

Popich, E. (1997). *The impact of a digital speaker on a teacher's interaction with a non-speaking child in the classroom situation*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. Erna Alant (Advisor): 96 pages of text, 143 references, 21 appendices, 9 tables, and 33 figures.

Children who are non-speaking are unable to express basic needs, are excluded from interaction and experience isolation within their environment. Literature has indicated that due to the reciprocal nature of interaction, teachers tend to compensate for children who are non-speaking by taking more turns, initiating more frequently, using more direct questions as well as using more attention directing utterances and requests. The use of a voice output device can, however, give the child access to communication and improve the quality of his interactions. Non-speaking children who use voice output are more communicatively competent, initiate more frequently, use more complex sentences and demonstrate more control than their non-speaking peers. It is important to determine whether the implementation of a digital speaker could reverse the negative trends in a teacher's interactions with children who are non-speaking. It is also of interest to determine the comparative role of teacher training in the process of improving the quality of interaction between the teacher and the AAC user.

This study aims to describe the impact of the implementation of a digital speaker and training, in a classroom situation, on the quality and quantity of the teacher's interaction with the AAC user. The data was obtained by recording and analyzing classroom story time interactions. The number of interactions directed at each child, the types of utterances used, the types of questions used as well as the messages recorded onto the digital speaker were determined for each research phase. There were four major phases in the research, namely, a pre-implementation phase, a post-implementation phase, a post-training phase and a post-withdrawal phase. Although there were nine children in the class, the focus of the data analysis was on the teacher's interaction with the AAC user and the study is, therefore, a case study.

The results indicated that the implementation of the digital speaker and the training of the teacher resulted in an increase in the number of interactions directed at the AAC user and a decrease in the number of interactions directed at the whole class. The discrepancy between the proportion of interaction directed at the speaking children and the children who were non-speaking remained consistent throughout the four research phases. Furthermore the implementation of the digital speaker and the training of the teacher also resulted in the interactions with the AAC user more closely resembling the teacher's interactions with the speaking children than the interactions with the non-speaking children. Utterance types such as answering and imitating were used more frequently after the implementation of the device. There was also a much greater variety in the teacher's use of questions as well as in the messages that were recorded onto the digital speaker after the five training sessions were completed.

This study highlighted the importance of formal training for the communication partners of the AAC user. One of the most important communication partners of the school-aged AAC user is the classroom teacher.