

Speech-Language Pathologists and Pediatric Feeding: Mapping Roles and Readiness Across NICU and Educational Settings

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Background

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) play an important role in treating pediatric feeding and swallowing disorders, especially in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). There’s a significant variation in how they approach therapy, collaborate with other professionals, and use standardized tools. Despite increasing research, there’s no clear framework to guide SLP training or service delivery, exposing a critical gap in education; hence the need for this study.

Aims

The scoping review aims to map current evidence on SLPs’ roles, knowledge, and use of evidence-based strategies in pediatric feeding management.

Methods

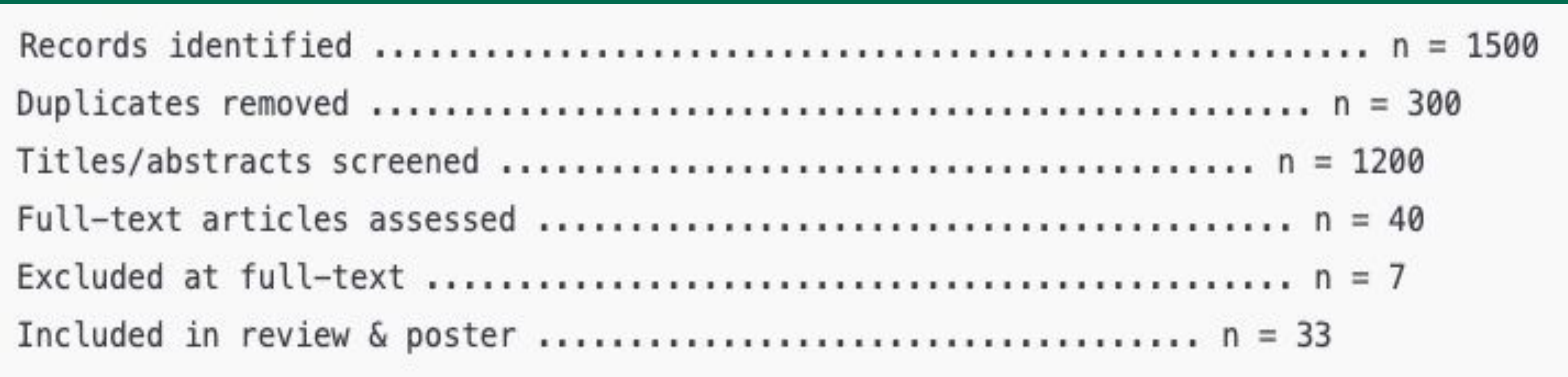
Scoping Review using Arksey & O’Malley framework (the five steps include: identify the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, charting the data, and collating, summarizing, and reporting results) and PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines.

Inclusion Criteria: Keywords “SLP AND pediatric feeding,” “NICU,” “dysphagia,” “interdisciplinary care.”

Databases: PubMed, Cochrane, ProQuest, Embase, Google Scholar.



Prisma-ScR Flow Summary

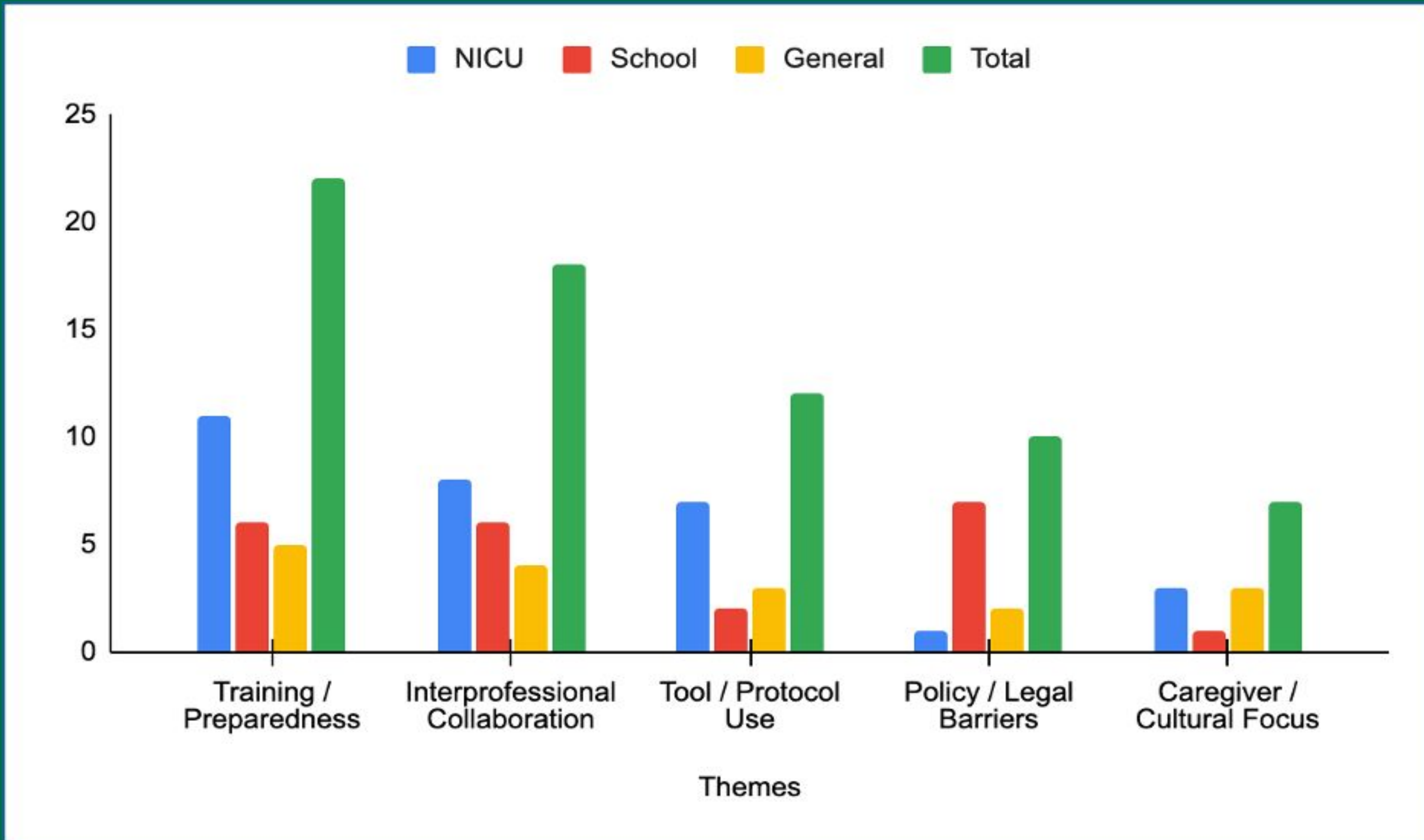


Results

Key Themes Identified by Setting

Setting	Key Themes Identified
NICU (13 studies)	Gaps in NICU-specific training; device-based therapy variability; need for neuroprotective care approaches; limited caregiver integration; interdisciplinary role inconsistency
School (10 studies)	Confusion over legal mandates; lack of IEP inclusion; heavy caseloads; fear of liability; policy mismatches; limited collaboration pathways
General (10 studies)	Universal training gaps; low self-efficacy; inconsistent tool use; underreported interprofessional practice (IPP); limited continuing education access

Distribution of Key Themes by Setting



Note. Each study contributes to multiple thematic categories. Bar heights reflect frequency of theme appearance, not study count.

Discussion

- ❖ Most pediatric feeding literature centers on NICU and school-based SLPs
- ❖ The results highlight a critical gap in training and role clarity
- ❖ Across all settings, SLPs report:
 - Low confidence in managing feeding and dysphagia
 - Inconsistent use of tools and protocols
 - Limited interprofessional collaboration
- ❖ Findings suggest a need for:
 - Setting-specific training models
 - Increased interdisciplinary pathways
 - Increased integration of feeding care into SLP curricula and IEP frameworks

Conclusion

This study reveals a gap between the demands of pediatric feeding care and SLPs’ preparedness to address them. The study highlights the need for increased interdisciplinary care to support evidence-based practice across settings.

References

Arksey, H., & O’Malley, L. (2005). *Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework*. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>

Tricco, A. C., Lillie, E., Zarin, W., O’Brien, K. K., Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., ... & Straus, S. E. (2018). *PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and Explanation*. Annals of Internal Medicine, 169(7), 467–473. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850>

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