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**SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY PRACTICE ADVANCEMENT: THE
INFLUENCE OF RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE ON STAYING
CURRENT**

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ABSTRACT

Speech pathology is a quickly evolving field as new research and discoveries may deem past practices old as newer practices prove to be more efficient in improving speech in patients. It is a speech therapist's job to learn current practices by taking courses and continuing their education, as well as exploring practices and techniques, different from their own, from other professionals to use any resource available to ensure the best treatment for their patients. Speech pathologists can continue their education through various methods, including but not limited to continuing medical education (CME) or continuing professional development (CPD) programs, conferences and workshops, and online courses/webinars. Most countries, including the U.S., require speech pathologists to take continuing education courses to reach a certain number of credits every few years to be able to maintain their licenses and continue their practice. Although many countries require pathologists to continue their education, there may still be challenges including time and financial constraints as some courses can cost up to \$700. However, the benefits of continuing education and learning to modify old patient practices to fit new research far outweigh the challenges that may come with it. It is crucial for countries like Armenia that do not have a strict policy for continuing education to modernize their medical education system and ensure that speech pathologists stay up to date on their medical knowledge and be able to help patients efficiently and effectively.

Key words: *Continuing education, speech therapy, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), professionals, practice, license, evidence-based practice (EBP), requirements, continuing education units (CEUs), research, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), programs, advancement, staying current.*

INTRODUCTION

To advance the field and studies of speech pathology and enhance patient care, speech therapists should continue pursuing education and engaging in new information related to their field. Research indicates that speech therapists may benefit from further exploring educational practices to increase their awareness of new discoveries in their practices by learning how to refer to online resources for addressing clinical inquiries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of speech pathology is characterized by rapid development, driven by continuous research and innovation. To ensure effective patient care, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) must consistently update their clinical practices through ongoing education (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2020). Continuing education is essential for SLPs to maintain evidence-based practice (EBP), enhancing their clinical skills, knowledge, and professional competence (Megan & Heather, 2018).

Multiple avenues exist for continuing education, including Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), conferences, workshops, and online webinars. According to Kastner (2021), professional development programs significantly influence clinical outcomes by facilitating the integration of current research into practice. Conferences and workshops provide opportunities for professionals to learn collaboratively, share experiences, and discuss practical applications, thus fostering professional growth and enhancing service quality (Lancaster, n.d.; Emelo, 2011).

Online education methods have particularly gained prominence due to their flexibility and accessibility. Çetin (n.d.) highlights the effectiveness of online professional development for educators and professionals during those periods when face-to-face training is challenging or impossible, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift underscores the importance of flexible and accessible continuing education opportunities for health professionals, including SLPs.

Despite clear benefits, continuing education poses challenges such as financial burdens and time constraints. Courses and workshops can be costly, limiting participation for some practitioners (Mataiti, 2008). However, research consistently demonstrates that investment in continuing education significantly outweighs the drawbacks. Finley (1988) and Thomas (2013) found that practitioners who engage actively in continuous learning demonstrate enhanced clinical judgment, better patient outcomes, and improved job satisfaction.

In countries like the USA, strict guidelines mandate a specific number of Continuing Education

Units (CEUs) every few years to maintain licensure (ASHA, 2020). This regulation ensures that SLPs remain current with advances in clinical research and practice methodologies. Conversely, countries lacking formal regulations, such as Armenia, face risks of clinical stagnation, potentially impacting patient care quality adversely (Ashegian, 2024).

Nomfundo and Joanne (2021) further emphasized the importance of continuing education through their exploration of telerehabilitation practices, noting how continuing education programs facilitated rapid adaptation among SLPs to telehealth services during emergencies. Similarly, Tucker (2012) documented how ongoing professional development supports practitioners' ability to adapt to evolving technologies and methodologies effectively.

Ultimately, the literature consistently advocates for continuing education as a cornerstone of quality improvement in speech pathology practice. Encouraging nations without mandatory continuing education policies to implement structured requirements can ensure practitioners remain informed of current best practices and research, thus significantly improving patient care outcomes (Squires, 2013; Megan & Heather, 2018). Addressing financial and logistical challenges through governmental or organizational support is crucial in promoting equitable access to professional development opportunities for all speech pathologists.

ANALYZES OF THE SITUATION

Background information in the field of speech therapy

The significance of evidence-based practice is the basis for expanding one's knowledge in their educational field and improvement in speech therapy practices. Continuing education allows speech therapists to stay current on research and learn new evidence-based information that may prove to be useful in their practices, ensuring they provide the most efficient treatment to clients. (Medical Necessity for Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Services, n.d.).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's position statement on evidence-based practice (EBP) was established in 2004. Since 2008, the Council on Academic Accreditation has required that graduate education programs in fields concerning speech-language pathology integrate research and evidence-based practices into their curricula and clinical practices. Following this need for more evidence-based practices in education programs, Employer-led EBP training opportunities and access to EBP resources have expanded over the past fifteen years (Greenwell & Walsh, 2021).

Working alongside professional groups and collaborative training opportunities can improve the knowledge and training required to provide support to patients with speech, language, and communication needs by enabling the sharing of knowledge and resources as people work to observe

and learn from one another. Speech therapists encounter obstacles in their ongoing education including learning new communication practices in clinical sessions that they may be unfamiliar with, collaborating with other healthcare professionals whose practice styles may differ, and learning to customize communication strategies to fit the unique needs of individual clients and circumstances. However, it is important for clinicians to continuously educate themselves and remain aware of these modern considerations to provide the best possible care for their patients. Research indicates that therapists may be required to provide training to other professionals on effective communication strategies and that there may be discrepancies in the strategies that are recommended for therapists and nurses. Furthermore, clinicians are required to address concerns regarding linguistic competence, gender, and social demographics in their professional practices (Armstrong & Ferguson, 2004).

Speech therapists supplement their ongoing education with resources such as therapy aides, games, and activities. It is crucial to foster collaboration between speech therapists and educators to offer assistance to children with communication, language, and speech impairments. Teachers and speech therapists acknowledge the necessity of supplementary resources and assistance; however, the demands of their caseloads and time can serve as obstacles to their provision. Interprofessional groups and collaborative training opportunities can facilitate the sharing of resources and the enhancement of support for children with speech, language, and communication needs (Jane et al., 2015).

Speech therapists keep up with the latest research by employing systematic reviews (SR) and meta-analyses, which offer the most rigorous evidence to confirm the efficacy of interventions. These evaluations assist professionals in maintaining their knowledge, evaluating the risks and benefits of interventions, and facilitating the development of care guidelines. For example, The Cochrane Collaboration is a critical organization that is involved in the production of evidence in speech therapy, establishing the criteria for the planning and execution of SR. Knowing how to identify quality SR and identify scientific evidence in corrected revisions can be advantageous for speech-language pathologists. It is important to stay informed about the latest research and guidelines to provide the best possible care for patients. Venessa et al. conducted a study on the effectiveness of SR in improving language outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorder. The study results had positive effects on language outcomes for children with autism spectrum disorder.

The current state of speech therapy education and a description of typical speech therapy education programs

Another example is SpeechPathology.com, which provides online continuing education units (CEUs) for speech-language pathologists. "Members are granted access to all SLP CEU courses for a

fee of \$129 annually. They offer resources and expert articles on SLP trends. SpeechPathology.com is an ASHA-approved continuing education provider that provides a variety of course formats and monitors CEUs to satisfy state license requirements. Additionally, they collaborate with universities to provide graduate-level credits to school-based SLPs (bilinguistics.com, n.d.).

Challenges faced by speech therapists in staying current with advancements

Maintaining awareness of the most recent research in our field and evidence-based therapeutic approaches necessitates earning continuing education units (CEUs). I am particularly fond of courses that provide practical advice and therapeutic techniques to assist you in working with your students and clientele. Professional development that is of the highest quality is designed to enhance your skill set, keep you informed, and motivate you to return to your therapy room and apply the knowledge you have acquired. Professional development hours are necessary for SLPs to maintain their ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCCs). Continuing education hours are also required in order to practice as a speech-language pathologist in the majority of states in the United States. It is important to be certain to verify the requirements of your state, as they may align with those of the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) or may differ. It is important to be certain to verify the requirements of your state, as they may align with those of the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA).

The requirements for maintaining your ASHA CCC's as of 2023 are as follows:

The professional development hours you accumulate must be consistent with the field of speech-language pathology or audiology, and they may pertain to any aspect of clinical practice, as per ASHA requirements. Not only are speech pathology CEUs certified by ASHA or state speech and language associations eligible for hours, but professional development opportunities provided by other organizations may also count towards continuing education requirements.

The hours you accumulate should be sufficient to satisfy both ASHA and your state's requirements.

CEUs for speech therapy can be costly to acquire. The expense of obtaining speech pathology CEUs can accumulate unless you are fortunate enough to have an employer who covers the cost of your CEU hours. Some workshops can cost as much as several hundred dollars per course. To fulfil your requirement for hours without incurring excessive expenses, consider attending local workshops (which eliminate the need for travel expenses) or conferences that frequently permit the accumulation of numerous hours for a single-entry charge. Additionally, online courses and webinars are accessible (some are recorded for instantaneous viewing).

In addition, you may consult with healthcare organizations, educational support centres, or universities in your vicinity. They may sponsor professional development seminars or events that

provide CEU hours at a discount or for free (Speech Sprouts, 2023).

The importance of ongoing education in a rapidly evolving field

It is imperative to participate in continuous learning and ongoing education in disciplines that are rapidly evolving to maintain a competitive edge and advance in one's career. By staying informed about industry trends and developments, individuals can improve their job performance, adapt to changes, and expand their skill set. Lifelong learning is essential for demonstrating a commitment to personal growth, career resilience, and professional development. To preserve a competitive advantage in a fast-paced business environment, it is imperative to engage in educational opportunities, network with peers, and adopt new technologies. Employers value individuals who consistently invest in their professional development and adapt to the evolving job market. (The Importance of Continuing Education and Staying Up to Date in Your Industry, WindowStill, 2023) (The Importance of Continuous Learning and How to Stay Up to Date with Industry Trends and Developments., n.d.) (The Vital Importance of Continuous Learning in an Ever-Evolving Work Landscape, n.d.) (The Power of Lifelong Learning and Professional Development in Career Advancement &Mdash; TxGAP, 2024)

The benefits of continuing education for speech therapists include staying up to date on the latest research and techniques to provide the best possible care for clients. Continuing education for speech-language pathologists can offer advantages, including the enhancement of provider engagement in practice improvement and the enhancement of practice. It can also result in self-evaluation and quality assurance, which can ultimately enhance patient care (Megan & Heather, 2018; Finley, 1988).

The efficacy of these learning opportunities is not well understood, even though speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are required to partake in continuing education opportunities. This preliminary study provides an empirical assessment of how both the SLPs and their instructors perceive the impact of problem-based learning (PBL) CE activity on SLPs. Twenty-five seasoned SLPs attended a multi-day, intensive PBL workshop on juvenile apraxia of speech. The self-perceived clinical efficacy of the SLPs is significantly different between T1 and T2, as well as T2 and T3. Instructors assessed the clinical efficacy of the SLPs as "very good" to "excellent" at T3. SLPs reported more confidence, critical thinking, and enhanced assessment and treatment skills after the training at T3, according to qualitative data. The SLPs also said that this workshop was different from other CE models because of how much was learned, the availability of professionals and mentors during and after the educational experience, and the PBL-based teaching elements, such as the focus on small-group discussions based on real-life situations. The limitations, implications, and prospective directions of the study are addressed (Megan & Heather, 2018; Overby & Rusiewicz, 2018). Impact and Perceived Benefits of a Problem-Based

Learning Workshop for Continuing Education in Speech-Language Pathology: A Pilot Study. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences and Disorders*, 2(1). The results of this pilot study provide evidence that the benefits and challenges of implementing PBL in continuing education for speech-language pathologists are addressed.

Improved clinical skills and knowledge enhance career advancement opportunities. "Speech therapists can enhance their clinical skills and knowledge through continuing education, which can result in more effective treatment plans and better patient outcomes." Additionally, it can improve career advancement prospects by ensuring that therapists are informed about the most recent research and techniques in the field" (Mataiti, 2008; Ann, 2003; Finley, 1988). It helps speech therapists stay up to date with the latest research and techniques. Speech therapists can remain informed about the most recent research and increase their chances of career advancement by enhancing their clinical skills and knowledge. To accommodate the developmental requirements of clinical educators at various phases, clinical educators must devise novel approaches to organizing and conducting professional development. This encompasses the enhancement of assessment abilities, relationship-building abilities, and an understanding of educational theory (y., 2005) (Finley, 1988).

Methods of Continuing Education for Speech Therapists

Speech therapists can continue their education through continuing medical education (CME) or continuing professional development (CPD) programs. Speech-language pathologists in nations like the United States must complete a certain number of continuing education units (CEUs) to maintain their certification, and professional associations like ASHA may audit them. "Speech therapists need to stay updated with new technologies and methods through continuing education to enhance their practice" (Ashekian, 2024) and ensure they are providing the best possible care for their clients.

Online speech therapy courses can provide practical experience opportunities that are comparable to those of in-person courses." Research has demonstrated that telepractice is a viable method of service delivery for speech-language pathologists and audiologists, facilitating the provision of superior quality care in environments where physical presence is not possible. Furthermore, research has shown that online learning modalities, such as teletherapy, can be effective in the provision of treatment and interventions for individuals with speech and language disorders (Nomfundo & Joanne, 2021; Finley, 1988).

Conferences and workshops

"Conferences and workshops are important for Continuing Education Units (CEU) for Speech-

Language Pathologists (SLP) as they provide opportunities to learn about new research, techniques, and best practices in the field. Attending these events can help SLPs stay updated on the latest advancements and improve their skills" (Lancaster, n.d.).

"Conferences are crucial for PDU speech therapy because they offer opportunities for professional development and networking". PDU members are permitted to participate in emergency OTPD activities with a degree of flexibility, which enables them to obtain esteemed international certificates. Nevertheless, conducting in-house professional development activities can be a difficult task for PDU members, as it necessitates the coordination of venues for group gatherings and the management of infrastructure. The PDU process has the potential to facilitate the growth of both individuals and groups by encouraging them to expand their perspectives and develop the confidence necessary to influence others (Çetin, n.d.; Iain & Steven, n.d.; Kausar, n.d; Finley, 1988).

Online courses and webinars

A multistate group of state horse specialists conducted a study in which they compared webinars and online short courses. The study found that there were no differences in perceived knowledge gained from webinars or short courses, but participation in short courses may be more useful for making positive management decisions. Short course participants also reported greater potential for cost savings. Certificates were important for motivating participants to complete the courses and achieve higher completion rates" (Kathleen et al., 2020; Finley, 1988).

Mentoring and peer learning opportunities

Mentoring and peer learning opportunities can be effectively implemented through group mentoring programs that concentrate on topics that are pertinent to the requirements of learners, regardless of whether they convene in person or virtually. Organizations such as CDW have discovered that group mentoring is a cost-effective, relational, and rapid learning approach that encourages knowledge sharing and practical application in the workplace. Research indicates that the advantages of group mentoring can be improved by establishing groups based on the relevance of topics and offering opportunities for participants to reunite to observe the implementation of ideas (Emelo, 2011; Finley, 1988).

Mentoring programs contribute to career advancement by offering mentors advantages such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and career success. Psychosocial mentoring is linked to organizational commitment; career mentoring is linked to career success; and role modelling mentoring is linked to job performance. Providing mentoring support can result in mentors being more

satisfied and committed to their employment. To ascertain the long-term influence of mentoring on a mentor's career, longitudinal research is required. Mentorship programs have been demonstrated to have a beneficial effect on the job satisfaction and career advancement of employees. Promotions, salary increases, and access to higher-level positions are more probable for employees who participate in formal mentorship relationships. Mentorship also results in increased job satisfaction because of the emotional support, increased confidence, and clarity in career paths that mentors provide (Thomas, 2013; Finley, 1988).

Challenges and Barriers to Continuing Education

SLPs face a variety of obstacles in their pursuit of continuing education, such as a lack of support from employers or administration (11%), a lack of emphasis on teamwork in the workplace (10%), insufficient training to work collaboratively on teams (5%), and resistance from other SLPs (2%). Participants in a study indicated that they would be more inclined to participate in collaborative practices if their caseloads were reduced. SLPs who are in rural areas encounter distinctive obstacles, including professional isolation and scheduling complications. In comparison to suburban or urban SLPs, rural SLPs report that they receive less professional support and have limited interaction with colleagues or supervisors. Common obstacles to effective collaboration with classroom instructors for SLPs, particularly in rural settings, include professional isolation, scheduling, and time constraints (Kastner, 2021; Finley, 1988).

Time constraints and balancing work-life responsibilities

Working time flexibility can affect the balance of work and life responsibilities. Individual-oriented flexibility has a positive impact on work-life balance, whereas organization-oriented flexibility may have a negative effect. According to research, the consumption of personal resources and the subsequent negative impact on work-life balance can result from high temporal flexibility requirements, such as overtime or weekend work. Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance is advantageous for both personal and professional well-being, underscoring the significance of striking a balance between work and personal life (Anne et al., 2020; Finley, 1988).

Financial constraints for attending conferences and courses

With the scarcity of qualified SLPs in a variety of settings, financial constraints can present a challenge for attending conferences and courses for SLPs. " Collaborations between institutions and school districts to offer training opportunities for SLPs and on-the-job training programs are among the

solutions to this shortage (Squires, 2013; Tucker, 2012; Finley, 1988).

Lack of awareness of available opportunities

In Armenia, there are efforts to modernize the medical education system to advance professional development and align with European CME/CPD requirements, but currently, there is no regulated CME program for speech therapy. Speech pathologists in Armenia do not have mandatory postgraduate education or license renewal restrictions like in developed nations. Establishing a unified system of continuous education for speech therapists in Armenia is essential to keeping up with advancements in the field (Ashekian, 2024) and ensuring that patients receive the best possible care.

CONCLUSION

Continuing education is essential for speech therapists, particularly those who are newly qualified and work with children who have cerebral palsy. Therapists can gain valuable hands-on experience and knowledge from short practical training courses, which can help them feel more prepared to work with complex conditions in low-resource settings. To improve the abilities of speech therapists, the courses should emphasize interprofessional learning, holistic approaches, and profession-specific topics. Forming virtual communities of practice, mentorship programs, and postgraduate-focused brief training courses for ongoing professional development are among the recommendations (Takondwa et al., 2020; Finley, 1988).

Call to action for speech therapists to prioritize ongoing learning.

Speech therapists should prioritize ongoing learning to support children's access to learning opportunities and development across domains by altering environmental elements. Collaboration between teachers and speech therapists is crucial to identifying and supporting children with speech, language, and communication needs throughout their school years (Jane et al., 2015; FAMILY, n.d.; Finley, 1988).

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