

A Narrative Study on the Improvement of Oral Expression Level of Children with Language Delay

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ABSTRACT

Children with language retardation often have low oral expression, mental, emotional and social problems. Improving their oral expression is crucial. This paper uses a narrative research method to track and intervene a 3-year-old child with language retardation for three years. The pre-test with Gesell Developmental Scale showed a language DQ of 38.0 (equivalent to 9.2 months). Through 36 months of progressive intervention (individual support, peer assistance, collective activities), the post-test DQ reached 83.3 (equivalent to 5 years old), showing significant progress. It is suggested that immersion language support strategies centered on children's subjectivity should be built in kindergarten daily life.

KEYWORDS

Children with language delay; Oral expression level; Narrative research

1 Introduction

Language delay is a common childhood developmental issue, marked by delayed language comprehension and expression, late speech, limited vocabulary, and communication difficulties ^[1]. Studies have found that the incidence of language delay is increasing, with the prevalence of language delay in 2-year-old children being 15%, in 3-year-old children being 2.6% -8.3%, and in early school-age children being 7% ^[2]. Lenneberg believes that there is a critical stage ^[3] in human language acquisition from birth to adolescence (about 2 to 12-13 years old). The oral expression ability of children aged 3-6 deserves the attention and support of educators. Oral expression difficulties in children with language retardation affect their language ability, communication and social interaction ^[4]. This study uses narrative research to explore the effect of a three-step intervention on oral expression in children with language delay, providing scientific reference.

2 Establish the Foundation: Based on the Behavior, Analyze the Individual Reasons

The case participant is Haohao, diagnosed with language delay in a Shenzhen Grade III Level A children's hospital in October 2022, with normal vocal organs. According to the parents' hospital diagnosis, the author used the National Health Commission's 0-6 Years Old Children's Developmental Behavior Assessment Scale (2018) ^[5] to assess five developmental domains. Only language domain data are presented in the table.

Table 1 Specific performance and preliminary analysis of case children

Energy area	Evaluation indicators	Specific performance	Preliminary analysis
Language area	Vocabulary	They can only passively respond to the address of "Mom and Dad" and can not actively use words to express their needs (such as "want" and "eat").	Language expression lags behind, which may be due to insufficient vocabulary accumulation or weak control of pronunciation muscles. Attention should be paid to the quality of language input and the frequency of interaction.
	Articulation	Ambiguous pronunciation, only a few syllables ("d" "m" ") need to repeat the guide to imitate.	If the coordination of articulation organs is insufficient, or the ability of auditory discrimination needs to be improved, it is recommended to combine hearing screening with oral motor training.
	Ability to understand instructions	Do not respond to simple commands such as "give me the ball" and "sit down", and need to cooperate with gestures or physical prompts to complete	Language comprehension lags behind, possibly due to insufficient attention allocation or information processing ability, and the clarity and consistency of instructions need to be strengthened.
	Ability to express	Vocabulary combinations (such as "mother hugs"), sentence structures (such as "I want to eat"), can only say single or double words, not form a complete sentence. Expression needs mainly depend on expressions and gestures.	Lack of vocabulary, vague pronunciation, difficulty in understanding instructions, weak social motivation and low imitation frequency need to be improved through family intervention and professional training.

3 The Construction Strategy: Based on the Development Goal, Designs the Lamination Intervention

For children with special needs, kindergartens form a trinity of family, kindergarten and rehabilitation institutions ^[6]. To ensure the interoperability, effectiveness and systematicness of children's information, we should rely on the information sharing group, conduct daily online communication, adjust activities weekly, make plans monthly, and hold tripartite

meetings at the half-semester cutoff point. Under this framework, the three parties jointly negotiate and formulate the individualized education plan (IEP) based on the results of children's multi-assessment and behavior, so as to ensure that the intervention measures accurately match the needs of children's development ^[7].

Table 2

Phases	Core objectives
Small class Phases	1. Basic language ability: master the words commonly used in daily life (such as "father", "eat"), and make clear plosives (such as "B" "p" ").2. Imitation and willingness to express: Actively imitate the teacher's mouth shape and try to say common simple words (such as "fruit").3. Social interaction basis: Be able to use words or vocabulary to communicate with others for 2-3 rounds.4. Coordination of oral muscles: complete the movements of lips, cheeks, jaw occlusion and tongue tip movement to improve the clarity of pronunciation.5. Cognitive and adaptive ability: identify and name the common objects in the daily life of kindergarten (such as "ball" and "book").
Middle shift Phases	1. Vocabulary and sentence expansion: Say the exact names of common objects (such as "table" and "airplane") and try to use simple sentence patterns (such as "I want to play with building blocks").2. Imitation and active expression: Complete 70% sentence retelling independently and actively express needs (such as "I want to play with building blocks").3. Picture book co-reading participation: identify three key elements in the picture book, and be able to describe the picture in one word.4. Peer interaction ability: Complete 5 rounds of matching numbers and objects with peers (such as "a table" and "an apple").5. Social interaction basis: Be able to understand other people's language and use simple sentences to communicate with others for more than 5-6 rounds.
Taipan Phases	1. Communicate with confidence: Take the initiative to assume a role and express ideas in complete sentences (such as "Today I want to share"). 2. Language comprehension: retell the four key plots in the picture book and use emotional words to describe feelings (such as "happy").3. Daily expression fluency: Complete the expression of 4 complex sentences independently 4. Problem-solving ability: Be able to propose 1-2 simple solutions on your own (such as "Let's play in turn" and "We can..").5. Social interaction basis: abide by the rules of collective activities (such as waiting to speak, taking turns to participate), and be able to communicate with others around a theme.

4 Practice: Linkage of Multiple Subjects and Construction of Three-stage Intervention

Based on the process of Haohao's metamorphosis, this paper takes the timeline as a clue and divides it into three stages, each of which is listed in terms of emphasis.

4.1 Small Class Stage: Individual Support and Learning to Express

Ecosystem theory highlights kindergarten as a key microsystem for children's development. Based on Haohao's language development, a "material-humanistic" collaborative intervention model was adopted: using appropriate teaching aids for language practice and creating a social support environment through teacher-guided dialogue and games to boost language output.

Strategy 1: Oral game activities

4.1.1 Oral Sensory Exercises

Teachers make full use of interesting toy materials such as straws, balloons and whistles, and combine their interest points (such as the hairball in the art design area) to guide Haohao to blow the hairball forward with the action of blowing through the mouth, so as to exercise the ability of breath explosion. On this basis, game situations such as "blowing bubbles" and "making faces" are further designed to naturally guide Haohao to complete tongue extension/closure, left-right movement and cheek bulge/collapse, and synchronously relax pharyngeal muscles and vocal cords ^[8].

4.1.2 Oral Muscle Movement

The teacher designed a step-by-step intervention through life-oriented teaching AIDS such as gutta-percha sticks and tongue depressors. Firstly, Haohao was guided to use the gutta-percha stick in a natural occlusion manner, and the mandibular stability was enhanced through gentle resistance training. Then the tongue depressor is used to carry out alternate actions such as pressing, pressing, patting and scraping to enhance the control force of tongue muscles ^[9]. During training, the teacher used vivid expressions and stickers to motivate Haohao and reinforce positive behavior.

Strategy 2: Mouth observation and imitation

Haohao was eager to communicate but had pronunciation errors. The teacher helped him by using exaggerated, slow mouth-shape demonstrations at eye level, guided imitation, and positive encouragement. Through repeated practice from single words to simple sentences, the teacher supported Haohao to speak clearly with great patience.

Strategy 3: Rhythm based on interest

The teacher chose the children's song Finger Five Senses Game according to children's cognitive level and interests. It uses repetitive rhythm and concrete lyrics to match young children's thinking, turning abstract language into actions and providing scaffolding for their language development. Follow-up teachers also gradually introduced more diversified and game-based situational prosody activities to promote the simultaneous development of their phonological awareness and social communication skills ^[10].

4.2 Middle Class Stage: Peer assistance to Enhance Expression

Ecosystem theory emphasizes that frequent child-adult interactions promote development. Haohao learns through

imitation; peer and teacher support are key to his language growth.

4.2.1 Strategy 1: Peer play

Teachers used peer learning and play therapy to guide Haohao's partner to join cooperative games, enhancing his pronunciation, expression, and thinking skills^[11]. Xi Xi and Haohao played a number game face to face. They chanted and showed fingers together, taking turns to say the corresponding words from 1 to 10.

4.2.2 Strategy 2: Imitation Sentence Pattern

Direct language teaching refers to a teaching technique that presents a specific language structure or language expression pattern and requires children to imitate or partially imitate it^[12]. After a year of intervention, Haohao's speech improved significantly but remained slower than peers. He still struggled with incomplete or confused sentences. The teacher used a gradual prompting strategy: starting with full modeling, then reducing support step by step, while using gestures and materials to help Haohao gradually develop independent sentence expression.

4.2.3 Strategy 3: Reading picture books together

Using age-appropriate picture books like *The Hungry Caterpillar*, the teacher read with Haohao, used vivid expressions to engage him, and guided him to retell the story using fixed sentence patterns. The teacher first tells the full story, then reads with Haohao interactively. Through questions and encouragement, Haohao gradually understands the plot and retells the story, improving his language skills^[13].

4.3 Large Class Stage: Collective Activities, the Courage to Express

According to ecosystem theory, the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems interact and shape individual development. For Haohao, kindergarten, family and rehabilitation settings are key environments. His language and social skills have improved greatly, but he still lacks confidence speaking in front of the group.

Strategy 1: Class morning meeting

As a situational teaching method, interactive language teaching helps children with language retardation to understand the expression form, meaning and function of language by creating specific context, and then learn to use language appropriately in context and actively construct language system^[14]. Morning meetings help Haohao improve interaction, friendship, courage and expression. Teachers used a "strong with weak" strategy, arranging a capable peer to join him, and assigned suitable roles and lines within his zone of proximal development to gradually improve his language skills.

Strategy 2: Parent-child reading

Pay attention to parents' interactive participation and enhance the adaptability of early language^[15]. Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, parent-child reading supports Haohao's zone of proximal development. Teachers recommended warm picture books like *I Love You This Way* to enhance parent-child emotional bonding, vocabulary, pronunciation, and emotional and social skills.

Strategy 3: Pre-meal broadcast

The natural situation teaching method effectively promotes children's functional language development and stimulates their communication initiative^[16]. Guided by children's interests in real contexts, teachers used demonstration and visual cues. Haohao improved greatly through daily class recipe broadcast practice, growing from shy and quiet to calm, confident and fluent in expression.

5 Follow the effect: through practice feedback, iterative optimization strategy

5.1 Game-based Design: Interesting Interaction to Activate Participation

In the strategy of supporting children with language delay, teachers should regard games as the core carrier and transform traditional mechanical training into interesting interactive experience^[17]. The teacher set up a language training corner with diverse materials and designed fun role-play games like "bubble blowing contest" using straws and balloons. With vivid expressions and onomatopoeia, children practiced language naturally in relaxed play, integrating multiple senses to improve efficiency and lay a foundation for later training.

5.2 Difficulty Adaptation: Ladder Challenge Promotes Development

Based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, teachers design progressive language intervention tasks. They assess children's current level, set challenging but achievable tasks from simple to complex, and offer timely prompts and feedback. This hierarchical approach prevents frustration and effectively promotes gradual improvement in language ability.

5.3 Peer Assistance: Two-way Empowerment for Integrated Growth

Teachers should be good at using peer intervention in daily life to guide ordinary children to act as "angel companions" and build a support bridge for children with special needs^[18]. Angel companions adapt to the

communication styles of children with special needs, helping them build social confidence and a sense of belonging. In return, they learn empathy, tolerance, and teamwork, internalizing respect for differences. This two-way inclusive practice supports the growth of both children with special needs and their peers.

5.4 Immediate Feedback: Positive Incentive Reinforcement Behavior

Positive reinforcement is a core strategy for children with language delays. Teachers use specific praise and immediate rewards like stickers to strengthen correct pronunciation and participation. They track progress and adjust encouragement dynamically, helping children build confidence, form a "try-success" cycle, and gradually improve their expression and language skills.

5.5 Tripartite Collaboration: Extended Support for Co-development Environment

Kindergartens, rehabilitation institutions and families form a collaborative network to support children with language delays. Kindergartens use "one child, one case" files for observation and intervention; rehabilitation institutions provide professional training; and parents promote language development through daily interaction and parent-child reading. The three parties share information to ensure consistent strategies, improving intervention effectiveness and promoting children's all-round development.

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