

Exploring the Cluttering Curriculum in Speech Pathology Programs Worldwide

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1. Introduction/Purpose

Cluttering has historically received less attention than other communication disorders in the field of speech-language pathology. To succeed in treating cluttering, it is essential that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) be well prepared to identify and differentiate cluttering from other communication and learning disorders and that they understand possible underlying mechanisms of cluttering symptoms, so that they can provide appropriate and effective treatment.

International surveys indicate that there are serious barriers to providing services to people with cluttering, many of which influence the availability and adequacy of professional preparation for speech-language pathology students. Reichel et al. (2010) presented responses to a survey of International Representatives (IRs) of the International Cluttering Association (ICA) from ten developing countries. The participants identified challenges associated with the etiological complexity of cluttering, as well as other significant difficulties, including a lack of public and professional awareness of the disorder, a lack of epidemiological data, a lack of a universal protocol for effective evidence-based assessment and treatment, and the unavailability of adequate support from specialized entities. An earlier survey by Reichel and Bakker (2009) examined professional preparation in cluttering in 25 countries and reported that 52% of the countries included cluttering in their university programs or in stuttering courses. Twenty percent of represented countries reported a special course in cluttering, although course formats and duration were varied. Germany, Norway, and the United States addressed cluttering in clinical settings also. Twenty-eight percent of the represented countries did not discuss cluttering in the curricula of their speech-language pathology programs.

A survey of university programs in the United States, Canada and Europe concluded that cluttering was usually taught within fluency disorders courses and was allocated an average of 100 minutes of classroom time with a range of 0 to 240 minutes (Scaler Scott et al., 2010). Educators in Canada estimated that from zero to three students graduated with clinical exposure to cluttering at each university each year (Di Domenicantonio & Duldulao, 2009). A survey of 70 school based SLPs in the United States conducted by Cook and Adams (2016) found that only 18.6% of the SLPs were satisfied with the education they received in cluttering during their clinical preparation. Forty percent of SLPs were unsure of whether they would be able to identify cluttering, and 8.6% reported that they would not be able to identify cluttering. Regarding professional preparation in cluttering in Germany, Schnell (2015) indicated that 20.6% of the SLPs reported being unsure of their ability to identify a person who clutters.

According to the literature on professional preparation in cluttering, most universities around the world include cluttering in their curricula, usually as part of fluency disorders courses that deal primarily with stuttering. For example, at the Moscow Pedagogical State University, cluttering is integrated into fluency disorders classes at the bachelor and master's levels (4 hours and 12 hours, respectively) (Reichel et al., 2022). Institutions in some

countries have reported offering a separate required or elective course on cluttering. For example, an undergraduate course in cluttering (15 hours) is taught at Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary (Lajos, 2014) and a graduate elective course (45 hours) is taught at Touro University, United States (Reichel, 2016).

The objectives of the present study were to obtain updated data on how much time universities in various countries allocate to cluttering and how they assign and utilize resources to support academic and clinical preparation of students in cluttering.

2. Methods

A survey was created and translated from English to French, Simplified Chinese, Spanish, and Turkish, and was disseminated in digital format through the Qualtrics platform with the assistance of 51 IRs of the ICA who were asked to forward the survey to speech-language pathology university programs in their respective countries. Questions were in multiple-choice and open-ended formats. The collection period was from April 1 to April 25, 2022.

Sixty-six participants, representing 25 countries from 6 continents (Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America), including 13 IRs, submitted complete surveys. Forty-six percent of the participants reported fulfilling two or more roles at their university. Fifty-two respondents selected the category of “educator,” 31 selected “clinical supervisor,” and 30 selected “researcher.” The years of teaching experience had an essentially consistent distribution, in the 21% to 29% range, for each of the response options: 0 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years, more than 10 years, more than 20 years. Fifty-five participants (83%) reported fluency disorders as an area of expertise.

3. Results

3.1. In-class Education in Cluttering

Fifty-seven participants (86%) reported that in-class education in cluttering was provided at their university: at the undergraduate level only (35%), at the graduate level only (30%), or at both undergraduate and graduate levels (35%). Nine participants (14%) reported that there was no in-class education in cluttering at the university with which they were affiliated, for the following reasons: limited time within the curriculum (selected 6 times), lack of qualified staff (selected 3 times), and lack of teaching resources (selected 2 times). One participant reported being unable to influence the curriculum at the university, and another reported that cluttering was not recognized in their country.

Fifty of 57 participants (88%) reported that cluttering was taught within another course, most often a stuttering course (96%). A separate mandatory course on cluttering was taught at five universities, ranging from 3 to 16 classroom hours, and three universities provided an elective course on cluttering, involving 3, 20 and 45 teaching hours. When cluttering was included in another course, the time allocated to cluttering ranged from less than 1 hour to 30 hours. The median and mode of the distribution were both 4 hours.

Participants reported that cluttering was taught by means of lectures (52 responses), clinical case analysis (41), role play and simulation (15), and inviting a person who clutters to the class (14). Many educators utilized audio and/or video recordings for teaching about cluttering (53), followed by specified readings (44). Thirty-two participants reported using cluttering textbooks and/or chapters in stuttering textbooks. Most fluency textbooks used were written in English, and some were written in Chinese, French, German, and Spanish. Twenty-five participants (44%) reported that cluttering resources were not available in their respective country’s dominant language.

Forty-three participants (75%) reported use of the following Internet resources to educate students about cluttering: the ICA website (31 responses), podcasts (12), the Fluency Bank (9), and a Cluttering Speech Group on Facebook (5). The ICA website was accessed for general information (38), downloadable resources (31), translated material (16), the newsletter archive (12), and information for consumers (10).

3.2. Clinical Practicum

Five respondents (9%) reported that clinical hours in cluttering were required as part of the clinical preparation of students. The required number of clinical hours were 2, 4, 15, 20, and 40 hours. When asked about the number of students who graduate with direct experience in cluttering, answers ranged from 1% to 96%. The median of the distribution was 10% and the mode was 5%.

3.3. Research

Thirty-three participants (50%) reported that there was no faculty member at their university with a special interest in cluttering, while 27 (40%) reported that someone on their faculty had an interest. Research in cluttering was in progress at the universities of 13 participants, while 17 reported that cluttering research was completed or published in the past. Sixty-eight percent of participants reported that there had been no student project related to cluttering in the past five years at their university.

4. Discussion

Based on findings in this survey, cluttering continues to receive considerably less classroom time than other communication disorders within most university curricula. Cluttering is much less likely to be encountered during student clinical practicum experiences and there is minimal interest reported in completing research or projects on cluttering among faculty and students. Literature, Internet, and video resources are commonly used in educating students in cluttering; however, resources are not available in some languages. Cluttering is not discussed in some countries, and it is not always included in university curricula due to limited time allotments within the curriculum, and/or a lack of qualified staff. Despite the limitations of the current study in terms of the small sample size, convenience sampling, and a disproportionate number of respondents from each country, this study summarizes international research data that represents the current state of cluttering education around the globe.

5. Conclusion

The results of the survey indicate that there is a need for better educational opportunities for speech-language pathology students and practicing clinicians worldwide regarding cluttering. Universities providing education and clinical preparation to future SLPs can utilize the findings of this study to (1) better support faculty development and identify teaching resources that may be lacking; (2) consider expanding the professional preparation of students in cluttering, as implemented, for example, by the Moscow Pedagogical State University, and/or creating a separate course in cluttering, such as those provided at Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary) and at Touro University (United States); (3) support culturally and linguistically appropriate research in cluttering; and (4) increase opportunities for competency development in cluttering for practicing SLPs.

Disclosures

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