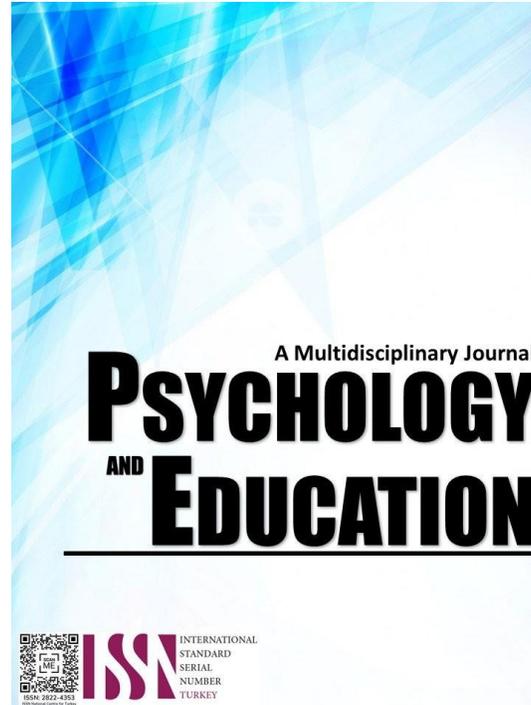


EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS HAVING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 37

Issue 3

Pages: 271-280

Document ID: 2025PEMJ3563

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.370307

Manuscript Accepted: 03-30-2025

Experiences of Parents Having Children with Autism in an Inclusive Classroom

Leah N. Carpio*

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

The parents of children with ASD generally have increased parenting stress. This study aimed to explore the experiences of parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive classrooms. I employed phenomenology research design through focus group with five parents. Key experiences were identified, including academic hurdles stemming from societal conditions, inconsistent administrative support, societal stigma, and financial constraints impacting access to resources. The findings highlighted the importance of collaboration between parents and educators, the need for targeted teacher training, and the significance of addressing societal perceptions of autism. This research underscored the urgent need for systemic changes to enhance inclusive education for children with ASD, ultimately promoting better educational outcomes and support for families.

Keywords: *spectrum disorder (ASD), inclusive education, parental experiences, ecological systems theory, advocacy*

Introduction

As a researcher exploring the experiences of parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I recognized the profound challenges they faced on a daily basis. Padden and James (2017) highlight how these parents regularly navigate the challenges of raising a child on the spectrum, an experience I found deeply significant in understanding the emotional and practical burdens they carry. I had come to see that families of individuals with ASD, particularly parents, often endure heightened parenting stress, increased anxiety and depression, and financial instability, which Dillenburger et al. (2015) described as contributing to an overall lower quality of life.

As I examined the experiences of parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I found it deeply compelling how their struggles extend beyond the home and into the educational landscape. In South Africa, Motshusi et al. (2024) revealed how parents grapple with stress and a lack of understanding of their children's unique needs, challenges that I recognized as critical factors influencing their children's academic progress. Similarly, I resonated with the findings of Narot and Kiettikunwong (2020) in Indonesia, which underscore how inclusive classrooms foster socialization and acceptance, yet parents still feel the persistent need to advocate for proper accommodations—a reality that speaks to the emotional labor they undertake daily. My reflections deepen as I considered Gaffney et al.'s (2021) study in the United States, which highlighted the distress parents experience when their children with autism face bullying.

As I explored the experiences of parents raising children with autism in the Philippines, I found the immense challenges they face daily. Many parents navigate overwhelming stress as they strive to support their children, a reality that Campilla et al. (2023) emphasize in their study. I reflected on how these struggles extend beyond caregiving, often taking a toll on their mental health and overall well-being. It is evident to me that the emotional and psychological burdens they bear not only affect their own lives but also influence the quality of time and care they can provide for their children. This realization deepened my understanding of the urgent need for greater support systems to alleviate the weight of these challenges and enhance both parental well-being and child development.

As I reflected on the challenges faced by parents of children with autism, I realized how cultural contexts shape their advocacy efforts and access to support services. Corbett et al. (2021) highlight how the limited focus on these cultural differences influences the opportunities available to parents, a perspective that resonates deeply with me. I found the findings of Alibekova et al. (2022), which emphasize how societal attitudes and regional resources play a crucial role in determining the stress levels parents experience. In exploring these diverse experiences, I recognized the importance of identifying the key factors that contribute to parental stress.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Mati, Davao Oriental. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in an inclusive classroom setting?
2. What are the conditions in inclusive classroom experienced by the parents that made them feel satisfied or dissatisfied?
3. What are the societal conditions that shaped the experiences of parents of children with ASD in inclusive classroom?

Literature Review

Experiences of Parents having children with ASD

Parents of children with autism often encounter a range of emotional, social, and educational challenges when their children are placed

in inclusive classroom settings. While inclusive education aims to promote equal learning opportunities, many parents express concerns about the adequacy of teacher training, peer interactions, and the responsiveness of educational institutions to their children's unique needs (Campilla et al. 2023). Studies have shown that some parents feel empowered and hopeful when witnessing their child's progress in inclusive environments, while others report feelings of frustration due to limited support services and a lack of individualized attention (Motshusi et al. 2024). These diverse experiences highlight the need for schools to strengthen home-school collaboration and enhance inclusive practices to better support both learners with autism and their families (Elsayed et al., 2024).

Methodology

Research Design

I chose a qualitative research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of parents navigating their children's education in inclusive classrooms. I believed this approach would allow me to capture the depth of their realities, moving beyond numbers to the emotions, challenges, and strategies they employed. By gathering their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, aimed to uncover the how's and whys behind their struggles and advocacy efforts (Tenny et al., 2022). This research design enabled me to examine the complex social and educational dynamics at play, offering a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education from the experiences of the parents.

I employed a phenomenological design, to capture the depth and richness of parents' experiences as they navigated having their child or children with ASD accommodated in inclusive classrooms (Papadopoulos, 2021). I focused on how these experiences unfolded within various ecological layers—examining individual interactions within the classroom (microsystem), relationships between home and school (mesosystem), community and societal influences (exosystem), and broader cultural attitudes toward disability (macrosystem). Through this approach, I gained a deeper understanding of their experiences shaping the educational journeys of children with ASD, allowing me to highlight the contextual factors that influenced their daily lives.

Participants

This study involved (5) five parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and these learners were enrolled in inclusive classrooms at Central District Elementary School. I deliberately used purposive sampling to ensure that participants had direct and meaningful experiences with inclusive education. This sampling allowed me to select parents who could provide deep insights into the realities of navigating an inclusive learning environment (Robinson, 2014). Participants were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) The participants were parents of pupils with ASD who were enrolled in one of Central District Elementary Schools. (b) The participants demonstrated active involvement in their child's education, either through regular communication with the school, participation in meetings, or engagement in school-related activities.

The study also applied exclusion criteria: (a) Individuals who were not the biological parents or legal guardians of a child with ASD (b) Parents whose children with ASD were not currently enrolled in one of the Central District Elementary Schools or who had previously attended but were no longer enrolled. In line with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, participants' personal information was kept confidential and protected throughout the study.

Instrument

To gather the necessary data, I conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) to explore the experiences of the participants. I used a semi-structured interview guide, which included three probing questions for each research objective, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of their perspectives. Before the actual interview, I ensured the validity of the interview guide by subjecting it to expert review. Three panelists carefully scrutinized the questions, and I incorporated their suggestions and recommendations to refine the instrument. This process helped me create a more effective and reliable tool for capturing the lived experiences of parents navigating inclusive education for their children with ASD.

Procedure

I carefully followed the data-gathering procedure to ensure that the collection process was comprehensive, reliable, and ethical. I structured it into three key phases: pre-data collection, data collection, and post-data collection. My first step was to secure approval from the Dean to conduct the study, followed by obtaining authorization from the Ethical Committee to ensure that all ethical considerations, including participant consent and data confidentiality, were strictly followed. I also sought permission from the schools involved, making sure to comply with district and institutional policies. These steps allowed me to establish a solid foundation for conducting the research while upholding ethical standards.

I identified potential participants by referring to school directories and district contacts, focusing on parents of children with autism who were enrolled in inclusive classrooms. I personally reached out to these parents to explain the purpose of my study, ensuring they fully understood what their participation would involve. I emphasized that their involvement was entirely voluntary and took the time to discuss the measures I had put in place to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Before proceeding, I secured written consent

from each participant, ensuring they felt comfortable and informed about their role in the study.

I developed a semi-structured interview guide based on my research questions and objectives to elicit detailed responses and facilitate in-depth discussions. The guide included open-ended and follow-up questions to encourage participants to share their experiences. To refine its effectiveness, I conducted a pilot test with teachers who were not part of the main study. I scheduled interviews at times convenient for participants, often during their vacant hours, to minimize disruptions. Depending on their preferences, interviews were conducted face-to-face, via phone, or through video conferencing. With their consent, I recorded all sessions for accurate transcription and analysis. Once completed, I generated verbatim transcripts, carefully reviewed them for accuracy, and securely organized the data for thorough examination.

Ethical considerations remained a priority throughout the study. I ensured informed consent, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. I acknowledged potential emotional discomfort when discussing sensitive topics and fostered a supportive environment during data collection. Privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, using secure data storage and restricted access. I upheld justice by selecting participants through purposive sampling and reimbursing any incurred expenses, such as travel costs. Transparency was maintained by disclosing potential conflicts of interest and openly sharing research findings. These ethical measures reinforced the credibility and integrity of my study while ensuring that participants felt respected and valued.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, I prioritized ethical standards to uphold the protection, respect, and well-being of all participants, adhering to the guidelines set by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB). I ensured that participants' rights were safeguarded through informed consent and assent, emphasizing voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time. To minimize potential risks, I fostered a supportive environment, addressed possible emotional distress, and provided reimbursements when necessary. Privacy and confidentiality remained a top priority, following the Data Privacy Act of 2012, through secure data storage and restricted access. Transparency guided my approach, as I maintained open communication, disclosed any conflicts of interest, and shared research findings with participants and relevant stakeholders.

I recognized the profound social value of this study, particularly for educational institutions and policymakers, as it provided critical insights into the experiences of parents of children with autism in inclusive classrooms. Through this research, I aimed to contribute to the development of more effective policies and practices that support inclusive education. For the participants, this study served as a platform to share their lived experiences, ensuring their voices were heard and directly influencing strategies that enhance their children's well-being and success. As a Master's student in Special Education, I remained deeply committed to cultural sensitivity and community empowerment, fostering an inclusive and respectful research environment that honored local traditions and valued the meaningful contributions of each participant.

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I presented the results of this study that revealed key insights into the lived experiences of Parents of learners with Autism. These findings are discussed in the context of existing literature and suggesting potential strategies for improvement in the inclusive classroom and benefits of parents of learners with autism

<i>Major Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
Experiences of Parents in Microsystem	Initial Adjustment Difficulties Ongoing Parental Support and Involvement Positive Impact of Teacher Support on Well-being and Academic Progress
Experiences of Parents in Mesosystem Level	Increased Parental Satisfaction with the Inclusive Program Supportive Environment from Teachers
Experiences of Parents in Exosystem Level	Importance of Community Support and Acceptance Societal Awareness and Scientific Progress Positive Impact of Teacher Support on Well-being and Academic Progress
Experiences of Parents in Macrosystem Level	Challenges in Understanding Academic Performance Progress in Social and Academic Engagement

Experiences of Parents in Microsystem Level

Initial Adjustment Difficulties. The participants' account of their children's initial difficulties to adjust to a larger class size and the overwhelming sensory stimulation stirred a mix of empathy and concern within me. I could almost visualize the child's discomfort, navigating an environment brimming with new sights, sounds, and social dynamics. As I listened to the parent's story, I felt a profound sense of urgency—not just to document these challenges but to amplify their voices in advocating for more tailored and sensitive approaches in inclusive education.

“Sa sinugdanan sa inclusive nga klase, lisod alang sa bata ang pag-adjust tungod sa mas daghang ihap sa mga estudyante ug sa nagkadugang nga sensory stimulation, ug nanginahanglan kini og panahon una pa siya nahimong komportable.” (P3 Pg1 L-13,14)

The participant's story painted a vivid picture of the intricate balance between patience and perseverance. The journey from initial discomfort to eventual comfort in the classroom setting underscored the adaptive resilience of both the child and the parent. It was a powerful reminder that behind each story lies a complex web of emotions, strategies, and small victories. The parents' words also revealed the often-hidden labor of love involved in supporting a child through transitions—navigating anxieties, celebrating progress, and holding space for hope amidst uncertainty. Such narratives not only provided invaluable insights but also inspired a deeper appreciation for the role of familial support in fostering inclusive educational environments.

Ongoing Parental Support and Involvement. Hearing the participants' narrative, I felt a profound sense of admiration and empathy. The parents' unconditional support for their child with ASD, despite their circumstances, it deeply influenced me. I was not merely a passive observer but an engaged listener, emotionally drawn into the lived realities of these families. The parents' words carried a weight of resilience and sacrifice, highlighting the delicate balance of nurturing their child's needs while managing their own challenges. This narrative underscored a powerful truth—despite adversity, the enduring hope for a positive and meaningful change in their child's life fuels their determination. I found myself reflecting on the strength it takes to maintain this level of commitment, and it strengthened my resolve to ensure that such voices are not only heard but also acted upon in shaping inclusive education practices.

“Bisan sa sitwasyon namo karon amo gihapon gi suportahan ang panginahanglan sa anak aron adunay dakong impact nga kausaban.” (P3 Pg1L-19,20)

The participants' story brought to light the often-unseen struggles behind supporting a child with ASD. Their mention of striving for a *“dakong impact nga kausaban”* (significant change) emphasized a deep desire for transformative growth—not just academically but holistically. It became clear that this journey involves more than providing resources or attending meetings; it is a daily commitment filled with small yet powerful gestures of love and support. This narrative also served as a poignant reminder that the impact of inclusive education extends beyond the classroom walls, influencing the family's hopes and shaping their daily realities.

Initial Difficulties in Adjustment. As I listened to the participants' story, I could not help but feel a deep sense of empathy and reflection. The parents' account of their child with ASD observing classmates with a mix of curiosity and confusion struck a chord with me. The vivid imagery of the child navigating an unfamiliar and bustling classroom environment, struggling to find comfort amidst the sensory overload, was both heart-wrenching and thought-provoking. As a researcher, I felt a profound responsibility to honor these experiences and to translate them into meaningful insights that could support more effective inclusive practices. The parents' words painted a picture of an adjustment process marked by patience, vulnerability, and resilience—not only for the child but also for the entire family.

“Sugod naniid pa siya sa iyang klasmate og dako niyang katingala ngano daghan siya kauban sa sulod klasehan.” “Pagsugod sa inclusive nga klasehan wala pa siya nakasabot kay samukan siya na dugay niyang mapa angay iyang sarili.” (P4&P2 Pg1L-26,27,28,29)

The participants' story highlighted the transition into an inclusive setting. The child's initial adjustment, marked by silent observation and the struggle to adapt, underscored the deep sensory and social challenges faced by children with ASD. It illustrated how overwhelming a classroom can be, with its myriad stimuli and unspoken social cues. The parents' narrative also shed light on the often-overlooked period of adjustment that demands not only time but also targeted support and understanding from educators.

Positive Impact of Teacher Support on Well-being and Academic Progress. Hearing the participant's narrative, I felt a deep sense of hope and affirmation. The parents' recognition of the positive influence that teachers' supportive attention had on their child's overall well-being, particularly in academic progress, resonated with me on a personal and professional level. I was not merely collecting data but absorbing the heartfelt stories that painted a broader picture of the impact of inclusive education. The parent's words served as a reminder that behind every academic achievement is a tapestry of care, understanding, and intentional support from educators. I felt inspired by this testament to the transformative power of empathy and individualized attention in fostering not only learning but also a sense of belonging and confidence in children with ASD.

“Naka impluwensiya sa kinatibukang kaayuhan labi na sa akademiko tungod sa ilang paghatag og maayong pagtagad. Parents acknowledge that the supportive attention provided by teachers plays a crucial role in improving their child's overall well-being, especially in academic development.” (P5Pg1 L-21, 22)

The word *pagtagad* (attention) stood out to me as a powerful focal point of this narrative. It is not merely about looking after or supervising a child; it encompasses a deeper, more intentional act of genuinely seeing, understanding, and responding to a child's needs. This level of attention signifies a mindful presence, a deliberate effort by teachers to create a nurturing and supportive environment. The parent's emphasis on *maayong pagtagad* (good attention) also highlighted the difference between mere accommodation and meaningful engagement. It entails on how such thoughtful and consistent attention can bridge gaps, build trust, and ultimately catalyze growth and development, particularly for learners who thrive on predictability and positive reinforcement.

Experiences of Parents in Mesosystem Level

Increased Parental Satisfaction with the Inclusive Program. The parent's expression of satisfaction with the inclusive education program, particularly seeing their child engage and interact within the classroom, resonated deeply with me. I found myself not only analyzing these experiences but also feeling a shared joy in witnessing such positive progress. The journey from hesitation to active participation is not merely a developmental milestone, it is a testament to the transformative impact of supportive learning environments.

“Sa pagkakaran adunay dugang katagbawan akong nabati bahin ani nga programa kay akong anak making-uban og maningkamot na sa iya makighalobilo sa iyang buluhatan sulod sa klasehan.” (P1Pg1 L-23,24,25)

The word *katagbawan* (satisfaction) stood out to me as a powerful reflection of the parent's emotional state. It encapsulates more than just a sense of contentment—it embodies a deeper, more profound gratitude and relief. It signifies the culmination of fears, hopes, and efforts, finding reassurance in the visible strides their child is making. The parent's narrative revealed how this satisfaction was not solely about academic achievements but more about seeing their child thrive socially and emotionally. The effort of *maningkamot* (to strive) also highlighted the resilience of the child and the unwavering support of both parents and educators.

Supportive Environment from Teachers. The parent's account of how fair treatment and attention from teachers contributed to their child's positive school experience resonated strongly with my own beliefs about inclusivity and equity. As a researcher, I felt a mix of gratitude and responsibility—grateful for the educators who embody true inclusion by treating all students with respect and dignity, and responsible for amplifying these stories to advocate for broader systemic support. The parent's feelings of comfort and trust, knowing their child was in a safe and nurturing environment, underscored the profound impact that effective classroom management and thoughtful attention can have on both students and their families.

“Ang patas nga pagtratar ug pagtagad sa mga magtutudlo sa among anak, sama sa ilang pag-atiman sa mga estudyanteng normal, dako kaayo’g natabang sa positibong kasinatian sa among anak sa eskwelahan. Ang maayong pagdumala sa klase ug ang paghatag ug espesyal nga pagtagad kung kinahanglan naghatag ug kahupayan ug pagsalig kanamo nga ginikanan nga naa sa husto nga kahimtang ang among anak sa inclusive nga klase.” (P3 Pg1, L-8)

The word *kahupayan* (comfort) particularly struck me as a powerful reflection of the emotional journey of parents with children in inclusive education. It goes beyond mere reassurance—it suggests a profound sense of peace, a respite from the anxiety and uncertainty that often accompanies sending a child with special needs into a mainstream classroom. This comfort stems not only from seeing their child thrive but also from witnessing educators who genuinely care and adapt to their child's unique needs. It is a reminder that inclusion is not just about access but about creating environments where both students and parents feel seen, valued, and supported.

Experiences of Parents in Exosystem Level

Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Children with Autism. The parents' unwavering faith, viewing their child as a gift from God despite the challenges of ASD, revealed a deep well of strength and acceptance. I felt both moved and honored to witness such a powerful narrative of resilience. This perspective offered a transformative lens through which to understand the experiences of families navigating inclusive education—not as a path of struggle but as a journey filled with grace and purpose. The parent's words reminded me of the profound impact that faith and a positive mindset can have in fostering not only acceptance but also a sense of pride and advocacy for their child.

“Ang kristuhanong pagtoo nga usa ka gasa gikan sa ginoo bisan tuod aduna siyay ing-ana nga kahimtang dili nimo ikaulaw.” (P2 Pg1L-34, 35, 36,37)

The word *gasa* (gift) resonated deeply with me, carrying an emotional weight that transcends the everyday challenges of raising a child with ASD. To describe a child as a gift is to see beyond the diagnosis and embrace the essence of who they are—an affirmation of unconditional love and gratitude. This choice of word also highlighted a perspective of abundance rather than scarcity, focusing on the joy and growth that the child brings to the family. It underscored how faith can serve as a powerful anchor, offering comfort and guiding parents to see blessings even in difficult circumstances. This narrative compelled me to reflect on how inclusive education not only supports academic and social development but also nurtures a family's holistic sense of well-being and purpose.

Importance of Community Support and Acceptance. The parent's narrative about how the community's acceptance alleviated their fears and provided a sense of security for their child with ASD touched me profoundly. As a researcher, I felt a renewed sense of purpose in highlighting these experiences, recognizing how powerful it is for families to feel embraced rather than judged. The parent's relief in knowing their child would not be subjected to stigma resonated with my desire to advocate for inclusive practices not only within schools but also across the broader community. It underscored how acceptance from the community acts as a critical pillar in building a supportive environment where children with special needs can thrive.

“Dakong suporta ang kuminidad labi na ilang dawaton ang sitwasyon og dili nila tamayon akong anak.” (P4Pg1 L-38,39)

The word *dawaton* (accept) stood out to me with remarkable strength. Acceptance goes beyond tolerance—it embodies an openness and a willingness to understand and support without prejudice. This word carries an emotional depth, signifying a safe space where

differences are not just acknowledged but valued. It reminded me of how crucial it is for inclusive education to extend beyond classroom walls, fostering an environment where families feel seen, heard, and uplifted. This insight reinforced my belief that genuine inclusion requires collective effort, transforming not just educational practices but the social fabric that binds communities together.

Societal Awareness and Scientific Progress. The parent's belief that "nothing is impossible" when using scientific approaches to support a child with autism echoed a message of hope and possibility. As a researcher, I felt both inspired and motivated, recognizing the importance of evidence-based practices in nurturing the development of learners with ASD. The parents' narrative not only highlighted their trust in structured interventions but also reflected their unwavering commitment to their child's growth. This perspective reinforced my passion for advocating for accessible, research-backed educational strategies that empower not only children but also their families to envision a brighter future.

“Walay imposibli sa panahon aron mapalambo ang bata na adunay autism pinaagi sa scientipico nga pagtulonan.” (P5Pg2 L-43,454,45)

The word *imposibli* (impossible) struck me as particularly powerful in this narrative. By framing it within the context of possibility and progress, the participant effectively transformed a word often associated with limitations into a beacon of hope. This shift from "impossible" to "possible" resonated with my belief in the boundless potential of every learner, regardless of their challenges. It underscored the critical role of scientific methodologies, not as rigid frameworks but as dynamic tools that, when applied with compassion and understanding, can lead to meaningful and lasting change. This insight fueled my commitment to ensuring that my research contributes to creating environments where every child's potential is not only recognized but actively cultivated.

Experiences of Parents in Macrosystem Level

At the Macrosystem Level, hearing about the Challenges in Understanding Academic Performance and the Progress in Social and Academic Engagement left a lasting impression on me. Parents' voices carried a blend of confusion and pride, as they navigated complex educational expectations while celebrating every small milestone their children achieved. I could sense their vulnerability and the constant push and pull between doubt and celebration. These interviews were a poignant reminder of how systemic challenges often intersect with personal experiences, creating a landscape where progress is hard-won and deeply cherished. I walked away with a deeper understanding of the importance of clear communication, accessible support, and ongoing guidance for parents within the educational system.

Progress in Social and Academic Engagement. The parent's observation in their child's social engagement and cooperation within the classroom highlighted the profound impact of inclusive education. As a researcher, I felt a deep connection to this narrative, as it validated the importance of creating supportive and nurturing environments for children with ASD. This story also evoked a mix of relief and hope, showing that the struggles of initial adjustment could transform into moments of triumph not only for the child but also for their entire family. It was a reminder of why I embarked on this study—to uncover and amplify these stories of growth and resilience.

“Makapansin ang mga ginikanan og klarong pag-uswag sa abilidad sa ilang anak sa pagpakig-uban sa mga kaubanan ug sa pakigtinabangay sa mga kalihokan sa klase.(Parents observe noticeable improvements in their child's ability to engage with peers and cooperate in classroom activities.” (PIPg1L4-6)

The word *pag-uswag* (improvement) resonated with me deeply, as it symbolizes a journey of progress and change. It is not just a measure of academic achievement but a testament to the holistic development of a child. This concept of progress speaks to the heart of my research, where every step forward—whether big or small—is a victory worth celebrating. It reinforced my belief that inclusive education is not merely about integration but about fostering genuine growth and potential. The participant's narrative inspired me to continue exploring how supportive teaching practices and inclusive strategies could lead to meaningful development for children with special needs, ultimately contributing to a more compassionate and equitable educational landscape.

Challenges in Understanding Academic Performance. The story of gradual learning and social adaptation juxtaposed with the persistent struggle to grasp their child's academic progress revealed the delicate balance between hope and uncertainty. I found myself empathizing deeply with their journey, recognizing how the joy of seeing their child learn and socialize could be clouded by the lingering ambiguity of academic achievement. This duality reminded me of the happenings of inclusive education, where victories in social integration might not always align with academic milestones.

“Bisan pa nga nakat-on ang bata pinaagi sa paglabay sa panahon ug pakig-uban sa iyang mga kauban sa klase, lisod gihapon sa mga ginikanan nga masabtan pag-ayo ang akademikong kalamboan sa ilang anak tungod sa komplikado nga kahintang niini.” (P3Pg1 L-10,11,12)

The word *komplikado* (complicated) struck me profoundly, as it encapsulates the layered challenges faced by parents of children with ASD. It embodies the intersection of joy and struggle, where every step forward is met with new, often unforeseen, challenges. For me, *komplikado* is not merely about the complexity of the child's condition but also about the intricate web of emotions, expectations, and realities that parents must navigate. It served as a powerful reminder of the need for more transparent and accessible communication between schools and families. The research journey, enriched by such narratives, continues to guide me toward advocating for inclusive education approaches that are not only effective but also sensitive to the multifaceted experiences of families, ensuring that support is

holistic and encompassing.

The discussion below is the elaboration of the emerging themes and subthemes of this study.

Experiences of Parents in Microsystem Level

Initial Adjustment Difficulties. In this study, I found that one of the biggest challenges for children with ASD in inclusive classrooms is the initial difficulty in adjusting to the new environment. The transition can be overwhelming due to larger class sizes, unfamiliar routines, and heightened sensory stimulation (Makin et al., 2017). I observed that this adjustment period demands time, patience, and structured support to help children feel comfortable and actively engage in learning. Additionally, the dynamic nature of the classroom often leads to sensory overload, further complicating their ability to adapt (Mallory & Keehn, 2021).

Ongoing Parental Support and Involvement. I observed that parents of children with ASD take on a dual role—directly supporting their child’s learning at home while also advocating within the school system (Eden & Onyebuc, 2024). Their dedication fosters a strong home-school connection, creating a more cohesive and supportive learning environment (Chand, 2024). I also found that their active involvement helps reduce feelings of exclusion and isolation, ensuring their child feels valued and included in the classroom. That some children with ASD may experience in inclusive settings.

Initial Difficulties in Adjustment. Through this study, it became evident that the transition into an inclusive classroom can be overwhelming for children with ASD, especially in the initial stages. Parents often notice their children struggling with sensory overload and adapting to the dynamic classroom environment (Kojovic et al., 2019). These challenges arise from their unique sensory sensitivities and difficulties with social communication, making early support and structured interventions crucial for a smoother adjustment.

Positive Impact of Teacher Support on Well-being and Academic Progress. I came to understand that teacher support is crucial for the academic and emotional development of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive classrooms. Parents often shared how the patience, understanding, and attentiveness of teachers greatly impacted their child’s well-being and learning progress (Utami, 2022). I agreed with Aas et al. (2023) who mentioned that inclusive education goes beyond simply integrating children with special needs into mainstream classrooms—it requires a nurturing environment where teachers actively engage with all students, embrace individual differences, and adapt their teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs.

Experiences of Parents in Mesosystem Level

Increased Parental Satisfaction with the Inclusive Program. I came to appreciate how deeply parents value their children’s engagement in classroom activities and social interactions (Utami, 2022). Many expressed a sense of reassurance when they noticed their child becoming more involved, viewing this as a sign that the inclusive program was effectively fostering both academic growth and social development (Molina et al., 2021). I also recognized that a key factor in their satisfaction was their child’s ability to participate meaningfully in classroom life, reinforcing the importance of creating inclusive environments that support active involvement and peer connections.

Supportive Environment from Teachers. I gained insight into how much parents value teachers who provide equitable treatment and individualized attention to their children, seeing these as crucial factors in the success of the inclusion process (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Their perspectives reinforced my belief that inclusive education is not just about placement but about fostering a supportive and accepting environment. I recognized that teacher attitudes, instructional strategies, and classroom management practices play a vital role in ensuring that children with ASD feel valued and empowered to thrive.

Experiences of Parents in Exosystem Level

Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Children with Autism. As I explored parents’ perspectives, I came to understand how deeply cultural and religious beliefs shape their responses to raising a child with autism (Kang-Yi et al., 2018). In many communities, faith provides a foundation for making sense of life’s challenges, including the complexities of parenting a child with special needs. I found that parents who view their child as a “gift from God” often develop a profound sense of acceptance and pride, which sustains their resilience despite daily struggles (Jansen-van Vuuren et al., 2021). This perspective not only strengthens their commitment to their child’s growth but also motivates them to seek educational opportunities and advocate for inclusive environments, firmly believing in their child’s inherent value and potential.

Importance of Community Support and Acceptance. I recognized how vital community support and acceptance are for parents raising children with unique needs or challenges (Elsayed et al., 2024). When families feel embraced by their community, they experience a stronger sense of belonging, which helps alleviate feelings of isolation and counteracts the stigma often associated with parenting difficulties. I observed that this acceptance not only eases their emotional burdens but also significantly impacts their overall well-being, reinforcing the importance of inclusive and supportive communities.

Societal Awareness and Scientific Progress. I gained a deeper understanding of how deeply parents of children with autism value societal awareness and scientific progress in shaping a better future for their children. I witnessed how increased awareness can transform lives, shifting societal attitudes from stigma to empathy and inclusion (Trew, 2024). When people understand autism better,

they become more accepting, creating spaces where children with autism can thrive. I also saw how awareness campaigns, media representation, and educational programs play a crucial role in fostering acceptance by educating communities about the unique challenges these children and their families face.

Experiences of Parents in Macrosystem Level

Progress in Social and Academic Engagement. As I engaged with parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), they observe positive changes in their child's social behavior (Meleady et al., 2020). They note improved peer interaction, increased cooperation during activities, and greater engagement both inside and outside the classroom, highlighting the benefits of an inclusive learning environment for social development.

Challenges in Understanding Academic Performance. As I engaged with parents, I gained insight into how children with ASD often learn and demonstrate knowledge in ways that differ from their neurotypical peers. Parents shared how their children might excel in areas like memorization or specific interests while struggling with language comprehension, abstract thinking, or social aspects of learning (Bullen et al., 2022). This uneven academic profile left many parents uncertain about whether their child was truly progressing. I also reflected on how traditional assessments, such as written tests or class participation, often fail to capture the full extent of a child's understanding or abilities (Ozan & Kınca, 2018). This gap between what children know and how they demonstrate it in school added to parents' concerns about their child's academic standing, highlighting the need for more inclusive and flexible evaluation methods.

Conclusions

This study highlights the multifaceted experiences of parents in navigating the inclusive education of their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) across different ecological levels. At the microsystem level, the findings reveal the initial adjustment difficulties faced by children with ASD due to sensory sensitivities, social communication challenges, and unfamiliar classroom dynamics. Parents play a crucial role in providing direct support at home while advocating for their child's needs in school, fostering a stronger home-school connection. Teacher support emerges as a significant factor in enhancing children's well-being and academic progress, reinforcing the importance of inclusive teaching strategies. At the mesosystem level, parental satisfaction is largely influenced by the quality of inclusion programs and the level of teacher engagement, emphasizing the necessity of creating supportive and interactive classroom environments that encourage meaningful participation and peer connections.

At the exosystem and macrosystem levels, broader societal factors shape parental experiences and attitudes toward inclusive education. Cultural beliefs and religious perspectives influence how families perceive and accept their child's condition, with many viewing their child as a source of strength and resilience. Community acceptance and societal awareness play a vital role in reducing stigma and fostering a more inclusive environment, allowing families to feel supported and valued. Additionally, while parents observe progress in their child's social interactions and engagement, challenges remain in understanding academic performance due to traditional assessment methods that may not fully capture their child's capabilities. These findings underscore the need for continued advocacy, teacher training, and policy improvements to create a more effective and equitable inclusive education system that caters to the diverse needs of children with ASD.

References

- Aas, H. K., Uthus, M., & Løhre, A. (2023). Inclusive education for students with challenging behaviour: development of teachers' beliefs and ideas for adaptations through Lesson Study. In *European Journal of Special Needs Education* (Vol. 39, Issue 1, pp. 64–78). Informa UK Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2023.2191107>
- Alibekova, R., Kai Chan, C., Crape, B., Kadyrzhanuly, K., Gusmanov, A., An, S., Bulekbayeva, S., Akhmetzhanova, Z., Ainabekova, A., Yerubayev, Z., Yessimkulova, F., Bekisheva, A., Ospanova, Z., & Rakhimova, M. (2022). Stress, anxiety and depression in parents of children with autism spectrum disorders in Kazakhstan: prevalence and associated factors. *Global mental health* (Cambridge, England), 9, 472–482. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2022.51>
- Bullen, J. C., Zajic, M. C., McIntyre, N., Solari, E., & Mundy, P. (2022). Patterns of math and reading achievement in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. In *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Vol. 92, p. 101933). Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2022.101933>
- Campilla, J. G., Guzman, J. J., Santiago, C. J., Rigor, J. O., & Frando, M. G. (2023). Challenges and Coping Strategies of Parents in the Education of their Children with Autism. In *E-DAWA: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* (Vol. 3, Issue 2). Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College. <https://doi.org/10.56901/qwia1958>
- Chand, S. P. (2024). Bridging the Gaps in Quality Education. In *The Educational Review, USA* (Vol. 8, Issue 2, pp. 202–210). Hill Publishing Group Inc. <https://doi.org/10.26855/er.2024.02.001>

- Colaizzi, P.F. (1978) Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In: Valle, R.S. and King, M., Eds., *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 48-71.
- Corbett, B. A., Muscatello, R. A., Klemencic, M. E., & Schwartzman, J. M. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on stress, anxiety, and coping in youth with and without autism and their parents. *Autism research : official journal of the International Society for Autism Research*, 14(7), 1496–1511. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2521>
- Dillenburger, K., Jordan, J. A., McKerr, L., & Keenan, M. (2014). The Millennium child with autism: Early childhood trajectories for health, education and economic wellbeing. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 18(1), 37–46. <https://doi.org/10.3109/17518423.2014.964378>
- Duriscic, M., & Bunjevac, M. (2017). Parental Involvement as a Important Factor for Successful Education. In *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal* (Vol. 7, Issue 3, pp. 137–153). University of Ljubljana. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.291>
- Eden, C., & Onyebuchi, N., (2024). Parent and Community Involvement In Education: Strengthening Partnerships For Social Improvement. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*. 6. 372-382. 10.51594/ijarss.v6i3.894.
- Elsayed, W. (2024). Building a better society: The Vital role of Family’s social values in creating a culture of giving in young Children’s minds. In *Heliyon* (Vol. 10, Issue 7, p. e29208). Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29208>
- Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2021). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying perpetration and victimization: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. In *Campbell Systematic Reviews* (Vol. 17, Issue 2). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1143>
- Jansen-van Vuuren, J., Lysaght, R., Batorowicz, B., Dawud, S., & Aldersey, H. M. (2021). Family Quality of Life and Support: Perceptions of Family Members of Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia. *Disabilities*, 1(3), 233-256. <https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities1030018>
- Kang-Yi, C. D., Grinker, R. R., Beidas, R., Agha, A., Russell, R., Shah, S. B., Shea, K., & Mandell, D. S. (2018). Influence of Community-Level Cultural Beliefs about Autism on Families' and Professionals' Care for Children. *Transcultural psychiatry*, 55(5), 623–647. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461518779831>
- Kojovic, N., Ben Hadid, L., Franchini, M., & Schaer, M. (2019). Sensory Processing Issues and Their Association with Social Difficulties in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of clinical medicine*, 8(10), 1508. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm8101508>
- Makin, C., Hill, V., & Pellicano, E. (2017). The primary-to-secondary school transition for children on the autism spectrum: A multi-informant mixed-methods study. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396941516684834>
- Mallory, C., & Keehn, B. (2021). Implications of Sensory Processing and Attentional Differences Associated With Autism in Academic Settings: An Integrative Review. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 12, 695825. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.695825>
- Meleady, J., Clyne, C., Braham, J., & Carr, A. (2020). Positive contributions among parents of children on the autism spectrum: A Systematic review. In *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Vol. 78, p. 101635). Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101635>
- Molina, S., Marauri, J., Aubert, A., & Flecha, R. (2021). How Inclusive Interactive Learning Environments Benefit Students Without Special Needs. In *Frontiers in Psychology* (Vol. 12). Frontiers Media SA. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661427>
- Motshusi, M. C., Ngobeni, E. T., & Sepeng, P. (2024). Lack of Parental Involvement in the Education of Their children in the Foundation Phase: Case of Selected Schools in the Thabazimbi Circuit. In *Research in Educational Policy and Management* (Vol. 6, Issue 2, pp. 21–41). OpenEd Network. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2024.20>
- Narot, P., & Kiettikunwong, N. (2024). A Strategy to Reorient Parental Perceptions to Create Conditions for Successful Inclusive Education: A Case Study in A Small-Sized School. In *Education Sciences* (Vol. 14, Issue 4, p. 358). MDPI AG. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14040358>
- Ozan, C., & Kınca, R. Y. (2018). The effects of formative assessment on academic achievement, attitudes toward the lesson, and self-regulation skills. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 18, 85–118. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12738/estp.2018.1.0216>
- Padden, C., & James, J. E. (2017). Stress among Parents of Children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Comparison Involving Physiological Indicators and Parent Self-Reports. In *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* (Vol. 29, Issue 4, pp. 567–586). Springer Science and Business Media LLC. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-017-9547-z>
- Papadopoulos, D. (2021). Mothers’ Experiences and Challenges Raising a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Qualitative Study. In *Brain Sciences* (Vol. 11, Issue 3, p. 309). MDPI AG. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci11030309>



Robinson, R.S. (2014). Purposive Sampling. In: Michalos, A.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337

Tenny, S., Brannan, J., & Brannan, G. (2022, September 18). Qualitative Study. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/#:~:text=Qualitative%20research%20is%20a%20type,well%20as%20further%20investigate%20and>

Trew, S. (2024). Made to feel different: Families perspectives on external responses to autism and the impacts on family well-being and relationships. In *Autism* (Vol. 28, Issue 8, pp. 2120–2139). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231221684>

Utami, A. Y. (2022). The Role of Parental Involvement in Student Academic Outcomes. In *Journal of Education Review Provision* (Vol. 2, Issue 1, pp. 17–21). Pusat Studi Pembangunan dan Pemberdayaan. <https://doi.org/10.55885/jerp.v2i1.156>

Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Leah N. Carpio

Rabat Rocamora Mati Central School SPED Center

Department of Education – Philippines