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The role of ICT in promoting skill and talents of children with autism spectrum disorders in Rwandan basic education schools

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Aim: The development of ICT based technologies is rapidly developed from 20th century, where many technologies emerged to solve the problems of daily life. Technology has transformed the healthcare and education systems. In healthcare sector, Autism is a rapidly developing disease and technology has the potential to improve their educational learning. This research aims to find out how ICT can be used to promote and support the educational learning potential and skills of the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Rwanda.

Method: We conducted five focus group discussions with 56 participants from different backgrounds: teachers, school managers, parents, students and specialists. Each focus group discussion took two hours. A predefined set of questions were selected to evaluate the people perception regarding assistive technologies used in ASD, their implementation, the challenges and opportunities. The interview was recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Direct assessment is used by discussing with learners with ASD, visiting their practical session in vocation training centre workshops.

Results: School managers of five selected schools in this study considered the integration of ICT tools to educate children with ASD is helpful for inclusive class settings. The performance of children in using cognitive applications were moderately positive with score between 60% and 80% compared to the children considered as having normal intellectual capacity who scored between 55% and 85%. The children like watching television, playing digital games and drawing objects they see around them as was said by 66% of their parents.

Conclusion: Integration of ICT is considered as a potential solution to support the talent of children with ASD as well as in teaching them. However, this domain demands further exploration with a larger population. Further research in low-resource settings, with more general populations is recommended.

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