World Conference on
Teaching, Learning, and Education

16 - 18 October 2026

Milan , Italy

Circular Movement Versus Free Spatial Movement: Contributions to Sense of Belonging and Emotional Regulation Among Children with High-Functioning Autism

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the contributions of circular movement compared to free spatial movement to sense of belonging and emotional regulation among 18 children aged 6 to 8 years diagnosed with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (HF-ASD). Participants were divided into an experimental group (n = 9) that engaged in structured circular movement classroom activities and a control group (n = 9) that engaged in free spatial movement. Three physical education teachers and three classroom teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to share their perceptions of each movement modality's impact on the children's sense of belonging and emotional self-regulation. Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded four central themes: (1) circular movement as a facilitator of emotional regulation; (2) circular movement as an enhancer of sense of belonging; (3) the role of circular activities to sense of security in a group; and (4) circular movement as a therapeutic tool. Findings indicated that circular movement was perceived as more effective than free spatial movement in enhancing sense of belonging and emotional regulation among children with HF-ASD. The study contributes to an underdeveloped area of research regarding movement-based interventions for school-age children with autism. Implications for educational and therapeutic practice are discussed, along with limitations and directions for future research.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Circular Movement, Emotional Regulation, Sense Of Belonging.