

Working with bilingual children and interpreters: from research to clinical practice

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Introduction

- Most Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) are monolingual English speakers and therefore need to work alongside interpreters when working with children who speak languages other than English (LOTE).
- There is clinical guidance available on the assessment of speech, language and communication needs in a bilingual context, and how to work with interpreters.
- However, there is limited research on delivering intervention in the child's home language.

Method

- The Language Intervention in the Early Years (LIVELY) study involved delivering 1:1 home language Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST) intervention for children speaking LOTE within education settings by an experienced SLT.
- The study was designed as a series of three single case studies.
- Throughout the study, reflections around the enablers and barriers to working successfully with bilingual children and interpreters were collated.
- A survey was devised and disseminated to SLTs working across the UK to capture their experiences of working with bilingual children and interpreters, and enablers and barriers to clinical practice.

Results

- BEST was delivered in Polish and Sylheti to three children.
- Despite thorough preparation, implementing the recommended guidance and the practicalities of delivering home language intervention was challenging in practice, even in a research context.
- The children rarely spoke during sessions and the pragmatics of the language situation may have influenced this.
- Guidance on working with interpreters mainly focusses on interpreting between adults. There is limited information about how interpreters can support working with children, especially in the delivery of intervention.
- Although the interpreters received tailored training, they benefitted from additional training to follow the intervention procedures more closely.
- 62 SLTs provided survey responses. Key intervention barriers identified were: 1) SLT knowledge of home language and cultural differences, 2) availability and access to interpreters, and 3) time and preparation.

Conclusions

- Similar themes around the enablers and barriers identified in this study were also described by many SLTs in clinical practice.
- More training is needed for SLTs and interpreters to have the specific skills to effectively work together.
- It is important to encourage bilingual children to use their home language more freely through working with members of their home language community and/or in familiar settings.
- SLTs may need to adapt their communication styles to reflect those of the child's community.
- Analysis of the enablers and barriers identified were synthesised into practical guidance for SLTs to provide home language intervention (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Tips for SLTs delivering home language intervention

FACILITATING HOME LANGUAGE USE IN BILINGUAL / LOTE CHILDREN DURING ASSESSMENT AND THERAPY



References

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