

# Online post-pandemic: Have students' perceptions of the online conversation partner placement changed post-pandemic?



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**Background:** Conversation partner (CP) placements teach students supported conversation techniques to use with people with aphasia (PWA). COVID-19 shifted CP placements from in-person to online, a format demonstrated to be effective (McKinley & O'Halloran, 2016). Kearns and Cunningham (2022) reported that students and PWA found the online format valuable but noted limitations in terms of in-person interaction and communication strategies.

**Aim:** This research explored SLT students' perceptions of the online CP placement, both during and after the pandemic.

**Methods:** Two phases of interviews with students who completed the online CP placements – Phase One during COVID-19 restrictions, Phase Two post-restrictions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically.

## Research Questions and Findings

### 1. Is being an online conversation partner a useful learning experience for Speech and Language Therapy students?

Yes, all students reported acquiring new skills and enjoying the experience.

### 2. What are the students' perceptions of the online conversation partner placement during and post-pandemic?

Both phases highlighted positive experiences but also limitations such as the restricted communication strategies and the absence of a holistic overview of the PWA. Phase two participants emphasized technology barriers and the need for relevant training.

### 3. Is being an online conversation partner still acceptable post-pandemic?

Yes, through flexibility and skill development opportunities. Addressing limitations and preferences, including hybrid approaches, can enhance its value for SLT students.

## References:

- McKinley, K., & O'Halloran, R. (2016). Communication partner training for nurses: A pilot study of an online learning program. *Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology*, 18, pp. 89-93.
- Kearns, Á., & Cunningham, R. (2022). Converting to online conversations in COVID-19: People with aphasia and Students' experiences of an online Conversation Partner Scheme. *Aphasiology*, pp. 1-25.

## Main Themes

*"A highlight of the course"*  
The positives of the experience.

*"Just a floating head"*  
The drawbacks of the online experience.

The conversation partner's ability shapes the experience.

The in-person briefing experience.

## Wider considerations

**Individual Need & Preference** – Students and clients may have diverse needs and preferences when engaging in telehealth. Some individuals may benefit from extra guidance and training to enhance their remote experience.

**Telehealth Preparation** – Educators should continue to incorporate telehealth opportunities into placement learning. This will equip students with the necessary skills for telehealth post pandemic.

**Total Communication Strategies** - these strategies are a valuable tool during in-person and remote conversations. Total communication needs to be taught and practised so that students can apply the strategies effectively in telehealth sessions.

**In conclusion:** The findings suggest that the online CP placement is still valuable for SLT student learning post pandemic, however there are limitations unique to the online experience that should be addressed to enhance the student experience.