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# Preparation of Future and Practicing Speech and Language Therapists to Identify Reading Disorders in Children and Provide Support

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## SHORT INTRODUCTION

- Reading and writing** are language-based abilities (Snowling & Hulme, 2021) and are also critical to long-term academic success, health, and employment outcomes (World Literacy Foundation, 2015).
- According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, **speech and language therapists (SLTs) play a critical and direct role** in the development of literacy in children and adolescents and in the diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of written language disorders” (ASHA, n.d.).
- Since 2001, ASHA's position statement on literacy, numerous scientists have continued **to advocate for the SLT role and responsibilities in school-based literacy teams**: Bridges & Kelley (2025); Stephenson, Serry, and Snow (2025), Yi & Erickson (2024), Hogan (2018), etc.
- Despite that, it is still a subject of discussion in the Baltic and other countries.






## OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

- The aim** of this research was to examine opinions about the role and responsibilities, training in reading, confidence in defining, assessing and treating reading disorders among future SLTs and practicing SLTs in Lithuania.
- Research design:** Quantitative approach
- Data collection methods:** online survey
- Data analysis methods:** Descriptive statistics (mean, percentages, standard deviation)
- Research sample:** 102 respondents (35 students / future SLTs, 67 practicing SLTs)

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Consists of three parts:

-  Sociodemographic data
-  Context of support for individuals with reading disorders
-  Self-assessment of preparedness to identify and support individuals with reading disorders

The questionnaire consisted of 35 open- and closed-ended questions, including single- and multiple-choice items, open responses, and self-assessment using a Likert scale. The second part of the questionnaire was completed only by practicing SLTs.

The questionnaire was adapted with the authors' Loveall et. al. (2022) permission.



## RESULTS

The results revealed clear differences between the opinions of practicing speech and language therapists (SLTs) and future SLTs regarding their roles, responsibilities, training, and confidence in the field of reading disorders.

Practicing SLTs more often assumed primary responsibility for identifying and assessing reading disorders, whereas future SLTs emphasized shared responsibility and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. This suggests that practical experience influences the perception of professional roles.

The findings also showed that both groups evaluated their overall preparedness as moderate, with practicing SLTs reporting consistently higher levels of confidence than students. This difference highlights the importance of practical experience in developing professional competencies.

Both groups reported the highest confidence in defining, assessing, and supporting language-related subskills, particularly phonological awareness. In contrast, lower confidence was observed in more complex areas, such as orthographic knowledge, application of assessment methods, and the provision of targeted support for children with reading disorders.

Overall, the results indicate that although future and practicing SLTs possess foundational knowledge, there is a clear need to strengthen practical skills related to assessment and intervention, especially in the areas of reading-specific difficulties.



## RESULTS

### Perception of SLT roles in reading disorders

Area	M (SLTs)	M (Students)
Prevention of reading disorders	4.05	4.54
Identification of reading disorders	5.04	5.00
Assessment of reading abilities	5.84	5.38
Intervention for reading disorders	5.77	5.35
Compensation (scaffolding)	4.30	4.73
Letter–sound correspondence	6.49	5.73
Phonological awareness	6.54	6.05

**Note.** M – mean; SLTs – practicing speech and language therapists



## CONCLUSIONS

- ❑ Nearly all participants strongly recognize their important role and responsibilities in working with reading disorders in children, especially in diagnosis and treatment. Despite that, there is a need to strengthen the preparation of the (future) SLTs in some specific areas.
- ❑ Practicing SLTs reported higher levels of confidence than students, highlighting the importance of professional experience in developing competencies.
- ❑ Both groups demonstrated the highest confidence in phonological awareness and language-related skills, while lower confidence was observed in reading assessment, orthographic knowledge, and intervention strategies
- ❑ The findings suggest a need to strengthen the preparation of future speech and language therapists in literacy-related competencies.



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