

## **School Support as a Mechanism for Integrating Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder into the Algerian Primary School**

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### **Abstract:**

This article addresses the issue of school support as a fundamental mechanism for supporting the integration of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder into the Algerian primary school, based on the gradual shift towards inclusive education and ensuring the right of this group to learning and participation. The article aims to highlight the importance of school support in achieving effective educational and social integration, and to identify the main roles played by the support assistant in helping the child adapt to the school environment, understand instructions, participate in activities, develop communication and interaction with peers, and enhance independence. It also seeks to identify the main conditions and strategies that make school support more effective, particularly pedagogical adaptation, the use of visual aids, the organization of the school routine, positive reinforcement, and coordination among the support assistant, teacher, family, and specialists.

The article is based on a review of the relevant Algerian literature and studies concerning school support and the integration of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Recent literature highlights that school support can contribute to improving school participation, communication, and adaptive behavior; however, its effectiveness remains dependent on a number of organizational, human, and pedagogical factors. In the Algerian context, the process of providing educational care for this group is witnessing significant development, with increasing attention to the development of pedagogical programs and the enhancement of support for cases integrated into regular classrooms. Nevertheless, it continues to face challenges, including inadequate specialized training, a shortage of appropriate educational resources, disparities in available capacities, and difficulties in coordination among the various stakeholders.

The article concludes that school support should not be limited to assisting the child within the classroom; rather, it should constitute an integrated system aimed at achieving genuine and sustainable participation, while gradually reducing the child's dependence on the support assistant and enhancing the child's independence. This also requires the adoption of individualized educational plans that take into account individual differences and support the child's gradual transition towards independence within the school.

**Keywords:** school support, school integration, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, primary school.

### **1. Introduction**

There are many difficulties encountered by the child with autism when transitioning to a regular school, as the latter constitutes a new environment for the child with autism. The school may potentially contribute to a deterioration of the child's condition due to the difficulty of adapting to the changes that may occur within the institution and the child's lack of readiness to perform the various school tasks, or the child may experience a range of sensory disturbances during the school day resulting from ordinary students' voices, the school bell, games, and other things.

However, the school can also be supportive and motivating for children with autism spectrum disorders by providing psychological and moral support to the child with autism and integrating the child with the students in the classroom and school for psychological and educational rehabilitation and to alleviate the child's psychological problems (Mohamed Ben Said, 2010).

Accordingly, the integration of children with autism into regular primary schools is one of the fundamental indicators for measuring the extent to which societies have progressed in achieving the principles of equality and equal opportunities.

Caring for individuals with autism spectrum disorder is one of the problems facing societies. No society is without a significant proportion of this group. These societies differ in their treatment of these children, ranging from contempt, cruelty, and marginalization to showing compassion towards them and moving towards their care in order to achieve the principle of equal opportunities with ordinary children, eliminate all forms of discrimination, and promote social cohesion.

Children with autism face numerous difficulties at school, including social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, adaptation to noisy environments due to sensory sensitivity, as well as difficulty dealing with sudden changes in the daily routine and transitioning between educational activities. The issue of integrating and providing care for children with autism spectrum disorder occupies an important position at both the global and local (Algerian) levels.

Since the early years of independence, Algeria has begun to pay attention to persons with special needs, as a ministry was established in 1984 to protect and care for persons with disabilities. It assumed responsibility for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and working towards achieving their full and effective participation. Centers and institutions for caring for these children subsequently emerged, followed by the discovery of methods, approaches, and mechanisms for integrating them into schools. Among these means is school support. In this article, we will therefore shed light on school support, given its great importance alongside the family, teacher, speech therapist, and psychologist in the psychological, educational, and pedagogical support provided to children with autism spectrum disorder to help integrate them into classrooms.

Based on the foregoing, we can formulate a general conception of the problem of our research, which is represented in the following question:

Does school support, as a mechanism, contribute to the integration of children with autism spectrum disorder into the Algerian primary school?

## **2. Importance and Objectives of the Study**

The topic of school support as a mechanism for integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into the Algerian primary school is considered among the most important topics in the field of psychology and educational sciences in recent years. It is of great importance because it addresses several aspects, including the educational, psychological, social, and instructional aspects, as well as the teacher and family aspects.

The general objective of the study is to identify the contributions of school support as a mechanism for integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into the Algerian primary school. It also aims to provide suggestions and recommendations that may contribute to developing school support and improving the quality of integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into the Algerian school.

## **3. Study Terminology**

In this research, we adopted four basic terms, as follows:

### **3.1. School Support**

The concept of the school support assistant emerged with the development of the philosophy of inclusive education. It refers to the person who accompanies a child with special needs within the educational institution and provides educational, behavioral, and social support, enabling the child to participate effectively in classroom activities and achieve the greatest possible degree of independence. The role is not limited to providing direct assistance; rather, it includes cooperation with the teacher, family, and specialists to implement the individualized educational plan and achieve the objectives of integration (Achachera, 2025).

Thus, the school support assistant is the person (male or female) who accompanies a child with special needs within the educational institution and provides academic, behavioral, and social support and assistance. This enables the child to participate in classroom activities and achieve the greatest possible degree of independence. The role is not limited to direct assistance; rather, it includes coordination with teachers, the family, and specialists to achieve the objectives of the individualized educational plan.

### **3.2. School Integration**

The process of educational and instructional integration of persons with special needs into the regular mainstream primary education environment is considered a step towards achieving equality between them and their ordinary peers.

UNESCO considers inclusive education to be a process aimed at responding to the diversity of the needs of all learners by increasing their participation in learning and reducing exclusion within the educational system. This requires making modifications to content, approaches, structures, and educational strategies (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14).

The term “integration” first appeared in the United States of America in 1975, with the enactment of Law No. 94-942, which emphasized the necessity of caring for children with disabilities and providing the best methods, approaches, and resources for their educational, social, and vocational care on an equal basis with their ordinary peers. The term “integration” reappeared globally in 1981 through the International Year of Disabled Persons, under the general slogan “Equality and Full Participation.”

The United Nations statement (UNESCO statement, 2005) stated that 52 countries supported the educational integration of persons with special needs in a regular manner and within ordinary and mainstream educational institutions.

Thus, school integration is an educational means that contributes to educating children with special needs by integrating them into the educational environment of regular schools. They are also dealt with through a carefully planned approach based on the nature of each child. The integration approach is considered one of the therapeutic means that helps the child adapt to other children so that the child can acquire new educational skills that contribute to the development of their personality and their integration into society.

### **3.3. Children with Autism**

The American National Association defines children with autism as having a disorder or syndrome that is behaviorally characterized and includes disorders in the following areas: development, responses to stimuli, language and speech, cognitive abilities, attachment and affiliation with people, and attachment to events and subjects. That is, every child who has been diagnosed with either a mild or moderate degree by a group of specialists in the field of autism and developmental disorders (Al-Hawamdeh, 2019, p. 13).

Thus, children with autism are children who suffer from a functional disorder in their nervous system, which affects their learning process.

### **3.4. Primary School**

According to Article 02, the primary school is a public institution specialized in education and instruction, enabling pupils to acquire basic competencies in the intellectual, moral, and civic fields (Directorate of Legal Affairs, February 2020).

It is the place where pupils engage in their primary educational activities based on the educational curricula of the Ministry of National Education.

## **4. Importance of Integrating Children with Autism**

The importance of integration lies in:

- Developing social skills.
- Improving communication skills.
- Increasing self-confidence.
- Improving academic achievement.
- Preparing the child for social life.

The Ministry of National Education has emphasized the development of specialized educational and pedagogical programs for the integration of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, in coordination with various sectors (Ministry of Education, 2026).

## **5. Types of Integration**

Integration is defined as enrolling a child with autism spectrum disorders in a regular school, and this integration may take the following forms:

### **5.1. Spatial Integration**

Spatial integration is limited to the general school environment, while children with autism spectrum disorders receive their specialized programs in special classes. This type of integration allows these pupils to interact with their ordinary peers outside school hours.

### **5.2. Academic Integration**

It goes beyond the mere presence of these children with their ordinary peers within the school environment, as both groups receive common programs. Here, the issue arises of children with autism accepting ordinary children and vice versa. The issue of the ordinary pupils' teacher's insufficient competencies to convey information to them also arises. Therefore, this type of integration requires the presence of a special education teacher (school support assistant) alongside the teacher. It also requires creating conditions that enable pupils from both groups to accept one another.

Academic integration takes two forms:

#### **5.2.1. Total Integration**

Total integration is based on integrating pupils with special needs with their ordinary peers in regular classrooms and regular mainstream schools, both educationally and socially.

#### **5.2.2. Partial Integration**

This refers to placing pupils with special needs with ordinary pupils in regular classrooms for part of the time, for example, half a day.

Methods of integration differ from one country to another, depending on the available resources and facilities.

### **5.3. Social Integration**

Social integration extends beyond the school environment to the community as a whole, including the residential neighborhood, the street, and so forth. This type of integration has the same positive aspects as integration within the school and classrooms.

It also refers to providing these children with the opportunity to integrate into social life after graduating from schools, institutes, or centers, and to rehabilitate them in a manner that guarantees their right to work and to rely on themselves as much as possible in the future.

## **6. Skills of the Child with Autism Eligible for Integration**

The researchers (and Sterling Pavel) proposed in 1992 that, at a minimum, a child with autism needs to learn the following skills in order to enroll in and continue with integration programs:

- Following the teacher's instructions, whether the teacher is near or far from the pupil.
- Taking turns.
- Sitting quietly during activities, particularly group activities.
- Walking in the classroom or in line.
- Using the bathroom when needed, and using different bathrooms without assistance.
- Expressing basic needs.

- Accepting the presence of other children and initiating play and communication with them.
- Being able to complete the required activities within a specified period.
- Perceptual skills involving matching colors, numbers, and numerals.
- Imitation, so that the pupil can learn by observing others in the classroom.
- Basic self-reliance skills, such as eating and drinking, and putting on and taking off clothes (Mustafa Nouri, 2010, p. 38).

### **7. Importance of the School Support Assistant in Integrating Children with Autism**

The school support assistant contributes to facilitating the integration of the child with autism within the primary school through:

- Enhancing communication between the child and the teacher.
- Training the child to adhere to classroom rules.
- Reducing undesirable behaviors.
- Developing social interaction skills with peers.
- Helping the child complete educational activities according to their abilities.
- Preparing the classroom environment and reducing stimuli that may cause anxiety and distraction.
- The school support assistant also contributes to reducing the professional pressures placed on the teacher and facilitates communication between the school and the family, which helps achieve integration between the school and the family and consequently increases the chances of successful school integration of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Bachioua, 2023, p. 57).

### **8. Tasks of the School Support Assistant**

The tasks of the school support assistant consist of a number of basic points, including:

- Receiving the child and accompanying them within the institution.
- Simplifying classroom instructions.
- Using visual communication aids when necessary.
- Encouraging the child to participate in the classroom.
- Recording daily observations regarding the child's progress.
- Continuous coordination with the family, teacher, and psychologist.
- Enhancing social interaction between the child and their peers (Khelifi, 2021).

### **9. School Support in Algeria**

A study by (Nouri Aouali, 2019, p. 07) recorded that the number of children with autism spectrum disorder exceeded 140 autistic children in 2015, and that this number was increasing, rising by 15% in 2016 and reaching 500 autistic children in 2019. These alarming figures necessitated the need for effective strategies to provide care for them.

The idea of educational integration was introduced to provide opportunities for participation in the educational system within regular schools, in accordance with educational methods, curricula, and resources whose adaptation is supervised by a team of specialists. This is in accordance with the ministerial law dated 21/04/2021, which included the policies adopted by

the Ministry of National Education for integrating children with autism into the regular educational system. Special classes were opened for them, and children with mild autism spectrum disorders were integrated into regular classes. The number of pupils with autism spectrum disorder enrolled in special classes reached 4,778, while the number of pupils in regular classes reached 1,057 during the 2020–2021 academic year (official website of the Ministry of National Education).

School support for children with autism spectrum disorder in Algeria relies on the "School Life Assistant" system to integrate them into regular classes, through the instructions of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of National Solidarity, which provide pedagogical and psychological support and assistance with assignments and examinations to facilitate their social and educational integration.

Algeria has established mechanisms allowing schooling in national education institutions, alongside special classes and specialized care. The forms of educational care for children with autism spectrum disorder in Algeria can be distinguished as follows:

- Care within specialized institutions affiliated with the Solidarity Sector.
- Special classes within educational institutions.
- Integration of some children into regular classes with appropriate support.
- Coordination between the Education Sector, the Solidarity Sector, the family, and specialists.

The Ministry of Education explicitly indicates that the Education Sector contributes to providing care for children with special needs by opening special classes, in addition to supporting integrated cases within regular classes (official website of the Ministry of National Education).

In 2026, autism is no longer addressed in official discourse solely in terms of health or social care; rather, the Ministry of Education now explicitly refers to specialized pedagogical care and support for integrated cases within regular classes.

### **10. Challenges Facing School Support in Algeria**

There are many challenges facing school support in Algeria, including:

1. Lack of training: Most support assistants have not received any training on Autism Spectrum Disorder or behavioral modification techniques. Rather, they rely on their personal experience, and there is no mandatory training course prior to commencing work (Yasmin, Hussein, 2025, p. 45).
2. Algerian law does not provide for a position of “school support assistant” within the employee classification system. This leaves school support outside the framework of social protection: no health insurance, no pension, no paid leave, etc.
3. In most cases, the family is the one that pays the salary of the school support assistant. The salary ranges from 1,500 DZD to 25,000 DZD per month. This amount is insufficient and disproportionate to the workload and psychological pressure. In addition, it is not guaranteed in the event of the child’s absence or the family’s financial difficulties.
4. Accompanying a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder throughout the school day in a noisy and crowded environment is a psychologically exhausting task.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that school support for children with autism spectrum disorder is no longer merely an auxiliary measure for the educational process; rather, it has become a fundamental mechanism for achieving effective school inclusion, given its educational, psychological, social, and communicative dimensions, which contribute to helping the child learn and adapt to the school environment, develop interaction with peers, and enhance independence and participation in various school activities. Its success is also not dependent solely on the school support worker; rather, it requires the integration of the efforts of the teacher, family, specialists, and the educational institution's administration.

In this context, it can be observed that Algeria has begun to take important and advanced steps in the field of educational care for children with autism spectrum disorder and their inclusion in the educational system, through enhancing attention to inclusive education, developing pedagogical programs, and expanding forms of care and support. This reflects a gradual shift from the logic of traditional care and support to the logic of the right to education, participation, and inclusion.

Nevertheless, these positive transformations are not without challenges facing the national education sector, foremost among which are the need for specialized and continuous training for teachers and school support workers, the provision of adequate human resources and pedagogical materials, the standardization of support procedures, and the strengthening of coordination between the school, family, and specialists, in addition to the need to take into account the considerable variation in the needs of children with autism.

Based on the foregoing, we can put forward some proposals through which school support can become an effective mechanism for integrating children with autism spectrum disorder into Algerian primary schools:

- Establishing a basic statute for school support workers to guarantee their rights and improve their income.
- Providing specialized training for support workers regarding autism.
- Raising teachers' awareness of the role of the support worker in the educational process for persons with special needs in general and children with autism spectrum disorder in particular, so that they are not subjected to harassment by them.

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