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DISCUSSION



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Speech-language pathology telementoring projects in global health contexts: Partnerships, payoffs and progression

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ABSTRACT

Speech-language pathology is an emerging profession in many Majority World countries. Pioneering speech-language pathology graduates within these settings face unique challenges such as limited access to professional support and development opportunities. Cross-cultural telementoring is a strategy growing in popularity within global health contexts. Cross-cultural telementoring aims to link experienced mentors from a setting where the profession is well established with pioneering graduate mentees. Mentoring partnerships work together to achieve mentee professional development goals. This paper summarizes three unique speech-language pathology cross-cultural telementoring projects from across the globe. Telementoring projects specific to Ghana and Viet Nam in addition to a multi-country project are presented as case studies. Project details for each case study are outlined, and, outcomes, challenges, success factors, and future directions are highlighted for each. Case studies consider the value and benefits of cross-cultural tele-

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mentoring projects in global health contexts and their impact on building globally sustainable partnerships for the profession.

KEYWORDS Cross-cultural; majority world; mentoring/telementoring; partnership; professional development; sustainability

Introduction

Speech-language pathology (SLP) is an emerging profession in many Majority World¹ countries (Cheng, 2013), including Ghana (Bampoe, 2018), East African nations (Alighieri, De Bock, Galiwango, Sseremba, & Van Lierde, 2023), and Viet Nam (Atherton, Davidson, & McAllister, 2017). Pioneering SLP graduates in the Majority World are often challenged by limited access to professional support and development opportunities (Alighieri et al., 2023; Atherton et al., 2017). Internationally, the SLP profession is striving to build globally sustainable partnerships and practices to progress the emerging profession of SLP across the Majority World (Dada, Wylie, Marshall, Rochus, & Bampoe, 2023).

Mentoring is a strategy used to build health professionals' capacity and promote quality clinical care in Majority World countries (Hansoti et al., 2019). Mentoring is recognized as a professional development tool, whereby guidance and support are provided to an individual (mentee) usually by a more experienced individual (mentor) via a reciprocal learning relationship (Rose & Best, 2005; Speech Pathology Australia [SPA], 2022). Although mentoring and supervision both provide professional support to a practitioner and promote lifelong learning (Moran et al., 2014), supervision is typically more formalized than mentoring, with a focus on supporting accountability, and enhancing safety and quality in the workplace (SPA, 2022).

It is well-documented that engagement in mentoring can result in numerous benefits for mentees and mentors (Rose & Best, 2005; Yoon et al., 2017). Challenges also exist such as cultural differences, unrealistic expectations of partners, time differences, internet access, and lack of sustainability (Barlow & Sullivan, 2022; Marshall & Wickenden, 2018); however, these can be overcome with strategies such as the use of technology (Westervelt et al., 2018), interpreter support (Van Bakel et al., 2022), and project resources and facilitation (Hansoti et al., 2019).

This clinical insights paper aims to describe three cross-cultural mentoring case studies from the Majority World (multi-country, Ghana, and Viet

¹The terms Majority World and Majority World Countries have been used in this paper to reflect a non-hierarchical classification of countries (Khan, Abimbola, Kyobutungi, & Pai, 2022). These terms describe a region of the world where most of the world's population resides (Alam, 2008). However, the authors wish to acknowledge and celebrate the uniqueness of each country and culture represented within the case studies.

Table 1. Overview of mentoring projects.

Majority World Setting	Number of Mentoring Pairs/Groups	Interpreters Involved
Multicountry (Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Togo, South Africa, Viet Nam)	10	Yes
Ghana	12	No (English is national language of Ghana)
Viet Nam	29	Yes

Nam). [Table 1](#) provides an overview of each of the mentoring projects. Our paper also aims to explore the outcomes, challenges, success factors, and future directions for each project.

In 2017, when the first of these case studies evolved in Viet Nam, no SLP or health professional-specific cross-cultural telementoring programs had been published in the literature. Relevant literature that discussed tele/mentoring programs from the Minority World were drawn upon to assist development of the Viet Nam project (Philippart & Gluesing, 2012; Schwerdtle, Morphet, & Hall, 2017). The Ghanaian and multi-country projects were developed after the Viet Nam project and took inspiration from the Viet Nam project during development. This paper will briefly discuss how outcomes from Viet Nam, Ghana, and the multi-country case studies align with other cross-cultural telementoring case studies.

International Association of Communication Sciences and Disorders mentoring project case study

Project description

The International Association of Communication Sciences and Disorders (IALP) seeks to improve services for people with speech, language, and communication disorders through supporting speech-language pathologists (SLPs), phoniatrists and audiologists across the world. IALP advocates for services for people with communication disability in underserved or unserved populations such as Africa, Asia, and South America where speech-language pathology is a newly established profession, and SLPs may not have access to resources, ongoing professional education, and support. In doing so, IALP seeks to facilitate clinical practice through international cooperation and collaboration and to provide a platform for international networking and advocacy. In a unique collaboration, IALP and the Tavistock Trust for Aphasia (TTA) pioneered a year-long mentoring project for ten speech-language pathologists who serve adults with aphasia in Majority World settings. The IALP Aphasia Committee spearheaded this innovative project from October 2021 to September 2022.

An online email communication was distributed to chairs of the IALP committees to seek mentors with skills and experience in working with people with aphasia to support the mentees on the project. Ten IALP members volunteered to assist. Expression of interest (EOI) forms were distributed online via WhatsApp groups, social media, and email to recruit mentees from Majority World settings². Mentees were based in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Togo, South Africa, and Viet Nam while IALP mentors were based in Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Greece, India, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Tavistock Trust for Aphasia funding provided mentees with IALP membership for a year. Mentees stated that being an IALP member was of immense benefit due to having access to resources, journals, conferences, the opportunity to attend virtual programs, foster networking, and access to evidence-based information on aphasia and other communication and swallowing difficulties that aided in their practice as SLPs. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in the United Kingdom also granted access to relevant online seminars in the field of aphasia.

Project outcomes, opportunities, and challenges

During this project, feedback from participants was sought at two time periods. The initial evaluation sought information from mentees and mentors on their expectations of the program and plans for their mentoring meetings. The final evaluation sought an in-depth reflection of the mentoring program and to assess progress made toward the achievement of the mentoring program's objectives. This included information on the frequency of meetings, mode of communication, key learnings from participation in the mentoring program, difficulties/challenges encountered, and goal setting and achievement.

The overall response to the mentoring project was extremely positive. Mentors and mentees stated that mentoring enabled collaboration and sharing of knowledge and skills, empowering them to improve the way they provided services to their communities. Mentors reflected on the importance of providing support to professionals with limited resources in the assessment and treatment of aphasia, of considering cultural and practical values and sharing resources for aphasia practice, and the need for resources (both time and financial) to further facilitate international partnerships and memberships of IALP for SLPs from Majority World countries. Mentees emphasized how the mentoring experience positively influenced their service delivery, increasing knowledge of aphasia treatments and working with families and communities. They reported increased

²The term Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) was used by IALP when sourcing mentees.

confidence and competence in transferring acquired knowledge to establish a more competent workforce in providing aphasia services. The reciprocal nature of learning between mentor and mentee included strengthening their reflective practice, gaining insights into their attitudes and practices (cultural learning), the importance of mentoring for their professional development and understanding gaps in aphasia services.

The program's success can be attributed to several key contributions, including the careful selection and pairing of mentors and mentees. The mentors, with their wealth of experience played a crucial role in guiding and supporting the mentees. The flexibility in running mentoring meetings to accommodate the different needs and contexts of participants, and the financial support provided by the Tavistock Trust for Aphasia, were also instrumental. Furthermore, the commitment and enthusiasm of all participants in sharing knowledge and experiences were fundamental to the project's success.

One main challenge was the logistical complexity of scheduling meetings due to differences in international time zones and internet connectivity problems. The linguistic differences of participants were also a consideration. An important learning outcome was the importance of having access to interpreters during mentoring sessions to ensure effective communication. Thus, the inclusion of funding for interpreters to facilitate communication between mentors and mentees is highly recommended for future mentoring projects.

Future directions

Based on our pilot project findings, some recommendations are made to guide future mentoring projects. Funding is important for the feasibility of future mentoring projects to support SLPs and other health and education professionals who work with people with aphasia, their families, and communities in resource-limited countries. In addition, we suggest the development of an online mentoring module focused on mentoring in multicultural environments, primarily aimed at mentors. This module would offer flexible and accessible training, allowing mentors to learn at their own pace while addressing cultural sensitivities, which are essential for effective cross-cultural mentoring. This module will be appropriate to be expanded or adapted for larger projects or different settings, sustainable, and could be regularly updated with new features such as case studies and discussion forums to enhance learning. Formal evaluation of mentoring projects is also recommended to explore the experiences of mentors and mentees and inform ongoing improvements.

British Ghanaian Therapy Partnership (BriGht) mentoring project case study

Background

In Ghana, Speech-language pathology (SLP), known locally as speech and language therapy, is a rapidly developing profession. In 2016 the first degree in SLP, a Master of Science (MSc) at the University of Ghana, was established (Bampoe, 2018). Twelve newly qualified speech-language pathologists (SLPs) graduated in 2018. With only six qualified SLPs working in Ghana at the time, there were not enough experienced SLPs to support a cohort of newly qualified SLPs. Relationships had been built between colleagues at the University of Ghana and UK-based SLPs who had visited to support teaching and learning during the MSc. This evolved into the 'British Ghanaian Therapy Partnership' (BriGht) being established. BriGht aimed to create a space for collaboration, mutual learning, and support. In response to a request from Ghanaian colleagues, BriGht members created a mentorship project (inspired by a similar project in Viet Nam) to support the first cohort of newly qualified Ghanaian SLPs.

Project description

BriGht members collaborated to match mentors (UK-based SLPs) with mentees (newly qualified Ghanaian SLPs). All allocated mentors had previous interactions with the mentees through teaching or placement supervision. Some had also worked or volunteered in Ghana previously. In Ghana, newly qualified therapists must complete an internship for one year before gaining their license to practice. The first mentorship project was carried out during this internship year in 2018. Mentoring meetings occurred at least once a month via Zoom. WhatsApp platforms were also established to encourage discussion about various clinical topics.

The second round of mentorship began in 2020 when the second cohort of newly qualified Ghanaian SLPs graduated. In this mentorship project, a new group of mentors were recruited. Whilst all had a connection to Ghana (e.g. family or professional), not all had visited recently or been involved with teaching the SLP course. Table 2 summarises the 2018 and 2020 Ghanaian projects.

Table 2. Summary of 2018 and 2020 BriGht SLP mentorship programs.

Year	Number of mentors	Number of mentees	Frequency of meetings	Number of mentees that had in-person interaction with mentors prior to start of program
2018	7	12	Once a month	12 out of 12
2020	8	12	Once a month	4 out of 12

During both iterations of the mentorship project, a coordinator was appointed. The coordinator was elected by the mentees and tasked with coordinating meeting dates and times, collating feedback from mentees and mentors and writing quarterly reports.

Project outcomes, opportunities, and challenges

Online surveys using likert scales were used alongside focus groups for mentees to provide feedback on what went well, and the challenges faced. Mentees accessed support from mentors on clinical cases as well as service-related matters. The WhatsApp platform was used to set up a member group for clinical questions to be posed and answered, however, was rarely used by mentees. This was partly because mentees felt the need to focus on service development in their roles and partly due to mentees' hesitation to approach their UK-based mentors whom they had never met.

The exchange of information, discussion of clinical and professional issues, and opportunities to reflect on the different processes and procedures in Ghana and the UK have increased knowledge and skills highly relevant to clinical practice for all. These included flexibility, cultural competence, humility, and self-reflection. Survey and focus group feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with mentees reporting feeling more confident in their clinical skills, practice, and decision-making. All mentees went on to pass their internship and licensure exams after participating in the mentoring project.

Whilst mentors across both projects had some link with Ghana, differences in experiences, ways of working and culture were difficult to navigate at times. All mentors had spent the majority of their SLP working life in the UK. Most had never experienced the issues mentees were raising. For example, mentees had to set up new SLP services, negotiate room/office space, work in remote locations, and often work in establishments with little knowledge of SLP or where they experienced hostility from other professionals. These practical and logistical issues were at times challenging for mentors to provide guidance and support on. Other cultural differences such as Ghanaian teaching and communication styles varying from typical practices in the UK required navigation and discussion, especially for mentors less familiar with the MSc SLP course in Ghana who had not worked/volunteered there previously.

Feedback highlighted that the mentoring experience was often more productive and beneficial for mentees working in establishments with knowledge of SLP and were 'SLP ready'. A consistent challenge for all was ensuring that mentoring rather than supervision was being provided. Clear expectations between mentors and mentees was deemed an important

factor in managing this, as were the opportunities mentors had to meet and support each other in the UK.

Future directions

In December 2022, a third cohort of SLPs graduated. It was agreed that a move towards experienced Ghanaian SLPs being trained and supported to provide clinical supervision would be a more sustainable next step than further mentoring from BRiGht. Using the training modules created by the Trinh Foundation to support therapists in Viet Nam, BriGht members developed a supervision course. This was targeted at Ghanaian SLPs from the first and second cohorts. The training was followed by a short period of monthly mentoring from BriGht members to support the development of practical supervision skills.

Engagement in this project was lower than previous projects. Although feedback has not been formally gathered, anecdotally it appears that increased confidence and experience meant that Ghanaian SLPs no longer felt the need for continued mentorship from BriGht.

In any partnership, it is important to reflect and adjust to changes. The mentorship project was BRiGHT's response to requests for support from colleagues in Ghana. As the profession in Ghana has grown, therapists have developed a range of skills and most importantly, confidence and expertise in SLP within the Ghanaian context. Research from similar projects across Africa have also highlighted the need for sustainable and culturally relevant support in the future (Marshall & Wickenden, 2018; Sowden, Wekhooda, & Musasizi, 2023). BriGht's mentorship project has achieved many of its aims. We celebrate its success and hope the lessons learned can continue to inspire further authentic mentorship partnerships between Majority World and Minority World colleagues. We also urge colleagues to be ready and willing to end support when the time is right. For BriGht, the time to end the mentorship project is now. We thank all involved over the last 5 years and look forward to continued collaboration in the future.

Trinh Foundation Australia Beyond Borders Mentoring Program (TFA BBMP) case study

Background

In 2017 the speech-language pathology (SLP) profession, known as 'speech and language therapy' in Viet Nam was in its infancy. The profession was not yet recognised by the Vietnamese Ministry of Health and formal undergraduate training had not commenced (Eitel & Vu, 2017). Trinh Foundation Australia (TFA), an Australian not-for-profit organization, had partnered with

Vietnamese organizations for over 10 years supporting the SLP profession in Viet Nam. Post-graduate certificate courses were underway and in 2018 there were 65 SLP graduates. In conversations with the primary author, graduates discussed the lack of access to professional support in their workplaces and requested individualized support. To support this request, a Speech Pathology Australia grant was secured by TFA in 2018 to pilot a cross-cultural telementoring project, the Beyond Borders Mentoring Program (BBMP).

Project description

TFA invited Vietnamese SLP graduates to submit an EOI and their specific learning goals to participate as mentees in BBMP. EOIs were also sought from SLPs with mentoring experience from outside Viet Nam.

Twenty-nine mentee EOIs were received and included in the 2018 pilot project. Mentees applied as individuals or as a group with similar learning goals. BBMP 2018 comprised three groups and nineteen individuals. Mentees were matched with relevant mentors from Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States by project facilitators, including the primary author (a Vietnamese-based Australian volunteer) and a Vietnamese-English interpreter. Trained TFA interpreters supported mentee-mentor partnerships.

The overarching goal of BBMP was to increase the capability of Vietnamese SLPs to provide high quality SLP services within their communities. To support this aim, SLP mentees set short-term learning goals with mentor support. Example goals included: 'I will know how to work with parents effectively: how to make them practice at home and share the outcomes with SLPs', and 'Enhance knowledge of assessment and treatment of swallowing disorders to guide clinical decision making and maximize treatment outcomes'. Partnerships were encouraged to refine learning goals during their initial session to ensure goals were SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timebound) (Poe, Brooks, Korzaan, Hulshult, & Woods, 2021).

Due to the geographical distance between mentees and mentors, telementoring was utilized. Mentoring partnerships met for one hour each month for six months using their preferred online platform e.g. Facetime or Skype. Mentoring partnerships chose meeting dates and times to suit their schedules. TFA funded seven hours of interpreter time per mentoring pair to support six one-hour sessions and one hour of email or document translation.

Project outcomes, opportunities, and challenges

Feedback was collected using a post-project survey. Participants used a Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of BBMP across a range of areas, and provide descriptive feedback about BBMP, share reflections of their participatory experience, and give ideas for improvement. Feedback indicated the project was highly valued by mentees, mentors, and interpreters. All

reported positive outcomes, including the opportunity to share knowledge, ideas, and experiences with partners. Building positive connections with mentoring partners as they worked in teams was emphasized. Post-project, strong connections were demonstrated when three mentors visited their mentees in Viet Nam to provide further mentoring, and many mentees requested ongoing mentoring support.

Mentees, mentors, and interpreters described role-specific outcomes. Mentees achieved their individual learning goals, valued the opportunity to learn from an experienced SLP, and increased their understanding and application of evidence-based practice. Increased confidence, motivation, self-awareness, resilience, and problem-solving and decision-making skills were highlighted by mentees. Mentors also experienced clinical learning in addition to enhancing their mentoring abilities. Mentees and mentors reported interpreter support was highly valued and vital to mentoring success. Interpreters described professional skill improvement and acquiring awareness of the need for SLP services.

Project flexibility and mentoring resources such as a guidebook, webinar, toolkit, and facilitator support were implemented in anticipation of challenges that may arise when working cross-contextually and cross-culturally (Kent, Kochan, & Green, 2013). These program components were critical to project success. They were highly effective in supporting participants to understand expectations and develop an awareness of cross-cultural practice while assisting partnerships to make mentoring agreements and set goals while working together for outcomes.

All groups reported limited time as a challenge and requested increased time for sessions, project length, and translation of resources in future iterations of BBMP. Access to reliable technology to support mentoring sessions was also challenging for partnerships.

Future directions

Since 2018, TFA has continued to facilitate and secure funding for implementation of the BBMP each year. However, the implementation of BBMP has undergone several revisions due to availability of funding, volunteer capacity, and feedback from previous participants. The current project includes increased number and length of mentoring sessions, and all mentoring groups utilize Zoom to connect more reliably. All mentees now participate within peer groups, often formed within a workplace, and share a mentor and common goals or projects. This encourages additional peer mentoring away from telementoring sessions and decreases the load on volunteer mentors and facilitators. Social platforms such as Instagram have allowed the success of BBMP to be shared with a wide audience and promote future participation.

In 2024 an Australian-based Vietnamese SLP is co-facilitating BBMP with an experienced Australian facilitator. Utilizing enthusiastic facilitators with cross-cultural experience has supported partnership outcomes and greater project sustainability. TFA is committed to promoting further sustainability and localization of BBMP by onboarding Vietnamese SLP mentors in future programs.

A formal evaluation of BBMP is being undertaken via a research program (ethics approval has been obtained from the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee ref: H-2018-0439), and initial dissemination of results has commenced (Day, Hewat, & Webb, 2021; Day, Hewat, Webb, & Atherton, 2023). TFA expects to utilize these results to assist in making improvements to and seeking funding for future telementoring projects.

Conclusion

Three distinct SLP cross-cultural telementoring projects were recently piloted by three unique partnerships across Majority World settings where the SLP profession is emerging. Case studies presented within this paper illustrate the value and benefits of cross-cultural telementoring projects in global health contexts, highlighting the challenges faced and the strategies employed to overcome them. Table 3 compares the three projects, highlighting similarities and differences across project aspects. The various case studies demonstrate that cross-cultural telementoring focused on achieving individual SLP mentee learning goals is a feasible and effective strategy to support the professional development of SLP mentees working in a range of Majority World settings.

Despite the challenges experienced, such as time and technology factors and navigating cultural and linguistic differences, participants from all case studies valued the mentoring experience, particularly the opportunity to share experiences and resources and build connections, partnerships, and collaborations with SLPs from across the world. Pre-existing literature has established that when mentors have an awareness of their mentee's culture and context, when both acknowledge cultural differences and power imbalances that exist between majority and minority world SLPs and spend time developing trusting partnerships and cultural competency in preparation for setting clear expectations early, the achievement of outcomes is most likely (Marshall & Wickenden, 2018; Osula & Irvin, 2009). The case studies presented in this paper support these premises. Access to interpreters (van Bakel et al., 2022) appropriate mentee-mentor matching (Deng, Gulseren, & Turner, 2022), flexible program structure (Marshall & Wickenden, 2018), and program resources and coordinator (Hansoti et al., 2019) have positively influenced one or more of the projects discussed in this paper as well as previously published projects. Mentees from all described projects reported increased confidence, clinical competence, and self-reflection post-

Table 3. Comparison of project outcomes, challenges, success factors, and future directions.

	Reported by participants	IALP (multi-country)	Ghana	Viet Nam
Outcomes	Collaboration/building partnerships/ connections	■		■
	Opportunity to share/exchange		■	
	Increased confidence, competence & reflective practice		■	
	Support to mentees/mentee empowerment/mentee achieve goals	■	■	■
	Cultural competence/insights	■		
	Improved decision-making/ application of evidence/problem- solving/resilience		■	■
	Humility	■		
	Flexibility	■		
	Valuable experience			■
	Motivation			■
	Increased mentoring abilities (mentors)			■
	Increased professional skills (interpreters)			■
	Challenges	Time factors (time zones, limited access to interpreters & mentors)	■	
Internet connectivity/technology/ logistical complexities		■		■
Navigating cultural differences			■	
Linguistic differences		■		
Success Factors	Mentees hesitant to approach mentors when no prior relationship		■	
	Differing expectations		■	
	Careful mentee-mentor matching	■		■
	Program flexibility	■		
	Pre-program mentor awareness of culture and context		■	
	Access to interpreters		Nil need	
	Financial support	■		
	Driven by mentee goals	■		
	Clear expectations		■	■
	Experienced mentors	■		
Future Directions	Previous mentee-mentor interactions		■	
	Project coordinator and mentoring resources			■
	Mentor support groups		■	
	Positive partnerships			■
	Project driven by local need			■
	Options for sustainability (locally led supervision/mentoring projects)		■	
	Formal evaluations	■		
	Continued funding			■
	Pre-program support to promote cultural awareness (Viet Nam and Ghana have in place)	■		
	Access to practice resources (Viet Nam and Ghana have in place)	■		

telementoring participation, aligning with the outcomes of similar previous studies by Barlow and Sullivan (2022), and Marshall and Wickenden (2018).

Authors acknowledge the limitations of this descriptive study, with minimal data collected across projects, and formal evaluation of projects yet to be finalised. We acknowledge the potential for courtesy bias when interviewing participants from Africa (Marshall & Wickenden, 2018) and South-East Asia (Johnson, Shavitt, & Holbrook, 2011) during data collection, with most reports collected being positive. We acknowledge projects were developed by independent teams for specific contexts, resulting in unique program designs and outcomes. Although this may limit our ability to compare success factors across projects, authors recognize that distinct contexts require a unique approach for best outcomes (Marshall & Wickenden, 2018).

When providing feedback participants identified that locally driven mentoring or supervision projects will be key to achieving future sustainability. Sowden et al. (2023) highlight that local SLPs should be at the center of any international partnership and be supported to take the lead in developing new projects. Local SLPs are most appropriately placed to identify and understand local needs, drive development and implementation, and support the contextualization of telementoring (Sowden et al., 2023). Opportunities for scaling up the intervention more broadly may be possible when this approach is employed.

This paper underscores the global impact of the initiatives discussed, demonstrating how cross-cultural telementoring can assist the profession in building globally sustainable partnerships and practices while working toward good health and well-being (Sustainable Development Goal 3) and quality education (Sustainable Development Goal 4), in Majority World settings where the SLP profession continues to emanate.

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