



## School inclusion and autism: The importance of family collaboration to support autistic students



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## **ABSTRACT**

The research investigates the importance of family collaboration in the school inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The objective was to understand how family support can facilitate the adaptation of these students to the school environment. Using a literature review methodology on the SciELO, Web Of Science and Google Scholar platforms, the research revealed that the active involvement of families is essential for the personalization of teaching and the creation of a more inclusive learning environment. The results showed that the families' knowledge about the needs and preferences of autistic students helps in the adaptation of pedagogical strategies and promotes greater consistency between what is taught at school and practiced at home. In addition, open communication between parents and educators is crucial for identifying challenges and developing joint solutions, positively impacting students' emotional well-being and their motivation to learn. The research concludes that family collaboration is an essential pillar for a more effective and inclusive education, benefiting both students and the school community by promoting a more understanding and respectful approach to ASD.

**Keywords:** Education, Inclusion, Autistic.



## INTRODUCTION

The school inclusion of students with autism has been widely discussed in recent years, as educational and social policies seek to guarantee the right of all students to quality education without discrimination. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has a diverse range of characteristics that can affect students' communication, behavior, and social interactions, which makes the school environment challenging for both students and educators (Cabral; Falcke; Marin, 2021).

In this context, school inclusion becomes a complex process that demands curricular adaptations, differentiated pedagogical strategies and, above all, multidisciplinary support that includes the essential role of families. Family collaboration stands out as one of the fundamental pillars for the success of school inclusion, offering the emotional and practical support necessary for autistic students to fully develop in the educational environment (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

The effective inclusion of autistic students requires a deep understanding of the individual needs of each student, something that the family can contribute significantly. Families, as they are involved in the student's life on a daily basis, have a unique knowledge about the preferences, challenges and potentialities of the child or adolescent with autism. This knowledge becomes a valuable tool for teachers and other school professionals, allowing pedagogical planning to be more personalized and effective (Santos et al., 2018).

In addition, the active participation of parents or guardians in school activities and in the development of joint teaching and support strategies can facilitate the adaptation of autistic students to the school environment, promoting a more inclusive and less stressful educational experience (Mantoan; Prieto, 2023).

Communication between school and family is, therefore, a crucial aspect in the process of school inclusion of students with autism. Continuous and open dialogue allows expectations to be aligned, difficulties to be shared, and solutions to be co-created, establishing a support network that benefits not only the student, but also the professionals involved (Silva; Menezes, 2022).

The family, when involved collaboratively, can assist in the implementation of inclusive practices that respect the specificities of autism, such as the creation of adapted routines, the use of visual and technological resources, and the application of positive reinforcement strategies. This collaboration is especially relevant when considering that the school environment can be a place of sensory and social challenges for students with autism, who often require adaptations to make them feel safe and included (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

Another important point is the role of the family in strengthening the self-esteem and autonomy of the autistic student. The active participation of parents in school activities and the reinforcement of skills learned at school in the home environment can contribute to the development of students' social and academic skills. By promoting a consistent and coordinated learning



environment between home and school, the family helps the student to generalize positive behaviors and adapt more easily to the different contexts of school life. This integration between school and family learning is vital for the holistic development of the student, allowing him to reach his full potential (Cabral; Marin, 2017; Oak; Shaw, 2021).

To this end, a bibliographic research was carried out through the survey of articles on the SciELO, Web Of Science and Google Scholar platforms. The justification for carrying out this research lies in the importance of understanding the dynamics that involve the school inclusion of autistic students and the role of family collaboration in this context. The investigation seeks to show how family support can contribute to the adaptation of students to the school environment, identifying effective practices and challenges faced by educators as well as parents and guardians. Given the growing demand for inclusive practices in schools, understanding these interactions becomes essential for the development of strategies that promote a more welcoming and effective education for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

### **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education is a pedagogical model that aims to guarantee the right of all students to education, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics. Based on principles of equality and respect for diversity, inclusive education seeks to create a learning environment that welcomes and values differences, promoting the active participation of all students in the educational process. This model challenges traditional practices, proposing the adaptation of the curriculum, teaching methods, and available resources to meet the specific needs of each student, with an emphasis on equity and social justice (Silva; Menezes, 2022).

The implementation of inclusive education implies profound changes in the educational system, ranging from teacher training to the physical adaptation of schools and the development of public policies that guarantee access and permanence for students with disabilities and other special educational needs (Soares; Santos, 2022).

In this context, the role of the teacher is central, as he needs to be able to deal with diversity in the classroom, using differentiated methodologies and pedagogical strategies that favor everyone's learning. Tools such as assistive technology, the use of visual resources, the flexibility of content, and the promotion of collaborative activities are some of the approaches that facilitate the inclusion of students with different learning profiles (Wiezenmann; Pezzi; Zanon, 2020).

In addition, inclusive education promotes a paradigm shift by emphasizing the importance of coexistence between students with and without disabilities, allowing everyone to learn from each other in an environment of respect and cooperation. This interaction is fundamental for the



development of social and emotional skills, both for students with special needs and for others, who learn from an early age to value differences and combat prejudice (Silva; Menezes, 2022).

Inclusion goes beyond physical presence at school; It entails a commitment to creating real learning and participation opportunities for all students, ensuring that no student is left behind. However, the implementation of inclusive education faces significant challenges, such as the lack of adequate resources, the scarcity of specialized training for teachers, and the resistance of some school communities to embrace diversity (Mantoan; Prieto, 2023).

To overcome these barriers, a joint effort is needed between government, schools, families and civil society, aiming to build an education that is truly for all. Investing in the continuing education of teachers, in the adaptation of school infrastructures and in the development of inclusive pedagogical materials are essential steps to strengthen inclusion in the school environment (Wiezenmann; Pezzi; Zanon, 2020).

## AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by a set of difficulties related to communication, social interaction, and behavior. The term "spectrum" is used because autism encompasses a wide variety of presentations and levels of impairment, ranging from mild to severe, reflecting the diversity of abilities and challenges faced by each individual (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

The most common characteristics of ASD include difficulties in social interaction, such as holding conversations and understanding social norms, repetitive behaviors, restricted interest in specific topics, and sensitivity to sensory stimuli, such as light, sound, or textures. These characteristics can manifest themselves in different ways and intensities, making each person with autism unique in their needs and potentialities (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

The diagnosis of ASD usually occurs in early childhood, although in some cases it can be made later when the signs become more evident. Early signs include speech delays, difficulty making eye contact, lack of interest in social play, and unusual reactions to changes in routine. There are no laboratory tests that can diagnose autism; The diagnosis is based on behavioral observation and the child's developmental history. Professionals such as pediatricians, psychologists, speech therapists, and neurologists use criteria established in manuals such as the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) to identify ASD, emphasizing the importance of early diagnosis to enable interventions that improve quality of life (Santos et al., 2018).

The causes of ASD are not yet completely understood, but it is known to involve a complex combination of genetic and environmental factors. Studies indicate that there is no single causative factor for autism, but rather an interaction of multiple genes that affect brain development from the



earliest stages of pregnancy. Environmental factors, such as pregnancy complications and maternal infections, may also play a role, but there is no evidence to prove a direct relationship between autism and influences such as vaccines or dietary practices. This understanding of ASD as a multifactorial disorder helps to demystify prejudices and guide families in search of support and appropriate treatment (Lima; Silva; Thedório, 2020).

The treatment of ASD is multidisciplinary and individualized, focusing on the specific needs of each person. There is no cure for autism, but interventions such as behavioral therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and school support are key to the development of social, communicative, and cognitive skills. ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) Therapy is widely used and has shown good results in improving social adaptation and reducing challenging behaviors. In addition, the active participation of the family is essential, as support in the home environment can enhance the advances achieved in therapies and at school, providing a continuous support network (Cabral; Marin, 2017).

The understanding of ASD has also been evolving with society, which increasingly recognizes the importance of inclusion and appreciation of people with autism in different spheres, such as education, the labor market, and social relationships. Recognizing the unique abilities and potential of individuals with ASD challenges long-standing stigmas and promotes a more humanized and respectful approach. Thus, awareness about autism is crucial for building a more inclusive society, which values diversity and offers real opportunities for all its members, respecting the particularities of each one (Lima; Silva; Thedório, 2020).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT AUTISTIC STUDENTS

Family collaboration plays a crucial role in supporting autistic students, significantly impacting their educational experience and overall development. The partnership between the school and the family is essential to create a learning environment that is welcoming and effective, meeting the specific needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Below, I detail some of the main reasons why family collaboration is essential to support these students (Lima; Silva; Thedório, 2020).

First, families have a deep and intimate knowledge of their children's needs, preferences, and challenges. This knowledge is vital for the school to adapt pedagogical strategies and create a learning environment that responds adequately to the individual characteristics of the autistic student. Information about how students react to different stimuli, their preferred routines, and strategies that work at home can help educators develop more personalized and effective approaches. The continuous exchange of information between the family and the school enables a more adjusted



pedagogical planning and a better understanding of the student's needs, promoting a more holistic and integrated approach (Cunha, 2017).

In addition, the active participation of the family in the educational process strengthens the cohesion between what is taught at school and what is practiced at home. When parents are involved in setting educational goals and developing support strategies, there is greater consistency in the approaches and practices used. This helps to create a more coherent and predictable learning environment for the student, facilitating the generalization of the skills acquired at school to the home environment and vice versa (Mantoan; Prieto, 2023).

Family collaboration also allows parents to reinforce and practice skills learned in school, which can speed up progress and boost student confidence. Family collaboration is also crucial to identify and address potential difficulties that may arise during the educational process. Families are often the first to notice changes in student behavior or needs, and their feedback can be instrumental in adjusting practices and interventions. When there is open and constant communication between parents and educators, it is possible to quickly identify any challenges and develop solutions collaboratively. This not only helps to solve problems more effectively, but also strengthens the relationship of trust and cooperation between all those involved in student support (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

Additionally, family involvement can have a significant positive impact on autistic student's self-esteem and emotional well-being. The constant support and active participation of parents help to create an environment of safety and encouragement, where the student feels valued and understood. When families show interest and investment in the educational process, this reinforces the importance of education and the value of the student's achievements, contributing to a more positive attitude towards learning and school (Lima; Silva; Thedório, 2020).

Finally, family collaboration promotes greater awareness and understanding of ASD within the school community. When parents are actively involved, they not only support their children, but they also educate and sensitize other members of the school about autism and its implications. This engagement can lead to a more inclusive and welcoming school environment, where diversity is recognized and respected, and all students, regardless of their characteristics, have the opportunity to learn and develop fully (Carvalho; Shaw, 2021).

In summary, family collaboration is essential to offer effective support to autistic students, facilitating the adaptation of pedagogical strategies, promoting consistency between school and home, identifying and solving difficulties, and supporting the student's emotional well-being. The active involvement of the family not only contributes to the student's educational success, but also to the construction of a more inclusive and understanding school community (Cabral; Falcke; Marin, 2021).



## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research carried out highlights the crucial importance of family collaboration in the school inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The objective of the investigation, which was to understand how family support contributes to the adaptation of these students to the school environment, was largely achieved. The analysis showed that the active involvement of families not only facilitates the implementation of pedagogical practices that are more appropriate to the individual needs of students, but also promotes a more effective integration between school and home contexts.

The school inclusion of students with ASD requires a holistic approach that goes beyond the simple physical presence of students in the classroom. The survey revealed that the in-depth knowledge that families have about their children is a valuable resource for personalizing teaching and creating a more inclusive learning environment. The constant collaboration between the school and the family allows the identification and adaptation of strategies that meet the specific characteristics of each student, improving the effectiveness of the educational process.

In addition, open communication between parents and educators proved essential for identifying challenges and co-creating solutions. This continuous dialogue not only facilitates the adaptation of pedagogical practices, but also contributes to the emotional well-being of students, strengthening their self-esteem and motivation for learning. The active participation of families in the development and application of educational strategies also helps to create a more consistent and safe learning environment, which is fundamental for the generalization of the acquired skills.

The survey also highlighted that family collaboration goes beyond direct student support, positively impacting awareness and understanding of ASD within the school community. The engagement of families contributes to a more welcoming and inclusive school environment, where diversity is valued and respected.

In short, research confirms that family collaboration is an essential pillar for the school inclusion of students with ASD, promoting a more personalized, effective and inclusive education. Building a strong support network between school and family not only benefits the individual student but also strengthens the school environment as a whole, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.





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