

BACKGROUND

Whilst degree apprenticeships in health care continue to grow [1,2], for sonography they remain a relatively new concept. There is currently only one English university offering this new educational pathway into sonography allowing apprentices to be paid employees with enhanced employer ownership for training [3,4,5]. However, there still appears to be some challenges relating to professional acceptance of the apprentice route [6,7] and it is evident that greater awareness of the pathway is still required [8,9].

This study captured a unique opportunity to explore the perceptions and expectations of the first Sonographer Degree Apprentices as they embarked on their educational journey. The aims were to explore their preparedness for the course as well as the benefits and challenges associated with it. Areas for change to enhance the apprentices' experience of degree apprenticeships were highlighted.

METHOD

This poster presents the findings from the first data collection phase of a longitudinal study of BSc (Hons) Medical Ultrasound Degree Apprentices. Following ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University, 7 semi structured interviews were conducted with sonographer degree apprentices enabling an in depth exploration. The interviews followed a defined interview schedule and were recorded using Microsoft Teams and later transcribed in full. Data was analysed using a framework approach to identify any common themes.

RESULTS

Three main themes emerged which were the importance of support, opportunities and challenges. There was an overwhelming notion of the importance of support mechanisms to undertake and succeed on the apprenticeship course from a wide range of sources. The opportunities included being able to earn whilst they trained, career opportunities and the flexible and structured approach to learning. The main challenges centred around acceptance of the role, self-acceptance, belief and confidence levels and operational challenges.

Support

University

Family and Friends

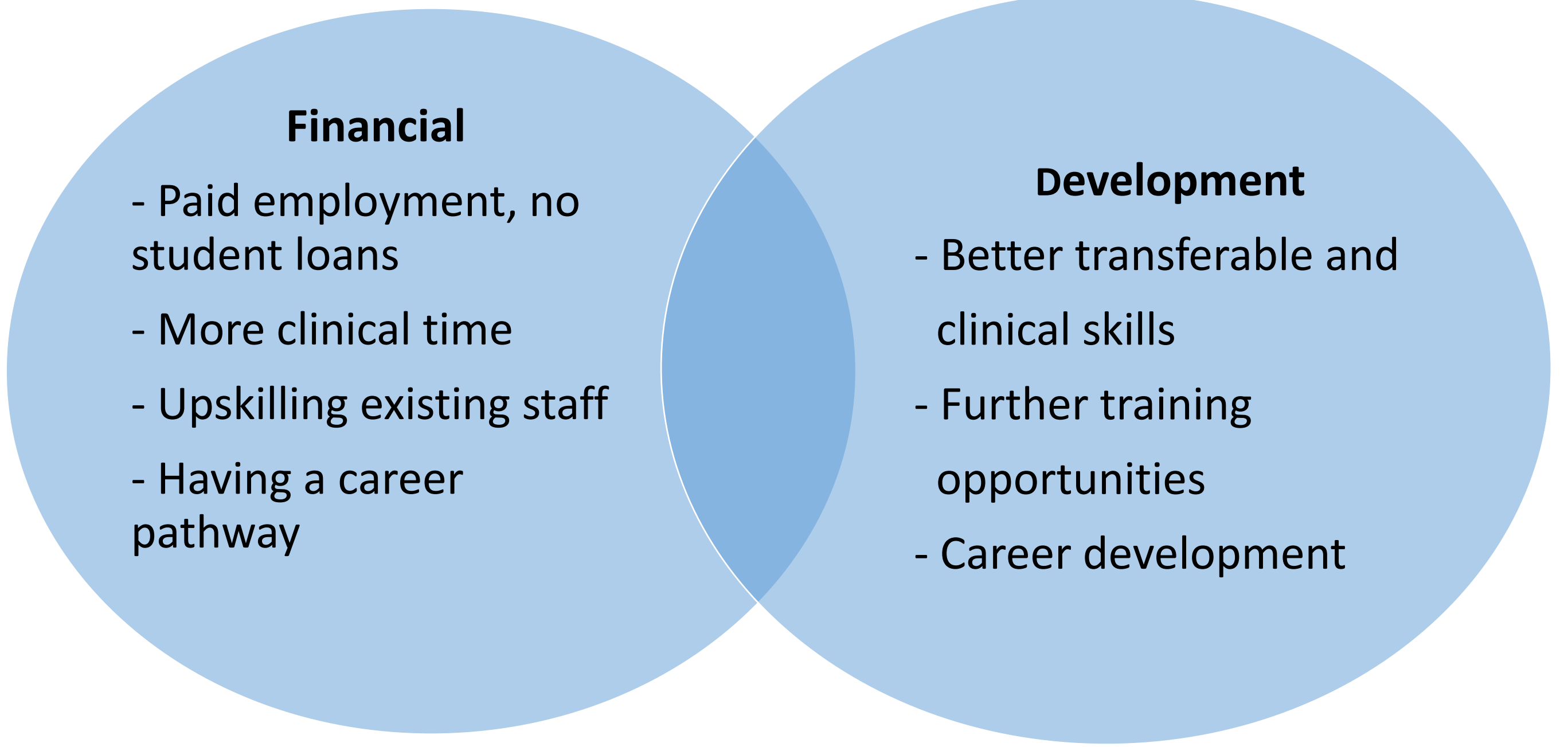
Employer

- You were amazing at the university side. P3
- Everyone's been really helpful and supportive, at the university everyone's always like checking up on everyone P4
- we had everything in terms of academic skills, we have loads of workshops. We got loads of support...and in terms of well-being, we all were made aware of where to go when we needed help. P5

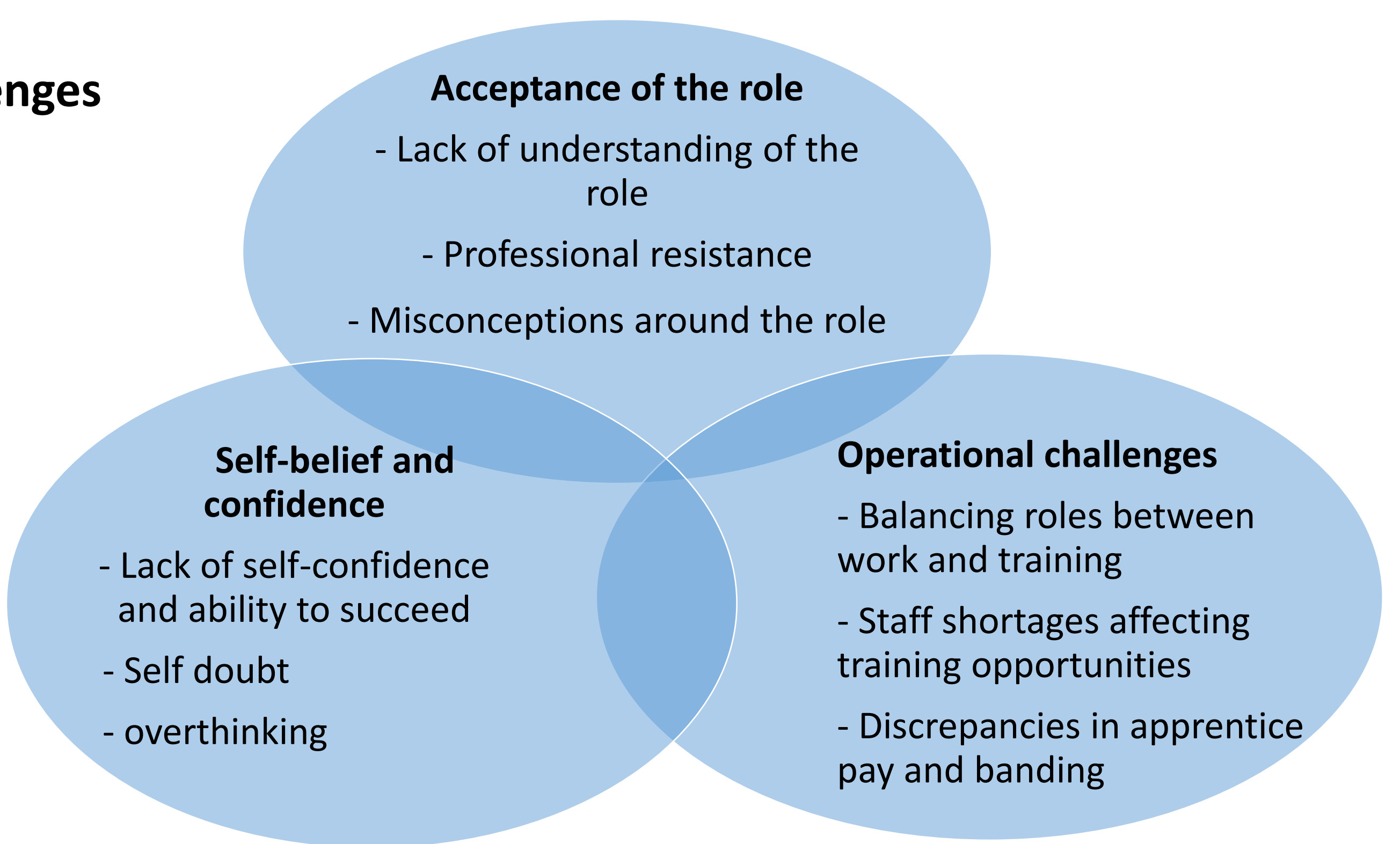
- they've [family] been so supportive, they're really supportive, absolutely brilliant. And it's really helped with the children as well...just studying as well and sharing that you can do it. I think that rubs off, and that helps them think. Oh, well, you know, at any age you can. Anyway, my stepson's been helping me as well, excellent. P3
- The group chat with all the other girls, it's really useful, just anything you ever need to know. P4

- And they are so supportive...they're going to support me throughout. P2
- my employees are really good as well...working with different people like everyone's involved with helping me, it's nice, everyone's kind and really wants to help and there's just so much support. P4
- the support system at work as well was really good P5

Opportunities



Challenges



Conclusion

It was evident that the sonographer apprentices identified and valued the support from the University, their family and friends and the employer. This new educational route clearly offered opportunities not previously available but there appears to be still a requirement to raise awareness and acceptance of sonographer apprentices. The findings from this unique study are informing enhancements for the apprentice experience of future cohorts of the sonography degree apprentices and is transferable to other health degree apprenticeship routes. The impact of this study is an increased understanding of the apprentice journey through this new educational route.

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