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Language Development in Children

Introduction

Speech and language development is a programmed process amongst children from birth. Language development is a continuous process throughout childhood to adolescence, but the first five years are essential. There is stimulation of language development during the first five years. The brain is developing new nerve cells, and several connections between the cells serve as receptive and expressive language (LeMoult, 2020). Language components that are developed during the early stages of growth and development are phonology, semantics, grammar, and programmatic. Communication entails language and speech, where language is the use of shared principles for connecting words to express feelings and thoughts, as speech is the verbal way of communication. Parents have a critical role to play in the child's language development as the first teachers. The knowledge of language development in toddlers improves the ability of the parents to interact with children while stimulating and guiding them to understand and communicate effectively with their environment. Lack of stimulation at the early stages of development results in language development disorder affecting the social, emotional, and academic ability of children calling for proper interventions from both teachers and parents to improve the language development of toddlers.

Theories of Language Development

Psychologists have put forward four major theories explaining the language development of children. These are behavioral, biological, social, and cognitive theories.

Behavioral Theory

From the behavioral perspective, language entails verbal behaviors learned via operant conditioning. Operant conditioning is a method of varying behaviors to reinforce the desired disorder. The theory was put forward by B.F Skinner and is applied in human learning such as language and speech development. The environment conditions the children's learning, resulting in reinforcement of their language. Thus, behaviorist believes that language behaviors are acquired through imitations and reinforcement. Language development is determined by selective reinforcement from language and speech models but not self-discovery or experimentation. There are external forces from the environment shaping the child's language development, making the toddler react to the forces.

Biological Theory

According to biological theory, language is innate, determined psychologically, and transmitted genetically. A born baby is ready to acquire language through linguistic techniques (Schmitz et al., 2020). Language is considered universal and unique to only people and should be acquired unless there are physical and mental limitations or severe deprivation and isolation. Biological theory suggests that caregivers have no role to play in teaching children language and are therefore not linked to the correctness of the child's communication ability.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory focuses on the relationship between cognition and language development. Children have different cognitive levels corresponding to their language behaviors. The cognitive level helps the child determine the words and arrangements before communication

(LeMoult, 2020). For instance, a child may know what they want to communicate (cognition) but may not use the appropriate grammar or semantic order. The child may not understand the meaning of the words but can utter the words.

Social Theory

The social theory considers communication as the basic foundation of language development. The interaction of the first caregivers with the children gives them the ability to respond to gestures and sounds correct. In ideal parent-child interaction, the parents play a critical role in the child's language development, and any miscommunication results in language development disorder.

Factors Affecting Language Development

Health and Physical Status

Motor development and general physical conditions impact the language development of the child. During the first two years, poor health and prolonged illness affect the development of speech. Illness makes the child isolated from others reducing the rate of learning how to speak and lacking self-confidence due to constant weak health and illness retarding spontaneous needs for effective self-expression. There is no enthusiasm because the child feels unwell, reducing the interest in communicating and interacting with others. Children who are deaf or have hearing challenges will have slow language development. Thus, if the body is healthy, the mind is healthy, making the child active and happy for complete progressive and life learning to critical personality, interest, and curiosity in the environment motivating the desire to learn.

Cognitive and Intelligence Development

There is a high correlation between intelligence and language development. The child's speech is the best indicator of intelligence quotient (IQ). Children who speak at an early age have above normal IQ compared to those who delay language development due to other factors such as illness, but it does not mean they are dull. The capability of the child to understand the meaning of words and benefit from language symbols is affected due to differences in intelligence quotient (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Mentally alert children have early language development hence understanding and comprehending early communication through speech. They quickly hear, internalize and understand the message being passed while recognizing individuals and objects within the immediate environment by knowing their names. Children who have a high intelligence quotient due to cognitive level express their needs and desires in simple sentences. Therefore, the growth of vocabulary is based on the cognitive level and growth of the child; hence the integration of language development is poor in dull children as the intelligent child expresses a high level of integration.

Maturation and Learning

The development of the language amongst children depends on maturation and language. The integration of both learning and maturation is essential in determining the child's language development. As the child increases in age, there is maturity in the vocal cord, leading to increased learning. Even if the child is provided with different training, there will be no speech development until the vocal cord is mature. There is a high degree of maturation influencing the language development as most children commence speaking at the age of 18-28 months. At this age, there is the full development of the speech muscles and nervous system for coordinating the information and comprehending the meanings of symbols. Besides, maturation shows that language development does not depend on culture, geographical differences, or religion. Speech

development has an inflexible sequence that must be followed at specific ages despite personal differences. Thus, after proper and complete maturation, the child is taught, motivated, and reinforced to talk, making learning assist in language development after the growth of speech organs at specific ages. Learning facilitates the development of language. Suppose the toddler is not given proper facilities that can reinforce and lead to motivation to speak through various mechanisms. In that case, language development will be affected due to a lack of training on communication skills. Maturation and language are therefore important in the child's language development, making the process to be affected if one of the conditions is not sufficient.

Environment

According to the research conducted by Eom et al. (2019), stimulating and favorable environmental conditions are important for improving the early development of speech as the unfavorable conditions retards the development. From the research, Ecom et al. (2019) show that orphans adopted from foster homes have improved language development than offering living in orphanages or institutions due to differences in environmental stimulating factors. The environment, therefore, plays an essential role in language development as the effects of unfavorable environments on language development are lasting and sometimes permanent. The verbal capability of the child is inhibited and restricted in the poor environment as the child lacks the motivation to speak. Social class is connected to the environment influencing language development. In the USA, Zee and Bolger (2019) show that increasing the stimulation of the child's environment in lower social class results in heightened interest in speech, leading to language improvement. The caretakers of children in the institution's orphanages have little time to communicate with the children resulting in a poor environment delaying the organization of

cognitive and language development. Providing a greater opportunity for children to speak with adults increases the scope of language development within different environmental conditions.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is an essential factor affecting the language development of the child. Bilingualism is achieved when a child is compelled to learn two languages at the early stages of development. A child suffers from language retardation development when they speak a foreign language from school and native language at home due to the child's confusion, which negatively impacts the thinking capability of the child. Bilingualism also results from the parents who speak a different language and forcing the child to learn both languages. Bilingualism, therefore, leads to delay in language development, affecting the child's vocabulary. In the process of training mechanism, there is the application of one word of one language in the learning of the second language resulting in the construction of faulty sentences. It is not advisable to teach child two languages at the same time before reaching the age of 5 years when he is supposed to enter school. Learning two languages before attending school makes it challenging for the child to adjust, leading to defect in comprehension and construction of sentences. There is a competition of two languages with one another resulting in a negative impact affecting the social and emotional adjustment of the child. After noticing the adverse effect of bilingualism on the child's language development, Eberhardt et al. (2006) say that there is no doubt that children grown in a bilingual environment are disabled in terms of speech and language development.

Effects of Poor Language Development

Poor language development has adverse social, emotional, and academic impacts on the child.

Social

In the early development stages of a child, the toddler can easily miss the language and speech development resulting in social problems if the challenge is not spotted and rectified at the appropriate time. At the age of 6 and 18 months, the child should interact with others and gain a greater understanding of certain words such as 'mama.' If this is not the situation, there are possibilities of developmental language disorder or autisms. The condition results from the inability of the child to communicate with others, reducing the child's social interaction with others. Without social interaction, a child cannot learn how to compromise, play, exchange ideas, and forgive others, impacting their social skills in the future.

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Emotion

Emotion is a complicated concept. Language is extremely vital in navigating through emotions. When the understanding of the child about language and speech is limited, their ability to express their emotions and comprehend them internally is also limited. The nature of the language and speech development challenge determines the problems a child faces while growing up. For example, children having stuttered know what they are supposed to express but lack the appropriate words to use while expressing themselves. The conditions result in teasing, making the child shy, quiet, and withdrawn from others (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2020). Children with poor language development are highly emotional and short-tempered when people laugh at them due to a lack of expressing their feelings and thoughts.

Academic

The child's academic performance is linked to language and speech development, which influences the ability to learn the material and understand the spoken and written language of communication. Poor language development makes the child unable to convey their knowledge in literary and verbal skills. Verbal and literately skills such as writing, reading, and spelling are essential for the child's academic performance (Samuel & Warner, 2019). Poor convention of these skills in an academic environment leads to poor language-based academic skills resulting in academic failure.

Recommendations for Dealing with Language Disorders

Teachers and parents have a critical role in ensuring children have an effective language development process.

Teachers

Educators are recommended to do the following ensuring:

- a) Conducting language intervention in a setting that represents real-life situations. The students will learn the actual functions and uses of language. The opportunities for applying language in daily experiences are applicable across the curriculum in an informal school setting.
- b) Apply a structured setting for students who cannot learn language skills in a typical learning environment. The settings may include but are not limited to plain walls, exaggerated colors, and limited sensory inputs. However, highly structured interventions change the environmental nature making it difficult to generalize to other contexts.

- c) There should be limited noise within a learning environment allowing the students to attend to language development within a classroom. Teachers can reduce noise within the learning environment by laying carpeting on concrete floors and establishing an environment full of principles controlling the conduct of learners as far as noise is concerned.
- d) Teachers should incorporate direct instructions through practices such as asking questions, greeting others, delivering messages, making requests, and pleading for help boosting the learners' social interaction.
- e) Utilizing language experience programs helps integrate reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills. The approaches are essential in coordinating all aspects of language development into meaningful experiences for the learners who have been struggling with language disorders.
- f) Teachers should maintain consistency among students' families and school personnel. There should be the production of home programs facilitating language interactions, form, and content in all environments.

Parents

Parents and guardians are the first teachers of their children. The development of language amongst the children is highly influenced by the role of the parents and guardians through social interaction. A child's mind is like a blank slate that is to be filled with experiences from the environment through learning. If parents do not provide

appropriate intervention and an effective environment for the children, they will have poor language development. Therefore, parents are recommended to do the following:

- a) The parents should get the child's attention by saying their names and talking to them about what they can see in the immediate environment. The children will be able to learn words at a faster rate and comprehend their meaning.
- b) Parents should have fun with the children by applying different actions like singing, putting on funny faces, and making considerable noise while talking to the children. Creating a funny environment with the children makes them confident and encourages language development.
- c) Parents should give children enough time to think asking questions. This makes them develop their cognitive level by creativity. They will be able to control their emotions. While talking to children, guardians should use simple language and encourage children to repeat their pronouncements.
- d) Parents' should come up with modifications to make it easy for children to listen and speak. Language development cannot be achieved without poor listening and speaking skills. Using music and turning on the radio makes children focused (Barr, 2019). A high level of concentration improves the cognition level of the children, which is essential for language development. Therefore, parents should build on what children say by speaking their language.

Conclusion

Language development is an important stage in the life and development of a child. Parents have a great role in ensuring children have good language development for social interaction, emotional management, and academic performance. If a child is not provided with a conducive environment supporting proper language development, the child will have language development disorder affecting their academic performance, social interaction, and emotional management. Teachers and parents need to understand various factors impacting the child's language development, such as environment, health, maturation and learning, and bilingualism, hence providing appropriate intervention to reduce or limit the factors.

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