

Self-evaluation of an undergraduate speech-language-hearing program from the perspective of its graduates

Autoavaliação de um curso de Graduação em Fonoaudiologia sob a perspectiva de seus egressos

Autoevaluación de una carrera de pregrado en Logopedia desde la perspectiva de sus egresados

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Abstract

Introduction: Assessments by graduates stand out among the indicators for the self-assessment of higher education institutions. **Objective:** To reflect on the contribution of graduates' assessment to an institutional self-assessment process to improve speech-language-hearing training. **Methods:** Observational cross-sectional research with graduates of the last four classes of a Speech-Language-Hearing program in the city of São Paulo. Participants answered an 11-question instrument (Microsoft Forms[®]) sent remotely via email and WhatsApp. Data were analyzed using numerical and percentage statistics. **Results:** The study invited 63 graduates, of which 48 (76.1%) participated, with a predominance of white women. The majority (44-92%) work in their area of training, find employment at most in the first year of graduation (42-88.0%), and assess their professors' contribution as significant to their academic trajectory (98%-47). After graduation, 89.5% (43) continued their studies, with a prevalence of lato sensu programs (54.2%-32). Language is the first area chosen (26.9%-11). The literature has a

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scarcity of analyses on research on graduates in the area, highlighting the need for scientific production on the training of speech-language pathologists in their relationship with the job market. **Conclusion:** The analysis of the institution's graduates helps improve the program and continuing education, making it possible to understand the demands and needs of the work field. The publication of such research based on an institutional instrument can contribute to the reflection of training demands in speech-language-hearing sciences.

Keywords: Health Education; Higher Education; Evaluation Study; Graduate.

Resumo

Introdução: dentre os indicadores para a autoavaliação de uma instituição de ensino superior (IES), destaca-se a avaliação realizada por egressos. **Objetivo:** refletir sobre a contribuição da avaliação de egressos em um processo de autoavaliação institucional para o aperfeiçoamento da formação em Fonoaudiologia. **Método:** pesquisa observacional e transversal realizada junto a egressos das últimas quatro turmas de um curso de Fonoaudiologia do município de São Paulo. Os participantes preencheram um instrumento (Microsoft Forms®) encaminhado de forma remota (*e-mail* e *WhatsApp*) com 11 questões. Os dados foram analisados por meio de estatística numérica e percentual. **Resultados:** dentre 63 convidados, 48 (76,1%) participaram, com predomínio de mulheres brancas. A maioria (44-92%) desenvolve atividade profissional dentro da área de formação, obtém emprego no máximo no primeiro ano de formada (42-88,0%) e faz uma avaliação significativa em relação à contribuição do corpo docente em sua trajetória acadêmica (98%-47). Após a graduação, 89,5% (43) deram continuidade aos estudos, com prevalência de cursos *lato sensu* (54,2%-32). Linguagem é a área escolhida em primeiro lugar (26,9%-11). A literatura mostra escassez de análises sobre pesquisa de egressos na área, fato que evidencia a necessidade de produção científica sobre a formação do fonoaudiólogo na sua relação com o mercado de trabalho. **Conclusão:** a análise dos egressos da instituição contribui para aperfeiçoar o curso e a educação continuada, possibilitando compreender demandas e necessidades do campo de trabalho. A publicação de pesquisas desta natureza, a partir de instrumento institucional, pode contribuir para a reflexão de demandas da formação no campo fonoaudiológico.

Palavras-chave: Educação em Saúde; Educação Superior; Estudo de Avaliação; Egresso.

Resumen

Introducción: entre los indicadores para la autoevaluación de una Institución de Educación Superior (IES) se destaca la evaluación realizada por los egresados. **Objetivo:** reflexionar sobre la contribución de la evaluación de egresados, inserta en un proceso de autoevaluación institucional para la mejora de la formación en Fonoaudiología. **Método:** investigación observacional y transversal, realizada con egresados de las cuatro últimas clases de la Carrera de Fonoaudiología, de la ciudad de São Paulo. Los participantes completaron un instrumento (Microsoft Forms®), enviado de forma remota (correo electrónico y WhatsApp) con 11 preguntas. Los datos fueron analizados mediante estadística, numérica y porcentual. **Resultados:** entre 63 invitados, participaron 48 (76,1%), con predominio de mujeres de raza blanca. La mayoría (44-92%) desarrolla una actividad profesional dentro del área de formación, se emplea como máximo en el primer año tras la graduación (42-88,0%) y realiza una valoración significativa en relación a la aportación del profesorado en su trayectoria académica. (98%-47). Después de la graduación, el 89,5% (43) continuó sus estudios, con prevalencia de cursos *lato sensu* (54,2%-32). El idioma es el área elegida en primer lugar (26,9%-11). La literatura muestra una falta de análisis sobre investigaciones sobre egresados en el área, hecho que destaca la necesidad de producción científica sobre la formación del fonoaudiólogo en su relación con el mercado de trabajo. **Conclusión:** el análisis de los egresados de la institución contribuye al mejoramiento del Curso y de la formación continua, pues posibilita la comprensión de las demandas de las necesidades en el campo de trabajo. La publicación de investigaciones de esta naturaleza, a partir de un instrumento institucional, puede contribuir a la reflexión sobre las demandas de formación en el campo de la logopedia.

Palabras clave: Educación para la Salud; Educación superior; Estudio de evaluación; Graduado.

Introduction

This research was conducted as part of a study implemented by the Internal Evaluation Commission (CPA) of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). Appointed by the Dean's Office of the Institution, the CPA is responsible for coordinating, planning, implementing, and developing actions aimed at institutional self-assessment, in accordance with the guidelines established by the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CONAES). Institutional self-assessment provides material for reflecting on university practices through qualitative and quantitative analyses of performance, thus enabling the continuous reorientation of academic and administrative policies, as well as supports research related to professional training.

There are several types of evaluations included in the activities developed by the CPA: faculty evaluations conducted by students; course evaluations through feedback from groups of students and faculty members of the Structuring Teaching Nucleus (NDE); evaluations of internships; evaluations of support activities (those that serve academic actions); and evaluations of alumni. These activities follow the indicators recommended by the National Higher Education Evaluation System (SINAES), established by Federal Law No. 10,861 of April 14, 2004.

According to the guidelines of the Self-Assessment Guide for Higher Education Institutions, by Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Research and Studies (INEP) of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), the evaluation of alumni (which is the focus of this article) provides indicators related to the dimension "Policies for student and alumni support"¹.

Two indicators stand out within this dimension: the professional placement of alumni and their participation in the life of the higher education institution (HEI). The first aspect concerns the analysis of alumni in light of the transformations prompted by the influence of the curriculum, particularly as graduates encounter complex professional situations that compel them to reflect on the knowledge and skills developed during their academic training and required in their professional practice¹.

The second aspect involves fostering a culture of alumni integration within the university, seeking to determine whether the HEI promotes continuing

education and professional development activities, and whether alumni actively participate in these initiatives. Among the key quality indicators of alumni support policies are mechanisms for collecting alumni feedback on the education received; employment rates of graduates; assessments of the alignment between employment and the professional training provided; evaluations from employers regarding alumni performance; and opportunities for alumni to participate in institutional life.^{2,3}

An analysis conducted by INEP in 2015, based on annual CPA reports and approached from a shared governance perspective, highlighted both the interest of HEIs in alumni data and their recognition of its strategic relevance⁴. However, institutions faced challenges regarding how to utilize the data effectively. Even in cases where HEIs had systematized alumni data, they often did not carry out more in-depth analyses of the information collected⁴.

Given that the quality of education is a decisive factor in facilitating entry into the labor market – preferably immediately after graduation – these indicators are of strategic importance for institutional self-assessment, complementing the broader set of evaluations developed by the CPA alongside academic programs and student training initiatives.

The scientific literature, meanwhile, shows that although such surveys are often conducted to meet governmental requirements, the publication of Brazilian scientific studies in the health field examining the relationship between education and entry into the labor market or research fields – both for undergraduate and postgraduate alumni – is more prevalent in the areas of Medicine and Nursing⁵.

According to some authors, this type of evaluation, beyond meeting external assessment requirements (e.g., MEC/INEP), can serve as a public policy tool of significant institutional impact, positioning alumni as key stakeholders in self-assessment processes²⁻⁶. The same perspective applies to evaluations carried out by the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) in graduate programs.

At PUC-SP, certain programs conduct alumni evaluations independently, without the involvement of experienced professionals from the CPA of the institution.

In this context, the present initiative focused on analyzing the professional placement of alumni from the Speech-Language Pathology program at



PUC-SP in the job market. The goal was to support the interpretation of findings, promote discussion, and inform reflections on the Course Pedagogical Project (PPC), the quality of teaching at the university level, and graduates' readiness for professional practice. Such analysis may also contribute to the development of an instrument that could later be adopted by other university programs, thereby integrating alumni evaluation cycles into institutional self-assessment and fostering reflection on academic training within specific fields.

Within the partnership between the CPA and the program coordination, the initial objective was to create a concise tool capable of generating relevant information for the university, with the potential for adaptation across different academic programs. The tool was intended to support reflection on training practices and improve educational outcomes.

Accordingly, efforts were directed toward achieving a satisfactory response rate that would yield relevant data for monitoring the Speech-Language Pathology course – particularly regarding alumni entry into the labor market. A pilot questionnaire was developed and submitted for review by the CPA, and the responsibility for data analysis rested with the program.

In designing the instrument, the core premise was to collect data that could inform institutional practices based on alumni perceptions of their educational experiences, especially in terms of the relationship between academic learning and its applicability to professional contexts. The analysis then aimed to identify necessary adjustments in the training process, particularly regarding the alignment between acquired knowledge and professional demands.

Concerning alumni involvement in the life of the HEI, a report by the INEP, which analyzed internal evaluation reports submitted by CPAs⁴, noted that some Brazilian universities have developed alumni engagement programs centered on collaborative and socially responsible activities. These initiatives aim to foster productive synergy between graduates and the labor market. This, however, is not yet the case at the PUC-SP, which currently lacks an institutional project dedicated to alumni engagement, despite the fact that many individual programs maintain some form of contact with their former students. These alumni are invited to attend both in-person and online events, either

as participants or guest speakers, and are included in groups that share job opportunities, research participation, and event announcements.

Such activities are part of the Speech-Language Pathology courses which alumni are regularly invited to participate in lectures and events organized by the program itself and by the Graduate Program in Human Communication and Health (e.g., *Fono em Foco*, *LaborVox Convida!*, seminars, among others). In 2016, a WhatsApp group was created to connect faculty and alumni, serving as a platform for disseminating job openings, training opportunities, official announcements from the Federal and Regional Speech-Language Pathology Councils, and other relevant content. While these initiatives are commendable, there is still no formal institutional framework that defines the potential benefits or contributions resulting from such collaborations.

The literature on alumni tracking and evaluation highlights that some public and private institutions have developed dedicated portals to monitor alumni outcomes. However, most of these platforms are limited to basic registration functionalities and lack access to analytical data capable of providing a deeper understanding of graduates' professional trajectories^{2,3}.

Undergraduate programs are expected to offer a solid academic foundation that supports the acquisition of field-specific knowledge and fosters the development of skills necessary for generalist practice in Speech-Language Pathology. To practice effectively, graduates must be able to plan, engage, solve problems, apply theoretical knowledge, and make meaningful connections between theory and professional practice. In doing so, they contribute to a practice rooted in critical and reflective thinking, particularly in addressing challenges related to healthcare, social determinants of health, and the promotion of citizenship, rights, diversity, and inclusion.⁷

In line with some scholars, alumni research should not be viewed solely as a tool to meet the self-assessment requirements of the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES)^{2,3}. Instead, such studies should serve as essential tools for improving the performance of undergraduate and graduate programs, offering valuable insights into graduate training, workforce entry timelines, and the adequacy of academic preparation in meeting the changing needs of society. Consequently, evaluations must consider



not only the quality of the instruments and the responses obtained but also how the resulting data is processed and utilized^{2,3}.

Self-assessment processes typically encourage institutional reflection and, in turn, foster the implementation of improvements based on the observed outcomes or impacts of educational activities on graduates' professional lives. The systematic collection of alumni feedback provides critical input for reviewing and updating the PPC, either reaffirming or challenging the prevailing perceptions alumni hold about their educational experience and learning environment.

One key dimension in understanding the transformation students undergo during their academic journey – shaped by curricular influence – is the process of actively listening to alumni. In their professional routines, graduates encounter complex scenarios that prompt them to assess whether the competencies developed during their studies are aligned with real-world professional demands. This evaluation allows them to reflect on the pedagogical framework they experienced and on the factors that shaped their academic training.⁷

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze the Speech-Language Pathology course offered by the School of Human and Health Sciences (FaCHS) at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) from an institutional perspective, drawing on insights from alumni who graduated in the last four cohorts. The study also aims to contribute to scientific literature and academic discussions surrounding alumni tracking and the evaluation of higher education outcomes.

Material and method

This is a prospective, observational, cross-sectional study. It did not require submission to the institution's Research Ethics Committee, as it is based on the analysis of a report prepared by the CPA of PUC-SP, without any direct interaction between the authors and participants, who were graduates of the Speech-Language Pathology course.

During a meeting involving representatives from the Department of Undergraduate Studies, the coordinator of the CPA, and the coordinator of the Speech-Language Pathology course, it was

decided to develop a brief and easily applicable instrument to collect qualitative data and serve as a pilot for potential implementation in other academic programs within the institution.

Participants included graduates from the classes of 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023. It is important to note that no students graduated in 2020 or 2021, and no exclusion criteria were applied.

The instrument was developed using Microsoft Forms® – a technology tool officially adopted by the university – and consisted of eight closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The questions were designed to gather information on the following aspects: graduates' current employment status; their assessment of the curriculum's alignment with their personal expectations and labor market demands; and their perceptions regarding areas in which their undergraduate education could be improved.

A user-friendly platform was intentionally chosen to facilitate participation.

The questionnaire was distributed remotely through personalized email invitations sent to the graduates, using contact information provided by the university's academic office and approved by the Department of Undergraduate Studies as part of the institutional self-assessment process led by the CPA at PUC-SP. To enhance outreach, the invitation was also shared via a message in the aforementioned WhatsApp group, "Sempre Fono PUC." The invitation clearly stated that participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The data collection period spanned 15 days and included repeated follow-up messages to encourage responses, given the importance of alumni engagement in the course evaluation process.

Responses were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet automatically generated by the platform and analyzed using descriptive statistics (both absolute and percentage values).

Results

A total of 63 alumni were invited to participate in the survey – that is, all individuals who graduated in the four selected cohorts. Of these, 48 responded (76.1%), with full participation from the class of 2018 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Numerical and percentage distribution of alumni, considering those invited and those who responded to the questionnaire (n = 63)

Year	Graduated alumni		Participating alumni	
	n	%	n	%
2018	18	28.6	18	37.5
2019	19	30.1	11	23.0
2022	10	15.9	6	12.5
2023	16	25.4	13	27.0
Total	63	100.0	48	100.0

The demographic profile of the respondents was predominantly female (46 participants, or 96%), with one male respondent and one graduate who preferred not to disclose their gender. With regard to race or ethnicity, more than half of the respondents identified as white (29–58.3%). The remaining participants included 11 individuals who identified as multiracial (23%), four as Black (8%), and four as Indigenous (8%).

Table 2 reveals that the majority of graduates

(44–92%) are professionally active in their field of study. A more detailed analysis indicates that three of those currently not employed graduated recently, in 2023.

The same table shows that most graduates began working soon after completing the program: 75% (36) reported entering the workforce immediately after graduation, while an additional 13% (6) secured employment within the first year following graduation.

Table 2. Numerical and percentage distribution regarding the time (in years) between graduation and employment (n = 48)

Years since graduation	n	%
From 1 to 2 years	1	2%
From 2 to 4 years	1	2%
Immediately upon completion of the degree	36	75%
Less than 1 year	6	13%
I am not working in the field of my degree	4	8%
Total	48	100%

As for graduates' evaluation of the Speech-Language Pathology course at PUC-SP and its contribution to their professional development, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Notably, 98% (47) of respondents indicated that the faculty played a significant role in their education (Table 3).

Theoretical training, as well as both mandatory and non-mandatory internships and participation in academic events, were also positively evaluated,

with approval rates ranging from 77% for non-mandatory internships to 71% for mandatory ones. In terms of preparation for professional practice, 60% of graduates reported that the program contributed substantially, while 40% felt it contributed moderately. The remaining items assessed refer to optional activities offered by the program, such as undergraduate research, peer tutoring, and exchange opportunities (Table 3).

Table 3. Numerical and percentage distribution regarding the contribution to the professional training of speech-language pathology alumni

Assessed aspect	Very much		Reasonably		Little		None		Not applicable		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Faculty	47	98	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	100
Theoretical training	36	75	12	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	100
Practical training	29	60	19	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	100
Mandatory internships	34	71	13	27	1	2	0	0	0	0	48	100
Non-mandatory internships	37	77	6	13	1	2	0	0	0	0	48	100
Scientific initiation	32	67	7	15	2	4	0	0	7	15	48	100
Academic events	35	73	12	25	1	2	0	0	0	0	48	100
Teaching assistantship	21	46	5	11	5	11	2	4	13	28	46	100
Exchange programs	2	4	3	7	3	7	3	7	35	76	46	100

With respect to continuing education after graduation – considering that a single graduate may have enrolled in or completed more than one course – Table 4 shows that 54.2% (32) pursued lato sensu graduate programs, while 37.3% (22) enrolled in stricto sensu programs, either separately or in combination. In total, 89.5% (43) of respon-

dents have pursued or are currently pursuing further education. It is important to note that all graduates who had not continued their studies (8.4%–5 individuals) had completed the undergraduate program recently, in 2023 – that is, less than a year prior to the survey (Table 4).

Table 4. Numerical and percentage distribution of mentions regarding the continuation of education by alumni (n = 59)

Level	n	%
I have completed or am currently pursuing a doctoral degree	2	3.4
I have completed or am currently pursuing a master's degree	20	34.0
I have completed or am currently pursuing a lato sensu graduate course	32	54.2
I have not pursued further education	5	8.4

Figure 1 shows the institutions selected by graduates for continuing education, including short courses, lato sensu, and stricto sensu graduate programs. Notably, 29.1% (14) of those pursuing

stricto sensu studies chose to remain at the institution where they earned their undergraduate degree (PUC-SP).

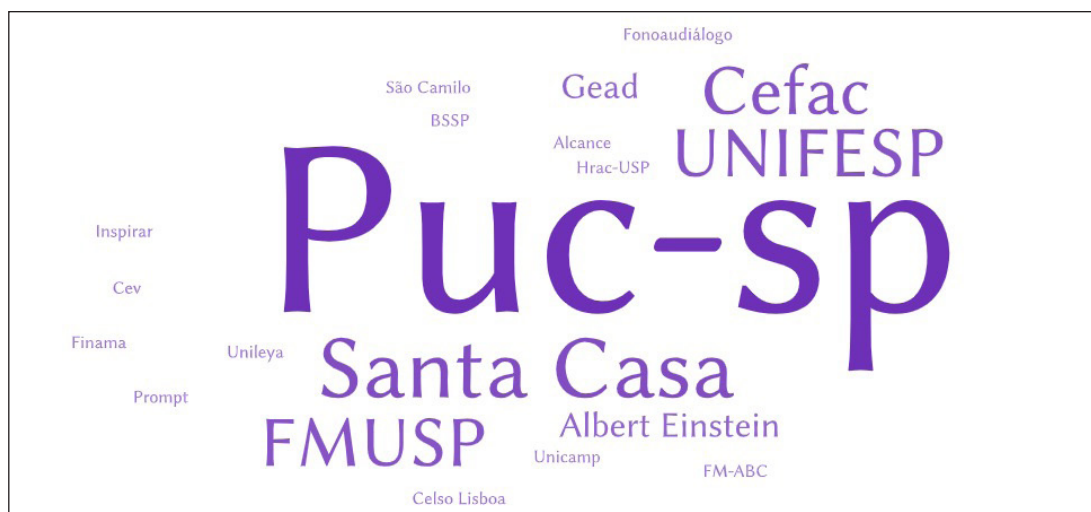


Figure 1. Word cloud of institutions mentioned by alumni where they completed short-term, lato sensu, and stricto sensu courses

When asked about their chosen areas of specialization, two respondents did not indicate a specific field, instead stating “to expand my

knowledge and résumé” and “PhD.” Among those who specified an area, Language was the most frequently mentioned field (16-28.0%) (Table 5).

Table 5. Numerical and percentage distribution of mentions of fields of interest for alumni to pursue further education (n = 57 mentions)

Field	n	%
Language	16	28.0
Audiology	13	22.9
Dysphagia	6	10.6
Voice	6	10.6
Orofacial Motricity	3	5.2
Management	3	5.2
Public/Community Health	3	5.2
Neurology	2	3.5
Hospital setting	2	3.5
Alternative Communication	2	3.5
Vestibular Rehabilitation	1	1.8

Graduates were also asked whether they would recommend the undergraduate program to family or acquaintances. All but one participant responded affirmatively (47-98%).

Discussion

The response rate to the survey was notably high, with participation from over three-quarters

of all program graduates. Although email is the institution’s official channel of communication with students and alumni, it is believed that the high response rate can be attributed to the creation of a WhatsApp group in 2016 – a faster and more accessible communication tool among young adults, especially considering that most respondents are under 30 years of age. Studies involving health field graduates have indicated that social networks facilitate job market entry⁸. Another factor likely

contributing to the high participation rate was the survey instrument itself, which included a limited number of straightforward questions and required only a short time to complete – on average, approximately three minutes.

Within this WhatsApp group, members regularly share not only information on courses and lectures but also a significant number of job openings across various domains of speech-language pathology. These opportunities include positions in public health institutions, private services such as APAE (Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional), AACD (Association for Assistance to Disabled Children), hearing aid companies, private clinics, and home care services. In recent years, the number of job postings shared within the group has increased substantially, undoubtedly contributing to the high rate of employment among graduates within their first year after completing the program.

The participant profile is predominantly female, a trend consistently observed in studies involving undergraduate students, as well as professionals with specialist or doctoral degrees in speech-language pathology⁷⁻⁹.

This gender imbalance has characterized the field since its inception, which was initially oriented toward educational concerns – a domain historically dominated by women^{7,8}. Originally focused on addressing language difficulties in children, particularly among immigrant populations, the profession developed a profile of practitioners skilled in working with children and employing playful learning strategies – traits that align with caregiving roles traditionally ascribed to women in society.

Although white students remain the majority, the data also suggest a growing presence of individuals who identify as multiracial, Black, or Indigenous, reflecting broader access to higher education. This trend is particularly notable at a university guided by Catholic values, which “ensures freedom of inquiry, teaching, and expression of thought, always aiming to fulfill its social mission, in light of the nature and public interest of its activities.” To fulfill this mission, the university participates in various scholarship programs – such as Fundação São Paulo, the University for All Program (Prouni), and the Student Financing Fund (FIES) – some of which are part of policies that promote diversity and facilitate the inclusion of students from different Indigenous groups¹⁰.

The fact that most graduates found employment within one year of completing their degree not only reflects the quality of the education they received but also suggests that current job market conditions are more favorable than in past decades. Historically, economic crises, a lack of public employment policies in the Unified Health System (SUS), and challenges associated with private health insurance companies have limited employment opportunities in the field.

Immediate job placement following graduation is therefore a positive indicator for both the academic program and the institution, especially in terms of fulfilling their social role by producing qualified professionals ready to enter the workforce. It is understood that the program and institution have fulfilled their social mission of preparing professionals to meet the needs of society.

When the graduates evaluated the program specifically, it is worth highlighting that they gave positive assessments of the faculty – an important indicator for the program and especially for the HEI. Nearly all instructors in the program hold doctoral degrees and are actively engaged in organizing academic courses, lectures, and research activities, as well as participating in committees and conferences, underscoring the faculty’s growing academic output. In recent years, the HEI has implemented a biannual faculty evaluation process, encouraging instructors to continually update their academic and research profiles.

The Speech-Language Pathology course at PUC-SP recently celebrated its 60th anniversary, alongside the 50th anniversary of its Graduate Program and the 35th anniversary of the journal *Distúrbios da Comunicação*. Much of this legacy, built by both faculty and students, has been documented in an open-access e-book, made possible through funding provided by the HEI. This publication highlights the significant national presence of the program’s faculty in the field of Speech-Language Pathology¹¹.

With regard to preparation for professional practice, the data prompt further reflection. While the results are not negative – 60% of respondents reported that the program contributed significantly and 40% stated that it contributed moderately – they suggest the need for deeper consideration of the evolving demands of the labor market. These changes are shaped by demographic transitions, shifts in care models, and the emergence of new



healthcare needs. Aligned with the National Curriculum Guidelines, the program aims to provide a generalist education. However, job opportunities – except those available within the Unified Health System (SUS) – increasingly demand specialized training in clinical areas such as audiology, language, orofacial myofunctional therapy, and dysphagia. These findings indicate the need to reevaluate not only the structure of required and elective internships but also the implementation of more active learning methodologies¹².

In particular, extracurricular internships – those conducted outside the official curriculum – are supervised by an internship coordinator who, in collaboration with the HEI, oversees the contractual agreements and monitors student activities to ensure they are not placed in positions without the support of a qualified professional. The most recent offerings of paid, non-mandatory internships point to a shift in the pedagogical approach of some companies, which are not always committed to providing meaningful learning experiences. In such cases, it is incumbent upon the internship coordinator to avoid endorsing agreements that do not fully comply with Internship Law (Law No. 11,788, of September 25, 2008). It is important to note, however, that the expectation of increasing both the quantity and quality of internships – particularly mandatory ones – cannot be met as desired. This is especially true given the implementation of a 3,200-hour course load for four-year programs established by Resolution CNE/CES [*Chamber of Higher Education of the National Council of Education*] No. 2, of June 18, 2007. Notably, Speech-Language Pathology is the only undergraduate health program with fewer than 4,000 hours.

Another ongoing challenge related to mandatory internships – affecting not only Speech-Language Pathology but all health programs – is the requirement to comply with the Public Education-Health Action Organizational Contract (COAPES) as a prerequisite for conducting internships within the SUS. These obligations increase program costs in private institutions, which are often passed on to students through higher tuition fees, thus posing potential barriers to enrollment.

With respect to graduates' evaluations of undergraduate research programs, academic monitoring, and exchange opportunities, it is worth emphasizing that these are optional activities. However, participation in such initiatives may count toward

fulfilling complementary academic requirements. Among these, Scientific Initiation was the most frequently pursued activity by the graduates. The HEI offers a structured undergraduate research program that annually seeks to expand its scholarship offerings through funding from public agencies – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) – as well as from the institution itself (CEPE/Fundasp). The program hosts an annual research conference, which in 2024 reached its 33rd edition, where scholarship recipients present their work either orally or through posters to faculty members and interested students. This initiative supports the development of research skills that are foundational for graduate studies, as discussed later in this report.

In recent years, the HEI has strengthened its support for academic monitoring activities, which are now institutionally recognized and certified – with or without financial aid. Despite student interest in participating, class schedules often conflict with monitoring sessions, particularly since the program is conducted in the morning. Nevertheless, these activities are strongly encouraged due to their positive impact on professional training.

During the evaluation period, an academic exchange was conducted with the Speech Therapy Program at the Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (IPS), involving the inbound mobility of 11 students and the outbound mobility of three Brazilian students between 2011 and 2017. It should be noted that the IPS program does not offer coursework in audiology, as this area is part of a separate degree in Portugal. This distinction created challenges in organizing class schedules for Brazilian students to effectively attend courses at the partner institution. These challenges were further exacerbated by the financial limitations faced by Brazilian students, including the costs of travel and accommodation. Nevertheless, the PUC-SP students who were able to participate in the exchange at IPS benefited significantly from academic, cultural, and professional enrichment. In contrast, IPS students participated in greater numbers and remained enrolled at PUC-SP for more than one semester, with some even completing internships in the field of public health. Despite the obstacles to broader Brazilian student participation in this exchange program, it brought significant contributions to student training and to the program itself – not only for those who went abroad, but for the entire academic community



through interaction and shared experience during the exchange period.

Recently, a partnership agreement was signed with Universidad San Sebastián, based in Santiago (Chile), with the aim of expanding student exchanges and promoting joint research initiatives, thereby strengthening the essential process of internationalizing Brazilian higher education¹³.

A key point to highlight is graduates' recognition of the importance of continuing education in the health professions, particularly as a means to engage with new theoretical frameworks and evolving professional practices. Except for the most recent graduates, the majority pursued further education, possibly inspired by faculty members who both encourage and actively participate in such academic development.

Graduate tracking studies in the field of Speech-Language Pathology, conducted in the states of Minas Gerais⁸ and Rio de Janeiro¹⁴, indicate a general preference among alumni for continuing education through lato sensu specialization programs – an observation consistent with the data presented in this study.

Among the participants in this research, when asked about the institution where they continued their studies, the highest number of mentions referred to the same higher education institution from which they had graduated – PUC-SP. This is likely due to the university's longstanding tradition of offering a master's program since 1972 and a doctoral program since 2009, both well-established in terms of academic history and scientific output, currently housed within the Graduate Program in Human Communication and Health. PUC-SP also offers another graduate program in a related field – the Graduate Program in Applied Linguistics – Language Studies – which has attracted some alumni, particularly those with an interest in the Language Clinic research track.

The data suggest that the most sought-after area for advanced studies among alumni is Language, likely due to the program's distinctive theoretical framework, which views language and subjectivity as inseparable, drawing on psychoanalytic theory and clinical speech-language pathology – perspectives introduced during the undergraduate program. Simultaneously, the growing number of cases – especially among children – of autism spectrum disorder, language delays, and intellectual

disabilities, in which language plays a central role in social integration, must also be considered¹⁵.

Audiology ranks second in terms of postgraduate interest, likely driven by labor market demands and public policies introduced under the Living Without Limits Program I (Programa Viver Sem Limites I), established by Decree No. 7,612, of November 17, 2011. This policy improved access to timely care for infants, children, adults, and older individuals with hearing impairments, and led to the implementation of the Network of Care for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD – Rede de Cuidados da Pessoa com Deficiência).

Research involving undergraduate alumni in Brazil is still in its early stages, and it is rare for HEIs to integrate such initiatives into their self-assessment processes. However, such practices are recommended by SINAES, under the MEC and the INEP, which emphasize the importance of incorporating alumni as key stakeholders in institutional self-assessment, particularly for systematizing information based on their experiences in entering the labor market.

If speech-language pathology courses do conduct such assessments but do not publish their findings in open-access bibliographic sources, this constitutes a gap in the literature, as few studies in the field address the training of speech-language pathologists. When such studies are undertaken, they contribute to the formulation of alumni tracking policies and provide research-based evidence to inform further inquiries into professional training and labor market mapping – in this case, for speech-language pathologists.⁸

In São Paulo, in particular, it has been observed that job openings for speech-language pathologists announced by Social Health Organizations (OSS) responsible for managing primary care services remain unfilled. This reflects an unmet demand for professionals within the SUS that requires further investigation, as it may be linked, among other factors, to issues related to professional training. This is a paradoxical situation, considering that for decades the field experienced difficulties with employability. The SUS, particularly within the scope of primary health care, has transformed this scenario with the creation of NASF (Family Health Support Center). Moreover, the entire field – especially the Teaching Committees of the Brazilian Society of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and the Council System for Speech-

Language Pathology – has engaged in efforts to recognize the new National Curriculum Guidelines for undergraduate speech-language pathology courses, which have already been approved by the National Health Council (CNS) and are now awaiting ratification by the MEC.¹⁶ This situation may be explained by working conditions, which must be carefully studied.

It is important to reiterate that alumni research in this field supports the development of both public and institutional policies. Such research compiles evidence-based knowledge that not only guides future studies but also supports the mapping and analysis of professional profiles within the labor market – an approach also adopted in other health professions. These studies help identify alumni satisfaction with their training, detect gaps in education or in Curriculum Pedagogical Projects, provide updated labor market mappings, identify alumni needs, and support the development of continuing education programs offered by institutions. As noted, they also contribute to the development of alumni tracking policies and provide evidence to support research on changes and challenges in the speech-language pathology labor market. It is also essential to emphasize that, not only in Brazil but in many other countries, the relationship between employers and academia remains fragile, often guided by a hegemonic logic in which institutions are perceived as subordinate to labor market demands¹⁷. In reality, the mission of HEIs is to educate professionals to address broader social needs.

Graduate employability does not depend solely on individual efforts, but rather on coordination between HEIs and public or private employers. Thus, fostering regional-level dialogue between HEIs and employers is of fundamental importance.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the participants in this study graduated from a private, community-based university in Brazil's southeastern region. This geographic and institutional context limits the generalizability of the findings to programs in other regions, as the results may reflect regional or institutional specificities. However, this does not diminish the relevance of the study. On the contrary, it can illuminate similarities and differences among graduates from other regional contexts and serve as a stimulus for comparative research across various institutions and locations. Moreover, the study illustrates that alumni research goes beyond meeting the formal requirements set

by SINAES/MEC/INEP, the agencies responsible for institutional evaluation and accreditation. It provides data and analytical benchmarks for academic training that are aligned with both general and regional social needs, thereby fulfilling the university's broader social mission.

In this regard, one limitation of the applied questionnaire should be noted: it did not include a key question for analyzing the relationship between academic training and current employment sectors. It would have been relevant to ask participants about the sector in which they are currently employed: public services (SUS – primary care, specialized care, hospitals), private services (clinics, private practices, hospitals), education or cultural institutions, or other professional settings in which speech-language pathologists may work.

Another issue to address is the need to revise the open-ended questions in future alumni surveys to collect data on both the locations and fields of continued education, as well as on the sectors and locations of current employment. This would broaden the analytical scope.

Conclusion

The alumni who participated in this research – conducted by the Speech-Language Pathology Course at PUC-SP in partnership with the CPA – recognized the quality of their academic training, especially highlighting the excellence of the faculty. They reported being professionally active as early as the first year after graduation and demonstrated an awareness of the importance of ongoing professional development. Most have acted on this awareness, reflecting their understanding that professional practice requires constant enhancement of knowledge and skills.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that speech-language pathology programs make their alumni research publicly available. This would allow the field to reflect critically on the training needs emerging from ongoing transformations in both the labor market and society. It is also essential that the field engage in dialogue regarding the challenges of professional training in speech-language pathology and its interface with public policies – particularly those related to health.

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