

Going Global, Staying Local: Pre-implementation Research as the Anchor for Rehabilitation Science Scholarship in the Philippines

Health care professions in rehabilitation science, namely, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and audiology, are undergoing a critical transformation. Long defined by strong traditions in clinical care and a deep commitment to service, these disciplines are increasingly shaping their identities not only through practice but also through the systematic production of knowledge grounded in local contexts.¹ This shift signals a maturing professional landscape in which scholarship is becoming central rather than peripheral to practice.

In physical therapy, this shift is particularly evident. The establishment of the *Philippine Journal of Physical Therapy* in 2021 has provided a dedicated national platform for the dissemination of rehabilitation research, while recent scientometric analyses indicate a steady, although still evolving, trajectory of scholarly output over the past three decades.^{2,3} These developments reflect a profession that not only strengthens its evidence base but also critically examines the patterns, gaps, and future directions of its own knowledge production.

Occupational therapy has similarly progressed toward a more deliberate and research-oriented culture. Recent scholarship has underscored the importance of developing a coherent and contextually grounded research agenda, one that critically engages with Filipino lived experience while remaining responsive to global developments in occupational science.⁴ This imperative is both timely and necessary as the profession continues to broaden its roles across clinical, community, and policy domains.

Speech-language pathology and audiology, although comparatively younger disciplines in the country, exhibit similar momentum. Since the formal establishment of speech-language pathology in 1978, the field has advanced in terms of education, regulation, and professional organization, alongside an increasing recognition of the need to strengthen its research base.⁵ In parallel, audiology faces a pressing imperative, as national and community-based studies continue to document the burden of hearing disorders in the Philippines, highlighting the need for locally generated epidemiologic, clinical, and service delivery research.⁶

Across these professions, the trajectory is clear: scholarship is no longer an adjunct to practice but a foundational component of professional growth. However, this growing volume of locally generated evidence, although encouraging, does not by itself guarantee that it will change everyday clinical practice; producing knowledge and putting it into routine use are distinct challenges.⁷ As these disciplines transition from consumers to producers of research, the crucial next step for rehabilitation science in the Philippines is bridging the "know-do gap" in resource-constrained environments. Generating local evidence is an essential first step, but ensuring that evidence leads to widespread, sustained clinical adoption requires a deliberate focus on dissemination and implementation.⁸

Even within an expanding health system, resource-constrained clinical settings continue to grapple with workforce shortages, infrastructure bottlenecks, financial barriers, and regional disparities in health delivery.⁹ Transplanting evidence-based interventions without prior contextual adaptation frequently leads to poor clinical fidelity, underutilization, or outright intervention failure.¹⁰ Here, pre-implementation research serves as the foundational work that evaluates local contexts, stakeholder needs, structural barriers, and cultural fit that link clinical efficacy and real-world utility.¹¹



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The contributions in this special issue of *Acta Medica Philippina* span a range of areas, including clinical and community-based rehabilitation research, innovations in health professions education, and emerging approaches to service delivery. Rather than representing isolated efforts across distinct professions, these diverse studies occupy complementary positions along the pre-implementation pathway. Collectively, they illustrate the breadth of pre-implementation evidence required to strengthen local health systems while also generating insights that resonate beyond national boundaries. Locally situated scholarship can inform shared challenges, contribute to comparative perspectives, and enrich the collective understanding of health professions education and practice across diverse settings. We therefore honor the contributions of these researchers who are “going global while staying local.”

Important challenges remain, including limited research infrastructure, uneven mentorship opportunities, and the need for stronger institutional and interdisciplinary collaboration.^{12,13} Addressing these constraints will be essential to sustaining momentum and ensuring that research efforts are aligned with the evolving health needs of Filipino communities. Intentionally embedding implementation science principles into future study designs can contribute to addressing these systemic constraints.

As guest editors of this special issue, we are grateful for the opportunity to highlight scholarship that reflects the breadth of rehabilitation science and its commitment to addressing the needs of Filipino communities. As alumni of the University of the Philippines Manila – College of Allied Medical Professions ourselves, we approach this responsibility with a deep appreciation for the institution’s longstanding contributions to rehabilitation education, research, and service in the Philippines.

Ultimately, this special issue demonstrates the expansion of research within rehabilitation science that is both substantive and consequential. The recent developments point toward a future in which Filipino rehabilitation professionals are not only consumers of knowledge but also recognized contributors to it. The task ahead is not simply to sustain current gains but to institutionalize a culture of inquiry that supports rigorous, contextually grounded, and implementation-ready scholarship. In doing so, these professions can help shape a body of knowledge that actively transforms patient care and health systems globally while unmistakably remaining Filipino.

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