

Social Skills of Children with Specific Language Impairment: Occupational and Speech Therapists' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is, to investigate the social skills of children with Specific Language Impairment. The term "social skills" means the capabilities of relationship management, and a whole range of communication and collaboration skills (Karalis, Papadakis, Frangoulis, 2005). The methodology used in this research is quantitative analysis and it is based on a sample survey, using a standardized questionnaire. One of the main was the isolation that children with Specific Language Impairment experience. Their relationships with peers are limited and they often get along with adults. It was also found that their attention is easily divided and it is difficult for them to be concentrated for a long time. As a conclusion, it can be mentioned that they have general difficulties with social skills and this is an obstacle to their daily life, especially in relation to their peers which is a challenge for the education of these children.

Keywords: Social Skills, Specific Language Impairment, Occupational therapists and Speech therapists.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the international community social skills are very important for the modern citizen, especially in this time of rapid developments and rate changes (OECD, 2008, EE, 2006). The most important is that acquiring such skills, has an effect on the ability to cope with any situation which requires interaction among people on a daily basis. Social skills are the foundation for communication among people (Goleman, 2011. Smith et al., 1995). There has been a lot of research on social skills in businesses and organisations, on human resources of school units and on people with Specific Language Impairment. (Antoniadou, 2014).

Specific Language Impairment (SLI) appeared in the 1990s as a term, and refers to the language field, or disorder which is not derived from neurological damage, deafness or mental retardation. The Specific Language Impairment and language problems in children, may occur congenitally, or can be acquired over time (Tasioudi, 2009). The ability of the individual to exhibit proper behavior using skills is reflected by social skills, self-control and cooperation (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 1998. Wilkinson & Carter, 1991).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Specific Language Impairment

The term Specific Language Impairment (SLI) appeared in the 1990s and refers to the language field, or to a disorder which is not accompanied by a neurological damage, deafness or mental retardation. The Specific Language Impairment and language problems in children, may occur congenitally or can be acquired over time. These children have trouble at the cognitive and language level. There has been a discrimination of Specific Language Impairment in two categories: children who have trouble understanding, and to children who have problems mainly in production. The separation of the two categories is not sufficient, as children

with Specific Language Impairment do not make up homogeneity (Leonard, 1998: vii) (Tasioudi, 2009).

Children with Specific Language Impairment have serious difficulties in versatility in forms of expression. They have difficulty in expressing themselves. Spontaneous speech is missing and there is difficulty in understanding and in creating questions. It is also difficult to use the right words in a sentence. They experience problems in reading and in their learning (Pouliasis).

Bishop & Norbury (2002) found that children with SLI tended to use a standard language and informal intonation during the learning process. But they appeared to be communicative and social and they had a typical non-verbal communication, with a few disturbances out of the areas of linguistic communication (Pouliasis). The clinical picture of children with Specific Language Impairment is still being studied. The researchers emphasize on morphology, phonology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics as well (Pita, 1998) (Dina & Savvidou, 2012).

2.2 Social Skills

The individual's adaptive behavior is reflected on social skills. Social skills vary, depending on the context, the time and by whom the message was sent or received. Thus, people communicate with each other, they transmit messages and interact according to their personalities and experiences (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker 1998 in Wiener 2004: 24, Wilkinson & Carter 1991: 12).

There are many opinions about categories of social skills. According to Elksnin and Elksnin (2001) they are distinguished in six categories. The first category includes skills related to children's ability to create friendships. In the second category are the skills of the positive impact of a person's behavior towards individuals of the same age

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(peer-pleasing social skills). Social skills of the latter category are estimated by people of the same age and have to do with a person's ability to give and receive information on a subject, to be able to understand the feelings of others, and to work within a group of people of the same age. The third category includes the skills of the positive impact of the behavior of a person to a tutor within an educational context (teaching pleasing social skills). In the fourth category are skills that are relevant to the individual (self-related behaviors). These are the skills that help the student to participate in society in a particular occasion, using the appropriate skills to evaluate this situation and to control his anger and feelings. The fifth category includes social skills with which the student learns to claim for his needs in a calm manner and without being aggressive. These are the claiming skills (assertiveness skills). Finally, there is the category of communication skills (communication skills). This includes conversation skills and interpersonal skills to be able to solve problems and respond to the discussant (Elksnin & Elksnin 2001: 92, Rinn & Markle 1979: 110-11).

Social skills should start in the pre-school age and not in the primary school age. If social skills are nurtured as mentioned, in pre-school age, then the child with Specific Language Impairment, can have a very good transition from school to society and later on, to work (Mantzaris, 2012).

2.3 Social Skills in Specific Language Impairment

There has been lots of relevant research, which dealt with a similar subject. In one of these researches, two groups of children were tested: one group with children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) and the other group of children who develop normally. Two approaches were proposed, one with the problem entirely attributed to the language issue and the other with the problem attributed to learning mechanisms. Generally, children with Specific Language Impairment, face various grammatical and semantic difficulties and have difficulty in social skills. In this research there were two cases, one if children with Specific Language Impairment have difficulty to understand the relative and temporal sentences and the second, if the interconnecting processes in the level of understanding of composite structures, are effective to a lower level in the same children. The results showed that the performance of the understanding of sentences was significantly lower in children with Specific Language Impairment and this certainly bears down on social skills. In this study, its data seems to be contrary to the predictions of the classical linguistic approach of Specific Language Impairment, because it interprets the difficulties in understanding the complex sentences, distinguishing the sentence structure or grammatical principles. Combining the two approaches, leads to a conclusion that children with specific language impairment have less language performance, in case they have to deal with skills requiring increased processing. (Spanoudis, 2010).

Another research (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) is planned to study the emotional and social skills of pupils with special educational needs, which naturally includes students with Specific Language Impairment, in relation to their cognitive and psychosocial development. This research deals with the analysis of learning behavior with the following entries: Participation of students in collaborative, learning, activities,

participation of students in non-collective learning activities and participation of students in groups and friendly relationships. It also deals with the management of problems and negative reactions. In this study, as in the previous one, there is an attempt to outline the differences identified in some children with special needs, such as Specific Language Impairment in children who have not been diagnosed with special educational needs. Low performance is compared to learning difficulties, as well as the relationship between social relationships and difficulties of children with disabilities. The time children spend at home, is undoubtedly important for their emotional and social development. Of course, children also spend much time at school, so school is clearly of great importance for their social development. Lots of changes have occurred in the Greek society in the past few years, so it is obvious that in the school context, children will create experiences and self-perception and it can possibly affect many aspects of their lives (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

In these researches, there is no clear indication that the scales used in questionnaires have been checked for their validity and reliability. Also, they do not correspond to the cultural and historical context of Greece, to a great degree (Chatzichristou al, 2004a., Chatzichristou al, 2004b).

Additionally, the research reveals the lack of an evaluation model of social skills, in people with Specific Language Impairment (Koutrafour, 2014).

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

The methodology is quantitative. There are two discrete stages of the process of conducting a quantitative research: The first is the planning stage, in which the objectives of the research are formulated and with working assumptions, the purpose was identified. Then, in the second stage, the coordination method was chosen and the plan was implemented step by step. Necessary data was collected, and then followed the processing and analysis of the collected data. Then, there was a composition to identify the relevant conclusions. It is understood, that the control was made throughout the research for each activity, with emphasis on the correct completion of the sampling rules (Neuman, 2000). The quantitative method is used when the research aims to study a social phenomenon, by controlling certain theoretical assumptions. The quantitative method has the survey as its basis and uses a standardized questionnaire. With this questionnaire, the researcher can approach a large part of the sample and check the theory. If the survey and the results are based on a very large number of cases, then the theoretical assumptions should be subject to a more stringent and reliable control. Quantitative analysis is the most prevalent form of research that studies social phenomena. The main features that the researcher has to rely on, in order to come up with valid and scientific results are: the development of a suitable questionnaire for the specific research, and the collection of representative sample of the population to be studied (Kapoulou, h.i.).

3.2 Research Questions

The individual research questions that were studied in this research are listed below:

1. What are the difficulties faced by children with Specific Language Impairment, in daily social activities? (Relationship management and behavioral problems of children of different ages)
2. Do the difficulties faced by children with Specific Language Impairment, seem to worry or upset them?
3. What are the difficulties which are an obstacle to children with Specific Language Impairment, in their relations with their peers and learning in school, in their daily life?

3.3 Participants – sample

The participants in this study were 20 occupational therapy students and 20 speech therapy students. The survey was completed by 19 occupational therapy students and 20 speech therapy students. The sample used is the facility sampling. That involved people who were available at that time. This type of sampling is the most common of all sample types. The selection of the participants in the survey was easy, because they were chosen from the premises of internships and from college. This was the most suitable way to find participants, because as they were all speech therapy and occupational therapy students, their attitudes in the survey were positive (Diamantopoulos, 2012).

3.4 Data collection instruments

The questionnaire is usually a form in which there are structured questions in which the presentation is in a specific order and the participant is asked to reply in writing to these questions. The questionnaire is a standard format used to collect and record information with thoroughness and precision, on a specialized and related subject. That questionnaire is used as guidance for the process of gathering information and systematically promotes the recording. In fact, the questionnaire is the way the researcher contacts with the participant, directly or indirectly, depending on how the method collects the data (Gitas, 2014).

This questionnaire was based on Likert method (Rensis Likert, 1932) and provided the degree of response and removal of bisected answers. It created a degree of sensitivity and differentiation in the answers, while producing data at the same time. Using Likert’s grade, there was a production of responses of a wide spectrum, to only one question (Cohen, Manion, 2007).

The questionnaire of possibilities and difficulties was used to assess the social skills of children with Specific Language Impairment (Goodman, 1994, 1997). This questionnaire identified the difficulties and possibilities of these children, as far as their social skills are concerned. These questions described their emotional disorders and behavior problems. There was a three-point scale that determined them "Not valid", "a bit valid", "certainly valid" (Keranopoulou-Goliou, 2012).

Then, four scales of full content questions, were used for the overall view of the respondents about the childrens’ with Specific Language Impairment difficulties, in social skills.

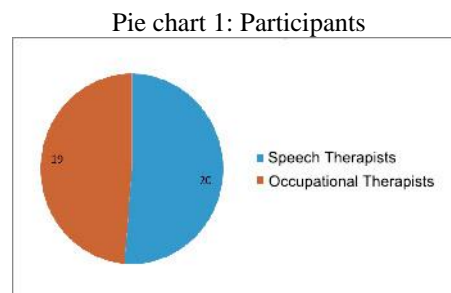
The tiers’ questions were based on Likert method (Rensis Likert, 1932), and provided the degree of response, the response intensity and the removal of bisected answers. They

proved to be very useful tools for research, because they created a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of the response, while producing data. The Likert scale produced a wide range of responses to one question (Cohen, Manion, 2007).

The validity and reliability of a survey are mainly related to quantitative research and not only. By saying validity, we mean that you really ‘measured’ what is asked to be measured. Reliability shows the accuracy of the research and techniques, ie how data is accurately and reliably measured. Therefore, it is necessary to consider and to verify that each question has the appropriate research method and source. The concepts of validity and reliability are relevant to whether the research method followed, clarifies the concepts to be considered. They are also relevant to that the concepts used can be identified, measured and observed by the way that the researcher means (Mason, 2003). The focus in this research was on the validity and reliability of the methods and the production tools of research data. In the quantitative survey, data derives from a standard set of measurements and thus it is possible to check reliability and validity (Mason, 2003).

4. RESULTS

The students and teachers who received the questionnaire were 20 Speech Therapists and 20 Occupational Therapists. 20 Speech Therapists and 19 Occupational Therapists filled in the questionnaire and delivered it, as shown in Pie Chart 1



The results of the questionnaire are displayed in the following tables 1 and 2. Table 1: Results of questions about the potentials of children with Specific Language Impairment Children with Specific Language Impairment:

Take into account other peoples’ feelings					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
0%	10,5 %	70,0 %	47,4 %	30,0 %	42,1 %
Share with other children (treats, toys, pencils)					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
20,0 %	21,1 %	75,0 %	68,4 %	5,0 %	10,5 %
Often have tantrums or become aggressive					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
15,0 %	21,1 %	35,0 %	42,1 %	50,0 %	36,8 %

Usually get isolated and tend to play alone					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
10,0 %	31,6 %	50,0 %	31,6 %	40,0 %	36,8 %
Are usually obedient and do whatever adults ask from them					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
30,0 %	31,6 %	65,0 %	63,2 %	5,0 %	5,3 %
Are willing to help a person who is wounded, upset, sad or sick					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
30,0 %	36,8 %	45,0 %	36,8 %	25,0 %	26,3 %
Often argue with other children or even mock them, scare them or hit them					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
35,0 %	47,4 %	50,0 %	36,8 %	15,0 %	15,8 %
Often cry, or feel depressed or disheartened					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
20,0 %	26,3 %	55,0 %	52,6 %	25,0 %	21,1 %
Generally, are amiable to other children					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
25,0 %	10,5 %	65,0 %	89,5 %	10,0 %	0 %
Their attention is easily divided and they have difficulty in concentrating					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
0 %	31,6 %	25,0 %	42,1 %	75,0 %	26,3 %
In new situations, they become nervous, or they get attached to others, they easily lose their confidence					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
10,0 %	10,5 %	40,0 %	57,9 %	50,0 %	31,6 %
They feel fine with younger children					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
25,0 %	10,5 %	40,0 %	57,9 %	50,0 %	31,6 %
They often lie or cheat					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
55,0 %	57,9 %	40,0 %	49,1 %	5,0 %	0 %
The other children bully them or mock them, they scare or hit them					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
5,0 %	10,5 %	65,0 %	47,4 %	30,0 %	42,1 %
Before doing something, they measure it well					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
65,0 %	47,4 %	20,0 %	47,4 %	15,0 %	5,3 %

They are better off with adults than with children					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
15,0 %	21,1 %	55,0 %	47,4 %	30,0 %	31,6 %
They have lots of fears, they get scared easily					
NOT VALID		SLIGHTLY VALID		DEFINITELY VALID	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
5,0 %	0 %	50,0 %	68,4 %	45,0 %	31,6 %

A. Table 2: Results of questions about the difficulties of children with Specific Language Impairment

Overall, do you think that these children have difficulty in one or more of the areas below: feelings, concentration or capability of doing well with other people?							
NO		YES, SOME DIFFICULTIES		YES, ENOUGH DIFFICULTIES		YES, SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
25,0 %	36,8 %	70,0 %	57,9 %	5,0 %	5,3 %		
Usually, after how long are these difficulties noticed?							
LESS THAN A MONTH		1-5 MONTHS		6-12 MONTHS		MORE THAN A YEAR	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
30,0 %	10,5 %	25,0 %	52,6 %	35,0 %	21,1 %	10,0 %	15,8 %
Do these difficulties worry or upset the children?							
NOT AT ALL		JUST A LITTLE BIT		ENOUGH		VERY MUCH	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
5,0 %	15,8 %	20,0 %	36,8 %	65,0 %	31,6 %	10,0 %	15,8 %
Do these difficulties become an obstacle to their daily life, in relation to children of their own age?							
NOT AT ALL		JUST A LITTLE BIT		ENOUGH		VERY MUCH	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
0 %	0 %	25,0 %	42,1 %	45,0 %	36,8 %	30,0 %	21,1 %
Are these difficulties an obstacle in the children's daily life to scholar learning?							
NOT AT ALL		JUST A LITTLE BIT		ENOUGH		VERY MUCH	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
0 %	5,3 %	0 %	26,3 %	60,0 %	36,8 %	40,0 %	31,6 %
Are these difficulties a burden for the class teacher?							
NOT AT ALL		JUST A LITTLE BIT		ENOUGH		VERY MUCH	
SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL	SPEECH	OCCUPATIONAL
5,0 %	5,3 %	40,0 %	31,6 %	45,0 %	63,2 %	10,0 %	0 %

Considering the above results, these are the answers to the research questions:

Research question 1: What are the difficulties faced by children with specific language impairment in their daily

social activities? (Relationship management and skills scale)

Children with Specific Language Impairment take into account the feelings of others and according Wiener (2004: 24) it is a social cognitive ability with which a person is able to understand thoughts and feelings of other people (Mantzaris, 2012).

They easily share their things with other children. They have the social ability to transmit social messages and interact, depending on the personality and each ones' experiences (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker 1998 in Wiener 2004: 24, Wilkinson & Carter 1991: 12).

They are rather solitary and tend to play alone. It is a skill in which they do not have the ability to create friendships, introduce themselves to a group, make comments about others, or accept the comments of others and also to ask for someone's help. (Mantzaris, 2012).

Research question 2: Do the difficulties faced by children with Specific Language Impairment, seem to worry or upset them?

When they face new situations they become nervous or show attachment behavior and easily lose their confidence. It is the social skill to learn how to assert their needs, in a calm manner and without aggressiveness. But these children do not have this social skill, except for some specific cases (Mantzaris, 2012).

They have several difficulties in emotions, in concentrating and in the ability to get along with other people. This means that they do not have the skill to understand the other person and collaborate with him (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker 1998 in Wiener 2004: 24, Wilkinson & Carter 1991: 12).

Research question 3: What are the difficulties which are an obstacle to childrens' with Specific Language Impairment daily lives, in their relations with their peers and their learning at school?

The first two research questions mentioned the difficulties that are an obstacle to childrens' with specific language impairment daily lives, in relation to their peers and they answer the third research question. These are the social skills that are valued by people of the same age and have to do with an individual's ability to work within a team with people the same age. (Mantzaris, 2012).

Problems in school learning are too many and enough burden for the teacher, because students with SLI do not have the ability to listen carefully to the teacher and follow his instructions. (Mantzaris, 2012).

Thus, about the third research question, these difficulties upset the children with specific language impairment very much and they are an obstacle in their daily life and in the relationship with their peers. They have great difficulty in school learning and that is a heavy burden on the teacher.

5. CONCLUSION

Children with Specific Language Impairment take into account the feelings of others, which means that they have the cognitive ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of

others as mentioned by Wiener (2004: 24) (Mantzaris, 2012). They do not have the skills to easily create friendships and do not claim their needs in a calm manner and without tantrums. Only in certain cases they have the skill to control their emotions (Mantzaris, 2012). The lack of skill to listen carefully to the teacher, follow his instructions and have a certain attitude towards him, creates problems in school learning and a big burden for the teacher (Mantzaris, 2012).

One weak point of the study, is the relatively small sample of participants consisted of 20 speech therapists and 20 occupational therapists. Another weak point of the study is a relatively small difference in the opinions between the speech therapists and the occupational therapists. It is very rare both specialists agree on almost the same percentage on the same answer and that is likely due to the lack of experience of the participants. This weakness can possibly create a small inaccuracy in the findings.

There are suggestions for future research on the social skills of people with Specific Language Impairment, in order to cover up for those weaknesses mentioned above. These suggestions are to select experienced speech therapists and occupational therapists and have a larger sample of participants.

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