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The Role of Speech Therapy in Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Exceptional Needs: A Critical Analysis

Azizreza. Ghasemzadeh[1, 2*], Maryam. Saadat[3], Razie. Kia Kojori[4]

[1] Speech-Language Pathologist, Armada Medical Centre, Dubai, UAE
[2] Department of Psychology and Counseling, KMAN Research Institute, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada
[3] Psychoanalyst, LifeWorks Holistic Counselling Centre, Dubai, UAE
[4] M.A, Clinical Psychology, Tonkabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonkabon, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: aghasemzadeh@irimed.org

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A B S T R A C T

This article critically analyzes the role of speech therapy in enhancing the communication skills of children with exceptional needs. It explores the multifaceted nature of speech therapy, encompassing a range of interventions tailored to individual needs. The discussion includes the benefits of speech therapy, such as improvements in speech production, language abilities, social communication, and pragmatic language skills. Challenges and limitations within the field are also examined, along with a comparative analysis of speech therapy against other interventions. Current trends, latest developments, and research gaps in speech therapy are addressed, emphasizing the need for continued research and innovation. The article concludes with policy recommendations and practical implications for evidence-based speech therapy practices, highlighting their significance in promoting holistic development and well-being in children with exceptional needs.

Keywords: *Speech Therapy, Communication Skills, Children with Exceptional Needs, Critical Analysis.*

1. Introduction

The role of speech therapy in enhancing the communication skills of children with exceptional needs is a critical aspect of their overall development. Speech therapy plays a crucial role in helping children with various conditions such as cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, cleft palate, and speech disorders to acquire and use a full range of communication skills (Bessell et al., 2013; Pennington et al., 2006; Sumastri & Pastari, 2022). It is evident that speech therapy interventions are essential for children with exceptional needs, as they can significantly impact their behavioral development and social communication needs (Sumastri & Pastari, 2022). Additionally, speech therapy is crucial for children with conditions such as cleft palate, as it requires methodologically rigorous studies to provide a secure evidence base for speech-language therapy practice (Bessell et al., 2013). Moreover, the use of telepractice in speech therapy has been highlighted as a potential solution to provide correctional and developmental services to children with speech disorders over long distances (Mytsyk & Pryshliak, 2020).

Furthermore, the initiation of physical, occupational, and speech therapy in children with traumatic brain injury has been emphasized, indicating the importance of speech therapy evaluation in such cases (Bennett et al., 2013). The effectiveness and efficiency of different arrangements for organizing and providing services for children and young people with speech, language, and communication difficulties have also been a subject of study, highlighting the significance of evidence-based practice in speech therapy (Lindsay, 2011; Lindsay et al., 2010). Moreover, a systematic review has shown the short-term efficacy of speech and language therapy for young children, emphasizing the positive impact of speech therapy interventions (Glogowska et al., 2000).

In addition, the use of telerehabilitation in speech-language pathology has been explored, indicating the potential for managing speech and language disorders in children through innovative approaches (Theodoros, 2008). Furthermore, the incidence of speech therapy has been found to be higher than estimated in earlier literature for children with conditions such as unilateral cleft lip and palate, emphasizing the substantial need for speech therapy in such cases (Alaluusua et al., 2022). It is also noteworthy that music therapy has shown measurable effects on the speech development of children, particularly in areas such as client-therapist relationship and communication, suggesting the potential of alternative therapeutic approaches in speech therapy (Groß et al., 2010).

Overall, the comprehensive analysis of various studies and interventions in speech therapy underscores the critical role of speech therapy in enhancing the communication skills of children with exceptional needs. The evidence-based practice and innovative approaches in speech therapy highlight the significance of addressing the diverse communication needs of children with exceptional conditions.

2. The Role of Speech Therapy

The development of communication skills in children with exceptional needs is a complex and multifaceted process, and speech therapy plays a pivotal role in aiding this development. Speech therapy encompasses a wide range of interventions and approaches that are tailored to the specific needs of each child, aiming to enhance their communication abilities. Through the use of evidence-based practices and innovative methodologies, speech therapy facilitates the acquisition and utilization of various communication skills, including speech, language, and social communication.

One of the fundamental ways in which speech therapy aids in skill development is through the enhancement of speech production and intelligibility. Studies have shown that speech therapy interventions result in improvements in intelligibility, independent communication, play, and socialization among children with speech disorders (Terband et al., 2017). Additionally, speech therapy is instrumental in addressing specific speech and language impairments, such as aphasia and pragmatic language impairments, thereby contributing to the overall development of communication skills (Adams & Lloyd, 2007; Fama et al., 2016).

Furthermore, speech therapy interventions are crucial in supporting the development of language skills in children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (Douglas & Gerde, 2019; Terband et al., 2017). These interventions focus on improving speech production, expressive language, and receptive language, thereby enabling children to effectively engage in verbal communication and express their thoughts and needs (Douglas & Gerde, 2019; Monish & Sreedevi, 2022). Moreover, speech therapy plays a vital role in addressing the unique communication challenges faced by children with conditions such as Down syndrome and Koolen-de Vries

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syndrome, contributing to the development of their play skills, interpersonal relationships, and pragmatic language abilities (Anghel & Agheana, 2022; John et al., 2022).

In addition to traditional speech therapy approaches, the use of alternative methods, such as group therapy and multimodal intervention programs, has been shown to be effective in promoting communication skills in children with diverse needs (Jagoe & Roseingrave, 2011; Niyazova et al., 2018). These approaches not only focus on speech and language development but also emphasize the enhancement of social interaction, empathy, and interpersonal competence, thereby fostering holistic communication skills development (Jagoe & Roseingrave, 2011; Niyazova et al., 2018).

Moreover, the use of assistive communication devices and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) has been highlighted as a valuable tool in supporting the restoration and acquisition of communication skills in children with speech and language disorders (Semansky et al., 2013; Wallace & Bradshaw, 2011). These technologies provide avenues for children to develop speech and language skills, thereby enhancing their overall communication abilities (Semansky et al., 2013; Wallace & Bradshaw, 2011).

In sum, speech therapy plays a critical role in the development of various communication skills in children with exceptional needs. By employing diverse methodologies and interventions, speech therapy contributes to the enhancement of speech production, language abilities, social communication, and pragmatic language skills, ultimately empowering children to effectively engage in communication and social interaction.

3. Critical Analysis

Speech therapy offers numerous benefits in aiding the development of communication skills in children with exceptional needs. It plays a pivotal role in addressing deficits associated with various disorders, such as autism spectrum disorders, aphasia, and speech and language impairments (Semansky et al., 2013). The most commonly used therapies to address deficits associated with these disorders include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and interventions such as behavior modification and social skills training based on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) (Semansky et al., 2013). Speech therapy interventions have been shown to positively impact communicative participation skills, including improvements in intelligibility, independent communication, play, and socialization among children with speech disorders (Thomas-Stonell et al., 2013). Additionally, speech therapy has been found to contribute to the improvement of social language and communication, thereby enhancing the overall communication abilities of children with exceptional needs (Semansky et al., 2013; Thomas-Stonell et al., 2013).

3.1. Benefits

Speech therapy offers a wide array of benefits in the development of communication skills in children with exceptional needs. It plays a crucial role in improving social language and communication, thereby enhancing the overall communication abilities of children with various disorders (Semansky et al., 2013). Additionally, speech therapy interventions have been shown to positively impact communicative participation skills, including improvements in intelligibility, independent communication, play, and socialization among children with speech disorders (Thomas-Stonell et al., 2013). Furthermore, speech therapy contributes to the enhancement of speech production, language abilities, social interaction, empathy, and interpersonal competence, fostering holistic communication skills development. Moreover, the use of assistive communication devices and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) has been highlighted as a valuable tool in supporting the restoration and acquisition of communication skills in children with speech and language disorders (Fama et al., 2016).

3.2. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its numerous benefits, speech therapy also presents challenges and limitations in the development of communication skills for children with exceptional needs. For instance, limitations in speech therapy interventions can impede skill development for practical communications, highlighting the need for continuous improvement and adaptation of therapeutic approaches (Qiu & Abdullah, 2021). Additionally, the comparative efficiency of treatment regimens for children with phonological impairments has been relatively unresearched, indicating a gap in understanding the optimal timing of intervention and the subcomponents of speech therapy interventions (Stackhouse et al., 2002). Furthermore, the discriminatory power of predictors in identifying reading disabilities has been assessed to be insufficient, suggesting the need for further

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research to enhance the effectiveness of speech therapy interventions (Gijsel et al., 2006).

3.3. *Comparative Analysis*

In comparison to other interventions, such as cochlear implantation and multidisciplinary therapy, speech therapy has been shown to significantly impact the development of communication skills in children with exceptional needs. For instance, cochlear implantation has been found to mirror the pattern of listening skill development seen in normal-hearing infants, indicating its efficacy in addressing auditory impairments (Miyamoto et al., 2005). On the other hand, multidisciplinary therapy has been assessed to achieve significant improvement in speech and communication skills among children with autism, highlighting its positive impact on the development of communication abilities (Sobaniec et al., 2017). However, the comparative efficiency of treatment regimens for children with phonological impairments has been relatively unresearched, indicating the need for further investigation to compare the efficacy of speech therapy with other interventions (Stackhouse et al., 2002).

4. Discussion

The field of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs is witnessing several current trends and ongoing research endeavors. Recent studies have focused on the implementation of speech therapy services and speech disorders assessment in regional psycho-pedagogical support centers, aiming to determine the main trends in the development of theoretical and practical requirements necessary for the communication and speech development of children with speech disorders (Aslanyan, 2023). Additionally, the use of telepractice in the system of providing correctional and developmental services to children with speech disorders has been explored, reflecting a trend towards leveraging technology to extend speech therapy assistance to children at a distance (Mytsyk & Pryshliak, 2020). Furthermore, the development of applications for early intervention speech therapy in children with intellectual disability has been a subject of recent research, indicating a growing emphasis on early intervention strategies in speech therapy (Niratama et al., 2023).

In the realm of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs, several latest developments have emerged. The BioVisualSpeech Corpus of Words with Sibilants has been developed, providing valuable data for the development of speech therapy games and tools, particularly for children with speech sound disorders (Cavaco et al., 2020). Moreover, customizable serious speech therapy games with dynamic difficulty adjustment have been introduced, catering to the specific needs of children with sigmatism and reflecting a trend towards personalized and engaging therapeutic interventions (Martins & Cavaco, 2022). Additionally, the development of a quality of life measure for children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs signifies a shift towards holistic assessments that encompass the broader impact of speech therapy on daily life (Markham et al., 2011).

Despite the progress in the field of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs, several research gaps persist. Continued research into more specific provision to subgroups of children is needed to identify better treatment methods, indicating a need for targeted and tailored interventions in speech therapy (Glogowska et al., 2000). Furthermore, the collection and analysis of data on children with speech, language, and communication needs present challenges to education and health services, highlighting the need for standardized criteria and comprehensive data collection methods (Lindsay, 2011). Moreover, the impact of early therapy termination on speech sound disorders in 5- to 6-year-old children remains an area of investigation, emphasizing the need for further understanding of the long-term effects of speech therapy interventions (Detter-Biesl & Schwartz, 2022).

In conclusion, the current trends and research in speech therapy for children with exceptional needs underscore the evolving nature of therapeutic interventions and the growing emphasis on personalized, technology-driven, and holistic approaches. However, research gaps persist, necessitating continued efforts to address specific subgroups, standardize assessments, and understand the long-term effects of speech therapy interventions.

5. Policy and Practice Implications

5.1. *Policy Recommendations*

The findings and developments in the field of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs have significant policy implications. It is recommended that policy frameworks prioritize the integration of evidence-based speech therapy interventions into early intervention practices, emphasizing family-centered approaches and the provision of services in natural environments as mandated by law Bruder & Dunst (2005). Additionally, there is a need

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for policies that support the implementation of telepractice in speech therapy services, particularly in underserved regions, to ensure equitable access to therapeutic interventions for children with speech disorders (Bruder & Dunst, 2005). Furthermore, policy recommendations should focus on the development of guidelines for the use of assistive communication devices and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to support the restoration and acquisition of communication skills in children with speech and language disorders (Allen et al., 2022).

5.2. Practical Implications

The evolving landscape of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs has practical implications for service delivery and clinical practice. It is essential for speech and language therapists to integrate reflective practice into clinical learning, emphasizing the use of reflective tools to enhance therapeutic interventions and improve clinical outcomes (Hill et al., 2012). Moreover, the development of serious speech therapy games with dynamic difficulty adjustment presents practical implications for engaging children with speech disorders in therapeutic exercises, highlighting the importance of personalized and motivating interventions (Martins & Cavaco, 2022). Additionally, the use of non-speech oro-motor exercises in acquired dysarthria management underscores the practical implications of incorporating diverse therapeutic approaches to address speech disorders (Mackenzie et al., 2010). Furthermore, the emerging contribution of speech and language therapists in awake craniotomy necessitates initiatives towards standard assessments and the integration of speech therapy into perioperative care practices (O'Neill et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the policy and practice implications of the latest developments in speech therapy for children with exceptional needs underscore the need for evidence-based policy frameworks that prioritize early intervention practices and equitable access to therapeutic interventions. Moreover, the practical implications emphasize the integration of reflective practice, personalized therapeutic interventions, and diverse therapeutic approaches into clinical service delivery.

6. Conclusion

The topic of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs is deeply connected to broader issues in education and healthcare, reflecting the fundamental importance of addressing communication challenges in individuals with diverse abilities. In the realm of education, the provision of evidence-based speech therapy interventions aligns with the overarching goal of inclusive education, emphasizing the need to support the communication and language development of all learners, irrespective of their individual needs. Furthermore, in the healthcare domain, speech therapy plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of children with exceptional needs, highlighting the intersection of communication abilities with holistic health outcomes.

In summary, this commentary has underscored the critical role of speech therapy in enhancing the communication skills of children with exceptional needs. The discussion has highlighted the diverse benefits of speech therapy interventions, including improvements in speech production, language abilities, social communication, and pragmatic language skills. Additionally, the analysis has emphasized the challenges and limitations within the field, as well as the comparative efficacy of speech therapy with other interventions. Furthermore, the commentary has addressed current trends, latest developments, research gaps, policy recommendations, and practical implications in the field of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs.

In conclusion, the analysis of speech therapy for children with exceptional needs underscores the significance of evidence-based interventions in addressing communication challenges. The findings emphasize the need for continued research, policy support, and clinical innovation to ensure equitable access to high-quality speech therapy services for all children, thereby promoting their holistic development and well-being.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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