

Connecting Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Students to Their Future; Telepractice Pedagogy in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Basic skills requirements, implementation, training and competency for effective telepractice delivery remain relatively underinvestigated. As a result of COVID-19 it is now being conducted an everyday practice in many clinical settings. Professional support for certified, licensed speech-language clinicians is rapidly emerging. The question is “How are we preparing graduate students to provide telepractice as entry level clinicians?” This paper introduces the investigation of speech-language pathology graduate student’s perspectives of telepractice training and delivery as a pedagogical tool within the non-clinical academic environment.

Qualitative data, addressing the phenomenology of graduate student perceptions of tele-practice inclusion during classroom lecture, was collected via a final semester assignment investigating student perceptions on the use of telepractice as a learning tool in the classroom. Responses were analyzed to determine perspectives on instruction for using telepractice, experience with technology, implementation of a virtual session, and overall satisfaction with the experience, practice application and potential impact on employability.

Response analysis identified three major perceptual themes: 1.) Valuable pedagogy in contributing to positive impact learning, 2.) Enhancement of professional development and 3.) Potential to enhance employability.

These findings suggest student perspectives on use of telepractice as a graduate level pedagogical tool has merit in academic training for therapeutic implementation, satisfaction with the learning platform and professional application.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to describe graduate student’s attitudes toward inclusion of telepractice as an in course didactic hands-on instruction pedagogy. Specifically, to address: 1.) the learning impact of hands on telepractice experience within the classroom environment, 2.) identify helpfulness of the various tasks, 3.) perceived influence on professional development and 4.) effect on potential employment opportunities.

METHODS

Participants in this study include 61 second semester graduate students from two cohorts enrolled full time in an accelerated speech-language pathology degree program. Student ages ranged from 21 - 41 years of age with a mean age of 24.7 (Table 1). Participants included 5 males and 56 females all with earned undergraduate degrees. No prior experience with structured virtual participation activity was reported outside of engaging in social media with family and peers.

Design: A cross sectional study design was used to assess the phenomenology of graduate student perceptions on the inclusion of telepractice during classroom lecture. Qualitative data was collected via final reflective assignment investigating student feedback on their perceived experience and applicability to professional practice.

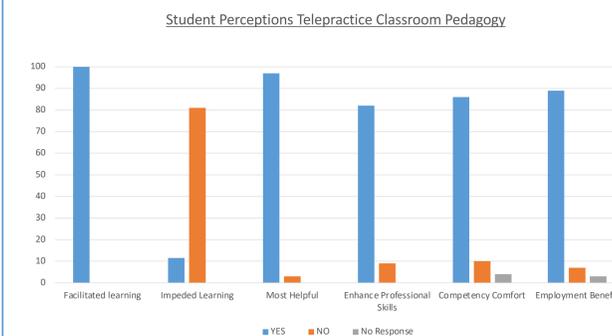
Procedure: Graduate Students (GS) enrolled in a 15-week aphasia course participated in required weekly teleparticipation activities with an off-campus participant. Each week, pairs of students selected a course topic, planned, organized and conducted an informal assessment and carried out an evidenced based treatment activity while the remaining cohort observed, collected participant performance data and documented findings. Included in documentation, students provided a statement addressing what went well and what could be improved for both the student clinicians and the participant. At the end of the semester, students completed a 10-question survey.

Data Analysis: Fifty-nine de-identified graduate student reflective papers were analyzed by three independent reviewers; the Classroom Instructor, and two Graduate Students who attended and participated in the teleparticipation classroom activity. Analysis of responses included identifying student’s written reflections on experiential factors which were perceived to:

1. Facilitate learning,
2. Impede learning
3. Be generalized to overall professional skills
4. Be a statement of satisfaction with training
5. Indicate comfort using a virtual service delivery model
6. Be helpful in contributing to employability

RESULTS

Three themes emerged from the data analysis. First, use of Telepractice, was reported by 100% of student respondents to be perceived as a valuable classroom pedagogy in facilitating the learning of course content. Second, 82% of student respondents indicated Telepractice experience, embedded in course lectures promoted professional development and third, 89% of student respondents perceived the experience would potentially improve employability.



CONCLUSIONS

Given the exploratory nature of this study, initial findings suggest graduate student support for the use of virtual patients/telepractice embedded in course curriculum, believe it enhances professional development and improves candidacy for employment. A significant number of negative responses addressing technology were reported. Specifically, troubleshooting connectivity, creating intervention materials for virtual delivery and training client on navigating telepractice platforms. Clinical delivery was reported to be intimidating initially, however quickly resolved with onset of engagement. Students had a number of positive suggestions for improving the experience including learning the “how to” deliver effective intervention, require prior practice and to have a “better understanding” of the disorder prior to initiating activity. Based on initial results and suggestions for experiential improvement, continued investigation addressing technological training in the delivery of therapeutic intervention and establishing baseline performance competencies for both clinician and patient recipient are needed.

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