

Professional Support Needs and Readiness for Implementing Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention in Social Skills Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Survey of Primary School Teachers in Central Vietnam

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HOW TO CITE:

Mai Thi Thanh Thuy, Nguyen Nu Tam An (2026). Professional Support Needs and Readiness for Implementing Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention in Social Skills Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Survey of Primary School Teachers in Central Vietnam. International Journal of Special Education, 41(7s), 1208-1217

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ABSTRACT:

Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII) is an evidence-based practice for improving the social skills of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Despite its documented effectiveness, successful implementation of PMII in schools depends largely on teachers' readiness and the availability of professional support. In Vietnam, empirical evidence regarding teachers' professional support needs and readiness to implement PMII remains scarce. This study examined primary school teachers' professional support needs, their readiness to implement PMII, and the extent to which professional support needs predict implementation readiness. A cross-sectional quantitative survey was conducted with 105 primary school teachers from three provinces and cities in Central Vietnam. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and multiple linear regression. The findings indicated that teachers reported very high levels of need for professional development ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.53$), implementation guidelines ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.54$), and readiness to implement PMII ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.52$). Age, teaching experience, and certification in special or inclusive education were not significantly associated with implementation readiness when examined independently. In contrast, professional support needs were strong predictors of readiness, with the need for professional development explaining 79.4% of the variance in teachers' readiness to implement PMII. These findings suggest that teachers' readiness to implement PMII is more strongly associated with professional support than with individual characteristics. The study provides empirical evidence to inform the development of professional learning programs and implementation guidelines that support the adoption of evidence-based practices in inclusive primary education in Vietnam.

Keywords: peer-mediated instruction and intervention; autism spectrum disorder; social skills; teacher readiness; professional development; inclusive education.

1. Introduction

Developing social skills is a major goal of inclusive education for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR), persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction are core characteristics of ASD that substantially limit students' participation in classroom activities, peer relationships, and inclusive education (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Previous reviews have consistently shown that limited social skills are associated with social isolation, reduced classroom engagement, and poorer educational outcomes among students with ASD (Bellini et al., 2007; Reichow et al., 2013; Gates et al., 2017). Consequently, promoting social skills has become a central objective of educational interventions for this population.

Among evidence-based practices (EBPs) for students with ASD, Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII) is one of the most extensively studied approaches for promoting social communication and peer interaction in inclusive school settings. PMII involves training typically developing peers to support students with ASD through modelling, prompting, reinforcement, and structured opportunities for social interaction during naturally occurring school activities. PMII has been identified as an evidence-based practice by both the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (Wong et al., 2015) and the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (Steinbrenner et al., 2020). Experimental studies and systematic reviews have consistently demonstrated its effectiveness in improving social communication, peer interaction, social participation, and friendship development among students with ASD (Chan et al., 2009; Kasari et al., 2012; Kamps et al., 2015; Shih et al., 2019).

Although PMII has demonstrated consistent effectiveness, translating research evidence into routine school practice remains

challenging. Research in implementation science suggests that many EBPs are not successfully adopted because teachers lack adequate professional preparation, implementation guidance, and organisational support (Fixsen et al., 2005; Domitrovich et al., 2008; Cook & Odom, 2013). Within PMII, teachers are responsible for selecting peer partners, organising intervention activities, monitoring interactions, and evaluating outcomes. Therefore, teacher readiness reflects not only positive attitudes towards PMII but also access to professional learning opportunities and implementation support. Previous studies have shown that teacher readiness is influenced more by professional preparation, self-efficacy, and institutional support than by demographic characteristics alone (Sharma et al., 2008; Forlin & Sin, 2017).

In Vietnam, inclusive education has been strengthened through the Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010), the Law on Education (2019), Circular No. 03/2018/TT-BGDĐT on inclusive education for persons with disabilities, and the 2018 General Education Curriculum. These policies provide an important legal foundation for expanding inclusive education in mainstream schools. However, PMII remains relatively new in Vietnamese primary education. To date, little empirical evidence is available regarding teachers' professional support needs and readiness to implement PMII in Vietnamese primary schools. Consequently, there is limited evidence to inform the development of professional learning programmes and implementation guidelines for successful implementation of PMII in inclusive school settings.

To address this gap, this study examined primary school teachers' professional support needs and their readiness to implement PMII in social skills education for students with ASD. Specifically, the study aimed to: (1) examine teachers' needs for professional development and implementation guidelines, together with their readiness to implement PMII; (2) investigate the relationships between teachers' demographic and professional characteristics and their professional support needs and readiness; and (3) examine

whether professional support needs predict teachers' readiness to implement PMII. The findings provide empirical evidence to support teacher professional development and the implementation of evidence-based practices in inclusive primary education in Vietnam.

2. Methodology

• Study design and participants

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to investigate primary school teachers' professional support needs and

readiness to implement PMII in social skills education for students with ASD. Participants were 105 primary school teachers recruited through convenience sampling from mainstream schools in Hue, Da Nang, and Quang Tri, three localities in Central Vietnam where inclusive education has been actively implemented. Teachers were eligible to participate if they (a) were currently teaching at a mainstream primary school, (b) had experience teaching students with ASD or inclusive classrooms, and (c) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants (N = 105)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
School location	Hue	55	52.4
	Da Nang	29	27.6
	Quang Tri	21	20.0
Gender	Male	5	4.8
	Female	100	95.2
Age	<25 years	2	1.9
	25–35 years	35	33.3
	36–45 years	35	33.3
	46–55 years	30	28.6
	>55 years	3	2.9
Educational qualification	Bachelor's degree	102	97.1
	Master's degree	3	2.9
Teaching experience	<5 years	6	5.7
	5–10 years	26	24.8
	10–20 years	33	31.4
	>20 years	40	38.1
Experience teaching students with ASD	<2 years	21	20.0
	2–5 years	44	41.9
	6–10 years	30	28.6
	>10 years	10	9.5
Certification in special or inclusive education	Yes	49	46.7
	No	56	53.3

Most participants were female (95.2%) and held a bachelor's degree (97.1%). Nearly 70% had more than 10 years of teaching experience, and 80% had at least two years of experience teaching students with ASD. Approximately half of the participants (53.3%) had not received formal certification in special or inclusive education.

• Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire informed by the

literature on evidence-based practices, implementation science, teacher readiness, and PMII (Fixsen et al., 2005; Wong et al., 2015; Steinbrenner et al., 2020). The questionnaire consisted of two sections.

The first section collected demographic and professional information, including school location, gender, age, educational qualification, teaching experience, experience teaching students

with ASD, and certification in special or inclusive education.

The second section assessed three study variables: (1) teachers' need for professional development related to PMII, (2) teachers' need for PMII implementation guidelines, and (3) teachers' readiness to implement PMII. Each construct was measured using a single-item, five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger agreement.

The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in special and inclusive education to establish content validity. Their feedback was used to improve item wording and ensure the relevance of the questionnaire to the Vietnamese educational context. A pilot administration involving 15 primary school teachers confirmed that all items were clear, understandable, and appropriate for the target participants.

Single-item measures were used because the study aimed to capture teachers' overall perceptions of professional support needs and implementation readiness rather than multidimensional psychological constructs. Previous methodological studies have suggested that single-item measures are appropriate for assessing concrete and unidimensional constructs while reducing respondent burden in survey research.

• Data collection

Data were collected from March to May 2026. After obtaining permission from school administrators, questionnaires were distributed directly to participating teachers during professional meetings. Participation was voluntary, and all questionnaires were completed anonymously. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before data entry, and no missing data were identified.

• Data analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize participant characteristics and the main study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between teachers' demographic characteristics and the study variables. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed to compare group differences. To determine whether professional support needs predicted teachers' readiness to implement PMII, two separate multiple linear regression models were conducted. Because the need for professional development and the need for implementation guidelines were highly correlated, these variables were entered into separate models to avoid multicollinearity. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

• Ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles for educational research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Responses were collected anonymously and treated confidentially. Participants were informed that they could decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Data were used exclusively for research purposes.

3. Results

• Teachers' professional support needs and readiness to implement PMII

Table 2 presents teachers' professional support needs and their readiness to implement PMII in social skills education for students with ASD.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the main study variables (N = 105)

Variable	M	SD
Need for professional development related to PMII	4.28	0.53
Need for PMII implementation guidelines	4.26	0.54
Readiness to implement PMII	4.27	0.52

Teachers reported high levels of agreement across all three variables, with mean scores exceeding 4.25 on the five-point Likert scale. The highest mean score was observed for the need for professional development ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.53$), followed by readiness to implement PMII ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.52$) and the need for implementation guidelines ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.54$).

• Relationships between teachers' characteristics and professional support needs

Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine whether teachers' demographic and professional characteristics were associated with professional support needs and readiness to implement PMII.

Table 3. Relationships between teachers' characteristics and the main study variables

Variable	Age	Experience teaching students with ASD	Certification in special/inclusive education	School location
Need for professional development	$r = 0.057, p = .282$	$r = 0.000, p = .499$	$t = -1.695, p = .093$	$F = 3.204, p = .045^*$
Need for implementation guidelines	$r = 0.055, p = .289$	$r = 0.011, p = .456$	$t = -1.689, p = .094$	$F = 3.179, p = .046^*$
Readiness to implement PMII	$r = -0.024, p = .403$	$r = 0.108, p = .136$	$t = -1.528, p = .129$	$F = 3.245, p = .043^*$

* $p < .05$.

Neither age nor experience teaching students with ASD was significantly associated with teachers' professional support needs or readiness to implement PMII (all $p > .05$). Likewise, no statistically significant differences were found between teachers with and without certification in special or inclusive education across any of the three study variables.

In contrast, school location was significantly associated with teachers' professional development needs, need for implementation guidelines, and readiness to implement PMII (all $p < .05$). Post hoc analyses indicated that these differences primarily occurred between teachers in Hue and Da Nang,

whereas no significant differences were observed between the other location pairs.

• Predictors of teachers' readiness to implement PMII

Two multiple linear regression models were conducted to examine whether teachers' professional support needs predicted their readiness to implement PMII. Because the need for professional development and the need for implementation guidelines were highly correlated, these variables were entered into separate regression models to minimize multicollinearity.

Table 4. Multiple linear regression predicting teachers' readiness to implement PMII

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	p	β	P
Need for professional development	0.882	<0.001	—	—
Need for implementation guidelines	—	—	0.847	<0.001
Age	-0.131	0.008	-0.124	0.026
Experience teaching students with ASD	0.157	0.002	0.146	0.009
Certification in special/inclusive education	0.023	0.614	0.028	0.591
Adjusted R²	0.794		0.730	

F	99.193	<0.001	71.372	<0.001
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Both regression models were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Model 1 explained 79.4% of the variance in teachers' readiness to implement PMII, whereas Model 2 explained 73.0%. In both models, professional support needs emerged as the strongest predictors of readiness. Teachers reporting greater needs for professional development ($\beta = 0.882$, $p < .001$) or implementation guidelines ($\beta = 0.847$, $p < .001$) also reported higher levels of readiness to implement PMII. After controlling for professional support needs, age was negatively associated with readiness, whereas experience teaching students with ASD was positively associated with readiness. Certification in special

or inclusive education was not a significant predictor in either model.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model summarizing the main findings of this study. The model illustrates that teachers' need for professional development and need for implementation guidelines were strongly associated with teachers' readiness to implement PMII. In contrast, individual and professional characteristics, including age, experience teaching students with autism spectrum disorder, and certification in special or inclusive education, demonstrated limited overall associations with implementation readiness.

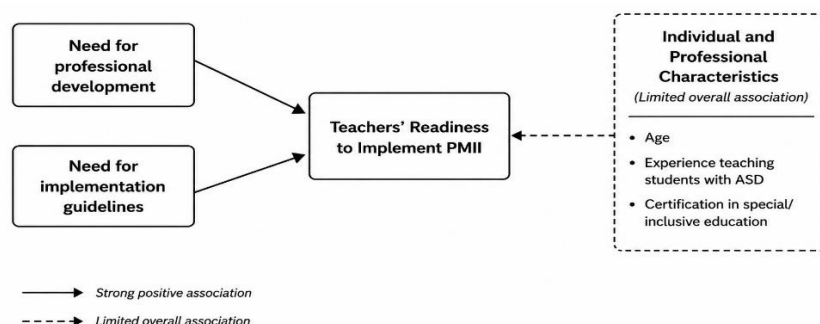


Figure 1. Conceptual model of factors associated with teachers' readiness to implement PMII.

4. Discussion

As summarized in Figure 1, teachers' readiness to implement PMII was more strongly associated with professional support needs than with individual characteristics. This finding highlights the importance of strengthening professional support systems when promoting the implementation of evidence-based practices in inclusive primary education.

• Primary school teachers reported substantial professional support needs for implementing PMII

The present study found that primary school teachers reported high levels of need for professional development, implementation guidelines, and readiness to implement PMII. Among these variables, the need for professional development received the highest mean score,

indicating that teachers perceived professional preparation as an essential prerequisite for implementing PMII in inclusive classrooms. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that the successful implementation of evidence-based practices depends not only on the effectiveness of the intervention itself but also on the preparedness of those responsible for delivering it. Although PMII has consistently been shown to improve social communication, peer interaction, and social participation among students with autism spectrum disorder (Chan et al., 2009; Kasari et al., 2012; Kamps et al., 2015; Shih et al., 2019), its effectiveness in practice largely depends on teachers' ability to organize peer-mediated activities, train peer partners, monitor interactions, and provide ongoing support throughout implementation.

The findings can also be interpreted from the perspective of implementation science. According to Fixsen et al. (2005), the successful adoption of evidence-based practices relies on implementation drivers such as professional training, coaching, organizational support, and continuous performance feedback. Similarly, Damschroder et al. (2009) emphasized that implementation readiness is shaped by the interaction between individual capability and organizational support. Therefore, teachers' strong demand for professional development and implementation guidance observed in the present study reflects the practical conditions required for implementing PMII rather than deficiencies in teachers' professional competence.

The findings also highlight current challenges in the Vietnamese context. Although inclusive education has been increasingly promoted through national educational policies, professional development programs have largely focused on general principles of inclusive education rather than specific evidence-based practices for students with ASD. In addition, standardized implementation guidelines for PMII adapted to Vietnamese primary schools remain limited. Consequently, teachers' high demand for professional support appears to reflect the gap between policy expectations and available implementation resources.

Overall, this study extends previous PMII research by shifting the focus from intervention effectiveness to implementation conditions. The findings suggest that strengthening teachers' professional preparation may be an essential step toward promoting the sustainable implementation of evidence-based practices in inclusive primary education.

- **Teachers' implementation readiness is more strongly associated with professional support than with individual characteristics**

Another important finding of this study is that teachers' readiness to implement PMII was more strongly associated with professional support needs than with individual demographic or professional characteristics. Age, teaching

experience, and certification in special or inclusive education were not significantly associated with readiness when examined independently. In contrast, teachers' need for professional development and implementation guidelines emerged as strong predictors of implementation readiness, explaining a substantial proportion of its variance.

These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that successful implementation of evidence-based practices depends more on implementation capacity than on teachers' demographic characteristics. Sharma et al. (2008) argued that teachers' willingness to adopt inclusive practices is primarily influenced by professional preparation, self-efficacy, and access to ongoing support rather than by age or years of experience. Similarly, implementation science emphasizes that organizational support, coaching, and professional learning opportunities are critical drivers of sustainable implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005; Damschroder et al., 2009).

An interesting finding of the present study is that age and teaching experience became statistically significant only after professional support needs were entered into the regression models. This suggests that demographic characteristics alone may have limited explanatory value, whereas their influence becomes apparent when considered alongside teachers' professional support needs. These findings reinforce the view that implementation readiness should be understood as a dynamic and context-dependent construct rather than a fixed personal attribute. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening professional support systems may be a more effective strategy for improving teachers' readiness than focusing primarily on demographic or professional characteristics.

- **Implications for teacher professional development and the implementation of PMII in Vietnam**

The findings of this study have several implications for inclusive education policy and teacher professional development in Vietnam. First, the consistently high demand for professional development indicates the need to incorporate PMII into both pre-service teacher

education and in-service professional learning programmes. Rather than introducing PMII as a theoretical concept, professional development should emphasize practical implementation through modelling, classroom-based practice, coaching, and continuous feedback.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of developing standardized implementation guidelines for PMII that are aligned with the Vietnamese educational context and the 2018 General Education Curriculum. Practical resources, including implementation manuals, classroom examples, observation checklists, and fidelity monitoring tools, may help teachers translate evidence-based knowledge into everyday classroom practice.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing literature on the implementation of evidence-based practices in inclusive education by demonstrating that teachers' professional support needs are more closely associated with implementation readiness than individual teacher characteristics. From an implementation science perspective, improving professional learning opportunities and organizational support may represent a more sustainable pathway for promoting the adoption of PMII in Vietnamese primary schools than focusing solely on teachers' individual qualifications or experience.

5. Conclusion

This study examined primary school teachers' professional support needs and their readiness to implement PMII for social skills education of students with ASD. The findings revealed that teachers reported high levels of need for professional development and implementation guidelines, and that these professional support needs were more strongly associated with implementation readiness than individual characteristics such as age, teaching experience, or certification in special or inclusive education.

The study contributes to the growing literature on evidence-based practices by extending PMII research beyond intervention effectiveness to the implementation conditions

required in inclusive school settings. The findings suggest that strengthening professional learning opportunities and providing practical implementation guidelines may represent more effective strategies for promoting PMII than focusing primarily on teachers' demographic or professional characteristics. These findings provide empirical evidence to support the design of teacher professional development programmes and implementation support for inclusive primary education in Vietnam.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inferences. Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected from a convenience sample of teachers in three provinces of Central Vietnam, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, use validated multi-item instruments, and investigate how professional support influences the fidelity, sustainability, and effectiveness of PMII implementation in authentic classroom settings.

Acknowledgements (Optional)

The authors sincerely thank the participating primary school teachers and school administrators for their valuable time, cooperation, and support during the data collection process. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Declaration

The authors declare that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its submission to the journal. The authors declare that they have no competing interests or conflicts of interest related to this study.

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