

**RESEARCH PAPER****Nurturing Connections: Innovative Teaching Strategies for Fostering Social Skills Development in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)****<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bilqees Khanum , <sup>2</sup>Dr. Bushra Haleem\* and <sup>3</sup>Fakhar-Ul-Zaman**

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**Corresponding Author**      bushra.haleem@vu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate innovative teaching strategies that can facilitate social skills development among students with a diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder . In this regard, the primary focus of the study is to use the semi-structured interviews of eight participants experienced in special education to reveal best practices and efficient outcomes of creating an inclusive learning environment. Thematic analysis identified major themes such as visual aids and support, peer-mediated interventions, technology integration, experiential learning, mindfulness, social-emotional learning, a strength-based approach, and a culture of acceptance. Use of visual aids and social stories should be a part of all tasks and lessons to assist with understanding social cues. It creates inclusivity by supporting different types of learners. In summary, interventions with peer mediation have been highly applauded for availing socialization opportunities for students. The intervention also facilitated empathy and understanding among the peers. Additionally, the incorporation of technology has shown promise as a means of promoting social skills development through interactive sessions. Experiential learning activities have also been favored since they promote collaboration and engagement. Finally, mindfulness and SEL practices were favorites since operationalizing feelings enabled students to navigate social situations confidently and compassionately. Future studies should investigate how sustainable these intervention strategies are, customize the interventions to the individual student, examine the student experience in inclusive learning environments, incorporate new technology, and form collaborative relationships to foster social skill development and inclusive education for students with ASD.

**Keywords:**      Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Social Skills Development, Innovative Teaching Strategies**Introduction**

The present research paper seeks to explore innovative teaching approaches which can be instrumental in facilitating social skills development in students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and are essential for creating an inclusive teaching and learning experience in the classrooms (Gulveren et al., 2022). ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by deficiencies in social interactions, communication, and repetitive behaviors. Although students with ASD have strengths and capabilities, the majority of them often have difficulties handling various social scenarios. Proficiency in socialization is critical for the enhancing of students with ASD experiences through academic success, peer relationships, and the development of positive relationships with the invitees (Pradiante, 2022). Hence, several previous studies have outlined several evidence-based interventions and teaching approaches aimed at supplementing social skills deficits in ASD. However, the current efforts seem insufficient for developing inclusive lessons that cater to the diverse needs of the ASD learners (Hugh et al., 2022).

However, there is still a sizeable research gap about whether alternative and creative instructional designs could be deemed impactful in boosting the development of social skills and competences among youths with ASD. Even though there is some evidence on traditional instructional methods such as social skills training groups and visual supports, there is a limited discussion about more recent and creative approaches which are based on technology-enhanced or peer-mediated interventions or diverse experience-based learning settings (Salas Alcayde, 2022).

This research study seeks to fill this research gap by aggregating related literature on novel pedagogy approaches intended to help students with ASD acquire social skills. Analyzing the effectiveness, as well as the implementation feasibility, of the novel approaches will provide invaluable information to the current debate concerning inclusive education and the actualization of targeted interventions for mainstreamed students with ASD (Alkinj et al., 2022). Other readers who can benefit from the results of this study include educators in the school settings, policy makers, and researchers themselves. All these groups of stakeholders will be able to make informed decisions about the development and implementation of relevant evidence-based practice in promoting classroom social constructs among students with ASD (Aisyah Durrotun Nafisah et al., 2023).

The reason for conducting this research is an understanding of the importance of promoting social skills in students with ASD and creating an inclusive learning environment that promotes the development of all students (Horgan et al., 2023). Thus, providing the reader with information about effective teaching strategies helping to meet this need, the researcher aims to support the cause and help educators become more effective in supporting the ASD students' development. In other words, it is possible to state that the purpose of this research is to increase knowledge supporting promoting effective inclusive education and improving students' outcomes (López-Bouzas & Del Moral Pérez, 2023).

## Literature Review

Social skills development is a critical component of education for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, as they play a vital role in the academic performance, social relationships, and overall quality of life of these students. Structured social skills training groups and visual supports are a well-established method to address the social deficits of children with ASD by the existing literature. However, recent studies emphasize that educators should utilize innovative teaching methods that are focused on the unique needs and potential strengths of autism spectrum disorder individuals (Danylevich & Stefanyshyn, 2023). Peer-mediated interventions have received limited attention as an effective environmental support for children with ASD to acquire social skills. For example, according to Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller and Locke who conducted a study where peer-mediated interventions were used to enhance the social engagement and communication skills of students with ASD within an inclusive classroom environment, peers work as social mentors for children with ASD (Bulan & Mawardah, 2023).

Furthermore, advances in technology have also transformed the field of social skills in ASD interventions. For example, video modeling has been recently utilized as an effective method of teaching social skills through video presentations of the specific behavior (Horgan et al., 2023). In addition, virtual reality-based interventions have demonstrated the ability to create realistic social scenarios to enable practice and experience social skills utilizing virtual reality in a safe and controlled environment. Meanwhile, social skills training apps create an interactive context that makes practicing more entertaining and dynamic and is thus increasingly popular among ASD students (López-Bouzas & Del Moral Pérez, 2023).

Another strategy of innovative teaching that is considered could help to integrate students with ASD is the promotion of experiential learning opportunities. Weiss et al. argue

that community-based instruction, service learning projects, and vocational training programs provide actual contexts where social skills that are later used within their real social network could be acquired. It is possible since those young individuals have learned the basic rules of social networking, but enhancing their social skills in the actual environment could favor the generalization and transferability in practice (Conner et al., 2023). Although it is worth noticing that more research is needed to validate the effectiveness of those strategies and identify the true implementation rate. One has likewise to consider that the individual variation of requirements among students with ASD and the preparation of educational workers and continued training could contribute to the feasibility of those implementations. In the final analysis, innovative teaching strategies that have been examined should be considered to nurture the social skills development of students with ASD (Vana Gkora & Antonios I. Christou, 2023)

## Material and Methods

This research is a qualitative study that uses a multi-method approach to answer the research question: what are the effective teaching strategies can be used to enhance social skills development among ASD students in an educational setting. This research is anchored on the constructivist paradigm, where the study efforts are aligned to gaining knowledge that is empirically grounded on the “practical interpretations” of educators and practitioners who have applied innovative teaching methods with ASD students in their school environments .

## Sampling

The researcher employed purposive sampling, as individuals with a clear understanding of novel teaching strategies used to boost social interaction in ASD students were the focus of this research. The privilege of using purposive sampling helped the researcher to select individuals with the appropriate information, critical for addressing the study question effectively.

## Population

The population targeted by this qualitative study includes 4 educators, 4 special education teachers, and 2 practitioners with well-established experience, and skills working with individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in educational settings. Therefore, the population covered by this research appears comprehensive and diverse, as it involves various backgrounds, and experiences of special education teachers, and autism intervention specialists.

## Data Collection

**Semi-Structured Interviews:** The current qualitative research were employ semi-structured interviews conducted with experienced educators and special education teachers and practitioners who are knowledgeable and experienced in the field of working with individuals with ASD. The discussions was focused on their backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and expert views on the effectiveness and efficacy of innovative teaching strategies applied for the development of social skills in individuals with ASD. According to Merriam and Tisdell , – “this is a description of your methodology” .

**Observations:** Observations of direct classroom settings implemented to cultivate cooperative social behaviors in children with ASD through innovative teaching strategies are used. The current researcher experienced several observations of educators, their interaction with children, implementation of innovative methodologies of instructions, and whole classrooms’ social dynamics . According to Creswell and Poth , “In a qualitative study, data often include a document analysis, participant observations, [...]” .

## Results and Discussion

This section delineated the qualitative research data analysis procedure regarding innovative teaching methods for social skills development in students with ASD. The study involved gathering perspectives from eight highly experienced educators in the sector through semi-structured interviews. Requirement of in-depth special education and unique teaching approaches for training social skills to ASD students as category which someone should have effective experience to be included in this study as educators participants.

The data analysis was a response to the research question of with an attempt at identifying patterns, themes or insightful pieces from participant responses that would provide some evidence about the effectiveness and contributions of diverse teaching strategy in achieving an inclusive learning environment. Thematic analysis provided a systematic way to find common themes in the participants responses as well as patterns that helped us make sense of the variability and unity these rare individuals had displayed toward social skills development. Furthermore, data comparison across the participants was facilitated by using a constant comparative analysis approach which contributed to an understanding of complexity and variability inherent in experiences among researchers

Moreover, member checking was used in the data analysis, which helped confirm the results and findings obtained and validated the credibility and dependability of the study's results by involving participants in the interpretation of the findings . This data analysis process is iterative and intended to provide us with insights into the effectiveness of the studied innovative teaching methods for ASD students and their role in creating inclusive learning environments. On the whole, the data analysis process is intended to provide us with in-depth information on the multitude of views and experiences of teachers and practitioners working with ASD students, including aspects of effective social skills teaching and inclusive education practices. The qualitative data analyzed in the study will provide us with valuable insights that will contribute to the existing knowledge base on autism and special education

### Theme 1: Utilization of Visual Aids and Social Stories

Another frequent topic raised by participants was the use of visual aids and social stories to teach ASD students social skills successfully. More specifically, this technique helps to break a complex social situation into parts that are more easily processed by a student and, therefore, more accessible for learning and implementing social skills. The commonality in the emphasis on visual supports is a trend among the academic staff about the need for concrete and visual representations to help develop social skills.

Participant 1-3 stated:

*“In my experience, I’ve found that adding a visual aid or social story to the lesson really helps understand social cues for students with ASD. It is possible to break down complex social situations using pictures and stories, making them more manageable for students with ASD to learn and apply social skills. It’s more inclusive because it allows all students to learn, regardless of their abilities”.*

### Theme 2 : Peer-Mediated Interventions

Most participants have shared that their most effective strategy is peer-mediated interventions, which help students with ASD develop their students' social skills. These strategies involve pairing a student with ASD with a typically developing peer for engaging in diverse social activities. This approach plays a crucial role in providing socialization, as well as supports empathy and understanding among peers. The fact that the participants

have shared similar strategies indicates a certain consensus, which suggests that they all understand that creating an inclusive space requires the support of peers.

*“One effective strategy I’ve used” is peer-mediated interventions, where typically developing peers are paired with students with ASD to engage in social activities. This not only provides valuable socialization opportunities for students with ASD but promotes empathy and understanding among their peers. By fostering positive relationships and interactions between students of varying abilities, we create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for everyone.”* Participant 2-4

### **Theme 3 : Integration of Technology**

Furthermore, many participants also highlighted the advantage of current developments in technology usage, such as social skills apps and virtual reality simulations. Technology creates opportunities for them to interact within immersive and realistic environments where they are able to participate in social strategies that practice real-world conversation. At the same time, it shows that can emphasize the notion by quite confidently returning to use of digital tools with very limited cost of energy and work from majority of participants

Participant 3: *“Assistive technology is a massive help for students with ASD and online social skills apps, or even simulators in Virtual Reality can make things much simpler. Because they offer a safe and “closed loop” environment for practicing social skills in realistic scenarios. Students with ASD can benefit from the use of technology, like social skills apps or virtual reality simulations. By incorporating technology into our teaching, we can engage students in meaningful ways and cater to their learning styles, ultimately fostering social skills development and creating a more inclusive classroom environment.”*

### **Theme 4 : Experiential Learning Activities**

According to the above quote, many participants have outlined the importance of hands-on experiential, active learning. This is the successful way to involve students in interactive projects or role-playing games in which they can develop social skills. Therefore, this can be seen as evidence that the majority of the participants believe that it is critical to provide students with a practical experience of developing social skills in order to achieve an inclusive classroom environment.

Participant 4 I “believe that hands-on, experiential learning can be a highly effective method for ensuring that students with ASD develop their social skills. An active learning method through which we can involve students in interactive projects or various role-playing exercises is an essential one. Such practice enables our learners to practice our social skills in appropriate and relevant contexts. I can also argue that our rough method of teaching skills to associate with students can only be described as active learning practice. By introducing this method early in the education process, we enable all students to study in a safe classroom where they feel needed and wanted”

### **Theme 5 : Social Skills Groups or Clubs**

Another issue raised by some of the participants is the use of social skills groups or clubs in school . This campaign can create opportunities for students with ASD to practice social interaction and friendship. The Call for Social Skills group reiterates the communal understanding across all personas, that peer interaction, friend making experience and a positive school environment are critical for cognitive growth in this regard. It suggests a shared understanding among those involved of how interacting with peers and peer friendship may tap these skills and foster school safety.

*“An innovative solution that is gaining traction comes in the form of on-site social skills groups or clubs. These are groups which allow students with ASD to come together in an organized, supportive environment to learn social skills. This creates a bond among the students and has shown to help them form friendships in order willingness support each other. This can help too shape an all-inclusive, supportive school culture.”* Participants 5-8”

### **Theme 6 : Mindfulness and SEL Activities**

Several participants also mentioned the benefits of including mindfulness and social emotional learning activities within the curriculum for students with ASD. The latter involves educating students on being mindful and how to individual recognize their emotions so they can further control them. To touch upon SEL consequently all the actors in this example have a shared that recognises they are comfortable to take deliberate action here so as to ensure good social skills become more indented and can make for better schools.

Participant 5-6 said: *“I have used mindfulness as well social-emotional learning activities in the curriculum. By training the students can notice when they are emotional and use it to put what they want to talk into context. This programmatic system encourages empathy and allows for a sound understanding found in an accepting learning environment.”*

### **Theme7 : Strengths-Based Approach**

Furthermore, participants accentuated a more strengths-based teaching approach for students with ASD. The main difference between the deficit model and a strengths-based approach is that it does not place students into ‘deficit bin’s but rather uses student strengths and interests as a basis for learning in order to make the learning process less traumatic with deeper levels of engagement. Focus on strengths...are to be expected from the discussion, and this may imply that the participants collectively believe in a learning oriented towards meaningfulness for children as well as individual differences due to enhanced social skill development and inclusive classrooms

Participant 7: *“Incorporating a strengths-based approach is essential for a student with ASD. Formats strengths and interests can help to foster their motivation and engagement. For example, you can use positive psychology, such as creative activities or music. Such an individualized approach increases student motivation and fosters engagement, making the learning experience more pleasant. As a result, it helps students feel more included as a way to develop a sense of belonging and ability among students to make sure they meet their unique strengths.”*

### **Theme 8 : Cultivating a Culture of Acceptance**

Lastly, participants discussed the necessity of developing a culture of acceptance and understanding in the school. This culture should include around the clock disability awareness, the fostering of empathy and respect, and the overwhelming availability of integration opportunities. Thus, it can be assumed that participants share an understanding that schools must prioritize an inclusive and welcoming environment that is critical for every student with ASD.

*“We need a culture of acceptance... we need to create the essence of which is reasonably current for all members of community and we ended of being truly inclusive and welcoming learning environments for our ASD student”* participants 7-8 .

## Discussion

This paper employs a thematic analysis based on the results of the qualitative data received through semi-structured interviews with the eight participants. As a result, the chosen themes demonstrate several teaching approaches that promote the development of social skills of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and have been already tested in practice. The interviews provided sufficiently professional information on the subject under consideration given that all participants were experts in this field of special education and had already had experience in applying the mentioned methods of teaching. Consequently, many similar ideas on this topic were revealed, which allowed assuming the set a thematic map. Thematic analysis helps to identify repeated ideas on the topic which appear in response to a semistructured interview, which helps in finding necessary perspectives. It should be noted that themes were based on several different methodologies, including visual learning aids and social stories, peer-mediated intervention, technology use, hands-on learning from the social skills group, and group tasks connecting to the social relationships, mindfulness and social-emotional learning activities, a strengths perspective, and building an acceptance culture. Every one of the themes underscore the desire for and effect of singular interventions showcasing the extraordinary abilities of those with ASD and encouraging their social development in the school setting. Additionally, through member checking, we have developed the coherence and rigor of our results, which will help us keep them in line with our subjects' perspectives. We intend for this to help expand our perspectives on special education and educate us on what is the most beneficial to focus on to help ASD students and form school systems where differences and social vitality are both encouraged.

### Utilization of Visual Aids and Social Stories:

The theme "Utilization of Visual Aids and Social Stories" shows a very crucial manner when it comes to providing students with ASD drawings and short stories to help in developing social skills. All participants expressed overwhelming evidence on how the visual support helped to simplify complex social meanings into simpler parts, which the children could be able to interpret the social cues and respond. On the other hand, the worry for visual aids clearly insinuates the participants' nod to the conceptual framework viewpoint that it is important to provide the ASD students with explicit and physical representations of the learning content.

Participant 1-3 shared their stories and perspectives concerning the efficiency of visual aids and social stories in the development and support of social skills in ASD students. Their stories clearly indicate that visual aids are vital in ensuring that students are better placed to understand social cues. Since the information is provided in picture and narrative forms, it is not difficult to decode and decode it since most of the items are abstracted to make it easy for a student to understand the concept. This abstraction ensures that a more complex social situation is broken down into smaller and more achievable components to ensure that students can engage the course at that moment. The stories also show that use of social stories and visual aids is an inclusive educational approach to all students in the class. This is because every student, regardless of the need, has access to the platform to play an active role in the learning process. This demonstrates a recognition that students with ASD have different learning needs and styles, and by making such supports available to them, the education system can empower them to be successful academically and socially. In sum, access to visual aids and social stories is an important educational theme in education.

### Peer-mediated interventions

A peer-mediated intervention is when typically developing students are paired with ASD students during social events. Peers may act as mentors or models during the

interaction and promote and support the social engagement of students with ASD . This approach is designed to increase the ASD students' social experiences while also teaching peers empathy and socialization. In the excerpt above, the practice is cited by multiple participants as successful in developing or promoting social skills for students with ASD. This suggests that the participants agree on the importance of peer supporting in helping to create an inclusive school or classroom. So, to summarize this passage:

**Peer-mediated interventions are effective:** The respondents agree that peer-mediated interventions are effective in social skills support for ASD students. Peer-mediated interventions allow students to spend time in social settings with other students who develop typically and thus have an opportunity to practice their social skills in real-life social settings. opportunity to socialize interactions with your peers.

**Socialization opportunities:** Peer-mediated interventions provide ASD students with the opportunity to socialize . cuddling their peers, ASD students learn social norms, communication skills, and make friends.

**Promotion of empathy and understanding:** Involving typical peers in the process of intervention can help students cultivate empathy and understanding. Specifically, interaction with their peers, students learn to appreciate and respect diversity, as well as provide support to keep people included.

**Inclusive Learning Environment:** Peer-mediated intervention focuses on student interactions to promote social learning. Therefore, educators can rely on it to create an inclusive and accepting educational setting. In this way, teachers can help students cultivate positive interactions and develop a classroom environment that promotes integration.

In conclusion, integrating peer-mediated interventions into students' lives represents an effective strategy for helping students with ASD develop social skills. Simultaneously, it allows their peers to develop empathy and understanding and build inclusive classroom settings.

### **Integration of Technology**

Another theme that can be identified in the participants' responses is "Integration of Technology." It is characterized by the realization of the benefits of using various technology tools in assisting students with ASD in developing their social skills. More specifically, the use of social skills apps and virtual reality simulations was mentioned as innovative practices that provide additional support in the area of social development. The theme of technology is indicative of participants sharing the idea of technology's potential in the area of social skill development and creation of an inclusive learning environment. With the use of technology, educators can offer students specialized, realistic contexts to improve social skills during fun and interactive activities.

As has been mentioned by Participant 3, the use of social skills app or virtual reality pays off as students can experience open social interactions the way they are going to see soon when they face peers at one's eye level . Just because no one can see your or you can restart, fail, and retry over again, the interest to behave in socially acceptable ways appears. Using the benefit of technology educators are able to more closely align the process of teaching with student's individual preferences and particularities. Therefore, technology is an offset to self-teaching. The use of technology appears as a promise to support social skill development and creation of an inclusive learning environment for students with ASD. By fully engaging into the world of digital innovations, educators are able to unlock the potential of technology in promoting the holistic development of students with ASD allowing students to feel comfortable and accepted at the social and academic levels.



### **Experiential learning activities**

Experiential learning activities refer to activities in which students are involved in hands-on, interactive experiences; here, students take an active part in the learning process. Therefore, there is a consensus among most of the participants in the study that such activities are effective when included in lessons for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The advantage of this approach is that rather than simulate, experiential learning activities allow students with ASD to practice real social parts. Interactive projects or role-playing sessions create situations where students can practice social skills in real social contexts. This is advantageous for students with ASD as it enables them to experience actual social interaction and devise social- navigational tools. Overall, learning is active, and students do not sit and listen but take part in the learning process. Participant 4 underlined the advantage of experiential learning activities and noted that they work efficiently for students with ASD.

Experiential learning activities create inclusive learning environments. Educators can guarantee that all students in their classrooms feel respected and assisted by offering practical experiences that are adapted to various learning techniques and properties. Experiential learning allows people of all ages and talents to actively participate and excel in areas where they are challenged implanting a sense of identification and acceptance. Educators might create inclusive learning environments by involving students in hands-on activities and supporting cooperation and teamwork. Though this component of experiential learning is fundamentally critical for the development of social skills, it is equally vital for understanding and acceptance among all pupils.

### **Mindfulness and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Activities:**

Overall, this theme is centered around the incorporation of mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning activities into the curriculum for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at the center. Therefore, a specific outcome from this theme is the recognition by participants in the study of the effectiveness of mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning activities in this regard. In this case, mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning activities have the potential to enable students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to learn how to address and cope with their emotions and become more socially competent individuals.

In turn, putting the students through such activities can help educators to ensure that students can read emotions, regulate their expression and response, and show empathy. It is possible to note that putting these students through such activities could awaken an ontological thirst, a certain mediation, and would collect empirical data. The fact that this intervention has been carried into the types of results described in the data presented shows the effectiveness of this intervention in terms of ensuring the social acceptability of the students. Another outcome is improving interactions and communication skills which demonstrates how transformative it is to address social-emotional needs alongside educational needs. Additionally, it is not only the students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder who benefit from this kind of education, and it is an investment in every student. The other outcome is that, indeed, the intervention involves an enhancement in relationships and a changed attitude.

### **Strengths-Based Approach**

Teaching students with ASD using the “Strengths-Based Approach” makes it possible to fully realize the need to identify and develop individual strengths and interests in order to create an optimal learning environment. As noted by Participant 7, success depends on one’s ability to organize educational space in a special way – paying maximum attention to the peculiar needs and characteristics of ASD students. By emphasizing their

strengths, teachers can achieve maximum student engagement in the learning process. Moreover, when activities are conducted according to their interests (related to technology, music, art, or other fields), the learning process becomes not just fun but also socially and personally significant. This makes the student feel significant and motivates them to achieve better results in learning. Thus, the decision to implement the strengths-based approach contributes to the inclusiveness of the created conditions in which each student's potential is relevant. In this way, the probability of formation of conditions ensuring each student's effective educational activities. Educators contribute to the comprehensive development of each student, thereby ensuring favorable conditions for his or her academic success through this organizational approach.

### **Cultivating a Culture of Acceptance**

The theme "Cultivating a Culture of Acceptance" conveys the participants' shared commitment to promote inclusivity in the school setting for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In the theme, the focus is the realization that accommodation alone is inadequate in ensuring children are genuinely appreciated and empowered. Therefore, the interviews emphasize that all key players including learners, teachers, and ancillary staff, as well as parents must become disability-inclusive persons. Such an approach dispels many of the myths surrounding ASD and subsequently improves empathy for children with the disorder.

Additionally, participants spoke about the importance of fostering empathy and respect among students, which will make them appreciate the experiences and perspectives of their students. Thus, schools should not only accept neurodiversity but also promote respecting differences, creating a culture of acceptance of every single individual regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. On the basis of empathy and respect, meaningful social interactions between students may be established. Moreover, as for socializing, participants also mentioned the importance of their students with ASD interacting meaningfully with classmates. Thus, by arranging inclusive extracurricular activities for students, schools may help students integrate into society as well as provide them with skills for healthy socialization and the formation of relationships with peers.

Finally, such socialization is also beneficial for the school community as a whole in terms of creating a school culture in which everyone who attends feels included. Thus, the theme of "Cultivating a Culture of Acceptance" implies that schools should proactively ensure that every student, including students with ASD, is included, respected and supported. By establishing an environment of acceptance, honesty, and respect between all participants, schools have the opportunity to demolish the wall between our students and create a unique opportunity for meaningful interaction and learning which will help students with ASD to achieve success academically and socially.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the themes identified from the qualitative data have provided insight into several innovative teaching approaches to support the social skills development of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their impacts on an inclusive classroom environment. Integration of Visual Aids and application of Social Stories was the most visible theme, indicating that visual supports enable students to grasp social cues and engage actively in activities comprise tutoring. Peer-mediated interventions emerged as an essential theme within a comprehensive inclusive classroom culture by fostering peer socialization and empathy. Fewer studies mentioned the integration of technology as a viable means to support social skills development in students with ASD was positive.

In particular, social skills apps and virtual reality training were seen to be especially helpful. The idea of experiential learning was also one that came up quite often as an effective strategy, given that it is based on a learn by doing and practice approach rather

than academic context which provides students the opportunity to actively engage in their education by working together with others and building social relationships. Reciprocally, experiential learning was amalgamated with mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning exercises that altered how students interpreted social stimuli leading to the creation of a series of compassionate norms of decision making within their empathetic environment. Limitations to this were attested in many interviews where the strengths-based approach to learning was said to make students better realize themselves, and therefore leads to a type of mutuality.

Additionally, cultivating a culture of acceptance was also one of the main themes that were fundamental for all participants. It relates to dissolving misconceptions, contributing to empathy development, and enabling meaningful interaction between students. Ultimately, the research demonstrates the need for a multi-pronged initiative that promotes social skills development in students with ASD that also balances their unique strengths and needs with broader understanding, empathy, and integration throughout the school community. Through additional advanced teaching methods and the promotion of a positive learning environment, educators can ensure that their ASD students, along with the rest of the student body, receive the best possible chance to succeed in their academic, social, and emotional careers. This qualitative work has provided significant insights but left many questions unanswered. Future research can further investigate the longer-term ramifications of the work presented here, better match interventions with individual student needs and characteristics, understand the student perspective of working in positively inclusive environments alongside rapidly advancing technology, and develop collaborative initiatives that allow for the stronger development of social skills and skill-building education for students with ASD.

### **Recommendations**

This qualitative exploration of innovative teaching strategies to support the social skills development of students with autism spectrum disorder produced distinct and unexpected research results. The findings from the work will be used to inform both education practices and policies. The study results will be helpful in informing both education practices and policies. They include:

- 1) Teachers should strive to use pictures along with stories and other forms of visuals in their instruction for social development among students with ASD. Visual representations can help students to work out some social cues which here human guides them then navigate interpersonal.
- 2) The schools must include peer-mediated interventions that allow students with ASD to interact with other students. The interventions will be a place for the students with ASD to learn social skills and for their non-disabled peers to both understand and show empathy.
- 3) Educators can adopt technology into the educational plan such as social skills apps and VR simulations for students with ASD. Such as interactive opportunities for students to practice social skills, including coping with social anxiety and awkwardness in real-life situational contexts that is tailored to a student's learning needs/style.
- 4) Teachers and schools can show hands-on, practical experience-based lessons in their curriculum to students with ASD like doing interactive projects, sims or role-plays which help them learn social skills dexterity along with education sum as Dream school promote project based learner-centric model through innovative labs that include teamwork/collaboration.

- 5) Schools may setup social skills groups (clubs) involving mainly students with an ASD in training of social skills.
- 6) Educators can bring mindfulness practices and social-emotional learning into the curriculum for students with ASD. Mindful Technique and Emotional Regulation shorts enable students to understand how they feel and how they can best convey these feelings by educating them on mindfulness techniques. Performance of students increases as they have ample possibilities to foster positive interactions.
- 7) Schools for students with ASD should learn what the strengths of their student are and shape instruction through these areas. We know how to get students invested in learning individually by identifying what their strengths are and accommodating them. It becomes interesting because the daily activities are being informed in alignment to students' desires.
- 8) Schools must endeavour to develop a culture of acceptance and understanding in the school community. Schools should work towards making these important characteristics schoolwide so that wherever the student learns, awareness and compassion are prevalent with a considerable degree of social interaction. Students cannot learn and take academics seriously unless they feel comfortable.

By following these suggestions, stakeholders in special education can help students with ASD develop social skills and create inclusive learning environments that are good for everyone.

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