

UNDERSTANDING AND CHARACTERIZING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE FIELD
OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY WITHIN AN ECOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Past research suggests that exposure shapes careers in speech-language pathology and related healthcare fields including occupational therapy and nursing. With the growing demand for professionals in speech-language pathology (SLP) and the lack of understanding in stakeholder perspectives, there needs to be more research surrounding the impact of experiences in SLP on career choices. This study investigates the influence of current and previous experiences of university students in SLP on their career choices. Participants completed an online questionnaire to assess their experience with SLP and the extent to which this experience influenced their career paths. Among 160 respondents, 44% reported receiving SLP services themselves. Fifteen of these participants who had received services completed a follow-up semi-structured interview. The interviews revealed several themes regarding the perspectives of the services received and the impact of SLP experiences on their career choices. Themes were developed surrounding the influences of confidence, comfortable learning environment, family support, and peer judgements. In terms of career decision, individuals' motivation to reciprocate, their career qualities being shaped, and career perspectives varied throughout interviewees. These findings are discussed in the context within the ecological perspective and the existing evidence base. Implications for practice and future research directions are also explored.

Introduction

The field of speech-language pathology (SLP) is experiencing a growing demand for professionals. From 2019 to 2029, the American Speech and Hearing Association estimates the job outlook to increase by 25%, surpassing the growth rate for most other occupations. “As a result of the growth, an estimate of 40,500 speech-language pathology jobs will be available over the 10-year period” (ASHA, 2022). As the demand for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) continues to rise, it is essential to understand the factors that lead to the recruitment and retention of professionals to ensure demands are met across the lifespan. Failure to meet this demand could potentially impact service availability and quality of care.

Demand for Speech-Language Pathologists

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, SLP job employment is projected to grow nineteen percent from 2022-2032, much higher than other occupations (BLS, 2023). There are a variety of factors contributing to the continually increasing demand for SLPs. First, SLPs work with clients across the lifespan. Susan Karr, the Associate Director of School Services for ASHA, attests to the versatility of SLPs and highlights offer services across all age groups, demonstrating their diverse range of expertise (AMN, 2022). The U.S. Census reported the geriatric population, grew much faster than the overall population from 1920-2020 (Caplan, 2023). This age shift introduces an influx of diverse needs, such as stroke, dementia, and brain injuries. These conditions can result in the need for speech, language, and/or swallowing intervention (ASHA, 2022).

However, SLPs have the potential to treat clients of any age, including children. Since 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated that referred children, from three to twenty-one years of age, are entitled to specialized education and related services (IDEA,

2023). This federal requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ensures that children in the school system receive the necessary support for their education, which can include speech-language therapy. Additionally, accessible resources in early intervention are playing a crucial role in educating and encouraging parents to monitor their child's communication milestones and abilities (Murine & Kollia, 2015). This emphasis on early intervention for children with communication needs is likely contributing to the growing demand for SLPs.

Finally, also contributing to the demand for SLPs could be the multitude of environments in which they can treat, such as research labs, educational environments, and healthcare settings (ASHA, 2022). These professionals are also expected to work with a diverse client population amongst a team of interdisciplinary professionals, audiologists, teachers, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, and/or alone. The steady growth in the demand for SLPs is not surprising, due to the diverse range of settings and diagnoses they treat across the lifespan.

Limited or Inaccurate Knowledge About the Profession

The limited knowledge of the SLP profession amid its growing demand raises concerns and highlights the need for enhanced public understanding surrounding the field. A survey study conducted by Greenwood et al. (2006) aimed to investigate factors influencing attitudes toward a career in SLP. Results found that one third of the undergraduate students reported knowing nothing about the profession or had never heard of it (Greenwood et al., 2006). Without prior knowledge of this profession, students choosing their career path cannot consider it as a career choice. Moreover, in the same study, less than 50% of respondents were aware that a degree was required to practice as an SLP (Greenwood et al., 2006).

A study conducted by Byrne (2010) indicated that students who were enrolled in similar allied health science professions, such as occupational therapy, education, social work, and physical therapy also had limited knowledge of speech-language pathology as a career choice. This finding is surprising given that related careers have a greater potential for overlap and interactions with professionals in the SLP field. When surveying students enrolled in allied health programs, SLP, and similar fields, a study reported an influencing factor in career choice was the desire to help others (Barfield et al., 2011). In Stone and Pellowski's (2016) study, the desire to work in a helping profession was emphasized with seventy percent of undergraduate and graduate students indicated altruism being a driving influence for career choice. This was found in other related studies as well (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000; Byrne 2007, 2008; Lass et al., 1995; Rockwood & Madison, 1993; Stone & Pellowski, 2016). If individuals in alike majors share similar altruistic views, they may be more likely to consider the field of SLP if they are introduced earlier or at all. Research suggests educating related healthcare fields because improved relationships could possibly foster a greater appreciation in the workplace (Byrne, 2010). Interdisciplinary work between allied health professionals could increase interest toward the field of SLP and in turn, may result in more students seeking out this career. Overall, research emphasizes the importance of expanding students' awareness of career opportunities in allied health fields (Byrne, 2010; Barfield et al., 2011).

While limited knowledge of the field of SLP is prevalent among some, there is another factor that could potentially affect entry into the field. The proliferation of inaccurate knowledge about the field has possibly had negative impacts on recruitment and retention. Notably, Greenwood et al. (2006) found that some opinions about SLP careers were grounded in inaccurate information. During interviews, respondents were asked about their willingness to

enter this field, and one response displayed a dismissive opinion. For instance, a parent recounted a session with a licensed SLP for their child, which was viewed as mere playtime, indicating a lack of perceived importance. This anecdote exemplifies the potential impact of misinformation.

Limited SLP-Related Opportunities

The root of the recruitment issue can stem from limited opportunities for exposure to this career. This could potentially impact students' interest in the field. Barfield and coauthors (2011) focused on identifying the factors associated with enrollment in allied health programs to help recruit interested students and potentially increase enrollment. They surveyed undergraduate students and found six factors that were independently associated with influencing career choice in an allied health profession. Among these factors were personal influence, social influence, and individual aspiration, along with academic preparation, career opportunity, and self-efficacy. This finding suggests that students in allied healthcare fields rated mentoring or personal influences as less influential compared to students in unrelated professions. This was attributed to a small percentage of high school and college faculty teaching allied health courses, thereby limiting exposure before secondary education (Barfield et al., 2011). In an earlier study conducted to survey current undergraduate students' expectations for graduate schooling, few of the respondents chose the SLP path before secondary education (Rockwood & Madison, 1993). This suggests that students may not be aware of this career as an option while attending high school.

A study by Wallace, Mathew, Mandrusiak, and Hatton (2021) surveyed speech-language pathology students who had experience in the field as undergraduate first-year students. They aimed to explore how these experiences impacted interest in pursuing a career as an SLP

specializing in geriatric care. This study concluded that we must think about the potential influences that could materialize from positive experiences happening early in SLP students' education (Wallace et al., 2021). This research could form a continuum for seeking opportunities based on experience. The findings suggest early learning experiences can influence career choices, possibly contributing to meeting the demands for SLPs. While this study did not directly inquire whether these early experiences influenced their career decisions, the absence of any reported negative experiences in speech-language pathology following this learning experience is noteworthy (Wallace et al., 2021). This suggests that while we cannot definitively conclude that early experiences impact career choice in SLP, they did not appear to have any negative impact on the individuals surveyed.

Importance of Exposure

In a few studies surveying influence in entering SLP, the selected individuals were mainly those who already chose SLP as a career and had identified having an exposure to the field in some capacity (Brodsky & Cook, 2000; Byrne, 2008, 2015; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Tillard, 2011). The types of exposure to the field varied, ranging from direct to indirect experiences. However, the consistency of this finding across studies suggests that any form of exposure to the field can influence individuals in choosing a career in SLP. Findings by Wallace and colleagues (2021) suggest that exposure may have the capacity to influence graduate career choices. These results parallel the study by Adamson et al. (2003), who reported that nearly three-quarters of the SLP students and others from related fields mentioned prior exposure played a role in their career decision. Furthermore, Byrne found that awareness of the field and exposure were positively associated when prospective SLP students were asked about entering the field. In fact, 68% of students reported a previous exposure to the profession and more than

half identified factors of influence directly related to exposure (Byrne, 2008). This commonality between studies emphasizes the role that exposure can play in influencing career choice.

Within the allied healthcare fields, the most common factors influencing career decisions include the desire to work with people, the desire to work in a 'helping profession,' and the diversity of work environments within the field (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000; Byrne, 2007, 2008; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Lass et al., 1995; Rockwood & Madison, 1993). Across studies, it is emphasized that individuals tend to prioritize decision-making based on a combination of influences rather than the impact of one factor alone. Thus, it introduces the notion that there are various reasons why individuals choose a career. Considering every exposure as a potential influence reflects a holistic perspective. The importance of the holistic perspective is highlighted in the study by Barfield and colleagues (2011). This study describes the potential for limited awareness among allied healthcare fields in relation to influential factors for decision-making among potential students. Due to a range of factors contributing to one's choice in career path and the significance of exposure in shaping perspectives, it is imperative to apply a framework that underpins our understanding of influence. In this study, we utilize key components of the mesosystem and the microsystem in the ecological framework to shed light on how exposure intertwines with influence.

Theory Implementation: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework

This research is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, which serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding the multifaceted influences on career choices, particularly in the context of speech-language pathology. Tudge and colleagues (2009) evaluated the uses of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and highlighted the importance of accurately representing the theoretical motivations of a study by being more explicit. Their findings suggest

that articles should either represent the most up-to-date version of the theory or apply an early version of it appropriately but also explain what portion is being used. It is important to clearly state how this theory is being used as it has been found to be misused in the past (Tudge et al., 2016). This theory helps us to understand the factors in our lives that most impact our development and well-being by considering outside influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework emphasizes the importance of exploring various influencing factors and understanding how they intertwine to shape experiences and their impacts. Past research on the influences affecting career choices in SLP has not consistently used theoretical approaches that emphasize the bio-psycho-social influences. This framework aligns with the holistic nature of speech-language pathology.

Bronfenbrenner explains that the individual is surrounded by five subsystems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. In this study's context, the emphasis is on understanding the influential factors related to exposure to the field within the microsystem and mesosystem. Further, the emphasis is on understanding the influential factors related to exposure to the field of SLP within the microsystem and mesosystem. Focusing on the microsystem and mesosystem specifically allows for a comprehensive view of the influences from experience on career choice due to their direct relevance to the experiences and influences that individuals encounter in their immediate and broader environments. The microsystem, the innermost system, focuses on factors of direct influence within an individual's immediate environment. This system encompasses the individual's direct experiences, which could include interactions with family members or personally receiving services. By examining student experiences within this system, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the influential factors that shape career choices.

Additionally, Tudge et al. (2009) identified the key elements of Bronfenbrenner's later work, particularly the emphasis on proximal processes in human development. As the theory developed overtime, there is a new importance placed on incorporating all four elements of the PPCT model (process, person, context, and time) in research guided by this theory. These processes involve the interactions between an individual and their immediate environment, such as family, peers, and school. Proximal processes are crucial because they directly impact the individual's development and well-being. Understanding these elements is crucial for assessing the accuracy and application of Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Moreover, the mesosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1994), involves exploring broader influences within the field, such as working with a professional in an allied healthcare field. The mesosystem encompasses influences that extend beyond direct interactions, affecting other factors in our lives over time. For instance, the mesosystem can be observed in the relationships and connections between home, school, or family and the workplace, extending beyond individual microsystems.

Work as an Influence

In Byrne's (2015) study, which focused on occupational therapy (OT) students' exposure to the field, 'working with an OT' emerged as the third most influential factor on career choice. This highlights the role that exposure through job shadowing, observation, or employment can play in the decision-making process, with the substantial majority choosing this influence. In the United Kingdom, over 84% of prospective students who had observed speech-language pathologists had also choose SLP as their first choice in career (Patterson & Woodward, 1996).

An important observation from Byrnes' (2015) study is the overlap of roles that can potentially shape influences. An individual may have a parent or mentor who works as an allied

healthcare professional, which could contribute to the impact of exposures. This overlap highlights the interconnectedness of influences. In the study by Barfield and colleagues (2011), a mentor can be a number of people in one's life, "consisting of family members, high school or college counselors, and allied health professionals." These mentors play a crucial role in shaping individuals career choices, providing guidance, support, and valuable insights into various professions, including allied healthcare fields such as speech-language pathology. Mentors can encompass a diverse range of individuals, including family members, college counselors, peers, coaches, or even other related healthcare professionals. Given the overlapping of these roles, a mentor in the workplace through observation or shadowing can play a role in influencing career decisions.

Byrne (2007) conducted interviews with undergraduate SLP students, revealing that they primarily gathered information about the field through personal acquaintances who were SLPs, indicating personal connections with allied healthcare professionals. This suggests that individuals who know an SLP can be educated about the field. The study by Stone and Pellowski (2016) utilized a questionnaire to investigate factors affecting career choice among undergraduate and graduate students. Results were found that students reported knowing a speech-language pathologist, and it influenced their career choice. For example, these findings suggest that personally knowing a speech-language pathologist can influence career choices, similar to the influence of exposure through friends or family members.

Family as an Influence

Byrne's (2007) study found through interviews that information about SLP as a career and its influence on career choice often came from one main source: exposure to SLP through family members. Students indicated being directly influenced by their family members who had

experience with the profession or who had received services themselves. Additionally, 60% of the students identified that one of their parents was working in a healthcare or education field and that this was influential for their career choice (Byrne 2007). This aligns with research that asked prospective and current students to identify the most influential factors on career choice, with 'parents' and 'family' being the most selected choices (Tillard, 2011). These findings align with other survey-based studies (Byrne, 2010, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2006; McAllister et al., 2011; Stone & Pellowski, 2016), all of which identified family as an influence in career choice. This underscores the role of family within the ecological framework, particularly within the microsystem. Direct relationships and interactions within this system have a greater potential for influence overall. According to Bronfenbrenner, the parent-child dynamic can have a stronger influence than other relationships, given the role caregivers play in our lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This family influence extends to related fields such as occupational therapy (OT) and revealed that pursuing OT careers were highly influenced by 'parents/family' followed by the influence of a 'family member used therapy' (Byrne, 2015). Utilizing associated career paths, such as occupational therapy, for job outlook research in speech-language pathology is beneficial because there is limited research surrounding this field and there are commonalities of influence in allied health career paths (Barfield et al., 2011). The results in this study may be attributed to nearly half of the participants in this study that had a family member employed in the field. This is an example of family as an influence in multiple contexts (Barfield et al., 2011).

Primary Experience as Influence

Receiving direct treatment from an SLP may lead to a different perspective and influence than the other, less direct, exposures. Eleven percent of the sample (n=96) in Byrne (2008) was

comprised of students who received SLP intervention. Conversely, in various investigations involving current and prospective SLP students, a higher response identified a family member or friend who had received SLP services, rather than themselves. For instance, Stone and Pellowski (2016) found that when individuals with communication disorders received services, seventy-seven percent acknowledged it had some effect on their decision to major in SLP. However, without further follow-up to explore the individuals' perceptions, the extent and nature of the influence remains unclear.

While some studies indicate that individuals undergoing SLP intervention might be less inclined to pursue a career in the field themselves, there is evidence suggesting that their exposure to SLP has the potential to influence their family members or peers to consider SLP as a career (Byrne, 2008). This suggests that while individuals directly receiving SLP services may not be as likely to pursue the profession themselves, their experience could serve as inspiration for others to explore the field. Having a communication disorder could prompt someone close to seek information about the profession, potentially contributing to the field in ways that were previously overlooked.

The Current Study

In the limited past research surrounding identification of factors influencing career choice in SLP from experiences has been placed within varying theoretical approaches. However, this study will be situated within the ecological human development theory by Bronfenbrenner which has not been utilized when exploring potentially influential experiences in SLP on career choice. By considering influences on career decisions, such as family and work opportunities as described in the micro and mesosystems of the ecological framework, this study aims to provide

a comprehensive understanding of students' career trajectories influences by their exposure to SLP.

This research is novel because it focuses on the experiences of all students, not limited to those who have already chosen a career in SLP or related healthcare fields. This approach is critical because previous studies have mainly investigated current and/or prospective students in these fields, which could potentially yield different results (Adamson et al., 2003; Byrne 2008; Patterson & Woodward, 1996; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Tillard, 2011). Also, this study includes a follow-up component after the questionnaire to delve deeper into the impact of speech-language therapy experiences, while past studies have concluded after a single method. Previous research that incorporated follow-up interviews focused solely on parents of children receiving speech-language therapy (McAllister, 2011), leaving a gap in the literature regarding direct follow-up with the patients themselves.

In contrast to existing questionnaire studies, the online questionnaire portion considered all types of exposures to the field of SLP and their potential impact on students' career choices. This comprehensive approach allows us to better understand the wide range of current influential exposures in SLP. In the interview portion of this study, we focused on the primary experiences in the field of SLP to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences more specifically. This information aids in characterizing experiences and understanding possible student interest to enter the field from direct experiences.

This study explores Ohio University students' perspectives on their experiences with the field of SLP and how these experiences influence their career choices. By understanding their perspectives, this research may inform prospective students and encourage them to seek more information after exposure to the field. The primary research question for the online

questionnaire portion of this study is: How do individuals who have experience in the field of speech-language pathology characterize their indirect or direct exposure? This question is framed within the mesosystem, which encompasses the broader influences that extend beyond individual therapy sessions.

The semi-structured interviews focused on direct experiences and aim to answer the following questions: 1) What are the students' perspectives on the nature and types of services received? 2) What impact, if any, has participation in speech-language therapy had on the participants' career path? The questions are mainly within the microsystem, representing the immediate environments in which individuals interact. By exploring the individual's perceptions of the services received and the potential impact on their career choices, we aim to examine the direct influences within their immediate environment. This includes experiences within therapy sessions, interactions with the SLPs, and personal reflections on these encounters. Overall, these questions seek to shed light on the interaction between personal experiences and environmental influences within the context of SLP.

Method

The online questionnaire included four main sections: demographics, primary experience, identification of other exposures, and ranking the influence of indirect exposures on career choice. Respondents with primary exposures were then invited to a semi-structured interview exploring their direct exposure to SLP and examining their impact on career decisions.

Participants

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Ohio University's Institutional Review Board prior to the commencement of the study (24-X-34).

Questionnaire Recruitment

The recruitment process for the online questionnaire involved distributing a mass email via Microsoft Office to 34,970 students across Ohio University campuses. The email provided an overview of the study's purpose and included instructions for accessing the questionnaire through a provided link.

Questionnaire Criteria

In order to be eligible for the online questionnaire, inclusionary criteria are as follows: individuals who (a) are 18 years of age or older; (b) are enrolled at Ohio University's main campus or regional campuses; (c) having any exposure to the field of speech-language pathology, indirectly or directly, (e.g., family member who received services, working/volunteering, shadowing/observing, or other self-described exposures); (d) have access to the technology required to complete the online questionnaire via Qualtrics. The online questionnaire initially received 248 responses, with 160 deemed viable. Viability required completion of all quantitative questions which involves the ranking of their other exposures on how influential

they were on career choice. If they did not complete the ranking of influence portion, their response was not considered in the dataset.

Interview Recruitment

The seventy respondents who identified having a direct exposure in the online questionnaire and expressed interest in continued participation were invited to provide their Ohio University email address for further contact. Thirty-three participants entered their emails and from this group, 15 individuals were randomly selected by randomized drawing for follow-up interviews. For those who participated in both phases of the study, their responses were linked while ensuring complete deidentification.

Interview Criteria

To be eligible for the semi-structured interview, participants met all criteria from the questionnaire and also (a) responded to the online questionnaire; (b) had a primary/direct exposure to the field of SLP, such as being the patient themselves; and (c) access to the technology required to complete the online interview via Microsoft Teams. Seventy participants indicated they had primary exposures, and 33 identified they were interested in completing semi-structured interviews by entering their email. Out of the interested individuals, fifteen randomly drawn participants were selected to be interviewed using a script to ensure likeness.

Materials

For the online questionnaire, the necessary materials include: (a) the online questionnaire via Qualtrics software and (b) a device to complete the online questionnaire. For the semi-structure interviews, materials consist of: (a) the semi-structured interview script and (b) the Microsoft Teams application. The Microsoft Office program is accessible by all enrolled Ohio University

students and is compatible with screen/audio recording to facilitate live transcription and later review.

Procedures

Online Questionnaire

Prior to completing the questionnaire, all participants were directed to the online consent form (see Appendix A). To gather information about participants' broader experiences with the field of speech-language pathology, a 25-item questionnaire was created using Qualtrics software. See Appendix B. There were four major sections in the questionnaire, demographics, primary exposure, other exposures, and influence of other exposures. Participants provided explicit consent through a mandatory "yes-or-no" question integrated within Qualtrics. If participants selected "yes," they proceeded to the four main sections of the questionnaire; if they chose "no," indicating non-consent, the questionnaire was automatically concluded.

The first section focused on demographic information, encompassing closed- and open-ended questions about participant age, sex, race or ethnic identity, primary language, and undergraduate major or graduate area of study. The subsequent section explored primary experiences within SLP. Specific questions regarding the frequency, age, and setting of the direct experience were prompted if the participant indicated having a direct exposure. If participants did not have a primary exposure, they were directed to the next section, which asked participants to identify other exposures to the field—such as having a family member receive services, volunteering/working, or shadowing/observing a professional.

The final section of the online questionnaire centered on the influence of these other exposures. Those who identified other exposures they had with the field of SLP were asked to independently rank the influence of their experience on their career choice using a scale of 1 to 5.

Individuals were also asked to rank the overall influence of their experiences together. They also had the option to indicate “Not applicable” if the experience did not apply to them. At the end of the questionnaire, participants could express interest in a follow-up interview, targeting those with direct/primary experiences in SLP. Responders had the option to enter an email address for a \$25 gift card raffle. With consent, data from the online questionnaire were linked to the interview data.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants reviewed the online consent form (see Appendix C) and were interviewed individually via Microsoft Teams. The semi-structured interview questions focused on their direct experiences while receiving SLP services and explored how these experiences influenced their career choices. Additionally, the interview inquired about the impact of work/school, family, and relationship with the speech-language pathologist within their experiences. All sessions were recorded, transcribed, and coded for major themes and subthemes across all participant transcripts (see Appendix D). Participants received a \$25 gift card as compensation for participation in interviews.

Data Preparation and Analysis

In the online questionnaire, quantitative data from the coded questions were manually entered into SPSS software for analysis. Frequencies and descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, and ranges) were analyzed in the program, IBM SPSS-29.0. The graphics were created in Microsoft Excel by manually entering the data from SPSS.

For the follow-up interviews, the thematic analysis (TA) process was used to develop patterns and tell the overall story of the participants with direct exposures (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data analysis process began with familiarization, which involved immersing myself

in the data to gain a thorough understanding of the content. During this phase, I read and re-read the interview transcripts to identify patterns related to the influence of speech-language therapy on individuals' lives. This initial immersion allowed me to become familiar with the nuances of the data and helped me generate initial codes based on the content of the interviews. By using color coding with various highlighters, pens, and markers, I was able to differentiate between the patterns visually in this beginning stage.

Following familiarization, the next step in Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis process was coding, where I systematically labeled and categorized data extracts representing similar ideas. This involved process included sticky notes and color codes to organize the meaningful extracts and assign descriptive labels to them. These initial codes helped me deductively understand the data by identifying recurring patterns related to the impact of speech-language therapy at distinct levels, the individual, in-session, and beyond the session. After first creating codes based on the dataset, I refined them based on the research questions at the end of this stage.

The next phase involved developing themes, where I reviewed and refined the initial codes to identify broader patterns that emerged. This process required comparing and contrasting codes, looking for connections between different concepts. I tried diverse ways to display the data to ensure that it was clearly and accurately highlighting the lived experiences of the respondents. For example, for each theme that was a developing pattern had its own sheet in which I would use sticky notes with data extracts to reorganize the overall themes to ensure richness. Through this iterative process, I identified several key themes, such as the role of family support and the impact on the individual overall.

In accordance with the TA practices of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), reflexivity was identified as essential to the entire process (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 13). Reflexivity is acknowledging your role in the research process, the implications of that position, and bias that can result. To remain mindful of my potential personal influence and maintain reflexivity, I journaled about my involvement with the data. With my personal experience of having a family member who received services, I recognize the possible impact on my interpretations and analysis. It is noted by Braun and Clarke (2022) as crucial to acknowledge researcher bias to differentiate participants' experiences and avoid influencing analysis. This step is imperative to ensure the participants' voices were heard clearly.

Moving onto the next, more systematic phase of reflexive thematic analysis, I focused on the specific observations from the interview responses, identifying more common patterns among the data and reviewing the themes generated. It became clearer to me that the underlying influence at various levels of the ecological framework was contributing to the individuals' experiences in their unique ways. Organizing themes according to these levels helped me relate participants' experiences to the overall framework.

Once the themes were identified, I began defining themes, which involved clarifying the definitions of each theme based on the data. This process required me to ensure that each theme accurately represented the data and that there was “a story” between themes. This step helped me establish clear boundaries for each theme and ensured that they were grounded in the data. There were a set of questions I followed to facilitate this process and ensure that each theme was evaluated on the same basis. (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 99).

I followed the author's advice to "let things go" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 111). Through refining, revising, and renaming the developed themes, I delved deeper into the overall

meaning that the data was telling. I categorized the themes based on the locations of influence—individual, in-session, and beyond the session. This iterative process allowed me to develop a deep understanding of the data within the context of the ecological framework. Major themes were developed throughout the fifteen semi-structured interviews, and these intersected with the micro- and mesosystems of the ecological framework. This process provided more detail to the direct experiences of those in speech-language therapy and how they relate to the ecological framework's systems.

The final phase of the analysis involved writing the report, where I synthesized the findings and presented them in a coherent and meaningful way. This process required me to contextualize the themes within the broader literature on speech-language therapy and career choice, highlighting the significance of the findings and their implications for practice. Overall, the thematic analysis process allowed me to systematically analyze and interpret the data, providing valuable insights into the impact of speech-language therapy on individuals' lives.

Results

Online Questionnaire Overview

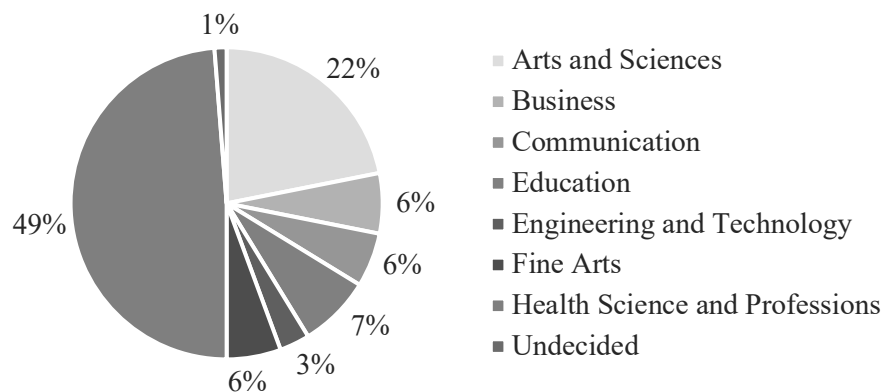
In the online questionnaire, we initially received 248 responses and 160 were deemed viable. In the questionnaire, there were four major sections, demographics, primary exposure, other exposures, and influence of other exposures.

Questionnaire Demographics

Of the individuals that responded to the demographic questions pertaining to their gender identity, 74% were female (n=118), 20% were male (n=32), and 6% preferred to self-describe (n=10). The ages of the participants ranged from 18-47 with an average age of 22.5. The majority (n=144) spoke English as their primary language, thirteen students identified being multilingual, and three preferred to not respond. 49% (n=78) of the participants were from the College of Health Sciences and Professions which includes the major of speech language pathology. The individuals who responded to the questionnaire were 77% undergraduate students (n=123) and 23% were graduate students (n=37).

Figure 1

Majors

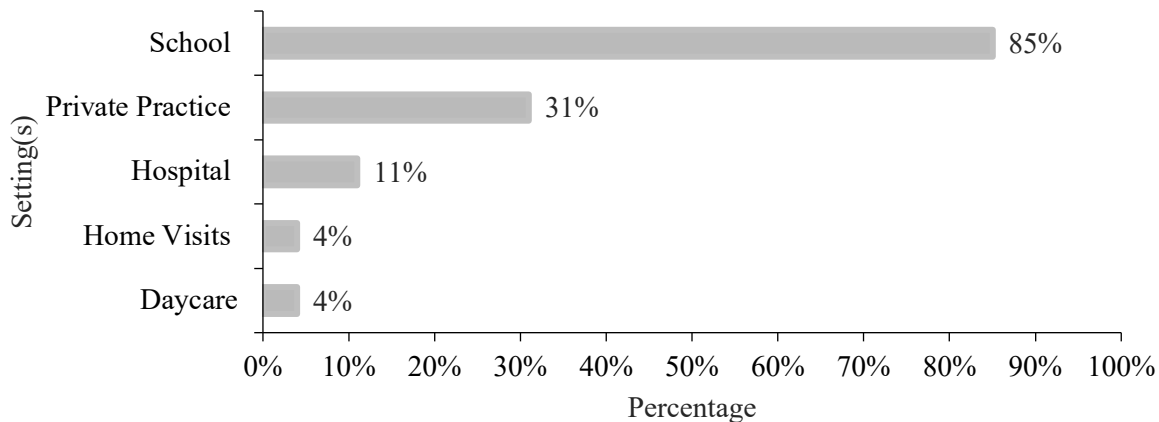


Note. Majors/programs of participants across seven colleges at Ohio University

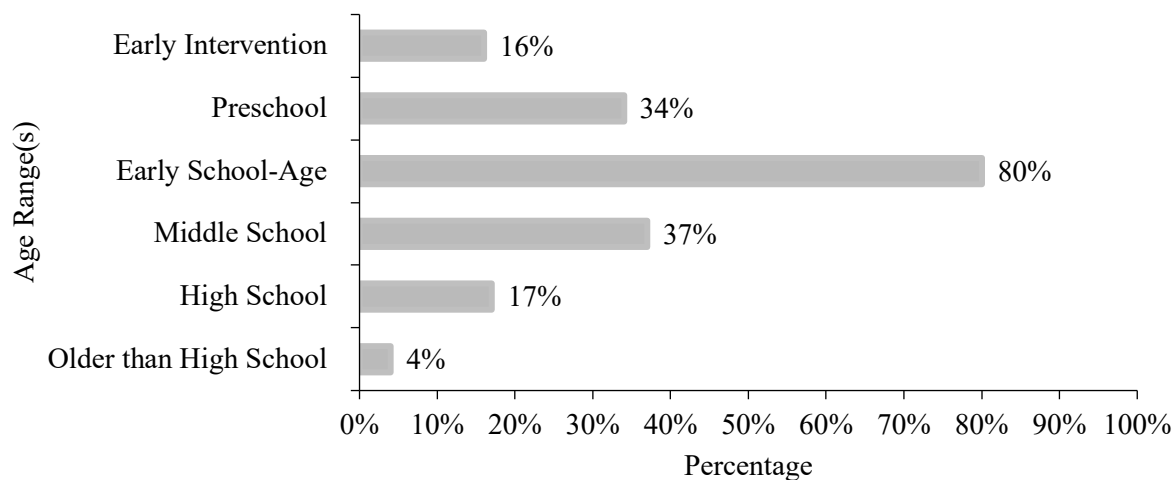
Primary Exposure. After the demographic portion of the questionnaire, individuals were asked if they have received services themselves from speech-language pathologists, labelled as a primary exposure. If respondents indicated direct exposure to the field, they were directed to answer three questions related to their experience with setting, age range(s), and frequency. Of the 160 responses, 44% (n=70) indicated having a primary experience. The majority, at 85%, indicated receiving services in the school system. The next highest selected setting was private practice at 31%. Hospital, home visits, and daycare all resulted in less than 12% selection. For the age ranges, aligning with the findings for setting, early school age range was the highest selected age at 80% and other ages followed with middle school and preschool following behind at 37% and 34% respectively. For frequency, over half of the responses for in therapy attendance were chosen at once a week, a schedule that mimics intervention in the school schedule.

Figure 2

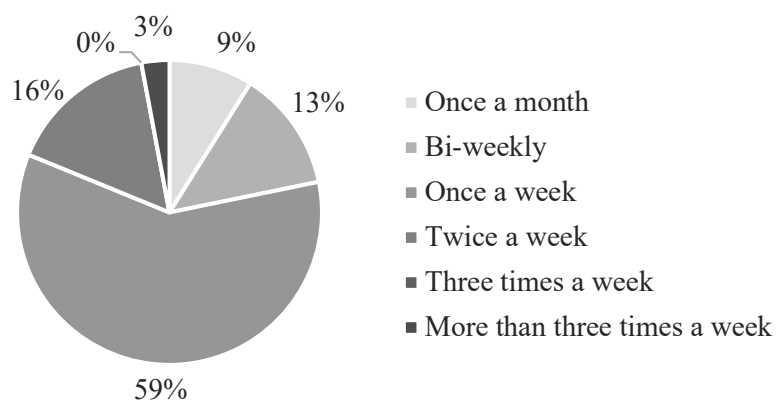
Primary Exposure Setting(s)



Note. Settings at which participants received services themselves.

Figure 3*Primary Exposure Age Range(s)*

Note. Age Range(s) in which participants received services themselves.

Figure 4*Primary Exposure Frequency*

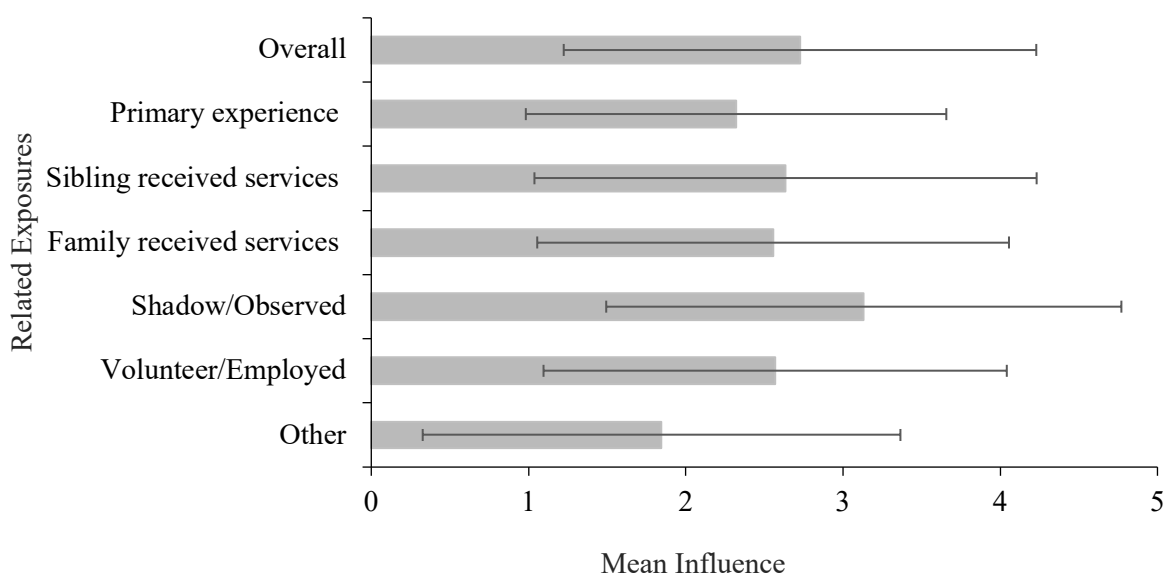
Note. How often participants received services themselves.

Influence of Other Exposures. Along with identifying if they had received SLP services, participants identified other exposures within the field. This could be a family member who received services, working or volunteering with a SLP, shadowing or observing an SLP, or

other exposures the individual preferred to self-describe. Upon identification of these exposures, participants were also asked to rank how influential they were on their career choice. They were asked to rank the influence of all exposures considered together and also the influence of each exposure individually on a scale of 1-5 (1 = no influence and 5 = very influential). The responses were analyzed by mean and standard deviation in Figure 5. Out of the options provided for exposure, shadowing/observing was selected highest out of the other options in terms of influence. The responses for ranking the influence of all exposures together were selected the second most out of the choices with volunteering or being employed by an SLP following closely behind at the third highest selection.

Figure 5

Influence of Other Exposure(s)



Note. Students ranked each related exposure on a 5-point scale. (1 = no influence at all; 5 = very influential) The error bars present represent the standard deviation of each choice.

Interview Overview

Fifteen participants who identified having a direct experience from the questionnaire were interviewed on their experiences and how they potentially influenced their career choices. The following overview table describes main themes developed from the research question, what are the nature and perspectives of the services received?

Table 1

Themes for Perspectives of Services Received

Location	Theme	Subthemes	Definition
Individual	Newfound Confidence		Feeling more understood after being able to implement strategies learned in-session and noted a new-found confidence in peer interactions.
In-session	Comfortable Environment	Community	There were several subthemes contributing to overall participant success. Participants noted feeling more comfortable with someone with expertise and a community of friends to relate to during the personalized sessions.
		View of SLP	
		Tailored Treatment	
Beyond the Session	Family Support in Home Practice		Family support was noted as imperative by some. Most described practice outside of sessions provided encouragement and emotional support which boosted motivation.
	Peer Judgement		Some noted peers did not understand why they were being pulled from the classroom which led to being looked at differently or “lightly teased.” There was variation among responses.

Note. The operational definitions are descriptions of developed themes.

Individual

Newfound Confidence. In the first category, the theme, 'Newfound Confidence,' was developed when exploring how individuals with experiences in speech-language therapy felt more understood after being able to implement strategies learned in therapy. They noted a result of attending speech-language therapy was an increased, or even newfound confidence in communicating with their peers. One individual noted:

I was like more comfortable talking to friends, and like I could actually talk to them because they could understand what I'm saying. So that definitely changed, like my social life. I remember just being less shy and confident in what I was doing... I became just a lot more confident talking to people and would do it more often, so it definitely increased and like benefited the relationships.

This quotation explores the experience of speech-language therapy directly impacting their social life, specifically with peers. Being understood was noted as the main contributor to finding more personal confidence in social settings.

It definitely impacted them [relationships with others] in a positive way...It made me feel way more confident with speaking to others, kind of making friends. And that's such a crucial time when you're making friends and talking to people. And the first thing people notice when you're a kid like your appearance, how you speak, and what you talk about because it's just so surface level. So, it was really nice to understand that kids could finally see me just for more than my speech impediment. I felt confident going into middle school knowing that was kind of in the past. So, definitely kind of gave me a new I guess perspective on making friends and kind of gaining a little more confidence than I had previously.

This quote reflects how this individuals' experience in speech-language therapy positively impacted their relationships with others, particularly with making friends. Being understood was highlighted and allowed them to be seen for more than just how they speak. They commented on the surface nature of relationships at a young age, emphasizing how impactful an experience like speech-language therapy can be in various areas of our lives. The experience gave them a new perspective on making friends and boosted their confidence as they entered a new stage of their life.

In-session: Comfortable Environment

Community. Contributing to the theme 'Comfortable Environment', the subtheme of 'Community' was developed to highlight the impact of friendships created in the speech-language therapy sessions themselves. The majority of participants identified attending speech-language therapy during the school day and expressed feeling less isolated when engaging in small group sessions with peers. This emphasizes the importance of social connections within the therapy environment. Even those attending speech-language therapy outside of the school session noted community was important for their progress. For example, one participant noted:

We would have like another person in the room with us, like another student. So, I remember that would be helpful a lot. Like, not only are we helping each other, but like now we know that there's other people with this problem too and like not to be embarrassed cause there's more people than you think that are dealing with this... I'm like I don't know, it makes it more fun and I'm not the only person messing up right now.

This quote illustrates how peer support within therapy sessions can positively impact individuals' experiences and motivation to engage in therapy. They emphasize the contribution of having

other students in therapy with them helped with the therapy itself and with the emotional impact.

Another individual mentioned:

It was a communal, it was a community we all like shared the same- some people have different words they can't say...So, we were all together like struggling in the same area, if that makes sense. So, we were kind of like one big family.

This participant highlights the sense of community and support they felt during speech-language therapy. Describing it as a communal experience where everyone shared similar challenges emphasizes the created sense of unity through understanding. The phrase "we were kind of like one big family" suggests a strong bond and connection among the participants, emphasizing the typically supportive nature of the therapy environment. This quote reflects the theme "Comfortable Environment" by showing how peer support and shared experiences can create an encouraging atmosphere for therapy.

View of the SLP. Another subtheme that was developed in relation to the theme "Comfortable Environment" was the subtheme of 'View of the SLP.' This subtheme delves into how participants' perceptions of their speech-language pathologist (SLP) influenced their therapy experience. The participants' view of the SLP contributed to their motivation in the session and made the interaction feel less intimidating.

I really liked her, actually. I loved going with her every time that she would call on me. I mean, I always had a really good relationships with school anyways, but I enjoyed going to the room with her and doing the little exercises that we did because to me it was still learning ...I remember it was less of a "get up and teach" style. It was definitely more of a interact[ion]. Not like being talked at, or being talked to, but being talked *with*. And like the way that she would interact with us, kind of like had a very special close feeling.

This quote illustrates how the individual valued their relationship with their SLP and found the interaction to be engaging and supportive. This highlights the positive impact of the SLP's approach and teaching style on the overall therapy experience. Specifying that they felt like they weren't being talked *at*, evokes the idea that they were comfortable to have a mutual conversation instead of instructor and student dynamic. Another individual reported:

It gave me closure and comfort that I was able to like, talk to someone about it and actually get help without them judging or like, saying something out of place or stuff like that.

This highlights the non-judgmental nature of the therapy environment, creating a sense of safety in that space. Participants commonly felt more comfortable given that they knew their SLP had specialized knowledge in the field and was not judging them.

Tailored Treatment. The subtheme "Tailored Treatment" within the theme of "Comfortable Environment" highlights the personalized nature of speech-language therapy sessions. Participants noted that their sessions could change based on their current interests, likes, and dislikes. They found that personalizing sessions or having rewards and incentives as motivators had a positive impact on their experience. The accommodations made to personalize their therapy sessions were seen as enhancing their motivation to participate and engage in therapy.

I loved working with her. I did theater in middle school... she made everything quite fun in terms of like letting us do art projects in her room or helping us with like helping us with learning lines like if we were singing something particularly fast, going through the songs with us.

This quote reflects how the participants appreciated the efforts to make the therapy sessions enjoyable and engaging with focusing on tasks relevant to their interests. They mentioned art projects and practicing lines for theater which are two ways in which their SLP personalized their experience. This suggests that the SLP incorporated creative and interactive elements into the sessions, making them more enjoyable and, in turn, more effective for the participant. The SLP tailored the sessions to the participant's interests and needs, which was noted as contributing to their positive therapy experience. One individual even mentioned that the sessions that were more scripted and guided were not as helpful as the sessions that were tailored to them.

Beyond the Session

Family Support in Home Practice. The theme of 'Family Support in Home Practice' highlights the crucial role of family members in supporting individuals in speech-language therapy. This support extends beyond the therapy sessions themselves, as families play a role in practicing and reinforcing the skills in home that were learned in therapy. Participants illustrated how family support contributed to their motivation and progress in speech-language therapy.

They supported me through anything. If I would come home and I would tell my mom that oh, I can't get this word right and I would like cry to her like I'm struggling, and she would sit down and... we would practice more. And so, she would help me and always just have, like, be a support team.

This quote demonstrates the emotional support provided by family members. The individual's mom not only helps with practicing skills for speech-language therapy but also provides emotional support when the individual experienced challenges. This suggests that family support goes beyond just practicing skills; it also includes being a source of encouragement.

At home, my mom and dad always made me work on what I was supposed to be working on through therapy. So, our therapist would ways send like papers home to work on, especially over break. And we would always sit down and work on it every night. Which definitely helped me... I did excel pretty fast because my parents were committed...I think they were pretty fundamental for the speed of me growing and also just, you know being able to correct what I had learned.

This quote highlights the involvement of parents in their child's therapy outside of the formal sessions. The parents not only ensured that their child practiced the recommended skills from therapy but also incorporated practice into everyday activities, such as ordering at restaurants and reading street signs. The individual noted that the consistent practice at home contributed to their progress and success in therapy. This demonstrates the importance of family support and involvement in reinforcing therapy goals beyond the session.

Peer Judgement. The theme of peer judgment highlights the impact or effects of being pulled out of the classroom to attend speech-language therapy. While some participants did not mind being pulled out and did not notice a difference in peer behavior, others noted that their peers looked at them differently or even lightly teased them. These assumptions could be attributed to a lack of understanding from the peer perspective, but it was important to note as a commonality for some. One respondent described their experience of being pulled out of class:

Another thing is I always kind of felt weird just leaving class randomly. And I think at that age I was not embarrassed but it just kind of felt like something that I didn't always want to share. Um but other than that, I remember it pretty positive[ly].

This quote suggests that while the participant had a generally positive experience, the act of leaving class for sessions could sometimes feel awkward. Despite this, they remember their

overall experience positively, indicating that the impact of peer judgment may have been minimal compared to the benefits they received from therapy. Similar responses were found with another individual noting:

When I was younger, maybe there was a little bit more of poking fun at me, but I got it under control enough that it wasn't super obvious... tiny bit of teasing because of my lisp.

This quote demonstrates that even though there were sometimes unpleasant interactions with peers, they were able to manage it to some extent. This suggests that they were able to navigate the challenges and maintain a relatively positive view of their overall experience. Overall, these quotes suggest that while some participants faced challenges and peer judgment related to their speech-language therapy, therapy was also found to be beneficial and impactful in improving their speech and social interactions. Even those who missed in-class material due to being pulled out for speech-language therapy noted that the content being taught in class was generally less crucial for development and socialization compared to the topics covered in speech-language therapy. I would be remiss if I did not mention those who noted more extreme experiences with peer judgement. A couple of participants identified that there is a stigma around attending speech-language therapy and that their peers reacted negatively toward them. These experiences highlight the further need for understanding and supporting individuals undergoing speech-language therapy. The overall perception of experience seems to be influenced by the challenges faced and any positive outcomes achieved through therapy.

Career Choice Impact

Table 2 outlines the main themes identified from the final research question, what impact, if any, has participation in speech-language therapy had on the participants' career path?

Table 2*Themes for Career Choice Impact*

Theme	Definition
Motivation to Reciprocate	Individuals who have positive experience from speech-language therapy often feel motivated to help others facing similar challenges. This motivation is rooted in their desire to support others in achieving similar goals.
Shaping Career Qualities	Participant experiences in speech-language therapy influenced the qualities they noted as essential for their future careers such as talking on the phone and one-on-one conversations. While experiences did not explicitly guide their career choices, they acknowledged these experiences as pivotal for the qualities essential for their future goals.
Diverse Career Perspectives	Explores the wide range of responses on the impact of speech-language therapy experiences on career choices. Various perspectives highlight the diversity of influences and outcomes observed in career decisions.

Note. The operational definitions describe the developed themes.

Motivation to Reciprocate. When participants were asked what impact their experiences had on their career choice, most responses had a common theme of wanting to give back in their future career path in some capacity.

I kind of feel like I was given a gift of speaking at a young age and I want to be able to give that gift to someone else.

This quote highlights how positive experiences in speech-language therapy can motivate individuals to pursue careers in helping professions. This participant expressed a desire to pay forward the support they received through speech-language therapy. This motivation stems from gratitude for the help they received and their dedication to impacting others' lives in the same way. This positive experience contributed to their goals and aspirations to pursue a similar path and become a speech-language pathologist themselves. Although this is an example of a

participant entering the field after an experience in speech-language therapy which also could impact interest to join related helping professions.

So, I think I've known forever that I want to help people. It's definitely bounced around a lot. I've gone through different majors, I've gone through different professions, different career goals, but something that's always stayed consistent is at the end of the day, I know I want to help people and I want to help children and families. So that was just something I've always kept in mind. And I think that was kind of implemented to me when I had my relationship with my teachers and elementary school SLP.

Despite exploring various majors and career paths, their motivation to help others remained consistent. They attributed these career goals to the relationships they had with their teachers and elementary school SLP, indicating the impact of these interactions. This individuals' experience clearly influenced their career aspirations and emphasizes the importance of supportive relationships with the SLP during speech-language therapy.

Shaping Career Qualities. Some individuals indicated their experiences had other implications that not only assisted with their communication difficulties at the time but also introduced them to skills required for their future careers.

So, it definitely helped me a lot. Like now I do public speaking all the time. It's, I'm like leadership roles of a lot of different organizations. Oh, I have to get up for in front of all of them and talk. So, I mean, I think I've done a lot of like public speaking types of things.

This response shows how the participants' experiences in speech-language therapy have influenced their ability to engage with areas of professionalism that they might not have before, such as public speaking and leadership roles. The skills developed through speech-language

therapy, such as effective communication and confidence in speaking, have enabled them to excel in roles that require public speaking. This suggests that while speech-language therapy may not have directly shaped their career path, it has impacted the qualities needed for their current and future career endeavors, particularly in communication roles. Moreover, another participant specifically commented on their future dream.

...career choice is to be an actress which is obviously a lot of talking, a lot of like public speaking as well.

This addition of nontraditional careers being affected by speech-language therapy highlights the multifaceted influences of this experience. This quote emphasizes how speech-language therapy may not have directly dictated their career path, it had influenced the skills required for their future career pursuits. This individual mentioning the role of being an actress involves public speaking skills and the need for effective communication which are common skills practiced in speech-language therapy. This experience not only addressed their immediate communication needs but also equipped individuals with skills they need for future careers in diverse areas.

Diverse Career Perspectives. The responses regarding the impact of therapy on their career choice produced a wide range of responses. The variation of these responses is essential to highlight.

Speech therapy was probably the greatest time in my life because I felt like I was doing things right because I kept getting better. And I want to be able to provide that to a kid. I want to be- make them realize that even though they can't do something, doesn't mean that they won't ever be able to do it... Oh it changed my whole life, honestly. I definitely recognize that, you know, if I wasn't in speech therapy I wouldn't obviously be here because I don't think I would even know about the field.

This individual explains their experiences as “the greatest time” in their life. They want to provide the same experience they had to other children with communication disorders. This individual continues to describe how their extracurricular activities were also impacted such as musicals and band, giving them more confidence and the tools to communicate effectively. Overall, they emphasize the transformative impact of this experience in speech-language therapy on their life, stating that they would not be who they are today without it.

I didn't explicitly think about it when I chose my career. I decided my choice was for major was mathematics, specifically actuarial science. I guess generally taking speech pathology class didn't affect what I decided to go for as a career, but it definitely impacted what I wanted to do before I ended up going to my like my general career like ... the three jobs that I've had before... all really need communication skills and I guess at somewhat of a fundamental level knowing that I had a deficit in communication skills pushed me towards getting a job that would, well, force me, in a sense to practice those skills, to get better, to learn how to communicate in a way other people understand and can interpret.

In contrast, this individual responds with a different perspective, showcasing how their experience did not directly influence their career choice but impacted the types of jobs they sought. While majoring in mathematics, the individual acknowledges their communication struggles influenced their job choices, pushing them towards roles that required strong communication skills to naturally gain more practice. This demonstrates the indirect impact that speech-language therapy experiences can have on career decisions.

The juxtaposition of these two responses emphasizes the diversity among participants' perspectives regarding the impact of speech-language therapy on their career choice. One

individual attribute their career path directly to their positive experiences while another acknowledges the influence of speech-language therapy on the types of jobs they pursued, despite not directly impacting their career choice. This variation highlights the complexity between experiences in SLP and career outcomes, thereby suggesting the varied ways these experiences can shape individuals' career paths.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the impact of speech-language therapy experiences, directly and indirectly, on various areas of the individuals' lives, including their career choices. Using a mixed-methods approach, a questionnaire was conducted to gain a broad understanding of the students' who have been exposed to an SLP. In addition, a follow-up semi-structured interview was conducted with those who had direct experiences with speech-language therapy. Our research aimed to understand participants' experiences with speech-language pathology, and what impact, if any, the exposure had on their career decision.

Glimpse into Exposure

The questionnaire results revealed a glimpse into the influence of various exposures in SLP. To start, respondents were predominantly, reflecting the gender imbalance in the field. With this trend being consistent with previous research (Adamson, 2003; Brodsky & Cook, 2000; Byrne, 2008, 2010, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2006; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Tillard, 2011; Wallace, 2021), there is a need for targeted recruitment to attract a diverse crowd to this profession. Additionally, the high response rate from students enrolled in the College of Health Sciences and Professions (CHSP) indicates a strong interest in the field among individuals with prior experience in SLP.

Furthermore, the influence of exposures considered as shadowing or observing an SLP, was chosen as an influence on individuals' career choices which emphasizes the importance of hands-on experience. This finding aligns with past studies that highlight the role of exposure to the field prior to choosing it as a career choice (Byrne, 2007, 2008, 2015; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Wallace, 2021). Due to limited opportunities to inform prospective students of this career

before the decision-making process (Greenwood et al., 2016), these findings provide insights for possibly developing varying strategies to recruit and retain by encouraging exposure to careers.

In the influence ranking section, the individuals ranked the influence of all exposures they've had in the field of SLP overall and it was scored second highest among respondents. This shows a trend of prioritizing decision-making based on a combination of influences rather than the impact of one factor alone (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000). Exposure, directly or indirectly, was commonly found to be a positive influencing factor on career choice due to the increased awareness that resulted (Rockwood & Madison, 1993). This also aligns with the work of Byrne (2008) who specifies that the varying experiences of an individual are what contribute to influence overall. This highlights the diverse reasons that individuals may have for pursuing a career, emphasizing the importance of considering a holistic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The quantitative data from the online questionnaire provided valuable insights into the demographics and trends among respondents, shedding light on the broader patterns in exposure among the field of speech-language pathology. However, to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and personal perspectives of individuals, the follow-up interviews were essential. These qualitative interviews allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the factors influencing career choices in speech-language pathology. By combining the quantitative findings with the qualitative insights from the interviews, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of speech-language therapy on individuals' lives emerged.

The interviews with those who had direct experiences provided rich insights into how speech-language therapy contributed to individuals' growth at the level of self, in-session, and beyond the session. Some participants attributed their career choices to their positive experiences in speech-language therapy, expressing a desire to give back and help others in a similar way.

This indicates a direct influence of speech-language therapy on their career paths. Similar to the findings of the study conducted by Greenwood and colleagues (2006), some interviewees mentioned that having a communication disorder initially deterred them from entering the field, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between personal experiences and career choices.

Some participants experienced peer judgments related to being pulled out of class for therapy which led to feelings of isolation in this experience. This has the potential to impact their overall school experience. However, there were participants who managed these challenges and maintained a positive view of their therapy experience. Possibly implementing education surrounding speech-language therapy taking place in the school setting could help with peer misunderstanding. If other students are aware of the reasoning for others attending, they may be more aware and sensitive of how their peers might feel. This result was unique compared to past studies that did not explore the direct exposures and influences beyond the session.

Another novel result that emerged from the interviews were participants emphasizing the benefits of small group settings and the sense of community that resulted. Having friends in therapy helped with feeling less isolated. Additionally, some participants noted appreciation of the personalized approach to treatment that aligned with their interests and needs. This led to more engaging sessions that resulted in greater motivation and quicker progress for some.

The next theme involves the feelings from being pulled out of the classroom and facing peer judgment which directly relates to the microsystem. Interactions with peers can impact the individual's feelings related to speech-language therapy. The mesosystem also comes into play in this theme as these experiences are connected. For example, peer judgment at school can influence how the individual feels about attending therapy, which then affects their experiences at school and vice versa.

Family members played a crucial role in emotionally supporting individuals in speech-language therapy. They helped practice skills at home that were learned in therapy which contributed to encouragement, motivation, and progress. One study discussed family members with communication disorders and their influence for entering the field (Stone & Pellowski, 2016), but this study parallels others in discussing the role and influence of family support on the experiences overall (Byrne 2007, 2008, 2010, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2006; McAllister, 2011; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Tillard, 2011). This could be implemented into the approach of clinicians by involving family members in home practice more given that it was noted as positive by respondents.

In the interview portion, participants also highlighted the desire to give back and help others in a similar way, suggesting a direct influence of speech-language therapy on their career paths (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000; Byrne, 2007, 2008; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Lass et al., 1995; Rockwood & Madison, 1993). These studies involved research questions that specifically queried individuals' motivations when selecting a career. While these studies investigated individuals' motivations, my approach centered on understanding their personal experiences to see if this finding naturally emerged. I sought to uncover the underlying aspects of influence through open-ended questions. Where past literature has specifically asked participants if their motivation was impacted, this method allowed the idea of reciprocating from personal experience to develop organically, providing a deeper understanding to how impactful this experience was on career choice.

As highlighted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, the semi-structured interviews revealed a variety of influencing factors on career choice. The 'Diverse Career Perspectives' theme showcases the notion that career choices were influenced in several ways. This aligns with

the study that had prospective students of related fields identify what they consider when making a choice in career (Barfield et al., 2011). By exploring the diverse aspects that individuals consider, including those who received services, this study shows the various factors involved in choosing a career.

Applying Theory to Themes

The themes identified in our study are consistent with the ecological framework. In essence, this framework recognizes the influence of our immediate environments and how they can impact each other. The first theme of confidence that stems from participation in speech-language therapy highlights its direct link to the microsystem. This level includes immediate environments like social settings and peer interactions. The supportive environment of speech-language therapy teaches individuals techniques to improve their communication skills, resulting in increased confidence. This newfound confidence is attributed to a better understanding of oneself and others during interactions, leading to more positive experiences socially. This was a relatively novel finding due to stakeholder experiences not being reflected in most of the surrounding research. However, this does align with the idea of various environments shaping individuals' confidence in social settings is supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Tudge et al. (2009) discussed how individuals' attributes, such as confidence, can have broader effects, influencing various aspects of an individual's life. They also emphasized the importance of understanding personal characteristics, particularly in relation to proximal process and shaping developmental outcomes. As the individual gains confidence in their ability to communicate, this newfound confidence can influence other proximal processes in their life, such as interactions with peers and family members. For example, the individual

may become more willing to engage in conversations and social activities, leading to more positive interactions and relationships.

The speech-language therapy environment serves as the microsystem where the theme of the participant feeling comfortable was developed for several reasons. The friendships created through small group therapy sessions cultivate a community that supports the experience. Having a peer with them throughout the process of speech-language therapy was noted as helpful for supplementing the emotionally taxing aspects. Individuals also noted that another factor contributing to the comforting environment was having a caring SLP and progress without judgment. The view of the SLP from the perspective of the participant falls within the microsystem and highlights the importance of comfortable environments for the participant. The last subtheme contributing to the comfortable environment in-session is the tailored treatment aspect. This subtheme aligns with the microsystem and mesosystem. The personalization of therapy sessions references the immediate environments of interaction, such as with their SLP directly. By tailoring the sessions to the participant's interests, the SLP creates an engaging environment which most impacted the participant's motivation. The personalized approach also extends to interactions with other systems in the individual's life, such as their hobbies outside of therapy. This integration of personal interests into therapy sessions demonstrates how the therapy environment can interact with other aspects of the individual's life, highlighting the connections between different systems in the ecological framework.

The next theme, the family support outside of the session, reflects the levels of the microsystem and mesosystem. The individuals' immediate interaction with the family is at the microsystem level but also extends to the mesosystem. Due to the home practice support provided by the parents, a supportive environment is created that enhances the individual's

progress in speech-language therapy. The parental support in this experience reflects the mesosystem by demonstrating how interactions in the home could potentially influence the views and benefits of speech-language therapy and vice versa. Numerous studies have identified the family as a crucial support system during the speech-language therapy experience. This support often translates into a positive influence on individuals' career choices. Some studies have underscored the role of family support in shaping career decisions towards SLP and related fields (Byrne 2007, 2008, 2010, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2006; McAllister, 2011; Stone & Pellowski, 2016; Tillard, 2011).

The interactions between the school environment, family support, and the therapy environment all contribute to the individual's overall experience and development. The ecological framework helps understand how these different systems interact and influence each other, shaping the individual's experiences and perceptions of their experiences in speech-language therapy.

Limitations

The questionnaire received a high response rate (49%) from those in the Hearing, Speech and Language Sciences (HSLS) major (n=78). This high proportion of responses from a closely related major could introduce a response bias, as students in this field might feel more inclined to participate due to their interest in the subject matter. This potential bias could skew the results due to unique perspectives compared to those outside of the HSLS major. Additionally, the study was conducted at Ohio University's main and regional campuses, which may limit the generalizability of findings. Cultural and regional differences in the perception of speech-language therapy may not be represented which could impact the broader applicability of the results. Expanding the study population beyond Ohio University to include a wider range of

experiences and diverse backgrounds could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of speech-language therapy experiences across different populations. As a self-report study, the study's scope may not have captured the full range of experiences in speech-language therapy. Factors such as duration of therapy, severity of communication difficulties, and age at the time of therapy could all influence how individuals reflect on their experiences. Finally, external factors, such as societal attitudes toward speech-language therapy and access to services were not accounted for in this study.

Future Directions

A potential direction for future research is to conduct comparative studies that examine the influence of speech-language therapy across different ages, comparing those who received early intervention in childhood to those who received therapy later in life. This comparative approach could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of speech-language therapy at different stages of life. By comparing outcomes between therapy at different ages, researchers may gain a better understanding of how the timing of therapy influences the overall experience in differing ways. Additionally, potentially exploring the challenges and benefits associated with early intervention versus therapy later in life, shedding light on the critical periods for intervention and possible factors contributing to success across the lifespan. Understanding these differences could inform the development of more targeted and personalized speech-language therapy approaches tailored to individuals' age-related needs and developmental stages. This research falls primarily within the microsystem level of the theoretical framework. Comparing outcomes between different ages could allow more understanding of how experiences in speech-language therapy interact with other factors in their immediate environment to influence overall development.

Additionally, researchers could conduct a systematic examination of the motivations shaping individuals' career choices in SLP, with a focus on gender. Given that a majority of the respondents in this study were female, understanding the role of gender on influence of career motivations could provide valuable insights into societal expectations, personal experiences, and how professional aspirations differ between genders, influencing career decisions in SLP. This gender imbalance was researched by Campos, Skiados, and Flynn (2018), yet its findings were less than conclusive for improving the recruitment and retention strategies for other genders. A more recent study by Azios and Bellon-Harn (2021), explored the perspectives and opinions from men in SLP and inquired about the role of gender in their career. This study found that gender targeted recruitment strategies may be a future implementation to increase male interest in SLP. (Azios & Bellon-Harn, 2021). The research has shown that with a role model of the same gender and recognizing inclusiveness could possibly enhance understanding of recruitment dynamics and in turn, possibly increase the number of men entering this profession. More specific and personalized tactics may encourage more diverse populations to enter this profession. Given the gendered experience of graduate students described by Matthews and Daniels (2019), there is a clear imbalance in gender within the field and a need to gain a deeper understanding of these gender-related influences. By giving the males in the field a voice, they were able to better understand group dynamics and interactions with clients (Matthews & Daniels, 2019). More research in this area could aid in the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for recruiting individuals of all genders in pursuing careers in SLP. This direction spans across multiple levels of the ecological framework. At the microsystem level, it explores how personal interactions within the family and school environments could facilitate the shaping of career motivations. At the exosystem level, a level we did not explore in this study, it

considers societal expectations and norms related to gender roles and career choices. At the macrosystem level, it examines broader cultural factors that influence gender dynamics in career decisions, contributing to a more holistic understanding of career choice motivations in SLP.

Additional future directions could involve investigating how SLPs perceive their own influence on their clients' lives. Due to the mention of involvement of the SLP in therapy sessions during the follow-up interviews, querying the SLP themselves could provide more information on the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship and its long-term effects. By understanding how SLPs perceive their influence, research may understand more about the nature of positive outcomes in therapy. Additionally, this research could help shed light on the emotional fulfillment that SLPs gain from their work, which could be valuable for recruitment and retention efforts in the field. This direction primarily aligns with the mesosystem level of the ecological framework. The mesosystem refers to interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationship between an SLP and their clients within the context of the therapy environment. Understanding SLPs' perceptions of their own influence could provide insights into how their interactions with clients are influenced by broader factors, such as training, professional culture, and personal beliefs, all of which can impact therapeutic outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the influence of speech-language therapy experiences on individuals' career paths and development. Results showed that while speech-language therapy may not have directly impacted career choices, there was a noted influence on the qualities needed for current and future career goals. Direct experience has the potential to prepare individuals for various fields where effective communication is imperative. These findings are important for the approach to therapy given that there was an emphasis placed on

tailored treatment to the clients' specific needs. By understanding the influences of these experiences in-depth, professionals can understand the importance and provide personalized treatment for their clients. This study emphasizes the potential lasting effects of attending speech-language therapy and showcases the importance of providing personalized, supported, and effective care to individuals with communication needs.

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Appendix A

Online Consent Form

Title of Research: Understanding and Characterizing Students' Personal Experiences with Speech-Language Pathology

Researchers: Miranda Kress and Joann P. Benigno Ph.D., CCC-SLP

IRB number: 23-X-34

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in a research study. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You may print a copy of this document to take with you.

Summary of Study

In this study, you will be asked about the past experiences you have had with the field of speech-language pathology and to identify those exposures. You will be asked a series of questions via an online questionnaire related to that exposure and its impact on future career choice. The online questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. There will be two sections: the first will consist of demographic questions such as sex, age, race or ethnic identity, undergraduate/graduate major or graduate specialty, personal or family member diagnosis of a communication disorder, and other related questions about your personal information. The second section will ask questions about your exposures to the field of speech-language pathology and if those experiences impacted your career choice. The goal of this study is to identify those exposures and characterize the level of impact it has had on your future goals.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because there is a limited amount of research in the area of identifying and characterizing individuals' experiences and exposures to a speech-language therapist or pathologist. These experiences can influence major decisions or impact other factors in an individual's life. Asking the individual that experienced this firsthand will not only give researchers insight as to why these experiences impact lives so greatly, but also give them access to accurate information from the participants themselves.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire that asks a series of questions related to your specific experience in the field of speech-language pathology. Close-ended questions will pertain to what age(s) you were exposed to, what setting(s), what was your diagnosis at the time of exposure if any, and other questions related to your experience. For some questions, open-ended response boxes are provided, when applicable, to ensure that you are able to elaborate on any questions if you wish.

You should not participate in this study if you are not an Ohio University student 18 years or older. You may choose to only participate in the online questionnaire if you wish. For the

continuation of this study, only participants that indicate firsthand experience with an SLP will be invited to participate in an interview. Additionally, to participate in second portion of this research study, you must have completed the online questionnaire in this research study to be eligible to participate in the interview portion. If consented, your data will be linked from the two studies. Your participation in the study will last between 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risks and Discomforts

None anticipated

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because there is limited research and reports completed on personal experiences from the patient's perspective in speech-language pathology and why this may impact their career choice. It is known that personal experiences impact career choice, yet there is limited research on personal experiences from the patient's perspective conducted in the present research. Completing this questionnaire and identifying what these exposures are and how they broadly impacted peers will hopefully provide insight on if this population experienced any noticeable effect from this exposure. Understanding what these experiences are will assist in understanding more specifically what personal experiences drive decisions and impact factors in an individuals' life. More importantly, understanding their perspectives may inform students in the field of speech-language pathologists to seek more information after exposure to this field.

Individually, you may benefit from recounting any positive moments experienced in speech-language therapy.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by having all materials that you have completed remain on a password protected device in the locked designated lab. Only researchers affiliated with this study will have access to the questionnaire data. Data will only be accessed from a computer located in the before mentioned locked research lab of the primary investigator's advisor.

For maximum confidentiality, please clear your browser history and close the browser before leaving the computer. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with: * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research; * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Compensation

As compensation for your time/effort, you will have the option to put your email into a raffle to receive a \$25.00 Amazon gift card. There will be twelve \$25.00 Amazon gift cards. We expect approximately 300 people to participate, so your odds of winning a gift card would be no less than 1 in 25 responses. Please be aware that certain personal information, such as name, address and social security number, may be provided to the Ohio University Finance Office to document that you received payment for research participation. However, your study data will not be

shared with Finance.

Future Use Statement

Identifiers might be removed from data collected, and after such removal, the data may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator **Miranda Kress, mk516319@ohio.edu, (304)-476-1730** or the advisor **Dr. Joann Benigno, benigno@ohio.edu, (740)-593-4149**.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or compliance@ohio.edu.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Version Date: **[04/04/2023]**

Appendix B

Online Questionnaire

1. What is your current age?
2. What gender do you identify as?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender
 - ☐ Prefer to self-describe:
 - ☐ Prefer not to respond
3. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnic identity? Select all that apply.
 - ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Black or African American
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Native American
 - ☐ Pacific Islander
 - ☐ White or Caucasian
 - ☐ Prefer to self-describe:
 - ☐ Prefer not to respond
4. What is your primary language? Please indicate if you are fluent in any other languages. Briefly specify below.
5. Do you have an immediate family member who has a diagnosed disability? If yes, specify below.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
6. If you indicated that you have a family member with a diagnosed disability and are comfortable responding, please provide more information below. (diagnosis, age of diagnosis, frequency of treatment, etc.)
7. Which of the following best describes your progress at the university?
 - ☐ Freshman
 - ☐ Sophomore
 - ☐ Junior
 - ☐ Senior
 - ☐ Graduate student or professional student
8. What is/was your undergraduate major?
9. If you are a graduate student, what is your graduate degree program?
10. Upon completion of your education, what career do you plan to pursue?
11. Are you currently enrolled with Student Accessibility Services?

- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- a. If yes...
- 12. What accommodations do you receive through Student Accessibility Services?
- 13. Did you receive any accommodations prior to beginning higher education? (e.g., IEP or 504 Plan) If yes, please specify.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 14. Currently, do you have one or more of the following diagnosed disabilities? Select all that apply.
 - ☐ I do not have any of the following disabilities.
 - ☐ Apraxia of Speech
 - ☐ Articulation or Speech Sound Disorder
 - ☐ Auditory Processing Disorder
 - ☐ Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
 - ☐ Complex Communication Disorder
 - ☐ Dyslexia
 - ☐ Expressive Language Disorder
 - ☐ Fluency Disorder (e.g., stuttering)
 - ☐ Receptive Language Disorder
 - ☐ Specific Learning Disability
 - ☐ Voice Disorder
 - ☐ Hearing difficulty (e.g., Deaf, serious difficulty hearing)
 - ☐ Prefer to self-describe:
- 15. At any point in your life, did you receive speech-language services?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- a. If yes...
- 16. At what age(s) did you receive speech-language services? Check all that apply.
 - ☐ Early intervention (Birth-3 years old)
 - ☐ Preschool (3 - 5 years old)
 - ☐ Early school-age years (Kindergarten-3rd grade)
 - ☐ Middle school (4th-8th grade)
 - ☐ High school (9th-12th grade)
 - ☐ Older than high school
- 17. Which setting(s) did you receive treatment in? Select all that apply.
 - ☐ School
 - ☐ Private practitioner
 - ☐ Hospital
 - ☐ Home visits

- Daycare
- Other/Prefer to self describe:

18. On average, how often did you attend therapy?

- Once a month
- Bi-weekly
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Three times a week
- More than three times weekly

19. What was your education setting while you received treatment services?
Select all that apply.

- Homeschool
- Private school
- Public school
- Other/Prefer to self describe:

20. What was your diagnosis/reason for receiving treatment? Select all that apply.

- Apraxia of Speech
- Articulation or Speech Sound Disorder
- Auditory Processing Disorder
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Complex Communication Disorder
- Dyslexia
- Expressive Language Disorder
- Fluency Disorder (e.g., stuttering)
- Receptive Language Disorder
- Specific Learning Disability
- Voice Disorder
- Hearing difficulty (e.g., Deaf, serious difficulty hearing)
- Other/Prefer to self-describe:

21. Whether you received direct speech-therapy services or not, what other exposures did you have to speech-language pathology?

- I know someone who is a speech-language pathologist.
- I have a sibling who has received speech-language therapy.
- I have a family member who has received speech-language therapy.
- I have shadowed or observed a speech-language pathologist delivering services.
- I have been employed or volunteered in a setting where SLPs work.
- Other/Prefer to self-describe:

22. In which of the following settings were you exposed to speech-language pathology? Select all that apply.

- School
- Private Practitioner
- Hospital
- Home visits
- Daycare
- Other/Prefer to self-describe:

Please use the scale to complete the following questions.

23. Overall, to what extent has your previous exposure to the field of speech-language pathology influenced your career path?

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Please use the scale to complete the following questions.

24. As applicable, to what extent did each of the specific previous exposures to the field of speech-language pathology influence your career path?

Personally received services:

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Had a sibling receive services with an SLP:

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Had a family member receive services with an SLP:

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence

- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Shadowing or observing within the field of SLP:

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Volunteering or working within the field of SLP

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

Other/Prefer to self-describe:

- 5- Very Influential
- 4- Significant Influence
- 3- Moderate Influence
- 2- Slight Influence
- 1- No Influence
- N/A- Not Applicable

25. Please provide any additional comments that you would like to add regarding your experience with the field of speech-language pathology.

26. We are also interested in conducting interviews with participants who received speech-language therapy services. If this is something you would be interested in, please provide your Ohio University email below. If not, you may leave this question blank.

27. If you would like to be entered into a raffle for a \$25.00 electronic Amazon gift card, please follow the link below to enter your Ohio University outlook email:

Appendix C

Interview Consent Form

Title of Research: Understanding and Characterizing Students' Personal Experiences with Speech-Language Pathology

Researchers: Miranda Kress and Joann P. Benigno Ph.D., CCC-SLP

IRB number: 23-X-34

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You may print a copy of this document to take with you.

Summary of Study

In this study, you will be asked to recount past experiences with a speech-language pathologist. During an online interview via Teams, you will be asked a series of questions related to that exposure and about its impact on future career choice and other factors in your life. This interview will ask questions pertaining to an opinion about the overall experience, family involvement, relationship with SLP(s), and effect on related factors. The goal of this study is to understand and characterize the experiences of the patient when receiving speech-language services and whether and how this has influenced their future career choice decisions.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because there is limited research in the area of recounting personal experiences in speech-language pathology. Personal experience is a big reason why many people choose their careers, and we want to explore if those exposures are so meaningful, what are they? Asking the individual that experienced this firsthand will not only give researchers insight as to why these experiences impact lives so greatly, but also give them access to accurate information from the participants themselves.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to describe your experiences in speech-language therapy services, think of the potential positive and negative takeaways from this experience, describe relationships between service providers, and expand on how this exposure affected different areas of your life.

You should not participate in this study if you are not an Ohio University student 18 years or older and did not complete the online questionnaire. You must have completed the online questionnaire and indicated having a primary experience in speech-language therapy services to be eligible to participate in the interview portion. If consented, your data will be linked from the two studies. Your participation in the study will last approximately 45 minutes for the length of the interview.

Risks and Discomforts

None anticipated

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because there is limited research and reports completed on personal experiences from the patient's perspective in speech-language pathology and why this may impact their career choice. It is known that personal experiences impact career choice, yet there is limited research on personal experiences from the patient's perspective conducted in the present research. Understanding these experiences will assist in understanding more about what attracts students to the field. More importantly, understanding their perspectives may inform students in the field of speech-language pathologists to seek more information after exposure to this field.

Individually, you may benefit from recounting any positive moments experienced in speech-language therapy.

Confidentiality and Records

If consented, your interview will be recorded within Microsoft Teams. The interviews will be recorded for transcription and analysis after the interview as taken place. Microsoft Teams will notify you once the recording has begun. If you wish to continue, the recording will begin, and a notification will pop up. This notification will alert you that recording and transcription has begun. Your study information will be kept confidential by having all materials associated with the study remain on a password protected device in the locked designated lab. Only researchers affiliated with this study will have access to the questionnaire data. Data will only be accessed from a computer located in the beforementioned locked research lab of the primary investigator's advisor.

For maximum confidentiality, please clear your browser history and close the browser before leaving the computer.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research.
- * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU

Compensation

As compensation for your time/effort, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Please be aware that certain personal information, such as name, address, and social security number, may be provided to the Ohio University Finance Office to document that you received payment for research participation. However, your study data will not be shared with Finance.

Future Use Statement

Identifiers might be removed from data collected, and after such removal, the data may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research

studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator *Miranda Kress*, mk516319@ohio.edu, (304)-476-1730 or the advisor *Dr. Joann Benigno*, benigno@ohio.edu, (740)-593-4149.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or compliance@ohio.edu.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Version Date: *[04/04/2023]*

Appendix D

Interview Script

Opening Prompts/Questions

- Tell me about your experiences in speech-language therapy.
 - Why did you attend speech-language therapy?
 - What were some of the skills you worked on?
- 1. How did attending speech-language therapy sessions impact your work/school experience?
- 2. Describe the impact of your experience with speech-language therapy across different settings (e.g., home, school, work).
- 3. In what ways (if any) do you feel that speech-language therapy helped you?
- 4. What do you wish would have been different regarding your therapy?
- 5. Tell me about your relationship with your speech-language pathologist(s).
 - How did your SLP interact with you during therapy?
- 6. What factors influenced your engagement in sessions with your speech-language pathologist(s)?
- 7. What role did your family or caregiver play in your experience with speech-language therapy sessions?
- 8. If applicable, how did attending speech-language therapy sessions affect your relationships with others in your life?
- 9. How did your experience with speech-language pathology impact your career choice?
- 10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences within speech-language therapy?