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Teachers' beliefs about inclusion and their implementation of inclusive practice for students with autism spectrum disorder in selected private schools

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Declaration

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ACRONYMS

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

APA: American Psychiatry Association

DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition

IEP: Individualized Education Program

MOE: Ministry of Education (Ethiopia)

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

This mixed method study examined the belief in inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorder in selected private schools in Addis Ababa. A total of 150 teachers from Flipper International School, Cambridge International School and School of Tomorrow were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires to collect quantitative data on inclusive beliefs and practices, complemented by semi-structured interviews to provide deeper qualitative insights. Quantitative data were analysed by descriptive statistics, t-tests and ANOVA, while qualitative interview responses were analysed by thematic analysis. The results of the present study show that, although teachers generally have positive beliefs about the importance of inclusion for students with ASD, they also report major difficulties in implementing inclusive practices in practice. In particular, the findings highlighted the critical need for targeted professional development and adequate resources to effectively support students with ASD in inclusive settings. The qualitative data from the interviews further highlighted these obstacles, highlighting the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application in the different classroom settings. The study concluded that closing this gap requires comprehensive training, increased allocation of resources and supportive school policies to improve the ability of teachers in private schools to deliver truly inclusive education for students with ASD. These findings have important implications for teacher training programmes, school administrators and policy makers working to promote a more inclusive and effective education system.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher training, inclusive practices, autism spectrum disorder, special needs education

Chapter One

1 Introduction

1.1. Background

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver for social and economic development. Globally, the objective of providing quality education for all has led to a growing recognition of the need for education systems to become more inclusive and responsive to the diversity of learners (UNESCO, 2020). Historically, disabled pupils have often been educated in segregated environments, isolated from their peers in mainstream schools (Ainslie, 1999).

Over time, the transition from segregation to integration has taken place, with disabled students being placed in mainstream schools, but often without sufficient support or adjustment. This has led to the creation of inclusive education, which goes beyond physical location and aims to transform schools to meet the diverse learning needs of all pupils (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is not just about where pupils learn, but also about how they learn, with emphasis on cooperation, participation and individualized support (Florian et al, 2011).

Developing an inclusive society depends to a large extent on how inclusive values are reflected in the education system. Schools have a key role to play in shaping attitudes, reducing stigma and promoting equity between learners with different abilities. Implementing inclusive education is particularly important in addressing the needs of children with disabilities, such as those with autism spectrum disorder. (Booth et al, 2011)

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neuro developmental disorder characterized by persistent problems with social communication and limited repetitive patterns of behavior (APA, 2013). The educational needs of students with ASD are complex and often require a structured environment, individualized instruction and trained teachers. Despite

increasing awareness, many ASD pupils still face obstacles to full mainstream education due to inadequate teacher training and support systems (Humphrey et al, 2008).

Inclusive education means a global shift towards providing all learners with equal and quality education, irrespective of their ability or background. According to UNESCO (2017), inclusive education is a process which transforms the learning environment to meet the needs of all learners, ensuring that they are fully involved and that diversity is promoted. It emphasizes the need to remove structural, social and physical barriers to ensure that all learners, particularly those with disabilities, can thrive in mainstream education.(UNESCO, 2017)

The Salamanca Declaration is the cornerstone of this movement, calling on countries to recognize the fundamental human right of inclusive education. It stressed the importance of mainstreaming children with disabilities and of seeing diversity as an opportunity, not a constraint. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) calls for inclusive and equitable quality education by 2030, and reinforces the global commitment to the SDG agenda. (UNESCO, 1994)

However, implementation of education policies varies from country to country. In developed countries, for example, considerable resources and policies have helped to achieve success, but problems remain in the coordination of curricula and teachers. In contrast, developing countries, including Ethiopia, face various structural barriers to implementing comprehensive education systems, such as weak infrastructure, social stigma and insufficient infrastructure (Ainsk et al, 2020)

Ethiopia has demonstrated its commitment to inclusive education through policies such as the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy. This policy defines inclusive education as a way of integrating children with special needs into mainstream education and addressing the various obstacles they may face. The plan aims to create a system that provides all with good, relevant and fair education and ensures that people with disabilities are involved in the social development of the country. (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Despite these efforts, implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia remains uneven. Public schools often lack the resources and staff to support students with special needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Study shows that teachers in Ethiopia often feel unprepared for the needs of disabled students due to inadequate training and lack of flexible resources. (Tesfaye et al, 2018).

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by difficulty communicating, repetitive behavior and limited self-control. The term spectrum refers to the wide variation in symptoms and severity, making the needs of each individual unique. Autism spectrum disorder is one of the most challenging disorders and requires tailored educational programmes. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

For students with ASD, mainstream education provides opportunities for socialization, skills development and academic achievement. However, success in integration often depends on teacher training and availability of adequate resources. Teachers have a key role to play in understanding and addressing the specific needs of these pupils through evidence-based approaches such as structured learning and mindful practice (Spriggs, 2013).

The beliefs of teachers play an important role in shaping inclusive practices. Positive attitudes towards inclusion allow teachers to use strategies to support disabled students, while negative attitudes prevent teachers from being willing to include students with special needs (Staub et al, 2012).

In Ethiopia, a study found that teachers have different attitudes towards inclusive education, influenced by factors such as training, cultural norms and school support. Teachers participating in inclusive education programmes are more likely to see diversity as an asset and adopt evidence-based practices in their classrooms. However, many teachers in Ethiopia report that due to a lack of training and resources, they are not prepared to support students with autism.(Beyene et al,2011).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Inclusive education has become a global priority, with the support of international guidelines such as the Salamanca Declaration and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These initiatives demonstrate equity for all students regardless of their ability or background. However, assisting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remains a major challenge.(UNESCO, 1994)

Teachers worldwide face challenges in adjusting curricula, running classes and meeting the unique needs of these pupils. The principles of inclusive education promote the celebration of diversity and ensure that all students have access to a supportive learning environment. Although progress has been made in policy development, implementation is often lagging behind.(Spriggs, 2013)

Teacher attitudes and beliefs are widely recognized as important factors in educational outcomes (Staub et al, 2012); research shows that positive attitudes promote good practice, while negative attitudes may hinder inclusive environments. Moreover, autism poses unique educational challenges due to its complexity and variability, which often require tailored support. Despite increasing awareness, many ASD students still face barriers to full mainstream education due to insufficient training and support systems (Humphrey et al, 2008).

Ethiopia has demonstrated its commitment to inclusive education through policies such as the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2012). However, implementation remains uneven and, in particular, most schools in Ethiopia lack the resources, training and internal support necessary to effectively implement inclusive programmes (Tsfaye et al, 2018). Positive attitudes to inclusion may lead to more effective learning strategies and better results, while negative attitudes may lead to students being isolated and offered fewer opportunities (Beyene et al, 2011).

While international practices promote differentiated instruction and adaptive thinking for autistic students, the scope of such practices in Ethiopian schools is not clear. In Ethiopia, the research currently being conducted is largely focused on general disability or public schools. This creates a clear research gap, as there is limited research specifically on the spectrum of autism in private schools in Addis Ababa. (Abebe et al, 2022).

Understanding this dynamic is essential, as private schools often have different resources, expectations and structures than public ones, which can have a unique impact on the perception and implementation of inclusive practices. Although private schools can offer advantages such as more resources and smaller class sizes, they also face challenges such as focusing on academic performance, which can undermine efforts to achieve equity, and limited access to career development programmes for teachers to support students with special needs. The integration of students with special needs into mainstream education in Ethiopia is a relatively recent development, which requires a deeper understanding of the factors influencing teacher beliefs and behaviour in order to lead successfully. (Brittany et al, 2017).

This study addresses this identified research gap directly by examining the beliefs of teachers in inclusion and how these beliefs are reflected in their implementation of inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorder in selected private schools in Addis Ababa. By addressing this specific context, the study aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities of inclusive learning, identify best practices and identify obstacles to achieving it. The findings should benefit students with ASD and inform policies and practices to promote greater equity and inclusion across the educational system.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs about inclusion and implementation of activities for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in private schools in Addis Ababa.

1.3.2 Specific objectives:

1. To assess and describe the beliefs and attitudes of teachers regarding the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder in selected private schools in Addis Ababa.
2. To identify and describe inclusive practices implemented by teachers for students with ASD in selected private schools in Addis Ababa.
3. To investigate the relationship between teachers' belief in inclusion and their reported inclusion practices for autistic students in selected private schools in Addis Ababa.

1.4 Research questions

1. What are teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of ASD students?
2. How are ASD students included in private schools in Addis Ababa?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' beliefs about inclusion and practices with ASD students?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The relevance of this study is to help understand how teacher beliefs and attitudes affect the implementation of inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorders, particularly in private schools in Addis Ababa.

Helping students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) remains a challenge. Teachers face challenges in adapting curricula, running classes and meeting the unique needs of these pupils. Positive attitudes towards inclusion can lead to more effective learning

strategies and better outcomes for students with special needs. Conversely, negative attitudes may lead to isolation and reduced opportunities for these students. This study is important in order to highlight the challenges and opportunities of inclusive learning and to report on the progress of teacher education programmes.

The importance of this study is that it can provide important insights for:- Education Centre: The study provides evidence-based recommendations for private schools in Addis Ababa to improve their inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorders and is of relevance to future researchers

There is little awareness and resources about autism and related disorders in Ethiopia. This study fills this gap by examining the relationship between teacher belief in inclusion and the implementation of activities for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in private schools in Addis Ababa.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study was carried out in the Ethiopian city of Addis Ababa in three exemplary private schools, namely Flipper International School, School of Tomorrow and Cambridge International School. These schools were selected not only for their commitment to offer internationally recognized curricula, but also for their innovative and innovative approaches to inclusive education, in particular in the support and inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between teacher belief in inclusion and the implementation of activities for students with autism spectrum disorder in these private schools. Research carried out over a period of 4-10 months to allow for detailed data collection and analysis.

1.7 Limitations of the study

While this survey provides valuable insights into teachers' practices and experiences, it is important to recognize some limitations which may affect the interpretation of the results.

A small sample size and a specific geographical area may limit the study; this may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings. Also, because of time and resources, not all

teachers from every school in Ethiopia participate in the survey. The sample was drawn exclusively from three different private schools in Addis Ababa, which raised concerns as to whether it adequately represented the diverse range of private and public education institutions in the city.

The limitations of sampling may be a factor in whether the findings of this study can be generalised to autistic teachers in other schools, countries or regions, particularly in different cultural, social and economic contexts. The Ethiopian context, with its unique pedagogical or inclusive system and cultural attitudes towards disability, may limit the wider applicability of the results.

The study relies on self-reported data which may be prone to bias, such as bias in individual desirability or to false reporting. Teachers may under- or over-report their level of attitude and belief, which may affect the accuracy of their findings.

1.8 Operational Definition

Inclusive Education: Concepts and practices that teach all pupils, irrespective of their disability, in the mainstream education system with appropriate support (Florian, 2008).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

Autism is a neurodevelopment disorder characterized by genetic and environmental factors, which usually occurs in the early life and causes difficulties in social communication and interaction and limited and repetitive behavior. Children with ASD typically exhibit imbalances in social interaction, repeat certain behaviors, and have difficulty communicating with others verbally and non-verbally (Emad et al., 2019).

Teacher Beliefs: Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about students with disabilities and concepts of inclusion change their teaching methods and classroom practices (Forlin et al, 2011).

Chapter Two

2. Review of the related literature

2.1 Introduction

The comprehensive literature review provides a theoretical and empirical basis for the understanding of the subject under consideration. This chapter examines the global and local developments in inclusive education and explores key theories and studies on teacher beliefs and practices in inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The chapter starts with a theoretical framework on which the study is based, followed by a review of inclusive education in the world and in Ethiopia.

2.2 Theoretical review

2.2.1 The definition of inclusive education

Inclusive education has received significant attention and research funding in recent years, underlining the growing commitment to equal opportunities for all students, irrespective of their background or needs. Inclusive education is defined as a single system which offers learning benefits to both typically developing and special needs students. It embodies a comprehensive framework for education, emphasising the provision of quality, individualised education tailored to the individual needs of each child. (Lipsky et al, 1999:15).

Polat (2011) extends this debate by arguing that achieving inclusive education requires a fundamental change in the values, attitudes, policies and practices embedded in education systems. This transition emphasizes the importance of creating a child-friendly, high-quality learning environment which not only promotes academic achievement but also fosters social and emotional growth. Such environments are essential to fostering the development of well-rounded individuals and ultimately contribute positively to the development of society as a whole. (Polat, 2011).

In practice, it is important to recognize that there is no universal model of inclusive education. Interpretation and implementation of inclusive practices varies greatly

depending on the different cultural, social and political contexts of each country (Dyson et al, 1999). For example, in the context of inclusive education for disabled children, several frameworks are used: single-track, dual-track and multi-track systems.(Goransson et al, 2011; Ochiai et al, 2016).

While there is strong international support for a one-stop-shop model of inclusive education, the role and importance of special schools and classrooms remain key issues worthy of in-depth discussion. The World Federation of the Deaf for example has made important points on the need to balance shared learning environments with the unique benefits of specialized environments. (WFD 2016: 7)

Inclusive education has evolved into a pivotal movement, garnering international recognition as a fundamental principle vital for the equitable education of individuals with disabilities. This paradigm is strongly endorsed by multiple global organizations that advocate for the integration of inclusive methodologies across diverse educational systems. The significance of this movement lies in its commitment to aligning educational frameworks with international standards and human rights, focusing on citizenship, inclusion, and societal belonging. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established in 1948, is a key document asserting that access to education is a fundamental right for all individuals (Munongi, 2022).

A landmark moment in the advancement of inclusive education occurred at the UNESCO conference in Salamanca, Spain, in June 1994, known as “The International Conference on Education for People with Special Needs: Access and Quality.” This seminal event brought together representatives from 92 countries and 25 international organizations, culminating in the Salamanca Statement and Framework. This document serves as a guiding framework for global initiatives aimed at the development and implementation of inclusive education systems). It emphasizes the imperative for educational systems to accommodate all students, including those with a spectrum of diverse needs. (Ainscow et al., 2019).

The aim is to alleviate the exclusion of individuals from the education system and the wider social context. This approach advocates substantial changes in content, curricula,

organisational structures and pedagogy, promoting a common vision whereby mainstream education fulfils its responsibility to educate every child and adapts its methods to meet the unique needs and learning experiences of each learner (Ainscow et al., 2013).

At a later meeting in 2009, the International Conference on Education extended the definition of inclusive education as a transformative process whereby mainstream education and the early childhood environment are gradually adapted to better support all children in achieving their academic and social potential. This definition underlines the urgent need to remove obstacles to communication, interaction, access to curricula, teaching methods, socialisation and evaluation at all levels of education (Forlin, 2013). Furthermore, the striking definition of (Loreman et al, 2002) makes it clear that inclusive education is an inherent right for all students with disabilities, which requires equal access to educational services, as well as a culture that recognises and celebrates diversity.

Recent data from UNESCO reveals a pressing situation, with approximately 263 million children and youth out of school, a majority of whom are girls aged between 6 and 17 years. This sobering statistic underscores the critical need for ongoing advocacy and initiatives aimed at ensuring that the principles of inclusive education are not only recognized but effectively implemented (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016).

2.2.2 Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, with a population of over 128.7 million, is facing major educational challenges, especially as around 85 percent of its population lives in rural areas. These dispersed communities create distinct barriers to the education sector and complicate efforts to disseminate knowledge and ensure equal access to educational resources. The Ministry of Education (2015) stresses that the geographical diversity and remoteness of rural areas necessitate innovative approaches in order to overcome these barriers.

Ministry of Education launched in 2012 a special needs education programme strategy that is directly linked to the basic education and training policy. This strategy recognises the rights of students with disabilities to access mainstream, secondary and university

education which is adapted specifically to their individual needs and stresses the need for appropriate accommodation to achieve this. However, the strategy has inherent weaknesses and various problems have emerged in its implementation. Increased awareness of the evolving educational landscape and the Ethiopian Government's support for the United Nations (UN) conventions on the rights of persons with disabilities have required a thorough review and updating of the strategy.

The revised strategy aspires to create an inclusive education system that delivers high-quality, relevant, and equitable educational and training opportunities for all children, youth, and adults with Special Educational Needs. The overarching goal is to enable these individuals to participate fully in the socio-economic development of Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 2016). Notably, in the fifth ESDP, inclusive and special needs education has been prioritized as cross-cutting themes, mandating their integration into every facet of the educational sector (Ministry of Education 2015).

At present, inclusive education has gained traction as a significant priority among various international partners engaged in educational reform in Ethiopia. A prominent supporter of these efforts has been Finland, which has played a leading role in advancing inclusive education in the country for over two decades (Šiška et al. 2020). The partnership between Ethiopia and the Finnish government dates back to 1982, highlighting a long-standing commitment. The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia has maintained a fruitful collaboration with the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working together to enhance inclusive education frameworks within schools and teacher training colleges. This partnership has bolstered both technical support and financial resources, contributing largely to the inclusive educational landscape (Šiška et al. 2020).

As a result of these concerted national and international efforts, there has been a notable increase in the enrollment of children with disabilities in schools at the national level, particularly between 2012 and 2016 (José et al, 2020). However, the education system still grapples with longstanding challenges that were evident even before the policies were reformed (Schiemer, 2017). For instance, while specific current data on special

schools and classes remains elusive, the Education Statistics Annual Abstract for the 2016/17 academic year reported a gross enrollment rate of only 7.8% for primary students with disabilities (with boys at 8.6% and girls at 7.0%), and just 2.3% for secondary education (boys at 2.5% and girls at 2.0%) (Ministry of Education 2016b). Even more concerning is the low enrollment of children with disabilities in higher education; reports indicate that only about 4% of students with special educational needs are able to access this level of education (Ministry of Education, 2016).

This stark statistic underscores the troubling reality that approximately 96% of children with disabilities remain out of school, and those who do manage to enroll often face significant barriers, including high dropout rates and grade repetition, primarily due to inadequate support and resources (Haye, 2018). Furthermore, the frequency of both dropout and repetition rates among students with disabilities is considerably higher compared to their peers, revealing persistent gaps in the educational system that warrant urgent attention and targeted intervention (Temesgen et al, 2018).

2.3 Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive Education

A substantial body of research has scrutinized educators' attitudes toward inclusive education, revealing a complex and heterogeneous spectrum of opinions. Although much of the existing literature has emerged from developed countries employing quantitative methodologies, a systematic review conducted by (Boer et al, 2011) analyzed 26 studies and discovered a significant variability in teachers' attitudes, with a notable proportion exhibiting neutral or negative perceptions. Contrarily, a meta-analysis encompassing data from 1984 to 2000, demonstrated a general trend of increasing positivity and support for inclusive education among educators. (Avramidis et al, 2002).

In contrast, empirical research regarding teachers' perceptions in developing nations remains scarce, albeit some noteworthy studies have surfaced. For example, (Kuroda et al, 2017) assessed the Cambodian educational context, highlighting teachers' reluctance to include children with severe sensory impairments. Similar investigated teacher experiences in Ghana, identifying that entrenched negative attitudes stemmed from inadequate training and a dearth of resources.(Suddey et al, 2008).

The first factor, teachers' competencies, especially regarding specialized training, is pivotal. Research in Cambodia and various African countries underscores the pressing need for enhanced training and comprehensive support for educators operating in inclusive environments (Eleweke et al, 2002; Kuroda, et al, 2017).

The second factor concerns the overarching educational milieu. Evidence suggests that reduced class sizes correlate with more affirmative attitudes among teachers (Boer et al, 2011). Studies from Ghana underscore that large class sizes present substantive barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education (Ocloo et al, 2008). Although class size challenges are less frequently highlighted in research from developed nations, they remain a critical concern for classroom management in inclusive settings within developing contexts. Furthermore, studies often emphasize the necessity of adequate facilities for accommodating children with disabilities (Eleweke et al, 2002).

The third factor pertains to the social dynamics within the classroom. Numerous investigations indicate that students with disabilities frequently encounter social isolation and are susceptible to behaviours such as teasing and bullying from their peers (Boer et al, 2011; UNESCO 2009). Such adverse experiences understandably contribute to teachers' cautious perspectives on inclusive education. For instance, interviews with primary school students with learning disabilities in Ireland conducted revealed significant barriers to interactions with their non-disabled peers. Additionally, a report from the European Commission (2013) elucidated that students with autism spectrum disorders frequently experience teasing connected to their behaviour patterns. These findings suggest that learners with specific disabilities may face analogous challenges in mainstream educational environments. (Ring et al, 2005)

2.4 Inclusive education Policies and Practices in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has made commendable progress in adopting inclusive education, which is based on the belief that all students deserve the opportunity to learn in a regular classroom, with teachers carefully addressing their individual needs. While this transition presents challenges, it also opens the door to meaningful progress. Research carried out

in various Ethiopian schools highlights the need to address the misconception and negative attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of disabled students. For example, a study shows that a significant proportion of teachers may be reluctant to integrate disabled pupils into mainstream education. Concerns are often raised about educational productivity and perceived additional demands on teachers, especially for students with more severe disabilities who may need specialised support. (Etenesh, 2000).

On the positive side, new research shows that some teachers in an inclusive setting move towards a more supportive approach. This evolving perspective suggests that, under the right conditions and with the right support, a culture of inclusion can take root and flourish. To reinforce the progress made, it is important to continue addressing the current negative attitudes of some teachers and to ensure that inclusive learning can flourish as a realistic and effective approach to teaching. (Wood, 1992; cited in Abate 2001),

Ethiopia's commitment to inclusive education is clearly reflected in its formal political frameworks. The Special Needs Education Programme Strategy, launched in 2006 and revised in 2012 as the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy, sets out a comprehensive vision for the integration of students with special needs in the education system. The aim of this policy is to create an inclusive education system which guarantees quality and equitable education for all children, young people and adults with intellectual disabilities and which empowers them to play an active role in the socio-economic development of the country (ME 2012: 12). A fundamental goal of this strategy is to foster a more inclusive society that recognizes and values individuals with diverse educational needs.

In order to effectively realise this inclusive vision, it is essential that educators, parents and the wider community develop a thorough understanding of the concept of inclusion. From a sociological point of view, theories such as Cultural Marxism emphasise the important impact that teachers' attitudes can have on their students (Yamada 2005). It is therefore essential to foster a positive perception of inclusive education among key stakeholders, including teachers and parents, in order to ensure successful implementation. The importance of all stakeholders in education being well acquainted

with inclusive education principles and practices in order to support their effective implementation.(Lipsky and Gartner, 1999)

2.4.1 Overview of Inclusive Education Policies in Ethiopia

This section provides a constructive review of inclusive education policies in Ethiopia. The road to inclusive education began with the creation of an education and training policy in 1994, which was the first important step under the current federal Democratic government. Although the ETP (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994) mentioned special education only briefly, it laid the ground for future development in this sector.

Subsequent Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) were initiated, with ESDP I (1997/98-2001/02) and ESDP II (2002/03-2004/05) not addressing special education. However, ESDP III (2005/06-2010/11) represented a pivotal moment, as it began to recognize the need for special education and emphasized the importance of inclusive education (MoE 2003; MoE 2005). This progressive recognition continued with ESDP IV (2010/11-2014/15), which was the first to include a dedicated section on special needs education and inclusive education (MoE 2010). ESDP V (2015/16-2019/20) further integrated "special needs education (SNE)/inclusive education" as a key component, outlining current circumstances and plans (MoE 2015)

These advancements in policy reflect a growing commitment to inclusive education within Ethiopia's educational framework. In alignment with global trends, the "Special Needs Education Program Strategy," developed in 2006, highlighted the importance of inclusive education in achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Education For All (EFA) goals.

The 2012 update, now called the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy, sets out a clear vision: to create an inclusive education system offering quality, relevant and fair education to all children, young people and adults with special needs. This objective aims to empower individuals to play their full part in the country's socio-economic development (MNE 2012: 12), and reflects Ethiopia's ambition to promote an inclusive society through a comprehensive education policy.

2.5 Implementation of inclusive education:

The "Guideline for establishing and managing inclusive education resource/support centers" created in 2015 outlines the specific responsibilities and activities associated with IE resource centers (MoE 2015). IE resource centers develop educational materials tailored for children with disabilities, which teachers can utilize in both core and satellite schools. Itinerant teachers, who hold degrees in Special Needs Education (SNE), assist in the education of children with disabilities within both core and satellite schools. For example, itinerant teachers assess the various types and levels of disabilities among children, as well as their specific needs (MoE 2015).

Core schools also host teacher training sessions and meetings for the sharing of experiences among teachers from both core and satellite schools (Jennings 2011; MoE 2002). The "Special Needs Education Program Strategy" established in 2006 incorporates the creation of IE resource centers and the assignment of itinerant teachers in core schools (MoE 2006).

According to ESDP V, Ethiopia has established 113 IE resource centers. On March 2017, only nine schools in Addis Ababa had IE resource centers, while two schools were in the process of establishing them. This suggests that the conditions across the 113 IE resource centers may differ. (MoE, 2015).

Ethiopia has made notable progress in endorsing and applying various international frameworks and legal texts that emphasize the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities. The rights of persons with disabilities are integrated within several legal frameworks and policy documents at the national level (MoE, 2012), reflecting the nation's dedication to enhancing the lives of these individuals.

However, despite these policy advancements, studies indicate that considerable efforts are still needed to achieve full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all areas of society, particularly in education (Teketel, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). Research conducted highlights the difficulties in effectively implementing inclusive education for special needs children in Ethiopia. Their findings suggest that the current policy approach largely

depends on a top-down strategy heavily influenced by both international and national guidelines, slogans, and strategies. (Belay et al, 2015)

Melese (2019) study, entitled 'Ethiopia's inclusive education strategy as a responsive learning environment for an inclusive higher education system', points out that Ethiopia lacks a well organised and robust inclusive education model at tertiary level. Research shows that there is currently no coherent policy on inclusive education; instead, there is a draft strategy paper which provides some initial elements to assist students with disabilities. In addition points out the worrying lack of enrolment opportunities for disabled children and highlights the difficult choice between regular schooling and special education. (Yoshiko, 2019)

The Ludago (2020) report also highlights the lack of dedicated staff in district, zone and regional education offices to promote and implement inclusive learning practices. This observation is consistent with Mintesnot (2020), which found that the lack of clear guidelines defining what constitutes inclusive education and its implementation poses major challenges in the BenchiMaji area of south-west Ethiopia. The absence of a mandatory inclusive education policy is a major obstacle to effective implementation of inclusive practices in educational institutions.(Zellalem, 2018)

At a global level, disabled people often face high levels of poverty and marginalisation (UNESCO, 2016). In Ethiopia, UNICEF reports that participation by disabled people in economic, social and cultural activities in their communities is severely limited (UNICEF, 2011). Access to educational resources that meet the diverse needs of students is also highlighted as a key factor in the overall success of education.

The educational system in Ethiopia is lacking in institutions and facilities to meet the educational needs of all segments of the population. These shortcomings are often linked to existing social inequalities, as reported in the Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education ISSN (online): 2789-2875. Thus, the recurrent theme in various sources is that the lack of resources is a major obstacle to effective implementation of inclusive education initiatives in Ethiopia (Alemayehu, 2019; Dessalegn et al, 2016; Ludag, 2020; Tressew, 2005; Wondwossen et al, 2020).

Several studies confirm the importance of accessible environments for children with disabilities to fully enjoy their educational rights. However, the persistent lack of accessibility in the school environment remains one of the most important obstacles to effective implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia, underlining the urgent need for systemic reform and investment in resources to address these problems.(Jaffer et al, 2020; Mintesnot et al, 2020; Mitiku et al, 2014).

2.6 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder with significant impact on social interaction, communication and behaviour. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V), published in 2013 by the American Psychiatric Association, in order to meet the diagnostic criteria for autism, a child needs to have persistent deficits in the areas of social communication and interaction. This includes problems in areas such as social and emotional reciprocity - where individuals may struggle to respond to social cues or to share emotional experiences - non-verbal communication, including eye contact and gesture, and developing, maintaining and understanding relationships. (DSM-V, 2013)

In addition to the classic symptoms of social deficits and repetitive behaviour, people with ASD may also experience cognitive problems, which may include intellectual disabilities, attention deficit disorder and problems with executive function. These cognitive problems may lead to behavioural problems, including aggression and repetitive behaviour, which further complicate the educational and social experience of people with spectrum disorders (Mannion et al, 2013).Previous studies have revealed a clear gap between the multiple challenges faced by people with ASD and public understanding, which tends to focus mainly on behavioural problems. This focus often reinforces a narrow and subjective view which highlights insufficient social skills and disruptive behaviour (Wood et al, 2016; Aube et al., 2020).

Autism encompasses a number of neurodevelopmental disorders and Spectrum refers to the variation in social, communicative and cognitive abilities of people with the disease (Campisi et al., 2018). Current estimates suggest that approximately 1-2 percent of children worldwide are diagnosed with autism (Elsabird et al., 2012). There has been a

marked increase in these diagnoses over the last 30 years, raising questions about the underlying causes (Blaxill, 2004; Warnke et al., 2007).

In addition, people with ASD often have co-morbid psychiatric disorders, and research has shown that symptoms such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, problems with executive function and various social and communication impairments are common (Van Steensel et al., 2011; Williams et al, 2018).

This complexity may manifest itself in violent behaviour, stereotyped behaviour, and emotional instability (Cappadocia et al., 2012). It should also be noted that many students with ASD may perform poorly in school and may not achieve their full cognitive potential because of these multiple problems (Ashburner et al., 2010).

The unique challenges of ASD often lead to considerable difficulties in mainstream education which ultimately affects the teachers' perception of how appropriate this environment is for children with ASD. While a significant number of children with ASD face significant functional limitations, many others have demonstrated the ability to function at high levels and thrive in inclusive settings. (van Roekel et al., 2010),

However, students with ASD are statistically more likely to be excluded from school than those with other types of special needs (Barnard, 2000; Department of Education and Skills, 2006). This trend may be due to the significant learning challenges faced by students with ASD, which may undermine the self-efficacy and self-confidence of teachers in their ability to effectively engage with these students (Anglim et al., 2018; Klassen et al., 2011; Rodden et al., 2018; Ruble et al., 2013).

Teachers often say that ASD students present greater integration problems than other students with special needs (Speak of Parliament, Education and Skills Committee, 2006). They report that they experience increased stress in dealing with the social and emotional deficits specific to these students and consider the task of teaching students with ASD to be particularly challenging (Emam et al, 2009; Simpson et al., 2003). Given the increased prevalence of ASD in educational settings and the different ways in which impairments can affect the dynamics of a classroom according to the severity of the symptoms it is essential to critically examine the attitudes of teachers towards the

inclusion of students with ASD. This investigation could provide insight into better support structures and strategies for promoting equity in the education sector.(Leonard et al, 2020),

2.7 Prevalence Rates of ASD

Research on autism in Africa remains particularly limited, revealing critical gaps in knowledge and understanding of the condition across the continent. Evidence suggests that many African countries suffer from a lack of mental health care infrastructure and an acute shortage of trained health workers to deal with autism and related developmental disorders (Bakare et al, 2011). Unfortunately, no African government has developed comprehensive policies or good practice guidelines to address the assessment, treatment, education and support of people with autism (Vries, 2016).A recent conference involving 47 delegates from 14 African countries highlighted these shortcomings, highlighted the widespread lack of autism services and the urgent need to raise awareness and develop protocols for screening, training and service delivery across the continent (Ruparelia et al., 2016).

Ethiopia exemplifies the resource constraints faced by many African nations concerning autism service provision. The identification and management of children with autism are further exacerbated by entrenched stigma surrounding mental health (Shibre et al., 2006) and widespread misconceptions about the etiology of developmental disabilities and mental health disorders (Alem et al., 1999; Abera et al., 2015). Our recent study explored the stigma experienced, the explanatory models employed by caregivers, and the unmet needs of 102 caregivers seeking assistance for their children with autism and/or intellectual disabilities (Tilahun et al., 2016).

2.8 Challenges Encountered by Students with ASD in Mainstream Education

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) typically encounter significant challenges relating to communication and social interaction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Research indicates that while educators generally exhibit positive attitudes towards including students with ASD in mainstream classrooms, both parents

and educators frequently articulate concerns over these students' social interaction difficulties, and, in some instances, behavioral issues. To facilitate effective and tailored support for students with ASD in mainstream educational settings, educators have identified a range of specific needs.(Mandell et al, 2016).

In the study (Van der Steen et al, 2020), primary school teachers have expressed their wish for collaborative involvement with specialised educators, practical classroom teaching strategies, opportunities to strengthen their self-confidence in dealing with students with ASD and effective tools to support their communication and social skills. This is consistent with findings from other research showing that teachers often identify the need for additional ASD-related training to improve their self-efficacy. It is a concern that in general teacher training programmes specialised training or courses addressing autism are often absent, which may hamper effective teaching practices for students with ASD.(Garrad et al., 2019; Helms et al., 1999; Lindsay et al., 2013; Zambrano et al, 2018)

2.8.1 Academic Performance Challenges of students with ASD

Students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder face a complex set of challenges in inclusive education settings. The research of Allen and Yau (2019) describes the social, academic, and behavioural challenges these individuals face. Delays in acquiring basic social and communication skills are a major concern, which critically hamper their participation in both play and learning activities (Mody&Belliveau, 2013). Unique behavioural characteristics associated with ASD may prevent active participation in the classroom and negatively affect peer interaction, as noted by (Conallen et al, 2017).

For example, many students on the spectrum exhibit language acquisition problems, leading to communication deficits, which often lead to social withdrawal and reduced ability to interact with others. These difficulties prevent them from engaging in normal conversations and social interactions and encourage feelings of isolation, especially in collaborative group activities and in non-structured interaction with peers (Mody et al, 2013, p. 159).

In addition, behavioural problems such as verbal outbursts and non-compliance often disrupt the learning environment, distracting teachers and peers, and provoking negative reactions in typically developing pupils (Mody et al, 2013).

The diversity inherent in ASD requires a nuanced understanding of individual differences, which makes it difficult for teachers to integrate these students into mainstream education (Finlay et al., 2022; Leonard et al, 2022). Changes in curricula and pedagogical strategies are necessary to facilitate meaningful learning experiences for students with ASD, alongside their peers. These adaptations need to be adapted to the individual learner's level of functioning (Moore et al, 2010). As a result, teachers face considerable challenges in meeting the diverse needs of these pupils (Hodges et al., 2020), and navigating these complexities can be particularly difficult without clear and structured guidance (Simpson et al., 2003; Van Der Steen et al., 2020).

In the context of mainstreaming of ASD students, teachers have a dual role in addressing the specific learning needs of these individuals while also meeting the needs of typically developing peers (Boyle et al., 2022). Unfortunately, numerous studies show that teachers in general education often lack the training and professional development necessary to create a truly inclusive environment (Gomez-Marquez et al., 2021, 2022).

Teachers have reported the urgent need to improve cooperation with special education staff, to improve access to the necessary resources, and to integrate technology - elements crucial to fulfilling the mandates set out in legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Mulholland et al, 2016).

2.9 Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes toward Inclusion

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes about inclusive education are the result of a complex interplay of factors, as explained in a comprehensive meta-analysis by (Avramidis et al, 2002). These structures are dynamic and evolve over time as a result of different influences. Notably, national educational policies have a strong impact on teacher attitudes towards inclusion, as confirmed by (Takala et al. 2012; Saloviita et al, 2016). The availability of academic support and educational resources for teachers and students is also crucial to instilling these beliefs (Urton et al., 2014). Moreover, the level of

understanding of inclusive learning frameworks by teachers varies, which has a significant impact on their willingness to implement inclusive practices. The nature of student disability also plays a key role in informing teacher attitudes to disability.(Krischler et al., 2019)

In a rigorous review of scholarly investigations, (De Boer et al, 2011) cataloged numerous studies that reveal students with emotional and behavioral disorders, along with those characterized by severe and complex learning disabilities, are frequently viewed as most challenging to incorporate within mainstream educational settings. This perception complicates teachers' efficacy in enacting inclusive pedagogie. Similarly identified that educators often expressed more negative sentiments toward students presenting behavioral issues or sensory disabilities, such as deafness or blindness, particularly when contrasted with peers who have learning disabilities.(Benoit, 2016).

This demonstrates a prevailing belief among teachers that certain disabilities are inherently more intricate and demanding to address, fostering apprehension towards fully integrating students with pronounced challenges in inclusive environments. Consequently, teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are closely linked to their perceived ability to adapt teaching strategies to the curriculum and to adapt to the different degrees of disability experienced by their pupils. Such flexibility is essential to promote a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere beneficial to all students. (Ward et al, 1987)

2.9.1 Importance of Teacher Beliefs in Inclusion

Zelalem (2018) highlighted the important and complex interaction between the beliefs of teachers about ability and disability, their approach to learning and teaching methods, and their conception of their role and responsibilities in addressing the needs of all learners in the educational system. These beliefs have a critical impact not only on their teaching practices, but also on their overall effectiveness in engaging and supporting students with special needs alongside non-disabled students. Teachers who perceive themselves as not having the necessary knowledge and skills to teach students with special needs effectively are often hampered by the lack of quality training adapted to inclusive classrooms.(Florian and Linklater, 2010).

The need for students with disabilities to have equal access to educational opportunities with non-disabled students is paramount. This requirement requires that teachers of general education provide tailored and effective instruction to meet the unique needs of these pupils. However, many teachers face major difficulties in fully integrating disabled pupils into mainstream classrooms, mainly due to a lack of training in adaptive pedagogy and lack of the necessary skills. A poignant illustration of this issue can be found in a study of 20 regular schools in Ghana, wherein 46% of the 220 teachers surveyed exhibited a limited grasp of fundamental inclusive education concepts, while 58% reported lacking any training in special education or inclusive teaching methodologies. This notable gap in both training and understanding underscores the pressing need for targeted professional development initiatives to equip educators for the complexities of inclusive education. (Kuyini & Desai, 2008).

2.10. Factors Influencing Teachers' Attitudes

Extensive studies have shown that a variety of interconnected factors significantly impact teachers' attitudes towards their students, particularly in inclusive educational environments. A crucial takeaway from the literature is that teachers' reactions can differ greatly based on the specific disabilities exhibited by their students. This variation suggests that the nature of the learning disability of any individual student, whether it is a learning problem, a physical limitation or an emotional problem, and the unique educational obstacles that these conditions pose, can strongly influence the views and interactions of teachers. This is consistent with the framework proposed by (Salvia et al, 1986), which classify these effects as child-related.

The importance of teacher attitudes is enormous, as they play a key role in promoting successful integration in the educational system. (Avramidis and Norwich 2002) point out that the success of inclusive learning depends on the passion and commitment shown by teachers in their interaction with pupils. When teachers show real passion for their teaching and devote time to understanding the interests and backgrounds of their students, their involvement with students is often more meaningful and supportive. Such positive approaches not only foster a caring learning environment but also significantly affect students' feelings of belonging and participation in the school community. This

concept is supported by various research studies conducted which highlight the crucial role of nurturing teacher-student interactions for favourable educational outcomes. (Alder, 2002; Breault, 2013; Smith et al, 2012),

Moreover, the type and quality of these interactions is crucial, as they can have a significant impact on the learning process of students. Research shows that these pathways are influenced not only by the innate characteristics of students and teachers, but also by the nuances and dynamics of the ongoing interaction in the classroom. This underlines the importance of attentive and responsive teaching practices that address the individual needs of students.(Steenbeek et al, 2012; Van der Steen et al, 2019).

Chapter Three

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In order to fully explore the complex dynamics involved in inclusive education for students with ASD, this study adopts a mixed methodology approach, effectively combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative aspect involves the use of a carefully designed questionnaire to assess teachers' attitudes, beliefs and self-efficiencies in relation to including ASD pupils in their classrooms.

At the same time, the Qualitative dimension includes semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive information on teachers' personal experiences, obstacles encountered in their inclusion practices and views on what constitutes adequate support for students with ASD. This mixed method approach increases the validity of findings, allows for triangulation of data from different sources and leads to a better understanding of this important field of research (Creswell, 2014; Manion et al, 2007).

3.2 Description of the Study Area

This research is carried out in only three exemplary private schools situated in the dynamic city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Flipper International School, School of Tomorrow, and Cambridge International School. These schools were selected not only for their commitment to offer internationally recognised curricula, but also for their innovative and innovative approaches to inclusive education, in particular in the support and inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder.

❖ Flipper International School

Flipper International School was founded in 1998 by Mrs. Menna Selamu and Mrs. Serkaddis Seifu. The school is known for its student-centered teaching philosophy and its aim to provide a comprehensive education that addresses academic, emotional, and social development. Its vision includes creating a nurturing environment, especially in early

childhood and primary education, where every student is recognized and supported based on their individual learning needs.

While the school's vision aligns with inclusive ideals, findings from this study indicate that practical application remains limited. Teachers were generally open to supporting learners with ASD, but many lacked specific training or professional development in inclusive methodologies. Although the school promotes individual learning plans, the actual implementation of these plans for children with autism appeared inconsistent. The responsibility for inclusion largely rested on individual teachers' personal motivation rather than coordinated institutional policy. Additionally, there was limited availability of specialized support staff or infrastructure designed specifically to accommodate students with ASD.

- Website: [Flipper International School](<https://www.flipperschool.com/>)

❖ **School of Tomorrow**

The school established in September 1993, School of Tomorrow is one of Ethiopia's well-established private schools, providing nursery, pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. The school is recognized for its emphasis on English language instruction and individualized learning, aiming to develop students into responsible global citizens. Its branches are spread across Addis Ababa, including three in Bole, Yeka, three in Arada, and three in Nifas Silk-Lafto sub-cities, ensuring wide community access.

The school formally acknowledges the importance of inclusive education, including the inclusion of learners with ASD. However, this study found that while physical infrastructure was relatively supportive — including ramps and classroom flexibility — there was a significant disconnect between the school's inclusive mission and classroom-level implementation. Many teachers expressed uncertainty about how to recognize or support students on the autism spectrum. Interview findings also revealed that prior training opportunities had little lasting impact due to the absence of follow-up, institutional reinforcement, or a dedicated special needs team.

Website: [School of Tomorrow](<https://www.schooloftomorrow-edu.com/>)

❖ Cambridge International School

Cambridge International School, located in Goro Medhanialem, is a member of the Cambridge global network. It offers a British curriculum from Early Years to A Levels and BTEC qualifications, with a strong academic culture and a vision centered on quality education, innovation, and inclusivity. The school serves approximately 600 students and employs over 100 teachers, many with international experience. It is endorsed by Pearson Edexcel and is known for its high academic standards.

Despite these strengths, findings from this research highlighted that the school's focus on academic rigor and discipline may limit its flexibility to accommodate neurodiverse learners such as those with ASD. While the school has articulated its vision to promote diversity and inclusion, observations and interviews suggested that classroom realities do not consistently reflect this vision. Teachers reported minimal exposure to students with autism and lacked the training and resources necessary to adapt teaching strategies effectively. Inclusion existed more as a concept in policy than as a daily classroom practice.

Overall, while Cambridge International School promotes high standards and claims inclusivity, actual support for students with ASD remains limited. The success of inclusive efforts was often dependent on the discretion, training, and attitudes of individual teachers rather than a comprehensive school-wide strategy.

3.3. Study population

With an expected sample size of approximately 250 teachers in three schools, it was concluded that a sample size of 150 teachers was sufficient to reach a 95 percent confidence level and to maintain a margin of error of 5 percent. This rigorous statistical methodology not only supports the validation of our findings, but also increases their relevance for the wider teacher population, thus increasing the overall relevance and impact of the study.

The total sample were determined by using single population proportion formula by

Considering the following assumptions

Formula: $n = (z \alpha/2)^2 * (1-p)/d^2$

Where: n = the desired sample size

d =5% (maximum margin of error the researcher is willing to allow)

Z =1.96 (standard normal deviation value corresponding to 95% confidence level)

95% confidence level,

P = 50%

$n = (z \alpha/2)^2 * (1-p)/d^2 = (1.96)^2 (0.5*0.5) = 384$

(0.05)²

Thus, the minimum required sample size was approximately 384. However, due to the limited resources and access, only 150 participants were selected. This limitation is recognised and discussed in the limitations section of the study.

3.3.1 Sampling Techniques

In order to ensure a thorough and fair representation of different viewpoints, stratified random sampling was used to select a total of 150 teachers from three different schools to participate in the survey. In particular, the sampling strategy involved the selection of 50 teachers from each school, ensuring an equal representation which really reflects the different contexts and demographics of each school. Adopting this method may promote a balanced distribution between the three schools, while also improving the universality of results. This strategy has allowed the development of broader implications which may be applicable to similar educational environments (Krejcie et al, 1970).

A purposive sampling strategy was used for the qualitative part of the survey to select 10 teachers with significant teaching experience in students with autism spectrum disorder. This targeted selection process prioritised teachers who could provide a thorough and insightful perspective based on their direct classroom experience, which enriched the quality of the data collection.

3.4 Tools of data collection

This study used two main data collection tools to effectively address the study objectives of integrating students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) into private schools in Addis Ababa. These tools were carefully selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs, attitudes and practices of educators in the field of student inclusion of people with ASD.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aims to cover in a comprehensive way the key elements of the learning environment around the inclusion of students with ASD, with a particular focus on: the attitudes of teachers towards the integration of students with ASD into mainstream classrooms. The questionnaire is divided into three different parts to encourage a coherent flow and a thorough collection of data.

The questionnaire was provided in a paper-based format to a representative sample of 150 teachers, 50 of whom were selected from each of the three schools selected. The responses were systematically analysed using SPSS software and using a variety of descriptive and inferential statistical methods to generate meaningful results (Bryman, 2016).

3.4.2 Interview Guide

The interview guide consists of open-ended questions, each designed to elicit a comprehensive response on key topics relevant to the objectives of the study: this approach allows participants to share their personal stories while keeping the objectives of the study in line. It strikes a balance between consistency and adaptability, and allows for the examination of specific issues that may arise in interviews (Cohen et al, 2018). This depth of dialogue promotes a more comprehensive understanding of the different experiences and institutional contexts of the different continents.

A **purposive sampling** method was used to select 10 teachers based on their direct involvement with students with special needs. Interviews were conducted in person and digitally recorded with the consent of the participants, followed by a comprehensive thematic analysis to identify and articulate key themes. a employed to select 10 teachers based on their direct involvement with ASD students. The interviews were take place in person and it was digitally recorded with the consent of participants, followed by an extensive thematic analysis aimed at identifying and expressing key themes.(Braun et al, 2006).

3.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Teachers must have at least one year of teaching experience, which is necessary to ensure that they have a basic understanding of classroom dynamics and pedagogical methods.
- Teachers should be actively involved with or teaching students with ASD, which would allow them to provide relevant insights and in-depth experiences in the context of inclusive education.
- Teachers must be willing to give informed consent for participation in this research, ensuring they comprehend their role and the study's intentions.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Teachers with less than one year of teaching experience will be excluded from the study as their limited experience may result in insufficient depth of information being collected.
- Teachers with no previous experience of working with students with ASD will also be excluded, as their experience may not adequately reflect the specific challenges and strategies of teaching in an inclusive environment.
- Teachers who are unable to give informed consent will be excluded to ensure that all participants fully understand and agree with the nature and scope of the study.

Variables

Independent Variables:

- Teachers' Attitudes
- Teachers' Beliefs
- Teachers' Efficacy

Dependent Variables:

- Practice

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. In this study, reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which evaluates the internal consistency of the instruments used to measure teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive education for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

In order to verify clarity, understanding, and acceptance, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the research instruments and to identify and address any weaknesses a pretest with 15 participants which will not be included in the actual study. This will make the results of the primary study more valid and reliable, while reducing errors. The coefficient of reliability, also known as Cronbach's alpha, is used to calculate the internal consistency or reliability of the questionnaire measures.

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Items	N of Items	Interpretation
Attitude Scale	.74	19	Acceptable internal consistency
Belief Scale	.73	9	Acceptable internal consistency

These values indicate that both scales are acceptable internally, as Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 or higher are generally considered acceptable for research purposes (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). In summary, the results of the pilot study suggest that the instruments are of acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha 0.74 for attitudes and 0.73 for beliefs. table1)

3.7. Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were cleaned and verified for completeness and coded and entered in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis such as frequency, percentage and mean, median, variance and standard deviation are calculated as correlations. These were then put into tables and figures.

3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

To perform a thorough analysis of the quantitative data collected during the study, the researcher used software from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis starts by calculating descriptive statistics, which include key metrics such as mean, standard deviation, median, and frequency distribution. These descriptive statistics provided a basic overview of the data and allowed us to identify the main trends and variations in the responses of the respondents.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-tests and ANOVA to explore the relationship between demographic variables and attitudes. These analytical strategies allow exploring the relationships between the variables and helping the researcher to identify important patterns and associations that may be present in the data. For example, to examine how demographic factors such as age, gender, and teaching experience relate to participants' attitudes towards inclusive education. Through these analyses, the research goal is to enhance our interpretations of the data, arriving at meaningful conclusions that address the broader research questions.

3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews have been carefully analysed using thematic analysis in line with the structured framework proposed by (Braun et al, 2006). This involved open coding of responses from participants to reveal key themes, patterns and sentiments reflecting their experience and views.

Thematic analysis was used for the transcript of the interrogation. Data has been manually coded to identify recurring patterns and themes relevant to teacher beliefs and inclusive practice. Thematic analysis allow for the identification of recurring themes that illustrate the views of the participants on inclusive education and any challenges they face. During this phase focus specifically on the subtleties of their narrative, examining how each experience differs from or conforms to established educational theories. By linking these insights to the study objectives, the research was extracted a rich and contextual understanding of the experiences of the participants, which would contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of inclusive practices in education.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, University of Addis Ababa prior to the study. Authorization by the authorities of each university. The significance of the study explained to the participant prior to enrollment in the study and informed consent was given. Any information obtained from teachers keep remain confidential. Coding and aggregated reporting used to remove the names and other personal identifiers of respondents throughout the course of the study to ensure anonymity.

Chapter Four

4. Results

4.1. Introduction

The objective of this research is to examine and assess educators' views and beliefs concerning the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) into mainstream classrooms. It particularly looks at potential variations in attitudes between male and female teachers and investigates how teaching experience might affect these perspectives. This chapter intends to elaborate on the findings, consider their implications, recognize the study's limitations, and propose recommendations for future research and practical application.

4.2. Demographic characteristics of participants

The total sample size for this study was 150 participants. The sample consisted of 51 male (34%) and 99 female (66%) teachers, indicating a predominantly female sample. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents were between 26-33 years old (66.7%), with smaller proportions in the 34-41 age groups (26.7%) and 42-49 age groups (6.7%). In terms of field of specialization, applied science was the most frequent (28%), followed by others (21.3%), psychology (20%), special needs (16%), and engineering (14.7%). Most respondents held a degree (69.3%), with 26.7% holding a master's degree and 4% holding a diploma. The years of experience were categorized into 1-5 years (45.3%), 6-10 years (38%), and greater than 10 years (16.7%), with the largest group having 1-5 years of experience. The grade levels taught by the respondents were kindergarten (29.3%), grade 1-4 (44.7%), and grade 5-8 (26%).

Regarding experience with children with autism, 32% of respondents face them daily, 10% weekly, 8.7% monthly, 34% sometimes, and 15.3% never. 57.3% of the respondents do not have a student with autism in their class, while 42.7% do. For those who have students with autism, the level of autism was reported as mild (15.3%), moderate (22.7%), severe (10%), and none (52%). In terms of training, 54% of the respondents believe they do not have enough training for educating children with autism, compared to 46% who believe they do.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	51	34.0
	Female	99	66.0
Age	26-33	100	66.7
	34-41	40	26.7
	42-49	10	6.7
Field of Specialization	Special Needs	24	16.0
	Psychology	30	20.0
	Engineering	22	14.7
	Applied Science	42	28.0
	Others	32	21.3
Educational Level	Diploma	6	4.0
	Degree	104	69.3
	Master's Degree	40	26.7
Year of Experience	1-5 years	68	45.3

	6-10 years	57	38.0
	>10 years	25	16.7
Grade Level	Kindergarten	44	29.3
	Grade 1-4	67	44.7
	Grade 5-8	39	26.0
Frequency of Contact	Daily	48	32.0
	Weekly	15	10.0
	Monthly	13	8.7
	Sometimes	51	34.0
	Never	23	15.3
Student with Autism	Yes	64	42.7
	No	86	57.3
Level of Autism	Mild	23	15.3
	Moderate	34	22.7
	Severe	15	10.0
	None	78	52.0
Training	Yes	69	46.0

	No	81	54.0
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4.3. Result of Teachers' Attitudes towards inclusion

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for individual attitude (1-19) items. On the attitude scale, the mean scores range from 2.06 to 4.33, indicating variability in teachers' attitudes towards including students with autism. Teachers generally agree that children with autism can learn from a good teacher (a5: Mean = 4.25) and that a good teacher can significantly help them (a12: Mean = 4.33). There is a general disagreement with statements suggesting that children with autism should be taught separately (a4: Mean = 2.71), that regular schools are too advanced for them (a6: Mean = 2.72), and that teachers shouldn't be expected to deal with them without special training (a8: Mean = 2.58). Teachers also tend to disagree with the idea that they wouldn't want children with autism in their class (a7: Mean = 2.06).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Variables

Number	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Only teachers with extensive special education training can help a child with autism	2.72	1.32
2	Mealtime behaviors of children with autism are disruptive and negatively influence the behavior of children around them	3.03	1.12

3	Schools with both typically developing children and children with autism enhance the learning experiences of typically developing children	3.32	1.02
4	Typically developing children and children with autism should be taught in separate schools	2.71	1.38
5	Children with autism can learn from a good teacher	4.25	0.91
6	Regular schools are too advanced for children with autism	2.72	1.36
7	I would not want the children in my class to have to put up with children with autism	2.06	1.06
8	Teachers not specifically trained in special education should not be expected to deal with a child with	2.58	1.25

	autism		
9	Children with autism are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a general school	3.00	1.21
10	Schools with both typically developing children and children with autism enhance the learning experiences of children with autism	3.41	1.06
11	If I had the choice, I would teach in a school in which there were no children with autism	2.17	1.18
12	A good teacher can do a lot to help a child with autism	4.33	0.97
13	Children with autism cannot socialize well enough to profit from contact with typically developing children	2.39	1.19

14	It is unfair to ask teachers to accept children with autism in their school	2.15	1.10
15	The extra attention students with ASD require will be to the detriment of the other students	2.82	1.16
16	The behavior of students with ASD will set a bad example for students without disabilities	2.07	1.06
17	The inclusion of students with ASD can be beneficial for students without disabilities	3.31	1.13
18	Teaching students with ASD is better done by special than general classroom teachers	3.72	1.17
19	Since they lack academic skill, they will not be productive in a regular class	2.39	1.18

4.3.1. Result of Teachers' Beliefs towards inclusion

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for individual belief scale, the mean scores range from 3.24 to 4.28, showing generally positive beliefs. Teachers express interest in training related to autism (b2: Mean = 4.28), willingness to include children with ASD if adequately trained (b3: Mean = 4.09), and a desire to make a difference in their education (b6: Mean = 4.02). They also generally believe they can organize the classroom to minimize distractions (b8: Mean = 4.00) and identify causes of problematic behavior (b9: Mean = 3.89). However, teachers are relatively neutral in their belief in feeling equipped to handle children with ASD (b1: Mean = 3.24).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Belief Variables

Number	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I feel equipped to handle children with ASD	3.24	1.17
2	I am interested in attending training in the area of childhood developmental and behavioral disorders	4.28	0.95
3	If adequately trained, I am willing to have children with ASD in my class	4.09	0.88
4	I am keen to be a partner in the classroom management of children with ASD	3.89	0.83
5	I see the need to implement changes in the classroom to accommodate a child with ASD	3.89	0.87
6	I want to make a difference in the education of children	4.02	0.85

	with ASD		
7	I feel I can make a difference in the education of children with ASD	3.69	0.93
8	I can organize the classroom to minimize distractions for students with autism	4.00	0.88
9	Identify the causes that lead to problematic behavior of students with autism	3.89	0.94

4.4. Difference between Teachers' Belief and Attitude towards inclusion

The one-sample t-test results revealed that teachers, on average, hold statistically significant positive attitudes and beliefs towards the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (see Table 4). The mean attitude score (Mean = 55.13) was significantly higher than the neutral midpoint of the scale (3), $t(149) = 95.78$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 52.13 (95% CI: 51.06, 53.21). Similarly, the mean belief score (Mean = 35.01) was significantly higher than the neutral midpoint (3), $t(149) = 75.42$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 32.01 (95% CI: 31.17, 32.85).

Table 4: One-Sample T-Test Results for Attitude and Belief

Variable	t-value	Df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
ATTITUDE	95.78	149	<.001	52.13	51.06	53.21
BELIEF	75.42	149	<.001	32.01	31.17	32.85

4.5. Gender Differences in Attitudes and Beliefs

The independent samples t-test results show no statistically significant difference in attitude scores between male (Mean = 55.04) and female (Mean = 55.18) teachers ($t(148) = -0.12, p = 0.902$). Similarly, there is no significant difference in belief scores between male (Mean = 34.80) and female (Mean = 35.11) teachers ($t(148) = -0.34, p = 0.733$). These results indicate that, in this sample, gender does not appear to be a significant factor influencing teachers' attitudes or beliefs towards including students with autism.

Table 5: Independent Samples T-Test Results Comparing Attitude and Belief by Sex

Variable	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
ATTITUDE	Male	55.04	6.14	-0.12	148	0.902	-0.14	-2.42	2.14
ATTITUDE	Female	55.18	6.95						
BELIEF	Male	34.80	5.59	-0.34	148	0.733	-0.31	-2.08	1.47
BELIEF	Female	35.11	5.01						

4.6. The Influence of Teaching Experience on Attitudes and Beliefs

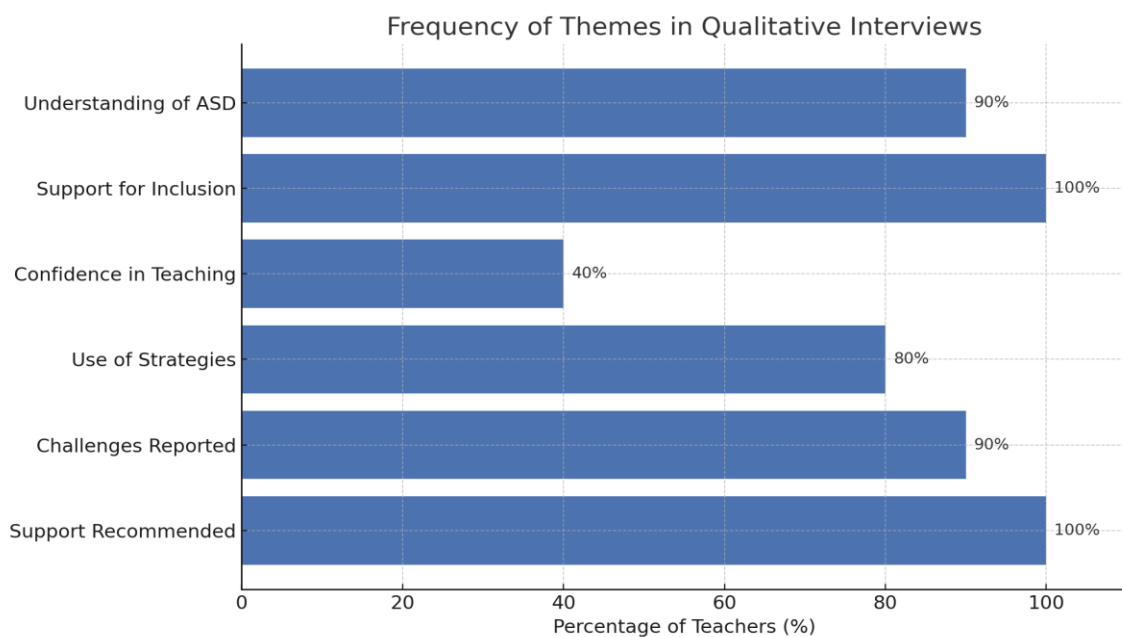
The one-way ANOVA results indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes ($F(2, 147) = 2.42, p = 0.093$) or beliefs ($F(2, 147) = 0.72, p = 0.490$) across the different levels of teaching experience (1-5 years, 6-10 years, >10 years).

Table 6: ANOVA Results for Attitude and Belief by Years of Experience

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ATTITUDE	Between Groups	210.70	2	105.35	2.42	0.093
ATTITUDE	Within Groups	6410.63	147	43.61		
ATTITUDE	Total	6621.33	149			
BELIEF	Between Groups	38.91	2	19.45	0.72	0.490
BELIEF	Within Groups	3986.08	147	27.12		
BELIEF	Total	4024.99	149			

4.7 Qualitative Report

This qualitative report explores private school teachers' perceptions, experiences, and challenges in implementing inclusive education for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Addis Ababa. Through ten semi-structured interviews, the study captures teachers' voices and contextualizes them alongside quantitative findings to better inform inclusive education policy and practice.



Ten teachers from various private schools were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. The interviews focused on understanding of ASD, attitudes toward inclusion, classroom practices, challenges, and needed support. Responses were transcribed, thematically coded, and summarized. The themes were analyzed using frequency counts and converted into simple percentages to support integration with quantitative data. The percentage for each theme was calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = (\text{Number of teachers expressing the theme} / \text{Total number of teachers}) \times 100$$

Results and Thematic Analysis

4.7.1 Teachers' understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

A majority of the interviewed teachers (9 out of 10) demonstrated a basic understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), describing it primarily as a neuro developmental condition. While some responses were general, those with prior classroom experience supporting autistic students provided more nuanced and empathetic descriptions.

One teacher from school of tomorrow explained, “They learn differently, but they can learn.” This quote reflects an emerging recognition that students with ASD possess potential, albeit with diverse learning styles. Another teacher from same school noted, “Autism doesn’t mean they can’t learn. It means we must change how we teach.” Such statements suggest that awareness is growing, though not yet paired with deep theoretical knowledge or training. The one teacher from Flipper international school who was unsure about what ASD meant acknowledged, “I’ve heard of autism, but I don’t fully understand what it looks like in real classroom situations.”

This variation highlights the need for structured professional learning to ensure all teachers share a consistent, evidence-based understanding of ASD.

4.7.2 Attitudes toward Inclusion of students with ASD

All participants (10 out of 10) expressed strong support for inclusive education, at least in principle. Inclusion was seen not only as a pedagogical goal but also as a moral obligation. Teachers frequently described inclusion as promoting empathy, diversity, and social cohesion.

One teacher from Cambridge international school shared, “Inclusion helps both the child and their peers. It teaches everyone about difference and respect.” This sentiment was echoed in multiple interviews, with another teacher saying, “Even if it’s hard sometimes, it’s the right thing to do. Every child deserves a chance.”

However, despite this widespread support, there was an undercurrent of uncertainty about what effective inclusion entails. While teachers agreed with the philosophy of inclusion, some admitted struggling with implementation. One participant remarked, “I agree with inclusion, but in reality, we are not ready as schools or teachers.”

4.7.3 Teachers' Confidence and Preparedness for inclusion

Confidence levels varied significantly among participants. Only 4 out of 10 teachers (40%) reported feeling confident in their ability to teach students with ASD. The remaining 6 (60%) pointed to a lack of formal training, insufficient support, and uncertainty in applying teaching strategies.

As one of school of tomorrow teacher put it, “I try, but I’m not trained for this.” Another noted, “I’m often worried I’m doing more harm than good because I don’t know what works best for them.” These reflections indicate that even highly motivated teachers feel unprepared and unsupported in inclusive classrooms.

Some teachers mentioned relying on intuition or trial-and-error approaches: “I just repeat instructions and use visuals because I think it helps. But I’m not sure if that’s the right way.” This highlights a pressing need for targeted professional development and ongoing in-service training.

4.7.4 Teaching Strategies and Challenges on implementation

Most teachers (8 out of 10) reported using basic strategies such as visual aids, structured routines, and repetition to support students with ASD. These were often based on self-discovery or informal advice from peers rather than formal training.

A teacher from Flipper international school shared, “Routine helps a lot. Once they know what to expect, they’re calmer and more focused.” Another said, “I print visual schedules and break tasks into steps. It works better, but takes time to prepare.”

However, nearly all participants (9 out of 10) highlighted systemic and classroom-level barriers. Overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching time, and lack of resources were the most frequently cited obstacles. One participant commented, “Time and class size make it difficult. I can’t give them the attention they need.”

4.7.5 Support and Policy Recommendations for inclusion

All ten teachers strongly advocated for system-wide reforms to support inclusion, with particular emphasis on teacher training, smaller class sizes, and access to specialist professionals. Many also suggested the introduction of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and better collaboration with families.

One teacher stated, “We need regular workshops and resources that are specific to autism. General training doesn’t help much.” Another added, “Every school should have at least one expert who can guide us, especially when we’re confused.”

Teachers also highlighted the need for administrative commitment. As one participant said, “School leaders need to understand that inclusion is not just a trend. It’s a responsibility, and it costs time and money.”

Several participants suggested policy-level interventions: “The government or education bureaus should make special needs training compulsory for all teachers, not just optional.”

Chapter Five

5. Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. The study employed a convergent mixed methods design, whereby both types of data were collected concurrently and analyzed separately, but interpreted together. The results from the questionnaire provided a broad view of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), while the interviews offered in-depth insights into individual experiences, attitudes, and institutional contexts.

The study thoroughly examines how teachers' perceptions about including students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) relate to their use of inclusive teaching methods in private schools in Addis Ababa. Chapter 4 reveals that a substantial number of teachers express positive views towards the inclusion of students with special needs, with these views remaining consistent across different demographic factors, such as gender and teaching experience. Importantly, it was found that some teachers indicated they had no students diagnosed with autism in their classrooms, prompting significant inquiries about the representation and visibility of ASD in these educational environments.

This chapter carefully assesses the quantitative data gathered, connecting the findings to existing literature on inclusive education and autism. It also addresses the limitations of the research, including potential biases from self-reported data and the small sample size, which might limit the applicability of the conclusions. Additionally, the chapter offers specific suggestions for future studies, highlighting the necessity for a larger and more varied sample and the investigation of suburban and rural areas to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion practices.

In addition, this chapter prepares for the following qualitative aspect of the survey, which aims to examine more in detail the experiences and views of teachers. This phase may seek to address the difficulties encountered by teachers working to implement inclusive approaches in private schools serving predominantly middle and upper income families, where resources and support for students with ASD may be significantly different from those available in public schools. By highlighting these complexities, the research is hoped to provide valuable insights that could influence policies and practice in the field of inclusive education.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of teacher beliefs and practices regarding the inclusion of students with ASD, the study used both quantitative and qualitative survey methods. The discussion that follows will summarise the main results of both strands and highlight how the qualitative data confirm, build on or provide more insight into the quantitative findings. This integrated approach allows a more nuanced interpretation of the complex interaction between teacher attitudes, beliefs and classroom practices.

5.2. Discussion of Quantitative Findings

5.2.1 Interpretation of Demographic Variables

The demographic characteristics of the teachers participating in the study provide a crucial background to the understanding of the results. The observed gender gap, with a large majority of female teachers - around 70 percent of the sample - is in line with the general trend in education, where women are often overrepresented. The relatively young age distribution, with the majority of teachers aged 26 to 33 years, suggests that the findings largely reflect the views and experiences of new teachers, who may have different perspectives than their more experienced colleagues. Additionally, the variety in areas of specialization and academic backgrounds, with teachers holding degrees in multiple disciplines from special education to general pedagogy, enhances the profile of the sample. Importantly, 42.7% of respondents reported having students with autism in their classrooms, highlighting the urgent need for effective inclusion strategies in these private educational institutions. 52% response c which signifies teachers without any diagnosed students with autism, adds a crucial layer to the analysis of specialization

prevalence in private schools in Addis Ababa. Although this limitation limits the study of autism practices to a specific subset of the learning population, it also reveals broader patterns in the educational system, indicating where inclusiveness may be insufficient and where targeted professional development and support could be helpful. This finding is in line with the findings of (Avramidis and Norwich 2002), which point out that demographic diversity, including gender, experience and education, has a significant impact on attitudes towards inclusion.

5.2.2. Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs towards inclusion

While the quantitative results revealed generally positive attitudes towards inclusion, these findings also indicate areas where teachers feel less prepared or equipped. This begins to suggest a gap between belief and practice.

The quantitative analysis indicates a favorable perspective regarding teachers' attitudes and beliefs about including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in educational settings. The high average scores noted across different measures of attitudes and beliefs (see Table 2 and 3) illustrate this positive view, underscoring the growing dedication to inclusive education both in Ethiopia and around the world. Nevertheless, it is important to note that teachers expressed a somewhat neutral stance concerning their readiness to support children with ASD (b1: Mean = 3.24). This observation highlights a crucial area needing improvement, signifying a potential disconnect between their positive attitudes and their self-assessed ability to facilitate such inclusion. Prior studies by (Villa et al, 1996) and Avramidis et al, (2002) have indicated that favorable teacher attitudes are often shaped by moral and social justifications for inclusion.

5.2.3. Gender-Based Differences Discussion on Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs

An additional important finding from this research is the lack of significant gender differences in the attitudes and beliefs of teachers. While earlier studies have shown variations in teacher attitudes towards inclusion based on gender, the outcomes of this study reveal an unexpected uniformity—both male and female educators hold similar views on this critical issue. Repository of the report by the committee on comparative notes, (G. Gómez-Marí et al, 2021) argues that gender gaps in inclusive attitudes are reduced if educational opportunities are equal, which reinforces the current findings.

5.2.4. Influence of Teaching Experience on Beliefs

The observation that the length of teaching experience does not considerably influence attitudes or beliefs regarding inclusion prompts interesting inquiries about the factors that more significantly affect educators' viewpoints. It seems that aspects such as the quality and thoroughness of pre-service training programs, the existence and efficiency of ongoing professional development opportunities, and the extent of administrative backing for inclusive practices are crucial factors. Furthermore, personal interactions with students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may significantly affect how teachers view inclusive education. Research conducted by (Kuyini et al, 2008) supports this idea, highlighting that simply possessing experience does not necessarily lead to an inclusive attitude; instead, targeted training and strong support systems are vital for nurturing positive beliefs about inclusion.

5.2.5. The difference between Teachers' Attitude and Belief

The results of a single sample t-test reveal an interesting pattern: teacher attitudes and beliefs are on average well above the neutral midpoint of the scale. These data show that the teachers in the sample generally retain a positive attitude towards inclusion and consider it a fundamental element of modern education practices. According to this view, the report by (Gómez-Marí et al, 2021) found that, although attitudes towards inclusion are statistically high, these positive feelings often do not correspond to the level of preparedness of teachers, unless they receive appropriate training. The difference between attitude and preparedness underscores the importance of comprehensive training programs to adequately equip educators for inclusive settings.

5.3. Integration of Qualitative Findings

This section integrates the qualitative data collected from ten large-scale interviews with teachers in a broader framework of quantitative results. Using thematic coding for all interviews, we found four main themes that are consistent with our research objectives. To strengthen the link between qualitative and quantitative findings, we have converted the thematic frequencies into simple percentages by applying the following formula:

Percentage = (number of teachers expressing the topic or total number of teachers) × 100
this approach allows a meaningful comparison between qualitative information and

survey statistics, while preserving the depth and richness of qualitative data. Each topic is illustrated by relevant quotations, which establish a clear link with the relevant quantitative results. Qualitative information complements quantitative findings by providing an explanation of why teachers may show positive attitudes despite feelings of inadequacy. This integration promotes a deeper understanding of our research questions, particularly concerning the discrepancies between beliefs and practices.

5.3.1 Understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in practice

The results show that nine out of ten teachers (90 per cent) have a basic to intermediate understanding of autism spectrum disorder, which is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting communication and behaviour. The diversity of responses shows both clinical language and insights from personal classroom experiences. Some participants expressed a wish for clarification of specific terms, but overall they conveyed an empathic approach to inclusion. For example, one educator wrote, Autism is something that affects the way a child communicates or acts. They learn differently. This observation is in line with findings by (Allen et al, 2019), which highlight that practical experience, often more effective than formal training, significantly improves the functional understanding of autism by educators. These insights could guide future training and mentoring programmes for teachers.

5.3.2 Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion

All 10 participants (100%) showed a strong commitment to inclusive learning principles. Many of them cited compelling moral and social reasons and highlighted the important benefits of inclusion, such as fostering empathy, celebrating diversity and promoting equity in the learning environment. The secretarial. Several participants stressed the need to set up adequate support systems to ensure that students with autism spectrum disorder and their fellow students can thrive in an inclusive environment. A touching comment sums up the idea perfectly: they deserve to learn with others. This approach is beneficial to them and to other students. This approach is in line with the findings of (Norwich et al, 2002), who note that the support of inclusion by teachers is often based on a strong set of moral and social values.

5.3.3 Confidence and Preparedness for inclusion

Four of the participants, four out of ten (40%) conveyed a sense of confidence in their ability to effectively assist students with ASD, indicating a considerable level of self-assurance. However, six teachers (60%) openly recognized the urgent need for more organized training and ongoing guidance. This shared feeling mirrors a broader trend, as 54% of participants acknowledged a significant deficiency in sufficient professional development. One participant expressed this challenge clearly: “I want to help, but I need more training. It is difficult to provide the right kind of support. research by (Kuyini et al, 2008; Gómez-Marijo et al. 2021) shows that, while there is a generally positive attitude towards inclusion, the need for in-depth training is essential to strengthen teachers' self-confidence and effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of their pupils.

5.3.4 Teaching Strategies and Challenges on implementation

An impressive 80 percent of teachers said that they use different teaching strategies, such as visual aids, repetition, structured routines and peer-to-peer learning, to improve the learning experience of students with autism spectrum disorder. These teachers stressed the critical importance of clear communication and adaptability in their teaching methods. Among the difficulties they encountered, an astonishing 90% cited a lack of specialized training, exacerbated by challenges in effectively managing classroom time and the limited availability of appropriately tailored instructional materials. One educator poignantly stated, “I use pictures, songs, and simple words. It helps them stay calm and focused,” demonstrating the practical approaches taken to create an optimal learning atmosphere. The research carried out by (Moores-Abdool, 2010; Benoit, 2016) supports these findings and notes that teachers often rely on basic visual techniques and structured methods in the absence of formal training and face systemic barriers.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this research provides valuable insights into teachers' practices and experiences, it is important to recognise some limitations which may affect the interpretation of the

results. The sample was drawn exclusively from three different private schools in Addis Ababa, which raised concerns as to whether it adequately represented the diverse range of private and public education institutions in the city.

Therefore caution should be exercised when generalising these results to other educational settings. In order to overcome these limitations in future research, it is recommended that researchers extend their sample to cover public schools and other geographical areas. In addition, future studies should aim to cover a wider spectrum of the severity levels of autism and use a mixed sample approach to increase the robustness and relevance of their findings.

5.5. Implications for Practice

The findings of this study highlight several key implications for private education institutions in Addis Ababa. There is a clear need for better training, emphasising the importance of continuous professional development to equip teachers with the resources and strategies to effectively support students with autism spectrum disorder. This is in line with the main recommendations (Kuyini et al, 2008), which underline that successful integration depends on teacher training, support in classrooms and collaborative planning.

The key message of the study is an immediate call to schools to adopt policies that not only require but also promote inclusive practices. Strong administrative support is essential to ensure that classrooms are adequately equipped and to encourage cooperation between teachers. Adapting training initiatives such as TEACCH or SCERTS to Ethiopia's specific context can significantly increase their efficiency. In addition, the adoption of collaborative learning approaches, the appointment of inclusion coordinators and the facilitation of family workshops are key measures to reinforce the efforts to integrate. Addressing cultural attitudes toward disability through awareness campaigns and active involvement of stakeholders is also vital, as negative stigma can profoundly impact teacher expectations and parental participation.

5.6. Final Summary of Findings

The study reveals an important dynamic in Ethiopia's private schools: although teachers generally have positive attitudes towards including students with autism spectrum

disorder (ASD), there is a significant gap between this belief and their practice in the classroom. The quantitative data showed that teachers rated their attitudes and beliefs on inclusion very highly, and no statistical differences were identified in terms of gender or age. However, a worrying 42.7 percent of teachers reported having students with an intellectual disability, which indicates a lack of practical implementation of inclusion.

Qualitative findings offered a more in-depth perspective and showed that all teachers surveyed supported inclusion on ethical and social grounds, which is in line with the principles set out in (Avramidis et al, 2002). Unfortunately, only 40 per cent of these teachers felt that they were adequately prepared to effectively implement inclusive practices. This result is consistent with the findings (Gómez-Marí et al, 2021; Kuyini et al, 2008), which highlight that positive attitudes are often undermined by a lack of preparedness, in particular due to lack of training. Many teachers described using basic strategies such as visual aids, repetition and structured learning, which reflects the problems identified by (Moores-Abdool, 2010; Benoit 2016).

In addition, systemic barriers were identified as the main obstacles, with teachers referring to the lack of strong institutional policies, limited resources and unclear guidelines - issues which are in line with the global challenges highlighted by (Florian and Linklater 2010). Even within the relatively decentralized world of private schools, teachers have faced common challenges with regard to pluralism in the world of tuition. As shown by (Allen and Yau 2019), hands-on learning improves understanding of autism beyond the theoretical, which is also confirmed by this study.

In conclusion, these results underline the urgent need for structured and culturally relevant vocational training programmes and stronger commitment from school management. Future efforts must focus specifically on systemic weaknesses to close the existing gap between belief and practice and ultimately create a truly inclusive environment for students with special needs.

5.7. Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into how educators view the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder in private schools in Addis Ababa. The results highlight the urgent need for specialised training for teachers and highlight the importance of extensive training to support the implementation of effective and inclusive teaching methods. In addition, it is essential to foster a supportive school environment that encourages cooperation between teachers, special education staff and families to ensure successful implementation of integration practices.

As Florian and Linklater (2010) have pointed out, promoting positive attitudes towards inclusion requires systemic changes in educational institutions, targeted professional development for teachers and the creation of inclusive school environments. Chapter 5 provides a well structured and informative discussion which greatly improves our understanding of inclusive learning practices in Addis Ababa. By addressing the identified gaps and using evidence-based recommendations, future research projects can help schools to serve students with ASD in a more effective and equitable way.

Although educators have a supportive attitude towards inclusion, the findings show a worrying gap between this affirmation and its practical implementation. This difference is largely attributable to insufficient training, unclear policy guidance and insufficient resources. There is an urgent need for systemic change, greater awareness of cultural contexts and a focus on targeted professional development programmes to close this gap.

5.8. Recommendations

Regarding professional development: 'In order to bridge the gap between beliefs and practices effectively, the curricula should be revised to include the following key elements;

Practical classroom workshops: these should provide teachers with specific strategies and techniques to differentiate teaching, adapt materials and manage diverse classrooms.

Collaborative learning opportunities: creating platforms for teachers to share experiences, work together on problems and learn from each other's successes and challenges. This could include peer-learning, mentorship programmes or careers councils.

As regards school support: 'In order to promote a supportive school environment conducive to inclusive learning, the following strategies are recommended: Dedicated time for cooperation: schools should allocate time for teachers, special needs educators and related service providers to cooperate in planning and delivering inclusive learning.

Clear policy guidance and support from the administration: Develop and communicate clear policies on inclusive education and provide continuous support and support to school administrators.

5.8.1 Recommendations for Future Research

The study provided some important and practical recommendations for furthering our knowledge and progress in the field of inclusive education in Ethiopia:

- ❖ **Professional development programmes:** - Develop targeted workshops for teachers specifically addressing ASD, including evidence-based models such as TEACH and SCERTS, together with continuous coaching to ensure continued effectiveness.
- ❖ **Broaden Sample Scope:** - Future research should encompass public schools to obtain a more comprehensive perspective on systemic disparities, ultimately improving the overall representativeness of the findings.

- ❖ **Focus on systemic issues:** - It is important to examine how policies, administrative support and funding strategies affect integration practices in different types of schools.
- ❖ **Longitudinal Studies:** - Consider following changes in teacher attitudes and instructional methods over time, particularly after their involvement in inclusive training programs.
- ❖ **Cultural perspectives:** - Explore how Ethiopian cultural beliefs and norms regarding disability influence teacher behaviour as well as parental involvement, and provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics in the educational context.

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Appendix I

Informed consent

Study Title: Teacher's beliefs about inclusion and their implementation of inclusive practice for students with autism spectrum disorder in selected private schools

Principal Investigator: KalkidanAssefa,

Department of counseling psychology, Addis Ababa University

Contact Information: kaliassefa05@gmail.com

You are invited to participate in a research study that involves completing a questionnaire designed to assess teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding inclusion of ASD students in private schools. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your participation in this study will remain confidential. The data you provide will not include any personally identifiable information, and all responses will be coded to ensure anonymity. Only the research team will have access to the data, and all data will be securely stored. The results of the study may be published, but individual responses will not be identifiable. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence, and you may choose not to answer any question without affecting your participation in the study.

Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: KalkidanAssefa

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix II

Teacher Questionnaire

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

School of Psychology

Questionnaire to be Filled by Teachers

My name is KalkidanAssefa, a Postgraduate student at Addis Ababa University, and currently, I am collecting data related to the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in private schools in Addis Ababa. The main purpose of this questionnaire is to collect relevant data concerning the attitudes and practices of inclusion of ASD. Moreover, the study explores the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their inclusion practices. Hence, your genuine and timely response is quite vital. The information you provide will be used purely for the research purpose and will be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance!!

Direction:

1. Don't write your name
2. Put a "✓" sign or circle a number where appropriate

PART I: Background information of respondents

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age: 26-33 34-41 42-49 50- 57 58- 65
3. Field of specialization _____
4. Education level: Diploma BSC Master's
5. Year of experience: 1 – 5 years 6 – 10 years 11–15 years 16 years and above
6. What grade are you teaching now? _____
7. How frequently do you face/deal/meet with a child with autism? Daily

Weekly Monthly Sometimes Never

8. Do you have a student with autism in your class? Yes No

9. If your response to Q8 is yes, describe his/her level autism. Mild Moderate

Sever

10. Do you believe you have enough training for educating children with autism?

Yes No

PART II: Teachers' attitude toward inclusion of students with ASD

Direction: The following table presents items related to the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students with ASD. Show your level of agreement by circling numbers in the box.

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Only teachers with extensive special education training can help a child with autism	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Meal time behaviors of children with autism are disruptive and negatively influence the behavior of children around them	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Schools with both typically developing children and children with autism enhance the learning experiences of typically developing children	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Typically developing children and children with autism should be taught in separate schools	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Children with autism can learn from a good teacher	1	2	3	4	5

6.	Regular schools are too advanced for children with autism	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I would not want the children in my class to have to put up with children with autism	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Teachers not specifically trained in special education should not be expected to deal with a child with autism	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Children with autism are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a general school	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Schools with both typically developing children and children with autism enhance the learning experiences of children with autism	1	2	3	4	5
11.	If I had the choice, I would teach in a school in which there were no children with autism	1	2	3	4	5
12.	A good teacher can do a lot to help a child with autism	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Children with autism cannot socialise well enough to profit from contact with typically developing children	1	2	3	4	5
14.	It is unfair to ask teachers to accept children with autism into their school	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The extra attention students with ASD require will be to the detriment of the other students	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The behavior of students with ASD will set a bad example for students without disabilities	1	2	3	4	5

17.	The inclusion of students with ASD can be beneficial for students without disabilities	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Teaching students with ASD is better done by special- than general-classroom teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Since they lack academic skill they will not be productive in a regular class	1	2	3	4	5

PART III: Teachers' efficacy beliefs in the inclusion of students with ASD

Direction: The following table presents items that measures teachers efficacy in the inclusion of students with ASD. Show your level of agreement by circling numbers in the box.

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I feel equipped to handle children with ASD.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am interested in attending training in the area of childhood developmental and behavioral disorders.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	If adequately trained, I am willing to have children with ASD in my class.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I am keen to be a partner in the classroom management of children with ASD (e.g., using specific visual aids, monitoring medication effects).	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I see the need to implement changes in the	1	2	3	4	5

	classroom to accommodate a child with ASD.					
6.	I want to make a difference in the education of children with ASD.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I feel I can make a difference in the education of children with ASD.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I can organize the classroom to minimize distractions for students with autism	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Identify the causes that lead to problematic behaviors of students with autism	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix III

Interview Protocol

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

School of Psychology

Interview Protocol with teachers

Introduction:

I would like to thank you for being willing to participate in this interview. My name is KalkidanAssefa, a Postgraduate student at Addis Ababa University. This research project is aimed at investigating the practices and attitudes of inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in private schools in Addis Ababa. The study further explores the interplay between teachers' beliefs and their practices in schools. Our interview today will last approximately one hour during which I will be asking about issues relevant to the study. Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? If any questions arise at any point in this interview, you are free to ask them at any time.

Personal data of teachers

Preferred pseudonym: _____ School name: _____

Gender: _____ Age: _____ Educational level: _____

Place of the interview: _____ Lessons in a week _____

General questions

- How did you decide to be a teacher?
- For how long have you been teaching in primary schools?
- Can you tell me a bit about what teaching is for you?
- What subject(s) and which grade(s) are you currently teaching?

Teachers understanding and practices of inclusion of students with ASD

Now, I will move to the main issue we need to talk in detail. I want to talk about environment and environmental education;

1. What do you understand by the term autism spectrum disorder?
2. Have you ever met a student with autism spectrum disorder? What was your first reaction?
3. Do you feel you could support and enable such students to succeed in their education?
4. Have you ever received any training or course previously to help autistic students?
5. Do you think children with ASD should be taught in inclusive or separate classes? why?

Thank you for your responses. I would like to ask you another set of questions regarding your practices of inclusion of students with ASD.

1. Do you remember teaching of students with ASD? [If yes] Can you please provide some instances?
2. Can you give an example of a time when you have successfully supported a student with autism in the classroom?
3. Can you please tell me how you have been teaching these students? What strategies did you mostly use?
4. How do you differentiate instruction for students with autism?
5. How do you involve families of students with autism in their education?
6. How do you find the inclusion of students with ASD? Is it easy or difficult? [prompt] What is the reason for that? [follow up]
7. We know that teaching of students with ASD require knowledge and skill. Do you think that you are good enough at teaching these students with in your subject?

8. Based on your experience, in what ways do you think students with ASD should be included and taught in schools?

9. How are facilities and resources in schools to facilitate the inclusion of students with ASD?

Challenges in the inclusion of students with ASD

My final questions are concerned with identifying the challenges you face in the inclusion of student with ASD.

1. What barriers do you face in teaching/entertaining students with ASD?

2. *You listed barriers*, in what ways these barriers affect your inclusion?

3. Have you attempted to address those barriers? What did you do? *You may mention some examples*[prompt]

4. What do you suggest to better practice inclusion of students with ASD in your classroom and the school setting in general?