

THE INFLUENCE OF BILINGUALITY ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, 2-6 YEARS OLD

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Abstract: Children with developmental disabilities, diagnosed and following the therapeutic process depending on the needs they encounter and the difficulty on language development. Parents of children with developmental disabilities has more difficulties in terms of behavior, cognition, communication, self-help processes or other health problems. As a result of not managing the situation, it happens that these children are exposed a lot to technology, telephone or television. During the navigation they do on the internet, materials are often displayed in languages other than their mother language. The study aimed to analyze the influence of bilingualism on the language development in children with developmental disabilities at the age of 2-6 years. The used study method was the qualitative method, as an effective method in the study findings, based on the purpose of the study and the studied target. In these conditions, the fact that it was a sensitive topic, the sample of the study was intentional, setting as specific criteria, parents of children diagnosed with developmental disabilities, aged 2-6 years and who follow the therapeutic process.

Bilingualism affected negatively all children aged 2-6 years with developmental disabilities, reducing the performance on the language development. In children with autism spectrum disorder, it affects more significant levels. All the cases considered with a longer and earlier time of exposure to bilingualism present a disorder or delay in passing the next and subsequent stages of language development. Prejudice and exclusion undermine generalization as a very essential part of effective therapeutic treatment, as treatment aims at adequate functioning of children in social and community settings. Inclusion and prejudice reduce the chances to be functionally integrated into society and to improve personal and social skills. The study brings a new approach and serves as an incentive for other quantitative studies, considering that there are few studies in this field in Albanian society.

Keywords: children, developmental problems, language.

1. INTRODUCCION

The arrival of a child is associated with a lot of pleasure, unconditional love, but also associated with fear and uncertainty. Parenting remains a difficult task for each person, as they want to achieve the best for their child (Ullman, 2020). The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of bilingualism on the development of the speech process in children with cognitive development problems aged 2-6 years. There is a lack of scientific studies which measure, thanks to empirical methods, the connection between bilingualism and the development of the speech process in children who present problems of cognitive development. The study brought innovation due to the fact that there is a lack of official data on the actual number of children involved in therapeutic processes. This study with a qualitative methodological approach lays the foundations for the development of other quantitative studies for more specific measurement of the indicators of involvement and effectiveness of therapeutic processes, as well as the generalization of the findings in a broader and more inclusive line. The findings of this study shed light on the understanding of many problems, which can serve policy makers as guidance in their work for the establishment of cooperative interstate policies, in aid of identification, treatment and inclusion in the community.

The main objective of the study was to measure the impact of the presence of a second language on the development of the speech process in children with cognitive development problems.

Other objectives were:

- To explore the abilities to integrate into the community under the influence of therapeutic support of children with developmental problems who have been exposed to bilingualism in early childhood.
- To explore the perceptions of the respective parents regarding the presence of bilingualism and the therapeutic process as well as inclusion in the community and society.
- To identify the key factors that, regardless of others, can help or hinder the development of children and the speech process.
- To explore the consequences or effects that early experiences of bilingualism can bring in the later stages of life. Research questions:
 - How are the accompanying problems of children with developmental and bilingual problems managed by the parents?

- How is the coordination of community services managed in order to identify, prevent and efficiently intervene in favor of children and their parents?

Language is a system, which consists in the development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex communication structures (referring to the human species) (John W. Schweiter, Julia Festman, 2023). Speaking is an interactive process of thought construction, involving the production, acquisition and processing of information. Its form and meaning depend on the context in which it occurs, the participants, the collective experiences, the physical environment and the purpose of the speech. (Hernandes, 2013). Bilingualism is the ability to use two equivalent languages to communicate. Language Stages: Cause-and-effect (non-verbal), language experimentation, meaningful language use, early concepts, advanced/complex concepts, functional learning and writing performance (Owens, 2012). Each phase affects the overall linguistic and cognitive creation and development. Predispositions and influencing factors such as; motivation, age, language exposure, personality (Hashmi, 2021), mother tongue development, quality of instruction and encouragement, cognitive skills and environmental factors (T.G. David, C.S. Weinstein, 2013).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The fact that we are dealing with a social phenomenon can only be analyzed with qualitative methods. This is a multidimensional process and is not done once and for all. Like all complex phenomena, it is not the object of direct measurement, but of indirect measurement. Since we are talking about human beings and their individual perceptions, we cannot have objective data, only a qualitative study can present a picture of this phenomenon. (Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, Ajay Bailey, 2020). The use of purposive sampling techniques allowed to achieve the purpose of the study. The possibility of conducting a study where the quantitative method was used was limited due to insufficient resources in identifying cases of children with developmental problems who were exposed to a second language. The advantages of qualitative methods such as: flexibility (Potter, 2013), obtaining in-depth information, high percentage of responses from interviewees and other participants in the study, the meaning of non-verbal behaviors (Sooriya, 2017), originality of responses etc. were taken into consideration in the study. Children following the therapeutic process and their parents were included in the study. For each study sample, the sample selection criteria are specified in order to obtain and summarize all the necessary information in function of the purpose of the study. The most specific criteria have been set in relation to the subject of the study, but claiming criteria in the minimum limits of acceptability. 1. Children of the city of Tirana and the city of Durrës. 2. Children with developmental problems involved in therapeutic processes. 3. Children who are exposed to bilingualism. 4. The parents of these children. The age of the children included in the study is 2-6 years. 15 parents of the children included in the study, aged 20 - 44, participated in the in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. The study included 10 children aged 2-6 years, 8 boys and 2 girls, 3 children diagnosed according to DSM-V-R (Handbook of DSM-5 Disorders in Children and Adolescents, 2017) with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 4 children diagnosed in the group of learning difficulties and 3 children diagnosed with delayed language development at the phonological level. The interviewed persons were left free in their answers, they expressed their thoughts with their own words. I myself, in the role of the researcher, explored the most important issues with the participants. Interview participants were encouraged to express their feelings and opinions as freely and naturally as possible. The interview was flexible and suitable for different participants. The same aspects of the research topic were discussed with each participant. The interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study, the preservation of anonymity and confidentiality.

3. RESULTS

The study brought to light some important findings in relation to the study on the bilingualism of children with developmental problems aged 2-6 years. Eliminating exposure to a second language had a positive effect on children's language development, as it reduced the consumption of cerebral energy in the selection of one of the two languages and the orientation towards learning in a single language. Involvement in the therapeutic process favored the development of language skills and the facilitation of communication using different auxiliary communication schemes in all children regardless of diagnosis. The involvement of the family in the therapeutic process and the motivation of the parents increased the effectiveness of the intervention, as it enabled the transfer of skills to the natural environment and the generalization of the skills achieved during the therapeutic sessions. Non-involvement and prejudice affected the emotionality and psychology of the parents of these children. The accompanying problems reduced the quality of life of the child and their parents, for which the latter went to various institutions to seek guidance and continuous professional support. Attending nursery/kindergarten with a supportive program and supportive teachers depending on the need had positive effects on treatment, as it helped with play and social skills.

The coordination of services in institutions was still incomplete, being supported by an incomplete multidisciplinary team, the lack of more detailed diagnostic manuals standardized in accordance with the Albanian culture. Low public screening, preventive initiatives at the most present levels in the early life of the child, for example the family pediatrician, continuous routine screening tests limited the earliest identification of cases and the necessary orientation in obtaining the necessary service.

In conclusion, the exposures to bilingualism of children with developmental problems negatively affected the development of the speech process and language development as a function of communication.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The process of developing a democratic society that meets the needs of every child and their parents, regardless of the difficulty, must be realized through a correct attitude towards the law of inclusiveness, in all public and non-public institutions, for all children regardless of bilingualism and developmental problems, with the aim of involving children actively and continuously in the social environment.

The development of informative educational programs in understanding special needs and accepting others as they are is likely to reduce prejudice and increase the effectiveness of the intervention as a whole. Cooperation between the families of children with special needs and any Albanian institution, public or private, institutions that focus on the identification of cases, the provision of primary and secondary services, the protection of children's rights, non-profit organizations as well as all means of information.

Coordination of services from ambulatory services to case identification, orientation to diagnostic institutions and those that provide treatment and support services.

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