

Needs Analysis for the Development of a Social Interaction Skills Module for Students with Autism in Inclusive Secondary Education: Experts' and Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT:

This study was conducted to analyze the needs for the design and development of a teaching module on social interaction skills for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive secondary education. Although inclusive education has been increasingly implemented, there remains a lack of systematic, structured, and contextualised modules. This study employed the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach, guided by the ADDIE model with a focus on the needs analysis phase. Data were collected through questionnaires involving three experts and semi-structured interviews with five teachers, and were analysed using descriptive and thematic analysis. The findings show that experts demonstrated a high level of agreement, with percentages ranging from 67% to 100% regarding the need for the module. Thematic analysis identified four main themes: teachers' professional needs, module requirements, instructional strategies, and implementation constraints. Teachers also reported a lack of specialised training and the absence of structured guidelines. The proposed module should emphasise social awareness, emotional regulation, communication, and social interaction through strategies such as role-playing, peer-mediated approaches, scaffolding, and visual supports. This study highlights the need for a contextualised and theory-based module to enhance social skills and self-confidence among students with ASD.

Keywords: Social Interaction Skills, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Inclusive Secondary Education, Needs Analysis, Module Development, Design and Development Research (DDR).

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of inclusive education has received increasing global attention, including in Malaysia, as part of broader educational efforts ensuring equitable learning opportunities for students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). In this context, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are among the groups that require specific interventions and support,

particularly in the domain of social interaction skills. Deficits in these skills may affect their ability to engage in meaningful social interactions within authentic school environments.

Previous studies have indicated that students with ASD often experience difficulties in interpreting social cues, emotional expressions, and the norms that regulate social behaviour (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This condition necessitates

systematic, explicit, and structured instructional approaches to support the acquisition of these skills. Despite the increasing implementation of inclusive education, a significant gap remains in the provision of specialised teaching materials that systematically and contextually support the progress of social interaction skills.

In Malaysia, inclusive education guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia emphasise the need for differentiated instruction based on students' needs. However, teachers often face challenges such as the lack of specialised modules, limited professional training, and time constraints in effectively implementing social skills instruction. Findings by Laugeson et al. (2015) demonstrate that structured modules, including the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS), are effective in improving social skills and self-confidence among individuals with ASD. Extending this evidence, Lynn Kern Koegel et al. (2022) found that interest-based interventions increase students' motivation and active engagement in social learning.

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of structured instruction in reinforcing the social development of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For example, Wendy L. Stone et al. (2020) reported that teaching methodology that incorporates clear instruction, continuous practice, and timely feedback can enhance students' ability to recognise social cues and give appropriate respond during interactions. However, despite the increasing endorsement of inclusive education, there is still a significant lack of well-designed instructional resources that could support the teaching of social interaction skills systematically.

Furthermore, Catherine Lord et al. (2020) highlighted students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face notable difficulties in communication, especially in practicing the skills learned in a real-world scenario. This highlights the need for instructional strategies that are based off authentic and meaningful contexts. Similarly, Connie Kasari et al. (2021) found that peer-mediated approaches within inclusive settings can significantly improve students' social participation and communication abilities. Collectively, these

findings denote effective social skills instruction should be structured, contextually relevant, and supp

Therefore, the development of a systematic and theory-based instructional module is essential to support teachers in delivering social interaction skills instruction. This study focuses on understanding needs analysis as part of the Design and Development Research (DDR) framework to identify actual needs based on the perspectives of experts and teachers prior to the development of the module. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the need for a social interaction skills instructional module for teachers in inclusive education programmes.
2. To explore the essential components and requirements for developing a social interaction skills instructional module for teachers in inclusive education programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach to ensure a systematic development process. The study was guided by the ADDIE model, which included five main phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. However, this study focused only on the needs analysis phase, which aims to identify user needs prior to the development of the module.

This approach was selected as it is suitable for studies that aim to develop instructional modules based on empirical data and actual user needs, particularly within the context of special education and inclusive education.

2.2 Sample

This study involved two groups of respondents: three experts in special education with extensive experience in curriculum development and teacher training, and five teachers who teach students with ASD in inclusive education programmes at the secondary school level. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the sample to ensure that only respondents with relevant experience and expertise related to the focus of the study were included.

Even though this study involved a small sample size consisting of three experts and five teachers, the number was considered relevant for the purpose of the study in the needs analysis phase of the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach. In DDR studies, the primary emphasis is placed on an in-depth exploration of users' needs, research context, and product development processes rather than on statistical generalization to a large population. According to Rita C. Richey and James D. Klein (2007), DDR studies focus on the processes of analysis, design, development, and evaluation of educational products through the involvement of participants who possess relevant expertise and experience in the field of study. Therefore, purposive sampling is commonly employed to gain rich, in-depth, and relevant data.

In this study, three experts were selected based on their expertise in special education, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and instructional module development. Meanwhile, five teachers were selected because they had direct experience in handling students with special educational needs within secondary school inclusive education programmes. The selection of these participants is consistent with the view of John W. Creswell (2014), who stated that qualitative and exploratory studies place greater emphasis on selecting participants who are able to provide significant information rather than relying on a large sample size.

In addition, this study is exploratory in nature as it aims to identify the preliminary needs for the development of a social interaction skills module for students with ASD within the context of inclusive education. Therefore, the main focus of the study is to understand the issues, challenges, and instructional needs from the perspectives of experts and teachers, rather than to generalize the findings to the whole population of special education teachers in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations, particularly in terms of the small sample size and the limited research context, which involved only a few selected participants. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be fully generalized to all teachers or schools implementing inclusive education programmes. However, the data obtained still

provide significant and meaningful preliminary information to support the development of a more systematic and needs-based social interaction skills module for users.

2.3 Research Instruments

Two types of instruments were used in this study:

a) Expert Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed to obtain the level of expert agreement on the need for module development. The items covered aspects such as module requirements, module content, instructional strategies, and module design. A Likert scale was used to measure experts' level of agreement.

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted out with teachers to gain detailed insights into their experiences in teaching social skills, the challenges they faced, module needs, and appropriate instructional strategies. This approach enabled the collection of richer and more contextualised data.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in two phases:

1. Distribution of questionnaires to experts to obtain initial feedback on module needs.
2. Interviews with teachers, conducted either face-to-face or online, and recorded for analysis purposes.

Before data collection, all participants were informed the purpose of the study, and obtained consent prior to data collection.

2.5 Data Analysis

Two approaches were used to analyze the data:

- a. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data and determine the level of expert agreement expressed in percentages.
- b. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the interview data in order to identify the main themes derived from teachers' responses.

The findings from the thematic analysis in this study not only indicate the need for the development of a

social interaction skills module, but also illustrate the interrelated relationships among teachers' needs, instructional strategies, administrative support, and module requirements within the context of inclusive education. For example, the theme related to teachers' needs was found to have a direct relationship with the theme of module requirements, as the lack of systematic instructional materials caused teachers to experience difficulties in implementing social skills instruction consistently and systematically.

In addition, the themes of instructional strategies and administrative support also revealed a significant relationship. Teachers stated that the use of strategies such as visual supports, social games, positive reinforcement, and collaborative activities needed support from the school administration in terms of time allocation, professional training, and the provision of teaching materials. This indicates that the effectiveness of teaching social interaction skills depends not only on teachers' competencies, but is also effected by organizational factors and the school environment.

These findings indicate that the need for module development exists due to several key factors, such as the limit use of standardized instructional guidelines, teachers' challenges in managing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive classrooms, and the need for more systematic and ASD-friendly instructional approaches.

The interpretation of these findings can also be connected to the Social Learning Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in students' learning development. In the context of this study, students with ASD require structured social support to help them develop communication and interaction skills within an inclusive environment. Furthermore, the findings are also consistent with the Constructivist Theory introduced by Jean Piaget, which emphasizes that learning develops through active experiences and interactions with the environment.

2.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor of the qualitative study, several measures were undertaken during the data

collection and analysis processes. This study employed data triangulation through the involvement of two different groups of participants, namely experts and teachers, in order to gather more comprehensive perspectives regarding the needs for the development of a social interaction skills module. In addition, participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and to prevent the loss of important information during the analysis process.

In terms of credibility, the researcher conducted member checking by obtaining confirmation from several participants regarding the interview transcripts and data interpretations to ensure that the interpreted meanings were consistent with the participants' actual perspectives. Furthermore, peer review was also conducted to enhance the accuracy of theme interpretation and to decrease researcher bias during the data analysis process.

To ensure dependability, the data coding process was carried out systematically and in an organized manner through several stages, namely repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes, categorization, and the development of major themes. This process was clearly documented to enable the data analysis procedures to be consistently understood and traced.

From the aspect of confirmability, the researcher provided an audit trail that included records of the data collection process, transcription procedures, coding processes, researcher reflective notes, and the theme development process.

2.7 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research instruments were evaluated through expert review of the questionnaire in the field of special education. In addition, the interview protocol was constructed based on relevant literature to ensure content appropriateness. The reliability of the interview data was strengthened through audio recording and verbatim transcription, researcher verification, and data triangulation between experts and teachers.

To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire instrument, an expert review process was conducted prior to data collection. In this study, the

questionnaire instrument was reviewed by three experts with expertise in special education, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and instructional module development.

The instrument validation process involved the evaluation of several key aspects, including the suitability of the item content with the research objectives, language clarity, sentence structure, item comprehension, and the appropriateness of the constructs being measured. The experts also provided suggestions for improvement in terms of terminology usage, item arrangement, and the suitability of the items within the context of inclusive education. In response to the feedback received, several items were revised and reorganized to enhance the clarity and appropriateness of the instrument in relation to the purpose of the study.

Nevertheless, this study did not involve statistical reliability analysis such as Cronbach's Alpha values because the instrument was used on a limited basis during the needs analysis phase of this exploratory study. Therefore, this limitation is acknowledged as one of the limitations of the study.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Thematic Analysis Findings

This section presents the study's findings based on two primary data sources: expert input and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis in order to address the research objectives.

a. Experts

Analysis of the questionnaire data from three experts indicated a high level of agreement regarding the need to develop a social interaction skills teaching module for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive education. Overall, the percentage of agreement ranged from 67% to 100%, reflecting strong consensus among the experts.

The findings revealed that all experts agreed that;

- i. A social interaction skills teaching module is highly necessary in the context of inclusive education.
- ii. The module should be systematic and

structured to facilitate implementation by teachers.

iii. The module content should include key elements such as social awareness, emotional regulation, behaviour, communication, and social interaction.

iv. The module should be flexible and practical, and adaptable according to the functional levels of students with ASD.

The importance of integrating diverse instructional strategies, including behavioural modelling, role-playing, and the use of visual supports, to enhance teaching effectiveness were highlighted by the experts.

Table 1: Level of Expert Agreement on Module Needs

Evaluation Aspect	Percentage of Agreement
Need for module development	100%
Module content	100%
Instructional strategies	67% - 100%
Module design	67% - 100%

These findings clearly indicate that the development of a social interaction skills teaching module is an urgent need in inclusive education.

b. Teachers

The thematic analysis of interview data obtained from five teachers revealed four main themes:

- i. Teachers' roles and professional needs
- ii. Module needs
- iii. Instructional strategies
- iv. Constraints and administrative support

3.2.1 Theme 1: Teachers' Roles and Professional Needs

Teachers play a critical role in supporting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in developing social interaction skills. However, the findings indicate that teachers face challenges related to limited training and insufficient specialised knowledge in teaching social interaction skills. Most teachers reported that they had not received specific training related to autism and social skills

instruction. Instead, they relied on personal experience and trial-and-error approaches, and expressed the need for continuous professional development and training.

One respondent stated:

"We teach based on our own experience; there is no specific module that can be used as a guide."

These findings (32%) highlight the need to provide professional support to teachers in order to enhance their competence in teaching social skills.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Module Needs

All teachers agreed that a specialised instructional module is essential to support more systematic and effective teaching practices. Teachers emphasised that the module should have a clear and user-friendly structure, include practical activities appropriate to students' levels, provide step-by-step guidance, and be accompanied by teaching aids and sample activities.

One teacher stated:

"If there is a comprehensive module, it would be very helpful because we would have clear guidance for teaching."

These findings (25%) indicate that such a module is not only necessary but must also be designed with usability in real classroom contexts in mind.

3.2.3 Theme 3: Instructional Strategies

Teachers identified several effective instructional strategies to support students with ASD to develop social interaction skills. The most frequently used strategies include:

- Role-play
- Peer-mediated approaches
- Scaffolding
- Use of visual supports
- Observation-based assessment

According to the teachers, practical and repetitive instructional strategies enhance students' ability to understand social situations more effectively.

For example, one teacher stated:

"Role-play is very helpful because students can understand real situations and try them themselves."

These findings (22%) suggest that the developed module should integrate diverse instructional strategies grounded in best practices.

3.2.4 Theme 4: Constraints and Administrative Support

Although teachers demonstrated readiness to implement social skills instruction, they faced several key constraints, including:

- Time constraints within the teaching schedule
- Lack of teaching materials and resources
- High teacher workload
- Limited administrative support

One respondent stated:

"Time is very limited; we have to focus on completing the academic syllabus, so social skills receive less attention."

Nevertheless, findings stated that 21% teachers also indicated that support from school administration, such as the provision of training and resources, could enhance the implementation of social skills instruction.

3.3 Distribution of Themes Across Participants

In this study, qualitative themes were qualified using percentage intended to indicate the frequency tendency of themes that emerged from the participants' interview data. These percentages were calculated based on the total frequency of codes or themes identified throughout the thematic analysis process.

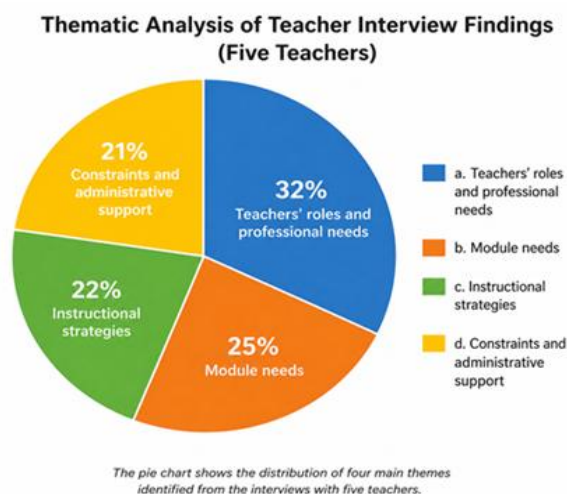
Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledges that the use of percentages in qualitative research may raise methodological concerns because qualitative approaches focus more on meaning, experiences, and data interpretation rather than statistical measurement.

Therefore, the reporting of themes in this study should be considered as an indicator supporting the tendency of dominant themes rather than as

statistical generalization to the study population. The use of percentages was applied descriptively to assist in explaining the thematic patterns that emerged from the participants' data.

However, to enhance the appropriateness of the qualitative methodology, the researcher has provided additional explanation regarding the method used to calculate the themes in the data analysis section. In addition, the main focus of the study discussion was placed on the interpretation of thematic meanings, the relationships among themes, and the contextual explanation of the need for developing a social interaction skills module.

Pie Chart 1: Shows four main themes identified from the interviews with five teachers.



4. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study by linking them to existing literature, learning theories, and the context of inclusive education implementation. Overall, the findings indicate a significant need to develop a systematic, contextualized, and theory-driven instructional module on social interaction skills for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

4.1 The Need for a Systematic and Structured Module

This suggests that a high level of expert agreement regarding the identified need to develop a systematic and well-structured module. This is consistent with previous studies which indicate that students with

ASD require explicit instructional approaches, emphasising that they need structured, consistent, and explicit teaching to understand abstract social skills (Wong et al., 2015).

The need for a systematic module can also be explained through Lev Vygotsky's social learning theory, which posits that learning take place most effectively through social interaction and structured guided support within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this context, the developed module should provide a clear sequence of learning, beginning with basic skills such as recognising social cues and progressing to more complex skills such as emotional regulation and social interaction.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach, emphasizing importance needs analysis as a fundamental step in producing modules that are systematic, relevant, and aligned with real classroom contexts.

4.2 The Importance of Comprehensive Module Content

This highlights that the module content should include key elements related to social awareness, emotional regulation, behaviour, communication, and social interaction. These findings are consistent with the study by Elizabeth Laugeson et al. (2015), which highlights intervention of social skills interventions must be implemented in a organised and systematically manner to enhance their effectiveness among students with ASD.

From the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's social learning theory, learning occurs through social interaction and support from more knowledgeable individuals in facilitating students' skill development. Therefore, the module should emphasise activities that involve authentic social interaction, such as group work and peer-mediated learning. This comprehensive approach is necessary to ensure that students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) not only understand social concepts but are also able to apply these skills in real-life situations.

4.3 Effectiveness of Instructional Strategies Based on Best Practices

This suggested that strategies such as role-playing, peer-mediated approaches, scaffolding, and visual support uses are among the most effective instructional strategies. These findings are aligned with the work of Wong et al. (2015), who identified these strategies as evidence-based practices for the students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Role-playing, for instance, allows students to practise social situations in a safe and controlled environment. This approach supports students' understanding of social contexts while enhancing their self-confidence. Similarly, peer-mediated approaches increase opportunities for natural social interaction within inclusive classroom settings.

The use of scaffolding is also aligned with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as proposed by Lev Vygotsky, where students are able to achieve higher levels of learning through support from teachers or peers. Visual supports such as social cards and images have also been found to be effective in supporting students with ASD, who tend to be visual learners.

4.4 The Need for Teacher Professional Development

Limited professional preparation may affect teachers' confidence and consistency in delivering social skills instruction effectively within inclusive education settings. These findings correspond with the study conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who emphasized that continuous professional development is essential element in improving the quality of teaching. In this context, teachers require more targeted training that includes effective instructional strategies, behaviour management, and the development of appropriate instructional modules.

Moreover, the results indicate that teachers often rely on their own experiences in teaching social skills, which may lead to inconsistencies in instructional practices. Therefore, the provision of a systematic module would not only support students but also serve as a practical guide for teachers.

4.5 Implementation Challenges in Inclusive Education

This study revealed several significant key challenges in implementing social skills instruction in inclusive classrooms influenced by structural and institutional factors, particularly workload demands, limited resources, and insufficient administrative support. These findings correspond with previous research showing that teachers often face heavy workloads and must balance academic demands with students' social development (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Time constraints remain a major challenge, as teachers are required to prioritise the academic syllabus. Consequently, social skills instruction receives less attention despite its importance for the students' development. In addition, the lack of appropriate teaching materials and modules further limits teachers' ability to implement effective instruction.

Administrative support plays a critical role ensuring the effective implementation of inclusive education. Without sufficient support, teachers may face difficulties in implementing innovative teaching practices effectively.

4.6 Implications of the Study

The result of this study presents several significant implications that should be considered in efforts to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning implementation:

- a. **Implications for Module Development**
The module developed should be systematic, flexible, and grounded in strong theoretical foundations, while also taking into account the actual needs of both teachers and students.
- b. **Implications for Teaching Practice**
Teachers need to be more effective and proactive in selecting and evaluating instructional strategies used in the classroom.
- c. **Implications for Teacher Training**
Professional development programmes should be strengthened to enhance teachers' competencies in inclusive education.

d. Implications for Educational Policy
Educational policies should emphasise the role of stakeholders in providing comprehensive support, including training resources and well-structured guidelines, to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study's findings of this study show a need to develop social interaction skills teaching module for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive secondary education programmes. The results highlight a significant demand for a module that is systematically developed, structured, flexible, and practical to support teachers in delivering social skills instruction more effectively.

Analysis from both expert and teacher perspectives demonstrates clear alignment, particularly in terms of module content, instructional strategies, and implementation challenges. The proposed module should incorporate key elements includes social awareness, emotional regulation, behaviour,

communication, and social interaction. In addition, instructional strategies such as role-playing, peer-mediated approaches, scaffolding, and visual supports uses have been identified as effective and should be included in the module.

Despite these significant findings, the study also highlights several key issues, particularly time constraints in implementation. Therefore, module development should take into account the realities of school settings to ensure that the module is practical and feasible to implement.

The implications of this study suggest that the development of a social interaction skills teaching module grounded in theory and actual user needs is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education. The developed module not only functions as a teaching resource but also serves as a guide for teachers in planning and implementing systematic instruction. Future research is recommended to provide stronger support for the study's on the design, development, and evaluation phases of the module to further strengthen the findings.

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