



Current Situation of Inclusive Education for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Attending some Primary Schools in Ho Chi Minh City

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ABSTRACT: This article studies the current state of inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in several primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. The research focuses on evaluating the level of inclusive education implementation, the awareness and competence of teachers, and the support available to students with ASD in the school environment. The results show that inclusive education has received attention and implementation, but some difficulties still exist, such as limitations in teachers' expertise, lack of support resources, and ineffective coordination between schools and families. Therefore, this paper proposes several measures to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorder in primary schools.

KEYWORDS: Autism spectrum disorder, Current Situation, Elementary school, Inclusive education, Primary School.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been observed to be on the rise globally as well as in Vietnam. According to data from the "Global Burden of Disease" by Ministry of Education and Training (2020), the number of people diagnosed with and living with ASD has increased sharply since 1990, indicating that this is no longer a problem solely for the healthcare sector but has become a challenge for the entire education system. However, the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools still faces many difficulties related to teacher capacity, support conditions, and coordination between schools and families. Given the increasing number of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) attending inclusive education in Ho Chi Minh City, research into the current state of inclusive education in primary schools is necessary to propose measures to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education for this group of students.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1. Some related concepts

- The concept of inclusive education is an educational approach for all children, in which children with special needs (children with disabilities) learn alongside typically developing children in mainstream schools in their own communities. Inclusive education is based on a societal perspective on the understanding of children with disabilities. The causes of disability are not solely due to individual deficiencies but also to limitations in the societal support system.
- ("Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental condition involving persistent challenges with social communication, restricted interests and repetitive behavior. While autism is considered a lifelong condition, the need for services and supports because of these challenges varies among individuals with autism" (Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), n.d).

2.2. Classification of Autism

2.2.1. According to the time

Typical autism (congenital): symptoms appear gradually during the first 3 years.

Atypical autism (acquired): symptoms appear after age 3 and are accompanied by impaired language and communication development.



2.2.2. According to intelligence quotient

N0	Intelligence index			
	High intelligence, able to speak.	High IQ, doesn't speak.	Low IQ, able to speak.	Low intelligence, unable to speak.
1	Good vision skills	Good vision skills	They frequently yell loudly and may become aggressive as they get older.	Sensitive to sounds or noises
2	They may learn to read early (2-3 years old).	Children may be overly sensitive to auditory stimulation.	Having self-stimulation behavior	Children are often silent.
3	Children are very passive	Children have differences between speech skills and motor skills.	Defective	Knowing how to use a few words or a few gestures
4	They have a tendency to be obsessed.	The behavior may be mildly abnormal.	Say it again	There is particular interest in machinery.
5	Better understanding of adult behavior		Poor concentration	Inappropriate social skills
6				No relationship with other people

2.2.3. By degree

- Mild autism: Children can make eye contact, speak, but have limited interaction with others.
- Moderate autism: Children can make eye contact, have limited interaction with others, and speak, but with limited ability.
- Severe autism: Children do not make eye contact, do not interact with others, and cannot speak.

2.3. Characteristics of autism spectrum disorder in children

Children with autism spectrum disorder often exhibit unique behavioral characteristics. These behaviors can be categorized into several main groups, each with distinct manifestations.

N0	Field	Characteristic
1	Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty in using and understanding language: Children may have difficulty speaking or understanding what others say. - Lack of nonverbal communication: Children may not use gestures, facial expressions, or eye contact to communicate. Repetitive language use: Some children may repeat sentences they have heard without understanding the meaning.
2	Regarding social behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of social interaction skills: Children may not pay attention to those around them or participate in group games. Difficulty sharing emotions: Children may not know how to express their own emotions or recognize the emotions of others. - Lack of empathy: Children may not understand or care about the feelings of others.



3	Regarding repetitive behavior	Children may perform repetitive actions such as waving, jumping, or spinning.
4	Regarding special interests	Children may be very fond of certain objects or activities and may spend a lot of time focusing on them. Difficulty accepting change: Children may react strongly to changes in routine or their surroundings.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Current situation regarding the number and severity of children with developmental disorders.

3.1.1. Quantity

In the 2024-2025 school year, the total number of students attending primary schools will be 6822.

Table 1. Annual statistical reports of primary schools.

N0	School	RLPTK Students (School year 2024-2025)	All students in the school (School year 2024-2025)
1	Phu Tho Primary School	22	1922
2	Tan An Primary School	17	1637
3	Tuong Binh Hiep Primary School	19	1585
Total		58	4144

3.1.2. Level of RLPTK in children

In these primary schools, the majority of children with intellectual disabilities have mild intellectual abilities (44.72%), followed by moderate abilities (44.72%), severe abilities (15.48%), and very severe abilities (a small percentage: 5.04%).

Table 2. Annual statistical reports of primary schools.

N0	Level	Number (People)	Percentage (%)
1	Light	26	44,8
2	Medium	16	27,6
3	Heavy	9	15,5
4	Very heavy	7	12,1

Thus, the above statistics on children with developmental disorders in some primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City show that this group of children accounts for a significant proportion. It is necessary to classify them and provide timely support to help them participate in groups with their peers, promoting their development as well as the development of the entire education system in general and in some primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City in particular.

3.2. Current situation of inclusive education for children with developmental disorders.

To achieve the research objectives, this paper uses a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the collected data.

The research team developed a questionnaire which was distributed to 128 teachers and administrators working at the three primary schools mentioned above. The survey data was processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis techniques.

3.2.1. The current state of teachers' awareness regarding the importance of inclusive education activities for children with developmental disorders.



N0	Content	Very Necessary	(%)	Necessary	(%)	Not Necessary	(%)	Unnecessary	(%)
1	Implementing inclusive education for children with developmental disorders is fulfilling children's rights.	69	53,9	48	37,4	7	5,46	4	3,24
2	Helping children participate in learning and activities with their friends will help them develop and enhance their communication and social skills.	59	46,1	37	28,9	18	14,4	14	10,9
3	Children are exposed to diverse situations, thereby learning to observe, imitate, adjust their behavior, and adapt to social norms.	52	40,6	43	33,6	19	14,9	14	10,9

Based on the above results, we can affirm that the majority of teachers correctly understand the overall objectives of inclusive education activities for children with developmental disorders in primary schools, with 91.1% of teachers believing that this content is necessary and very necessary. However, when it comes to the specific objectives of inclusive education activities for children with developmental disorders in primary schools, a large number of teachers are still hesitant or do not fully understand the true importance of this activity, accounting for 25.3% for content 2 and 25.8% for content 3.

3.2.2. *The current state of effectiveness of knowledge and skills acquired by teachers regarding inclusive education for children with developmental disorders.*

N0	Mission	Very good	(%)	Good	(%)	Not Good	(%)	Not good	(%)
1	In the primary school teacher training program.	39	30,47	36	28,12	36	28,12	17	13,29
2	From expanded thematic workshops.	35	27,35	32	25,0	35	27,35	26	20,3
3	Learn on your own, find information independently.	27	21,1	33	25,8	44	34,4	24	18,7

The survey results show that teachers' knowledge and skills regarding inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in the formal primary school teacher training program are limited, partly due to the insufficient number of credits for the module (2+0). Alternatively, teachers may not fully understand the process, which could hinder inclusive education, accounting for 55.9%



of those rated as good or very good. A significant percentage (over 60%) of teachers also received good or very good ratings for self-learning and independent research.

From this, we can conclude that the level of understanding and perspective of teachers greatly influences the development of children with intellectual disabilities. Teachers are not only companions to the children but also support their families. When teachers are properly trained and have specialized knowledge in special education, they will understand the characteristics of the children, as well as the specifics of the job, thereby supporting the children more appropriately, professionally, and effectively. The teachers' thinking, attitude, and treatment of children will be adjusted towards respect and fairness, handling situations in a way that is appropriate to the child's development. At the same time, teachers will also be able to provide better counseling and support to the families of children with intellectual disabilities.

3.2.3. *The current situation of activities supporting the provision of knowledge and skills to children with developmental disorders in inclusive education at primary schools.*

To assess the effectiveness of equipping children with developmental disorders with knowledge in the curriculum, the group conducted a survey and obtained the following results:

N0	Content	Very good	(%)	Good	(%)	Not Good	(%)	Not good	(%)
1	Providing basic knowledge in subjects appropriate to the abilities of children with developmental disorders and the curriculum.	23	18,0	41	32,0	43	33,6	21	16,4
2	Developing basic skills in subjects appropriate to the abilities of children with developmental disabilities and the curriculum.	21	16,4	36	28,12	45	35,1	26	20,3
3	Provide facilities and equipment that are appropriate for the abilities of children with developmental disabilities and the curriculum.	27	21,1	34	26,6	43	33,6	24	18,7

Regarding the section "Providing basic subject knowledge suitable for children with developmental disorders and the curriculum," the 50% rating of "poor/unsatisfactory" indicates that half of the teachers are dissatisfied with the provision of basic knowledge to children with developmental disorders. This demonstrates that the implementation of this content still has many limitations in teaching practice. The fact that subject knowledge is not adjusted to suit the abilities of children with developmental disorders may be due to the children's difficulty in absorbing learning content, especially in abstract subjects, or the teachers' difficulty in personalizing the content and teaching methods.

Regarding the section "Developing basic subject skills suitable for children with learning disabilities and the curriculum," 58.1% of respondents rated it as unsatisfactory/not good. This indicates that the requirements of the educational program and the goal of



supporting children's integration into learning are not met. This suggests the need for improvements in teaching methods, supporting materials, and the professional competence of teachers.

Regarding the section on "Providing facilities and equipment suitable for children with learning disabilities and the curriculum," teachers gave more diverse assessments. 21.1% of teachers rated it as very good, 26.6% rated it as good, but 33.6% felt it was only moderately good, and 18.7% rated it as poor. This indicates a significant gap between the provision of facilities and equipment suitable for children with learning disabilities and the need for improved access to learning.

3.2.3. *The current situation regarding support, consultation, and access to policies for families of children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive education.*

In inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), counseling for parents and families plays a crucial role. Counseling not only helps parents better understand their child's condition but also provides them with effective methods for more holistic care and education.

N0	Content	Very good	(%)	Good	(%)	Not Good	(%)	Not good	(%)
1	Provide counseling and guidance to parents on how to care for and raise children with developmental disorders at home.	20	15,6	30	23,4	52	40,6	26	20,4
2	Partial waivers or reductions of fees for inclusive education and participation in extracurricular activities.	44	34,4	46	35,9	26	20,3	12	9,4
3	Connecting support services, development funds, and relevant departments, agencies, and centers for legal and policy advice.	19	14,8	28	21,8	46	35,9	35	27,35

According to the survey results in item number 1, with 61.0% of teachers stating that they rarely conduct counseling and guidance activities for parents, it shows that coordination between schools and families in caring for and nurturing children with developmental disorders has not been given sufficient attention and is not systematic. Measures are needed to strengthen support for these children both at school and at home.

Notably, regarding the section on "Partial waiver or reduction of inclusive education fees and participation in extracurricular activities," in addition to the survey results showing 70.3% of respondents giving good and very good ratings, we also received positive feedback from teachers during interviews, indicating that the school has implemented relatively well the policies supporting the costs for children with learning disabilities. Partial waivers or reductions help alleviate the financial burden on families while allowing children to participate more fully in academic and extracurricular activities with their peers.

Besides implementing the regulations and policies prescribed by the State, many teachers and schools also proactively organize practical support activities, such as:



Organizing fundraising activities within the school to support children's learning expenses.

Mobilizing contributions and sharing from the collective of teachers, students, and social organizations.

Integrating extracurricular activities that encourage the participation of children with intellectual disabilities creates opportunities for them to better integrate into the school environment.

The survey results regarding the topic "Connecting support services, development funds, and relevant departments, units, and centers for policy and legal advice" showed less than satisfactory results, with 63.25% still choosing the topic as "not good" or "not good." This indicates that the collaboration and mobilization of external support resources for children with developmental disorders are still limited. This may stem from the fact that schools and teachers have not had many opportunities or conditions to establish cooperative relationships with relevant organizations and units, as well as a lack of specific and regular coordination mechanisms between schools and community support services.

Furthermore, some teachers lack information about organizations, support funds, or legal policy counseling centers, leading to limited access to and utilization of support resources for children with developmental disorders and their families. This lack of connection may prevent parents from fully accessing necessary professional, legal, or financial support services.

3.2.4. *Current situation of factors affecting inclusive education for children with developmental disorders.*

Advantages:

Support forces are aware of the need to support children with intellectual disabilities during their studies and help them integrate well into society.

The school provides support for the children and implements activities to help children with intellectual disabilities and their families, such as waiving health insurance policies, reducing tuition fees, and providing life skills training to give them more opportunities to play with their peers and integrate better into society.

Classifying the severity level of each child with developmental disorders allows for the development of more optimal learning and assessment methods for their development.

There are counseling rooms available to provide timely support for the difficulties children are facing, thereby building trust and helping children gain confidence in communication, while also understanding the problems they are experiencing and providing timely support.

Challenges:

Some families are not yet aware of their children's condition and are therefore quite negligent in caring for them.

Teachers do not have a full understanding of children with developmental disorders.

Lack of adequate facilities at the school.

Teachers lack the skills to support these children in integrating into society.

3.3. **Some measures to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education for children with developmental disorders.**

3.3.1. *Measure 1: Developing communication and social interaction skills for children with developmental disorders.*

With the goal of training and developing communication and social interaction skills, helping children with developmental disorders gradually understand, express, and maintain positive relationships in the school environment, teachers need to organize purposeful communication activities such as interactive games, small group activities, or the "companion" model. This allows children to practice speech, gestures, and eye contact in familiar, low-pressure situations. Guide children to use verbal and nonverbal language naturally, from short conversations to basic emotional expressions, while providing slow, clear, and encouraging feedback to acknowledge all of the children's communication efforts.

Simultaneously, collaboration with families ensures that children receive continuous training both at home and at school, creating a unified and sustainable support system. Thanks to these gentle yet consistent influences, children gradually become more confident in their interactions, expand their world, and progressively integrate into the collective life of the group.

3.3.2. *Measure 2: Implement appropriate educational programs and methods for children with developmental disorders.*

The goal of this approach is to apply appropriate educational programs and methods to meet the specific needs of each child with intellectual disabilities, helping them to progress in cognitive, communication, behavioral, and social skills within an inclusive environment. The application of suitable educational programs and methods plays a particularly important role in supporting children with intellectual disabilities, guiding interventions scientifically and tailored to each child's individual needs.

When approaching international educational programs, schools and teachers need to select and adapt them flexibly to suit the



culture and practical conditions of Vietnam. Some programs are considered suitable and can be effectively implemented, such as Small Steps, Catherine Maurice's Behavioral Intervention, and PEP-R. These programs provide a system of scientifically-based exercises, supporting comprehensive assessment and intervention for children from an early age.

Besides selecting the right curriculum, teachers need to employ flexible teaching methods to meet the learning abilities of each child. One-on-one interaction between teacher and child enhances engagement, develops language skills, and reduces communication barriers. Exercises are designed to be simple, clear, and broken down into steps, making them easy for children to understand, perform, and maintain focus. During the teaching process, teachers also need to pay attention to adjusting behavior and carefully observing children's expressions to provide timely support and reinforce positive responses.

3.3.2..Measure 3: Strengthening counseling and guidance activities for parents on how to care for and nurture children with developmental disorders at home, as well as improving coordination between family, school, and society.

The goal is to strengthen coordinated efforts between families, schools, and society to form a unified, continuous, and sustainable support network, ensuring that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) receive comprehensive care, education, and development throughout their lives. First and foremost, the family is the most stable emotional support system and the environment for early intervention that has the most profound influence on children with ASD. Therefore, parents need to play an active and proactive role in all collaborative activities with the school by fully attending meetings, individual counseling sessions, and family support programs. At the same time, parents should regularly communicate with teachers about their child's behavior, psychological changes, or progress to promptly update and adjust educational methods. In addition, maintaining communication skills, independence, and social behavior training at home according to the professional guidance of the teacher is extremely important.

The perseverance, empathy, and unconditional love from the family create a "safe zone" that helps children confidently explore, readily interact, and become more self-assured on their journey to integration. Building on this foundation from the family, the school plays the role of a "coordinating center" for educational activities for children with developmental disorders.

Teachers need to build and maintain stable and effective communication channels with parents, such as Zalo groups, electronic communication logs, or regular meetings, to ensure that all information is exchanged promptly and consistently. The school should also organize professional training sessions to help parents understand methods for supporting their children at home, thereby creating consistency in the educational process.

Furthermore, proactively connecting with psychology experts, centers for children with disabilities, and social organizations plays a crucial role in supplementing specialized resources, helping schools adjust educational plans to suit the individual needs of each student. Thanks to this collaboration, the process of supporting children in the school environment becomes more scientific, continuous, and effective.

Alongside the efforts of families and schools, society contributes to expanding learning, experiential, and communication spaces for children with developmental disorders. Community organizations and local groups can participate in building inclusive playgrounds, organizing extracurricular activities, or practical experience programs to create opportunities for children to interact, exercise, and learn how to communicate in a richer environment.

Simultaneously, non-profit organizations, skills clubs, or professional support centers can play a role in communicating and raising community awareness about the rights of children with intellectual disabilities to be respected, understood, and supported. When society participates actively and comprehensively, children have the opportunity to experience many real-life situations, thereby gradually developing life skills, increasing self-confidence, and integrating more naturally into the wider community.

4. CONCLUSION

From the above results, it can be affirmed that to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorder in primary schools, comprehensive solutions are needed, such as strengthening professional development for teachers in special education and inclusive education, building a friendly and flexible learning environment, developing professional support resources, and promoting close cooperation between schools, families, and professional institutions. These solutions will contribute to improving the quality of inclusive education, creating conditions for children with autism spectrum disorder to develop comprehensively and integrate effectively into the school environment.



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