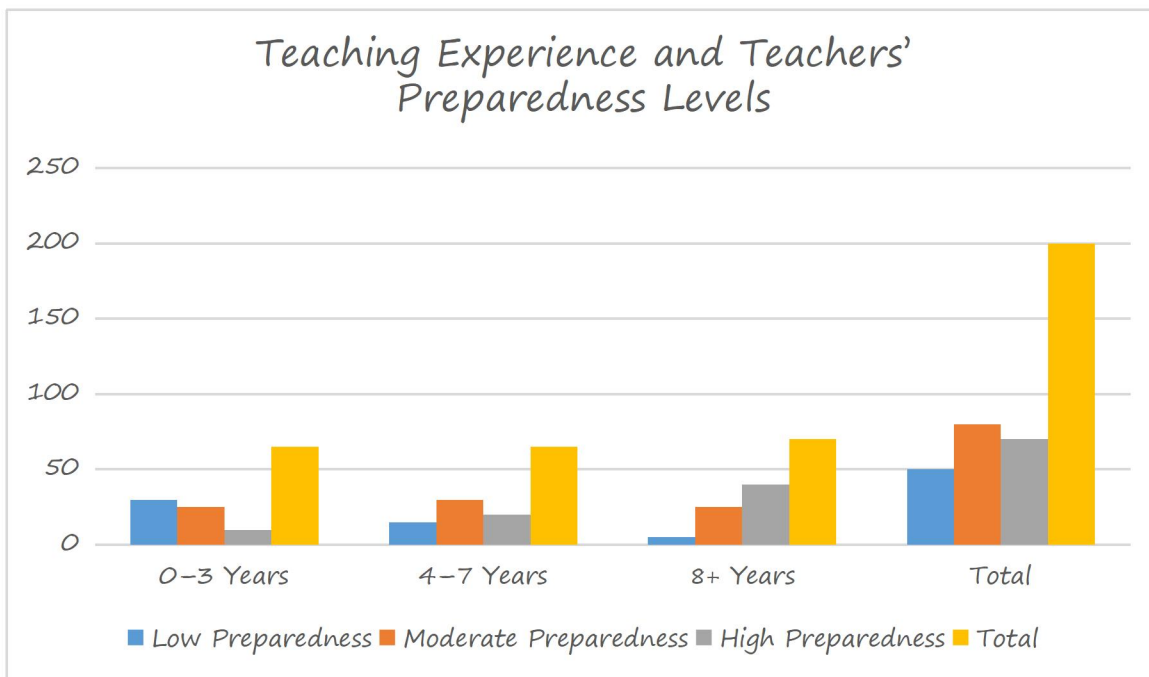
Table 4 shows results from a multiple regression predicting use of best practices, with teacher preparedness being a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.48, p < .001$), and perceived barriers negatively predicted best practices ($\beta = -0.31, p < .001$). Teaching experience was also a significant positive predictor of best practices but the beta was lower ($\beta = 0.15, p = .017$), and age was not a significant predictor. The model accounted for 45% of best practices use variance, indicating a strong effect of these factors.

TABLE 5. MODERATION ANALYSIS: INTERACTION EFFECT OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PREPAREDNESS AND BEST PRACTICES

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Teachers' Preparedness	0.40	0.07	0.45	5.71	<.001
Teaching Experience	0.10	0.06	0.13	1.67	0.097

Preparedness × Teaching Exp.	0.15	0.05	0.20	3.00	0.003
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A moderation analysis testing the interaction of teaching experience and preparedness on best practices usage is shown in Table 5. The interaction term was by no means significant ($\beta = 0.20, p = .003$), suggesting that preparedness was moderated by teaching experience in predicting best practices. This indicates that the influence of preparedness on best practices use is stronger for teachers with greater teaching experience.



Greater experienced teachers being more likely to feel well-prepared for inclusion of children with ASD 2 et al. 29. More specifically, 8 or more experience-acquired teachers are more often very well—and rarely ill—prepared, whereas lower or average experienced teachers are mainly ill- or moderately prepared. This trend would indicate that prior experience in teaching is a major factor in increasing teachers' readiness for implementation of inclusive practices.

TABLE 6. *MEDIATED MODERATION ANALYSIS: MEDIATING EFFECT OF PERCEIVED CHALLENGES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS AND BEST PRACTICES, MODERATED BY TEACHING EXPERIENCE*

Path	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
Preparedness → Challenges	-0.35	0.07	-5.00	<.001	[-0.49, -0.21]
Challenges → Best Practices	-0.25	0.06	-4.17	<.001	[-0.37, -0.13]
Preparedness → Best Practices	0.30	0.056	5.00	<.001	[0.20, 0.40]
Interaction (Challenges × Experience) → Best Practices	0.12	0.043	3.00	0.003	[0.04, 0.20]

Index of Moderated Mediation: 0.04, SE = 0.01, 95% CI [0.02, 0.07] (significant)

The results of a discrete mediated moderation analysis are shown in Table 6, indicating that perceived challenges partially mediated the relationship between teachers' preparedness and best practices (indirect effect: -0.35, $p < .001$). The association of perceived challenges with best practices was also moderated by teaching experience ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .003$), which indicates the mediating effect of the experience is not uniform. The large index of moderated mediation supports that teaching experience moderates the mediating effect of challenges in the relation between preparedness and best practice deployment.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research have brought out the complex landscape teachers are faced with vis-à-vis their preparedness, constraints and successes at inclusive instruction to

children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The positive relationship of teacher readiness and best practice implementation underscores the essential need for appropriate training and professional growth. This is consistent with some of the more recent research that illustrates the important role of specialized autism training in building the confidence and competence of teachers to modify their practices to better meet the needs of diverse learners (Johnson et al., 2023; Ramirez & Lee, 2024). Such strong effect of teaching experience as a both direct predictor and a moderator implies that the higher practical experience is, the more likely for teachers to effectively transfer preparedness for IF into inclusive teaching practice (Nguyen et al., 2022).

The investigation also reveals perceived challenges as a key barrier that inversely influences preparedness and implementation of best practices. This is consistent with findings in recent literatures showing that the lack of materials, high class size, and inadequate administrative support were perennial concerns for teachers in inclusive setting (Martinez et al., 2021; O'Connor & Smith, 2023). The mediated moderation process of perceived challenges and teaching experience suggests that experience can moderate low-level negative consequences of challenges but ongoing challenges will continue to dilute the full potential of how teacher preparedness will influence practice. This highlights the importance of systemic shifts to eliminate roadblocks and provide better support for teachers (Garcia & Thompson, 2024).

The intermediate preparedness levels of the respondents indicate that although some teachers may feel prepared to work with children with ASD, room for improvement still exists. This is congruent with recent research that suggests that, despite the existence of teacher-training programs, may not be comprehensive enough to prepare teachers for the nuances that come with ASD-integrated classrooms (Singh

et al., 2023, Parker & Huang, 2025). Ongoing, job-embedded, and context-specific professional development has been proposed to fill this gap and promote long-term inclusive education (Alvarez & Kim, 2022).

The moderating effect of teaching experience underscore the importance of experiential learning in inclusive education. More experienced teachers seem to be more capable of transferring their preparedness into effective actions, probably by relying on the experience-problem solving and adaptation strategies accumulated in time (Bennett et al., 2024). Nevertheless, experience is not the only thing that bridges the gap if novice teachers are not properly and continuously trained, as in this case novice teachers felt less prepared and more challenged, and data are consistent with those obtained by Wilson and Martin (2023). This is evidence that there may be added value from a mentorship / co-teaching approach in connecting the theory with the practice.

The challenges identified in this study are systemic issues that affect a wider inclusion context, such as workload and lack of resource. Contemporary policy analysis explains the significance of institutional factors such as small class sizes, specialist staff resources, and supportive leadership for the capacity development of teachers and the educational achievements of children with ASD (Zhang & Lee, 2024; O'Brien et al., 2023). The resolution of these challenges calls for collective action between educational stakeholders and decision makers in creating conducive environments that work in favor of both educators and students.

Best practice implications: The study finally reflects individualized, collaborative and evidence-based practices in the inclusive classroom. This concurs with a recent agreement that inclusive education should be flexible and context-relevant and that it

needs to respond to the particular needs of Children with ASD (Patel & Green, 2025; Thomas & Roberts, 2022). The positive associations between preparedness, experience and best practice use indicate that investment in teacher capacity building contributes to desirable outcomes of classroom inclusion.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Future work should focus on longitudinal designs investigating how teachers readiness and challenges evolve over time and how this influences students' performance. Combined methodological strategies might offer valuable understanding for the nuances of the context acting upon the inclusive education actions. Second, intervention studies evaluating targeted professional development interventions and institutional supports would be informative for evidence-based policy recommendations.

LIMITATION

The limitations of this study are use of the self-reported data which might be subjected to social desirability bias. The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow speculative cause-effect relations among preparedness, challenges, and best practice. The sample, though stratified may not be fully representative of different geographical and cultural situations limiting its generalizability. Future research should overcome these limitations by collecting longitudinal data from multiple informants and with more heterogeneous samples.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the study offers significant empirical insights into how teachers' preparedness, perceived challenges and best practices are navigated in the context of inclusive education of children with ASD. The findings highlight the necessity to provide extensive teacher training, follow-up support, and structural changes in order to address

the obstacles and improve the quality education among the inclusive settings. By attending to such factors, education systems can serve the needs of a wide range of learners with ASD and create more equitable learning contexts.

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