

# An Overview of the Status of the Speech-Language and Hearing Professions in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

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*Al Sabi, Y. N.: Speech-Language and Hearing Sciences Department Hekma School of Health, Behavioral Sciences and Education Dar Al-Hekma University, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

## Abstract

Jordan has been one of the leading Arab countries in establishing academic programs in the field of speech-language pathology (SLP) in the Arab region. The first master's program was established at the University of Jordan in 1992 in Amman. The first bachelor's program in SLP was established in 1992 at the private Applied Sciences University in Amman, Jordan. Currently, there are two master's and four bachelor's programs in Jordan. The total number of graduates holding bachelor's degrees from the four programs is 2472, and the total number of graduates with master's degrees is 500. According to the records of the Licensing Unit at the Ministry of Health, there are 142 licensed speech-language pathologists, 754 technician speech-language pathologists, 27 licensed audiologists, 244 technician- audiologists, and seven assistant technician audiologists. The total number of ASHA-certified Jordanian SLPs is around 15. The profession of SLP in Jordan has progressed remarkably in the past twenty years; however, it requires more attention at different levels to continue to advance. More financial support is needed for scholars to conduct more rigorous research. A code of ethics should be developed to promote the service delivery models and SLP services. Additionally, more centers are needed all over the country to service the vast numbers of individuals with communication disorders. A professional association should be established immediately to regulate and promote the profession at all levels.

## Keywords:

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Al Sabi, Y. N.  
Email: [ysabi@dah.edu.sa](mailto:ysabi@dah.edu.sa)

## **Introduction**

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, also known as Jordan, is one of the Middle East countries and one of the Asian continent's countries. "Jordan occupies an area of approximately 96, 188 square kilometers including the Dead Sea, making it similar in size to Austria and Portugal" (Jordan Government, 2006). Jordan's population is about 11 million people who are made up mostly of Arabs. Jordan's residents include about 1.4 million Palestinian refugees who were forced out of Palestine during the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel; these Palestinians are now considered Jordanian citizens. Jordan is also home to 20,000-80,000 Circassian non-Arab Muslims who came originally from the Caucasus region of Western Asia. Most of them live in Amman, the Wadi Seer area, Naur, Jerash, Sweileh, Zarqa, Azraq, and the Wadi See area. Other minorities include the Druze, who live near the Syrian border, and in Azraq, in the east of Jordan. Several thousand Armenians live mainly in Amman, and a very small minority of Turkomans and Bahais are found in the northern Jordan Valley. The latter came to Jordan from Iran in 1910. Jordan's population includes a relatively small number of Chechen Caucasians who moved to Jordan from Grozny in the late nineteenth century.

Currently, Jordan is divided into 12 governorates (Ajlun, Amman, Aqaba, Balqa, Irbid, Jerash, Karak, Ma'an, Madaba, Mafraq, Tafilah, and Zarqa), each of which is ruled by a governor appointed directly by the king. The major cities of Jordan are Amman (2.1

million people), the capital, which is located in the northeast of the country, and the north of which are Irbid and Az Zarqa (the two largest cities after Amman).

### **Speech-Language Services in Jordan**

In an article about the strategies of disability in Jordan, written by Suheir Bushnaq, a journalist in Alrai Daily Newspaper, published on January 01, 2007, it was reported that the number of residential and rehabilitation centers in Jordan is 35, most of which are private (Bushnaq, 2007). Bushnaq noted that according to the owners and directors of these centers, the rehabilitation services are not as adequate and effective as they should be. This may be related to the high costs of rehabilitation services and the poor quality of the services provided. According to reports by special education specialists, Bushnaq reported that the major problem these specialists faced was diagnostic services. She added that these specialists stressed that if the diagnoses were not correct, then all other services and treatment plans would be ineffective. The article indicated that the results of the 2004 demographic census showed that the rate of disability in Jordan is 1.5%. However, the data provided by the rehabilitation centers indicated that the rate of disability in Jordan is between 2-4%. There are between 180,000 to 200,000 individuals with a disability in Jordan (Bushnaq, 2007). To improve the quality of services needed and to provide effective rehabilitation services for all Jordanian individuals with disabilities, King Abdullah II announced in October 2007 the need to set up a national strategy. Prince Ra'ad was directly appointed by the king to be the head of the royal

committee responsible for this national strategy. A report by one of the committee members indicated that the national strategy initial draft had been completed. It focused on organizing and coordinating the efforts of all of the rehabilitation centers, establishing a high council that will monitor all rehabilitation facilities in Jordan (both private and public), and setting a comprehensive plan that would guarantee the provision of effective rehabilitation services for any individual with a disability in Jordan (Bushnaq, 2007).

### **Speech-Language-Hearing Academic Programs in Jordan**

The following section presents all the programs established in government and private universities. Speech therapy services are currently available at government clinics, university clinics, and private clinics, under the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Social Affairs.

#### **Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences at The University of Jordan**

The University of Jordan (UJ) was the first university established in Jordan in 1962. It is located in Amman, the capital of Jordan and its largest city. It has another branch in the town of Aqaba, in the southern region of Jordan. The Master Program in Speech-Language Pathology was established at the University of Jordan in 1992 (JU, n.d.). The program was one of the first programs in the Arab region. The program consists of 39 credit hours. The available data indicated that 234 graduated from the program until 2010 (85% of graduates are Jordanian and 15% from other Arab countries, namely Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain.) In 2003, a bachelor's program in Speech-Language

Pathology was also established. Approximately 500 students graduated from the master's program, and 650 students graduated from the bachelor's program. The speech-language pathology department consists of faculty members who all earned Ph.D. degrees from the United States of America and Europe and specialized in audiology speech-language pathology. Only two of the faculty members are certified by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) in the discipline of speech-language pathology.

### **The First Bachelor Program in Speech-Language Pathology in Jordan**

The Applied Science Private University - ASU (All Arabs University) was established in 1991. It is located in Shafaa Badran, inside Great Amman City Municipality. The University is a subsidiary of the Arab International Company for Education and Investment. The first Bachelor in Speech-Language Pathology was developed in 1992 at the Applied Science Private University in Amman, Jordan (ASU, n.d.). However, the program was closed in 2006 due to the shortage of faculty members. Approximately 300 students graduated from that program.

### **The Audiology and Speech Pathology Program at the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST)**

The Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) is one of the top universities in Jordan. It was established in 1986 and is located in the city of Irbid, in the northern region of Jordan. Currently, it offers more than 123 undergraduate and graduate programs (JUST, n.d.). The second Bachelor's program in speech-language pathology was

established at the Jordan University for Science and Technology (JUST), Irbid, Jordan, in 2002. Currently, there are 243 students in the program. Approximately 1045 graduated from the program. Eight faculty members are in the program; four are specialized in speech-language pathology, and four hold Ph.D. degrees in audiology. One faculty member only is certified by ASHA in speech-language pathology.

### **The Audiology and Speech Pathology Program at Al-Ahliyya Amman University**

Al-Ahliyya Amman University (AAU) was established in Amman in 1990 and was the first private university (AAU, n.d.). It has eight faculties that offer 29 bachelor's and eight master's programs. The Audiology and Speech Pathology Program was established in 2001 at Al-Ahliyya Amman University (AAU), Amman, Jordan. This was the second bachelor's program founded to offer a bachelor's degree in audiology and speech pathology. AAU established the second Master in Speech-language Pathology in 2021. To date, 477 students graduated from the bachelor program. Presently, 103 students are matriculating in the bachelor program and 15 in the master program. There are seven faculty members; five hold Ph.D. degrees, and two have master's degrees. Three of the seven faculty members specialized in audiology, and the rest in speech-language pathology. One faculty member is ASHA-certified (AAU, Faculty of Allied Medical Sciences, n.d.).

### **Department of Applied Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology at Zarqa University**

The Applied Speech-Language-Pathology and Audiology bachelor program was established at Zarqa University in 2019. This bachelor program is the fourth bachelor program in Jordan. The program is accredited by the Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC). Zarqa University is located in Zarqa Governorate and was established in 1994. It is the first private university to open in Zarqa city. Currently, there are 80 students in the program at different levels. The program is equipped with a state-of-the-art speech lab. The program is focused on the clinical and practical aspects of the field. According to the head of the department, 66% of the courses are clinical. The total number of credit hours is 131 hours. There are three faculty members in the program; one holds a Ph.D. degree in Special Education with a master's degree in speech-language pathology, and the other holds a Ph.D. degree in audiology. The third faculty member has a master's degree in speech-language pathology. None of the faculty members is ASHA-certified (Zarqa University, n.d.).

### **Regulating the professions of speech and hearing in Jordan**

Rules and regulations for working in the field of speech-language pathology in Jordan were approved in 1999. The Speech-Language Therapy Profession Practice Regulations became effective in 2014. The licensing body for SLPs and audiologists is the Ministry of Health. The concerned department for licensing in the ministry is called the Health Professions Licensing Department. To work independently, the individual must hold a

bachelor's or graduate degree in the field (a master's degree or Doctor of Philosophy) with a minimum of two years of experience and pass an exam by the Ministry of Health (Dyson & Amayreh, 2007). See appendices A and B for speech-language pathologists and audiologists' licensing rules and regulations.

According to the regulations of the Health Professions Licensing Department, SLPs can be classified as follows based on their qualifications:

*Speech-Language Therapist*: A professional with a master's or Ph.D. degree in speech-language pathology.

*Speech-Language Therapist Technician*: A professional with a bachelor's degree in speech-language pathology. The SLP technician can work as a therapist only under the supervision of a certified/licensed SLP.

### **Challenges facing the professions of speech and hearing in Jordan:**

Jordan is considered one of the primary feeders for speech-language pathologists in the Arab region. In total, there are four bachelor programs offering bachelor's degrees in speech-language pathology; two programs were established in governmental universities, and the other two were established in private universities.

According to the reports received from speech-language pathologists and university instructors, the discipline of speech-language pathology in Jordan requires more support and attention in the academic institutions, the Ministry of Health, the



Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and in the private sectors. Several instructors indicated that speech labs are not well equipped and the equipment is old. Some instructors stated that students need more supervision during clinical practicum courses, particularly the clinical medical practicum. They stressed the fact that they need more access to hospital settings to be able to provide students with more effective supervision. This requires more collaboration or affiliation between hospitals and academic institutions. Governmental support is immediately needed to improve the quality of the students' clinical competencies.

The licensing policies and regulations must be revisited and updated to meet international standards in speech-language pathology. One of the major issues is the classifications of the licensed SLPs (technician SLP, SLP, technician audiologist, audiologist, and assistant technician audiologist). No policies are available for the promotion of SLPs or audiologists. One of the university instructors stated that the scope of practice for speech-language pathologists is not "scientifically available." It is critical to develop the scope of practice more explicitly.

According to one of the old professionals in the field, who was consulted while writing this report, the policies regulating the establishment/opening of rehabilitation centers are not fair. Other professionals indicated that these regulations are unfair and need to be modified immediately.

One major problem that threatens the whole discipline of speech-language pathology is the absence of a professional organization or association. This shortcoming would continue to negatively impact the quality of services provided and leave clients, families, and SLPs unprotected.

Most university instructors expressed frustration with the poor financial support needed for research. They reported that their research output is limited due to insufficient funding, which requires immediate action and attention from the research centers in the universities to secure sufficient funding. More collaboration is needed among national, regional, and international universities.

Another significant issue is the absence of a code of ethics specific to speech-language pathology and audiology disciplines. This code of ethics is crucial to regulate service delivery in both fields. ASHA (2003) stressed the need for speech-language pathologists to abide by the code of ethics to guarantee that speech-language services are delivered with the highest standards of professional ethics and integrity.

Accordingly, a code of ethics must be developed for speech-language pathologists in Jordan.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, advancements in speech-language pathology in Jordan depend upon immediate and stringent support from the government and academic institutions. More centers are needed all over Jordan to provide services to all populations needing speech-language and audiology services. The discipline would also improve if there were a clear code of ethics. Students and junior clinicians must be provided with high-quality supervision. Financial support is mandatory for conducting research. It is also essential to establish a professional association for SLPs and audiologists to promote the quality, interests, services, and advocacy for professionals and individuals with communication disorders. Scholars and SLP professionals should also put more effort into developing more culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment and treatment protocols. The field of speech pathology in Jordan will advance only through developing culturally appropriate and essential service delivery models, interventions, and diagnostic assessments. Speech-language therapy services are still limited and poor in school settings. The Ministry of Education should provide these services in all schools immediately. Every school would need at least one SLP.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Licensing Rules and Regulations of Speech-Language Pathologists

(Ministry of Health, Jordan, n.d)

##### Licensing Requirements

To be licensed as a speech therapist, the following shall be required:

A- He must have obtained a first university degree (bachelor's) from a university or college recognized by the competent authorities in the field of speech-language pathology, provided that the period of study in it is not less than four years or its equivalent.

b- He must have obtained a second university degree (master) or a third university degree (Ph.D.) in the field of speech from a recognized university.

C- He must have practical experience after obtaining a (master's) or (Ph.D.) degree not less than two years for holders of a (master's) degree and one year for holders of a (Ph.D.) degree under the supervision of a licensed speech therapist in a licensed speech center or the Ministry of Health or medical services Ownership, universities or outside the Kingdom with an accredited certificate.

d- He must pass the theoretical and practical examination prescribed in accordance with the instructions issued under the provisions of this bylaw.

E - To be of Jordanian nationality.

F- He has not been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, morals, and public morals.



## **Examination Committee**

Details about the examination committee for licensing SLPs and its roles and duties are provided in Articles 6 and 7 of the Bylaws below:

### **Article 6**

A- A committee shall be formed in the Ministry by a decision of the Minister, headed by the director in charge of licensing medical and health professions, and the membership of each of the following:

1- A speech therapist from the ministry named by the minister based on the recommendation of the Secretary-General.

2- A speech therapist from the Royal Medical Services nominated by its director.

3- A speech therapist from one of the official Jordanian universities, nominated by the university president at the request of the minister.

4- A speech therapist from the private health sector nominated by the Minister.

5- Head of the Health Professions Licensing Department in the Ministry.

6- One or more representatives from any relevant authority designated by the Minister.

B- The committee chooses from among its members a vice-chairman.

C- In the event that there is no specialist with the authorities referred to in Paragraph (A) of this Article, a technician licensed to practice the profession shall be named.

### **Article 7**

A- The committee shall be concerned with the following:

1- Considering applications for licensing speech therapists and speech therapists.

2- Examining requests for licensing the center.

3- Conducting the prescribed exams in accordance with the instructions issued under the provisions of this bylaw.

4- Inspecting the center before granting the license and stating its suitability for practicing the profession.

- 5- Determining the fees for the treatment sessions in the center.
  - 6- Examining the complaints related to the profession referred to it by the Minister.
  - 7- Suggesting instructions related to the practice of the profession and its ethics.
  - 8- Any other tasks that the Minister deems fit to be presented to it.
- b- The committee submits its recommendations to the minister to issue a decision in their regard.
- C- The committee meets at the invitation of its chairman or his deputy in his absence at least once every three months and whenever the need arises. Its meeting is legal in the presence of at least four of its members, provided that the chairman or his deputy is among them
- D- The minister may form a committee in the directorate that will undertake the tasks of the committee stipulated in paragraph (a) of this article.

According to the records of the Health Professions Licensing Department from the Ministry of health, there are 142 licensed speech-language pathologists and 754 technician speech-language pathologists.

## **Appendix B**

### **Licensing of Audiologists**

Ministry of Health, Jordan (n.d).

Rules and regulations for working in the field of audiology in Jordan were approved in 2004. The Audiology Profession Practice Regulations became effective in 2014. The licensing body for audiologists is the Ministry of Health. The concerned department for licensing in the ministry is called the Health Professions Licensing Department. It is not permissible to practice the profession or open an audiovisual center or a center for selling hearing aids without obtaining a license to do so in accordance with the provisions of the law governing the audiology discipline in the Ministry of Health. According to the regulations of the Health Professions Licensing Department, audiologists can be classified as follows based on their qualifications:

Audiologist: The professional who holds a master's or Ph.D. degree in the field of audiology.

Audiologist technician: The professional who holds a bachelor's degree in audiology.

Technician Audiologist: The professional who holds a diploma in audiology.

### **Licensing Requirements**

The requirements for licensing of audiologists are explained in Articles 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the Audiology Bylaws below:

#### **Article 5**

Subject to the provisions of Articles (6), (7) and (8) of this system, a person applying to practice the profession shall fulfill the following conditions:

A- To be of Jordanian nationality.

b- Not convicted of a felony or misdemeanor violating honor and public morals.

C- To pass the examination set by the Ministry to practice the profession in accordance with the instructions issued for this purpose.

#### **Article 6**

A person applying to practice the profession of audiologist must have any of the following:

A- A third university degree (Ph.D.) in audiology from a recognized university, and the first university degree should be in audiology.

B - A second university degree (Master's) in audiology from a recognized university and the first university degree must be in audiology. He has practiced the profession for a period of no less than two years in a licensed audiology center or the Ministry of Health, the Royal Medical Services, Jordanian universities, the Queen Alia Foundation for Hearing and Speech, or Outside the Kingdom with an approved certificate.

c- A master's or doctorate degree in audiology and he was a general physician.

D- A third university degree (Ph.D.) in audiology and equivalent to a bachelor's degree, a higher diploma or a master's degree in audiology from a recognized university or college, and he must have spent a period of no less than five years in practicing the profession of audiology in a licensed center or the Ministry of Health or Medical Services Royal Jordanian universities, Queen Alia Foundation for Hearing and Speech, or outside the Kingdom with an accredited certificate.

#### **Article 7**

Whoever applies to practice the profession of audiologist must have a first university degree (bachelor's) in audiology from a recognized university or college.

#### **Article 8**

Whoever applies to practice the profession of audiologist assistant is required to have a comprehensive community college diploma or its equivalent from a recognized audio-visual college or institute, provided that the study period in either of them is not less than two years.

## **Licensing Requirements of Audiology Clinics and Centers:**

The licensing requirements for opening an audiology clinic or center are explained in article 9 of the Law below:

### **Article 9**

The following are required for licensing the audio center:

A- To contain:

1- An audio-treated hearing examination room by the specifications specified in the instructions issued by the Minister for this purpose.

2- The auditors' waiting room.

3- Hearing examination room for audiological examinations that do not require isolation.

4- Sanitary facility.

B- It should have the following devices:

1- At least one diagnostic hearing test device.

2- Compliance test device to evaluate and examine the middle ear.

3- Endoscope for ear examination.

4- A device for checking the performance of hearing aids.

5- Tools and materials for taking ear print.

C- Appointing a licensed audiologist or audio technician to manage and supervise the center and a clerk to record the data in the records.

d- Any other requirements determined by the Minister upon the recommendation of the Committee.

Licensing Requirements for Hearing Aid Centers:

To open a hearing aid center, the following requirements must be fulfilled:

### **Article 10**

A- An audio technician licensed to work for a full-time employee.

B- Devices and equipment necessary for examining and maintaining hearing aids and manufacturing molds approved by the Ministry.

C- Spare parts for hearing aids.

D- A device for checking the performance of hearing aids.

E- Any other requirements determined by the Minister upon the recommendation of the Committee.

### **Examination Committee**

Articles 11 and 12 below provide details about the audiology examination committee and the duties of this committee:

#### **Article 11**

A committee is formed in the Ministry called (the Audiology Committee), headed by the Director of the Directorate of Licensing of Professions and Health Institutions, and the membership of:

A- 1- The head of ear, nose, and throat specialization in the ministry as a vice president.

2- An audiologist from the ministry named by the minister.

3- A licensed audiologist from the Royal Medical Services nominated by its director.

4- A licensed audiologist, provided that he is from one of the official Jordanian universities, nominated by the university president with the approval of the minister, and his membership period is two years, subject to renewal.

5- An audiologist or a licensed audio technician from the private sector nominated by the Minister, and his membership term is two years, subject to renewal.

6- Head of the Health Professions Licensing Department in the Ministry.

B- In the event that there is no specialist with any of the bodies referred to in clauses (2), (3), (4), and (5) of Paragraph (a) of this Article, an audiologist shall be named, licensed to practice the profession, whose service period shall not be less than For (10) years.

#### **Article 12**

The Committee shall have the following duties and powers:

A- Examining the applications for licensing the profession submitted to it by the department concerned with licensing medical professions and submitting its recommendations to the Minister to take the appropriate decision regarding them.

B- Recommending to the Minister the formation of any committee to conduct examinations for the purposes of licensing.

C- Inspecting audio centers and hearing aids selling centers for the purposes of licensing them.

D- Periodic inspection of all centers established under the provisions of this system, at least once a year, to ensure that they comply with the licensing conditions contained in this system and the instructions issued pursuant to it.

E- Determining the list of fees for audiological and rehabilitation examinations in accordance with the instructions issued by the Minister.

F- Examining the complaints submitted to the Ministry

According to the records of the Health Professions Licensing Department from the Ministry of Health, there are 27 licensed audiologists, 244 technician audiologists, and seven assistant technician audiologists.