

## **School Integration for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder - An Analytical Study-**

**Dr. Amina Hartani<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Asma Benhalilem<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>University of Djillali Liabes Sidi Bel Abbes, Laboratory of application of psychology and pedagogy for development in Algeria (Algeria).

<sup>2</sup>University of Djillali Liabes Sidi Bel Abbes, Laboratory of Psychological and Educational Research (Algeria).

**The Author's E-mail:** [amina.hartani@unin-sba.dz](mailto:amina.hartani@unin-sba.dz)<sup>1</sup>, [asma.benhalilem@unin-sba.dz](mailto:asma.benhalilem@unin-sba.dz)<sup>2</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

Algeria is among the countries that have adopted the policy of integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into regular classrooms, considering them a group with the same right to education as other groups in society. It has given significant attention to the process of integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into regular schools, which requires extensive examination and research due to its sensitivity and importance for the autistic child, their family, and also for the educational community.

This paper addresses the basic concepts related to both autism spectrum disorder and school integration, highlighting the conditions for school integration, and the challenges faced in integrating children with autism spectrum disorder.

**Keywords:** Autism Spectrum Disorder; School integration; Children with autism.

### **1- Introduction**

The category of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is one of the special groups that has been continuously and alarmingly increasing. In 2009, there were reported to be 39,000 cases, and this number rose in 2010 to reach 65,000 affected children, reaching 80,000 cases by 2013 in Algeria (Mehida and Mjber, 2022: 341). It is one of the most serious and complex disorders because the child remains isolated, as if he's in another world. The deficits are not limited to one aspect but extend to many areas of development: cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional. This latter leaves negative effects on behavior, which hinders its ability to learn, acquire, and subsequently train for independence and self-protection (Al-Hijazi, wd.). This is what the results of the study conducted by Gena and Kymissis (2010) on three children with autism spectrum disorder experience many behavioral issues compared to their non-autistic peers, such as: The lack of response to comments, questions, and requests from their classmates, in addition to their lack of initiative in interacting with others (Dhib and Muhaydat, 2013).

Community integration is considered the most essential type of integration needed by the families of children with autism, more than for their affected child. This is due to the lack of special schools for these children or the scarcity of specialized educational centers that cater to their needs (Abu Al-Fotouh, 2011). School integration is the most suitable and best solution for them because it significantly contributes to their inclusion in society, acceptance of them, and changing the negative perception towards them, making them

individuals with all the rights just like other special groups. A study conducted by Cock and others in the United States revealed that inclusion has many benefits for children with mild disabilities in several related aspects. This is attributed to the supportive services they receive during the inclusion process (Bougrada and hanifi, 2022). It aligns with the findings of the study by Freeman and Alkan, which demonstrated that the educational environment contributes to improving social behavior and enhancing the academic achievement of integrated children compared to those enrolled in special education schools in the United States. The same study highlighted the importance of using individual educational plans as a curriculum for them in order to enhance the effectiveness of learning in an integration environment (Bougrada and hanifi, 2022.).

The researcher adds that despite the importance of this educational process, it has not received adequate acceptance and support from the educational team, especially the teachers who are the fundamental of educational institutions. Numerous studies, both Arab and foreign, have been conducted, such as the studies by Al-Shammari (2010), Al-Othman (2002), Al-Fayez (2006), McGregor & Campbell (2011), Hendricks (2008), and Segell (2008). and The results of the Barsed study (2003), which aimed to understand teachers' attitudes towards integrating children with autism into elementary schools with their typically developing peers, indicated that the majority of these studies found a negative perception regarding full integration, as opposed to partial integration. despite the existence of differences attributed to their specialization, experience, and work environment. This result is attributed to factors related to the circumstances surrounding teachers, such as work pressure and overcrowding in this classrooms, adding the teachers' limited understanding of the importance of inclusion and its objectives, as well as the specifics of this disorder, coupled with their lack of awareness of recent studies in this field, and their insufficient skills and methods, make it difficult to implement educational activities during the class for children with autism. Additionally, there is a clear and significant deficiency among these teachers regarding their knowledge of the characteristics of this group and their complete lack of knowledge about individual strategies (individual educational programs). This is confirmed through the study conducted by Helps et al. (1999), Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996), and Mavropoulou & Padelid (2000) as well as Park & Sehitoglu. (Park & Chitiyo, 2011). We cannot overlook here the factors related to the autistic child themselves, such as their struggles with communication difficulties, stereotypical and unusual behaviors, lack of independence, and absence of motivation to learn, which can sometimes lead to repeated absences and lack of discipline.

From the above, it is clear to the researcher, according to the limits of her study, that the thorough assessment of the obstacles to the integration of children with autism in schools has not received its due attention in scientific research, and to reveal the extent to which this possibility has been realized (a field study in the schools of Sétif) by conducting semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers using the Barleson technique for content analysis. The results did not differ from all the previously mentioned studies in the research, which indicate that the symptoms of autism and the concept of school integration remain unclear to primary school teachers, due to the novelty of this concept at the national level.

This gives the current study special importance, as the problem of the study can be expressed in the following questions: **What is the meaning of school integration for children with autism? And what are the main obstacles facing the implementation of this system?**

## **2- Objectives of the study:**

The current research aims to the following:

- Highlighting the most important modern concepts related to autism spectrum disorder.
- Defining what school integration is and the philosophy that underpins it.
- Specify the conditions and challenges faced by children with autism spectrum disorder.

## **3- Importance of the Study:**

The importance of the current study lies in:

- It is considered one of the few studies in Algeria, as it adds to the theoretical heritage in the field of special education.
- The study addresses the category of children with autism, whose numbers are increasing day by day according to global reports and statistics.
- An attempt to shed light on a phenomenon that is considered one of the most important contemporary issues for children with autism, which has garnered the attention of researchers and those of interest on both the global and Arab levels, namely the integration of children with autism with their peers in regular schools, as well as the conditions for its implementation

## **4. Study concepts:**

- **Autism:** It is a developmental disorder that is often diagnosed before the age of three and affects psychological, social, and emotional development, which in turn impacts cognitive, emotional, and behavioral performance.
- **School integration for the autistic child:** It refers to the organized placement of the autistic child in a classroom within a public school alongside their typically developing peers, providing them the opportunity to engage in various educational activities outlined in an individualized education plan that considers the unique needs of each child.

## **The theoretical framework of the study:**

### **First, autism:**

#### **1- Definition of autism:**

Autism (Autisme) is a term derived from Greek, composed of two parts: the first "Aut," meaning self, and the second "Ism," meaning state. Thus, this term refers to a state of self and indicates the intense preoccupation of children with this disorder with themselves and their diminished interest in others (Khalil et al., 2009: 37).

Here is a set of definitions that address the concept of autism:

- The World Health Organization defines it as a developmental disorder that appears in the first three years of a child's life, leading to deficits in language and social skills (Al-Nimr, 2015: 225).
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Law (IDEA) defines autism as a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as social interaction, and manifests before the age of three, impacting the child's educational performance. Other characteristics include the presence of clearly repetitive stereotypical behaviors, an aversion to change, especially in daily routines, and unusual reactions to sensory experiences. The term autism does not apply to a child if their educational performance has declined due to severe emotional disturbances (Farouk and Al-Sharbin, 2011: 26), which is the same definition referenced by Wolf. (Wolf , 1988).
- Jamal Mithqal Al-Qasim defines it as "a disorder that appears from birth, and those affected suffer from an inability to communicate in any form with others, in addition to a weakness or absence of language, especially in the early stages of life." (Farouk and Al-Sharbin, 2000: 128)
- And Osman Labib (2001) points out that autism is a term used to describe a developmental disability characterized by cognitive deficits, delays or stagnation in development, and a tendency towards introversion and withdrawal that isolates the child from their surrounding environment, causing them to live in a closed-off world where they barely perceive the people, events, or phenomena around them (Al-Hijazi, n.d.: 270).

## **2- Revised diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder in the DSM5**

### **A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive, see text):**

1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.

**Specify current severity:** Severity is based on social communication impairments and restricted repetitive patterns of behavior.

### **B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by at least two of the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):**

1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypies, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).
2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behavior (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, need to take same route or eat food every day).
3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g, strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interest).
4. Hyper- or hypo reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).

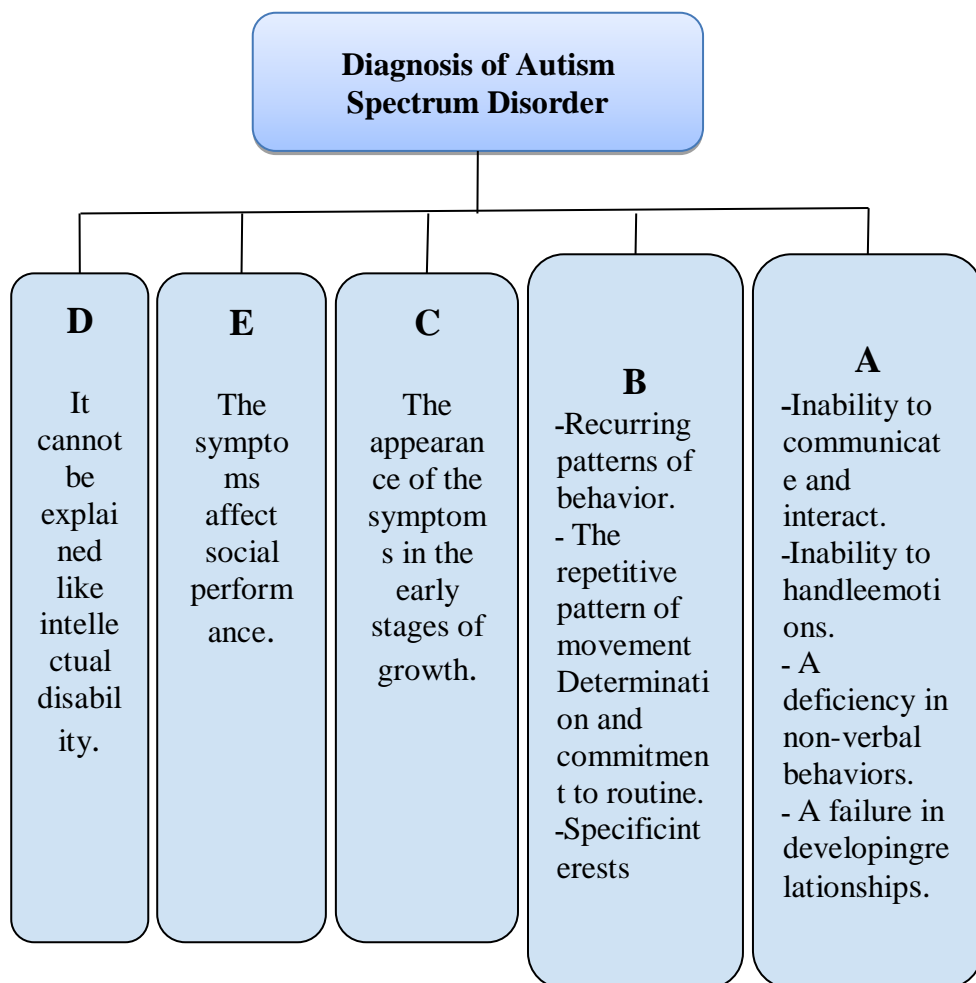
Specify current severity: Severity is based on social communication impairments and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior.

**C. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).**

**D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.**

**E. These disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder) or global developmental delay. Intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder frequently co-occur; to make comorbid diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability, social communication should be below that expected for general developmental level.(DSM-5, 2013)**

**Note:** Individuals with a well-established DSM-IV diagnosis of autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, or pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Individuals who have marked deficits in social communication, but whose symptoms do not otherwise meet criteria for autism spectrum disorder, should be evaluated for social (pragmatic) communication disorder.



**Shape No (01): A brief explanation of the diagnostic symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder**

**Secondly, school integration.**

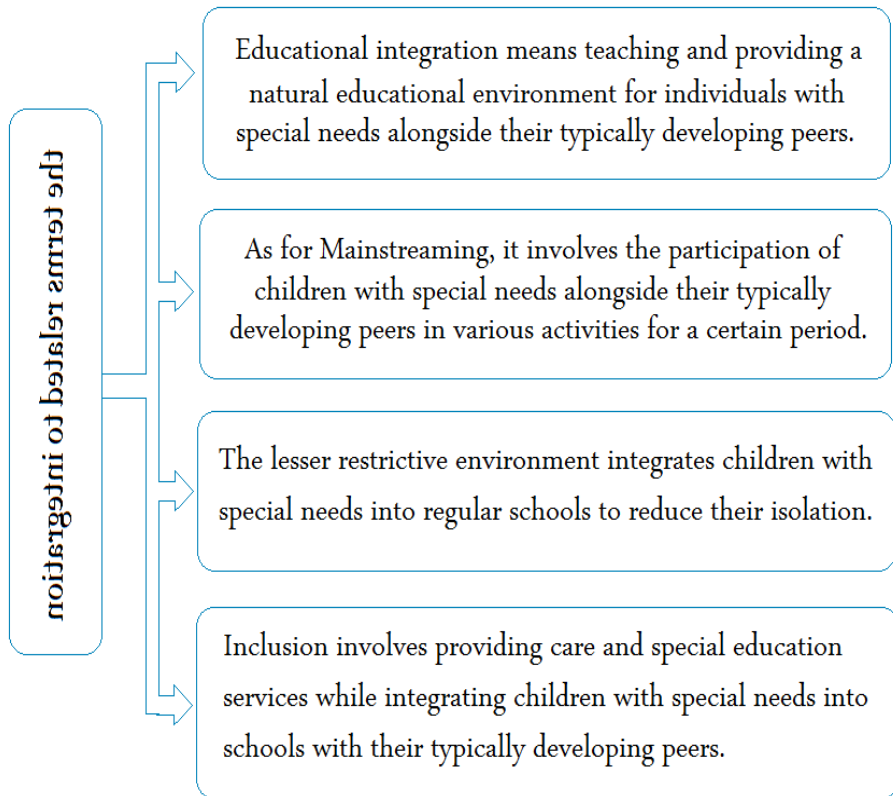
**1/ Definition of school integration**

- Kauffman's definition is considered the most comprehensive and widely accepted. They view integration as the inclusion of exceptional children with their peers in a manner that is temporal, educational, and social, determined according to the needs of each child individually, based on a continuous educational plan and program. It requires clarity of responsibility within the administrative and educational systems in both public and private education (Hareez and Lazraq, 2023).

- Stefan et al. (1988) define it as: "the placement of students with special needs in the lesser restrictive educational environments, where this procedure involves planning and making educational decisions for students with special needs in those environments" (Sulaf, 2023: 1176).

## 2/ Terms related to integration

The term "Integration" has also not escaped the chaos of terminology, as it is often used synonymously with many other terms such as educational inclusion, Integration, and Mainstreaming. In fact, there is a clear distinction between these terms, Integration and Mainstreaming.

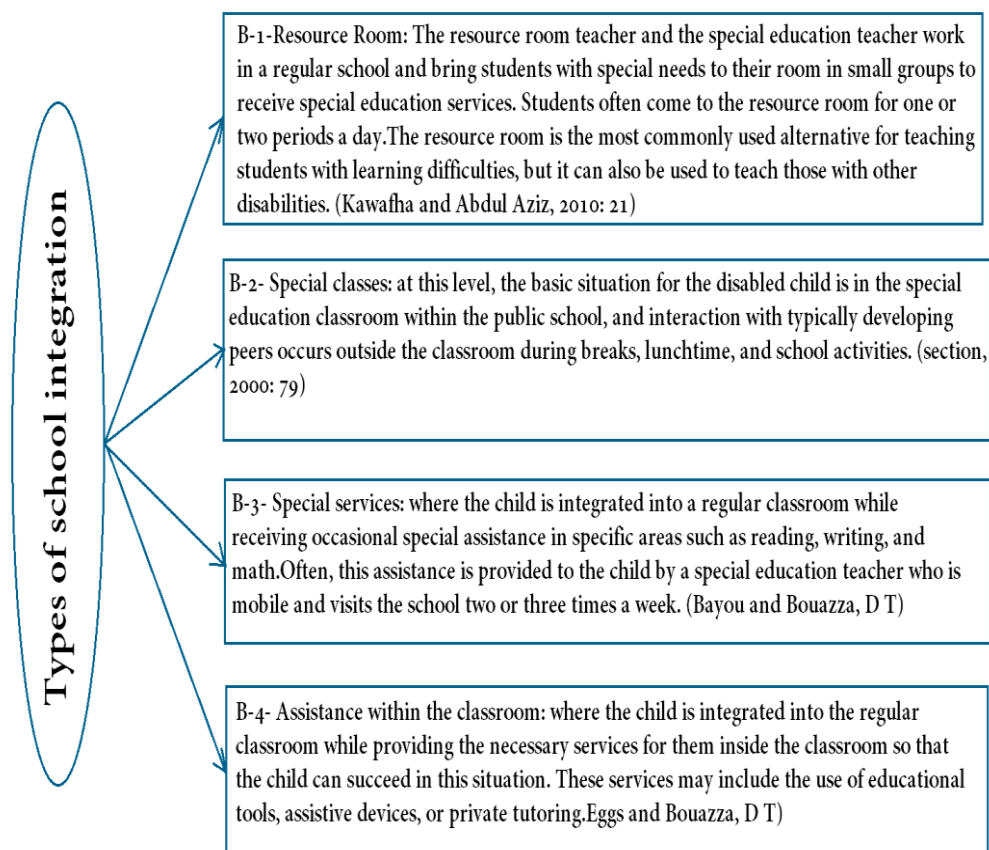


### Shape No (02): Illustrates the terms related to integration according to (Mohamed Abu Al-Fotouh, 2011).

Based on the above, inclusive education can be defined as providing opportunities for children with autism to engage in the regular education system as a measure to emphasize the principle of equal opportunities in education. The goal of inclusion, in general, is to address the special educational needs of the autistic child within the framework of a regular school, in accordance with teaching methods, curricula, and educational resources.

### 3/ Types of school integration:

There are types of school integration that will be explained in the following figure.



**Shape No (03): Shows the researchers' conception of types of school integration (quoted from Al-Dib, n.d.).**

### 4/ The Philosophy of integration Education:

The philosophy of integration can be summarized in the following points:

- The needs of children with disabilities must be met by placing them in educational environments.
- The disabled individual should be placed in special schools if problems arise that hinder their benefit from regular classes.
- It provides educational alternatives suitable for the educational conditions that the unusual students can benefit from.



- If it is observed that there is no benefit in teaching the disabled in their own special schools and that these institutions are unable to accommodate all the disabled individuals.
- A person with a disability has all the rights and respect just like any ordinary individual.
- Inclusion helps to change people's attitudes towards individuals with disabilities.
- integration helps children with disabilities engage in social activities with their peers and contributes to the development of their self-concept.
- Additionally it can help teachers understand the individual differences among children to develop suitable programs and methods for them.(Al-Izza, 2002: 21)

#### **5/ Conditions of school integration for children with autism:**

Integration is a complex process that requires certain conditions for its success, following careful planning so that these children can benefit from an educational level that matches the program available in private schools. Therefore, the following aspects must be taken into consideration:

- The child should adapt psychologically and emotionally so that they can integrate with regular children at school.
- Explaining to all the educational and pedagogical staff, including the principal, teachers, and student counselors, as well as the regular students, of the necessity to integrate these children with them. (Ajami and Mujahid, 2002)
- The integration should primarily concern artistic activities such as physical sports, educational field trips, and drawing.
- Teachers are not required to be specialists in special education, but they must receive training and qualifications that prepare them to work with children on the autism spectrum.
- Schools should have special sections for each disability separately and not integrate children with autism spectrum disorder with children who have other disabilities(Osama and others, 2011).

#### **6/The importance of planning for the integration of children with autism:**

Horror and Dunlap (2001) pointed out the importance of planning for the following matters:

- Training a child with autism spectrum disorder on individual activities before implementing them in a group setting is essential to avoid incidents of stress that could disrupt the educational process, which is referred to as adjust Pre-stimulus.
- When providing education to students with autism spectrum disorder, appropriate prompt methods should be used.
- The classroom should provide visual schedules to help students with autism transition easily from one activity to another.
- Teaching a child with autism spectrum disorder self-management by helping them recognize good behavior from bad behavior with the use of encouragement.
- Motivating typical children in the same class to engage positively without causing disruption to the child with autism, as it helps him with social integration and the motivation to learn. (The Wolf and Mehaidat, 2013)

However, the researcher finds that this planning may succeed with a segment of children with autism who are characterized by emotional stability, as its absence can disrupt the educational process in the classroom.

**The conclusion:**

Despite the existence of conditions that must be respected, a child with autism spectrum disorder should possess a set of skills, primarily behavioral, such as sitting quietly during activities, raising their hand to ask for permission, and understanding how to line up. Additionally, cognitive and perceptual characteristics like matching, imitation, and attention are also necessary. This, in itself, is a challenge that requires the combined efforts of both parents and teachers.

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