



Speech Therapists' Roles in Multisectoral Collaboration for Children with Special Needs: A Case Study in Indonesian Special Schools

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Abstract: Children with special needs require a holistic and collaborative approach to ensure their optimal development, especially in communication and language aspects. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in special schools. This type of research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a case study method to explore in depth the role of speech therapists in multisectoral collaboration within special schools. The research procedure involves merging, connecting, and embedding stages to facilitate the collaborative role of teachers and speech therapists. The sample selection technique used was purposive sampling used in this study consisted of 54 participants (> 5 years of work). The findings of quantitative data indicate that the dimensions of collaboration that have been running well are evaluation and advocacy. The evaluation aspect received an average of 4.25 (SD = 0.55), which is also in the high category, indicating that the role of speech therapists in monitoring children's development is considered important and quite optimal. The highest achievement was in the advocacy aspect, with a score of 4.50 (SD = 0.50), falling within the very high category. Qualitative data findings indicate that policies and funding currently hinder collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in schools, which are the most inhibiting factors. As a result, assessment and learning planning have lower scores than evaluation and advocacy in schools. It is hoped that future collaboration will not only involve teachers and speech therapists, but can also be studied in conjunction with psychologists, who are important elements in the assessment and learning planning of children with special needs. Future research is expected to develop guidelines or standard operating procedures for multisectoral collaboration among teachers, therapists, and psychologists, ensuring that school services are more effective.

Keywords: *children with special needs, mixed-methods, multisectoral collaboration, speech therapist*

I. Introduction

Children with special needs require a holistic and collaborative approach to ensure their optimal development, particularly in communication and language. Special schools, as educational institutions specifically designed to address children with special needs, often face challenges in providing comprehensive services due to the complexity of children's needs (Smith & Jones, 2020). In this context, speech therapists play a crucial role because communication and language disorders are among the main barriers experienced by children with special needs, such as children with autism, cerebral palsy, hearing impairments, or intellectual disabilities (Brown, 2021). However, the effectiveness of speech therapist interventions cannot be achieved optimally without multisectoral collaboration involving teachers, parents, psychologists, doctors, and other health professionals (WHO, 2022). This collaboration is increasingly important considering that each child with special needs has unique needs that require multidisciplinary care (Lines et al., 2024). Collaboration in developing integrated learning plans across all elements will provide optimal service. Broader and closer collaboration, more transparent communication, and more organized information sharing across services (Thøgersen, 2024).

Recent research indicates that integrating speech therapy interventions with school educational programs can significantly enhance the communication, socialization, and academic skills of children with special needs (Puspitasari, 2022). However, in Indonesia, collaboration between speech therapists, schools, and families is often hampered by a lack of understanding of the roles of each sector, limited resources, and minimal interprofessional coordination (Damayanti, 2023). A study by Puspitasari (2022) found that only 40% of special needs schools in Central Java have structured speech therapy programs, and most therapists work without clear collaboration guidelines with teachers or other health professionals. This results in interventions being less effective and sustainable. This issue needs to be addressed because the regulation, as

outlined in Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023, concerning appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities, requires schools to collaborate across various sectors, including teachers, psychologists, and therapists. This statement aligns with the World Health Organization (WHO), which emphasizes that a multisectoral approach is key to success in addressing disabilities, including in the fields of education and health (WHO, 2023).

Collaboration between teachers and speech therapists occurs through three distinct, complementary phases (Gonzalez-Fernandez & Iturra, 2024). The first phase involves planning, for example, by reviewing student performance together. The second phase includes co-teaching in the classroom, where both professionals work directly with students. The third phase involves joint evaluation and reflection on collaborative activities (Anderson, 2020). Speech therapists play a role not only in providing direct intervention but also in supporting teachers in integrating communication strategies into the learning curriculum (Harris, 2022). For children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), speech therapists can collaborate with teachers to implement Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods that enhance children's ability to communicate more effectively (Ganz, 2015). Furthermore, parental involvement is crucial to ensure the generalization of communication skills at home (Fan et al., 2024). Unfortunately, research by Damayanti (2021) revealed that many parents of children with special needs in Indonesia have not received adequate education on how to support their children's speech therapy at home. Collaboration between speech therapists and teachers in educational settings for children with special needs suggests that a collaborative approach is key to overcoming communication barriers (As et al., 2025). Collaboration between various professionals working together to support children with special needs demonstrates that a multidisciplinary approach is more effective than isolated interventions (Hija & Harsiwi, 2024).

Another challenge to effective multisectoral collaboration is the absence of policies that promote cooperation among institutions. In some developed countries, such as the United States and Australia, the Individual Education Program model requires monthly meetings between therapists and teachers to discuss children's progress (USDOE, 2020). While Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities mandates inclusive education and integrated healthcare services in Indonesia, implementation remains poor (Ministry of Social Affairs RI, 2021). A case study at special schools in Surakarta showed that speech therapists often work independently rather than collaborating with the school. As a result, therapy programs fail to meet children's learning needs (Nurhayati, 2023). This study aims to explore how speech therapists can enhance services for Children with special needs in special schools through multisectoral collaboration. Currently, no structured collaboration model in Indonesia that divides tasks between teachers and speech therapists. Previous research has been challenging to model as a collaboration model because existing studies are largely qualitative and exploratory, lacking large-scale quantitative investigations into the mechanisms of professional collaboration in disability education, which results in insufficiently tested model validity. Previous research has not specifically explored collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in special schools.

This study uses a case study approach to analyze the dynamics of collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in special schools. Case studies were chosen because they provide an in-depth understanding of the specific context and the factors that support and hinder collaboration. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with therapists, teachers, parents, and health workers, as well as through participant observation of the therapy and learning process. The results of this study are expected to provide policy and practical recommendations to strengthen multisectoral collaboration in the care of children with special needs, particularly in Indonesia. Thus, speech therapists can play a more effective role in ensuring that children with special needs receive holistic and sustainable services. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to quantify important aspects of the collaborative role, reinforced by qualitative data from the experiences of teachers and speech therapists working together in schools.

II. Method

A. Research Procedures

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, incorporating a case study to in-depth explore the role of speech therapists in multisectoral collaboration within special schools. Mixed methods is a research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study (Yin, 2021). This method was employed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of speech therapists' roles in multisectoral collaboration in special schools, both qualitatively and quantitatively, ensuring the robustness of the findings in this study. This research design employed the convergent parallel design, a

Table 1. Demographics of the Research Sample

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n = 54) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Position | Special Needs Teacher | 34 | 63 % |
| | Speech Therapist | 20 | 37 % |
| Length of Work | < 5 Years | 12 | 22,2% |
| | 6 – 10 Years | 17 | 31,5 |
| | > 10 Years | 25 | 46, 3 % |
| Gender | Male | 13 | 24 % |
| | Female | 41 | 76 % |

C. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique used an online survey with Google Forms. The theory employed in this instrument is the theory of Interdisciplinary Collaboration, as presented by Friend & Cook (2007). The instrument consisted of 18 questions to gather information on the needs and constraints of multisectoral collaboration among Speech Therapists in Schools, encompassing six dimensions: assessment and identification (items I1, I2, I3), joint program planning (items I4, I5, I6), Integrated Intervention Implementation (items I7, I8, I9), communication and coordination (items I10, I11, I12), evaluation (items I13, I14, I15), and advocacy (items I16, I17, I18). Before being distributed in the field, the instrument items underwent validation testing by experts, involving four experts from the fields of speech therapy, special education, and psychology.

Table 2. Content Validation Test (Aiken V) of Instrument Items

| Dimension | Item | Expert 1 | Expert 2 | Expert 3 | Expert 4 | Aiken_V |
|----------------------------------------|------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| Assessment & Identification | I1 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 0,938 |
| | I2 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 0,812 |
| | I3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 0,875 |
| Joint Program Planning | I4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 0,75 |
| | I5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 0,688 |
| | I6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0,688 |
| Integrated Intervention Implementation | I7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0,688 |
| | I8 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 0,625 |
| | I9 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 0,625 |
| Communication & Coordination | I10 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 0,688 |
| | I11 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0,938 |
| | I12 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 0,688 |
| Evaluation | I13 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 0,812 |
| | I14 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 0,938 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|-----|---|---|---|---|-------|
| | I15 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 0,688 |
| | I16 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 0,812 |
| Advocacy | I17 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 0,75 |
| | I18 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 0,875 |

Source: (Friend & Cook, 2007)

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha

| Estimate | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Point Estimate (18) | 819 |

Content validity was assessed with the assistance of four experts on a 1-5 scale. The results of Aiken’s V calculation for content validity range between 0.75 and 0.95 (valid ≥ 0.70). Content validity of the instrument, Role of Speech Therapists in Multisectoral Collaboration in Schools, was good (Aiken’s V ≥ 0.75) and reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha ≥ 0.80). These findings revealed that the instrument can be used to meet the needs and constraints of multisectoral collaboration among Speech Therapists in Schools.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique employed in this study utilizes two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data analysis utilizes SPSS version 25 to obtain descriptive data on the role and needs of speech therapy in multisectoral collaboration within schools. Qualitative data analysis in this study utilizes Atlas. TI version 9 to visualize qualitative data transcripts regarding information on obstacles to multisectoral collaboration among speech therapists in Schools. The data sources analyzed comprised interviews with teachers and speech therapists, totaling 54 participants. Interview questions reveal challenges in collaboration within special schools, specifically in areas such as policies and financial support, parental involvement, collaboration and coordination, facilities and infrastructure, and therapist resources. With the coding technique of interview data as follows.

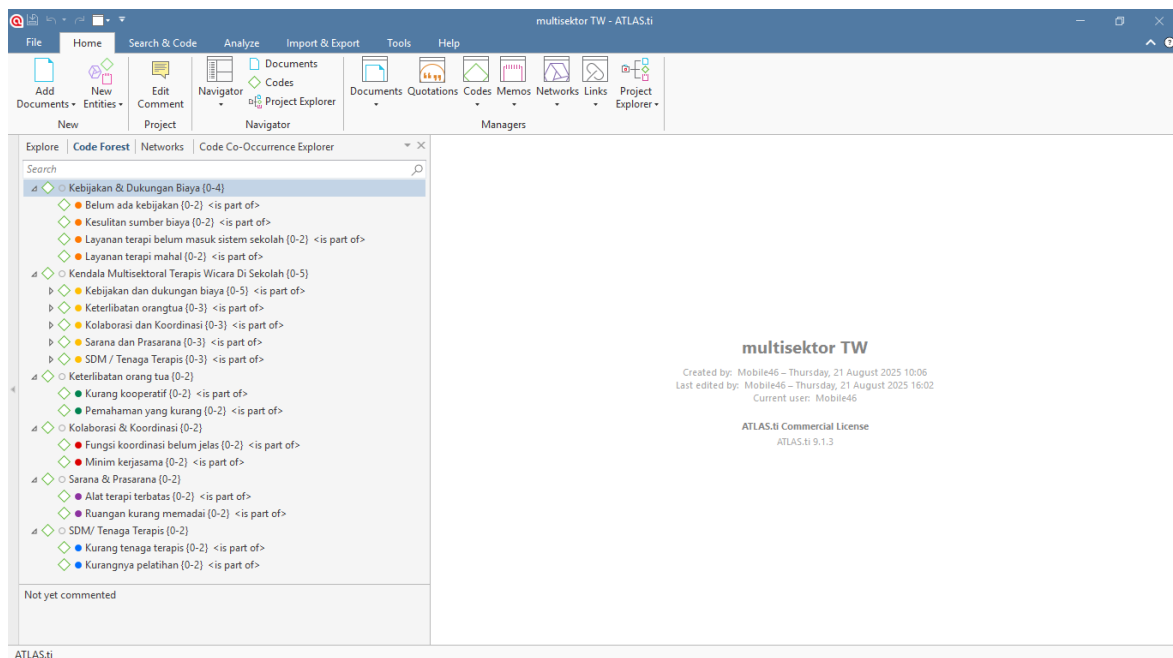


Figure 2. Data Coding Technique for Interview Results on Obstacles to Collaboration

III. Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis using SPSS regarding the role and need for multisectoral collaboration of Speech Therapists in Schools can be seen in full in Table 4.

Table 4. Duration of Mathematics Addition Problems

| Dimensions | Mean | SD | Category |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|-----------|
| Assessment & Identification | 2.45 | 0.72 | Low |
| Joint Program Planning | 2.10 | 0.81 | Low |
| Integrated Intervention Implementation | 4.35 | 0.61 | High |
| Communication & Coordination | 3.80 | 0.85 | High |
| Evaluation | 4.25 | 0.55 | High |
| Advocacy | 4.50 | 0.50 | Very high |

Study results showed that the roles and needs of speech therapists in multisector collaboration in schools vary based on their engagement levels. For assessment and identification, the mean score ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 0.72$) was low. This suggests that while speech therapists play a significant role in identifying children's needs early on, there is still room for improvement in establishing a more effective early detection system. In contrast, the program planning received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.10$; $SD = 0.81$). This score is also moderate, suggesting that the role of speech therapists in developing Individualized Education Programs and intervention plans is limited. More collaboration with teachers, healthcare professionals, and parents is required.

On the other hand, the remaining variables displayed more positive results. In integrated intervention, the mean score ($M = 4.35$; $SD = 0.61$) was high, indicating that the involvement of speech therapists in executing direct interventions with teams across sectors is crucial. Additionally, the communication and coordination mean score ($M = 3.80$; $SD = 0.85$) indicates that sharing information between speech therapists, teachers, parents, and healthcare professionals has been beneficial, though it needs to be more consistent. The evaluation aspect received a mean score ($M = 4.25$; $SD = 0.55$), also high, showing that the involvement of speech therapists in assessing the impact of early childhood multisector integration programs on children is vital. The strongest performance was in the advocacy aspect, with a mean score ($M = 4.50$; $SD = 0.50$) categorized as very high. The highest dimensions of collaboration are evaluation and advocacy, compared to assessment and identification. This is due to the lack of synchronization between assessment and learning planning among teachers and therapists, which currently still operate independently in schools. Evaluation and advocacy appear to play a more substantive role than assessment and planning in speech therapy and teacher collaboration in special needs schools, although direct comparative evidence is limited. Other research sources indicate that evaluation and advocacy are crucial in special education, where advocacy interventions effectively enhance teachers' understanding of collaborative skills, resulting in a moderate increase ($N\text{ Gain} = 0.708$) (Primandiri et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that speech therapists are viewed as effective advocates for children with speech and language challenges, both in schools and across various sectors. Overall, while speech therapists play important roles in intervention, evaluation, and advocacy, the early assessment and program planning process needs improvement. This supports findings from Krimm's (2022) study, which compared the awareness of speech therapists and teachers regarding children's developing reading skills. It found differences in how aware the two groups are of children's needs. Although these differences were not statistically significant, there is a clear need to address the educational population with diverse professional development strategies tailored to their specific needs. Thus, capacity-building measures and more formal collaboration between schools, healthcare professionals, parents, and speech therapists need to be enhanced. This would ensure that the role of speech therapists in multisector collaboration goes beyond intervention and encompasses the entire educational and healthcare experience for children in schools.

According to the statistical analysis conducted using SPSS, the results highlighted the vital role of speech therapists in addressing the needs of children with special needs in schools, particularly in the areas of communication and speech skills. The data showed that teachers, parents, and schools view the presence of speech therapists as critical, making the demand for therapy services urgent. The analysis revealed that the most significant concern was the need for multisectoral support, where speech therapists work not only with students but also alongside classroom teachers, school counselors, health professionals, and parents. This support is believed to enhance service delivery and expand the range of assistance provided to children.

The findings also highlighted discrepancies between needs and available treatment. There is an inadequate number of therapists relative to the number of students requiring assistance. Other influencing factors include limited infrastructure, insufficient intersectoral collaboration, and a lack of legislative backing for integrating speech therapy into the education system. Consequently, while speech therapists are acknowledged as playing an important role in schools, there is an urgent need to enhance resources, upgrade facilities, and create more structured mechanisms for multisectoral collaboration. The quantitative study above outlines the responsibilities and challenges facing speech therapists in a multisector setting. Qualitative analysis unveiled additional barriers to effective collaboration between speech therapists and other professionals in schools. The following section utilizes Atlas to present the results of the qualitative analysis. Ti 9.

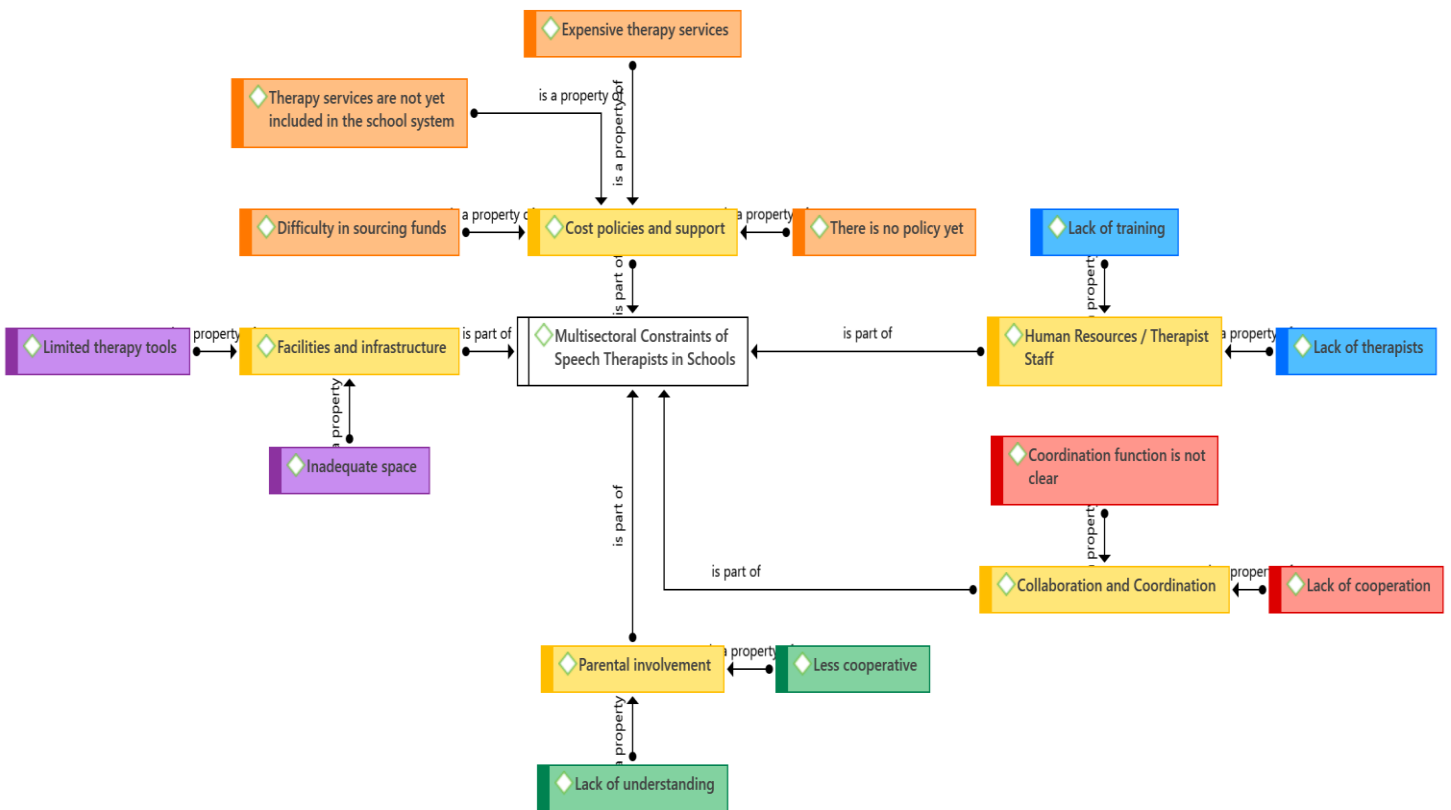


Figure 3. Analysis of Multisectoral Constraints on Speech Therapists in Schools

Table 5. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

| Quantitative Data | Qualitative Data | Data Integration |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assessment & Identification (Mean: 2.45; SD: 0.72) | Cost Policy and Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speech therapy services are not yet integrated into the school system, due to funding constraints, expensive therapists, and the lack of government policy to include therapists in the school personnel system. Consequently, assessment and learning planning score lower than evaluation and advocacy in schools. |
| Joint Program Planning (Mean: 2.10; SD: 0.81) | Parental Involvement | |
| Integrated Intervention Implementation (Mean: 4.35; SD: 0.61) | Collaboration and Coordination | |
| Communication & Coordination (Mean: 3.80; SD: 0.85) | Infrastructure | |
| Evaluation (Mean: 4.25; SD: 0.55) | Therapist Resources | |
| Advocacy (Mean: 4.50; SD: 0.50) | | |

The quantitative data findings indicate that the collaboration dimensions that have been running well are evaluation and advocacy. The evaluation aspect received an average of 4.25 (SD = 0.55), which falls in the high category, indicating that the role of speech therapists in monitoring child development is considered important and optimal. The highest achievement was in the advocacy aspect, with a score of 4.50 (SD = 0.50), falling within the very high category. Qualitative data findings indicate that policies and financing currently hinder collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in schools, with these factors being the most inhibiting. Speech therapy services that cannot be included in the school system, sources of funding, the provision of expensive therapists, and the absence of government policies to include therapists in the school personnel system. These concerns are what many teachers and therapists express in interviews, specifically that they are unable to collaborate optimally in conducting assessments, planning lessons, and evaluating students. As a result, assessment and lesson planning have a greater impact on scoring than evaluation and advocacy in schools.

Based on an examination of barriers to providing speech therapy services in schools, it can be concluded that several interconnected factors influence the effectiveness of these services. These factors include policies, financial support, facilities, personnel, stakeholder collaboration, and parental involvement. The complexity of these obstacles shows that speech therapy issues in schools are both structural and systemic, as well as technological. First, policy and financial support are significant issues. Speech therapy is not offered enough in schools, so children with special needs have limited access to it. Additionally, therapy costs are relatively high, which creates a challenge for families with limited financial resources. There is no clear policy from schools or the government that could provide a budget or financial support. Related studies have shown that many speech therapists and teachers do not receive additional compensation for their work. Collaboration is more effective when support comes from school leadership and when teachers are open and transparent (McLean et al., 2011). Therefore, although speech therapists possess unique and important skills, they should be better integrated into schools, rather than being used sparingly. Without proper regulation, therapy will remain limited in scope and sustainability.

Second, the facilities and infrastructure are still lacking. Some schools do not have the right spaces for speech therapy, forcing therapists to work in less-than-ideal conditions. Limited therapy tools also present a significant challenge. Proper therapeutic materials are essential for successful interventions. Poor facilities can negatively affect the effectiveness of therapy and discourage children from attending. Facilities need to support both academic and non-academic growth in children with special needs. They should be designed to accommodate these children's unique requirements and be managed collaboratively by special education instructors, homeroom teachers, and therapists (Azzahra, 2022).

Third, there is a shortage of human resources. There are too few therapists available, and a lack of ongoing training for them has led to heavy workloads. This reduces their ability to work effectively with children. The lack of specialists is particularly evident in schools in disadvantaged areas. Due to these staffing limitations, one speech therapist may need to serve multiple schools with numerous children, yet national policies do not address this issue. As a result, children with speech and language difficulties have

unequal access to services. The role of the speech therapist crosses national borders, so a uniform approach to regulation is necessary (Pearce, 2024).

Fourth, collaboration and coordination among sectors are ineffective. The roles of schools, government agencies, and healthcare professionals in coordinating care are not clearly defined. This lack of clarity creates gaps and weak integration of treatment. Poor communication between sectors hampers the care of children who need speech therapy. School-based speech therapy offers an additional opportunity for collaboration between therapists and teachers (Flippin & Hahs-Vaughn, 2020). Teachers aim to support children in becoming active participants in the classroom and fostering social engagement and independence. Meanwhile, speech therapists focus on developing phonological, vocabulary, and structural language skills, as well as transferring communication abilities to academic settings (Cahlill et al., 2024).

Fifth, parental involvement remains a significant issue. Parents who do not understand the importance of speech therapy for their children may have limited engagement in both home and school therapy (Cahill et al., 2024). A lack of parental participation can hinder collaboration between schools and therapists. However, strong parental involvement is linked to better outcomes in therapy. Parents contribute to the therapeutic process in several ways: (1) they provide information regarding their child's language skills, behavior, communication, and needs during assessments; (2) they help implement communication strategies from therapy sessions into daily activities at home; and (3) they contribute to the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) based on their child's requirements.

Collaboration among teachers, therapists, psychologists, and community service providers can enrich support services for students with special needs (Putri et al., 2024). Teachers can learn from the expertise and experience of support staff in identifying and addressing specific challenges faced by children. Collaboration enables the development of tailored learning strategies and the provision of appropriate accommodations for children with special needs (Putri et al., 2024). This collaboration also involves experts such as speech therapists. If a child requires speech therapy, teachers can coordinate with the therapist to develop an integrated program between school and therapy sessions. For children experiencing language difficulties, collaboration between teachers and speech therapists can facilitate assessments, intervention plans, and early learning, thereby minimizing the negative impact on the child's social and academic development (Mariam & Rahayu, 2024; Oktavia et al., 2024). Other research findings demonstrate the significance of effective collaboration between teachers and speech therapists, repeatedly emphasized through open communication, a deep understanding of individual student needs, curriculum adjustments, and emotional and social support as essential elements in creating a learning environment for children with special needs (Hasan et al., 2024). Previous research findings align with the current study, stating that the roles of teachers and speech therapists are assessment, curriculum development, and lesson plans for children with special needs. However, field findings suggest that evaluation and advocacy play a more significant role in this context. This is based on interviews, as policies and funding are the most significant inhibiting factors in teacher-speech therapist collaboration in special schools.

Interprofessional collaboration between teachers and speech-language therapists (SLTs) is crucial for supporting inclusive education and enhancing children's learning outcomes; however, its implementation faces significant challenges (González-Fernández & Iturra, 2025; Jeremy et al., 2025). Research shows that effective collaboration requires conditions at multiple levels political, municipal, school, and individual based on an ecological framework (González-Fernández & Iturra, 2025). Key factors for successful interprofessional practice include providing participatory spaces, facilitating power sharing, balancing practical and propositional knowledge, and anchoring collaboration in co-designed activities (Quigley & Smith, 2021). Studies emphasize the importance of a coordinated, family-centered support model, involving special educators and speech therapists working together to support children with special educational needs and their families (Kantanavičiūtė & Tomėnienė, 2020). However, definitions of collaboration vary across studies and disciplines, and measurement tools require further development using robust theoretical frameworks validated in educational contexts (Jeremy et al., 2025).

Overall, this study highlights that providing school-based speech therapy services is a complex issue that needs holistic solutions. We need clear guidelines, increased financial support, improved facilities, enhanced training for therapists, and better coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders. Additionally, raising parents' awareness and involvement is crucial for the long-term success of therapy. Addressing these issues together can help expand school-based speech therapy services, significantly benefiting children with special needs.

IV. Conclusion and Suggestion

The quantitative data findings indicate that the collaboration dimensions that have been running well are evaluation and advocacy. Qualitative data findings currently highlight the barriers to collaboration between teachers and speech therapists in schools, which are the most inhibiting factors. Speech therapist services are not yet integrated into the school system due to limited funding sources, the high cost of hiring therapists, and the absence of government policies to include therapists in the school personnel system. These issues were highlighted in interviews with many teachers and therapists, who reported difficulties in collaborating optimally during assessments, lesson planning, and evaluation. Consequently, assessment and lesson planning scored lower than evaluation and advocacy in schools. This study was limited in its ability to obtain respondents from speech therapists working in educational settings. This is because most speech therapists' primary work locations are in hospitals or clinics. Consequently, the proportion of teachers and speech therapists in this study was unbalanced, resulting in a greater perspective on collaboration from teachers who had previously collaborated in schools. The hope is that future collaboration will not only involve teachers and speech therapists, but also with psychologists, who are crucial elements in the assessment and learning planning of children with special needs. Future research is expected to lead to the development of guidelines or standard operating procedures for multisectoral collaboration between teachers, therapists, and psychologists, thus optimizing school services.

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