
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS IN SKILLED NURSING: ROLES, PERCEPTIONS, AND KNOWLEDGE OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND ALTERNATIVE NUTRITION – A SCOPING REVIEW

MOHAMMED ABDULLAH ALYAHYA

SPECIALIST FOOD AND NUTRITION ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL ALQASSIM

MOHAMMED SULAIMAN ALSAWYAN

SPECIALIST FOOD AND NUTRITION ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL ALQASSIM

NAIF MANSOUR ALWEHAIBI

SPECIALIST FOOD AND NUTRITION ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL ALQASSIM

ABDULLAH ALI ALFAWZAN

SPECIALIST FOOD AND NUTRITION ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL ALQASSIM

SULAIMAN IBRAHIM ALMOHAIMEED

PUBLIC HEALTH QASSIM ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL ALQASSIM

ZYNAB ABDULRAHMAN ALGRNAS

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL RIYADH

DANA AHMED ALMOOSA

CLINICAL DIETITIAN KING FAHAD MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX DHAHRAN

NOUF SALEH ALROWAISHED

CLINICAL DIETITIAN KING FAHAD MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX DHAHRAN

MARYAM ABDULLA ALYOUSIF

CLINICAL DIETITIAN KING FAHAD MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX DHAHRAN

HESSA FAYED ALHARBI

NURSING KING FAHAD MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX DHAHRAN

ABSTRACT

This scoping review investigates the roles, perceptions, and knowledge of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in skilled nursing facilities, with particular emphasis on their engagement in evidence-based practice (EBP) and alternative nutrition care. By synthesizing findings from international and Saudi Arabian literature, this review highlights critical gaps in role clarity, EBP implementation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Saudi-based studies reveal limited awareness among nursing staff regarding SLP responsibilities, underutilization of SLP expertise in nutrition-related

decisions, and growing adoption of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. These insights emphasize the urgent need for structured training, national guidelines, and better integration of SLPs within multidisciplinary teams. The review concludes with recommendations to enhance patient-centered care and optimize long-term outcomes through improved SLP involvement.

Keywords: Speech-language pathologists, skilled nursing facilities, evidence-based practice, alternative nutrition, Saudi Arabia, dysphagia, interprofessional collaboration, telehealth, long-term care

INTRODUCTION

Speech-language pathologists are essential members of multidisciplinary teams in skilled nursing facilities. Their expertise in communication and swallowing disorders places them at the intersection of patient care, clinical decision-making, and nutritional support. With an aging population and increased incidence of dysphagia, understanding SLPs' roles and knowledge of EBP and alternative nutrition is increasingly relevant.

METHODOLOGY

A scoping review methodology was selected following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework. This method was chosen to broadly explore the literature on SLPs' roles and practices without limiting the scope to a particular intervention or outcome.

- **Databases searched:** PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, Web of Science
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Studies from 2005 to 2025
 - Focus on SLPs in skilled nursing or long-term care settings
 - Address roles, perceptions, EBP usage, or knowledge of nutrition
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Studies focused solely on pediatric populations
 - Studies from acute hospital settings
 - Non-English publications

RESULTS

The review identified 25 relevant articles. SLPs commonly perform swallowing assessments, design and implement therapy plans, contribute to decisions about oral vs. non-oral feeding, and coordinate with other professionals. However, the scope of practice often varies between facilities. While SLPs generally endorse the value of EBP, many report barriers including time constraints, limited access to current research, and lack of institutional support. These issues may prevent full integration of EBP in daily practice. SLPs display varying levels of knowledge about enteral and parenteral nutrition. Their involvement in nutrition-related decisions is often inconsistent and depends on the collaboration with nursing staff and dietitians.

Summary of Previous Studies (2015–2024)

Author(s) and Year	Study Focus	Key Findings	Country
McCurtin & Roddam (2015)	SLPs' use of research in clinical settings	Limited use of research despite positive attitudes	Ireland
Tarnanen et al. (2017)	EBP among SLPs in service contexts	Variable implementation of EBP across settings	Finland
White & Chisolm (2016)	SLPs' role in nutritional decision-making	SLPs often excluded from formal nutrition decisions	USA
Swan & Specht (2021)	Attitudes toward alternative nutrition	Positive attitudes but knowledge gaps exist	USA
Tarnanen et al. (2020)	Use of EBP among SLPs in rehabilitation	Barriers to EBP include time and access	Finland
Watkins & Rice (2019)	Interaction styles of SLPs with patients	Patient-centered approaches increase compliance	USA

Johnson et al. (2023)	SLPs' perceptions of dysphagia guidelines	Guideline use improves outcomes	dysphagia	Canada
Lee & Park (2022)	Interdisciplinary collaboration in SNFs	Effective collaboration enhances care delivery		South Korea
Anderson & Miller (2018)	Training needs in alternative nutrition	Need for structured education on nutrition		UK
Nguyen et al. (2024)	SLP roles in long-term care units	SLPs contribute significantly to care teams		Australia

DISCUSSION

The findings from this scoping review highlight several critical themes regarding the role of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in skilled nursing facilities. First, the scope of practice for SLPs varies significantly across facilities, creating inconsistencies in patient care delivery. While many SLPs are actively engaged in dysphagia management and communication therapy, their participation in nutritional decision-making is less consistent, often dependent on local policy or interprofessional collaboration.

A significant insight from the literature is the underutilization of evidence-based practice (EBP) despite general support for its principles among SLPs. Barriers such as limited access to current research, insufficient time, and lack of institutional resources hinder its full integration. This is consistent with studies by Tarnanen et al. (2020) and McCurtin & Roddam (2015), which report similar obstacles in various service contexts.

The reviewed studies also reveal that SLPs possess varying levels of knowledge concerning alternative nutrition methods, such as enteral and parenteral feeding. While they are key players in managing dysphagia, their role in deciding on nutrition modalities is often unclear or marginalized. This gap suggests a need for structured educational initiatives and clearer guidelines to empower SLPs in contributing meaningfully to nutritional care.

Interdisciplinary collaboration emerges as a crucial factor in enhancing care quality. Research by Lee & Park (2022) and Nguyen et al. (2024) demonstrates that strong team dynamics and clearly defined roles significantly improve patient outcomes and staff satisfaction. These findings advocate for better integration of SLPs into decision-making processes, especially when nutritional and communication issues overlap.

Overall, the review underscores the necessity for systemic improvements. This includes defining standard role expectations, expanding professional development in EBP and nutrition, and fostering stronger interdisciplinary collaboration. Future research should focus on evaluating patient outcomes linked to enhanced SLP engagement in skilled nursing settings, particularly in the context of alternative nutrition and evidence-based interventions.

INSIGHTS FROM SAUDI ARABIAN RESEARCH ON SLP PRACTICE

Saudi Arabia has contributed a growing body of research highlighting specific local challenges and opportunities related to speech-language pathology in skilled nursing and healthcare facilities. Three notable studies provide insight into the country's current landscape:

First, Alhamidi et al. (2021) investigated the knowledge and perceptions of nurses regarding the scope of practice of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in Saudi Arabia. The study found that a large proportion of nurses were unfamiliar with the roles SLPs play in managing dysphagia, particularly in complex cases such as dementia, stroke, and head and neck cancer. This indicates a critical gap in interprofessional awareness and collaboration.

Second, Al Awaji et al. (2022) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on speech-language and swallowing services in Saudi Arabia. With responses from 91 SLPs, the study showed a major shift toward telehealth delivery, with over 90% of respondents using remote consultations during the pandemic. While many professionals supported the continued use of telepractice, challenges such as lack of training, technical issues, and limitations in patient engagement were commonly reported.

Third, a caregiver-focused study by Al Awaji and colleagues (2021) assessed access to speech-language services during the pandemic from the family's perspective. Nearly half of the children identified as needing services were unable to access them, yet caregivers demonstrated strong openness toward using video-based teletherapy platforms.

These Saudi-based studies highlight systemic challenges, including limited interprofessional understanding, inadequate training on dysphagia among nursing staff, and the uneven integration of

telehealth. They also illustrate significant opportunities for enhancing SLP involvement through policy reform, professional education, and technological infrastructure development.

The collective findings support the call for Saudi-specific strategies that address these local barriers and optimize the contribution of SLPs to long-term and post-acute care in alignment with national healthcare goals such as Vision 2030.

CONCLUSION

SLPs play a critical yet often under-recognized role in skilled nursing facilities. Standardizing their responsibilities, expanding EBP training, and improving interprofessional dynamics will enhance both patient care and clinical efficiency.

The importance of this topic lies in the growing demand for comprehensive care in skilled nursing facilities, where the elderly population and individuals with complex medical needs often reside. Speech-language pathologists are uniquely positioned to address communication and swallowing disorders—conditions that are both prevalent and consequential in these settings. Their involvement directly impacts nutritional safety, patient autonomy, and overall quality of life.

Furthermore, the integration of evidence-based practice (EBP) into the daily routines of SLPs can significantly enhance clinical decision-making, leading to better patient outcomes and reduced healthcare costs. Understanding the current gaps in EBP utilization and knowledge of alternative nutrition provides a foundation for targeted interventions and professional development.

This topic also holds significance in the context of interdisciplinary care. In modern healthcare systems, collaboration among professionals such as nurses, dietitians, and SLPs is essential for coordinated and patient-centered care. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of SLPs ensures their optimal contribution to care teams, enhances efficiency, and improves patient satisfaction. As healthcare systems worldwide strive for integrated, high-quality care, the insights from this review are both timely and essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the context of Saudi Arabia, several targeted recommendations can support the development and integration of speech-language pathologists within skilled nursing facilities:

1. **National Guidelines Development:** Establish national practice guidelines outlining the scope of SLP responsibilities in nutritional care and dysphagia management to ensure consistent roles across all healthcare institutions.
2. **EBP Training Initiatives:** Implement continuing education programs and workshops tailored to Saudi healthcare providers, emphasizing the application of evidence-based practice in speech-language pathology.
3. **Multidisciplinary Team Protocols:** Encourage the creation of standardized interdisciplinary care protocols that mandate the inclusion of SLPs in nutrition-related decision-making processes.
4. **Academic Integration:** Incorporate alternative nutrition and EBP modules into undergraduate and postgraduate SLP training programs within Saudi universities.
5. **Data Collection and Research:** Promote local research initiatives that assess SLP impact on patient outcomes, particularly within Ministry of Health and private skilled nursing facilities.
6. **Policy Advocacy:** Support efforts by Saudi health authorities to recognize the essential role of SLPs in long-term care settings and allocate appropriate resources and staffing ratios.

REFERENCES (APA STYLE):

- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>
- Chadwick, D. D., Jolliffe, J., & Goldbart, J. (2002). Communication training for care staff supporting adults with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(3), 347-368.
- McCurtin, A., & Roddam, H. (2015). Evidence-based practice: SLTs under siege or opportunity for growth? The use and nature of research evidence in the profession. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 50(4), 493-507. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12143>
- Swan, K., & Specht, J. (2021). Speech-language pathologists' knowledge and attitudes toward alternative nutrition in long-term care. *Journal of Nutrition in Clinical Practice*, 36(5), 987-993. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ncp.10702>

-
- Tarnanen, M., Salminen, A. L., & Pirilä, T. (2020). Use of evidence-based practice among speech-language therapists in different service contexts. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 42(22), 3200-3208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2019.1597179>
 - Watkins, R. V., & Rice, M. L. (2019). Communication interaction style of speech-language pathologists in early intervention. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 62(6), 1641–1652.
 - White, J., & Chisolm, T. (2016). The role of speech-language pathologists in nutritional decision-making. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 25(4), 450–457.
 - Johnson, L., Smith, K., & Anderson, J. (2023). Perceptions of dysphagia guidelines among Canadian SLPs. *Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, 47(1), 12–20.
 - Lee, H., & Park, Y. (2022). Enhancing interdisciplinary teamwork in South Korean skilled nursing facilities. *Asian Nursing Research*, 16(3), 195-201.
 - Anderson, R., & Miller, T. (2018). Education gaps in alternative nutrition practices among SLPs. *British Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 72(2), 84-90.
 - Nguyen, P., Liu, R., & Hall, D. (2024). Role of speech-language pathologists in long-term care teams. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 43(1), 30-37.