



School-Based Mental Health Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Syndromes: Social Skills Development Outcomes in South African Cities Over Six Months

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of school-based mental health support for students with Autism Spectrum Syndromes (ASS) in South African cities over a six-month period. A randomized controlled trial was conducted, with 120 participants randomly allocated into an intervention group (n=60) and a control group (n=60). The intervention included weekly sessions of social skills training delivered by trained educators over six months. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were used to measure changes in social skills. During the study, there was a statistically significant improvement in social skills scores from pre-test to post-test for the intervention group ($t(118) = 4.23, p < 0.05$; CI: [2.3%, 6.7%]), indicating an average increase of 5% in social interaction abilities. The results suggest that school-based mental health support significantly enhances social skills development among students with ASS, contributing to their overall socio-emotional well-being. Further research should explore the sustainability and scalability of this intervention model across different urban contexts. The findings could inform policy makers in developing targeted educational programmes for ASS students.

Keywords: *African, Autism, Intervention, Randomized Controlled Trial, Social Skills Development, School-Based, Psychosocial Support*

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