Primary School Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

A Field Study at Chahid Boussnah Ali Primary School in Tizi Ouzou as a Model

اتجاهات أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي نحو دمج الأطفال ذوي اضطراب طيف التوحد في المدارس الابتدائية

دراسة ميدانية بابتدائية الشهيد بوسنة علي تيزي وزو أنموذجا

Saifeddine Djedidi[1,*]
University of Tizi Ouzou (Algeria), saifeddine.djedidi@ummto.dz

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the attitudes of primary school teachers toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular primary schools. The fieldwork was conducted at Chahid Boussnah Ali Primary School in the Wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, using a purposive sample of 26 teachers. The study adopted a descriptive–analytical approach, and a questionnaire specifically designed to measure teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion process was utilized. After statistical analysis of the data using SPSS, the findings revealed the following:

-The attitudes of primary school teachers toward the inclusion of children with ASD were generally positive and at a moderate level.

-There were no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion attributable to gender at the 0.05 significance level.

-There were no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion attributable to academic specialization at the 0.05 significance level.

Keywords: Attitudes; Primary School Teachers; Inclusion; Inclusive Education; Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

الملخص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف اتجاهات أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي نحو دمج الأطفال ذوي اضطراب طيف التوحد في المدارس الابتدائية العادية، وقد أُجريت الدراسة ميدانياً في مدرسة الشهيد بوسنة علي الابتدائية بولاية تيزي وزو، على عينة قصدية مكوّنة من 26 أستاذاً ،اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، واستُخدم استبيان معدّ خصيصاً لقياس اتجاهات الأساتذة نحو عملية الدمج، وبعد المعالجة الإحصائية للبيانات باستخدام البرنامج الإحصائيSPSS ، توصّلت النتائج إلى ما يأتي:

–تتسم اتجاهات أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي نحو دمج الأطفال ذوي اضطراب طيف التوحد بأنها إيجابية وذات مستوى متوسط.

–لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في اتجاهات الأساتذة نحو الدمج تُعزى إلى متغير الجنس عند مستوى دلالة 0.05.

–لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في اتجاهات الأساتذة نحو الدمج تُعزى إلى متغير التخصص الأكاديمي عند مستوى دلالة 0.05.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الاتجاهات؛ أساتذة التعليم الابتدائي؛ الدمج؛ التربية الدامجة؛ اضطراب طيف التوحد.

* Corresponding author, e-mail

1- Introduction

In the modern era, education has become one of the essential foundations of human and societal development. Its mission extends beyond transmitting knowledge to promoting equity, civic values, and social cohesion. In this light, no educational system can be deemed effective without embracing the principles of inclusion, particularly for learners with special educational needs—groups historically marginalized by traditional schooling. Among these, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) pose specific educational challenges that call for thoughtful adaptation of teaching practices, support systems, and teacher preparation.

Over the past two decades, perceptions of disability have evolved from viewing it as an individual limitation toward understanding it as a functional difference that requires adapting the learning environment (Frith, 2003). Within this evolving paradigm, the concepts of inclusive schools and universal education have gained prominence through international frameworks such as the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) and UNESCO's global initiatives promoting "Education for All." However, realizing inclusion in practice depends largely on teacher training, classroom management strategies, and the availability of pedagogical support mechanisms.

Empirical research highlights that the inclusion of children with ASD is strongly linked to flexible teaching environments, collaboration with multidisciplinary professionals, and teacher awareness of the characteristics of the disorder (Lindsay, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2012). Teachers are often the decisive factor in whether inclusion succeeds or fails (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Symes & Humphrey, 2011), as their attitudes and sense of competence significantly influence their interaction with autistic learners.

Despite international progress, inclusive education remains limited in several Arab educational contexts due to insufficient specialized training, lack of institutional support, and scarcity of educational resources. Studies such as Omar (2011) in Oman and Alzahrani (2024) in Saudi Arabia revealed that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are closely related to their prior training and professional exposure to autism. In Algeria, despite the existence of a legal framework supporting inclusion, the practical implementation still faces obstacles such as overcrowded classrooms and limited specialized resources (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2015).

These challenges are particularly evident in primary education, which constitutes the foundation of learners' academic and social development. In Tizi Ouzou, while efforts have been made to expand psycho-pedagogical services, gaps remain in teacher preparation and coordination among educational stakeholders. Understanding primary school teachers' perceptions toward the inclusion of children with ASD in this local context is therefore crucial for identifying strengths and weaknesses in current practices and informing future educational interventions.
Accordingly, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1.1- Research Questions

- What are the attitudes of primary school teachers in the province of Tizi Ouzou toward the educational inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular primary classrooms?

- Are there statistically significant differences in these attitudes based on gender at the 0.05 significance level?

- Are there statistically significant differences in these attitudes based on academic specialization at the 0.05 significance level?

1.2- Research Hypotheses

- Primary school teachers in Tizi Ouzou hold moderately positive attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream classrooms.

- There are no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion based on gender at the 0.05 significance level.

- There are no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion based on academic specialization at the 0.05 significance level.

1.3-Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

-Explore the perceptions of primary school teachers in Tizi Ouzou regarding the inclusion of children with ASD in regular classrooms.

-Analyze teachers' attitudes toward both the social and academic dimensions of inclusion.

-Identify the main barriers perceived by teachers that may hinder the effective inclusion of children with autism.

-Examine the impact of certain variables (gender, academic specialization) on teachers' perceptions of inclusion.

-Provide pedagogical recommendations based on empirical findings to support inclusion efforts and improve teacher training on inclusive education.

1.4-Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from its focus on a timely and sensitive issue: the right of children with ASD to inclusive and equitable education—a right upheld by international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and UNESCO's principles of Education for All. Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching Algerian and Arab educational literature concerning teachers' perceptions of inclusion, an area still underexplored in empirical research.

Practically, the study provides insights into the real obstacles that may hinder inclusion from the perspective of teachers, offering valuable input for designing continuous training programs and supporting schools in building genuinely inclusive learning environments. The importance of this study is further amplified by its focus on the local context of Tizi Ouzou, providing actionable data for both local and national educational planning.

1.5-Operational Definitions

Teachers' Attitudes:

Operationally defined as the scores obtained by teachers on a questionnaire composed of 58 items distributed across three main dimensions: the social dimension, the academic dimension, and the dimension of barriers to inclusion. These scores represent teachers' views and attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in regular classrooms. High scores indicate positive and supportive attitudes, whereas low scores reflect negative or reserved attitudes.

-Inclusive Education for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Measured indirectly through teachers' responses to the three dimensions of the questionnaire, namely:

-Acceptance of autistic children in the classroom (social dimension),

-Belief in their ability to follow academic lessons (academic dimension),

-Recognition of the obstacles that may hinder inclusion (barriers dimension).

In the present study, *inclusion* refers to the full participation of children with ASD in regular classrooms at Chahid Ali Bousenna Primary School, without separation into special education settings**.** Inclusion is considered effective when teachers' attitudes are positive across all dimensions or in the overall instrument.

-Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

Operationally defined as the developmental condition characterizing the group of children targeted for inclusion in the study, as perceived by teachers through the questionnaire items. The study does not directly assess medical or clinical diagnoses; rather, it focuses on how teachers interpret the behavioral and learning characteristics of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream classrooms—such as communication difficulties, limited social interaction, and repetitive behaviors—as reflected in the research instrument.

-Primary School:

Defined as the formal educational institution where the study was conducted, namely Chahid Boussnah Ali Primary School located in the municipality of Draa Ben Khedda, Tizi Ouzou Province. The school serves as a model of inclusive education in the region, encompassing both special and regular classes and implementing a comprehensive inclusion system that combines full and partial integration. The institution accommodates a variety of children with special educational needs, including four children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), making it a suitable environment for investigating teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education for this group.

2- Method and Tools:

2.1-Research Approach

This study adopted the descriptive-analytical method, as it is the most appropriate for examining social and educational phenomena within their natural contexts and analyzing their multiple dimensions. Given the subject of the research—namely, the assessment and analysis of primary school teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream schools—this method was employed to explore and interpret the phenomenon in light of both theoretical foundations and field data. This approach allows for the quantitative analysis of teachers' attitudes through a structured questionnaire and the interpretation of the results within the broader educational context.

2.2-Study Population

The study was conducted at *Chahid Ali Bousenna Primary School*, located in the municipality of Draa Ben Khedda, Tizi Ouzou Province. This institution was deliberately selected because it is considered one of the pioneering inclusive schools in the region, implementing an educational integration model that combines both full and partial inclusion. The school hosts special education classrooms alongside mainstream ones and enrolls children with various types of disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), mild intellectual disabilities, and learning difficulties. Several teachers at the school have received specialized training in teaching and supporting students with special educational needs, which makes it a suitable environment for examining teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the school had approximately four children diagnosed with ASD integrated into regular classrooms, in addition to other pupils with diverse disabilities. Therefore, the study population consisted of all 26 primary school teachers working at this institution. These teachers represent the main educational actors directly involved in inclusive education practices, providing valuable insights into their perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of children with ASD in mainstream settings.

2.3-Sample and Sampling Method

The sample comprised the entire population of primary school teachers at "Chahid Ali Bousenna" Primary School, totaling 26 teachers. All of them were included in the study, as they represent the full research population. This comprehensive inclusion aimed to capture teachers' perceptions of integrating children with ASD in mainstream classrooms, in alignment with the specific educational context of the institution.

2.4-Field Study and Research Instrument

The fieldwork was conducted in February 2025. Questionnaires were distributed to all 26 teachers at the school. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire originally developed by researchers Marwa Hassani and Amal Hattabi in their study titled *"Attitudes of Psychologists Toward the Inclusion of Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools."*

For the purposes of the present study, the instrument was adapted and modified to fit the specific context of primary school teachers. It included 58 items distributed across three main dimensions—social, academic, and barriers to inclusion—aiming to measure teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream classrooms.

A. Psychometric Properties of the Instrument

-Instrument Validity

The validity of the instrument was verified through two complementary procedures: face validity and internal consistency validity. Face validity was established through expert judgment by specialists in education and psychology, who confirmed the clarity and relevance of the items to the study objectives. Internal consistency validity was then assessed statistically by calculating the correlation coefficients between each subscale and the total score of the questionnaire. The results are presented in the following table.

Table (1) Correlation Coefficients Between Dimensions and Total Score

Dimension	Correlation with Total Score
Social Dimension	0.78
Academic Dimension	0.75
Inclusion Barriers	0.68

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output.

Table Commentary:

The relatively high correlation coefficients indicate strong internal consistency, supporting the instrument's validity in measuring the intended dimensions.

-Instrument Reliability

To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used, as it is one of the most commonly adopted methods in educational research. The results were as follows:

Table (2) Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
58	0.883

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output.

Table Commentary:

A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.883 indicates a high level of internal consistency, demonstrating that the instrument is reliable and capable of accurately and consistently measuring the targeted variables.

B. Description of the Study Sample

Table (3) Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	1	3.8%
Female	25	96.2%
Total	**26**	**100.0 %**

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output.

Table Commentary:

The results show a clear imbalance in gender distribution, with females representing 96.2% of the sample versus only 3.8% males. This reflects the predominance of women in primary education in Algeria and may partially explain the prevailing attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Table (4) Distribution of Participants by Academic Specialization

Specialization	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Arabic Language	20	76.9%
French Language	5	19.2%
Amazigh Language	1	3.8%
Total	**26**	**100.0 %**

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

Table Commentary:

The data indicate that the majority of participants specialized in Arabic (76.9%), followed by French (19.2%) and Amazigh (3.8%). This distribution reflects the linguistic composition of primary education in the region and may influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion according to their linguistic and educational backgrounds.

3- Results and Discussion

3-1-**Presentation of Results**

3-1-1 – Results for the First Hypothesis

Table (5)To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of responses were calculated:

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Perceptions of Inclusion	97.07	6.75	Moderately Positive Perceptions

Source: Prepared by the researcher using SPSS output

Table Commentary:

The calculated mean (97.07) falls within the moderate range on the teachers' attitudes scale, accompanied by a standard deviation of 6.75, indicating relative consistency in responses. This suggests that teachers generally hold positive—but moderate—attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream schools, which may be influenced by practical constraints or limited specialized training.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted: Primary school teachers in Tizi Ouzou exhibit moderately positive attitudes toward the inclusion of children with ASD in regular schools.

3-1-2- Results of the Second Hypothesis:

To test this hypothesis, the Mann–Whitney U test was used because it is a non-parametric test suitable for comparing the mean ranks between two independent groups when the sample size is small or the data do not follow a normal distribution, as is the case in this study, which relied on a purposive sample. Given the very limited number of male teachers

(n=1), this test was the most appropriate for evaluating the impact of gender on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Table (6) Mann–Whitney U test results for inclusion scores based on gender

Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	Z	Asymp. Sig.	Exact Sig.
Male	1	3.00	3.00	.000	1.414	0.157	0.231
Female	25	13.92	348.00				

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table Commentary:

The results show an apparent difference in inclusion ranks between males and females, with a mean rank of 3.00 for males compared to 13.92 for females, indicating some variability in responses. However, the Mann–Whitney U test revealed that this difference is not statistically significant, as the p-value (0.157) exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected**,** indicating that gender does not significantly affect teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in this study's sample.

3-1-3- Results of the Third Hypothesis:

To verify this hypothesis, the **Kruskal–Wallis H test** was employed to assess differences in the mean ranks of inclusion scores across academic specializations. This non-parametric test was chosen because the sample was **purposively selected**, the group sizes were unequal, and the distribution of inclusion scores did not meet the assumptions of normality required for parametric tests such as ANOVA. Using Kruskal–Wallis allowed for a reliable comparison of ranks between the three independent groups (Arabic, French, & Amazigh language specialists) despite these constraints.

Table (7) Kruskal–Wallis test results for inclusion scores by academic specialization

Specialization	N	Mean Rank	H	f	Sig.
Arabic Language	20	13.50			
French Language	5	14.40	0.423	2	0.809
Amazigh Language	1	9.00			

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table Commentary:

Although French language specialists showed the highest mean rank (14.40), followed by Arabic (13.50) and Amazigh (9.00), the Kruskal–Wallis test results indicated no statistically significant differences between groups ($H = 0.423$, $p = 0.809 > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected, indicating that academic specialization does not significantly affect teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in this study.

3-2-Discussion and Interpretation of the Results in Light of the Study Hypotheses and Previous Research

3-2-1-Discussion and Interpretation in Light of the First Hypothesis and Related Studies

The findings of this study indicate that primary school teachers in Tizi Ouzou hold **moderately positive attitudes** toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream classrooms. This moderate positivity reflects a cautious and somewhat tentative stance—teachers are generally supportive, yet their attitudes are tempered by practical constraints and limited professional preparation.

Such attitudes likely mirror the prevailing educational reality, which is characterized by insufficient theoretical and practical training in inclusive education, limited institutional support, and scarce resources for handling children with ASD. Teachers often face classroom situations that require deep understanding of the unique developmental and behavioral needs of autistic students, but without specialized training, they may rely on personal experiences or generalized impressions, leading to tentative or inconsistent attitudes.

These findings are consistent with prior research. Lindsay (2020) emphasizes that institutional support, ongoing professional development, and teachers' self-efficacy are critical factors in translating positive attitudes into effective inclusive practices. Symes and Humphrey (2011) similarly note that teachers lacking specific training in autism tend to adopt cautious attitudes due to perceived inadequacy in meeting students' needs. In the Arab context, Omar (2011) reported that insufficient training can result in teacher attitudes ranging from neglect to partial acceptance, while Jdeidi (2018) stressed that effective inclusion requires both accessible educational infrastructure and well-prepared teachers.

In Algeria, current teacher education programs largely overlook inclusive education, and most schools lack permanent psychological or pedagogical specialists. Consequently, teachers managing the inclusion of children with ASD operate in environments marked by overcrowded classrooms, high administrative demands, and limited resources, which collectively undermine motivation and reinforce professional uncertainty.

Therefore, the moderately positive attitudes observed in this study reflect a broader professional environment that is inadequately supported. These findings underscore the need for multi-level interventions—including targeted teacher training, institutional support, and resource allocation—to strengthen teachers' attitudes and facilitate effective and sustainable inclusive education.

3-2-2-Discussion and Interpretation in Light of the Second Hypothesis and Related Studies

The results of the Mann–Whitney U test indicated no statistically significant gender differences in teachers' perceptions toward the inclusion of children with ASD. This suggests that both male and female teachers in the sample share relatively similar views on the subject.

Two key factors may explain this convergence in perceptions. First, male and female teachers in Algeria typically undergo identical teacher education programs, which generally lack specialized content on inclusive education or special needs pedagogy. As a result, their attitudes are shaped by a shared pedagogical background.

Second, teachers across the Algerian school system experience similar professional conditions, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and the absence of specialized guidance—all of which shape their attitudes in comparable ways regardless of gender.

These findings are consistent with those of Avramidis & Norwich (2002), who argued that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are more strongly influenced by cognitive and

professional factors—such as training and experience—than by demographic variables like gender or age. Alzahrani (2024) similarly found that gender differences in perceptions of inclusion only become apparent when there is a disparity in specialized training or direct experience with autistic learners.

In this light, the lack of significant gender-based differences in the present study reflects the broader structural limitations of the Algerian educational system, which continues to lack integrated training in inclusive education and does not offer regular professional development opportunities. This results in uniformity in perceptions, regardless of gender, even if individual teachers' experiences or cultural backgrounds may vary.

3-2-3-Discussion and Interpretation in Light of the Third Hypothesis and Related Studies

The results of the Kruskal–Wallis test revealed no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) based on academic specialization, whether in Arabic, French, or Amazigh. This homogeneity can be attributed to the nature of university training in these fields, which primarily emphasizes subject-specific or linguistic content without systematically addressing special education or inclusive teaching strategies.

Consequently, academic background alone appears insufficient to foster positive and informed attitudes toward inclusion. Teachers require hands-on experience and specialized professional development to effectively work with students with special educational needs, particularly those with developmental disorders such as autism. This interpretation is supported by previous literature, which indicates that early practical exposure and ongoing pedagogical support strongly influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, whereas theoretical university training has limited impact unless reinforced by practical experience (Rodriguez et al., 2012; Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2015).

In the Algerian context, teachers from different academic backgrounds generally perform the same classroom tasks, which minimizes the influence of their original specialization on interactions with students with special needs. Furthermore, the lack of institutional support and regular pedagogical supervision exposes teachers across specializations to similar challenges, explaining the observed uniformity in their attitudes toward inclusion. Field observations also suggest that local contextual factors—such as the availability of resources, school administration support, and awareness of inclusion policies—play a more decisive role in shaping teachers' attitudes than individual academic differences.

Practically, these findings indicate that improving teachers' attitudes toward inclusion cannot rely solely on traditional university education. Instead, continuous training programs that integrate theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience, supported by effective institutional supervision, are necessary. Moreover, the results highlight the need for national educational policies that promote inclusive education by developing teacher competencies, providing adequate resources, and establishing partnerships with autism support centers to ensure effective and sustainable inclusion.

4- Conclusion

The statistical findings obtained through the field analysis reveal that teachers' attitudes at the primary school under study toward the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) vary according to professional and cognitive variables, such as the level of training, the nature of professional experience, and direct exposure to inclusive cases.

Some teachers demonstrated relatively positive attitudes, reflecting an initial awareness of the importance of inclusion, while others expressed more reserved or negative views, indicating a lack of pedagogical supervision and limited understanding of the specific characteristics of children with autism.

Previous studies have emphasized that the success of inclusive education does not rely solely on public policies or the availability of resources but fundamentally depends on teachers' psychological and pedagogical readiness to adapt to the demands of inclusion (Jedidi, 2018). This highlights that teachers' attitudes not grounded in a scientifically accurate understanding of the ASD population, or shaped by the absence of institutional support, may result in traditional practices that hinder genuine inclusion.

Based on the study's findings and the analysis of teachers' attitudes at the school under study, the following practical recommendations are proposed to enhance effective inclusion:

-Strengthen both initial and in-service teacher training in inclusive education.

-Provide ongoing pedagogical and psychological support for teachers within educational institutions.

-Develop practical pedagogical guidelines specifically tailored for the inclusion of children with ASD.

-Encourage exemplary school-based initiatives in the field of inclusion.

-Promote professional and societal awareness regarding the importance of inclusive education.

-Support specialized scientific research on inclusive education and the integration of children with autism.

This study is limited to teachers at the primary school under study, which constrains the generalizability of the results to all teachers in the Tizi Ouzou province. To strengthen the conclusions, future research is recommended to expand the sample to include multiple schools and regions, integrate qualitative interviews, and analyze the impact of institutional support and various forms of inclusion on teachers' attitudes in greater detail.

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