

Audiogram: Is There a Need to Get Trained Beyond Pure Tones and the Degree of Hearing Loss?

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
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To the Editor,

Pure-tone audiometry has long been the gold standard for assessing hearing sensitivity and diagnosing degrees of hearing loss. However, there is a growing acknowledgment among professionals that more than this method alone may be needed to sufficiently address the complexities of hearing impairment and the nuanced needs of patients, particularly in speech-language pathology and audiology.¹ Educational programs for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists predominantly focus on traditional methodologies such as pure-tone audiograms and the standard hearing loss classification system defined by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).² While these foundations are crucial, they exhibit significant limitations, notably in their ability to comprehensively evaluate speech science and auditory processing capabilities. Furthermore, these traditional tools often fail to provide the necessary framework for counseling individuals effectively across the spectrum of hearing loss severity.

Emerging research underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive and impactful approach for daily clinical use.³ Patients with identical hearing loss levels can exhibit vastly different speech-receptive abilities and needs, necessitating varied rehabilitation strategies. This variation highlights the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach to hearing loss. For instance, the conventional classification of “mild” or “moderate” hearing loss can lead to misunderstandings among patients about the implications of their condition. Similarly, the label “normal hearing” may not accurately reflect an individual’s functional auditory capabilities, potentially overlooking subtle but significant auditory processing difficulties. The importance of even mild hearing impairments is particularly evident in educational settings, where they can impact a child’s learning abilities.⁴ It is becoming increasingly clear that the degree of hearing loss should not solely dictate the rehabilitation approach; rather, the focus should be on the specific challenges and needs experienced by the patient.⁵

This evolving perspective necessitates a transformation in the training of audiologists and SLPs. Professionals in these fields must be equipped not only with skills in interpreting audiograms but also with the ability to develop tailored intervention strategies that consider the unique circumstances of each patient. Future audiology and speech-language pathology education should include expanded training on advanced diagnostic methods and the integration of broader evaluative tools that enhance the understanding of auditory processing and speech perception. This includes the incorporation of electrophysiological evaluations, which are increasingly recognized as vital components of a comprehensive audiological assessment.

The call for innovation extends beyond educational reform to encompass the implementation of comprehensive, evidence-driven clinical practices. These practices should support enhanced language development and communication abilities in infants and young children with hearing impairments. By broadening the scope of diagnostic tools and refining intervention strategies, the field can better meet the diverse needs of those it serves, paving the way for more effective treatment and improved patient outcomes. Establishing a more collaborative approach between ENT specialists and audiologists is also crucial, ensuring that patients receive a holistic evaluation that informs appropriate and individualized care

Paris Binos¹

George Psillas²

¹Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, CIRCLE Laboratory, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus

²Department of ENT, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki School of Medicine, Thessaloniki, Greece

Corresponding author:

Paris Binos

✉ paris.binos@cut.ac.cy

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strategies. This collaborative model can further enhance the efficacy of interventions, ultimately leading to better hearing health outcomes across the board.

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