

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TEACHING LEARNERS WITH AUTISM
SPECTRUM DISORDERS:
VALIDATION OF A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Abstract

Creating effective education programs for students with autism spectrum disorder is challenging for schools for a variety of reasons, most notably because of the increase in population, a widespread lack of expertise, and the variability in the presentation of the disorder itself.

This study takes a systems approach to understanding how to meet the needs of students with autism. It examines the reliability and validity of an observational tool that was designed to analyze the quality of an educational program for students with autism spectrum disorders. The *Best Practice Measures for Educating Students with Autism: Lesson Observation and Document Audit Matrix (Autism LODAM)* was created by synthesizing the relevant research on those program elements that are essential to an appropriate education for all students with autism. It is a tool created specifically for school systems and is designed to assist program administrators in analyzing their specific needs and creating steps for change.

The study examined content validity, interrater reliability and predictive validity. Overall, the Autism LODAM was determined to be a reliable and valid measure of program quality for students with autism spectrum disorders. It can be used by schools to help them more systematically understand the present state of their educational program for this population, and more importantly can be used to outline specific areas for improvement. It is hoped that this study and the Autism LODAM can help generate real change in the quality of education for students with autism on a broad scale by providing a comprehensive tool that will measure all elements of program quality for this unique population.