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Facilitating multimodal communication in individuals with complex communication needs: a perspective of AAC-based language

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Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) refers to all the methods of communication besides oral speech people use to achieve communication goals. It is the major modality of language used in individuals with complex communication needs resulting from a variety of disabilities. This study focuses on individuals with Rett syndrome, a rare genetic neurodevelopmental disability that causes a progressive decline in motor, speech, and other functioning, and systematically reviews existing literature on the implementation of aided AAC intervention in supporting communication in this underrepresented population. This review aims to examine the principal trends in research on aided AAC intervention and individuals with Rett syndrome, the types of aided AAC intervention and its outcomes on communication in individuals with Rett syndrome, and the limitations and future directions in this field. The initial search returned 124 articles which were reduced to 35 articles after duplicates were removed. After full-text review, 7 articles that met the inclusion criteria were identified. The findings are discussed in regards to the types of interventions, settings and participants characteristics, study designs, the effectiveness of the interventions on targeted communication skills (e.g., requesting preferred objects, using graphic symbols, taking communicative turns). This review demonstrated the effectiveness of aided AAC intervention and highlighted the potential and the pivotal role of eye-gaze technology in facilitating communication in individuals with Rett syndrome. This review also showed a critical need to carry out and support more evidence-based studies in facilitating communication intervention in various settings for individuals with Rett syndrome.

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Recommendation (for student section)

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