

The Perceived Usefulness of a Clinical Evidence Finder for Speech-Language Pathologists

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Background

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) exist in a professional climate that encourages the provision of evidence-based and accountable service for clients. Despite mandatory training at the Master's degree level, SLPs report that relevant research is difficult to locate and access. This qualitative study evaluated the usefulness of a Clinical Evidence Finder for SLPs, with an overall goal to make it easier for SLPs to access relevant information regarding specific clinical questions, taking into account the studies about research use found in the literature relating to individual, organizational and knowledge base barriers to research use.

Methods Tool Design

The study examined the perceived usefulness of the newly developed Clinical Evidence Finder, a tool designed to target the clinical question of planning speech and language intervention for a child with confirmed or suspected Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Many sources of information were reviewed by the investigator, and rated on an accessibility measure to create the Clinical Evidence Finder.

Study Methodology

Fifteen SLPs from British Columbia and Alberta completed two case studies, using the Clinical Evidence Finder to answer three probes about each case scenario. Participants represented:

- ~ rural and urban settings
- ~ management and frontline clinicians
- ~ new grads and experienced clinicians
- ~ varied caseloads

Semi-structured interviews were conducted following the completion of the case study exercise to examine the usefulness of the Clinical Evidence Finder. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to determine themes from the interviews.

Conclusions Trustworthy



Participants felt that this tool was especially useful because it was done by a fellow SLP – a colleague that they could trust to understand clinical relevance.

"You're sort of lending some credibility to the list, say, whereas Google is just a search engine. Google doesn't really know who is credible, who's not, who's useful, who's not, so I think that lends credibility to a list like this. You are a speech pathologist, you work in the field, to have a list like that you've kind of gone through and recommended is more useful than a Google search for example."



Timely

The CEF was useful in reducing the searching time, getting participants in a 'focused zone', and was compared to a literature review. In addition, with practice this would especially be seen as a time saver.

"It would be nice to have more time, but also more, it's really nice to have this or have one place that you can go to that someone has already done some of the legwork around finding some of this because I think we all struggle. I mean we have our library, and they're great, but sometimes even that you have to filter through and dig stuff out."



Transforming

This tool introduced participants to using the internet **clinically**, which they felt would be the way of the **future**, and helped them **integrate** information from many sources. SLPs felt this could be used as a **refresher** for a 'less common' type of case, and they found information in the case study that **changed** their perspective and influenced the way they will approach cases on their current caseload. This tool was seen as a helpful resource for **connecting** SLPs from more isolated settings, and inspired SLPs to be more **independent** in their problem solving for clinical situations.

"It was interesting in the sense that it alerted me to possibilities that I hadn't had before. My tendency before would have been to find an expert...and ask them either for direct support or for suggestions or information that I could read, and this gave me the idea that I could be doing much more independent research rather than needing to rely on another SLP, so it was convenient too in the sense that I could do it from home and do it on my own time rather than needing to take away, sort of clinical time, or take somebody else's clinical time to give me information."

Future Directions

Dynamic, updated format Other clinical areas addressed
Involvement of professional organizations Consistent ratings



Challenges

Knowledge base

Participants demanded practical, applicable information, and found websites with higher levels of evidence less useful (i.e. PubMed, journal abstracts). They felt that quality, practical information was limited in our profession.

Individual barriers

The SLPs struggled with 'wanting to see it all' on the websites, thus making the project take more time. They also had a difficult time with internet 'intuitiveness' and desired stronger critical appraisal skills. Newer grads found the tool less useful overall.

Organizational barriers

Limited access to computers and to document delivery services would make the tool less useful for some individuals.

Details

The first four sources were the most helpful to the majority of participants, and the details of the rating scale were not found to influence the participants' choice of sources.

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