

EMPOWERING ACCESSIBILITY: ENHANCING AWARENESS AND ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract: This study investigates the awareness and access to assistive technology (AT) among students with disabilities, aiming to empower accessibility in educational settings. Assistive technology plays a crucial role in facilitating learning and participation for students with disabilities, yet disparities in awareness and access persist. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations, this research explores the challenges and opportunities surrounding AT awareness and access. Key findings highlight the need for comprehensive AT training and support initiatives for students, educators, and educational institutions. Furthermore, policy recommendations are provided to enhance the integration of AT into educational environments, promoting inclusivity and equitable opportunities for all students.

Keywords: Assistive technology, students with disabilities, accessibility, awareness, access, education, inclusive practices, empowerment, policy recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Assistive technology has proven to be instrumental in supporting students with disabilities by enhancing their functional abilities and facilitating their participation in educational settings. However, the awareness and access to assistive technology among students with disabilities in special schools are crucial factors that determine the effectiveness of its implementation. This study focuses on examining the level of awareness and access to assistive technology among students with disabilities in a special school setting. By understanding these aspects, the study aims to shed light on the current situation and provide insights for developing inclusive education practices that optimize the use of assistive technology.

The special school setting provides a unique context for this study, as it caters specifically to students with disabilities who require specialized support and accommodations. By focusing on a special school, this

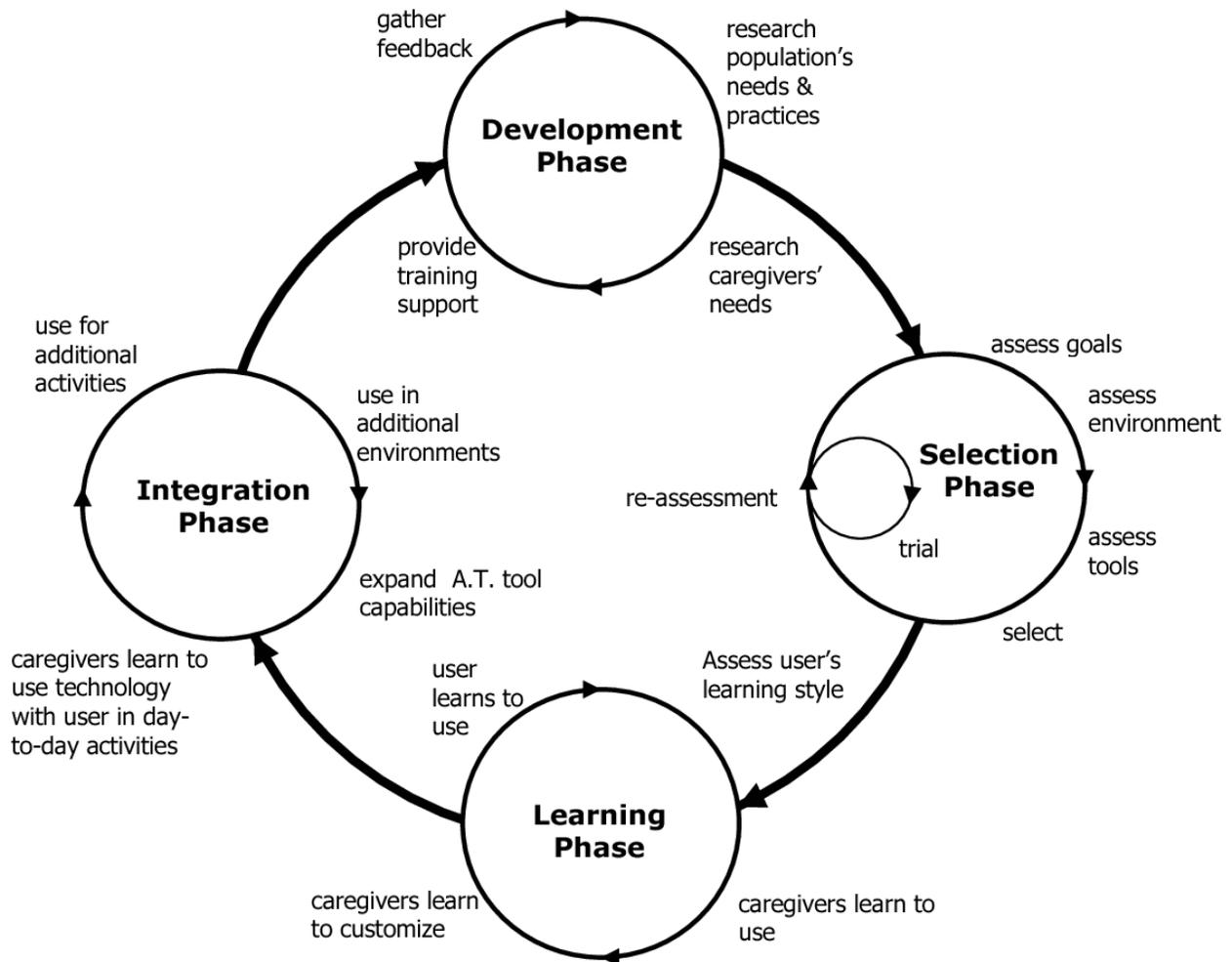
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research aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of the awareness and access to assistive technology within an environment dedicated to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

METHOD

To investigate the awareness and access to assistive technology (AT) among students with disabilities, a mixed-methods research approach was employed. Initially, a quantitative survey was developed to gather data on the current level of awareness and utilization of AT among students with disabilities. The survey was distributed to a diverse sample of students across different educational settings, including schools, colleges, and universities, to capture a broad range of perspectives.

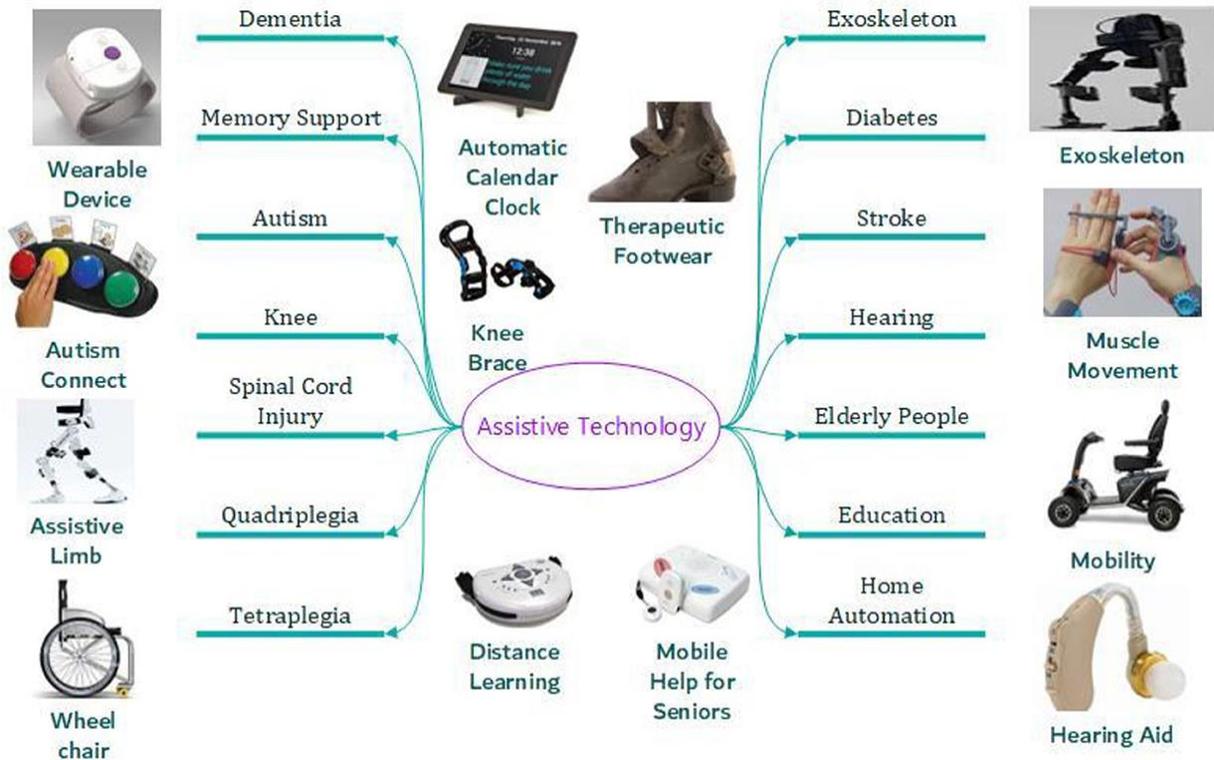
Simultaneously, qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, were conducted with students with disabilities, educators, and assistive technology specialists. These qualitative interviews aimed to explore in-depth the experiences, challenges, and needs related to AT awareness and access. Additionally, observations were conducted in educational settings to provide contextual insights into the utilization of AT in real-world scenarios.



Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, identifying common themes, patterns, and challenges related to AT awareness and access. Quantitative survey data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and correlations between different variables, such as types of disabilities, levels of awareness, and barriers to access.

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Triangulation of data from multiple sources allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing AT awareness and access among students with disabilities. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were carefully addressed throughout the research process, ensuring the well-being and rights of participants.

Finally, the findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were synthesized to develop recommendations for enhancing AT awareness and access in educational settings. These recommendations encompassed strategies for improving training and support for students, educators, and educational institutions, as well as policy recommendations to promote the integration of AT into inclusive educational environments.

RESULTS

The results of the study reveal important findings regarding the awareness and access to assistive technology among students with disabilities in a special school setting. The level of awareness among students, parents, and teachers varies, with students demonstrating the highest level of awareness regarding assistive technology. This indicates a positive trend in terms of students' understanding and recognition of the potential benefits of these technologies. However, despite the awareness, access to assistive technology remains limited within the special school.

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DISCUSSION

The discussion centers around the implications and significance of the study findings. The limited access to assistive technology can be attributed to various factors, including financial constraints and inadequate availability of resources. The high cost of assistive technology devices and limited financial resources can pose significant barriers to their adoption and implementation within the special school. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive policies and guidelines at the institutional level may contribute to the limited access to these technologies.

Furthermore, the discussion highlights the importance of improving access to assistive technology to promote inclusive education practices. Assistive technology has the potential to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of students with disabilities by providing them with the necessary tools and supports. By addressing the financial barriers and ensuring adequate availability of resources, special schools can create an environment where students with disabilities have equal opportunities to benefit from assistive technology.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides evidence of the varying levels of awareness and limited access to assistive technology among students with disabilities in a special school setting. The findings underscore the importance of increasing awareness and improving access to these technologies to promote inclusive education practices. To address the limitations, it is essential to develop comprehensive policies and guidelines that prioritize the provision of assistive technology in special schools. Additionally, efforts should be made to secure adequate funding and resources to ensure the availability and affordability of assistive technology devices. By doing so, special schools can enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of students with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

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