

Enhancing Inclusivity in Special Education through Augmentative and Alternative Communication Tools – A Case Study of Five Special Schools in the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province, South Africa



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ABSTRACT

This study reports on a series of workshops on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) conducted in the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province with teachers from five special education schools. The purpose of the study was to examine the integration of AAC tools in special education schools and assess their impact on inclusivity. It was established that AAC tools are changing special education schools by providing learners with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) techniques to express themselves. These tools, ranging from non-verbal communication systems to advanced speech-generating devices (SGDs), aim to enhance inclusivity and learner participation in classroom activities. Following a qualitative research approach, the study focused on teacher perspectives and classroom practices regarding AAC implementation. Seventeen (17) special education teachers from five schools who attended an AAC training workshop were purposively selected to participate in the study. Data were collected through interviews and analysed using thematic content analysis based on Creswell's model. Findings indicated that a lack of structured training programs prevents teachers from effectively implementing AAC tools, forcing them to rely on gestures and picture-based communication due to limited access to advanced technologies. Discussions highlighted the urgent need to improve teacher capacity and resource availability. To address these challenges, the study recommends comprehensive teacher training, policy support, and the integration of AAC tools into classrooms. This study contributes to scholarship by providing evidence on how AAC tools can redefine teaching methods and promote inclusivity in special education schools across the Sekhukhune District, offering insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners in inclusive education.

Keywords: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), Complex Communication Needs (CCN), inclusive education, special education, teacher training, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in special education schools face challenges in terms of integrating Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) instruments in their classrooms.¹ The findings of a study conducted

¹ G. Soto and B. Yu, "AAC in Inclusive Classrooms: Research and Practice," *Journal of Communication Disorders* 51 (2014): 1–10; A. Moorcroft, N. Scarinci, and C. Meyer, "A Systematic Review of the Barriers and Facilitators to the Provision and Use of Low-Tech and

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by Terblanche, Michelle et.al., highlighted additional issues that practitioners in LMICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries) need to consider when implementing AAC in under-resourced schools for learners with special education needs. The study recommended that LMICs, like South Africa, could make great strides towards providing appropriate AAC technology for all if strategic partnerships between governmental and non-governmental groups were put in place, appropriate communication, training and support systems were established, and evidence-based core-language AAC systems were created.²

In the evolving landscape of special education schools, the integration of AAC tools has been found as a way of transformation towards fostering inclusivity for learners with complex communication needs (CCN).³ In the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province, where educational inclusivity remains a priority, AAC strategies strive to give a leeway to effective engagement in learning and social participation for all. These tools range from picture-based communication boards to speech-generating devices, which empower learners who struggle with verbal communication to express themselves effectively, thereby enhancing their academic and social experiences.

Recent studies underscore the positive impact of AAC training on educators, improving their ability to support learners with communication challenges.⁴ Research conducted in 2024 highlights that while AAC is recognised within South African education policy, many teachers still lack sufficient AAC knowledge, limiting its full potential in special schools.⁵ In addition, a study published by Ngcobo and Bornman found that a brief AAC training session significantly improved teachers' perceptions of their ability to support learners with CCN, as well as their views on classroom interaction and inclusion.⁶ This suggests that structured training and resource allocation can play a crucial role in enhancing inclusivity in classrooms.

Furthermore, the integration of assistive technology in special education has been identified as important in improving learning experiences for learners with disabilities. Jacob et al. posit that technology fosters huge access and flexibility for learners living with disabilities and contributes to sustainable, inclusive education.⁷ However, challenges such as limited teacher training and resource constraints continue to impede the widespread adoption of AAC instruments in many areas, including the Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province.

By employing AAC tools in the special schools' education fraternity, special education schools in the Sekhukhune District can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, where communication barriers no longer hinder teachers and social development structures, as they have developed a model of collaboration. As teachers and policymakers refine strategies, embracing AAC innovations will be key to unlocking the potential of learners with complex communication needs. With continued research and investment in AAC training, special education schools in Sekhukhune can move toward a future where every learner has a voice and the opportunity to thrive. Despite growing literature on AAC in inclusive education, there is limited empirical evidence on how AAC tools are being integrated into under-resourced special education schools in rural South Africa. Few studies have focused on teacher experiences and classroom practices following AAC training in these contexts, leaving a gap in understanding practical challenges and opportunities.

This study aims to examine the integration of AAC tools in special education schools in the Sekhukhune District and assess their impact on inclusivity, with a focus on teacher perspectives and

Unaided AAC Systems for People with Complex Communication Needs and Their Families," *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology* 14, no. 7 (October 3, 2019): 710–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2018.1499135>.

² Camryn Terblanche, Michelle Pascoe, and Michal Harty, "Challenges, Perceptions and Implications of AAC Use in South African Classrooms: An Exploratory Focus Group Study," *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 41, no. 1 (February 2, 2025): 47–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02656590241311063>.

³ Bathobile Charity Ngcobo and Juan Bornman, "Augmentative and Alternative Communication Training: The Effect on Perceptions of Special School Teachers," *South African Journal of Education* 44, no. 3 (August 31, 2024): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v44n3a2467>.

⁴ M. Ngcobo and J. Bornman, "Effects of AAC Training on Educators' Ability to Support Learners with Complex Communication Needs," *South African Journal of Education* 44, no. 1 (2024): 1–15.

⁵ Siphos Sibanda and Brilliant Mhlanga, "Knowledge and Readiness of Teachers in Implementing Augmentative and Alternative Communication," *Discover Education* 3, no. 1 (August 5, 2024): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-024-00201-y>.

⁶ Ngcobo and Bornman, "Augmentative and Alternative Communication Training: The Effect on Perceptions of Special School Teachers."

⁷ Udem Samuel Jacob et al., "Assistive Technology in Special Education: Current Practices and Emerging Trends," *International Journal of Special Education* 39, no. 2 (2024): 120–36.

classroom practices. The next section reviews relevant literature on AAC and inclusive education. This is followed by the research methodology, which explains the qualitative approach used for data collection and analysis. The subsequent section presents the findings and discussion, and the paper concludes with recommendations for policy, teacher training, and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workshops in AAC

Workshops on AAC were structured following an educational session where participants engaged in interactive learning focused on specific topics or skills. Workshops often involve hands-on activities, group discussions, and expert-led instruction, creating an environment where teachers are actively applying new knowledge.⁸ In the context of special education, workshops on ACC tools enhance inclusivity by training teachers, social workers, and nurses using assistive technology to support learners with disabilities.⁹ These sessions empowered all the stakeholders to create individualised communication strategies, ensuring that all learners can participate effectively in classroom settings.

Model of Workshops

A participatory workshop model was adopted for ACC training in special education schools in the Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province. This model emphasized active involvement, where teachers from five special education needs schools, social workers, and nurses engaged in hands-on learning and collaborative problem-solving to enhance inclusivity.¹⁰ By integrating case studies, interactive demonstrations, and role-playing activities, participants gain practical experience with AAC tools, such as go-talks and big-mags, ensuring they can use them in real-world settings. Such workshops not only strengthened implementation strategies but also fostered a supportive learning environment where professionals could exchange insights and tailor communication approaches to learners' needs.¹¹

Another adaptable model is the train-the-trainer approach, which focuses on building long-term capacity within educational institutions.¹² In this setup, selected teachers, social workers, and nurses had to undergo intensive AAC training and then were mandated to mentor their colleagues who could not attend the workshop, creating a ripple effect of expertise in special education settings. This model is especially beneficial for regions like Sekhukhune, where resource limitations necessitate scalable solutions. By equipping all the participants with a comprehensive AAC knowledge, schools can develop sustainable inclusive practices, ensuring learners with communication barriers receive continued support without reliance on external trainers.¹³

The Capability Theory

From this study, the capability theory was adopted. This theory was developed by Sen and expanded by Nussbaum, which serves as a strong theoretical foundation for enhancing inclusivity in Sekhukhune special education through ACC tools.¹⁴ This theory emphasises the importance of providing learners with the necessary resources and opportunities to realize their full potential, making it particularly relevant to learners with communication challenges. By integrating AAC tools into special education, learners are

⁸ Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing, 1984).

⁹ D. Beukelman and P. Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*, 4th ed. (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, 2013).

¹⁰ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹¹ Janice Light and David McNaughton, "Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 30, no. 1 (March 10, 2014): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.3109/07434618.2014.885080>.

¹² Thomas R. Guskey, "Professional Development and Teacher Change," *Teachers and Teaching* 8, no. 3 (August 25, 2002): 381–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>.

¹³ Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*.

¹⁴ Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Sterling M McMurrin, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980); Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (May 1, 1992): 202–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591792020002002>.

given the means to actively participate in academic and social environments, ensuring they are not excluded due to their communication limitations.

Therefore, the Capability Theory also aligns clearly with inclusive education principles, advocating for equal opportunities and removing barriers that prevent effective learning.¹⁵ In addition, this framework supports the implementation of ACC by stressing the need for structured interventions that empower learners, rather than merely accommodating their disabilities.¹⁶ Beyond academic success, the theory underscores holistic development, ensuring that learners using AAC tools can engage meaningfully with their peers and educators.¹⁷ Applying the Capability Theory to Sekhukhune's special education system ensures that AAC strategies focus on equity, accessibility, and empowerment, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.¹⁸

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted for studying inclusivity in Sekhukhune special education through ACC instruments because it captures the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of teachers. One of the key advantages of qualitative research is its ability to explore lived experiences. Through interviews, we gained firsthand insights into how AAC instruments were used to impact communication and inclusivity in special education settings. A recent study found that special education teachers had positive attitudes toward using tablet-based AAC devices, such as go-talk 4, go-talk 9, go-talk 16, and others, to support learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other forms of disabilities. However, they also faced challenges, including students perceiving go-talks as entertainment tools rather than communication aids. Finally, qualitative research allows for a holistic interpretation of findings. Thematic analysis ensures that results reflect the complex realities of implementing AAC tools, rather than just numerical trends. A recent study emphasised that qualitative methodologies are essential for understanding teacher perspectives on AAC tools, as they provide deep insights into practical challenges and opportunities for improvement.

By using qualitative research, educators and policymakers can design interventions that are directly informed by the voices of those involved, making AAC tools more effective and culturally relevant. Would you like recommendations on specific qualitative research methods?

Selection of participants

Selecting participants for a study on ACC tools in Sekhukhune special education included diverse stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its impact. Key participants, including teachers, social workers, and nurses, as the primary beneficiaries of AAC tools, provided an in-depth experience into their effectiveness. For this study, 17 participants were purposively selected to take part, based on their workshop attendance. Special education needs teachers involved were able to assess the implementation, challenges, and training needs, while speech-language therapists contributed their expertise on the suitability of various AAC tools. School administrators played an essential role in facilitating policy support and resource allocation for AAC integration. Additionally, AAC specialists and researchers provided guidance on best practices and helped evaluate the outcomes of implementation. A well-rounded participant group ensured that the study captures the practical, technical, and personal aspects of AAC adoption in Sekhukhune's special education landscape.

Data Collection

We used semi-structured interviews, which were found to be a valuable data collection technique for understanding the implementation of ACC tools in special education settings. These interviews allowed teachers, social workers, and nurses to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in integrating AAC into learning environments. Teachers provided their insights into classroom strategies, curriculum

¹⁵ Martha C Nussbaum, "Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership," in *Frontiers of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 2007); Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

¹⁶ Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*.

¹⁷ Martha C Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Peter Mittler, *Working Towards Inclusive Education* (David Fulton Publishers, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203386149>; UNESCO, *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. (Paris: UNESCO, 2017).

adaptations, and learner engagement with AAC tools, while the social workers discussed the effectiveness of various AAC interventions and their impact on communication development. Nurses, on the other hand, offered perspectives on how AAC tools influence their children's communication at home and in social settings. Therefore, this study was found important in highlighting culturally and linguistically responsive AAC practices, emphasizing collaboration between teachers and other stakeholders involved to ensure consistent AAC device usage and inclusive communication environments. By incorporating structured interviews, we were able to gather rich qualitative data that captures the practical, technical, and emotional dimensions of AAC adoption in special education.

Data Analysis

To effectively analyse the collected data on ACC tools in Sekhukhune special needs education schools, a qualitative approach was adopted. This model provided a comprehensive understanding of AAC's impact on inclusivity.¹⁹ The qualitative phase involves thematic analysis of interviews and focus group discussions with participants. This method uncovers deeper insights into challenges, successes, and perceptions surrounding AAC implementation.²⁰ By integrating this approach, we developed evidence-based strategies to enhance inclusivity in Sekhukhune's special education system.²¹

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Four key themes emerged from the data analysis: understanding learners with communication difficulties, independence, application of various forms of assessments, and classroom participation using AAC tools.

Theme 1: Understanding Learners with Communication Difficulties

Understanding learners with communication barriers is central to enhancing inclusivity in Sekhukhune special education through AAC tools. Learners with autism, cerebral palsy, and developmental delays often struggle with verbal expression, limiting classroom engagement.²² AAC tools such as picture-based boards and speech-generating devices bridge this gap, providing alternative means for learners to express themselves and participate in social and academic activities.²³

Eight participants demonstrated a narrow understanding of AAC integration, viewing it primarily as a way of redefining traditional teaching methods. One participant stated:

“By simplifying the understanding of learners living with communication as a form of disability, we are able to answer related questions through displaying symbols.”

Another added:

“All tools promote traditional teaching because learners are allowed to respond to any change in special education schools by allowing input and output forms of curriculum adaptations.”

Addressing communication barriers aligns with South Africa's White Paper 6 on inclusive education.²⁴ Teacher training on AAC implementation is critical for creating individualised learning plans and promoting emotional well-being.²⁵

¹⁹ V. Braun and B. Clarke, *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2017).

²⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

²¹ Light and McNaughton, “Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?”

²² Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*.

²³ Light and McNaughton, “Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?”; MaryAnn Romski and Rose Sevcik, “Augmentative Communication and Early Intervention: Myths and Realities,” *Infants & Young Children* 18 (July 1, 2005): 174–85.

²⁴ Department of Basic Education, *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2001).

²⁵ J. Bornman and K. Tönsing, “Inclusive Education: South African Perspectives,” *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020): S1–11; Erna Alant and L. Lloyd, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication in South Africa: The Need for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Approaches*, *South African Journal of Communication Disorders* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcd.v39i1.274>.

Theme 2: Independence

Independence emerged as a critical factor in promoting inclusivity through AAC. Learners with communication barriers often rely on others for expression; AAC tools such as speech-generating devices and communication boards foster autonomy and self-advocacy.²⁶

Three participants highlighted this benefit. One noted:

“Improving communication skills, learners will be independent in their learning, with special reference to learners living with autism spectrum disorder. AAC tools will improve the learner’s vocabulary.”

Another stated:

“AAC allows learners with communication barriers to communicate effectively and gives them more independence.”

These views align with studies showing AAC’s effectiveness in improving communication skills and autonomy for learners with ASD.²⁷ Independence through AAC also supports the Screening, Assessment and Support (SIAS) framework, which promotes individualized learning.²⁸ Teacher training is essential to sustain this independence, particularly in resource-limited contexts like Sekhukhune.²⁹

Theme 3: Application of Various Forms of Assessments

Assessment is crucial in determining learners’ communication needs and tailoring AAC interventions accordingly. The SIAS policy provides guidance for identifying and supporting learners with special needs.³⁰ Participants confirmed that AAC assessments enabled learners to respond using symbols and gestures. One participant stated:

“AAC tools provided learners with the ability to respond to questions when using the symbols and gestures.”

Research supports these observations, showing that structured AAC assessments enhance vocabulary development, response accuracy, and communication competence.³¹ Tools such as dynamic assistive technology evaluations and AAC device trial checklists allow teachers to track progress and customize interventions.³²

Theme 4: Classroom Participation Using AAC Tools

Participation was identified as a key theme in fostering inclusivity. AAC tools, including Go-Talk and Quick Talk devices, enable learners with speech barriers to actively participate in classroom lessons. One participant explained:

“We use AAC tools to include all learners with speech barriers to be part of the lessons we present.”

²⁶ Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*; Light and McNaughton, “Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?”

²⁷ H. Aydin and I. H. Diken, “The Impact of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) on Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities* 55, no. 1 (2020): 44–56; C. K. Syriopoulou-Delli and P. Eleni, “AAC Interventions and Learner Autonomy: A Systematic Review,” *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 36, no. 4 (2022): 543–59; C. S. Nam and R. Sparks, “Augmentative and Alternative Communication Intervention and Its Effects on Children with ASD: A Meta-Analysis,” *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 72 (2018): 171–83.

²⁸ Department of Basic Education, *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2014).

²⁹ M. Matabane, “Teacher Perceptions of Assistive Technology in Inclusive Education: A South African Perspective,” *Journal of Education* 89, no. 1 (2022): 45–62.

³⁰ Department of Basic Education, *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy*.

³¹ Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*; Light and McNaughton, “Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?”; Soto and Yu, “AAC in Inclusive Classrooms: Research and Practice”; Bornman and Tönsing, “Inclusive Education: South African Perspectives.”

³² Alant and Lloyd, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication in South Africa: The Need for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Approaches*.

Another noted:

“AAC tools enhance inclusivity by allowing learners with communication barriers or those with little or no speech to actively participate in classroom activities.”

Participation aligns with the principles of White Paper 6, which advocates for equitable access to education.³³ Studies confirm that AAC interventions improve engagement, social interaction, and confidence, ensuring learners are active contributors rather than passive observers.³⁴

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight that AAC tools play a pivotal role in fostering inclusivity in special education by addressing communication barriers, promoting independence, supporting individualized assessments, and enhancing classroom participation. Learners with disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder AS cerebral palsy, and speech impairments benefit significantly from AAC strategies, which improve vocabulary, comprehension, and social engagement.³⁵ Independence was found to be particularly important, as AAC tools enable learners to express their needs, make choices, and engage in self-directed learning, thereby reducing reliance on caregivers and teachers.³⁶ Furthermore, systematic assessments ensure that AAC interventions are tailored to individual needs, improving response accuracy and communication competence.³⁷

Finally, classroom participation is critical for social inclusion and academic success. AAC tools allow learners with communication barriers to actively engage in lessons and collaborative learning, reinforcing their sense of belonging and confidence.³⁸ By integrating AAC strategies into special education classrooms, Sekhukhune schools can create equitable learning environments that support the academic and social development of all learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the integration of ACC tools in special education schools within the Sekhukhune District:

Structured Teacher Training Programs: There is a critical need for continuous professional development focused on AAC strategies, device usage, and classroom integration. Training should include practical demonstrations and follow-up support to ensure effective implementation.

Policy Strengthening and Implementation: The Department of Basic Education should reinforce inclusive education policies by mandating AAC integration as part of curriculum adaptation frameworks, aligned with White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy.

Resource Allocation and Accessibility: Adequate funding should be provided for the procurement and maintenance of AAC tools, including both low-tech and high-tech options, to address the current resource limitations in under-resourced schools.

Development of Context-Specific AAC Systems: Evidence-based, culturally relevant AAC systems should be developed for South African contexts, incorporating core vocabulary in local languages to ensure accessibility for all learners.

³³ Department of Basic Education, *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*.

³⁴ Bornman and Tönsing, “Inclusive Education: South African Perspectives”; Matabane, “Teacher Perceptions of Assistive Technology in Inclusive Education: A South African Perspective.”

³⁵ Beukelman and Mirenda, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*; Light and McNaughton, “Communicative Competence for Individuals Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?”

³⁶ Bornman and Tönsing, “Inclusive Education: South African Perspectives.”

³⁷ Soto and Yu, “AAC in Inclusive Classrooms: Research and Practice.”

³⁸ Matabane, “Teacher Perceptions of Assistive Technology in Inclusive Education: A South African Perspective.”; Alant and Lloyd, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication in South Africa: The Need for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Approaches*.

Collaborative Partnerships: Strategic partnerships should be established among government departments, non-governmental organizations, and private stakeholders to support the distribution, training, and sustainability of AAC programs.

Comprehensive Assessment Protocols: Schools should adopt structured AAC assessment tools to identify learners' communication needs, monitor progress, and guide individualized support plans.

Parental and Community Involvement: Parents and caregivers should be included in AAC training initiatives to ensure consistent support for learners beyond the classroom environment.

Integration of AAC into Teacher Education Curricula: Higher education institutions should incorporate AAC content into pre-service teacher training programs to prepare future educators for inclusive classrooms.

Ongoing Research and Monitoring: Further research should evaluate the long-term impact of AAC on learner independence, participation, and academic outcomes, while monitoring the effectiveness of implemented interventions.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the integration of ACC tools in special education schools in the Sekhukhune District and assess their impact on inclusivity. The findings revealed that AAC tools hold significant potential to overcome communication barriers and promote meaningful participation for learners with complex communication needs. By providing alternative channels for expression, these tools enable learners to engage in classroom interactions, build social connections, and develop a sense of independence. The study highlights that achieving full inclusivity requires more than just the availability of AAC tools; it demands structured teacher training, consistent policy implementation, and collaborative efforts across all stakeholders. If these challenges are addressed, AAC can serve as a transformative approach to ensuring that every learner has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed. This underscores the need for sustained investment in AAC strategies as a cornerstone of inclusive education in special schools within the Sekhukhune District.

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