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Available at:

<https://journal.nahnuinisiatif.com/index.php/ARJI>

Volume 7 Number 4 Year 2025

 **DOI :** 10.61227

 **E-ISSN :** 2775-0787

 **P-ISSN :** 2774-9290



2475 – 2488

Use of Self-Massage Techniques in Speech Therapy Practice

Artikel dikirim :

2025-09-01

Artikel diterima :

2025-09-24

Artikel diterbitkan :

2025-10-01

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Keywords:

self-massage, speech therapy, articulation disorders, dysarthria, stuttering, pediatric rehabilitation

Abstract: Background: Speech disorders affect 15-20% of children, requiring comprehensive interventions. Self-massage represents a promising cost-effective adjuvant technique that may enhance therapy outcomes through proprioceptive stimulation and muscle tone normalization. **Objective:** To evaluate self-massage effectiveness as an adjuvant technique in pediatric speech therapy for children with speech disorders. **Methods:** A quasi-experimental study involved 36 children aged 4-7 years with dysarthria (n=12), stuttering (n=12), and phonetic-phonemic perception disorders (n=12). Participants performed structured self-massage targeting head-neck, facial, and tongue muscles twice daily for 5-10 minutes over four weeks. Assessments included articulation, speech motor skills, fluency, and communication confidence at baseline, 2, 4, and 8 weeks. **Results:** All groups showed significant improvements. Dysarthria group demonstrated enhanced articulation and speech motor coordination. Stuttering group exhibited reduced disfluency and improved speech rhythm. Phonetic-phonemic disorder group showed normalized perception and improved speech production. Communication confidence increased across all groups with high compliance rates (>90%). **Conclusions:** Self-massage proved effective as an adjuvant pediatric speech therapy technique, improving speech motor function, articulation, and psychological well-being with high feasibility as a home-based program. This study contributes evidence-based framework for integrating accessible, cost-effective interventions in speech therapy practice. Future randomized controlled trials with larger samples, longer follow-up periods, and neuroimaging studies to explore underlying mechanisms are recommended.

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INTRODUCTION

Speech and articulation disorders are one of the most common communication problems found in children and adults around the world. Speech sound disorders (SSDs) affect an individual's ability to accurately produce language sounds, which can result in significant communication impairment (Bernthal et al., 2017). The prevalence of articulation disorders in 6-year-old children reaches about 15-20% of the pediatric population (Shriberg et al., 1999). Conditions such as dysarthria, stuttering, and phonetic-phonemic perceptual disorder require comprehensive and ongoing speech therapy interventions to achieve optimal outcomes (McCauley et al., 2009).

In modern speech therapy practice, a variety of approaches have been developed to address speech and articulation disorders. Traditional approaches include direct articulation exercises, phonological therapy, and language-based interventions (Baker & McLeod, 2011). However, there is a need for additional methods that can increase the effectiveness of therapy, especially those that can be done independently by clients at home to support the rehabilitation process (Lousada et al., 2013).

Although conventional speech therapy has been shown to be effective, there are still some significant research gaps in this area. First, evidence-based practice shows that the popular nonspeech oral motor exercises (NSOMEs) have limited evidence of effectiveness (Lee & Gibbon, 2015; McCauley et al., 2009). A systematic review conducted by Cochrane found "insufficient evidence to support or refute the use of oral motor exercises" to address speech disorders in children (McCauley et al., 2009, p. 343).

Second, there is controversy in clinical practice regarding the use of manual and oral motor therapy techniques. Several studies have shown that motor oral nonspeech techniques do not provide a significant transfer to speech ability (Lof, 2003; Forrest, 2002). However, more integrated approaches such as therapeutic speech massage show more promising potential (Dyakova, 2013).

Third, there is a lack of research on self-massage as an adjuvant technique in speech therapy, especially those that can be done independently by clients to support the normalization of muscle tone and increase proprioceptive awareness (Dyakova, 2013). Most of the research that exists focuses on manual therapy performed by therapists, rather than on self-massage techniques that can be practiced independently.

The development of self-massage techniques in speech therapy has high urgency for several fundamental reasons. First, from an accessibility perspective, not all individuals with speech impairments have adequate access to professional speech therapy services, especially in remote or economically disadvantaged areas (McCauley et al., 2009). Self-massage can be a cost-effective and accessible technique to support conventional therapy.

Second, from the point of view of neuroplasticity, sensory-motor stimulation through self-massage can provide proprioceptive inputs that are important for neural reorganization and improvement of motor function of the speech apparatus (Dyakova,

2013). Research in the field of motor speech disorders shows that tactile and kinesthetic stimulation can improve motor learning and speech motor control (Clark, 2008).

Third, the psychological aspect shows that the client's active involvement in the therapy process increases motivation and self-efficacy, which contributes to better therapeutic outcomes (Baker & McLeod, 2011). Self-massage provides an opportunity for the client to actively participate in his or her rehabilitation process.

Fourth, from the perspective of muscle tension dysphonia and voice disorders, recent research suggests that manual therapy techniques, including circumlaryngeal massage, can make a significant contribution to normalizing muscle tone and improving coordination of the muscles involved in speech production (Roy et al., 2013).

Based on the research gaps and urgency that have been identified, this study aims to analyze and evaluate the role of self-massage as an additional technique in speech therapy practice. Specifically, this study aims to: 1) Identify the effectiveness of self-massage in improving articulation and coordination of speech muscles in individuals with speech disorders, especially dysarthria, stuttering, and phonetic-phonemic perceptual disorders; 2) Evaluate the impact of self-massage on the normalization of speech apparatus muscle tone and increase proprioceptive awareness which contributes to the improvement of speech quality; 3) Analyze the contribution of self-massage to the psychological aspects of the client, including increasing confidence in communication and self-efficacy in the therapy process; 4) Provide practical recommendations regarding the implementation of self-massage techniques in speech therapy practice, both as adjuvant therapy and as a home program that can be done independently; 5) Provide an evidence-based framework for the integration of self-massage in comprehensive speech therapy programs that speech-language pathologists can apply in their clinical practice.

Through the achievement of these goals, it is hoped that this research can make a significant scientific contribution to the development of more holistic and evidence-based speech therapy practices, while providing accessible and cost-effective intervention alternatives to improve speech therapy outcomes in various client populations.

Literature Review

In recent decades, self-massage has been increasingly used in speech therapy as a method for correcting speech disorders. Numerous studies confirm its effectiveness in improving articulation, normalizing muscle tone, and activating the peripheral speech apparatus. According to the work of N.N. Benashvili (2004), self-massage is an important tool not only for improving the motor skills of the tongue, lips, and cheeks, but also for enhancing movement coordination, which is essential for normalizing speech breathing and voice production.

P.I. Levin (2005) emphasizes that simultaneous work with a group of children through self-massage has significant advantages, as it allows children not only to develop articulatory motor skills but also to form proper speech rhythm. Self-massage proves to be an effective tool not only for children with dysarthria and stuttering, but also for those with phonetic-phonemic perception disorders.

Tatyana Mikhailovna Fomina (2009) explores the use of self-massage as a supplementary technique to traditional speech therapy methods, highlighting its accessibility and universality. She notes that regular performance of the exercises not only increases the effectiveness of speech correction work but also improves the quality of life of patients by boosting their confidence in communication. However, despite the positive outcomes, the methodology still requires more in-depth research, as there is no unified approach or clear recommendations regarding the duration and frequency of the exercises. The literature presents conflicting views on how intensively self-massage should be incorporated into speech therapy programs and at what age it is most effective.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses an observational approach and practical analysis with a quasi-experimental pre-post intervention study design to analyze the effectiveness of self-massage in speech therapy. This design was chosen because it allowed the evaluation of changes in participants' conditions before and after the self-massage intervention, while also considering the ethical aspects in studies with a population of children with speech disorders (Robey, 2004).

Research Participants

The study involved 36 participants of children aged 4-7 years who had been diagnosed with a speech disorder by a licensed speech-language pathologist. Participants were divided into three groups based on the type of speech disorder, namely 12 children with dysarthria, 12 children with stuttering, and 12 children with phonetic-phonemic perceptual disorders. Inclusion criteria include adequate cognitive ability to understand and follow self-massage instructions based on SLP assessment, informed consent from a parent or guardian, and commitment to participate in the program for a minimum of 4 weeks. Exclusion criteria include severe neurological disorders that significantly affect motor abilities, pervasive developmental disorders of severe severity, uncorrected hearing loss, a history of trauma or phobia of the touch of massage, and being undergoing pharmacological therapy that may affect muscle tone.

Instruments and Measuring Instruments

The primary assessment instruments used include the Articulation Assessment Scale which is a modification of the Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation-3 to measure the accuracy of language sound production on a scale of 1-5, the Speech Motor Skills Evaluation based on the Oral Motor Assessment Scale to assess the strength, coordination, and range of motion of the speech muscles, and the Fluency Assessment Protocol specifically for the stuttering group which measures the frequency of disfluency per 100 words and assesses the level of tension muscles during speech. Secondary assessment instruments include the Communication Confidence Scale for Children (CCSC) with a

Likert scale of 1-4 for 16 items to measure the level of confidence in communication, the Parent-Reported Communication Effectiveness Scale consisting of 12 items on a scale of 1-5 for parents' assessment of children's communication skills, and the Self-Massage Compliance Log which records the frequency, duration, and consistency of self-massage carried out by parents or caregivers.

Data Collection

Procedure The pre-intervention phase at week 0 included a baseline assessment in the form of a comprehensive evaluation of speech and articulation conditions, assessment of muscle tone and motor coordination, and video documentation for perceptual analysis. In the same phase, demographic data collection was carried out including history of speech and language development, previous medical and therapeutic history, and sociodemographic characteristics of the family. The intervention phase lasted for weeks 1-4 starting with a training session in week 1 in the form of self-massage technique training for children and parents, demonstrations by experienced SLPs, practice sessions with direct supervision, and the provision of written guidance and instructional videos. The implementation phase lasts for weeks 1-4 where self-massage is done 2 times a day with a duration of 5-10 minutes per session for preschoolers, daily documentation in the compliance log, and weekly check-in via phone or video call. The post-intervention assessment phase was carried out in weeks 4 and 8 in the form of immediate post-assessment with re-evaluation using the same instrument as baseline and semi-structured interviews with parents about the observed changes, as well as follow-up assessments for maintenance effect evaluation, self-massage practice sustainability assessment, and long-term outcome measurement.

Protokol Self-Massage

The self-massage program based on the existing protocol includes self-massage of the head and neck muscles for 2-3 minutes with a "I'm fine" movement in the form of a gentle massage from the top of the head to the shoulders and "Wear a hat" in the form of palm movements from the ear to the front neck area with a frequency of 4-6 repetitions of each movement. Self-massage of the facial muscles is carried out for 3-4 minutes including forehead stimulation with "Drawing the way", "Drawing apples", and "Rain fingers", the eye area with "Drawing eyebrows", "Wearing glasses", and "Sleeping eyes", the mouth area with "Drawing a mustache", "Clown happy/sad", "Beak", and "Elus chin", as well as lip stimulation with the "Comb" and "Hammer" techniques. Self-massage of the tongue muscles is carried out for 2-3 minutes with active techniques in the form of clicking, tapping, stroking, and biting tongue, as well as sensorimotor exercises "Biting pears" with props. Individual adaptations are carried out based on the type of disorder where for dysarthria the focus is on proprioceptive stimulation and normalization of tone, for stuttering the emphasis on relaxation and respiration-phonation coordination, and for phonetic-phonemic disorders the emphasis on sensory awareness and motor precision.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study used a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of self-massage in speech therapy.

For quantitative analysis, the first stage was descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the characteristics of the data by calculating the mean, median, and standard deviation for all continuous variables such as articulation score, speech motor ability, and communication confidence level, as well as frequency distribution for categorical variables such as the type of speech disorder and severity. Furthermore, inferential statistics were used to test the research hypothesis through ANOVA's Repeated Measures which compared baseline, post-intervention, and follow-up scores to detect significant changes over time, paired t-test to analyze within-group changes in each speech disorder group, ANCOVA to control for confounding variables such as child age and baseline severity that could affect outcomes, and effect size calculation using Cohen's d to determine the clinical significance of the observed changes. If the data does not meet the normality assumptions required for parametric tests, alternative non-parametric tests will be used, namely the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to compare paired data between pre- and post-intervention, and the Friedman Test for repeated measures analysis at three measurement time points.

Qualitative analysis was conducted to deepen the understanding of participants' and parents' subjective experiences of self-massage programs. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data from semi-structured interviews with parents through systematic content analysis to identify themes that emerged related to changes observed in children, experiences of self-massage implementation at home, and perceptions of program benefits. The process of identifying the themes of reported change was carried out through inductive coding to capture nuances of change that may not be captured by quantitative instruments, and triangulation of data from various sources including therapist observations, parental reports, and children's self-reports to increase the credibility of the findings. Video analysis was conducted as an important component for the objectification of speech ability changes through perceptual rating by an independent SLP panel that acted as blinded raters to avoid bias, with standardized rating protocols to assess aspects of articulation, motor coordination, and fluency in speech. Inter-rater reliability will be calculated using the Kappa coefficient to ensure the consistency of the assessment between raters with a target of at least 0.80 that shows substantial agreement, so that the results of the video analysis can be relied upon as objective evidence of changes in participants' speaking ability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Result**

Table 1.
Results of Evaluating the Effectiveness of Self-Massage in Speech Disorder Correction

Group	Before Starting Self-Massage	After 2 Weeks of Self-Massage	After 4 Weeks of Self-Massage
Children with Dysarthria	Articulation disorders, weak tongue and lip motor skills, difficulties with complex sounds	Articulation improved, better tongue and lip motor skills, clearer pronunciation	Significant improvement in pronunciation, better breath coordination, increased communication confidence
Children with Stuttering	Frequent pauses, poor speech rhythm, muscle tension	Fewer pauses, better speech rhythm, muscle relaxation	Reduced stuttering, increased sound confidence, more stable speech
Children with Phonetic-Phonemic Perception Disorders	Difficulty perceiving sounds, issues with phonemic hearing	Improved sound perception, clearer phoneme differentiation	Normalized phonemic perception, better phonetic speech production
Psychological State	Low communication confidence, shyness, difficulties in social adaptation	Improved confidence, positive trends in social adaptation	Significant boost in confidence, more open communication, increased group engagement

Notes:

1. *Children with dysarthria*: Significant improvement in speech motor skills and articulation, along with increased facial muscle tone.
2. *Children with stuttering*: Results indicate better speech rhythm, reduced stuttering, and decreased tension in lips and tongue.
3. *Children with phonetic-phonemic perception disorders*: Sound perception became more accurate, improving phonemic awareness and pronunciation.
4. *Psychological condition*: Regular self-massage practice helps children become more confident in their speech abilities, leading to better social adaptation and openness.

The Effectiveness of Self-Massage in Children with Dysarthria

The results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of self-massage in the correction of speech disorders showed significant improvement in all groups of participants after the implementation of the four-week program. In the group of children with dysarthria, there was a substantial improvement in the ability to articulate and communicate motor speech. Before starting the self-massage program, participants showed obvious articulation disorders, weakness in tongue and lip motor skills, and difficulty with complex sounds. After two weeks of self-massage, improvements were seen in articulation with better motor coordination of the tongue and lips, as well as clearer pronunciation. By the fourth week, there was a significant improvement in pronunciation with better breath coordination and a marked increase in confidence in communication.

Therapeutic Response in Children with Stuttering

The group of children with stuttering showed a positive response to the self-massage program with different remedial characteristics. The initial condition shows frequent pauses in speech, poor speech rhythms, and noticeable muscle tension. After two weeks of implementation, the frequency of pauses decreases with better speech rhythms and muscle relaxation starting to be seen. At the fourth week of evaluation, there was a significant reduction in stuttering, a marked increase in voice confidence, and more stable speech overall. These results are in line with the findings of Pennington et al. (2013) which showed that intensive intervention over a 4-week period can provide meaningful improvement in children with speech disorders.

Changes in Phonetic-Phonemic Perception Disorders

The group of children with phonetic-phonemic perceptual impairment showed a pattern of improvement consistent with the other two groups. The baseline condition indicates difficulty in perceiving language sounds, problems with phonemic hearing that affect speech production. After two weeks of self-massage, there was an improvement in sound perception with clearer phoneme differentiation. At the end of the four-week period, phonemic perception experienced a significant normalization with improved phonetic speech production. These findings support the results of the research of Lousada et al. (2013) who show that therapeutic approaches that incorporate sensorimotor stimulation can provide more comprehensive improvements than conventional therapies alone.

Psychological Impact and Self-Confidence

Evaluation of the participants' psychological condition showed consistent improvement across all groups. The initial condition shows low communication confidence, excessive shyness, and difficulties in social adaptation. After two weeks, there was an improvement in confidence with a positive trend in social adaptation. In the fourth week, there was a significant increase in confidence with more open communication and markedly increased group engagement. These results are in line with the findings of Baker and McLeod (2011) who emphasized that the patient's active involvement in the therapy process improves psychological outcomes and confidence in communication.

Discussion

Neurobiological Mechanisms of Self-Massage in Speech Therapy

The findings of this study make an important contribution to understanding the effectiveness of self-massage as an adjuvant modality in speech therapy. Consistent improvements observed in all speech disorder groups suggest that self-massage can provide the proprioceptive and tactile stimulation necessary to improve the motor function of the speech apparatus. These results support the theory of neuroplasticity which states that sensorimotor stimulation can facilitate neural reorganization and improvement of motor function, as stated by Clark (2008) in his research on the principles of motor learning in speech disorders.

The mechanism of self-massage in improving speech ability can be explained through several neurobiological pathways. First, tactile and proprioceptive stimulation through self-massage increases sensorimotor awareness in the muscles involved in speech production, which contributes to improved coordination and motor control. Second, the relaxation techniques inherent in self-massage help reduce the excessive muscle tension often found in speech disorders such as dysarthria and stuttering. This is in line with the research of Roy et al. (2013) on circumlaryngeal massage which showed that manual techniques can normalize muscle tone and improve coordination of laryngeal and extralaryngeal muscles.

Significant improvements in the dysarthria group suggest that self-massage can facilitate the normalization of muscle tone and increase proprioceptive awareness necessary for better speech motor control. These results are consistent with the principles of therapeutic speech massage developed by Dyakova (2013), who emphasize that mechanical stimulation can alter the condition of muscles, nerves, and peripheral speech apparatus tissues. The improved breath-phonation coordination observed in this group suggests that self-massage not only affects the articulatory muscles locally, but also contributes to better integration of the respiratory and phonatory systems.

The stuttering group's positive response to self-massage provides important insights into the aspects of relaxation and tension reduction in the management of dysfluency. The observed reduction in the frequency of pauses and improvements in speech rhythm suggest that self-massage can help break the cycle of tension that often worsens stuttering. These findings support a holistic approach in stuttering therapy that focuses not only on speech production techniques but also on the management of physical and emotional tension, as suggested in the literature on muscle tension dysphonia (Roy et al., 2013).

Improvements that occurred in the group of phonetic-phonemic perceptual disorders suggest that self-massage can facilitate the sensorimotor integration necessary for accurate language sound discrimination and production. These results indicate that tactile and proprioceptive stimulation through self-massage can improve the neural representation of articulatory gestures, contributing to improvements in perception and phonemic production. These findings are in line with Gillon's (2000) research on phonological awareness which shows that interventions that combine sensorimotor and cognitive aspects can provide more optimal results.

The psychological aspect shows that self-massage makes a significant contribution not only to the motor aspect but also to the emotional well-being and communication confidence of the participants. Increased social engagement and self-confidence observed suggest that self-massage can provide a sense of empowerment and control to individuals with speech disorders. This is important because the psychological aspect is often a limiting factor in the success of speech therapy, especially in children who may experience frustration or anxiety regarding their communication skills.

The implementation of self-massage as a home program shows excellence in terms of accessibility and continuity of therapy. Unlike the technique of nonspeech oral motor exercises which is controversial and has limited evidence (McCauley et al., 2009; Lee & Gibbon, 2015), self-massage shows a clear transfer to functional speech ability. This may be due to the fact that self-massage does not only focus on isolated movements but on the comprehensive stimulation of the sensorimotor system involved in speech production.

The success of the self-massage program in this study also indicates the importance of parental and family involvement in the therapy process. Good compliance observed during the study period showed that this technique was well tolerated by children and their families. This is in line with the findings of Law et al. (2004) which show that interventions involving parents can provide effectiveness comparable to therapy performed directly by professionals.

However, it is important to consider some limitations in the interpretation of the results of this study. First, the absence of control groups in the study design limits the ability to determine whether the observed improvement is actually due to self-massage or other factors such as natural maturation or attention effects. Second, the relatively short duration of follow-up (8 weeks) limits the understanding of long-term maintenance effects. Third, heterogeneity in the severity of speech disorders in each group may affect responsiveness to interventions.

The findings of this study have important implications for clinical practice in the field of speech therapy. Self-massage can be integrated as an adjuvant component in a comprehensive therapy program, especially for cases that exhibit excessive muscle tension or deficit proprioceptive awareness. The implementation of self-massage can also be a cost-effective strategy to increase the intensity of therapy without increasing the burden on the health care system. In addition, the empowerment aspect inherent in self-massage can contribute to increasing the patient's motivation and engagement in the therapy process.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully shown that self-massage is effective as an additional technique in speech therapy for children aged 4-7 years with speech disorders. All groups of participants (dysarthria, stuttering, and phonetic-phonemic perceptual impairment) showed significant improvements in articulation, speech motor coordination, and communication confidence after four weeks of program implementation. Self-massage has been shown to normalize muscle tone, increase proprioceptive awareness, and provide positive psychological effects in the form of increased self-confidence and social engagement. This program also shows high reliability with a good compliance rate, making it an accessible and cost-effective therapeutic modality for implementation as a home program.

This study has several key limitations that need to be considered in the interpretation of the results. Quasi-experimental designs without control groups limit the ability to determine definitive causal relationships. The relatively short duration of follow-up (8 weeks) does not allow for the evaluation of long-term maintenance effects. The small sample size (36 participants) and the heterogeneity of the severity of the disorder in each group may affect the generalizability of the findings. Potential observer bias and limitations in population diversity (only 4-7 year olds from relatively homogeneous sociodemographic backgrounds) also limit the applicability of the results to a wider population.

Follow-up studies should use a randomized controlled trial design with a larger sample size and a longer follow-up period (minimum 6-12 months) to evaluate the maintenance effects. Multi-site studies with more diverse populations need to be conducted to improve generalizability. Investigation of optimal dosage, frequency, and duration of self-massage through dose-response studies will provide more specific guidance for clinical implementation. Research with neuroimaging techniques to

understand neurobiological mechanisms, as well as the development of digital technologies to improve program delivery and monitoring are also recommended. Expansion of research to a more diverse adult population and speech disorder conditions, as well as health economics studies to evaluate cost-effectiveness, will support widespread adoption in clinical practice.

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