

# **The effectiveness of a communication partner training program for parents of children with complex communication needs: A pilot study.**

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**Background:** Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is an evidence-based intervention that addresses the complex communication needs (CCN) in children with various developmental disabilities. A majority of the communication partners of children who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to facilitate effective communication opportunities. With the limited resources in low and middle-income countries, attending in-person training programs is challenging.

**Objective/s:** The study focused on evaluating the effectiveness of “Vivesa: Let’s read storybooks” an online, self-paced training intervention for Sinhala-speaking parents of children with complex communication needs. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the communication partner training program on parents’ ability to implement the targeted communication partner intervention during a shared storybook reading activity.

**Methods:** The study used the one-group pretest-posttest study design with eight parent-child dyads recruited from the Ayati National Center for Children with Disabilities in Ragama, Sri Lanka. A pretest was conducted at the baseline and after the completion of the online training and the subsequent online coaching sessions, a post-test was conducted with each parent-child dyad. The training intervention aimed to promote the effective incorporation of the children’s AAC systems when engaging in shared storybook reading activity through the implementation of Read, Ask, Answer, Prompt (RAAP) strategy. The training was composed of seven short instructional videos and two one on one online coaching sessions. The video recordings collected during the pre and post-tests were coded to count the number of accurate RAAP strategy implementations and a paired samples t-test was conducted to test the statistical significance of the participants’ improvement.

**Results:** All the participants of the study were females and their children involved in the study presented with a range of conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy and Specific Language Impairment resulting in complex communication needs. The findings of the paired sample t-test suggested that there was a statistically significant increase in the parental RAAP strategy use during the post-test ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.718$ ) when compared with the pre-test ( $M = 0.00$ ,  $SD = 0.000$ ) with a large effect size of 2.08.

**Conclusion/s:** The results of the study provided evidence that an online, self-paced training intervention could be effectively used to improve the target strategy use among parents during a shared storybook reading activity. This implies that technology can be effectively incorporated into communication partner training programs even in the context of low and middle-income countries.

**Key words:** *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Communication partner training, Shared storybook reading, RAAP strategy, Online training, self-paced training*