

Empowering students with high autistic traits: Advancing career preparedness and inclusive development in universities



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Abstract High autistic traits refer to characteristics commonly linked to autism spectrum conditions, such as challenges in social communication, sensory sensitivities, and a preference for structured routines. These traits vary significantly among individuals. In Malaysia, the true prevalence of autism is often underestimated due to underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis, highlighting the need for focused research and increased awareness. As gateways to future employment, universities play a crucial role in supporting the career preparedness of students with high autistic traits. This study explores how universities contribute to career readiness by examining the lived experiences of students. From a total of 1,344 respondents, four students with high autistic traits participated in semistructured interviews. These individuals were identified through a self-assessment using the Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ). Semistructured interviews revealed three main themes: a) University as a transition preparation to adult life, b) University as an essential platform for preparing the professional world, and c) The role of academics in career preparation. The findings underscore the critical role of universities in equipping students with high autistic traits for successful and sustainable career pathways. By proactively addressing their distinct academic, social, and professional development needs, universities can cultivate a genuinely inclusive and supportive learning ecosystem. This study advocates for enhanced career support, structured mentorship, targeted skill-building programs, and personalized interventions that actively embrace neurodiversity. Strengthening these initiatives not only benefits students with high autistic traits but also enriches the broader student community, ensuring that all learners—regardless of their neurodivergent characteristics—are empowered to pursue, navigate, and thrive in their chosen career journeys with confidence, resilience, and long-term success.

Keywords: high autistic traits, university, undergraduate students, career preparedness

1. Introduction

Individuals on the autism spectrum exhibit diverse cognitive profiles and behavioral characteristics, often described as "high autistic traits" (Hoekstra et al., 2011). These traits include challenges in social interaction, communication difficulties, heightened sensory sensitivities, and a preference for routine and predictability (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Autistic traits exist on a continuum across the general population (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020; Graf et al., 2017; Low et al., 2024), underscoring the need for inclusive strategies that address varying support needs rather than focusing solely on those with formal autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses. While individuals with high autistic traits may not meet the full criteria for ASD, they often face significant challenges in university settings and career preparation (Suzuki et al., 2020).

These traits manifest in various ways—some students experience difficulties with social communication and cognitive flexibility, whereas others demonstrate strengths such as exceptional focus, attention to detail, and analytical thinking (Motttron et al., 2013). Recognizing both the challenges and the unique abilities associated with high autistic traits is crucial for fostering inclusive educational environments. Failure to acknowledge these differences can alienate students, increase dropout rates, and limit future career opportunities, thereby reinforcing systemic inequalities. Promoting educational practices that value neurodiversity and offer equitable learning opportunities is vital for supporting all learners.

Understanding and addressing these challenges is fundamental to advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable education for all, and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which focuses on eliminating disparities in access to educational and career opportunities. Universities play a vital role in preparing students for adulthood and the workforce; however, for those with high autistic traits, university experience can present both avenues for growth and significant barriers. Complex social environments, varied teaching approaches, and overwhelming sensory stimuli in university settings can hinder academic performance and personal



development (Jansen et al., 2017). These obstacles underscore the urgency of creating inclusive educational spaces that prioritize equitable access, ensuring that all students—regardless of their level of neurodiversity—are equipped to reach their potential. Without targeted interventions, students with high autistic traits risk marginalization, further exacerbating existing inequalities.

In the ASEAN context, including Malaysia, awareness of neurodiversity in higher education is growing but remains inconsistent (Low et al., 2024). Cultural perceptions, societal expectations, and prevailing stigmas influence how neurodivergent individuals are supported within academic institutions. The development of culturally sensitive, context-specific support systems is essential for promoting equitable access to quality education and for addressing the disparities that prevent students with high autistic traits from fully participating in both academic and social aspects of university life. Tailored support that acknowledges the cultural nuances of neurodiversity is critical for fostering inclusive campuses that value diversity and promote well-being.

2. Literature Review

2.1. University students with high autistic traits

Despite their structured academic environments, students with high autistic traits often face obstacles that hinder their academic success and career preparedness. Challenges such as participating in group work, interpreting nonverbal cues, and navigating unstructured learning activities can be overwhelming (Anderson et al., 2020). Sensory sensitivities further complicate these difficulties, making crowded and noisy environments distressing. To address these barriers, universities must implement inclusive strategies, including sensory-friendly study spaces, flexible learning options, and faculty training in neurodiversity awareness. Additionally, career readiness remains a critical yet overlooked aspect, as students with high autistic traits often struggle with communication, adaptability, and workplace norms (Scott et al., 2018). Targeted interventions—such as specialized career counseling, mentorship programs, and practical skills workshops—are essential to bridging the employment gap and ensuring equitable access to professional opportunities.

In addition to challenges, individuals with high autistic traits possess valuable strengths, including strong analytical skills, heightened attention to detail, and deep focus, which can be significant workplace assets (Chen et al., 2013). However, without structured support, these strengths may remain underutilized. Research highlights that students with high autistic traits frequently experience anxiety, social isolation, and difficulty adapting to university life (Vincent, 2019). Universities must establish clear policies, tailored interventions, and robust support services to foster inclusive learning and career development pathways.

2.2. Supporting students with high autistic traits in career planning and employment

Students with high autistic traits often face significant challenges when planning their careers and accessing career-related services. These challenges stem from difficulties in navigating social environments, processing complex information, and managing the transition from university to the workforce. Traditional career guidance services are often designed for neurotypical students, leaving gaps in support for those with neurodivergent traits. As a result, students with high autistic traits require tailored assistance in choosing suitable academic majors, engaging with career services, and navigating sensitive issues such as self-disclosure (Briel & Getzel, 2014). Effective support involves understanding the diverse ways in which autistic traits manifest and creating pathways that acknowledge both the strengths and specific needs of these students.

One critical area where universities can play a transformative role is the integration of career and disability support services. Rather than treating these services as separate entities, a holistic approach ensures that students with high autistic traits receive cohesive and personalized guidance (Pesonen et al., 2021). This integration allows career counselors to collaborate with disability support staff to develop individualized career pathways that accommodate sensory sensitivities, communication styles, and differences in executive functioning. For example, offering specialized workshops on job interview preparation, disclosing a diagnosis, and navigating workplace accommodations can better equip autistic students to transition successfully into employment. Additionally, personalized career counseling that considers the unique experiences of autistic students helps bridge the gap between academic success and meaningful employment.

Despite their academic qualifications and unique skill sets, graduates with high autistic traits often face poorer employment outcomes than their typical peers do. Research indicates that many individuals with high autistic traits encounter systemic barriers, including discrimination, social isolation, and mental health challenges, which hinder their ability to secure and maintain employment (Anderson et al., 2024; Trusson & Travers, 2024). These barriers are further exacerbated by a lack of understanding and accommodation within workplace environments, making it difficult for autistic graduates to thrive professionally.

A major challenge faced by students with high autistic traits is the gap between their career aspirations and available opportunities (Vincent, 2019). Despite possessing strengths such as analytical thinking, attention to detail, and persistence, these attributes are often overlooked due to rigid hiring practices and misconceptions about autism. Traditional job interviews,

which prioritize verbal communication and quick social responses, place autistic candidates at a disadvantage. Additionally, the stigma surrounding autism often discourages disclosure, limiting access to essential workplace accommodations.

Research shows that autistic students are more likely to pursue academic careers and avoid socially intensive fields such as healthcare (Cheriyana et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2024). This trend reflects both their intellectual capabilities and the social challenges they encounter. However, the overrepresentation of autistic graduates in academic pathways highlights the urgent need to diversify career support. Universities play a crucial role in fostering career exploration across various industries by providing tailored resources and support. By collaborating with employers and offering mentorship programs, universities can create pathways that align with autistic students' strengths while addressing social and sensory barriers (Pellicano et al., 2021). Embracing neurodiversity in career planning is essential for ensuring that autistic students are empowered to pursue meaningful and fulfilling careers.

To enhance employment outcomes, universities should implement targeted interventions. Mentorship programs that connect autistic students with neurodivergent professionals have proven effective in reducing social anxiety and increasing social connectedness (Vincent et al., 2021). Additionally, partnerships with employers to create internships tailored for neurodivergent needs provide practical experience and promote inclusive hiring practices (Scott et al., 2022). Collaboration among academic departments, career services, and disability support offices is essential to address the unique challenges faced by autistic students. Normalizing neurodiversity within career support frameworks and providing staff training on neurodivergent experiences can lead to more informed guidance (Pesonen et al., 2021). The involvement of autistic students in developing support programs ensures that services are responsive to their needs (Sarrett, 2021). By adopting inclusive practices and dismantling employment barriers, universities can bridge the gap between education and meaningful employment, empowering autistic students to contribute effectively to the workforce.

2.3. Understanding highly autistic traits in the general population

Understanding highly autistic traits among the general university population is essential in preparing students for successful career pathways. Autistic traits, as measured by the autism-spectrum quotient (AQ), encompass social communication difficulties, rigid thinking patterns, and sensory sensitivities (Bishop et al., 2004; English et al., 2020). These traits, while varying across individuals, can significantly impact students' academic and career experiences. This preference reflects both their intellectual strengths and the challenges they face in environments that require extensive interpersonal engagement. However, the overrepresentation of autistic graduates in academic pathways underscores the need to diversify career support and provide exposure to a broader range of professional opportunities. By fostering career exploration across multiple fields, universities can encourage autistic students to identify and pursue careers that align with their skills and interests while providing appropriate support to overcome social and sensory barriers (Pellicano et al., 2021).

Furthermore, universities must acknowledge the diverse ways in which autistic traits manifest across cultural contexts. The AQ has demonstrated validity across multiple populations, including Persian and Chinese samples, underscoring the importance of culturally responsive approaches in supporting students with high autistic traits (Ebrahimi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2016). By adopting inclusive practices and dismantling employment barriers, universities can bridge the gap between education and meaningful employment, empowering autistic students to contribute effectively to the workforce. This proactive approach not only enhances individual career outcomes but also fosters a more inclusive academic environment where all students, regardless of their neurodivergent status, are supported in achieving their professional aspirations.

These efforts align with the SDG objective by ensuring that neurodivergent students receive the necessary support to thrive academically and transition successfully into the workforce. Understanding their perspectives is critical for developing evidence-based strategies that promote career preparedness, academic achievement, and holistic well-being. By prioritizing inclusivity and acknowledging the complex interplay between neurodiversity, education, and career readiness, universities can better equip all students to navigate adulthood and contribute meaningfully to society. Given these considerations, this study aims to explore the perceptions of students with high autistic traits regarding the role of universities in preparing them for successful careers.

3. Materials and methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach utilizing a case study design, which facilitates an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within a defined context, such as an individual, place, or event (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The choice of this method aligns with the research objective of gaining a comprehensive understanding of career preparedness from the perspectives of students with high autistic traits. A public university in Klang Valley, Malaysia, was selected as the study location to explore and comprehend the career aspirations and feedback of undergraduate students with high autistic traits.

The selection of the research site was guided by the criteria outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2014), emphasizing that an ideal research location should be easily accessible, free of barriers to data collection, conducive to obtaining rich and in-depth information, and convenient for participant involvement. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2018) suggested that the research

setting should allow for unobstructed data gathering, promote participant engagement, and ensure logistical feasibility. In this context, the chosen university met these conditions, offering practical advantages concerning time, distance, and cost constraints while maximizing the opportunity for meaningful data collection.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify and select participants who could provide relevant and rich information regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The selection criteria required participants to:

1. Be undergraduate students enrolled at the selected university.
2. High autistic traits can be operationally defined as a score of 70 or above on the Autism Quotient-28 (AQ-28) (Hoekstra et al., 2011).
3. Voluntary consent to participate in the study.

On the basis of these criteria, four undergraduate students were selected through purposive sampling. These participants were identified from a pool of 1,344 students who completed a prior self-assessment survey via the Malay version of the AQ-28. The researcher ensured that the selected participants not only met the established criteria but also demonstrated a willingness to engage fully in interviews and share their perspectives—aligning with Cohen et al. (2018) recommendation that participants in qualitative studies should be selected on the basis of their capacity to provide insightful and relevant data.

The research participants in this study ranged in age from 21--24 years. All participants were female, with one student enrolled in a social science program and the remaining three pursuing studies in the sciences. Prior to data collection, written informed consent was secured from each participant, verified through a digital signature and returned via email. Ethical considerations are fundamental in research to ensure that participants voluntarily engage in the study with full awareness of their rights and the research procedures. This process respects participants' autonomy, safeguards their well-being, and ensures that the study upholds principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence. Additionally, obtaining informed consent serves as a protective measure for the researcher in the event of potential legal challenges or complications.

This qualitative study employed semistructured interviews, which were considered appropriate for balancing flexibility with a consistent framework to explore and address the research questions effectively. This method enabled the collection of rich, detailed narratives regarding participants' lived experiences and the challenges they faced as university students with high autistic traits. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework to ensure a thorough and meaningful interpretation. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading and rereading the interview transcripts, allowing the participants to verify and amend their transcripts for accuracy. Next, 105 relevant codes were generated through systematic manual coding. These codes were then grouped into potential themes and subthemes through an iterative process. The themes were reviewed, refined, and named to ensure clarity and coherence. Finally, the themes were woven into a comprehensive narrative that reflected participants' experiences and addressed the research questions.

Atlas.ti 8 software facilitated systematic data management. The coding process included open coding (identifying initial codes), axial coding (exploring relationships between codes), and selective coding (integrating subthemes into overarching themes). Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged, ensuring robustness. Validity was ensured through participant validation, an audit trail for transparency, reflexivity to mitigate bias, and peer debriefing. These strategies enhanced credibility and trustworthiness. This methodological approach offers valuable insights into how universities support career preparedness for students with high autistic traits.

4. Results and discussion

Three main findings demonstrate the importance of universities for students with high autistic traits in career preparation.

4.1. University as a transition preparation to adult life

The interviews revealed that students perceive the university as a crucial medium in preparing them for adult life. This is expressed by Iliya:

"I believe that the university is a place for acquiring knowledge, but over time, it has become a place that focuses on obtaining jobs rather than solely for knowledge. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we have to go with the flow, have to adapt to the times because, ultimately, universities must collaborate and work with industries and various careers. In this way, students can prepare themselves for entry into the workforce. Whether we like it or not, we have to do it because it is not just about acquiring knowledge anymore."

Furthermore, Hijazida shares the same opinion as Iliya does. This is evidenced by the following statement:

"For me, it is important because once we are in university, if we do not learn anything, it is not like we have learned how to manage our time during our working years from high school. Therefore, at university, it is like a prelude before it enters the workforce. It provides experience and offers programs that show how to handle things, showcasing various careers."

4.1.1. Hijazida also added

“During school, few students are eager to achieve something. However, when in university, we see everyone putting in serious effort. Therefore, we feel the aspect of competition, and we should also participate; we need to join as well. Therefore, I feel that this university provides me with a competitive environment to step out of my comfort zone and feel like trying even harder.”

4.1.2. Furthermore, Hijazida also feels that the university environment is different from the current situation during school days

“In university, we have various age groups, and we will encounter people who are more or less in the preemployment phase, as if they are already working. However, they have not actually started working yet; it is like they are preparing us for employment. It is different from school, matriculation, or foundation because we meet people who are our peers. Therefore, our mentality is somewhat similar. When we meet people of different age groups and with different life experiences, we feel like we can learn better from them at university.”

Students view universities as crucial platforms for preparing for adulthood and careers. Initially, seen as a place for knowledge, it has evolved into a space focused on job preparation through industry collaboration. Hijazida described university as a transition phase before employment, offering valuable experiences and programs that teach essential life and career management skills. Unlike schools, universities expose students to diverse age groups and experiences, enhancing learning through peer interactions at various stages of preemployment. For students with high levels of autistic traits, universities play a vital role in career preparedness. In addition to academics, university experiences foster personal growth, career development, and adaptation to professional environments (Lucas et al., 2022; Brown & Wolf, 2021). Institutions must collaborate with industries to increase employability, ensuring that students receive the skills and exposure needed for workforce transitions (Fabri et al., 2022; Dean et al., 2022). Work-integrated learning programs, mentorship initiatives, and experiential learning provide structured pathways that accommodate neurodivergent students.

A supportive university environment enhances motivation and personal development. The competitive nature of higher education encourages students to push beyond comfort zones, fostering confidence and resilience—both of which are essential for career success (Lucas et al., 2022; Brown & Wolf, 2021). Structured motivation and external reinforcement are particularly beneficial for students with high autistic traits. Universities must balance challenge with support, creating an atmosphere where students are encouraged to excel while receiving tailored guidance. Exposure to diverse social interactions in university settings enhances communication skills, adaptability, and social learning (Brown & Wolf, 2021). Unlike schools, universities introduce students to peers of varying ages and backgrounds, broadening their perspectives and preparing them for workplace dynamics. Structured social learning through peer mentorship, collaborative projects, and networking events can help students develop essential interpersonal skills critical for professional success.

4.2. University as an essential platform for preparing the professional world

The study also indicates that students perceive the university as a platform for preparing themselves for the workforce, especially in enhancing their communication skills. This is elucidated from the statement by Hijazida as follows:

“Perhaps our experience in managing programs or our experience in asking questions with superiors or something like that. Therefore, that experience will prepare us and give us a sneak peek of what we will have to do and how to communicate when we are working later on. Therefore, for me, it is about the experiential aspect.”

4.2.1. Furthermore, Iliya expressed the same thing as Hijazida

“When a professional staff member interacts with students, completing tasks on time and providing direct responses, answering emails promptly, all these actions set clear expectations for students. Students understand that in the professional world, certain tasks need to be done in a particular manner, such as signing petitions.”

4.2.2. In addition to enhancing communication skills, the university also plays a role in training and providing input related to self-management in the process of professional life. This is explained by Hijazida's statement as follows

“In my own experience, it is more about things like, in terms of work, we know we have to work. To do the job, we need to learn in the classroom, or when we study any subject, we will learn the information from there and perhaps not have as much hands-on experience as in a company, which is why we have internships or work-based learning. For example, I know how to do the job, but when entering the workforce, suddenly they ask for insurance, EPF, and all of that. Technical skills are not part of the job, but if you want to enter the working world, you need to know things such as taxes, how to apply for this or that. I did not know anything about those things because I never learned them.”

4.2.3. Hijazida also reported that universities can provide real-world experiential learning in the workplace

“I feel that because of what we learn, our brain tends to memorize things more easily when associated with emotions. Therefore, when we are happy and excited about work, we will be more prepared and positive in the future. “Oh, I will work like

this, it is so enjoyable." Therefore, we will not feel negative or pressured, especially when with friends, it is fun. In the case of industrial training, we will transition into the working world alone, without anyone familiar, not knowing anyone. The pressure is a bit different."

4.2.4. Furthermore, Hijazida stated the following

"Like the situation in our lectures, we do learn and prepare ourselves for the job. Like me, for example, I have clinical duties, and we go to the clinic and work as usual. However, the pressure is not quite the same as when we participate in events or festivals in a more enjoyable atmosphere; we gain experience in a more enjoyable setting. Therefore, it is easier for our minds to absorb things in that context. When we study, we face pressure to learn; when we undergo industrial training, we face pressure from our bosses to perform our tasks."

The study highlights that students view universities as essential for workforce preparation, particularly in developing communication and self-management skills. Hijazida emphasized that engaging in programs and interacting with superiors provides experiential learning, helping students grasp workplace communication expectations. Iliya supported this, noting that timely communication from professional staff, such as responding to emails and meeting deadlines, sets clear standards for professional conduct. In addition to providing communication, universities foster self-management skills that are critical for professional life. Hijazida noted that while academic learning covers technical knowledge, real-world skills—such as taxes, insurance, and employment processes—are often acquired through internships and work-based learning. She stressed that industrial training offers firsthand exposure to workplace realities, which is distinct from classroom learning. Emotional engagement during events and campus activities also enhances learning and mental preparedness for future careers. However, she acknowledged that the pressure of industrial training differs from that of campus activities, underscoring the need for diverse learning experiences.

For students with high autistic traits, universities play a crucial role in workforce readiness, particularly in enhancing communication and self-management (Dean et al., 2022; Hadley & Mapondera, 2023). Effective communication is vital in professional settings, and students recognize that structured university interactions—such as engaging with faculty and participating in programs—help develop these skills. Exposure to real-world scenarios, including professional email etiquette and discussions with superiors, builds confidence and workplace awareness. These experiences equip students with practical competencies essential for career success (Roberts, 2010).

In addition to communication, self-management is another key competency that universities help cultivate. While academic curricula focus on technical knowledge, students acknowledge that crucial life skills—such as financial management and workplace policies—are often overlooked. This highlights the need for experiential learning through internships and work-based training, which offer hands-on exposure to professional environments (Lucas et al., 2022; Fabri et al., 2022). Additionally, students emphasize the emotional aspects of learning. Engaging in enjoyable university experiences, such as campus events, contributes to their overall career preparedness. The contrast between structured university learning and actual workforce pressures reinforces the need for a balanced approach to career preparation (Brown & Wolf, 2021). These findings suggest that universities should further integrate experiential learning, mentorship, and industry collaboration to better equip students with high autistic traits to meet the demands of modern employment.

4.2.5. *The role of academics in career preparation*

The interview results also revealed that students consider academic performance at university crucial for their careers. Naqibah emphasized the importance of achieving high scores during examinations:

"We will be screened for the interview process, and the employer will conduct screening through our resumes. Therefore, when we have good lecturers who teach us well and help us achieve high grades, I believe our chances of getting the job are better."

4.2.6. Furthermore, Naqibah added the following

"Even though we come from a reputable university, it is essential to consider how we carry ourselves and maintain our image. As long as we strive hard to achieve good results, employers may take more notice. Therefore, relying solely on the university's reputation may not be sufficient to demonstrate to others that we are truly qualified for a particular job."

4.2.7. *The importance of the field in which they are enrolled determines their career choices, as stated by Iliya*

"Because I believe it provides a glimpse of what the career will entail. When students are informed, they can better manage their expectations. Therefore, at least they can either continue or stop because everyone has the choice to continue or stop, and they would not want any regrets in their journey."

4.2.8. Hijazida also holds the same view as expressed by her

“Because for me, if we have entered a program or have been offered any program, we already know what we will ultimately gain, what we will become. Therefore, for me, it is reassuring; it convinces me that in the end, I will get a job as something, for example, like what I mentioned.”

However, Aina stated that academics are not just about exams and the field they pursue; the importance lies in gaining the appropriate exposure:

“I feel that my course does not expose me to the career opportunities I can pursue in my field. There are students like me who are not adequately informed about how to choose a career.”

4.2.9. Furthermore, Aina added the following

“I am not quite clear about my career choice, where to go after finishing my studies, and I feel that if I do my own research, I do not see a clear path because there is no one to guide me.”

The findings highlight that students view academic performance as crucial for career readiness, with high grades enhancing employability. Naqibah noted that employers often use academic results as a screening tool, emphasizing the role of quality teaching in securing job opportunities. However, she noted that attending a prestigious university alone is not enough—students must actively develop professionalism and networking skills to stand out in the job market. This suggests that academic excellence must be complemented by strong professional engagement (Fabri et al., 2022; Dean et al., 2022). Beyond grades, students recognize the importance of aligning their academic programs with career expectations. Iliya and Hijazida emphasized that understanding how their studies connect with future careers provides reassurance and aids decision-making. This underscores the need for structured career education within academic programs, ensuring that students gain clear insights into potential career paths (Vincent, 2019). Well-informed students can plan their next steps proactively—whether they continue in their field, explore alternatives, or pursue further qualifications.

Despite these insights, gaps in career exposure remain a challenge. Aina expressed uncertainty about job opportunities in her field, citing a lack of structured career guidance. She highlighted the difficulty of navigating postgraduate decisions, especially in disciplines without clear job pathways. This indicates that some students struggle with the transition from academia to the workforce due to limited career awareness (Anderson et al., 2024). While students acknowledge the importance of academic achievement, the findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to career preparation. Universities must go beyond academics by strengthening career guidance, industry collaboration, and experiential learning (Deen et al., 2022). Structured career counseling, mentorship, and internships can bridge the education-to-employment gap. By enhancing career support, institutions can equip students with the skills, confidence, and resources needed to succeed in an evolving job market.

5. Conclusions

Universities play a vital role in fostering career preparedness among students with high autistic traits by providing essential skills, knowledge, and professional exposure. In addition to academics, they serve as platforms for career development, communication skills enhancement, and self-management training. However, gaps remain in career exposure and structured guidance, affecting students' confidence in navigating their professional futures. Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality education, universities must integrate industry collaboration, work-based learning, and real-world skill development into curricula. Additionally, SDG 10: Reduced inequality emphasizes inclusive education, ensuring equal career opportunities for students with high autistic traits through tailored support systems. To bridge these gaps, universities should strengthen career advisory services, mentorship programs, and experiential learning opportunities. A more inclusive and structured approach will better prepare all students, regardless of their level of neurodivergence, for meaningful and sustainable employment.

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Ethical considerations

All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration, its later amendments, or comparable ethical standards. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee (Approval Code: 21030283). I agree to provide the Multidisciplinary Science Journal with copies of the consent or evidence that such consent has been obtained if requested.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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