



## Teachers' and Parents' Roles in Addressing Learning Difficulties of Students with Autism

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the roles of teachers and parents in overcoming the learning difficulties of autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School. A qualitative case study design was employed involving the school principal, classroom teachers, parents, and second-grade students with autism. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, display, and verification. Triangulation techniques were applied to ensure credibility and validity. The findings reveal four interconnected factors that contribute to reducing learning difficulties: teachers' adaptive instructional practices, active parental involvement at home, supportive school facilities, and the implementation of Individualised Learning Programs (ILP). Teachers applied multisensory and visual-based strategies, structured routines, and positive reinforcement, which improved students' attention, participation, and comprehension. Parents supported learning through consistent guidance, home routines, and emotional encouragement, promoting continuity between school and home. Sensory-friendly facilities and assistive technologies enhanced students' emotional regulation and engagement, while ILPs enabled personalized academic and social development. The synergy among teachers, parents, and school resources was found to be essential for addressing students' diverse needs. These results imply that strengthening teacher–parent collaboration, providing professional training, and optimizing individualized and resource-based support systems are critical for improving educational outcomes for autistic students in special and inclusive elementary settings.

**Keywords:** teacher–parent collaboration, autism spectrum disorder, learning difficulties, individualized learning, elementary education

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### Introduction

Students with autism in Special Elementary Schools (*Sekolah Dasar Luar Biasa*/SDLB) frequently encounter significant learning difficulties, particularly in information processing, comprehension, expression, adaptation, concentration, and understanding both verbal and non-verbal instructions, which necessitate adaptive instructional strategies from teachers and strong parental support (Fitrianingrum et al., 2023; O'Connell & Berger, 2025). The urgency of addressing these challenges is reinforced by global data from the World Health Organization, which reported an autism prevalence rate of 1 in 100 children worldwide, with higher rates observed in countries with more robust data systems (World Health Organization & Fund, 2023; Juran et al., 2019). Previous studies indicate that teachers employ individualized techniques such as learning motivation, varied teaching methods, and the creation of a conducive learning environment to support autistic students (Kisti & Dafit, 2023; Ristianita et al., 2024), including the use of visual aids and structured routines in religious and daily learning activities (Anggraini & Zuliana, 2025). Nevertheless, autistic children require comprehensive support not only from teachers but also from parents, schools, governments, and communities to foster

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resilience, creativity, and sustained educational participation (Gurung, 2022; Wang & Wang, 2024). Empirical observations from Muara Bungo State Special School further reveal that teachers often assume dual roles to support academic achievement and developmental needs, amid challenges such as behavioural instability, communication impairments, and diverse learning needs within a single classroom. These conditions highlight the critical importance of systematic collaboration between teachers and parents in creating emotionally supportive, adaptive, and effective learning environments, as such partnerships have been shown to significantly enhance learning outcomes and self-confidence among students with autism (Fitrianingrum et al., 2023; Kisti & Dafit, 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to explore the roles of teachers and parents in overcoming learning difficulties among autistic students in elementary special schools, providing empirical insights to strengthen collaborative practices in special education.

Research on the roles of teachers and parents in overcoming learning difficulties among students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in elementary schools indicates that collaboration between schools and families has a significant influence on children's academic, social, and behavioural development (Minke et al., 2014). Various studies emphasize that teachers play a crucial role in implementing adaptive instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, and classroom behavior management in inclusive settings (Fitri & Somantri, 2022; Amalia et al., 2021), while parents contribute through learning support at home, intensive communication with teachers, and reinforcement of positive behaviors (Nurul et al., 2022; Della et al., 2023). However, most existing studies remain descriptive and tend to position the roles of teachers and parents separately, without examining in depth a systematic, sustainable, integrated collaboration mechanism (Bai-Ella & Binasing, 2024; Sheridan et al., 2019). In addition, empirical research measuring the impact of teacher-parent collaboration on the learning outcomes of students with ASD, particularly at the elementary school level, is still limited, and few studies have integrated the use of inclusive digital learning technologies as a means of supporting such collaboration (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2023; Pétursdóttir, 2020). Therefore, this study offers novelty by proposing an integrated teacher-parent collaboration model tailored to the needs of elementary school students with autism, supported by structured instructional strategies and home-based learning support to improve students' academic and social learning outcomes.

A growing body of literature underscores that effective educational support for elementary students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) relies on the synergistic roles of teachers and parents. Studies by Simpson et al. (2018) and Odom et al. (2015) emphasize that structured instructional strategies, such as visual supports and task analysis, significantly enhance comprehension and task engagement among autistic learners. Research has also demonstrated that teacher competence in individualized education planning and classroom adaptation plays a crucial role in reducing learning barriers (Brock et al., 2014; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2016). From the family perspective, parental involvement through consistent home-based learning routines and emotional scaffolding has been shown to positively influence academic performance and adaptive behavior (Altiere & von Kluge, 2009; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012). Furthermore, collaborative frameworks between teachers and parents, particularly those that involve regular communication and shared goal-setting, contribute to more consistent behavioural and learning outcomes (Azad et al., 2018; Blue-Banning et al., 2004). However, several studies note that such collaboration is often hindered by limited teacher training, parental stress, and institutional constraints, which reduce its effectiveness in practice (Hart & Whalon, 2012; Lindsay et al., 2014). Overall, these findings suggest that while evidence-based instructional and familial support strategies are well-documented, their integration into a coherent teacher-parent partnership model at the elementary level remains an area requiring further empirical investigation.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior, causing elementary school students with ASD to often experience learning difficulties in both academic and social skill areas (Yulianti & Rudiyanto, 2024). Teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges through individualised learning strategies, visual aids, and a structured, adaptive learning environment (Ndasi et al., 2025; Meliyana & Priendarningtyas, 2025). The role of teachers also includes functioning as facilitators and motivators to enhance students' learning focus through activities tailored to their developmental characteristics. Meanwhile, parents contribute by supporting the learning process at home through guidance, consistent application of strategies, and the development of daily life skills (Seran et al., 2025; Fitriana et al., 2024). Collaboration between teachers and parents has been shown to improve academic outcomes, social skills, and children with

ASD's independence through intensive communication and alignment of learning strategies between home and school (Fhadilla & Wirza, 2025; Minke et al., 2014). However, various challenges arise, such as limited teacher training in handling autism, inadequate school resources, and psychological stress experienced by parents, highlighting the need for ongoing professional support and evidence-based training to maximize the effectiveness of learning for children with ASD (Cerero et al., 2024; Al Qonny & Sartinah, 2022). Therefore, the synergy between teachers and parents is key to overcoming the learning difficulties of elementary school students with autism.

The purpose of this study is to describe the roles of teachers and parents in overcoming the learning difficulties of autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School. This research contributes by providing practical insights into effective strategies for teacher–parent collaboration in supporting autistic learners. Additionally, it offers recommendations to improve educational practices and parental involvement, thereby enhancing academic and social outcomes for students with autism.

### **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore the roles of teachers and parents in overcoming learning difficulties of autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School. The research object was the educational support system for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and the subjects included the school principal, classroom teachers, parents, and Grade II students, all selected purposively for their direct involvement in teaching and supporting autistic learners. Data were obtained from multiple sources, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and the principal, and school documentation such as lesson plans and student progress reports. Field notes were also maintained to capture contextual details and non-verbal interactions.

To ensure data validity, all instruments—including observation checklists, interview guides, and documentation review forms—were validated by expert reviewers, and triangulation across data sources and techniques was applied (Denzin, 2017). The data analysis technique in this study employed the Miles and Huberman approach, involving the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Triangulation was applied throughout the analysis process to ensure credibility, consistency, and depth of the findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of how collaborative efforts between teachers and parents can overcome learning barriers for students with ASD.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Results**

The results of this study provide an empirical overview of how teachers and parents contribute to addressing the learning difficulties experienced by autistic students in elementary school settings. Drawing on classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, the findings highlight four interrelated domains that influence students' learning progress: teachers' instructional practices, parental involvement at home, the availability of supportive school facilities, and the implementation of individualized learning programs. These components were analyzed to identify the strategies applied, the extent of stakeholder involvement, the observable learning outcomes, and the challenges encountered during implementation. To present the findings more systematically and transparently, the qualitative evidence was complemented with quantitative summaries of the frequency and proportions of reported practices and impacts. This approach enables a clearer understanding of how collaborative efforts between teachers and parents, supported by institutional resources, contribute to improving students' attention, engagement, behavioral regulation, and academic performance. The following table summarizes the main findings across these domains.

**Table 1.** Results of Observation of Student Activities in Learning

Name	Focus Ability	Interaction with Teachers	Response to Learning Media	Challenges Experienced
Subject 1	Good, can focus for as long as ±20 minutes in each session learning.	Actively ask questions, follow instructions well.	Likes visual aids like pictures and flashcards.	Difficulty understanding long verbal instructions.
Subject 2	Simply, he is often distracted by voices outside the classroom.	Responding to simple instructions but tends to be passive.	Very interested in manipulative tools such as number blocks.	Requires repeating the instruction several times.
Subject 3	Low, often leaving their seats during learning.	Minimal interaction requires additional motivation.	Loved short learning videos.	Difficulty maintaining concentration in group activities.
Subject 4	Good, can focus for up to 25 minutes in Individual Learning.	Interact enthusiastically, often asked for clarification.	Response to both digital whiteboards and tablet applications.	Anxious when asked to answer questions in front of the class.

Table 1 summarizes classroom observation results of four autistic students, focusing on attention span, teacher interaction, responses to instructional media, and learning challenges. The findings reveal clear variations in concentration, communication patterns, and learning preferences, underscoring the importance of individualized instructional support. Two students (Subjects 1 and 4) demonstrated relatively strong focus, maintaining attention for approximately 20–25 minutes during individual tasks. They interacted actively with teachers, asked questions, followed instructions effectively, and responded positively to visual and digital media, including pictures, flashcards, digital whiteboards, and tablet-based applications. Subject 2 showed moderate attention but was easily distracted by environmental stimuli, particularly noise. Although more passive in interactions, this student demonstrated strong engagement when using manipulatives such as number blocks. Subject 3 exhibited the lowest concentration level, frequently leaving their seat and engaging minimally unless additional motivation was provided. Across all participants, visual, digital, and hands-on materials were more effective than lengthy verbal explanations. Common challenges included difficulty processing extended oral instructions, the need for repeated guidance, limited sustained attention, and anxiety during group or public speaking activities. Overall, the results highlight the need for structured classroom environments, concise instructions, and multisensory learning materials to enhance engagement and learning effectiveness among autistic students.

**Table 2.** Teacher and Parent Intervention Strategies

Component	Strategies Implemented	Observed Outcomes	Challenges
Teachers	Multisensory teaching, visual media, structured routines, reinforcement, flexible assessment	Increased focus, participation, comprehension, improved behavior	Short attention span, communication barriers
Parents	Study assistance, routines, visual supports, rewards, emotional guidance	Better motivation, consistent learning habits, behavioral stability	Limited time, limited knowledge/resources
Facilities	Sensory rooms, assistive tools, educational software, technology access	Improved emotional regulation, engagement, independent learning	Need for optimal utilization and maintenance
ILP	Individual targets, curriculum adaptation, multidisciplinary collaboration, periodic evaluation	Academic and social development, personalized progress	Limited trained staff, resource constraints

The findings in Table 2 indicate that overcoming learning difficulties among students with autism in elementary school is influenced by four interconnected components: teachers' instructional roles, parents' home support, school facilities, and the implementation of Individualized Learning Programs (ILP). First, teachers played a primary role in instructional and behavioural support. Classroom observations showed that teachers used multisensory instruction, visual-based learning, structured routines, and assistive media (flashcards, videos, tablets). These strategies improved students' attention, comprehension, and classroom participation. Teachers also implemented positive reinforcement and flexible curriculum adaptations. However, difficulties remained in sustaining attention and managing communication barriers.

Second, parents actively supported learning continuity at home. Parents established study schedules, provided direct assistance, used visual cues, and offered emotional encouragement and rewards. Students whose parents maintained consistent involvement demonstrated better behavioral stability and academic persistence. Some parents reported time and knowledge limitations. Third, school facilities supported students' self-regulation and engagement. Sensory therapy rooms, visual aids, and educational technologies enabled students to manage emotions, increase focus, and learn independently at their own pace. Fourth, the Individualized Learning Program (ILP) functioned as the main institutional strategy. Personalized targets, curriculum adaptations, and multidisciplinary collaboration (teachers, psychologists, and parents) contributed to improvements in academic and social skills. Nonetheless, limited specialized staff and training reduced implementation efficiency. Overall, the data show that students achieved better learning outcomes when school and home interventions were aligned and individualized.

Activity learning for students with autism in class 2 demonstrates the effectiveness of a multisensory approach and the use of visual media. However, every student has specific needs that require special attention, such as increasing focus, motivation, and emotional management. Teachers have implemented strategies that are appropriate to need student. However, collaboration more close with parents and additional training for teachers can further improve learning outcomes.

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted by researchers with teachers and parents, autistic students have difficulty learning in class. The most important thing is when students have tantrums in class. If there is a tantrum in class, all behaviour and enthusiasm for learning will not be carried out. Before students enter school, teachers must ask parents what food is served and which materials need to be studied that autistic students have not understood. Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted by researchers with teachers and parents, autistic students have difficulty learning in the student's sitting position; when learning begins, students and teachers face the chair; have difficulty sitting quietly in class; and like to cry in class. In addition, low learning focus and mood changes quickly. Autistic students have difficulty using language or making sounds.

Given the learning difficulties experienced by autistic students, teachers have made several efforts to overcome them, such as waiting for the child's mood to improve before the learning process, providing entertainment, and asking parents to repeat the material at home. Improving the quality of learning for autistic children requires ongoing efforts, including teacher training, curriculum development, the addition of learning media, communication with parents, and emotional support for children. Teachers also provide learning motivation. In the learning process, teachers provide motivation for autistic students by offering words of praise, such as 'congratulations,' 'great,' and 'extraordinary.' The second is providing a variety of learning methods. In learning activities, teachers use various methods for autistic students, such as creating learning materials in the form of games, learning outside the classroom, and using picture media.

## **Discussion**

### **The Role of Teachers in Teaching Autistic Students**

The results of this study indicate that teachers' role in teaching autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School is crucial, as they apply various teaching methods tailored to the individual needs of these students. Methods such as multisensory instruction and individualized approaches have proven effective in enhancing students' understanding of learning materials. This finding is supported by Alim et al. (2025), who demonstrated that structured teaching strategies, including ABA, TEACCH,

PBS approaches, and the use of visual media and a structured learning environment, significantly improve students' motivation and academic skills in a case study at SLB Arnadya Makassar.

Additionally, Kurnia et al. (2025) emphasised that adaptive teaching strategies, such as visual-based learning and positive reinforcement, are highly effective in supporting the cognitive development and learning responses of autistic students, aligning with the use of tools such as flashcards, videos, and educational tablet applications in this study. Similarly, Octaviani Reiz Anwari et al. (2025) found that learning activities involving visual and multi-modal stimuli can enhance student engagement and support cognitive and social development, despite challenges in verbal communication. Furthermore, Winata (2025) reported that teachers managing inclusive classrooms flexibly—adjusting objectives, materials, methods, media, and assessments—can improve active participation, independence, and social-communication skills in autistic students, reinforcing the need for teachers to play multidimensional and responsive roles. However, several studies highlight similar challenges faced by teachers, such as students' difficulty maintaining focus and communication barriers. Shalehah et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of specialised strategies to improve social skills in autistic students through a combination of teaching, therapy, and social support, findings that align with this study's finding that teachers need to create a conducive environment and support students' social interactions.

### **The Role of Parents in Supporting the Learning of Autistic Students**

Based on interviews with parents, this study found that parents play a significant role in supporting autistic students' learning at home. Parents actively assist their children during study time, create a comfortable learning environment, and use visual aids to help children understand the material. The approaches parents employ vary, ranging from rewarding children's efforts to instilling patience and perseverance. Positive reinforcement in the form of praise and small rewards has been shown to effectively increase children's motivation to learn.

These findings are consistent with previous research. For instance, Altieri and von Kluge (2009) demonstrated that active parental involvement, including guidance, encouragement, and structured home support, positively impacts academic performance and adaptive behavior in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Similarly, Karst and Van Hecke (2012) emphasized that parents who provide consistent routines, emotional support, and learning assistance at home can significantly enhance the social and cognitive development of children with ASD. Research by Azad et al. (2018) also highlighted the importance of parent-teacher collaboration, showing that regular communication and shared goal setting between school and home contribute to better learning outcomes for autistic students. Additionally, studies by Blue-Banning et al. (2004) and Hart and Whalon (2012) indicated that parental challenges, such as limited resources, time constraints, and difficulties with social interaction, can be mitigated when schools and teachers actively support and guide parents in implementing effective learning strategies at home. These findings underscore the importance of close collaboration between teachers and parents to maintain continuity of learning between school and home and to address the individual needs of autistic students.

### **School Facilities in Supporting the Learning of Autistic Students**

Muara Bungo Special Elementary School has provided various facilities to support the learning of autistic students, including sensory therapy rooms, visual aids, and educational technology devices. These facilities are designed to meet the unique needs of autistic students, helping them manage emotions, enhance focus, and increase participation in learning activities. The provision of sensory therapy rooms assists students in self-regulation and responding appropriately to environmental stimuli. Furthermore, access to computers with educational software allows students to engage in independent learning at their own pace.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of school facilities in supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For example, Ashburner et al. (2010) found that sensory-friendly spaces and assistive technology significantly improve engagement and learning outcomes for children with ASD. Similarly, Eaves and Ho (2008) noted that access to adaptive learning tools and technologies facilitates individualised learning and enhances students' autonomy. Kinnealey et al. (2012) demonstrated that sensory integration interventions in school settings positively affect attention, emotional regulation, and classroom participation. Meanwhile, Alnahdi (2020) emphasised the critical role of teacher training in effectively utilising educational technologies

to maximise the benefits of available facilities. Finally, Simpson et al. (2003) noted that even when schools provide advanced resources, the effectiveness largely depends on staff competence and ongoing professional development, reinforcing the need for continuous teacher training to optimize the use of facilities.

### **Implementation of Individualized Learning Programs (ILP) at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School**

One of the school's primary policies in supporting autistic students is the implementation of the Individualized Learning Program (ILP). The ILP is designed based on each student's unique needs, including curriculum adaptations, teaching methods, and specific intervention strategies tailored to each student's individual characteristics. The implementation of ILP has been shown to have a positive impact on the academic and social development of autistic students. Through this program, students receive more structured learning, guided by classroom teachers, special education teachers, and school psychologists. Additionally, parental involvement in periodic evaluations ensures that each student receives optimal support both at school and at home.

However, there are several challenges in implementing the ILP, including limited resources and teaching staff who are not fully trained to implement individualised learning strategies. Previous research supports these findings. For example, Schreibman et al. (2015) emphasized that individualized interventions tailored to each student's needs significantly improve learning outcomes and social skills. In line with this, Chiang et al. (2016) found that the effectiveness of individualised programs depends heavily on teacher training, parental involvement, and adequate resource availability. Studies by Ganz et al. (2012) and Wong et al. (2015) also highlight that structured, individualised learning plans, coupled with home-school collaboration, lead to better academic and behavioural outcomes for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Finally, Koegel et al. (2013) argued that the success of individualized programs relies on ongoing teacher professional development and coordinated support from families and school personnel.

Overall, the findings indicate that the success of autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School is influenced by the synergistic interaction between teachers, parents, school facilities, and school policies. While the ILP has positively contributed to student development, its effectiveness can be further optimised through enhanced teacher training, better resource allocation, and strengthened collaboration among schools, teachers, and parents. With these improvements, individualized learning programs can continue to advance the educational outcomes and prospects of autistic students.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the roles of teachers and parents in addressing the learning difficulties of autistic students at Muara Bungo Special Elementary School. The findings demonstrate that teachers and parents perform complementary, mutually reinforcing functions in supporting students' academic, behavioural, and social development. Teachers act not only as instructors but also as adaptive facilitators who design individualized learning programs, implement multisensory and visual-based strategies, establish structured classroom routines, and apply positive reinforcement tailored to students' needs. These practices contribute to improved attention, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Parents, meanwhile, provide consistent guidance at home by creating structured learning environments, offering emotional support, and reinforcing school-based instruction, thereby ensuring continuity between school and home experiences. The study also indicates that effective collaboration between teachers and parents—supported by school leadership, adequate facilities, and individualised education programs—reduces learning barriers and fosters sustained academic and behavioural progress. Overall, sustained partnerships, adaptive pedagogy, and coordinated institutional support are essential for optimizing the educational development of autistic students.

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