

Language And Speech Developmental Delays Among Early Learners In Selected Public Preschools Of Dagoretti Sub-County Nairobi County Kenya.

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Abstract

Language plays a pivotal role in child development by shaping cognitive abilities, enhancing communication skills, supporting social interactions, and contributing to better problem-solving, critical thinking, and overall learning. The goal of this research was to analyze the status of language and speech developmental delays among preschool children ages 3-6 in selected schools of Dagoretti- South Sub county, Nairobi County, Kenya. The total sample size was 155 children attending the selected preschools. This study used the descriptive survey design and the sampling technique was purposive. The research utilized Wellcomm Screener to identify the developmental delays. The study yielded quantitative data which was analysed using SPSS version 25. Key findings showed that 69% children had no language and speech developmental delays but 39% experienced delays ranging from 6 months to more than 2 years. Children without any form of global delay were 78.1%, while those with a delay in one area of development were 7.7%. Those showing global delay were 14.2%. Findings of this research showed that 12.9% children needed joint specialized support from both teachers and parents. Those that needed assessment, intervention and probably referral were 18.1%. They were in 'red' according to the screener interpretations. Results were presented in tables. The research concluded that language and speech developmental delays are common among early learners, but they go unaddressed. Further, the early years are foundational and are best suited for interventions, setting children on a path for success. Parental and teacher support would help the children experiencing delays to catch up with their peers. The study recommended capacity building of parents, teachers and other relevant stakeholders on early identification, assessment, interventions and a clear referral process of learners with language and speech difficulties

Keywords: Language, speech, developmental delays, identification, assessment, intervention, referral

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I. Introduction And Background Of Study

The terms language and speech are frequently used interchangeably. However, Language is the understanding, processing, and creation of communication, while speech involves the articulation and production of speech sounds in the mouth. The ability to communicate and give meaning of spoken words is referred to as expressive language. This output is usually speech, but it can also be written language, signs, or gestures. Receptive language, which includes both visual and auditory skills, is the capacity to comprehend what other people are saying. Children acquire other relevant language development components in addition to expressive and receptive language in order to build good communication skills. These include play, collaborative attention, and socio-pragmatic language, which describes how language is understood and used in social contexts Liang, et al.,(2023).

Increasing evidence shows that language is understood as the basis of learning because it enables the communication of information, facilitates cognitive development, hence serves as a medium for instruction and social interaction. Notably, limited language skills during childhood can have lifelong consequences in a range of areas including behavior, learning, well-being, and future employment states Riad ,et al.,(2023).

Language and speech developmental delays are notable when a child fails to achieve age appropriate developmental milestones. Like all other domains of child growth and development, children don't develop uniformly. There are individual differences however, those with the language and speech delays are usually behind their peers in terms of the developmental schedule. Children with these impairments usually manifest challenges with either receptive, expressive language or both.

According to Ducharme, (2016). Despite the significance of language in the life of a child, for millions of children each year, developing the skills that encompass communication, including speech and language skills, as well as attention and listening, delay or fail to develop at all. Such have far reaching consequences in the life of a child and specifically their academic life.

II. Literature Review

Children's oral language and early literacy development serve as the foundation for later reading abilities and influence overall academic success. It is well documented that children with low oral language abilities are at risk of poor outcomes as they progress through school (Hammer, et al., 2014).

In Norway, Joner, et al., (2023), According to the white paper 'Early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care' (Ministry of Education and Research Citation, 2019) many children get help too late. The paper also highlights that many children are not heard or understood and develop and learn less than they could have done with better adapted provision (Ministry of Education and Research Citation 2019). To meet these challenges, it is essential that children who struggle with different aspects of their development are identified and followed up in a responsible manner.

Swerling (2024) elucidates that about 40-75% of children with speech and language impairments have problems learning to read. Effective early interventions work to prevent problems occurring, or to tackle them head-on when they do, before problems get worse. It also helps to foster a whole set of personal strengths and skills that prepare a child for adult life.

In Australia, in their 2019 study, Burgoyne et al. examined a sizable sample of 569 school-age children. The children finished tests that assessed their nonverbal IQ, reading and reading-related skills (one word reading, letter-sound knowledge, phonic awareness, and short automated naming), and oral language (expressive and receptive grammar and listening comprehension). Six months later, the children were evaluated. According to the results, 6.88% of them had speech challenges, which were linked to lower reading, oral language, and nonverbal IQ scores than children without speech difficulties. A mediation model showed that phonological awareness was the only factor that helped to bridge the gap between speech issues and subsequent reading. These results demonstrated the connection between speech issues such as delays at school entry and challenges learning phonological awareness. Recommendations stated that children with speech difficulties should be assessed at or even before school entry and monitored and interventions provided for oral language difficulties and for delays in reading development, early interventions would ameliorate such difficulties..

Joner, et al., (2023) posits that according to the white paper 'Early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care', many children experiencing speech and language delays get help too late. Such children are not heard or understood and hence develop and learn less than they could have done with better adapted educational approaches (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). To mitigate these challenges, early assessment and follow up is important for the affected children.

In India, a cross-sectional study was conducted at a pediatric outpatient department (OPD) of a tertiary care teaching hospital. The sample consisted of 1658 children 1–12 years who attended the pediatric OPD during the study period. Results showed that 42 children (2.53%) had speech and language delay while 3 had comorbidities (Sunderajan and Kanhere, 2019).

Mwoma and Pillay (2015) in their study focusing on Orphans and Vulnerable Children OVC's in public primary schools in Soweto South Africa noted that one of the effects of language and communication impairments on early learners was that children from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced challenges related to psychosocial support due to lack of relevant interventions by qualified personnel as the parents could not afford to pay for the needed professional services. This cohort was found to be in need of educational interventions in order to safeguard them from the risk of becoming infected with HIV due to reduced parental care and protection as well as increased susceptibility to abuse.

Adebayo and Mabuku (2014) carried out a descriptive research on the impact of speech and language disorders on pupils' learning and socialization in schools of Kalomo District, Zambia. The sample consisted of 48 pupils with speech and language impairments purposively selected from 6 schools. The results of the study revealed that the performance of pupils with speech and language impairments in English Language was low, but were average in their socialization. It was also discovered that 77.2% variance in academic performance was accounted for by the level of speech and language disorders. The positive beta value of 11.885 showed that, the less the severity of speech and language disorder, the better the academic performance of pupils. It was recommended that teachers make early identification of pupils with speech and language disorders upon enrolling in schools for early educational interventions and that District Education Boards organize sensitization programs on the teaching and socialization of pupils with speech and language disorders.

The Kenya National Survey on Children with disabilities and Special Needs in Education (2017) which include speech and language delays clearly states that the government of Kenya has committed itself to realization

of the right of education for children with disabilities . This has been through signing of regional and local conventions.

Kiogora (2021) carried out an investigation that adopted a descriptive research design. It targeted 121 parents who had visited The Kenya Institute of Special Education KISE in 2019 and 2020 for speech and language therapy and 33 teachers who taught children with speech and language disorders. Secondary data was collected for this study. The study revealed that providing education for children with special needs is one way of ensuring that their right to basic education is protected. The effect of failure to provide children with this right is far reaching as the said children would be unlikely to realize their full potential. The current research was specific about children with language and speech delays in selected schools of Dagorretti Sub county, Kenya.

III. Methodology

This research utilized descriptive survey study design. This is because the research question ‘Language and Speech Delays Among Early Learners in Selected Schools preschools of Dagoretti Sub county Nairobi County Kenya’ sort to address the current status developmental delays in language and speech. Further, it allowed collection of data that described characteristics of phenomena within a specific population. The study sample was composed of all 150 children attending Preschool (PP1 and PP2) in the two public primary schools in Dagoretti South Sub-county. The schools were purposefully chosen.

Research Instrument

Data was collected using the Wellcomm language and speech screener which is a standardized tool. This ensured the corrected data was systematic and consistent. According to gl-assessment(2024), the WellComm screener helps one to identify preschoolers experiencing challenges in their speech and language development, helping the child to realize success in their education journey. The screener uses a traffic light scoring system; Green – age appropriate, no intervention required. Amber – slight delay, support with interventions initially to see if they improve without external support. Red – needs additional support in the settings with consideration of referral to additional services.

IV. Findings

Table 1.1 Language and Speech Developmental Delays According to Duration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No developmental delay	107	69.0	69.0
	Six to 9 months delay	26	16.8	85.8
	One year delay	10	6.5	92.3
	One and half years delay	4	2.6	94.8
	Two years delay	3	1.9	96.8
	More than two years delay	5	3.2	100.0
	Total	155	100.0	100.0

Developmental delays were categorized according to the duration in which they were experienced by the child. In light of this, table 1.1 shows that 69% children had no developmental delay. However, 39% experienced developmental delays ranging from 6 months to more than 2 years.

Table 1.2 Status of Developmental Delay

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No valid global developmental delay	121	78.1	78.1	78.1
Delay in one area of development	12	7.7	7.7	85.8
Global delay	22	14.2	14.2	100.0
Total	155	100.0	100.0	

Global developmental delay (GDD) is term used for children under 5 years of age. It is defined as a significant delay when found in two or more domains of development, including activities of daily living as well as motor, cognitive, speech/language, and personal/social skills (Habibullah,2019). From the table 1.2 the children found without any form of global delay were 121 which made up a percentage of 78.1%. They were in green according to categorizations of the wellcomm screener. The children with a delay in one area of development were 12 making a percentage of 7.7% they were in amber. Those that were showing global delay(categorized under red) were 22 which translated to 14.2%. Notably, those who showed delay in either productive or receptive language were recorded as having delay in one area of development, hence didn’t experience global delay. However, those who showed delay in both receptive and productive language were recoded as having global delay.

Table 1.3 Status of need for Assessment and Intervention

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No need for interventions	107	69.0	69.0	69.0
	Need for parent/teacher support	20	12.9	12.9	81.9
	Needing assessment and intervention	28	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	155	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3 shows that 69% were doing well and didn't need any specialized support. However, 12.9% children were in 'amber' according to the wellcomm screener and needed joint specialized support from both teachers and parents. Those that needed assessment, intervention and probably referral were 18.1%. They were in 'red' according to the screener interpretations.

V. Conclusions

Prevalence of Developmental Delays: Out of the 155 children assessed, 39% were experiencing developmental delays. Research shows that Children with Language and speech delays experience learning and behavioral difficulties associated with reading during early childhood and primary school years. The early years are foundational and are best suited for interventions due to increased neural plasticity in the brain. Thus, it is important to provide experiences that promote language acquisition early in life to ensure children are set on a path for success.

Therefore, all children with developmental delays require intervention. Those with a 6-month delay need combined parental and teacher support to catch up. Children with delays in one area would benefit from targeted interventions, while children with global delays need further assessment and more comprehensive interventions.

Parental Involvement:

Findings for this research showed that 18.1% early learners needed parental participation for purposes of effective interventions and developmental progress. And that collaboration between parents and teachers was recommended as having potential to yield best learning outcomes for the children.

Further Assessments Recommended:

Children screened and found to have profound developmental delays were recommended for further assessment using Griffith III Scales of Child Development, while those found to have autistic symptoms were recommended for Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale ADOS assessment in order to diagnose the underlying condition.

Recommendations

Screening for language and speech development is necessary at school entry. This is because interventions are most impactful in the early years as this helps them to benefit from this developmental window hence equipping them for academic and future career wellbeing.

Developmentally appropriate interventions tailored to meet children's individual needs yield best outcomes. Teachers and parents should collaborate and work together to support early learners experiencing developmental delays.

There is need for capacity building of parents, teachers and other relevant stakeholders on early identification, assessment, interventions and a clear referral process of learners with language and speech delays. Parents also needed to be enlightened on the significance of their support of their Children's learning experiences which would help the children to realize their full potential.

The researchers noted need for teachers to be trained on how to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPS) for those children with delays. The IEPs would go beyond academics to address other deficits being experienced by children.

The researchers perceived need for economic, educational and psychosocial services to meet the unique needs of early learners living in difficult circumstances. The unique circumstances amplify language and communication difficulties. The services of a social worker would go a long way in navigating and supporting such needs.

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