

# **Working with and learning from children with disabilities: Experiences of Speech and Hearing Sciences undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya**

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**Background:** Undergraduate Speech and Hearing Sciences students work closely with children with disabilities in their clinical training. When working with children with disabilities, there are many experiences that can be gained throughout the academic years.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to describe the experiences of working with and learning from children with disabilities among Speech and Hearing Sciences (SHS) undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya.

**Methods:** A total of 15 students participated in the study. These qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted among SHS students at the University of Kelaniya. The experiences of the participants with regard to working with children with disabilities, how experiences affect their personal and career lives in the future, how experiences affect their academic lives, the availability of services for children with disability, the view of society towards children with disability were all discussed in the interviews. Interviews were transcribed, analysed, and translated using a narrative thematic analysis method. Inductive coding was conducted manually by the research student and the supervisor.

**Results:** Four themes emerged from the collected data with both positive and negative aspects: ‘Positive and negative behaviour of children and parents,’ ‘Positive and negative impression of society on children with disabilities,’ ‘Positive and negative emotions of the students’ and ‘Positive and negative impact on self and future career ‘.

**Conclusion:** The results of the study showed that positive and negative experiences have influenced their personal lives and future career. Participants highlighted the importance of increasing speech therapy services in Sri Lanka and raising awareness about children with disability and about the rehabilitation services for those children.

**Keywords:** *Speech and hearing sciences, Children with disabilities, Experiences, Narrative qualitative study, Speech therapy*