

Inclusive Education for Autistic Learners in Trinidad and Tobago: Policy, Evidence, and Implementation Capacity

Gabriel Julien  

¹ University of the West Indies Global Campus, Trinidad and Tobago

*Corresponding Author's e-mail: gabriel.julien@open.uwi.edu

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education requires meaningful participation and support, not just placement. Evidence on how autistic learners participate and receive support in mainstream classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago remains limited and mostly disability-wide rather than autism-specific. This review examined learner participation, classroom practice, teacher preparedness, assessment, and policy implementation while distinguishing direct autism evidence from the national and regional contextual evidence. A structured narrative review screened a reconstructed corpus of 47 unique candidates through separate scholarly and policy document streams; 31 analytical sources were included, comprising 15 scholarly sources and 16 policy, legal, or technical documents. International evidence supports a participation-oriented interpretation and identifies potentially useful structured, individualized, communication-oriented, and participation-focused practices, although implementation appears to be contingent on training, resources, role clarity, collaboration, and organizational support. National sources document a substantial policy foundation alongside incomplete accommodations and continuing capacity, coordination, data, and accountability constraints. No included source evaluated a comprehensive local autism-inclusive classroom model. The findings suggest prioritizing usable school guidance, practice-based teacher development, coordinated specialist support, and participation-linked monitoring while evaluating internationally derived practices locally.

Keywords: *Autism, inclusive education, teacher development, policy implementation, Trinidad and Tobago.*

DOI: [10.70376/jerp.v4i2.453](#)

Received: 2026-05-06; Revised: 2026-07-03; Accepted: 2026-07-19; Published: 2026-07-30.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is intended to secure access to a mainstream school. It requires that learners are present, participate meaningfully, receive appropriate support, and have equitable opportunities to learn.¹ This distinction is especially important for autistic learners because physical placement can coexist with limited peer interaction, inaccessible communication, sensory barriers, inflexible instruction, or assessment practices that do not reflect learner variability.² Therefore, the relevant question is not only whether autistic learners enter mainstream classrooms, but whether educational environments enable their participation and development.

Autism is heterogeneous: learners differ in communication, sensory processing, executive functioning, interests, adaptive functioning, and support needs. These differences do not determine exclusion on their own. Neurodiversity and social-relational perspectives emphasize that disability is also produced through the interaction between learners and environments, including institutional expectations about communication, behavior, pace, independence, and achievement.³ From this perspective, inclusive education requires both individualized support and changes to classroom and system conditions; it should not be reduced to normalizing learners or locating difficulty solely within them.⁴

International research has identified a range of structured, individualized, communication-oriented, social-participation, and instructional practices that may support autistic learners.^{5,6} However, the literature does not justify the use of a universal package of techniques. School implementation studies indicate that practice use is shaped by educators' knowledge, coaching, role clarity, collaboration, resources, leadership, and organizational support.⁷ This shifts the analytical focus from whether a strategy appears on an evidence-

¹ Mel Ainscow, "Promoting Inclusion and Equity in Education: Lessons from International Experiences," *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 7–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587>; UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*, Third edit (Paris: UNESCO, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.54676/JJNK6989>.

² Regina M. Fasano et al., "A Granular Perspective on Inclusion: Objectively Measured Interactions of Preschoolers with and without Autism," *Autism Research* 14, no. 8 (August 3, 2021): 1658–69, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2526>; Rose A. Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis," *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 11, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 564–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-022-00352-4>.

³ Robert Chapman, "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 16, no. 6 (November 12, 2021): 1360–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620959833>; Patrick Dwyer, "The Neurodiversity Approach(Es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?," *Human Development* 66, no. 2 (2022): 73–92, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000523723>.

⁴ Monique Botha, "Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (September 28, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.727542>; Dwyer, "The Neurodiversity Approach(Es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?"

⁵ Kara Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 11 (November 15, 2021): 4013–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04844-2>.

⁶ Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis."

⁷ Maria L. Hugh et al., "Educators' Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis," *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children* 46, no. 4 (November 2, 2023): 317–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064231178768>; Jill Locke et al., "Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students:

based list to whether teachers and schools have the capacity to select, adapt, sustain, and monitor strategies for particular learners and contexts.

Trinidad and Tobago provides a consequential setting for this study. National education, disability, and equality frameworks establish commitments relevant to access, participation, teacher development, curriculum, accommodations, and accountability.⁸ Operational guidance also exists for special education services and assessment arrangements. However, direct national scholarship and implementation reports describe incomplete accommodations, uneven support, service fragmentation, capacity constraints, and policy-practice gaps.⁹ This raises the question of how consistently existing policy commitments are translated into school-level participation and support.

The evidence boundary is equally important. Most direct evidence about autistic learners, classroom practices, and educator implementation comes from international studies, particularly better-resourced systems. Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean is smaller and is mainly disability-wide, policy-oriented, or contextual rather than based on direct evaluation of autism-inclusive classroom models. International findings can therefore identify potentially relevant practices and implementation conditions, but they cannot establish how autistic learners experience mainstream schooling in Trinidad and Tobago. Local claims should be grounded in national evidence, and transferable claims should be labelled as requiring contextual adaptation and empirical testing.

This review is guided by a participation-oriented account of inclusive education, a social-relational understanding of disability, and neurodiversity-informed analysis. Together, these perspectives direct attention to the relationships among learner needs, classroom practice, teacher development, assessment, family and specialist collaboration, leadership, resources, and policy implementation. They also provide an ethical and analytical basis for distinguishing support from normalization and for evaluating whether educational systems remove or reproduce barriers to participation.¹⁰

Exploring Teachers' and Paraeducators' Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 13 (December 6, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.961219>.

⁸ Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, "Inclusive Education Policy" (Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, 2009), <https://wpuploadstorageaccount.blob.core.windows.net/corporate/2022/04/Inclusive-Education-Policy.pdf>; Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027," 2023, <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2023/09/Education-Policy-2023-2027.pdf>.

⁹ Bephyer Parey, "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 26, no. 6 (May 12, 2022): 559–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1701719>; Bephyer Parey, "Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 27, no. 14 (December 6, 2023): 1544–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1902004>; Sasha V Nandalal and Tess Miller, "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago," *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/ Revue Canadienne Des Jeunes Chercheurs et Chercheurs En Éducation* 15, no. 2 (December 23, 2024): 217–29, <https://journalhosting.ualgary.ca/index.php/cjnse/article/view/79910>; United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report," 2022, https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CR_TrinidadandTobago_2021-57e.pdf.

¹⁰ Ainscow, "Promoting Inclusion and Equity in Education: Lessons from International Experiences"; Chapman, "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions"; Dwyer, "The Neurodiversity Approach(Es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?"

Against this background, this review synthesizes scholarly and policy evidence on inclusive education for autistic learners in mainstream schools, with particular attention to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. It does not estimate the pooled intervention effects. Instead, it examines what the available evidence supports, how directly that evidence applies to the national context, and where important empirical gaps exist. This review addresses three questions:

1. What does the available evidence show about barriers to participation and classroom practices relevant to autistic learners in mainstream schools?
2. What teacher, school, and system conditions influence the implementation of autism-inclusive practices?
3. How do inclusive education commitments in Trinidad and Tobago compare with documented implementation evidence, and what evidence gaps remain?

This review contributes a source-traceable synthesis that keeps direct autism evidence separate from national and regional contextual evidence. It reframes the national challenge as one of implementation capacity rather than policy absence, while avoiding claims that international practices transfer automatically or that disability-wide evidence represents autistic learners' experiences uniformly. This approach is intended to support more precise policy discussions, context-sensitive school improvement, and a focused agenda for locally grounded research.

METHOD

1. Review design

This study used a structured narrative review to examine inclusive education for autistic learners in mainstream school settings, with particular attention to Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean region. This design was appropriate because the review question spans classroom participation, inclusive pedagogy, teacher development, assessment, disability policy, service coordination, and implementation evidence that cannot be reduced to a single intervention or an outcome measure.

The review was structured through predefined procedures for searching, eligibility assessment, deduplication, screening, extraction, appraisal, and synthesis. It was narrative because its purpose was interpretive integration rather than exhaustive effect estimation or meta-analysis. PRISMA- and PRISMA-S-informed principles guided the transparent reporting of the reconstructed corpus and search framework, but the study is not presented as a full systematic review.¹¹

2. Search strategy

The evidence corpus was reconstructed and verified on July 14, 2026, with source eligibility limited to evidence published or operative by December 31, 2025. Candidate

¹¹ Matthew J. Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *BMJ* 10, no. 1 (March 29, 2021): n71, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>; Melissa L. Rethlefsen et al., "PRISMA-S: An Extension to the PRISMA Statement for Reporting Literature Searches in Systematic Reviews," *Systematic Reviews* 10, no. 1 (January 26, 2021): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01542-z>.

sources were identified through targeted searches of government, parliamentary, university-repository, international-organization, regional-organization, ERIC-domain, scholarly-web, and exact-title sources, together with citation and source-link verification. The searches were designed to capture both scholarly evidence and authoritative policy, legal, or technical documents.

The search framework combined three concept blocks: autism or autistic learners, inclusive education, mainstream schooling, or general education, and classroom practice, teacher development, assessment, support, or policy implementation. Geographic terms for the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago were added where appropriate. Database-adapted syntax was specified for ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar as a reproducibility framework.

The reconstructed flow was reconciled at the level of distinct candidate sources rather than database-specific retrieval estimates. Each candidate was logged individually with a citation, source type, evidence stream, geography, decision, duplicate status, full-text or source-availability status, and stable URL where available. This approach allowed every included and excluded source to be audited, even though the original bibliographic database export files were not part of the available record.

3. Eligibility criteria

Eligibility was assessed using two evidence streams. Scholarly sources were eligible if they were in English, published from 2020 to 2025, concerned formal school settings and children or adolescents, and provided either ASD-specific educational evidence or direct Trinidad and Tobago or Caribbean inclusive-education evidence needed for contextual interpretation. Eligible topics included participation, classroom practice, teacher preparedness, curriculum or accommodations, assessment, support services, collaboration, and policy implementation.

Table 1. Two-stream inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Scholarly population and context	Children or adolescents in formal school settings; ASD-specific educational evidence or direct Trinidad and Tobago/Caribbean inclusive-education evidence required for contextual interpretation.	Adult or postsecondary-only, clinical-only, non-educational, or general inclusion evidence without a unique ASD or Caribbean contribution.
Scholarly focus	Participation, classroom practice, teacher preparedness, curriculum or accommodations, assessment, services, collaboration, and policy implementation.	No clear contribution to the review questions or commentary without a transparent, evidence-based approach.
Policy/legal/technical evidence	Authoritative national, regional, or international instruments relevant to rights, inclusive education, assessment, services, governance, and implementation.	Unstable pages, newsletters, promotional materials, or documents without substantive educational or policy applicability.
Period and language	English scholarly evidence from 2020 to 2025; policy or legal documents published or operative by December 31, 2025.	Non-English scholarly evidence or scholarly work outside 2020–2025, unless serving only as excluded historical background.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Explicit exceptions and weighting	Foundational or operative policy, legislation, and rights instruments may pre-date 2020; direct ASD and national implementation evidence receives the greatest weight.	Policy or conceptual sources used to infer intervention effectiveness, ASD prevalence, or a uniform national experience.

Policy, legal, and technical sources were eligible when they were authoritative national, regional, or international instruments relevant to disability rights, inclusive education, assessment, services, governance, or implementation, and were published or operative by 31 December 2025. Foundational or currently operative policies, legislation, and regional rights instruments could predate 2020 when their continuing relevance was explicit. Clinical-only, adult or postsecondary-only, non-educational, unstable, promotional, or opinion-based sources without a transparent scholarly or institutional basis were excluded. Policy and conceptual documents were not used to infer intervention effectiveness or local prevalence.

4. Screening and source selection

All candidate records were first checked for duplicate status using DOI where available, followed by normalized title, first author or institutional author, and publication year. Where records represented the same source, the version with the most complete citation, abstract, identifier, and source link was retained. No duplicates were identified within the reconstructed candidate set.

The reconstructed corpus contained 47 unique candidate genes. Each candidate was screened against the relevant scholarly or policy document criteria and assigned a decision. Thirty-one sources were included as analytical evidence: 15 scholarly sources and 16 policy, legal, and technical documents. Sixteen sources were excluded from the analytical corpus or retained only for methodological, clinical background, historical, or contextual citation. One principal exclusion reason was recorded for each of these 16 sources. The completed flow therefore reconciled as 47 candidates: 31 included + 16 excluded or non-analytical sources.

The author conducted the screening and extraction. The candidate register, included-source matrix, exclusion log, search log, appraisal rubric, and mathematical reconciliation are provided in Supplementary File 1 (Appendices A–D) and Supplementary File 2 (evidence-matrix workbook). Supplementary File 1, Appendix B assigns stable identifiers S01–S15 to scholarly evidence and P01–P16 to policy, legal, or technical evidence; these identifiers provide source-level traceability throughout the Results and Discussion.¹²

5. Data extraction

A structured evidence matrix was used for data extraction. For every candidate, the matrix recorded the source identifier, full citation, year, title, evidence stream, geography, source type, design or evidence base, population or scope, analytical domains, key contribution, appraisal category, directness to the review question, decision, exclusion reason

¹² Supplementary materials S01–S15; P01–P16.

where applicable, date exception, evidence role, origin, source availability status, duplicate status, and source URL.

The evidence was organized across five domains derived from the review questions: learner-level barriers and participation; classroom practices; teacher preparedness; policy and system-level support; and assessment and monitoring. Geography and directness were retained as separate fields so that direct ASD school evidence, direct Trinidad and Tobago evidence, Caribbean contextual evidence, international transferable evidence, and non-empirical policy or conceptual evidence could not be treated as interchangeable.

6. Source appraisal

The appraisal assessed relevance, transparency, directness, and analytical contribution rather than imposing a single hierarchy across heterogeneous source types. Empirical studies were considered in relation to the educational context, design appropriateness, data-source transparency, ASD or school relevance, and contribution to the analytical domains. Evidence syntheses were considered in relation to scope, search transparency, synthesis logic, recency, and ASD-inclusive relevance.

Policy, legal, and technical documents were assessed for institutional authority, policy relevance, implementation clarity, applicability, and operational status of the policies. Conceptual sources were assessed for their conceptual clarity, theoretical relevance, and interpretive usefulness. These criteria were used to reduce the risk of treating authoritative policy statements as intervention evidence or using conceptual sources to make empirical assertions.

Each included source was categorized as high, moderate, or limited in relevance and contribution. High-relevance sources directly addressed ASD-inclusive schooling or national implementation with a transparent evidence base. Moderate sources provided credible but indirect contextual, regional, policy, or conceptual evidence. Limited sources were retained only when they supplied a unique contribution that was not available from more direct evidence.

Appraisal informed the interpretive weight during synthesis. Direct ASD school studies and syntheses received the greatest weight for claims about autistic learners and classroom practice. Direct Trinidad and Tobago scholarship and implementation documents received the greatest weight for claims about the national context. Regional, conceptual, legal, and policy sources were used for context, interpretation, rights, or implementation analysis rather than causal or prevalence claims.

7. Data synthesis

Synthesis proceeded in three stages. First, extracted contributions were coded into five analytical domains. Second, evidence within each domain was compared for convergence, difference, geography, source type, and directness. Third, cross-domain patterns were interpreted through participation-oriented inclusive education, social-relational understandings of disability, and neurodiversity-informed analysis. The synthesis sought recurring implementation conditions and evidence gaps rather than pooled effects.

Every substantive results claim was linked to one or more Appendix B source identifiers. International ASD evidence was used to identify practices and implementation conditions; Trinidad and Tobago evidence was used to assess national policy, accommodations, teacher, and system conditions; and Caribbean evidence was used as a regional context. Where direct local ASD evidence was absent, the synthesis explicitly labelled the inference as transferable or contextual and avoided causal, effectiveness, prevalence, or uniform-national-experience claims.

8. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was supported by a candidate-level audit trail, predefined two-stream criteria, explicit deduplication rules, one-decision-per-candidate screening, one principal reason per exclusion, structured extraction, source-level appraisal, stable source identifiers, and formula-based reconciliation of all totals. The included scholarly evidence was kept separate from policy, legal, and technical evidence, and the evidence matrix preserves source links and directness judgments for verification.

Nevertheless, the review has important limitations. It was conducted by one reviewer; therefore, screening, extraction, and appraisal were not independently duplicated. It reports a reconstructed candidate corpus rather than an exhaustive database-export audit, and it was restricted to English-language scholarly evidence from 2020 to 2025, subject to explicit policy and legal exceptions. The corpus contains stronger international ASD evidence than direct Caribbean or Trinidad and Tobago ASD classroom research. Consequently, the synthesis is interpretive, not causal or exhaustive, and several national implications require local empirical testing.

9. Ethical considerations

This review used publicly available secondary sources and did not involve human participants, personal data collection, or intervention; therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. Research integrity was supported through accurate citation, preservation of source links, explicit exclusion reasons, and separation of direct evidence from contextual inference.

This review also used neurodiversity-informed and participation-oriented language. Autistic learners were not framed as deficits to be remediated, and policy or practice claims were interpreted in relation to environmental, institutional and support conditions. This stance was applied as an ethical principle of representation rather than as a substitute for evidence appraisal.¹³

¹³ Botha, “Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production”; Dwyer, “The Neurodiversity Approach(Es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The completed analytical corpus comprised 31 sources: 15 scholarly sources and 16 policy, legal, and technical documents.¹⁴ The scholarly stream included direct ASD school evidence, evidence syntheses, conceptual work, and Trinidad and Tobago or Caribbean inclusive education studies. The policy stream includes international and regional rights instruments, national policies and legislation, operational guidance, and implementation reports. Supplementary File 1, Appendix B provides the complete citation, geography, design or evidence base, contribution, appraisal, directness, and source link for every identifier used below.

Source identifiers are used throughout this section to make each synthesis statement auditable. The prefix S denotes scholarly evidence, and the prefix P denotes policy, legal, or technical evidence. Claims about autistic learners and inclusive-school practice are anchored principally in direct ASD evidence.¹⁵ Claims about Trinidad and Tobago are anchored in direct national scholarship¹⁶ and national documentary evidence.¹⁷ Caribbean sources provide regional context rather than ASD-specific effect evidence.¹⁸

1. Characteristics of the evidence base

The geographical and evidentiary distributions were uneven. Ten scholarly sources were either international or US-based.¹⁹ Only two scholarly studies provided direct Trinidad and Tobago inclusive-education evidence,²⁰ one compared Trinidad and Tobago with Canada,²¹ and two provided evidence from Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.²² Within the documentary stream, 11 sources addressed Trinidad and Tobago directly,²³ three were Caribbean or Eastern Caribbean sources,²⁴ and two supplied international standards.²⁵

The sources also serve different analytical functions. Direct ASD school studies and syntheses supported findings on peer participation, evidence-based practice, educator training, and implementation.²⁶ Trinidad and Tobago studies supported claims about accommodations, teacher attitudes, and policy-practice conditions but were not ASD-specific.²⁷ National policy and legal documents established formal commitments,²⁸ whereas the United Nations country analysis, parliamentary inquiry, and ministerial response supplied

¹⁴ Supplementary materials S01–S15; P01–P16.

¹⁵ Supplementary materials S04–S10.

¹⁶ Supplementary materials S11–S13.

¹⁷ Supplementary materials P03–P13.

¹⁸ Supplementary materials S14–S15; P14–P16.

¹⁹ Supplementary materials S01–S10.

²⁰ Supplementary materials S11 and S12.

²¹ Supplementary materials S13.

²² Supplementary materials S14 and S15.

²³ Supplementary materials P03–P13.

²⁴ Supplementary material P14–P16.

²⁵ Supplementary materials P01–P02.

²⁶ Supplementary materials S05–S10.

²⁷ Supplementary materials S11–S13.

²⁸ Supplementary materials P03–P09.

stronger evidence of implementation conditions and identified remedial actions.²⁹ Accordingly, international ASD findings are treated as potentially transferable, whereas national and regional evidence is used to judge contextual fit and system capacity.

Table 2. Thematic synthesis by analytical domain with principal evidence identifiers

Analytical domain	Main finding	Implication for Trinidad and Tobago
Learner-level barriers	One observational study indicated that physical placement did not ensure equivalent peer participation in the observed setting; support needs could become barriers when the environments and systems were insufficiently responsive. ³⁰	Potential implication: Schools may benefit from individualized, sensory-responsive, and participation-oriented support.
Classroom practices	ASD-specific reviews and implementation studies supported structured and individualized practices, but their use was reported to be shaped by training, resources, role clarity, and contextual adaptation. ³¹	Implementation may require teacher training, planning time, resources, leadership support and contextual adaptation.
Teacher preparedness	Practice-based training, coaching, collaboration, and organizational support were reported as supporting evidence-based practice use, and local and regional sources documented attitude and capacity constraints. ³²	Sustained practice-based professional development may support classroom-level implementation.

²⁹ Supplementary materials P11–P13.

³⁰ Botha, “Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production”; Chapman, “Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions”; Dwyer, “The Neurodiversity Approach(Es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?”; Fasano et al., “A Granular Perspective on Inclusion: Objectively Measured Interactions of Preschoolers with and without Autism”; Hume et al., “Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review”; Mason et al., “Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis”; Parey, “Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach.”

³¹ Shawna G. Harbin et al., “In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators’ Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 56, no. 1 (January 11, 2026): 71–82, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06531-y>; Hugh et al., “Educators’ Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis”; Hume et al., “Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review”; Locke et al., “Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers’ and Paraeducators’ Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools”; Parey, “Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach.”

³² Harbin et al., “In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators’ Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings”; Hugh et al., “Educators’ Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis”; Locke et al., “Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers’ and Paraeducators’ Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools”; Parey, “Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach”; Kishi Anderson Leachman, “Non-Teaching Stakeholders’ Experiences with Inclusive Education in a Private School in Jamaica,” *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity* 11, no. 1–2 (January 10, 2025): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1115432ar>; Monique Somma et al., “Inclusive Change in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: A Collaborative Autoethnography,” *Exceptionality Education International* 34, no. 1 (May 11, 2024): 89–111, <https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v34i1.16932>; Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, “Inclusive Education Policy”;

Policy and system-level support	Formal rights and policy commitments were extensive, but national implementation sources documented gaps in coordination, capacity, data, and accountability. ³³	Policy commitments may require clearer operational mechanisms, resource allocation, referral pathways, and accountability structures.
Assessment and monitoring	Operational examination accommodations existed, while national and regional sources identified wider monitoring and data gaps; however, no local ASD-specific assessment system was evaluated. ³⁴	Schools may require locally appropriate assessment and monitoring systems that reflect learner strengths, support needs, and contextual realities.

Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, "Education Chap. 39:01: An Act to Make Better Provision for the Promotion of Education in Trinidad and Tobago (Revised Laws of Trinidad and Tobago Updated to December 2014)," Pub. L. No. Chapter 39:01, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2017), <https://laws.gov.tt/ttdll-web2/revision/list?currentid=986&offset=0&q=educ>; Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027."

³³ Parey, "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach"; Nandalal and Miller, "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago"; UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*; Laura Lundy, "'Voice' Is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 6 (December 2, 2007): 927–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>; Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, "Inclusive Education Policy"; Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Education Chap. 39:01: An Act to make better provision for the promotion of education in Trinidad and Tobago (Revised Laws of Trinidad and Tobago updated to December 2014); Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027"; Minister of Social Development and Family Services, "National Policy on Persons with Disabilities," 2018, https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Trinidad-and-Tobago_National-Policy-on-Persons-with-Disabilities-2018.pdf; Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, "Equal Opportunity Chap. 22:03: An Act to Prohibit Certain Kinds of Discrimination, to Promote Equality of Opportunity between Persons of Different Status, to Establish an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal and for Matters Connected," Pub. L. No. Chapter 22:03, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2016), <https://laws.gov.tt/ttdll-web2/revision/list?currentid=164&offset=160&q=>; Ministry of Education, "Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)" (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2025), <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2025/02/Special-Concessions-Procedural-Guidelines-2024-2025.pdf>; Ministry of Education, "SSSD INSIDER: Term I — Academic Year 2022/2023," 2022, <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/corporate/2023/01/SSSD-insider-December-2022-pdf.pdf>; United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report"; Equality and Diversity Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, "Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools," 2020, <https://www.ttparliament.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/p11-s5-J-20200325-HRED-R15.pdf>; Ministry of Education, "The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools," 2020, <https://www.ttparliament.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/p11-s5-J-20201005-HRED-R15-MR-MOE.pdf>.

³⁴ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*; Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, "Inclusive Education Policy"; Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027"; Ministry of Education, "Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)"; United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report"; UNICEF, "Generation Unlimited: Well-Being of Young People in the Eastern Caribbean," 2021, https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/2981/file/GenU_full_report.pdf; UNICEF, "Formative Evaluation of UNICEF's Support to the Education Sector in the Framework of the UNICEF ECA COVID-19 Response Plan," 2025, https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/5761/file/Evaluation_of_UNICEF_Support_to_the_Education_Sector_during_COVID-19_Report_final.pdf.pdf.

2. Learner-level barriers

One observational study indicated that mainstream placement did not produce equivalent social participation in the observed setting; autistic preschoolers experienced different patterns of peer interaction despite sharing an inclusive setting.³⁵ ASD evidence reviews have documented heterogeneous support needs and a broad range of practices targeting communication, social engagement, behavior, adaptive functioning, and learning.³⁶ These sources support a participation-focused interpretation of inclusion, rather than treating physical placement as an outcome.

The conceptual evidence located barriers in the interaction between autistic learners and their environments. Botha challenged deficit-dominated autism knowledge,³⁷ Chapman described functioning as socially and environmentally situated,³⁸ and Dwyer supported context-sensitive neurodiversity approaches.³⁹ Taken together, these sources justify interpreting communication, sensory, organizational, or social differences as exclusionary when classroom expectations and supports are inflexible, not as learner deficits operating independently of context.

The national evidence was less ASD-specific. Parey found that environmental accommodations, law, and policy did not fully support the participation of children with disabilities in regular schools.⁴⁰ The national disability-rights situation analysis and parliamentary inquiry documented education barriers, fragmented services, gaps in data and accountability, and uneven support provision.⁴¹ These sources indicate plausible barriers for autistic learners in Trinidad and Tobago, but they do not establish ASD-specific prevalence or causal effects. The local finding is therefore a documented system-capacity concern, not a direct estimate of autistic learners' classroom experiences.

3. Classroom practices supporting inclusion

The strongest evidence came from ASD-specific reviews and school implementation studies. Hume et al. catalogued evidence-based practices for autistic children and youth,⁴² while Mason et al. synthesized practices specifically examined in inclusive settings.⁴³ These reviews support structured, individualized, communication-oriented, social-participation, and instructional support, but also show that evidence differs by learner outcome, age,

³⁵ Fasano et al., "A Granular Perspective on Inclusion: Objectively Measured Interactions of Preschoolers with and without Autism."

³⁶ Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review"; Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis."

³⁷ Botha, "Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production."

³⁸ Chapman, "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions."

³⁹ Dwyer, "The Neurodiversity Approach(es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?"

⁴⁰ Parey, "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach."

⁴¹ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report"; Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, "Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools."

⁴² Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review."

⁴³ Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis."

setting, and implementation conditions. They do not support a single, universally effective classroom package.

Implementation studies have indicated that the availability of a practice is not equivalent to its consistent use. Locke et al. documented the uneven use of evidence-based practices by teachers and para-educators and identified training, role clarity, and implementation support as relevant conditions.⁴⁴ Harbin et al. identified environmental, resource, training, and collaboration factors that affect educators' practice use.⁴⁵ Hugh et al. further identified practice-based training and coaching mechanisms valued by educators in general education settings.⁴⁶

The Trinidad and Tobago evidence supported the need for contextual adaptation rather than direct transfer. Parey documented limitations in school accommodations,⁴⁷ and Nandlal and Miller identified persistent policy and practice gaps in the national inclusion context.⁴⁸ Current national policy commits to equity, curriculum development, human-resource capacity, and monitoring,⁴⁹ while the Inclusive Education Policy assigns responsibilities related to curriculum and learner support.⁵⁰ These sources establish a policy basis for adaptation; however, they do not demonstrate that ASD-specific strategies are implemented consistently in mainstream classrooms.

Consequently, the traceable result is conditional: evidence for ASD-specific practices comes principally from international sources,⁵¹ whereas their feasibility in Trinidad and Tobago appears to be shaped by accommodations, teacher capacity, leadership, resources, and operational support documented in national sources.⁵² No source directly evaluated a comprehensive ASD-inclusive classroom model in Trinidad and Tobago.

⁴⁴ Locke et al., "Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers' and Paraeducators' Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools."

⁴⁵ Harbin et al., "In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators' Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings."

⁴⁶ Hugh et al., "Educators' Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis."

⁴⁷ Parey, "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach."

⁴⁸ Nandlal and Miller, "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago."

⁴⁹ Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027."

⁵⁰ Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, "Inclusive Education Policy."

⁵¹ Harbin et al., "In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators' Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings"; Hugh et al., "Educators' Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis"; Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review"; Locke et al., "Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers' and Paraeducators' Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools"; Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis."

⁵² Parey, "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach"; Parey, "Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education"; Nandlal and Miller, "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago"; Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, "Inclusive Education Policy"; Minister of Education, "Education Policy Paper 2017-2022 (White Paper)," 2017, <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2023/05/Education-Policy-Paper-2017-2022-6453b16ea4013.pdf>; Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027"; United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report"; Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, "Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes

4. Teacher preparedness

Teacher preparedness was supported by three direct ASD implementation studies. Educators described coaching, practice-based learning, and other implementation supports as useful for applying evidence-based practices.⁵³ Educators' practice use was also shaped by training, collaboration, environmental constraints, and available resources,⁵⁴ while teachers and paraeducators showed uneven practice use and role-related support needs.⁵⁵ Across these sources, information-only training was described as unlikely to be sufficient without opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and solve classroom implementation problems.

One Trinidad and Tobago study reported teacher attitudes that included both support for inclusion and concerns about limited capacity and insufficient support.⁵⁶ Regional studies similarly identified inconsistent teacher competence, leadership, and family-related conditions in Jamaica,⁵⁷ and the importance of collaboration and relational change during inclusive reform in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.⁵⁸ Because S12–S15 were not ASD-specific intervention studies, they support the contextual need for teacher development rather than the effectiveness of a particular ASD training model.⁵⁹

Documentary evidence aligned with these findings. The national Inclusive Education Policy identifies teacher and school responsibilities;⁶⁰ the 2017–2022 policy paper identified needs in policy, curriculum, legislation, and professional preparation;⁶¹ and the 2023–2027 policy includes human resource development and monitoring commitments.⁶² Parliamentary and country-level analyses have documented continuing capacity and service delivery limitations,⁶³ followed by government responses.⁶⁴

Across these sources, teacher capacity was not an individual attribute alone. Direct ASD studies linked practice use to environmental and organizational support,⁶⁵ and national evidence linked teacher work to policy, resources, referral arrangements, and service

and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools”; Ministry of Education, “The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools.”

⁵³ Hugh et al., “Educators’ Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis.”

⁵⁴ Harbin et al., “In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators’ Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings.”

⁵⁵ Locke et al., “Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers’ and Paraeducators’ Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools.”

⁵⁶ Parey, “Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers’ Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education.”

⁵⁷ Anderson Leachman, “Non-Teaching Stakeholders’ Experiences with Inclusive Education in a Private School in Jamaica.”

⁵⁸ Somma et al., “Inclusive Change in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: A Collaborative Autoethnography.”

⁵⁹ See supplementary materials S12–S15.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, “Inclusive Education Policy.”

⁶¹ Minister of Education, “Education Policy Paper 2017-2022 (White Paper).”

⁶² M Musthofa, M Junaedi, and S Hasanah, “The Influence of Online Learning on Student Professionalism Teacher Professional Education Program: Studies in Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia,” *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2276025>.

⁶³ Supplementary materials P11–P12.

⁶⁴ R Setiawan and R Munajah, “Evaluation of the Application of Online Learning in Indonesian Universities,” *TEM Journal* 9, no. 3 (2020): 1194–99, <https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM93-46>.

⁶⁵ Supplementary materials S06–S09.

coordination.⁶⁶ The source-level synthesis therefore identifies sustained professional learning, coaching, role clarity, planning support, and access to specialist collaboration as enabling conditions, while evidence of their consistent national provision is limited.

5. Policy and system-level support

The policy corpus established a clear framework of rights and commitments. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Declaration of Pétion Ville provide international and Caribbean disability inclusion commitments.⁶⁷ In Trinidad and Tobago, the Inclusive Education Policy, successive education policy papers, National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, Education Act, and Equal Opportunity Act provide policy and legal foundations for access, equity, curriculum, professional development, governance, and accountability.⁶⁸

National implementation sources have documented substantial constraints. The United Nations country analysis identified fragmented services, legal and data gaps, educational barriers, and accountability limitations.⁶⁹ The parliamentary inquiry documented concerns about special-education provision, public school access, staffing, and implementation,⁷⁰ and the ministerial response recorded the government's stated remedial actions.⁷¹ Direct scholarship has also reported incomplete accommodations and persistent policy-practice gaps.⁷² These sources substantiate a policy implementation gap without implying that every school or learner experiences the same conditions.

Operational mechanisms were present but partial. Ministry guidance described referral, placement, and service arrangements,⁷³ and the 2025 special-assessment guidelines established procedures for individualized examination accommodations.⁷⁴ These documents describe specific administrative pathways; however, they do not establish consistent implementation, sufficient resourcing, or classroom participation outcomes. UNESCO's system-level synthesis further identifies governance, teacher support, data, infrastructure, and policy follow-through as necessary conditions for inclusion.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Supplementary materials P03–P05; P10–P13.

⁶⁷ United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (New York: United Nations, 2007), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Ch_IV_15.pdf; Caribbean Community (CARICOM), "Declaration of Pétion Ville," Caribbean Community (CARICOM), 2013, <https://caricom.org/declaration-of-petion-ville/>.

⁶⁸ Supplementary materials P03–P08.

⁶⁹ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report."

⁷⁰ Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, "Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools."

⁷¹ Ministry of Education, "The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools."

⁷² United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report"; Ministry of Education, "The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools."

⁷³ Ministry of Education, "SSSD INSIDER: Term I — Academic Year 2022/2023."

⁷⁴ Ministry of Education, "Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)."

⁷⁵ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*.

Therefore, the source-level result distinguishes between formal commitment and demonstrated implementation. Formal commitments are well documented,⁷⁶ and selected operational procedures exist;⁷⁷ however, the strongest national implementation sources report persistent coordination, capacity, data, and accountability problems.⁷⁸ The evidence supports strengthening implementation mechanisms; it does not support the claim that national policy is absent.

6. Assessment and monitoring

Assessment evidence was concentrated in policy and operational documents rather than in local ASD-specific studies. The 2025 Ministry guidelines specify procedures for special assessment arrangements in national examinations,⁷⁹ demonstrating an operative route for individualized concessions. The Inclusive Education Policy and the current Education Policy also assign roles to curriculum, support, and monitoring processes.⁸⁰ These documents establish formal provisions but do not report learner-level outcomes from the accommodations.

Monitoring gaps were documented at the national and regional levels. The United Nations country analysis identified limitations in disability data, service coordination, and accountability.⁸¹ UNESCO emphasized data and monitoring as system conditions for inclusive education,⁸² while UNICEF sources described regional participation, equity, digital inclusion, teacher support, and data challenges in small-island education systems.⁸³ These sources support the need for monitoring that connects policy inputs with participation and educational outcomes.

No included source evaluated a locally developed or culturally responsive ASD assessment or monitoring system in Trinidad and Tobago. The absence is visible in the evidence matrix: the direct national scholarly sources addressed accommodations, teacher attitudes, and policy-practice conditions,⁸⁴ while the operational assessment source

⁷⁶ Supplementary materials P02–P08; P16.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Education, “Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)”; Ministry of Education, “Education Statistics Digest 2019/2020,” 2022, <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/corporate/2022/12/2019-2020-EDUCATION-STATISTICS-DIGEST-ccd-1.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Supplementary materials P11–P13.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Education, “Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions).”

⁸⁰ Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, “Inclusive Education Policy”; Ministry of Education, “Education Policy 2023–2027.”

⁸¹ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), “Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report.”

⁸² UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020*, Global Education Monitoring Report (UN, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.18356/2ddb782c-en>.

⁸³ UNICEF, “The State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children’s Mental Health” (New York, 2021), <https://www.unicef.org/media/114636/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>; UNICEF, “Formative Evaluation of UNICEF’s Support to the Education Sector in the Framework of the UNICEF ECA COVID-19 Response Plan.”

⁸⁴ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), “Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report”; Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, “Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools.”

concerned examination concessions.⁸⁵ Culturally responsive, classroom-based ASD assessment is therefore an evidence gap identified by source coverage and is not an established national practice or tested intervention.

7. Cross-cutting synthesis

Triangulation across the corpus suggests a recurrent, multilevel pattern. Direct ASD evidence linked participation and practice use to classroom and implementation conditions.⁸⁶ Trinidad and Tobago and Caribbean scholarship documented accommodation, teacher, leadership, collaboration, and policy-practice constraints.⁸⁷ Policy and implementation documents established both formal commitments and persistent system gaps.⁸⁸ The convergence is consistent with a systems interpretation in which meaningful participation may be more feasible when classroom support, teacher learning, assessment, leadership, resources, service coordination, and accountability are aligned.

The strength of this conclusion varies by claim. Evidence for ASD practices and educator implementation is principally international and relatively direct.⁸⁹ Evidence for Trinidad and Tobago's inclusive-education context is direct but mostly disability-wide rather than ASD-specific.⁹⁰ Regional evidence is contextual and not ASD-specific.⁹¹ The review therefore identifies a defensible policy-practice problem and a set of transferable implementation conditions, while retaining uncertainty about how autistic learners, families, and teachers experience these conditions across Trinidad and Tobago schools.

Discussion

The central interpretation is that the principal challenge is neither an absence of inclusive-education commitments nor a shortage of potentially useful practices. It is the limited capacity to connect those commitments and practices consistently at the school level. Across direct ASD evidence, national scholarship, and implementation documents, meaningful inclusion depended on alignment among participation-focused classroom support, teacher learning, assessment, leadership, resources, service coordination, and accountability.⁹²

1. Inclusion as participation and system alignment

The findings support a participation-oriented, rather than placement-oriented, understanding of inclusion. One observational study indicated that sharing a mainstream setting did not guarantee equivalent peer interaction in the observed setting,⁹³ while neurodiversity and social-ecological sources located disability partly in the interaction

⁸⁵ Ministry of Education, "Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)."

⁸⁶ Supplementary materials S05–S10.

⁸⁷ Supplementary materials S11–S15.

⁸⁸ Supplementary materials P01–P16.

⁸⁹ Supplementary materials S05–S10.

⁹⁰ Supplementary materials S11–S13; P03–P13.

⁹¹ Supplementary materials S14–S15; P14–P16.

⁹² Supplementary materials S05–S13; P03–P13.

⁹³ Ministry of Education, "Education Policy 2023–2027."

between learners and environments.⁹⁴ The practical implication is that communication, sensory, organizational, or social differences may become educational barriers when classroom routines and institutional support are insufficiently responsive.

This system interpretation also limits overgeneralization. International ASD studies identify relevant practices and implementation conditions,⁹⁵ but the Trinidad and Tobago evidence is mainly disability-wide and system-focused.⁹⁶ Therefore, international approaches should be considered adaptable resources rather than ready-made solutions. Their local value is likely to vary with curriculum conditions, available personnel, school leadership, family and specialist collaboration, and cultural fit.

2. The Trinidad and Tobago policy–implementation gap

Trinidad and Tobago has a substantial rights, legal, and policy foundation for inclusion (P03–P08), along with specific referral, placement, service, and examination-accommodation procedures.⁹⁷ Therefore, the problem identified by the evidence is not the absence of policy. Rather, national implementation sources documented fragmentation, capacity constraints, data limitations, and uneven accountability,⁹⁸ consistent with scholarly findings on incomplete accommodations and persistent policy-practice gaps.⁹⁹

Therefore, this review suggests prioritizing a stronger link between national commitments and routine school practice. The evidence points particularly to usable school-level guidance, sustained teacher and specialist support, coordinated referral and service pathways, and monitoring that connects provision with learner participation. These mechanisms should be resourced and evaluated; publishing additional commitments without implementation support is unlikely to resolve the documented gap.

3. Implications for classroom practice and teacher development

The review did not identify the best classroom strategy. ASD-specific reviews support structured, individualized, communication-oriented, social-participation, and instructional practices, but their effectiveness and feasibility vary by learner, outcome, setting, and

⁹⁴ United Nations, “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”; Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, “Inclusive Education Policy”; Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Education Chap. 39:01: An Act to make better provision for the promotion of education in Trinidad and Tobago (Revised Laws of Trinidad and Tobago updated to December 2014).

⁹⁵ Supplementary materials S06–S10.

⁹⁶ Supplementary materials S11–S13; P03–P13.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Education, “Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)”; Ministry of Education, “SSSD INSIDER: Term I — Academic Year 2022/2023.”

⁹⁸ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), “Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report”; Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, “Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools”; Ministry of Education, “The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools.”

⁹⁹ Parey, “Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach”; Parey, “Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers’ Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education”; Nandlal and Miller, “Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago.”

implementation conditions.¹⁰⁰ School studies further indicate that practice use is shaped by training, coaching, role clarity, collaboration, and organizational support.¹⁰¹ The appropriate conclusion is conditional: potentially useful practices require deliberate adaptation and sustained implementation of support.

Teacher development should therefore be practice-based and embedded in whole-school improvement. Trinidad and Tobago and regional evidence identify attitudes, competence, leadership, collaboration, and resource conditions as interdependent influences on inclusion.¹⁰² Professional learning should combine ASD knowledge with coached classroom application, planning time, peer and specialist collaboration, and feedback. This framing avoids making individual teachers responsible for compensating for system-level deficiencies.

4. Evidence boundaries and research priorities

The conclusions are bound by the corpus. Evidence for ASD classroom practices and educator implementation was primarily international and relatively direct.¹⁰³ Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago was direct but largely concerned disability-wide inclusion, policy, and service systems rather than ASD-specific classroom outcomes.¹⁰⁴ Regional sources were contextual and not ASD-specific.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the synthesis supports an implementation-capacity interpretation but not causal claims about strategy effectiveness or uniform claims about national school experience.

Research should now test the interpretation of the review in Trinidad and Tobago. Priorities include direct observation of classroom enactment, autistic learners' and families' experiences, teacher and school implementation studies, culturally responsive assessment, and monitoring of policy delivery and participation outcomes. Participatory and mixed-method designs would be especially useful because they can connect system indicators with the experiences of learners, families, educators, and school leaders.

CONCLUSION

Meaningful inclusion of autistic learners in mainstream classrooms extends beyond placement or formal policy commitment. The evidence synthesized in this review suggests

¹⁰⁰ Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review"; Locke et al., "Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers' and Paraeducators' Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools"; Mason et al., "Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis."

¹⁰¹ Harbin et al., "In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators' Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings"; Hugh et al., "Educators' Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis"; Hume et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review"; Locke et al., "Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers' and Paraeducators' Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools."

¹⁰² Parey, "Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education"; Nandlal and Miller, "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago"; Anderson Leachman, "Non-Teaching Stakeholders' Experiences with Inclusive Education in a Private School in Jamaica"; Somma et al., "Inclusive Change in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: A Collaborative Autoethnography."

¹⁰³ Supplementary materials S05–S10.

¹⁰⁴ Supplementary materials S11–S13; P03–P13.

¹⁰⁵ Supplementary materials S14–S15; P14–P16.

that participation may be more feasible when responsive classroom practice, teacher learning, assessment, leadership, resources, service coordination, and accountability are aligned. Trinidad and Tobago has an established rights and policy foundation; however, the central challenge is converting that foundation into consistent school-level support.

International ASD evidence identifies potentially useful structured, individualized, communication-oriented, and participation-focused practices, but their value is likely to vary by learner needs and implementation conditions. Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago is more limited and mainly disability-wide; it documents incomplete accommodations, teacher and system constraints, operational procedures, and continuing implementation gaps rather than the effectiveness of ASD-specific classroom interventions. Therefore, this review suggests prioritizing usable school guidance, sustained practice-based teacher development, coordinated referral and specialist support, and monitoring linked to learner participation.

This review supports an implementation-capacity interpretation, not a claim of universal strategy effectiveness or uniform national experience. Future research should examine classroom enactment, autistic learners' and families' experiences, culturally responsive assessment, teacher and school implementation, and policy delivery in Trinidad and Tobago. Participatory and mixed-method studies could examine whether and how national commitments are translated into equitable and sustainable participation in local schools.

REFERENCES

- Ainscow, Mel. "Promoting Inclusion and Equity in Education: Lessons from International Experiences." *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587>.
- Anderson Leachman, Kishi. "Non-Teaching Stakeholders' Experiences with Inclusive Education in a Private School in Jamaica." *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity* 11, no. 1–2 (January 10, 2025): 253–64. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1115432ar>.
- Botha, Monique. "Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (September 28, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.727542>.
- Caribbean Community (CARICOM). "Declaration of Pétion Ville." Caribbean Community (CARICOM), 2013. <https://caricom.org/declaration-of-petion-ville/>.
- Chapman, Robert. "Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 16, no. 6 (November 12, 2021): 1360–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620959833>.
- Dwyer, Patrick. "The Neurodiversity Approach(ES): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers?" *Human Development* 66, no. 2 (2022): 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000523723>.
- Fasano, Regina M., Lynn K. Perry, Yi Zhang, Laura Vitale, Jue Wang, Chaoming Song, and Daniel S. Messinger. "A Granular Perspective on Inclusion: Objectively Measured Interactions

- of Preschoolers with and without Autism.” *Autism Research* 14, no. 8 (August 3, 2021): 1658–69. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2526>.
- Harbin, Shawna G., Maria L. Hugh, Daina Tagavi, Alice Bravo, Mahima Joshi, Sharon Kiche, Olivia G. Michael, and Jill Locke. “In an Imperfect World: Barriers and Facilitators to Educators’ Evidence-Based Practice Use for Elementary-Aged Autistic Students in Inclusive Settings.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 56, no. 1 (January 11, 2026): 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06531-y>.
- Hugh, Maria L., Michael D. Pullmann, Mahima Joshi, Daina M. Tagavi, Kaitlyn Ahlers, Alyssa M. Hernandez, and Jill Locke. “Educators’ Perspectives on Training Mechanisms That Facilitate Evidence-Based Practice Use for Autistic Students in General Education Settings: A Mixed-Methods Analysis.” *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children* 46, no. 4 (November 2, 2023): 317–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064231178768>.
- Hume, Kara, Jessica R. Steinbrenner, Samuel L. Odom, Kristi L. Morin, Sallie W. Nowell, Brianne Tomaszewski, Susan Szendrey, Nancy S. McIntyre, Serife Yücesoy-Özkan, and Melissa N. Savage. “Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism: Third Generation Review.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 11 (November 15, 2021): 4013–32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04844-2>.
- Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity. “Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools,” 2020. <https://www.ttparliament.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/p11-s5-J-20200325-HRED-R15.pdf>.
- Locke, Jill, Alyssa M. Hernandez, Mahima Joshi, Maria L. Hugh, Alice Bravo, Anthony Osuna, and Michael David Pullmann. “Supporting the Inclusion and Retention of Autistic Students: Exploring Teachers’ and Paraeducators’ Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Elementary Schools.” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 13 (December 6, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.961219>.
- Lundy, Laura. “‘Voice’ Is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 6 (December 2, 2007): 927–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>.
- Mason, Rose A., Catharine Lory, Emily Gregori, Stephanie Gerow, Mandy J. Rispoli, Marie David, So Yeon Kim, and Danni Wang. “Evidence-Based Practice in Inclusive Settings for Students with Autism: A Best-Evidence Synthesis.” *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 11, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 564–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-022-00352-4>.
- Minister of Education. “Education Policy Paper 2017-2022 (White Paper),” 2017. <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2023/05/Education-Policy-Paper-2017-2022-6453b16ea4013.pdf>.
- Minister of Social Development and Family Services. “National Policy on Persons with Disabilities,” 2018. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Trinidad-and-Tobago_National-Policy-on-Persons-

- with-Disabilities-2018.pdf.
- Ministry of Education. "Education Policy 2023–2027," 2023. <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2023/09/Education-Policy-2023-2027.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. "Education Statistics Digest 2019/2020," 2022. <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/corporate/2022/12/2019-2020-EDUCATION-STATISTICS-DIGEST-ccd-1.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. "Procedural Guidelines for the Provision of Special Assessment Arrangements (Special Concessions)." Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2025. <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/wpdevelopment/2025/02/Special-Concessions-Procedural-Guidelines-2024-2025.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. "SSSD INSIDER: Term I — Academic Year 2022/2023," 2022. <https://storage.moe.gov.tt/corporate/2023/01/SSSD-insider-December-2022-pdf.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. "The Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on the Current Provisions for the Education of Children Who Require Special Education Programmes and Services in Public Primary and Secondary Schools," 2020. <https://www.ttparliament.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/p11-s5-J-20201005-HRED-R15-MR-MOE.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago. "Inclusive Education Policy." Ministry of Education Trinidad and Tobago, 2009. <https://wpuploadstorageaccount.blob.core.windows.net/corporate/2022/04/Inclusive-Education-Policy.pdf>.
- Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Education Chap. 39:01: An Act to make better provision for the promotion of education in Trinidad and Tobago (Revised Laws of Trinidad and Tobago updated to December 2014), Pub. L. No. Chapter 39:01, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2017). <https://laws.gov.tt/ttdll-web2/revision/list?currentid=986&offset=0&q=educ>.
- Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Equal Opportunity Chap. 22:03: An Act to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status, to establish an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal and for matters connate, Pub. L. No. Chapter 22:03, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2016). <https://laws.gov.tt/ttdll-web2/revision/list?currentid=164&offset=160&q=>.
- Musthofa, M, M Junaedi, and S Hasanah. "The Influence of Online Learning on Student Professionalism Teacher Professional Education Program: Studies in Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia." *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2276025>.
- Nandlal, Sasha V, and Tess Miller. "Connecting the Dots: Inclusive Education in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago." *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/ Revue Canadienne Des Jeunes Chercheuses et Chercheurs En Éducation* 15, no. 2 (December 23, 2024): 217–29. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjnse/article/view/79910>.
- Page, Matthew J., Joanne E. McKenzie, Patrick M. Bossuyt, Isabelle Boutron, Tammy C.

- Hoffmann, Cynthia D. Mulrow, Larissa Shamseer, et al. "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews." *BMJ* 10, no. 1 (March 29, 2021): n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.
- Parey, Bephyer. "Accommodations for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools in Trinidad: A Mixed Methods Approach." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 26, no. 6 (May 12, 2022): 559–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1701719>.
- Parey, Bephyer. "Exploring Positive and Negative Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Schools in Trinidad: Implications for Teacher Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 27, no. 14 (December 6, 2023): 1544–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1902004>.
- Rethlefsen, Melissa L., Shona Kirtley, Siw Waffenschmidt, Ana Patricia Ayala, David Moher, Matthew J. Page, Jonathan B. Koffel, et al. "PRISMA-S: An Extension to the PRISMA Statement for Reporting Literature Searches in Systematic Reviews." *Systematic Reviews* 10, no. 1 (January 26, 2021): 39. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01542-z>.
- Setiawan, R, and R Munajah. "Evaluation of the Application of Online Learning in Indonesian Universities." *TEM Journal* 9, no. 3 (2020): 1194–99. <https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM93-46>.
- Somma, Monique, John Freer, Margo Shuttleworth, and Sheila Bennett. "Inclusive Change in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: A Collaborative Autoethnography." *Exceptionality Education International* 34, no. 1 (May 11, 2024): 89–111. <https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v34i1.16932>.
- UNESCO. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*. Third edit. Paris: UNESCO, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.54676/JJNK6989>.
- UNESCO. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020*. Global Education Monitoring Report. UN, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18356/2ddb782c-en>.
- UNICEF. "Formative Evaluation of UNICEF's Support to the Education Sector in the Framework of the UNICEF ECA COVID-19 Response Plan," 2025. [https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/5761/file/Evaluation of UNICEF Support to the Education Sector during COVID-19 Report final.pdf.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/5761/file/Evaluation_of_UNICEF_Support_to_the_Education_Sector_during_COVID-19_Report_final.pdf.pdf).
- UNICEF. "Generation Unlimited: Well-Being of Young People in the Eastern Caribbean," 2021. [https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/2981/file/GenU full report.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/2981/file/GenU_full_report.pdf).
- UNICEF. "The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health." New York, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/media/114636/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>.
- United Nations. "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." New York: United Nations, 2007. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Ch_IV_15.pdf.
- United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). "Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago: Country Report," 2022. https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CR_TrinidadandTobago_2021-57e.pdf.