Chapter 11

Understanding the Developmental Needs of Children With Developmental Language Disorder According to Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore professional understanding of the developmental needs of children with developmental language disorder (DLD), the diagnostic criteria that they apply, as well as the challenges they face when working with children with DLD. One hundred and fifty-four professionals (35 educational psychologists (EPs), 75 speech and language therapists (SLTs), and 44 special educational needs teachers (SEN teachers)) completed a questionnaire. Results showed that although most professionals were familiar with the term "DLD," they defined it differently. Most professionals reported that children with DLD have difficulties both in receptive and expressive language as well as socio-emotional problems. Regarding the diagnostic criteria, SLTs used mostly the discrepancy and the language deficits criteria. Last, participants identified different challenges according to their professional orientation. The results are discussed in terms of how they could better inform both training and practice to be able to respond more appropriately to children's developmental needs.

INTRODUCTION

DLD is a common developmental disorder that affects both across and within language domains such as phonology, semantics, morphology, grammar, syntax, pragmatics in both expressive and receptive level (Bishop, 2006; Leonard, 1998). DLD affects about 7% of the children at school entry (Tomblin et al, 1997; Norbury et al., 2016), while it is also persistent, since it can affect language abilities into adolescence or even into adulthood (Brizzolara et al., 2011). Children with DLD are also at risk for less successful academic outcomes as well as behavioral, emotional and social difficulties (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2009; St Clair et al., 2011).

Although DLD affects a substantial number of children and young people it has traditionally received much less research attention when compared to other developmental disorders (e.g. Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Bishop, 2010), whereas public awareness of the disorder and knowledge of its manifestations are still limited (Thordardottir et al, 2021). Additionally, to date, professionals' views about DLD have been studied mainly in English speaking countries by a small group of studies (Bishop et al., 2017) and there is a paucity of information concerning professionals' perspectives about DLD in other countries, such as Greece.

Previous studies have shown that professionals (SLTs, and Eps) have different views concerning the terminology and the criteria used for the diagnosis of DLD, the characteristics and difficulties experienced by children with DLD, (Dockrell et al., 2014; Glover et al., 2015; Palikara et al. 2007). Many reasons may account for this variation. For example, in the last four decades, there was a confusion resulting from differences in terminology (e.g., *Language Disorder*, *Specific Language Impairment*, *Speech and Language Deficits or Disorders*, *Primary Language Impairment*) (Reilly et al., 2014) or in the diagnostic criteria used by researchers and professionals worldwide to identify children with DLD (Bishop, 2014; Reilly et al., 2014). These reasons have raised barriers to the communication and collaboration among professionals that may also have an impact on raising public awareness about the specific disorder, on the process of activating the appropriate services providing support or choosing the most effective methods and programs for intervention (Hartas, 2004). At the same time, it is important to be aware of the professionals' understanding of the above issues as it is evidenced that their professionalism may have an impact on the implementation of programs and strategies enhancing children's learning, social and emotional wellbeing (St Clair et al., 2011).

Thus, the aim of the current study was to investigate Greek professionals' understanding of (a) DLD (terminology, provision of a definition), (b) the language and socio-emotional needs of children with DLD (c) the diagnostic criteria they apply as well as the challenges they face when working with children with DLD, given the fact that to our knowledge, no previous studies have been carried out in Greece, while very few studies have been conducted in this domain internationally (Dockrell et al., 2014; Glover et al., 2015; Palikara et al. 2007).

Professionals' Understanding of DLD: Previous Studies

Until recently, there was no agreed terminology for describing childhood language problems (Reilly et al., 2014). One reason for this was the fact that DLD is a complex and heterogeneous condition with no clear-cut boundaries from either typical development or other developmental disorders (Reilly et al., 2014). However, after the publication of DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), there has been considerable progress in the theoretical understanding of DLD which acknowledges that multiple

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