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MOTOR LEARNING APPROACHES IN CHILDREN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

Zakir Ullah[*1], Faryal Javed [2], Sadiq Ullah Khan[3], Arisha Anjum[4], Jamila Bukhari[5], Sana Ali[6], Dr. Hassan Ali[7]

[*1] *Assistant Professor (Physical Therappy) School of Health Sciences, Peshawar*
[2] *Senior Physiotherapist Rehman Medical Institute, Peshawar*
[3]*student (MBBS 4th year) Rehman Medical Institute, Peshawar*
[4]*lecturer PEF University College, Peshawar*
[5]*Teaching Assistant Rehman Medical Institute, Peshawar*
[6]*Physiotherapist Pakistan Institute of Prosthetics and Orthotics Sciences (PIPOS) Peshawar*
[7]*(BDS) MPH Student Khyber Medical University, Peshawar*

[*1]faryalphysio@gmail.com, [2]zakirbaryal.9777@gmail.com, [3]sadiqkhan3979@gmail.com, [4]arishaphysio@gmail.com, [5]jamila.bukhari6@gmail.com, [6]sanaali67r@gmail.com, [7]hassanalibangash333@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *
Zakir Ullah

Abstract

Background: *Cerebral Palsy (CP) is the most common neurological condition in children, with a prevalence of 1.5 to 2.5 per 1000 live births, leading to permanent disorders of movement and posture. Beyond primary motor impairments, children with CP often experience significant difficulties in acquiring and refining motor skills due to altered neuromotor control, spasticity, and coordination deficits. Traditional rehabilitation has predominantly focused on impairment-level interventions. However, there has been a paradigm shift toward activity-based, functional approaches that integrate motor learning principles to promote skill acquisition, retaining, and generalization.*

Objective: *This narrative review aims to summarize the theoretical frameworks and practical applications of motor learning approaches in children with cerebral palsy, providing insights into evidence-based strategies that enhance rehabilitation outcomes.*

Methods: *A comprehensive search of relevant literature was conducted across PubMed and PEDro databases while some articles are retrieved from Google Scholar directly. Key search terms included "Cerebral Palsy," "Motor Learning," "Task-Oriented Training," "Feedback Strategies," and "Pediatric Rehabilitation." Studies focusing on motor learning interventions in children with CP, including randomized controlled trials, observational studies, and review articles published between 2021 and 2025, were included.*

Results: *The review highlights several motor learning strategies applied in CP rehabilitation, including Task-Specific Training (TST), Constraint-Induced Movement Therapy (CIMT), Bimanual Training, Virtual Reality (VR), Robotic-Assisted Therapy, Action Observation (AO), and Motor Imagery (MI). Core motor learning principles such as structured feedback (Knowledge of Results and Knowledge of Performance), practice conditions (blocked vs random, massed vs*

distributed, variable vs constant practice), and motivation-enhancing strategies are critical in facilitating skill acquisition. Emerging evidence supports the efficacy of these interventions in improving upper limb function, gait patterns, and overall functional independence. However, variations in study protocols, small sample sizes, and heterogeneity in CP presentations pose challenges in standardizing treatment approaches.

Conclusion: *Motor learning provides a robust framework for designing effective rehabilitation interventions in children with cerebral palsy. Integrating principles of task specificity, optimal feedback, adaptive practice conditions, and child-centered motivation strategies can significantly enhance motor outcomes. further longitudinal and large-scale studies are needed to establish standardized protocols and explore the integration of advanced technologies in motor learning-based interventions. Clinicians are encouraged to adopt individualized, evidence-based motor learning approaches to maximize functional gains in pediatric CP rehabilitation.*

INTRODUCTION

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is the most commonly occurring neurological condition in children, with the prevalence of 1.5 to 2.5 per 1000 births (1, 2) that remains throughout adulthood of the effected child (3) CP is defined as "the group of everlasting abnormal developmental conditions of movement and posture, leading to limitation in activities (3, 4) accompanied by non-progressive disorders which occurred during the developmental stage of fetal or infant brain" (5) Because of anatomical or structural brain abnormalities, children with CP experience a wide range of sensorimotor damages, including myotonic disorders, sensory discrepancies, deficits in atherogenic balance and coordination, motor function execution and planning (4, 6) combination of these impairments eventually lead to abnormalities in upper limb function (7) In addition to the primary neuromotor impairments, individual with CP often experience challenges in motor learning; the process of acquiring and retaining motor skills through practice and experience (8) Traditional rehabilitation approaches for CP have mainly focused on impairments (9)However, there has been a paradigm shift toward functional and activity-based interventions that emphasize learning and skill attainment (10) The application of this motor learning strategies in pediatric rehabilitation offers a designed roadmap and ideal framework to improve the achievement, retaining, and generalization of motor skills (4, 11)This narrative review explores motor learning concepts and their application in children with CP, summarizing evidence from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Motor Learning: (Theoretical Foundations)

Motor learning refers to a combination of internal processes connected with experience and practice that leads to relatively permanent changes in the abilities for skilled performance (12) In individuals with CP, these developments are often predisposed by abnormal muscle tone, spasticity, weakness, and poor selective motor control (13) Key motor learning theories include

Adams' Closed-Loop Theory also known as Adams' Theory of Motor Learning or Adams' Closed-Loop Concept of Learning and Motor Performance. This concept Emphasizes the role of feedback in strengthening movement traces. Less applicable to novel or fast-paced movements (14) Schmidt's Schema Theory: Richard Schmidt (1975) presented the schema theory for motor learning, suggesting in opposition to previously closed-loop theories. Schema Theory emphasizes on the development of generalized motor programs through variable practice and feedback (15) Dynamic Systems Theory: this theory states that motor behavior emerges from the interaction between the individual, task, and environment, this theory is highly relevant for pediatric rehabilitation (16) Ecological Theory: Focuses on the coupling of perception-action and the

importance of affordances in motor learning(17) Understanding all these theories provides a foundation for developing effective interventions tailored to children with CP.

Principles of Motor Learning Applied to CP Rehabilitation:

Task-Specific Training (TST) this concept involves practicing goal-oriented tasks that are expressive and contextually relevant. It has been evidenced to be effective in improving functional abilities (18) especially in upper limb training through constraint-induced movement therapy (CIMT) and two-handed training (19) Feedback Strategies Feedback is critical in guiding learning: Knowledge of Results (KR): a type of augmented feedback that provides information about the outcome of a movement, helping learners understand how close they are to achieving a goal. It plays a crucial role in motor learning by helping individuals refine their movements and improve their ability to perform skills consistently (12) Knowledge of Performance (KP): a feedback that focuses on the quality of a movement or action, rather than the outcome or result. It provides information about how a skill was performed, including technique, coordination, and specific movement patterns.(20) Feedbacks about the movement process Reduced frequency and faded feedback schedules are recommended to promote autonomy and skill retention(19, 20)

Practice Conditions:

Blocked vs. Random Practice: Random practice improves transfer and preservation of motor learning but may initially reduce performance (21) Distributed vs. Massed Practice: Distributed practice tends to yield better long-term learning as compared to massed practice (22) Variable vs. Constant Practice: Variable practice mainly work to promotes and adaptability (23) Motivation and Autonomy mostly Enhancing a child's motivation through self-directed goals, gamification, and positive reinforcement enhances engagement and motor learning (24) Neuroplasticity and Timing The developing brain in children offers a critical window for neuroplasticity. Interventions that influence motor learning principles during early developmental stages may yield better long-term outcomes (25)

Evidence from Pediatric Rehabilitation Studies: Some of studies conducted as clinical trials and observational studies support the application of motor learning principles in CP rehabilitation (26) Bimanual Therapy**:** Improve hand function and independence in children with hemiplegic CP. A huge number of quantitative bimanual assessments including different tools and bimanual tasks with specific variables established to improve bimanual function(27)

Virtual Reality and Robotic Therapy:

(VR,RT) Provide engaging and feedback-rich environment which support and help in improvement of motor learning Wen-Sheng Fu et al. conducted an RCT which conclude that all indicators had improved significantly after the intervention, the study demonstrated that the more effective impacts of VR combined with Robot Assisted Gait Training (RAGT) on walking ability compared to the control group and 30% of weight loss had the maximum improvement in children with CP (28)

Motor Imagery and Action Observation:

commonly used mental training techniques effective in children with CP are action observation (AO) and motor imagery (MI) Both AO and MI activate motor brain regions that bring into line closely with those commonly described hypoactive. AO is an externally determined process, relating the structured and careful observation of human movement (29) on the other hand MI is cognitively driven process, including the generation, maintenance and transformation of visual and kinesthetic perceptual representations of movement (30) AO and MI are type of motor stimulation; as alike motor areas are activated to movement initiation during their use(8, 27, 30) studies over last decade proposes training protocols involving the use of these motor simulations can improve movement outcomes for children. For example, AO-based training has been shown to facilitate throwing and catching accuracy and technique in children which improve motor initiation across a range of motion of tasks; jumping a rope, hitting a ball with a bat and throwing and catching tasks (30) while These interventions are promising, inconsistencies in outcome measures, small sample

sizes, and heterogeneous CP presentations limit generalizability.

Clinical Implications:

Integrating the motor learning approaches into therapy can optimize outcomes in children with CP. Clinicians should: Set functional, meaningful goals**,** incorporate variable and context-rich practice**,** use feedback judiciously**,** involve families in goal setting and practice**,** Utilize technology for enhanced engagement**.** Therapists should also consider individual differences in cognitive capacity, attention, and fatigue.

Limitations and Future Directions:

this study is conducted as narrative review and the disadvantage is that Narrative reviews are fundamentally limited by lack of systematic methodology while conducting this type of study. Additionally, the diversity in types of CP makes standardization difficult. It is therefore directed for Future research that it should prioritize: Longitudinal studies on motor learning-based interventions, Personalized therapy models, Integration of AI and adaptive technologies in motor training and Cross-disciplinary approaches involving educators and caregivers.

Conclusion:

Motor learning provides a strong and robust framework for designing and developing an effective rehabilitation interventions program in individual with cerebral palsy. It offers a dynamic, evidence based and up-to-date approach that highlights meaningful skill achievement through repetition, feedback methods and motivational concepts. The effective Techniques such as task-specific training programs, categorized or graded feedback, and variable practices are able to significantly improve not only physical function but also mental or cognitive involvement and emotional pliability. The use of modern and up to date adaptive technologies such as virtual reality, robotic technologies, and game-based rehab programs can further improve the motor learning environment, which is effective in making therapy more engaging and personalized for the patients or children with CP. Most Prominently, caregiver or attendant involvement in learning program and child-centered goal setting are important to translating motor learning into sustainable, long term real-world outcomes. Although challenges remain in standardizing protocols across heterogeneous CP populations, the integration of motor learning into pediatric rehabilitation continues to show great promise for enhancing functional independence, social participation, and overall quality of life.

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