



THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE LINGUISTIC EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN WITH A LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT

*IMPACTUL MEDIULUI EDUCAȚIONAL
ASUPRA DEZVOLTĂRII LINGVISTICE A COPIILOR
DE VÂRSTĂ PREȘCOLARĂ CU DEFICIENȚE DE VORBIRE*

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***Rezumat:** Studiul de față reflectă rezultatele unei investigații desfășurate în Israel privind influența mediului educațional asupra dezvoltării competențelor de literație timpurii la copiii cu deficiențe de vorbire. Cercetarea are la bază faptul că grădinițele logopedice și cele obișnuite adoptă diferite modalități de inculcare a literației la preșcolarii cu asemenea probleme.*

***Cuvinte-cheie:** mediu educațional, preșcolari cu deficiențe de vorbire, dezvoltare lingvistică, grădinițe logopedice, literație emergentă, pregătire perceptuală, mediere.*

Assimilating reading by children is affected by basic skills that include phonetic processing, awareness of written language existence and use of spoken language. A teacher in his work with young children is required to adjust the interaction with children and the teaching methods he implements to the unique conditions of children. In the US for example, official entities such as NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and IRA (International Reading Association) detail how learning and writing skills should be taught, in a way that corresponds development. Learning of reading and writing is an interactive process. The study supports the perception that considers a child as an active partner to his learning process, and concurrently emphasizes the critical function of a supporting adult, who is interested and involved in order to construct the scaffolding upon which abilities and understanding shall be built.

The basic learning principle is that children are active learners, who

produce knowledge out of a direct social and physical experience and also from messages delivered through culture, in order to design understanding of the world around them [1].

The Department of pre-Primary education, that represents the Ministry of Education in Israel, has adopted the instructions of NAEYC and IRA as has been expressed in the Levin report, published in August of 2001. Nonetheless, the condition remains complicated: a teaching method that corresponds to development, bases on an educational approach with a significant moral perception that puts in front, the changing developmental needs of a child. These needs are what lie in the center of educational activity [11]. In the field of teaching itself, especially in the logopaedic kindergartens, teachers do not act under the influence of this perception. This approach is contrary to the perception that puts the study program or the personal presence of class teachers in the center. The reality in logopaedic kindergartens is that class tea-

chers' expectations of certain performance surpass the personal attention given to a child. The class teachers in normal kindergartens tend, presently, to adopt with enthusiasm a teaching method that corresponds to development. The long and slow process of literacy development brings about a development of talents and skills, such as distinction between letters and other graphic representations, understanding that a script bears a message that has a meaning, understanding that ideas and thoughts can be represented by means of words and written sentences, understanding that script is used for communication between people, creation of relations between a sound of a letter and its written form, understanding that there is no relation between the physical characteristics of objects and between their representation by means of a script, familiarity with names of letters, decoding and understanding words and written sentences, distinction between letters, words and sentence, as well as understanding of the integration between them, understanding of the special importance of word order in a sentence and more [10], [11], [6].

The main purposes of teaching reading and writing that corresponds with the perception of teaching corresponding development, includes the encouragement of children to be active while searching information that assists in decoding a script, connecting new things and familiar things, learning how to locate mistakes, even if children cannot solve the problem on their own, learning how to use all their resources, initiation of problems solution in their way and encouragement of children to be active in new revelations in order to establish new knowledge [11]. The principles of cognitive changing theory of Feuerstein and Rand [2, 3]

correspond to the social-cultural theory of Vygotsky. The purpose of interactions between a child and his socialization agents is to acquire improved thinking "tools" to promote the quality of thinking of a developing child [7]. Klein [4, 5] phrased the operative definitions for the five key, universal mediation principles proposed by Feuerstein and his colleagues: direction and reciprocity, meaning, transcendence, mediation of emotions and ability, mediation of regulation or behaviour criticism. This theory maintains that the principles of mediation are universal and not dependent upon a studied material. Therefore, there is no barrier to implement them in contents related to cultivation of knowledge in math, history or any other knowledge including literacy [11].

In relation to the fact that in a logopaedic kindergarten, children with language impairment are being taught with the perceptual preparedness approach, which means a systematic instilling of basic concepts – vocabulary, duplication, hearing perception, visual perception, visio-motor perception, and that in a regular kindergarten a development compatible mediating approach is taken, it was our consideration that it should be assumed that their contribution to the expression of literacy would be differential, meaning that the educational approach in a logopaedic kindergarten contributes to reading and writing assimilation and the development of phonological awareness, whereas, the approach taken in a normal kindergarten contributes to general spontaneous behaviour towards the written word according to numerous expressions of emergent literacy.

In our study, early literacy skills were divided into three aspects: the aspect of emergent literacy that attests

a general spontaneous behavior towards a book; an aspect that includes the level of writing and letters recognition that express technical skills of reading and writing, and a third aspect of phonological awareness considered by some scientists as an expression of developmental maturity.

120 children have participated in the study between the age of 5 and 6 years old. 80 of them diagnosed as children with language impairment according to language filtering test, 40 children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten, 40 children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten and 40 of them will be their normal peers. Amongst regular children and those with language impairment, separately, half are boys and half are girls.

Five research tools have been implemented in the current study. One has been used as a diagnosis tool for categorizing children with language impairment – Gorelnik test [8] for language filtering. The other four research tools served as tools for research variables indexes: a tool for evaluation of emergent literacy [12], children writing level examination tool, phonological awareness exam [9] and knowledge exam for letters recognition.

The first hypothesis has assumed that there would be differences between children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten and children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten and in comparison to regular children (who have not been diagnosed as having language impairment) in emergent literacy, children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten would have lower achievements in emergent literacy in comparison to children with language impairment

who attend a normal kindergarten and in comparison to regular children.

The literacy indexes which have been examined in the study are: encounter with a book; transition from a chronological order to a special order, injective adjustment between a voiced word and a written word; familiarity with the punctuation marks; knowledge of structure of language and its rules; distinction between print and script; opinion about a story; beginning reading strategy [12] – the hypothesis has been confirmed.

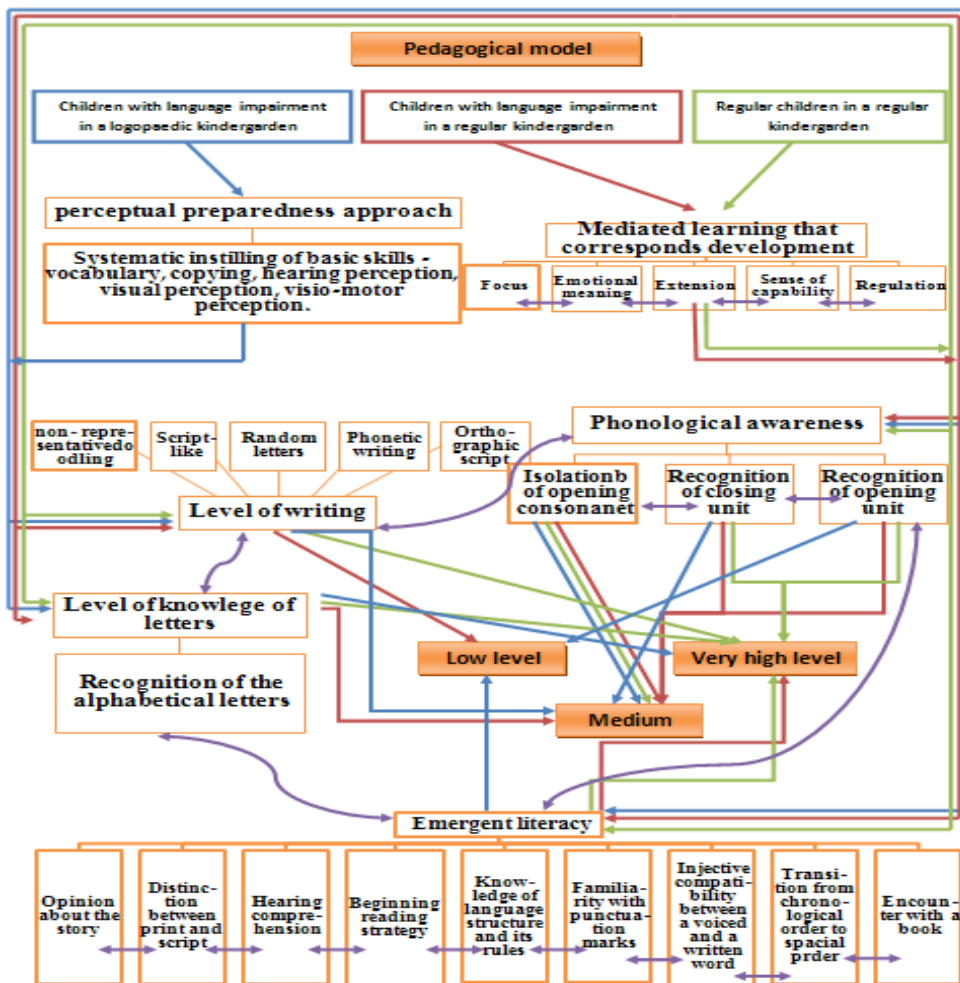
According to the current study, it can be seen that the cause of higher achievements in “emergent literacy” is the class teacher’s approach. A child with language impairment, who attends a normal kindergarten that uses the mediation approach, puts emphasis on mediation for literacy out of knowledge. In this frame, the purposes of teaching or mediation interactions are to teach skills to children in a way that encourages them to be active partners in construction of their new knowledge [11].

The second hypotheses has assumed that there would be differences between children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten at the level of writing and letters recognition in comparison to children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten and in comparison to regular children. The hypothesis has been partially confirmed, meaning that children with language impairment from a logopaedic kindergarten have a higher writing level than children with language impairment from a normal kindergarten and are slightly lower than regular. In addition this research hypothesis has assumed that children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten would have higher achieve-

vements in letters recognition than children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten, and would be found to be similar in letters recognition to regular children. The hypothesis has been confirmed.

The third hypothesis has assumed that there would be differences between children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten at the level of phonological awareness as compared with children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten and in comparison to regular children, while children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten would

be higher in phonological awareness in comparison to children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten and would be found to be similar at the level of phonological awareness to regular children. The hypothesis has not been confirmed. Findings of the study support the theory which maintains that phonological skills are acquired alongside with language acquisition. A systematic enhancement of reinforcement of skills does not significantly improve phonological development. Children with language impairment from the two kindergartens, language and regular ones have reached similar achievements.



Formal and technical teaching of reading and writing skills to children with language impairment in the perceptual preparedness approach – implemented in logopaedic kindergartens, brings about most impressive achievements in technical abilities of learning of reading and writing – as proven in current study in the writing and letters recognition test. Children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten are similar in achievements in technical abilities of reading and writing – at the level of writing and letters recognition, to regular children and children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten have lower achievements than these two groups. Thus there is a point in instilling technical skills of reading and writing in a balanced and careful manner into a normal kindergarten that takes a literacy approach. The phonological skills of children with language impairment are acquired alongside with acquisition of language as children with language impairment from a logopaedic kindergarten and a normal kindergarten have reached similar achievements, as proven in the phonological test.

In the phonological awareness test, the achievements of groups of children with language impairment have been lower than those of the group of regular children. Thus, phonological awareness is acquired with acquisition of language and the two approaches – the perceptual skills approach in a logopaedic kindergarten and the literate mediated learning approach in a normal kindergarten have not promoted the achievements of children with language impairment. Nonetheless, upon recognition of opening unit, children with language impairment in a normal

kindergarten have shown higher achievements than those of children with language impairment in a logopaedic kindergarten. Therefore, phonological training in a different approach of spontaneous games can definitely promote the children with language impairment. Additionally, in kindergartens, the kindergarten teacher has the tendency to “work” more on recognition of opening unit than on recognition of closing unit.

The perceptual preparedness approach in the logopaedic kindergarten has not promoted children with language impairment to be literate. This approach has blocked the natural spontaneous approach to a book – as has been proven in current study in the literacy test of “emergent literacy”. The literacy approach in a normal kindergarten has promoted to a great extent the regular children and the children with language impairment in the natural, spontaneous and loving relation to a written word. As can be seen in achievements the three study groups have reached in the test of “emergent literacy” [12]. Nonetheless, there is the need to diagnose the children with language impairment in a normal kindergarten, to include them in a language enhancement group in the kindergarten, to teach them while mediating to play a “real time” reading and writing in the kindergarten and home environments.

The period of transition from kindergarten to school has a central role in designing the academic course of a child. A kindergarten teacher in a normal kindergarten is to think of the goal of nurturing a “literate child” in a literate society. The kindergarten teacher is to be aware and attentive to the desire, pace and personal need of

each child for the technical learning of reading and writing [12], and all that while maintaining the natural love of a child for a book [12]. Teaching should be of quality, and in order to be effective, it should be individually adjusted. The challenge we are facing is developing a study program that is based on various theories of learning. Although kindergarten children do not study reading, there are evidences that certain activities in a kindergarten can promote their literacy development including letters of the alphabet and phonological awareness.

The following activities can be considered as activities focused on the alphabetical code – instilling of names of letters and the writing thereof, connecting between letters and words and between pictures and exhibits they represent. These are activities that are worth introducing into a normal kindergarten with impact of the perceptual preparedness approach that is studied in a logopaedic kindergarten. Oppositely, meaning-focused activities are ones helping a child understanding words and parts of a text, understanding what they are being read or what they themselves read, listening comprehension, and more, these are activities that are worth introducing into a logopaedic kindergarten with an impact on the mediated learning approach that is studied in a normal kindergarten. A careful combination between approaches would enrich the literacy world of a child towards his rising to the first grade, richness that would accompany him in the academic course of his life.

For the implementation of the research recommendations, an additional applied research was conducted.

As part of the applied research, intervention programs were implemented in a logopaedic kindergarten and in a regular one for the examination of research hypotheses in emergent literacy[12], level of writing, recognition of letters and phonological awareness. In the applied research, 30 children have participated, 10 children with language impairment who attend a logopaedic kindergarten, 10 children with language impairment who attend a regular kindergarten and 10 regular children. For the evaluation of the children, four research questionnaires were employed that served as tools for evaluation of variable indexes. The findings revealed a rise in all indexes in all research groups.

Despite the amazing technical achievements gained by children with language impairments who have studied by this approach, we must realize that technique is not our goal. In a regular literate kindergarten that cultivates a literate and active atmosphere, children express their understanding of the unique role of the written language. The occupations of a child in reading and writing integrate in every other areas of creation and learning, while much encouragement is required to experience in reading and writing. And indeed, children with language impairment who attend a normal kindergarten – and that mediate for literacy learning, have shown high achievements in their literacy ability. Some of the perceptual preparedness approach is to be carefully introduced in the technical skills of knowledge of letters and writing. Phonological training, as well, would be practiced through rhyming games, citations, cultivation of spontaneous games among children. The researcher is confident

that with this approach for all children, each child would advance in

his own speed out of love and desire and will to learn reading and writing.

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