Speech-Language Pathologists' Academic Preparation for Transition Services

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Citation

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Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources, and Communication Disorders

College of Education and Health Professions

Honors Thesis

April 15, 2022

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Abstract

When individuals with disabilities reach their senior year of high school, they undergo a transition period. Speech-language pathologists are often tasked with working on an interdisciplinary team to assist individuals undergoing transition. While research has been done on how professionals as a group can help with transition, there has been little to no research done on how SLPs can be better prepared to assist during this process. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the preparedness of SLPs in high schools to assist individuals undergoing the transition period. The requirements for the participants include being a practicing or past SLP in a high school setting where there are individuals with disabilities being provided transition services. Participants for the study were emailed a link to the survey to complete it online. The survey consisted of sixteen open and closed ended questions. These questions evaluated the schooling and curriculum the participants have undergone along with how prepared the participants feel working with individuals in transition services. The results showed that 93.13% of the participants did not take a course specific to transition in graduate school. In addition, of the 217 participants who have not taken a specific transition course, only 13.76% of this group had a graduate level course that discussed transition. This shows a significant lack of education on the transition period in graduate level SLP programs. 35.06% of the participants have had professional development concerning transition planning, and that 91.30% of the individuals that attended the professional development found it beneficial. The results stated that 47.53% of the participants have been a part of a team tasked with developing a transition plan, but only 2.70% stated that they felt "completely prepared" to complete this task. Additionally, multiple trends were found in the qualitative data. Over half of the participants who took a graduate course that discussed transition could not remember what course it was. Of the participants who received

professional development on transition, the majority was offered by their school district or department of education. A significant number of suggestions were received from the participants to graduate programs to better prepare their students to assist in transition. The significant trends were to provide graduate courses and clinical placements for the transition process. The results gathered from the survey allow clinicians to recognize that more SLPs will develop a transition plan during their career than SLPs that have been educated on transition or feel confident with transition. More clinicians are receiving education from professional development than graduate programs, but opportunities for learning about transition should be provided through both avenues to equip all clinicians to assist with transition.

Literature Review

Transition is a child's movement from school to post-school activities according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). While all students go through the transition period, this time can be much more challenging for individuals with disabilities. After high school, many students attend secondary education or enter the workforce, which is not as easily attained by individuals with disabilities. This has caused the widest employment success gap (38%) of any demographic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This significant of a gap must be attributed to a lack of preparation for employment that individuals without disabilities do not need or already receive. While preparation for succeeding in an employment setting does not just fall on one professional, speech-language pathologists have the ability to target therapy goals toward one's occupational goals or needs.

Individuals with disabilities are also more socially isolated than the average American. Forty percent reported never having contact with friends and one fifth reported never feeling hopeful about the future or never engaging in activities outside their homes or families (Orsmond, Shattuck, Cooper, Sterzing, & Anderson, 2013). Speech-Language Pathologists have the potential to provide these individuals in the transition period with communication skills that will better prepare them to enter the post-school community. For example, SLPs could create therapy objectives that target social communication to help these individuals feel comfortable engaging in social activities outside of their homes and families. They could focus on introducing yourself to new people or inviting friends to do something with you. A strategy for helping promote social relationships to individuals with disabilities is to foster participation with peers in group activities (Shattuck, Orsmond, Wagner, & Cooper, 2011). Participation in Social Activities Among Adolescents with an Autism Spectrum Disorder states, "With only one-third of

adolescents with an ASD accessing such opportunities, there is an obvious need for greater supports and services to promote community inclusion for this population." It is widely recognized that individuals with disabilities deserve inclusion in all aspects of life; however, education and healthcare professionals like speech-language pathologists are the ones who hold the power to help foster this inclusion. An integral way to begin to foster inclusion is to give individuals with disabilities the confidence and strategies to immerse themselves in social situations.

Individuals with disabilities are provided with services by their respective school districts until they graduate. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act ensures that these individuals are given the proper services to help them succeed during their years in school, but these services don't continue after graduation. This can be an extremely difficult time for these individuals because they are losing the consistency of what they have known virtually their whole lives. It is essential for transition services to be catered specifically to each individual going through the process because everyone is unique and has different needs. Each individual's transition plan should consider work, recreation, independent life in the community, and the identification of needed supports (Frazier, Whitby, Kucharcyzk, Perryman, Thomas, Koch, & Bengtson, 2019). It is attainable for some individuals going through the transition period to continue their education after high school. However, for others entering the workforce might be the best life path. Some individuals might have a strong community of friends and family while others could have little support from friends and family. Each of these factors in addition to where the individual is planning to live will influence how their transition plan should be written. For a plan to be completed successfully, many professionals collaborate to prepare the students for life after high school, and good communication skills are essential to succeed in all the areas

covered in transition plans. SLPs are essential to helping the individual lead a successful life by providing them with the most efficient means to communicate.

Interprofessional collaboration is an essential aspect of the transition process. Collaboration is especially important for individuals with significant disabilities that usually require the knowledge of various disciplines and professions to be successful (Frazier, Whitby, Kucharcyzk, Perryman, Thomas, Koch, & Bengtson, 2019). This collaboration will look different for each student, but team members can include special-education teachers, school counselors, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, and many more. It is also important for professionals working on transition planning to incorporate the student's parents or caregivers. In a study by Carter et al., parents and teachers were evaluated to see to what extent they shared similar perspectives of transition-related strengths and needs of students with severe disabilities (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014). The article states, "Although there was some convergence between teacher and parent perspectives on individual item ratings, the more prominent theme was one of divergence with 52% of all items receiving different ratings." This study shows how greatly the perspectives of parents and teachers can vary. Clinicians should take this into account and remember to collaborate with both groups to get the most well-rounded information about the student as possible.

Transition is a relatively new area of research, and much more research can be conducted to help students with disabilities lead successful lives after high school. Because individuals with disabilities have the widest employment success gap of any demographic group of 38%, one would expect them to have poorer outcomes after high school than the average student (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Communication skills are essential for employment at many organizations and for continuing education after high school, and SLPs have the ability to

provide individuals undergoing transition with the communication skills needed to enter the workforce or continue their education. While research has been done on how professionals as a group can help with transition, there has been little to no research done on how SLPs can be better prepared to assist during this process. This lack of research brings about the question of if SLPs are being trained to assist individuals in the transition period. Most communication sciences and disorders programs train future SLPs to serve students with disabilities and their families, but specialized training related to transition services should also be provided in their curriculum (Brandel & Loeb, 2011; Wilson, Mcneil, & Gillon, 2015). SLPs should not be expected to know how to assist these individuals without receiving any training. Specific classes related to the transition period as well as clinical opportunities working with individuals in transition could be offered by communication sciences and disorders graduate programs in order to better prepare future clinicians for working with this population.

Specific Aims of Project

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the preparedness of SLPs in high schools to assist individuals undergoing the transition period. Most communication sciences and disorders programs train future SLPs to serve students with disabilities and their families, but specialized training related to transition services should also be provided in their curriculum (Brandel & Loeb, 2011; Wilson, Mcneil, & Gillon, 2015). This study collected data concerning the courses and trainings these SLPs underwent that focused on transition, and if they feel prepared to help an individual successfully complete this process. The information gathered will be used to help undergraduate and graduate programs evaluate their curriculum on transition and make any adjustments to better prepare future SLPs.

While the main purpose of this study was to evaluate the curriculum SLPs completed before serving individuals in the transition period, it could potentially positively impact the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are significantly more socially isolated than the average American with 40% reporting never having contact with friends and one fifth reporting never feeling hopeful about the future or never engaging in activities outside their homes or families (Orsmond, Shattuck, Cooper, Sterzing, & Anderson, 2013). While the current goal of this study is specific to evaluating the preparedness of SLPs, the results of this survey could potentially open the door for future research on how SLPs can impact the life outcomes of individuals with disabilities after undergoing the transition period.

Research Question

Are current SLPs prepared to assist individuals with disabilities during the transition period? How can education for SLPs be improved to better prepare SLPs to assist during the transition process?

Methodology

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited by reaching out to high schools across the United States via email. The requirements for the participants included being a practicing or past SLP in a high school setting where there are individuals with disabilities being provided transition services. To incentivize participating in this project, each participant was entered into a raffle to win a $100 gift card to Amazon upon completion of the survey. We applied for and received IRB approval to ensure that our participants' rights and are welfare were protected.

Materials

The only materials we purchased were two $100 Amazon gift cards that were used in a raffle as an incentive for SLPs to complete the survey. The survey was conducted, and the results were gathered and analyzed through Qualtrics.

Procedures

Participants for the study were emailed a link to the survey to complete it online. Once the participants agreed to the terms and conditions of the survey, they were directed to begin answering the survey questions. These questions evaluated the schooling and curriculum the participants have undergone along with how prepared the participants feel working with individuals in transition services. The closed-ended questions were followed by the option choices provided in parentheses. The questions asked are as follows:

1. What is the highest educational degree you hold? (Ex: BS in Communication Sciences and Disorders, MS in Speech-Language Pathology, etc.)

2. What is the current or most recent state you have practiced in?

3. Have you taken any graduate level courses specific to transition from secondary school to adult hood? (yes, no)

4. If not, did any of your courses discuss transition planning? (yes, no)

5. If so, what courses?

6. Have you had any opportunities for professional development concerning transition planning? (yes, no)

7. If so, who offered this professional development?

8. If you attended the professional development, do you think it was beneficial? (yes, no)

9. How prepared do you feel to develop transition plans and assist students as they transition from secondary school to adulthood? (completely unprepared, somewhat unprepared, neither prepared nor unprepared, somewhat prepared, completely prepared)

10. Have you ever been part of a team charged with developing transition plans? (yes, no)

11. If so, how many transition plans have you developed?

12. How would you describe your role in the transition planning process?

13. What have you learned from your experiences with transition planning?

14. If you could make a suggestion to graduate programs on how to better prepare SLPs for working with students undergoing transition, what would it be?

15. What aspects of your current employment setting facilitates collaboration with other individuals working on transition?

16. What limitations (if any) do you see at your specific place of employment that would interfere with your collaboration on transition planning?

It is essential to note that not every participant answered every question. Some questions were only shown to participants who answered previous questions certain ways. If a participant answered "yes" to question three, they were then shown question six and did not respond to questions four or five. If a participant answered "no" to question three, they were shown questions four and five before moving on to question six.

The participants' responses to question six also affected the following questions shown to them. If a participant answered "yes" to question six, they were then directed to answer questions seven and eight. However, if a participant answered "no" to question six, they were shown question nine and did not answer questions seven or eight.

The last question that affected the remaining questions of the survey was question ten. If a participant answered "yes" to question ten, they were then shown questions eleven and twelve. If a participant answered "no" to question ten, they were shown question thirteen and did not answer questions eleven or twelve. Each of the question combinations described above were created to ensure that survey participants were not being asked redundant questions or questions that did not apply to them. This helped make the survey more efficient and effective.

Results of Quantitative Data

After two active survey periods, we received a total of 232 survey completions. However, as stated before some questions were only presented to certain respondents due to their previous answers. It was also not a requirement for the respondents to answer every question, so some respondents chose to not answer every question. Due to both of these conditions, not every question will have 242 responses. The survey responses provided us both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data we received is as follows:

In response to Question 3, "Have you taken any graduate level courses specific to transition from secondary school to adulthood?", 217 respondents marked the option "no", and 16 respondents marked the option "yes." This means that only 6.87% of the respondents have taken a graduate level course specific to transition, and 93.13% have not.

In response to Question 4, "If not, did any of your courses discuss transition planning?", 163 responses marked the option "no", and 26 respondents marked the option "yes." This means that of the 217 respondents who marked "no" on question 3, only 13.76% have taken a course that discussed transition planning, while 86.24% have not.

The next quantitative question is question 6, "Have you had any opportunities for professional development concerning transition planning?". 81 participants marked "yes", and

150 participants marked "no." This means only 35.06% of the survey participants have had opportunities for professional development concerning transition planning, while the other 64.94% have not.

Question eight read, "If you attended the professional development, do you think it was beneficial?" 63 participants marked "yes," and 6 participants marked "no". This shows that of the individuals that attended the professional development, 91.30% thought it was beneficial while only 8.70% did not think it was beneficial.

Question nine asked, "How prepared do you feel to develop transition plans and assist students as they transition from secondary school to adulthood?" The responses can be seen in Figure 1.
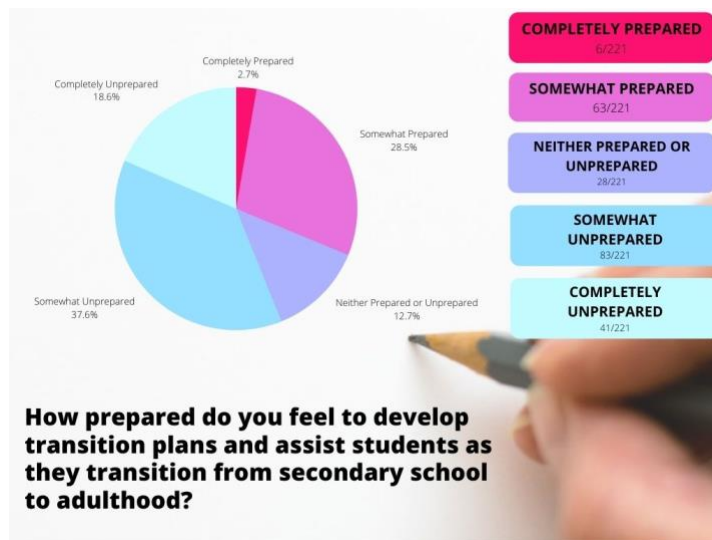

Figure 1

In response to question 10, "Have you ever been a part of a team charged with developing transition plans?", 106 participants marked "yes", and 117 participants marked "no." 47.53% of the participants who answered this question have been a part of a team charged with developing transition plans while 52.47% have not.

Results of Qualitative Data

The first question asked on the survey concerned what educational degree the participants held. 219 out of 232 responses wrote either a master's in speech-language pathology or a master's in communication sciences and disorders. Three participants stated they were an educational specialist, five stated they held an AuD, two stated they held a PhD in speech-language pathology, one stated they held a master's in education, one stated they held a PsyD, and one stated that they held a EdS (administration in special education).

The second question asked what the current or most recent state was that the participants had practiced in. The responses were as follows: Arkansas (186); Texas (11); Missouri (5), Tennessee (3); Texas and Arkansas (3); Georgia (3); Oklahoma (3); Arkansas and Missouri (2); California (2); Mississippi (2); Florida (2); North Carolina (2); Michigan (1); Pennsylvania (1); Nevada (1); Massachusetts (1); Idaho (1); Indiana (1); Arkansas and California (1); Arkansas, California, and Missouri (1).

The next question that provided qualitative data was the fifth question. It asked, "If so, what courses?" and was referring to what courses discussed transition planning. The responses were as follows: None/NA (9); I don't remember (8); severe disabilities (2); adult language (2); summer seminar on school based speech therapy (2); a course relevant to transition planning when leaving high school (1); communication disorders (1); augmentative communication (1); special education class (1); public school speech-language pathology (1); language disorders, language, and literacy (1).

Question 7 asked who offered the professional development on transition. The responses were as follows: school district (21); department of education (13); educational co-op (9); speechpathology.com or speechtherapypd.com (8); Arkansas Transition Services (4); educational

service center (3); Unsure (3); ASHA (2); Paul Johnston and Tammie Rose (2); continuing education searched for specifically (1); pediatric home health company (1); multiple companies (1); state special education unit/educational cooperatives, state conferences (1); LIFE (mom of adult with autism/ID) (1); employers (1); educational regional program in Texas (1); Organization for Autism Research, Educational Services, and MHMR (1); graduate school at Texas State University (1); and Project Search International (1).

Question 11 asked participants how many transition plans they have developed. A wide range of numbers was provided, and the results fell into these categories: between one and five (29), between five and ten (19), between twenty-five and fifty (8), zero (7), fifty to one hundred (6), ten to twenty-five (4), one hundred to two hundred (3). Other responses included: "I don't know" (3), "most are done by sped teachers but I help "(1), "just PreK to kindergarten" (1), "this was years ago, like 1990… we would reach out to employment agencies" (1), "transition from rehab to independent living back home" (1), "I am going on year 6 in 9th-12th grade so I have developed many" (1), "yearly about 4 to 5" (1), "I have helped with several" (1), "few in earlier years at easter seals" (1), and "I am a part of the IEP committee for each of my 40 students. We have a transition specialist who specifically designs the plan. Each committee member (SLP, teacher, parent, OT, etc.) contributes their input as needed" (1).

Question 12 asked participants how they would describe their role in the transition planning process. The results are as follows: "provide communication assistance for after school" (13); "member of the IEP team" (11); "minimal" (10); "SLP on planning team" (8); "talked with student about goals and ideas" (5); "helped special education teacher" (5); "assistive technology consultant" (2); "N/A" (2); "sole planner because it was a speech only student" (2); "brainstorming, surveys, and interview with student" (2); "I am the special education director for

our school so my experience has been at every level. I have been a collaborator, facilitator, mediator, advocate, and developer." (2); "related service provider but able to provide input" (2); "writing transition plans for speech impaired students" (1); "parent of student who has been in transition" (1); "learning how to do it by watching others" (1); "related service provider to special education teacher" (1); "provided data from assessment and treatment with the student to aid in determining their current level of function" (1); "discussed their progress in therapy and what their life will look like for them" (1); "actually, I thought as the SLP, and our experience with goal writing and taking careful notes for documentation, my input may have often been the most valuable/useful on the team with the exception of that provided by my parents and student" (1); "implementer of transition assessments, developing post-secondary career/employment goals, post-secondary education/training goals, and post-secondary independent living skills. Also developing transition activities to help students move toward their career/employment goal and education/training goals" (1); "influential" (1); "instigator, sadly. Not impressed with any transition programs in AR at this time." (1); "writing the speech therapy plans to transition to a different school" (1); "as a consultant of the person's strengths and weaknesses. Again, this was years ago! Things have totally changed!" (1); "transition planning is done every day. We constantly plan, program, and discuss transition with our students and their families" (1); "administrative" (1); "I am a part of the team that helps to set out the most appropriate transition goals for our students. As the SLP, I want to make sure that the plan fits their communication/language skills and needs. I would never want a student to be put in a situation that is not right for their unique communication/language abilities. I also want my clients to be as independent as possible, but to still receive all the assistance that they will need to be successful." (1); "I was an advocate for my brother who has special needs during his transition

planning from high school to post-high school." (1); "A liaison between parents and resources" (1); "Involved with transition interviews with students and then relaying that information to parents" (1); "For one, I was the one responsible. For others, I just had input." (1); "I am the CEO of an organization who has school aged and adults we develop transition plans to assist with the next phase of life at a variety of levels." (1); "Assisted children transitioning back into school and/or home after prolonged stay at rehab facility" (1); and "I am TOR for some secondary students with speech/language impairments. In Indiana, at the age of 14 or when a student enters grade 9, a transition plan must be completed. I do all the transition assessments and write up for the IEP." (1).

Question 13 asked, "What have you learned from your experiences with transition planning?" The responses were as follows: not applicable answer (52); the importance of starting early (8); it is a team effort (6); transition planning can be difficult in small/rural areas (3); it is a difficult thing to plan appropriately (3); "I learned there are other options after high school for students that doesn't include college or starting a job immediately" (1); "There are resources available, but it takes planning and information-providing to put them in place." (1); "It's important to have a workable plan that the students are involved in making for them to have buy in." (1); "It makes a big difference in planning in vocational or educational setting and helps people they are around know how to help them succeed." (1); "My graduate coursework and clinical practicum experiences provided little knowledge of transition services." (1); "To know and maybe even visit the options in the community that are available to the more severe population." (1); "I believe the transition team has the best interest of the client in mind." (1); "That it needs to be functional for that student," (1); "1. Parents are often unaware of transition services available for their child. 2. Surveyed parents often report a need for transitioning

services to help their children enter the workforce. 3. Parents are aware of their children's strengths and weaknesses and have realistic expectations." (1); "They are very beneficial to the student and their parents. It is difficult plan after graduation for your special education student when you know they will not be going to college but will be entering the workforce." (1); "Just life lessons – working in a school setting – there are job programs available to help students transition into the workforce if they are able to work." (1); "You can never be over prepared. Think outside of the box." (1); "Investigate plan for placements (school/home/community/work) and skills required for success. Include in POC specific skill building and functional execution of skills in manufactured contexts. Homework assigned then SLP/pt/care partner review regarding implementation in natural context." (1); "That kids' plans change year to year, so it is important to do a yearly check in." (1); "The transition plan is unique to each student provided the nature of their disability and the goals of the student/family." (1); "There is a lot of planning and paperwork." (1); "Very important. Need to ensure planning goes with adults in all future settings." (1); "Preparing the individual to know what to expect and to have the tools to maneuver in new and unfamiliar situations significantly lowered fears and increased confidence for this individual." (1); "I have learned that I don't feel confident in my role with transition planning. I have also learned that our high school sped teachers don't feel comfortable with it either." (1); "It's interesting! There are a lot of components to it." (1); "It is not organized." (1); "Need to understand knowledge base and level of capability of all individuals involved with client." (1); "There are lots of resources available, you just have to know where to look." (1); "The amount of programs that exist beyond school age are many." (1); "I have learned more about local and state programs to assist our students. It has changed my focus towards the future when I have conversations with my students about why their communication skills are so

important. It was definitely a shift from my perspective as a former elementary school therapist." (1); "That there are way more resources out there for planning than are used in high schools. That it should start sooner than high school. Should be discussing at middle school and junior high. That parents who say, 'I want my kid to stay home with me after graduation' usually change their mind after a couple of years." (1); "Services are fewer, less available, and more difficult to access for post high school individuals than those still in high school." (1); "Haven't done much transition planning as most secondary students receive speech therapy in addition to other services; therefore, case managers/special education teachers have typically been at the forefront of transitioning in my experience." (1); "To me, transitioning is a whole different beast. If you are not at a junior high or high school full time, you may not even know about it. I didn't until I started serving kids that age. There are a LOT of services out there for those kids, but not all kids are appropriate for the service. I feel like parents need more information on what is available for their specific child." (1); "That we as a school team do not focus on transition." (1); "The large amount of services that are available in the state of Arkansas that I knew little about when coming into the workforce." (1); "It's good to tell parents what they will be discussing as their middle schoolers get older." (1); "I am so thankful for the special education teachers at the high school who have helped model the transition process for me. They have been a wealth of knowledge in helping me learn how to assist in the transitions. I have learned that EVERY student's plan is different, and that it really does take a team approach to best meet the individual's needs." (1); "Information and opportunities change and are different in different areas of the state." (1); "I am encouraged to incorporate transition materials into therapy sessions." (1); "There are many aspects to consider, including housing, qualification for benefits due to disability which may require the family to seek legal assistance, workplace, transportation

to/from work and/or errands, and psychosocial opportunities." (1); "That it's important to look at the functionality of what the student will be able to do. Such as getting and holding a job." (1); "That each plan is completely unique and what is best for the child is in some instances overshadowed by parent decisions and that none of the existing solutions (of which I am aware) are ideal." (1); "Planning to get all requirements to get CCCs, interview preparation, time management." (1); "There are few meaningful opportunities for work and socialization for people with disabilities, and huge amounts of stress on caretakers." (1); "Parental/guardian involvement is key." (1); "1. It is important to do ongoing assessments to help determine how to develop and maintain the transition plan. 2. Work on helping the students become their own advocates and that they can speak for themselves. 3. It is important for the school, family, student, and community agencies to work together." (1); "I know how to do the process well to meet the IDEA requirements however I don't think the process actually leads to student success in many cases. Students and parents often have unrealistic expectations for their future. In our area, the third-party resources are slim to none which further complicates the process." (1); "Assessment is a key factor." (1); "The most important thing I have learned over the years is what actual services and real placement opportunities there are for our students in the Little Rock area. Being a part of a student's transition planning for so many years, our team has become quite informed on where our students, depending on goals and ability level, can actually go to be the most successful. i.e., 4-year college with AR rehab support, 2-year schools like Pulaski Tech, and other programs offered through rehab services." (1); "You definitely need to educate parents and help them establish resources. Most parents are unaware and need lots of prep and time to come to terms with what the future looks like for their child and what's available." (1); "It is very hard to transition children from all the support they receive through the age of 18 (or 21) to

adult services. There aren't many options – if any for these people." (1); "We need to make plans more individualized." (1); "Mostly non-theory but rather practical application such as connecting students with regional services for continued special needs support." (1); "There aren't many community resources that you can count on." (1); "More about the paperwork involved." (1); "It is difficult and time consuming. To really prepare, some students need a great deal and others need minimal support so all plans must be very individualized." (1); "There seem to be very few services for special needs students as they transition into adulthood. Becoming "of age" is a challenging concept for parents who often think they automatically retain the rights to speak and decide for their special needs child. There is almost no preparation for them to understand they need a legal procedure to be able to make decisions for their child." (1); "To make sure you talk to the students to help them get a plan for what they want to do after high school." (1); "I have learned to listen to the student's interests but also guide them in a potential field/job that is realistic and achievable." (1); "More support from psychologists." (1); "What we as the education team think is best for the student is less important than what is realistic for the student and family." (1); "Importance of getting all disciplines feedback, in addition to the students desires following graduation." (1); "There wasn't a lot involved for the SLP." (1); "Hard to quantify, but since I work in a junior high it is the starting point. I do try and get the caregivers to specifically think about life after high school." (1); "It requires time and much planning to develop an appropriate plan for each individual student's ability to transition into post high school activities." (1); "SLPs can play a crucial role in ensuring our patients have what they need beyond secondary school. We not only need to be a part of the transition process. We MUST. We play an ongoing roll… We can help patients make connections after graduation." (1); "That most school district personnel have NO CLUE about life even ten years out of graduation…

much less 20, 30, 40, 50… and many times they don't care." (1); "It is important to relay this information to the post-secondary facility so that they can better understand the student's communication ability level so that they can plan courses of study for that student that are equivalent to their ability level." (1); "That plans are already in place before our input is considered." (1); "I usually don't participate in doing the research to find all options available, but it seems that an easier way/database, etc. would be helpful for the resource teacher and all involved to find all available options to further aid in planning, such as waiver workers, adult care facilities, and other options, as well as options for further training, jobs available, etc. in a specific area." (1); "It can be time consuming, but helpful for the student." (1); "There are community programs and services available for students with special needs." (1); "It is good for cognitively delayed students to have a plan in place prior to graduation and work towards it. It does not make sense to require a plan for a high school senior who is just being seen for articulation or stuttering therapy." (1); and "Most of the many members of the team have never given the plan a lick of thought prior to the meeting. The process is the best way to be sure all persons are coming from a place of reality. The process is the best way to guide future academic planning and IEPs. In the SPED realm, with the individuals with varying needs, this process allows the parents, teachers, counselors, etc. to understand more clearly what the future holds for a particular student (i.e., can hold a job, but will likely need supervised housing). Parents hear for the first time that their child has the potential for marrying, attending college or a technical school or attending supervised work situations. It is so revelatory. The future picture for each individual student gets a mold for the future; the planning of the team helps fill in that mold in a variety of ways. Parents and students, teachers and administrators start to really see the student more holistically. Too bad it is not done sooner than it is. The student gets to host his/her own

meeting with the help of a lead or gets to be the major source of input if it is well-lead. It is such a strengthening moment in their lives." (1).

Question 14 asked, "If you could make a suggestion to graduate programs on how to better prepare SLPs for working with students undergoing transition, what would it be?" The results were as follows: A graduate school class on transition/clinical experience with transition (48); connect with community members and learn resources and options (34); provide guidelines on how to transition a student included in IEP paperwork (11); unknown/no comment (9); didn't understand question (8); have an SLP or transition specialist from a local school come lecture (8); collaboration with SPED teachers and counselors (7); fill out a mock transition program and have a mock transition meeting before graduation (5); help SLPs understand how to create realistic, functional goals starting well before high school (4); explanation of the process and ways that SLPs could be beneficial in the development of them (3); PD courses or list of places that help with transition (2); advocacy for the student as an adult in the process (2); emphasize that transition planning can never start too early (2); "Include a job shadowing opportunity for specialty areas such as transitional guidelines/documentation." (1); "They need to educate students about what it's like in public schools in general. I was completely unprepared for my role in an elementary school." (1); "To encourage the therapists to keep this transition in mind as long as this child is on your caseload. For example, if you start seeing this child in sixth grade, think that about the process. Ask yourself, what can I do to make this child's life easier after high school and to make them as independent as possible." (1); "Be proactive and do your own research." (1); "Look at functional communication and language skills that will help students be successful throughout their lifetime. Teaching compensatory strategies to deal with language deficits is invaluable in this setting." (1); "Address that it does occur in our scope of practice.

Give examples of what this would look like." (1); "Keep an open mind. The goals are those of the student who will be transitioning to adulthood." (1); "Job training assist." (1); "How to incorporate it into their everyday practice and get parents onboard early." (1); "How to work with a student's plan in a practical way when we may only see the student 30 to 45 minutes a week." (1); "Teach activities that can be completed in therapy to address transitioning to the workforce and functional communication skills related to that. I'm really not as concerned about the paperwork of a transitional plan as much as the everyday therapy involved in preparing students as they leave the school system." (1); "To navigate the system and know it." (1); "Provide a snapshot as part of due process discussions and public education provision of services." (1); "Use of a clinical if that is their interest. The field is too widespread to tap into every aspect, so if you like working with this population, upon graduation would be the time to delve into specific training." (1); "Know about adult services." (1); "Know that IEPs end when the student graduates high school, but 504 plans continue with them beyond. Also have more real-life/life-skill based therapy sessions as well as activities related to their education." (1); "Have an informed parent come talk about their take on the topic." (1); "If they're interested in the schools track, include a training similar to what the Iowa AEAs have for high school IEPs." (1); "Go more into detail about CEU courses. Explain different settings SLPs can work at." (1); "To teach about the different aspects of working with individuals with disabilities. We really deal with the whole individual, not just speech and language. Classes tend to teach about childhood or old age, there is a whole lifetime of in-between that we, as clinicians, need to know how we fit into. We need to assist these individuals in making their lives better and it is completely within our scope of practice to do so." (1); "Preparation should emphasize that: 1. Transition planning needs to start very early (middle school at the latest). We need to start with

long-term goals in mind and work backwards, with a focus on achieving pragmatic, functional skills. 2. Clients need to connect with community resources and build relationships in the community starting when they are young. 3. There are few transition resources, so SLPs will have to develop opportunities for their clients through networking and creative thinking. 4. Technology is integral. It should be a part of transition plans. 5. Problem behavior is a barrier to participating and connecting with others more than lack of skill. From the beginning, work with clients with disabilities should emphasize preventing problem behavior or resolving it if arises, through building the skills of effective communication, frustration tolerance, and cooperation." (1); and "Preparation in graduate school is difficult. Each student will have many different circumstances that either challenge or help the SLP to help the student who is undergoing a transition plan. These life circumstances are often difficult to prepare for. I suggest finding functional skills that the student enjoys and will be able to complete in adulthood PRIOR to the student's senior year. Asking questions such as where you see yourself in five years, what do you enjoy doing, what skills do you need to complete these goals, asking these questions to adults in the student's life, the student and student's teachers. So, coming up with a survey to be given to all the students supports and the student during the student's sophomore, junior, and senior year sounds like a great task for a graduate student! This would greatly help transition plans to be successful." (1).

Question 15 asked, "What aspects of your current employment setting facilitates collaboration with other individuals working on transition?" The results were as follows: IEP team participation/meetings (47); N/A (36); didn't answer question (26); using community connections and resources (4); working in a high school setting (2); nursing and social services (1); "limited, primarily due to lack of service opportunities" (1); "In the middle school we have

to consider the path for our 8th grades to transition to high school and beyond." (1); "They have a transition fair, and I am sure they offer trainings for the people at the high schools, but not positive." (1); "Preparation for conference is the only time I hear about transition." (1); "I serve K-12, but I am not invited to these meetings." (1); "We all put the students first." (1); "I train students in the AuD program for clinical experience." (1); "Transition is everything at my school! We have a phenomenal program that I am proud to be a part of!" (1); "I connect their speech goals with their goals after high school." (1); "I am the point of contact." (1); "We are a public school which is a good place to work on transition. We have a transition program with classes and job opportunities. We are partners in the WOLF program." (1); "I'm a language, literacy, and AT/AAC consultant to school districts." (1); "CBI teachers help middle school students transition to the junior high and share info." (1); "High school secondary therapists," (1); "We bring it up whenever we are working with school staff. My employer has several options for those in transition." (1); "Flexibility," (1); "Some many years ago I had one referral from Southeast Arkansas Rehabilitation Services for a young lady with a profound hearing impairment to help her be able to communicate with others in the workplace." (1); and "Due to the fact that we have such young students where I work, we develop an initial plan that will obviously change as they age. It is the starting point for future discussions with parents and high school personnel." (1).

Question 16 asked, "What limitations, if any, do you see at your specific place of employment that would interfere with your collaboration on transition planning?" The results were as follows: none (42); lack of time (28); does not work in this age (23); lack of preparation/resources (18); not able to collaborate with team/not consulted (18); difficulty locating services (6); COVID-19 (5); "Not having students on my caseload until after they

graduate high school." (1); "I am now a contract therapist, so we are not usually reimbursed for paperwork or meetings, just direct therapy." (1); "It's often hard for parents to initially see some of the needs that will likely come up in a few years for independent living." (1); "Reduced time in an acute care setting for transition planning." (1); "Disconnect between junior high (where we start transition planning) and what is offered at the high school." (1); "High turnover of SPED staff." (1); "Lack of parent education on available options post grad." (1); and "We rarely receive referrals for students of that age who are still receiving services and are in need of a transition plan, so it's not something we stay well prepared for in general." (1).

Discussion

The results gathered from the questions that provided quantitative data provides essential information concerning the education of SLPs on the transition period, their involvement with transition planning, and how prepared they feel to assist students undergoing transition. Only 6.87% of our respondents marked that they had taken a graduate level course specific to transition. This shows that many graduate programs are not offering courses specific to transition. We also found that the overwhelming majority of the participants have not even taken a graduate level course that discussed transition planning. Only 13.76% of the participants who had not taken a course specific to transition had taken a separate course that discussed transition. Combining the findings from these two questions shows that approximately 82% of the participants received no education concerning the transition process while in graduate school.

This survey also evaluated whether SLPs have received education concerning the transition after graduate school through professional development opportunities. It was found that more SLPs had received education through professional development, but still less than half of the participants. 64.94% of the participants had not had any opportunities for professional

development concerning the transition period. Of the 69 participants who had attended professional development on the transition process, 63 of the participants stated that it was beneficial. This shows that SLPs believed it was beneficial for them to learn about the transition process, making it important for these opportunities to be offered to more individuals in this field.

The last two quantitative questions evaluated if the participants had ever helped develop a transition plan and how confident they are with this task. Only 31.08% of the participants marked that they were either "somewhat prepared" or "completely prepared" to develop transition plans and assist students as they transition from secondary school to adulthood. This means that 68.92% of our participants either felt "completely unprepared", "somewhat unprepared", or "neither prepared or unprepared.". It would be ideal to have every SLP feel completely prepared to assist in this task while our survey showed that only 2.70% of our participants marked this answer. Of our participants, 47.53% stated that they have been a part of a team charged with developing transition plans. Of the 52.47% that have not been a part of one of these teams, many could end up developing a transition plan in the future of their careers.

The percentage of SLPs who have developed transition plans does not line up with the amount of SLPs who feel prepared to do so or have been educated on transition planning through graduate school or professional development. This means that some SLPs have been a part of a team responsible for developing a transition plan while not feeling confident in his or her ability to complete this task. To improve confidence, education through graduate school curriculum or professional development is needed.

The qualitative results found provided insight that cannot be obtained from quantitative data. The first two qualitative questions asked about the geographic location of the participants

and their education level. 80.1% of our participants stated that the current or most recent state they have practiced in is Arkansas. The data from this survey is not representative of the whole United States because of this, and further research could be done by recruiting more participants from other states. 94.4% of the participants stated that they have a master's degree in speech-language pathology or communication sciences and disorders.

When asked what graduate course discussed transition, a variety of answers were provided, but the main trend was that the participants did not remember what course. This shows that whatever education is currently being provided on transition, the course in which it was taught is not memorable to most of our participants. However, when asked who offered professional development on transition, the participants provided much more insight. The two largest trends were school districts or departments of education. Educational professionals who are aware of the transition needs within their district or department are putting on this transition more than outside entities.

The next qualitative data revealed how many transitions plans the participants had developed. The two largest trends were between one and five and between five and ten. However, there were responses that showed significantly more transition plans developed. Further research could be done to see if the individuals who have developed more plans are the same individuals who indicated that they are more confident in their ability to create a transition plan. When asked about their role in the transition planning process, each participant had a unique perspective. The three largest trends were providing insight on communication, serving as a member of the IEP team, or that they had a minimal role. Each SLP has a different experience working with transition, and there is not a universal experience that clinicians can be prepared for.

When asked about what they have learned from their experiences with transition, the two largest trends were the importance of starting early and that it is a team effort. Multiple participants also mentioned the lack of resources in rural areas or how resources differ based on the community you are in. This could spark research on the inequalities individuals from rural areas experience as well as how SLPs can better serve individuals in communities with less resources.

The participants were asked what they would suggest to graduate programs on how to better prepare SLPs for working with students undergoing transition, and the largest trend was to add curriculum and clinical experience on transition. Graduate SLP programs have many guidelines they must follow for curriculum, and since the scope of practice of an SLP is so large, it is impossible to cover every aspect of the field. However, electives concerning transition could be added for students who are interested in working in a high school setting. Clinical placements in high schools could also be added to begin to give students more experience. A total change in curriculum does not have to take place to take a step in the right direction of educating students about transition.

The last two qualitative questions asked about the participants' specific places of employment and how it affects their work with students undergoing transition. The two largest trends when asked what facilitates collaboration with other individuals working on transition were IEP team meetings and none. Some school settings allot time for IEP meetings and collaboration while others are shown to not provide an environment for this collaboration. When asked what limitations interfere with your collaboration of transition planning, the largest trends were none, lack of time, barriers to team collaboration, and lack of preparation. SLPs often have overwhelming caseloads, not leaving them enough time to collaborate with other professionals

on transition. School environments also present barriers to collaboration in many different forms and should be evaluated in each individual school to work to prevent these barriers.

The findings of this survey support the previously discussed need for transition-specific education stated in the literature review. Specialized training related to transition services should be provided in communication sciences and disorders programs' curriculum in addition to training future SLPs to serve students with disabilities and their families (Brandel & Loeb, 2011; Wilson, Mcneil, & Gillon, 2015). Training SLPs specifically on transition can lead them to feel more confident when working with students undergoing transition, allowing these students to receive better services. SLPs have the ability to start working to change the large employment success gap and lack of happiness individuals with disabilities have been shown to face. This will slowly spark a change in better preparing these individuals for life after high school, and in turn, improving their quality of life.

Conclusion

The results from this study showed that there is a significant number of SLPs who are never educated on the transition period. It also showed that there are more SLPs who will work with an individual undergoing transition than there are SLPs who have been educated on it. The data provided proves a need for more education on transition through graduate school curriculum and clinical placements as well as through professional development opportunities. Professional development undergone by the survey participants was shown to be beneficial and is essential to educate all of the current SLPs working in the field.

One limitation of this study is that the overwhelming majority of the participants practice in the state of Arkansas. In order for the data from this survey to be applied to all of the United States, this survey would need to be distributed to participants throughout all 50 states. However,

the data gained from this survey is still beneficial to the field and provides significant insight into the transition period in the state of Arkansas. Future research can be built off of this survey to see if similar results are gained from other geographical areas of the country.

Speech-language pathologists have an extremely wide scope of practice, and certain areas like transition are unknown to many SLPs until they experience it in the workplace. In order for SLPs to serve every patient to the best of their ability, education must be enhanced. Individuals with disabilities deserve to work with professionals who are equipped to help them create and carry out a plan that will help them to not only succeed, but also thrive throughout life after high school.

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