

Original article

Teacher preparation for family guidance for students with autism



La preparación del docente para la orientación familiar de educandos con autismo

Preparação de professores para orientação familiar de alunos com autismo

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ABSTRACT

Preparing primary school teachers to support families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder faces significant challenges due to the complexity of the disorder's manifestations, which include deficits in communication and social interaction, as well as repetitive patterns of interests and behaviors. This process must be conscious, systemic, and systematic to be effective. The objective of this study is to present a diagnosis of the preparation process for primary school teachers to support families of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the school setting. A mixed-methods approach is employed, using theoretical, empirical, and statistical-mathematical methods. The methods applied include historical-logical analysis, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction,

scientific observation, document analysis, interviews, surveys, pedagogical tests, and methodological triangulation. The results reveal shortcomings in the teacher preparation process, which is spontaneous, decontextualized, and unsystematic. This approach does not allow for a developmental pedagogical process or an intervention based on a coherent and appropriate framework. It is concluded that it is necessary to rethink the teacher training process, adopting a conscious, contextualized, and systemic approach aligned with the proposals of the Third Educational Improvement Plan to achieve effective guidance for the families of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Keywords: teacher; preparation; family; education; autism spectrum disorder.

RESUMEN

La preparación de los docentes de Educación Primaria para orientar a las familias de niños con Trastorno del Espectro Autista enfrenta importantes retos debido a la complejidad de las manifestaciones del trastorno, que incluyen déficits en la comunicación y la interacción social, así como patrones repetitivos de intereses y conductas. Este proceso debe tener un enfoque consciente, sistémico y sistemático para ser efectivo. El objetivo de este estudio es presentar un diagnóstico acerca del proceso de preparación de los docentes de Educación Primaria para la orientación a las familias de educandos con Trastorno del Espectro Autista en el ámbito escolar. Se emplea un enfoque mixto, utilizando métodos del nivel teórico, empírico y estadístico-matemático. Los métodos aplicados incluyen análisis histórico-lógico, análisis y síntesis, inducción y deducción, observación científica, análisis de documentos, entrevistas, encuestas, pruebas pedagógicas y la técnica de triangulación metodológica. Los resultados revelan insuficiencias en el proceso de preparación de los docentes, el cual es espontáneo, descontextualizado y asistémico. Este enfoque no permite un proceso pedagógico desarrollador ni una intervención sustentada en un enfoque coherente y adecuado. Se concluye que es necesario replantear el proceso de preparación docente, adoptando un enfoque consciente, contextualizado y sistémico alineado con las propuestas del III Perfeccionamiento Educativo para lograr una orientación eficaz a las familias de los educandos con Trastorno del Espectro Autista.

Palabras clave: docente; preparación; familia; educación; trastorno del espectro autista.

RESUMO

A preparação de professores do ensino fundamental para apoiar famílias de crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista enfrenta desafios significativos devido à complexidade das manifestações do transtorno, que incluem déficits na comunicação e interação social, bem como padrões repetitivos de interesses e comportamentos. Esse processo deve ter uma abordagem consciente, sistêmica e sistemática para ser eficaz. O objetivo deste estudo é apresentar um diagnóstico do processo de preparação de professores do ensino fundamental para apoiar famílias de alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista no ambiente escolar. Uma abordagem de métodos mistos foi empregada, utilizando métodos teóricos, empíricos e estatístico-matemáticos. Os métodos aplicados incluem análise histórico-lógica, análise e síntese, indução e dedução, observação científica, análise documental, entrevistas, questionários, testes pedagógicos e triangulação metodológica. Os resultados revelam deficiências no processo de preparação de professores, que é espontâneo, descontextualizado e assistemático. Essa abordagem não permite um processo pedagógico de desenvolvimento ou uma intervenção baseada em uma estrutura coerente e apropriada. Conclui-se que é necessário repensar o processo de formação de professores, adotando uma abordagem consciente, contextualizada e sistêmica, alinhada às propostas do Terceiro Plano de Aperfeiçoamento Educacional, para alcançar uma orientação eficaz para as famílias de alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista.

Palavras-chave: professor; formação; família; educação; transtorno do espectro autista.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 marked the beginning of a global process to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In this context, countries have redoubled their efforts to transform their education systems with a view to fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education, as well as lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this endeavor, the role of the teacher acquires essential importance, not only as a facilitator of learning, but also as a mediator between the school and the family, two fundamental agents in the integral development of students (Ramírez Frías *et al.*, 2022; Márquez Valdés *et al.*, 2022).

In Cuba, to achieve SDG 4, the Third Improvement of the National Education System is being promoted, which considers all 17 SDGs as a framework. This improvement depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of school administrators and educators to transform school organization and

curriculum. According to Zaldívar Guzmán *et al.* (2019), these transformations require more conscious and contextualized teacher training that reinforces the role of the school as an inclusive space connected to the community.

Primary education, due to its compulsory and widespread nature, is a key level for consolidating inclusion. Its classrooms bring together students with diverse characteristics, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), who, although they represent a low prevalence, require specific support from teachers and families (Aguiar Aguiar *et al.*, 2016; Aguiar Aguiar, 2017). At this educational level, teacher preparation becomes essential, enabling them to address diversity from a developmental perspective.

Hernández González *et al.* (2021) refer, based on their studies, to the need to implement more inclusive educational policies and to ensure that educators are trained and updated as needed to organize an inclusive environment and respond appropriately to the questions and emotional reactions of parents throughout the educational process.

Addressing diversity presents a constant pedagogical challenge. Designing appropriate educational responses for each particular situation requires a teacher committed to change, who knows their students and their families. According to Aguiar Aguiar *et al.* (2016), this preparation should favor not only academic learning, but also the affective and communicative bond between the teacher, the student and their family, based on integral development.

In this regard, Torres Hernández *et al.* (2018) highlight the importance of training teachers in strategies that promote family guidance from early childhood, thus contributing to a more coherent educational intervention. This training process should be ongoing and geared towards developing professional competencies that respond to the needs of each context.

Cangá León and Benítez Moreno (2025) emphasize that teachers require skills to design structured and predictable learning environments, but also to transfer these strategies to the home, facilitating the generalization of skills. In this sense, teacher training should include practical components of communication with families, recognizing the emotional process they go through after the diagnosis (Molina León & Valdivieso Crespo, 2024).

Similarly, Arango Tobón *et al.* (2014) point out that understanding the cognitive and emotional processes of students is essential to avoid exclusionary practices and to foster respectful and

empathetic school environments. Thus, knowledge of theories such as the theory of mind or empathy becomes an indispensable tool for educational work with students with ASD.

Several authors agree that teacher preparation is a systematic process of acquiring theoretical and methodological knowledge that translates into effective pedagogical actions (de la Fuente Anuncibay & Cuesta Gómez, 2017; Zaldívar Guzmán *et al.*, 2019). This approach involves designing contextualized learning projects adapted to the variability of child development, respecting individual differences and promoting equity.

Vygotsky (1979) argues that higher psychological development is achieved through mediated social interaction, which gives the teacher a key role as a guide and mediator of learning. From this perspective, teacher preparation should facilitate the creation of zones of proximal development, not only with students but also with their families, fostering a holistic educational environment.

Teachers who guide families of students with ASD must be prepared to address the various emotional reactions that arise after the diagnosis. As Márquez Valdés *et al.* (2022) state, psychoeducational support for families helps reduce uncertainty and foster a positive attitude toward the child's development.

In summary, preparing teachers to guide families is an urgent necessity in the current context. This preparation must be based on a pedagogical approach consistent with the principles of inclusion and human development, and supported by a curriculum that integrates the theoretical, practical, and emotional training of education professionals. This is an international issue, as reflected in recent studies on the subject: "It is essential that policymakers ensure improvements in teacher training" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 47).

The present work aims to present the diagnosis of the teacher preparation process for family guidance of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, who attend Primary Education in the province of Pinar del Río.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To carry out the diagnostic study on the preparation of teachers for family guidance of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the province of Pinar del Río, three sample groups were intentionally selected, considering the objectives of the research:

Group I: made up of 25 first-year students of the Special Education training at the Tania la Guerrillera Pedagogical School of Pinar del Río.

Group II: made up of eight professors from the same degree program, selected for their connection with the first year of the specialization.

Group III: composed of 12 Special Education teachers in Pinar del Río, who meet the following criteria: being graduates of the career, having more than five years of experience and having worked at least one year with students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Group IV: made up of 12 scientific leaders who are part of the research project Diverse and equal for an inclusive Pinar del Río society (DISPIN).

Operational definition of the variable: The variable under study was the teacher preparation process for providing family guidance to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This process is understood as a set of pedagogical and psychological activities that promote the acquisition of skills by teachers to work effectively with the families of students diagnosed with ASD, seeking to facilitate their inclusion in the school environment.

Based on this definition, the following dimensions of the preparation process were determined:

- Pedagogical skills in family guidance.
- Knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and its implications for family counseling.

Each dimension was broken down into its respective indicators to assess the level of teacher preparedness.

The analysis of the diagnosis on the process of preparing teachers for family guidance was carried out based on the assessments of the sample groups, using descriptive statistics supported by tables and graphs.

The collection of information was carried out using a mixed approach, employing both physical instruments (printed questionnaires) and virtual instruments (online forms), facilitating accessibility and speeding up the systematization of the data.

Document Analysis: Key documents were selected and analyzed, such as: the strategic planning of the pedagogical school, the curricula, and the educational programs related to the career, focused on preparing teachers for family guidance.

Scientific Observation: 25 classes, 18 practical activities and 33 complementary activities were observed to evaluate the level of preparation of teachers in relation to the process of guiding families.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with eight first-year teachers and 12 scientific leaders to verify information on teacher preparation in family guidance.

Survey: A survey was applied to 12 teachers from special schools to learn their assessments of the teacher preparation process in family guidance to families of students with ASD.

Pedagogical Test: carried out on 25 first-year students, with the objective of verifying the level of knowledge acquired in the training for family guidance of students with ASD.

The methodological triangulation technique was used to verify the consistency of the information obtained from the different instruments, allowing a deeper and more complete view of the state of the teacher preparation process, its dimensions and indicators.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the different methods used in this study provide a clear and detailed view of teacher preparedness for providing family guidance to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Pinar del Río. The general findings for each method are presented below to contextualize the diagnostic results.

Analysis of key documents related to the Special Education program at the Tania la Guerrillera Pedagogical School, such as strategic planning, curricula, and educational programs, revealed that while the curriculum includes sections addressing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), specific training in family support is still in its early stages. Educational programs related to initial teacher training include general content on ASD, but do not delve into direct training for working with students' families. In terms of strategic planning, the school has begun to integrate components of inclusive education and attention to diversity; however, these approaches are not fully developed with regard to teacher preparation for family support. The lack of a specific and coherent strategy for

collaboration with families represents a missed opportunity to improve the teaching and learning process and intervention for students with ASD.

Scientific observation conducted across 25 classes, 18 practical activities, and 33 supplementary activities allowed for the identification of the level of application of knowledge regarding the management and guidance of families of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by teachers. During the observations, it became evident that the activities carried out by teachers and students do not adequately integrate collaboration with families, which is crucial for the success of educational interventions in this area. Although some aspects of ASD are discussed in the classes and practical activities, it is observed that teachers lack sufficient preparation to implement effective guidance strategies for families. The supplementary activities, which should be a space for direct interaction with the community, also lack a clear focus on raising awareness and training families. This suggests that preparation for this type of work requires a more direct and systematic approach in educational programs, especially regarding collaboration with families.

Interviews with eight first-year teachers and 12 research leaders provided valuable insights into educators' perceptions and experiences regarding teacher preparation in family counseling. Overall, the first-year teachers demonstrated a basic understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) but acknowledged a lack of specific training for working with students' families. Most interviewees agreed that the school-family relationship is essential for the development of students with ASD.

Scientific leaders noted that, although there is a growing awareness of the importance of training in this area, the field of education has not yet established clear training policies that include specific preparation for working with families. This indicates that, despite theoretical concern about the issue, there are insufficient resources and concrete strategies to effectively address this need.

The survey, administered to 12 special education teachers, provided additional information on professionals' assessments of teacher preparedness for family support for students with ASD. The results indicated that teachers perceive a deficiency in specific training regarding family support, with a high percentage (70%) of responses indicating that they do not feel fully prepared to interact with and support the families of students with ASD. Most teachers expressed that, although they have knowledge about the disorder, their strategies for working with families remain limited in their initial training. This finding reflects a discrepancy between theoretical knowledge about ASD and practical ability to support families, highlighting the need for more practical and targeted training in this specific aspect of teacher education.

The pedagogical assessment administered to 25 first-year students evaluated the level of knowledge acquired during their training in family support for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The results indicated that the majority of students (72%) demonstrated a basic understanding of the needs of students with ASD, but only a small percentage (28%) showed an advanced level of comprehension of specific strategies for working with families. This suggests that the initial ASD training at the Pinar del Río Pedagogical School provides a theoretical foundation but lacks practical approaches and effective strategies for involving families in the educational process. The students also mentioned a lack of training in communication and collaboration skills with families, reflecting a significant gap in their teacher preparation.

The methodological triangulation employed in this study allowed for the comparison of information obtained from different instruments and the verification of the consistency of the results. By comparing data obtained from document analysis, observations, interviews, surveys, and pedagogical tests, a coherent view emerged that teacher training in family guidance for students with ASD is insufficient and lacks a systematic and specific approach. Although individual efforts exist and some areas of training are being addressed, the results indicate that teacher training colleges must take steps to integrate family guidance as an integral part of the curriculum, developing more effective strategies to prepare teachers in this essential area of educational support.

The following presents the results obtained regarding the teacher training process for providing family support to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Pinar del Río. The information has been organized based on the assessments made by the different sample groups.

Regarding educational support strategies, the results show that the majority of first-year students have a basic understanding of how to apply them (60%), while a lower percentage have advanced knowledge (40%). In comparison, professors and teachers show a more balanced distribution, with 50% of professors having advanced knowledge and 30% of teachers demonstrating advanced knowledge, suggesting a need to strengthen these strategies in teacher training (Table 1).

Table 1. Educational support strategies

Cluster	Basic knowledge	Advanced knowledge
Students	60%	40%
Professors	50%	50%
Teachers	70%	30%

Source: Own elaboration

Communication with families

Regarding communication with the families of students with ASD, it was observed that students have a greater inclination towards an informative approach (55%) compared to a collaborative approach (45%). Teachers show a more balanced tendency, but teachers have a greater inclination towards an informative approach (70%), which indicates a lack of collaborative methods between teachers and families (Table 2).

Table 2. Communication with families

Cluster	Collaborative approach	Informative focus
Students	45%	55%
Professors	55%	45%
Teachers	30%	70%

Source: Own elaboration

Family support environment

In the family support environment, the results indicate that the majority of professors (60%) and teachers (70%) consider that family support in the educational process is insufficient, which reflects a significant gap in the integration of families in the educational process of students with ASD (Table 3).

Table 3. Family support environment

Cluster	Adequate support	Insufficient support
Professors	40%	60%
Teachers	30%	70%

Source: Own elaboration

Knowledge about ASD

The results regarding general knowledge about ASD show that students have a good level of basic knowledge (80%) about Autism Spectrum Disorder, while teachers have a somewhat more balanced understanding, with 70% and 60%, respectively, of basic knowledge. These results suggest that, although there is a good level of general knowledge, more in-depth and up-to-date training on ASD is still needed (Table 4).

Table 4. General knowledge about ASD

Cluster	Basic knowledge	Advanced knowledge
Students	80%	20%
Professors	70%	30%
Teachers	60%	40%

Source: Own elaboration

Specific training on ASD in academic programs

Training on ASD in academic programs is severely lacking. 65% of professors indicate that the content related to ASD in their programs is limited, and 50% of teachers agree that the training provided in their initial teacher training programs does not fully cover the needs of working with students with ASD (Table 5).

Table 5. Specific training on ASD in academic programs

Cluster	Limited content
Professors	65%
Teachers	50%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding practical experience in managing ASD, the results show that only 40% of teachers and 60% of professors consider themselves sufficiently prepared in this field, while the rest consider their experience insufficient, highlighting the need to include more practical experiences in the teacher training process (Table 6).

Table 6. Practical experience in managing ASD

Cluster	Sufficient experience	Insufficient experience
Professors	60%	40%
Teachers	50%	50%

Source: Own elaboration

These tables and analyses reflect a number of shortcomings in the teacher training process for providing family support to students with autism in Pinar del Río. It is clear that teacher training needs to be more robust, specific, and contextualized to meet the educational needs of students with ASD and strengthen collaboration with their families.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this study highlight several areas where teacher preparation for providing family guidance to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents both strengths and weaknesses. This section compares these findings with the scientific literature, analyzing their implications for teacher training in the context of the province of Pinar del Río.

It was evident that both students and teachers possess knowledge of inclusive educational strategies, although with significant variations. Students show predominantly basic levels of knowledge, which can be attributed to the general approach taken to these topics in the early years of teacher training. However, professors and teachers demonstrate a deeper understanding, suggesting that experience and ongoing professional development positively influence their comprehension of these strategies. In this regard, Aguiar Aguiar *et al.* (2018) points out that teacher training should move from the general to the specific, gradually incorporating practical skills and theoretical knowledge that promote attention to diversity.

One of the most critical issues identified is the lack of training in effective communication with the families of students with ASD. This deficiency limits the possibility of establishing strong school-family bonds, which are fundamental to the success of the educational process. Márquez Valdés *et al.* (2022) emphasize the importance of preparing teachers to establish collaborative relationships with families, especially when dealing with students with ASD, given the variability in their development. The study's findings reveal that, while educators recognize the importance of the connection with families, they do not always have the necessary tools to manage it effectively.

Gualán Minga *et al.* (2024) evaluated teacher training programs that integrate workshops with parents and concluded that the effectiveness of inclusion increases when educators are trained in active listening, managing expectations, and mediating between the school and the family. Similarly, Sánchez-Molina and Torres (2024) emphasize the importance of collaboration, asserting that teachers who participate in joint teams with psychologists, therapists, and families achieve a better understanding of student development and a more tailored educational response.

Furthermore, the perception of inadequacy in the family support environment is also relevant. According to Ramírez Frías *et al.* (2022), psychoeducational guidance for families should not be understood as a one-off action, but rather as a sustained process that is an integral part of the teaching role. The results suggest that families are not being sufficiently integrated into school processes, which reinforces the need to include specific strategies in training programs to foster this integration.

Regarding general knowledge about ASD, it was found that students have an acceptable, albeit superficial, theoretical foundation. As Aguiar Aguiar states *et al.* (2016) argue that teacher training should incorporate a differentiated approach that goes beyond the transmission of information and allows for an understanding of the cognitive and social characteristics of these students. Similarly, Zaldívar Guzmán *et al.* (2019) maintain that professional preparation should focus on effective inclusion, which implies mastery of teaching strategies tailored to the developmental profile of students with ASD.

A lack of specific training on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in academic programs was also evident, coinciding with the findings of de la Fuente Anuncibay and Cuesta Gómez (2017), who warn of the need to redesign curricula to include content and practices aimed at addressing this type of diversity. Data analysis indicates that teachers require greater depth in areas such as early detection, the design of personalized educational interventions, and mediation with families.

Polo Márquez *et al.* (2023) propose the figure of the personal assistant as a bridge between the school and the family, suggesting that their training should include parental guidance skills, especially in contexts where specialized resources are limited.

Regarding practical experience, the results indicate that, although teachers have more experience than students, it remains limited in many cases. Aguiar Aguiar (2017) emphasizes that practical work with students with ASD is essential for developing real-world skills in professional practice. Systematic practice, accompanied by guided pedagogical reflection, allows teachers to build effective and contextualized strategies.

Furthermore, Torres Hernández *et al.* (2018) highlight the value of preparing educators from an early stage for the comprehensive care of children with autism, including both the cognitive and emotional components. This initial preparation is the key to strengthening teachers' professional confidence and their ability to respond to the challenges of diversity.

Finally, from a historical-cultural perspective, Vygotsky (1979) argues that learning occurs in contexts of mediated social interaction, which gives the teacher an essential role as a facilitator of development. This implies that working with families and the community should be part of the teacher's professional practice, especially when dealing with students with neurodevelopmental disorders.

In summary, the results of this assessment underscore the need to strengthen teacher training in relation to family guidance, understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and the implementation of inclusive strategies. More relevant initial teacher training is required, accompanied by opportunities for real-world practice and methodological support. In this way, it will be possible to move toward a high-quality, empathetic, and transformative inclusive education.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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