The History and Plausible Future of Assistive Technology and What It Might Mean for Singapore Students With Disabilities

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Abstract : This paper discusses the history and plausible future of assistive technology and what it means for students with disabilities in Singapore, a country known for its high quality of education in the world. Over more than a century, students with disabilities have benefitted from relatively low-tech assistive technology (like eye-glasses, Braille, magnifiers and wheelchairs) to high-tech assistive technology including electronic mobility switches, alternative keyboards, computer-screen enlargers, text-to-speech readers, electronic sign-language dictionaries and signing avatars for individuals with hearing impairments. Driven by legislation, the use of assistive technology in many countries is becoming so ubiquitous that more and more students with disabilities are able to perform as well as if not better than their counterparts. Yet in many other learning environments where assistive technology is not affordable or mandated, the learning gaps can be quite significant. Without stronger legislation, Singapore may still have a long way to go in levelling the playing field for its students with disabilities.