

COOPERATION BETWEEN SPEECH AND LANGUGAGE THERAPIST AND FAMILY TO PROMOTE READING SKILLS IN FIRST GRADE PUPILS

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Abstract. *Reading skills are one of essential skills to acquire literacy and be successful in everyday life in school and after it. Literacy skills are complicated for pupils with speech and language disorders, it is responsibility not only of speech and language therapists, but also of family to help these children to become literate. Situation in Latvia is different in different educational institutions, but we have to try our best to involve parents/family to be a part of pupil's everyday activities.*

The aim of the article is to state the necessity of cooperation and to explore what kind of cooperation is effective in acquiring reading skills in first grade pupils. Based on the scientific literature theoretical framework is updated and method of questionnaire is used, analysis of the collected data is presented.

Main conclusions – cooperation with family improve the results of acquiring reading skills in the first grade pupils with speech and language disorders and promote the reading interest.

Keywords: *cooperation, first grade pupils, reading skills, speech and language therapist.*

Introduction

Children are our future – what it will be – that depends on all of us, but especial responsibility is on families. It is an environment, which child enters, environment where first steps are made and first words, thoughts and statements said (Allen & Marshall, 2011; Bondere, 2014). Family is the first environment with an educational function (Frydkova, 2013). Especially important this environment is for children with speech and language impairment. Tendency to imitate is natural for children (Kalēja, 2016), but without stimulation it will not develop and there will be difficulties for a child to acquire new skills.

Speech therapist is working mostly with a child twice a week; therefore cooperation with family is necessary. Their efforts, care, energy, and involvement are a great impulsive force for the development of a child.

Cooperation is viewed from different perspectives, but in general it is common action, a process where exchange of intellectual values is going on; the development of experience is promoted (Černova, 2003); mutual exchange of

knowledge (Neubauer, 2012) and values (Frydkova, 2013) is present. Thus the development of a child in all areas will be successive in school (Lazarevič & Kopas-Vukašinič, 2007) and everyday life. Positive cooperation between family and speech therapist will be able to develop on mutual confidence and step by step solving tasks to reach common goals.

Research aim is to state the importance of cooperation between family and speech therapist to promote reading skills in first grade students.

Research methods: scientific literature analysis on actual issues, questionnaire for family and data analysis from pupil's speech therapy evaluation.

Theoretical framework

Reading skills are not innate, we have to learn and acquire them sequentially and purposed. If a child has speech and language impairments, the acquisition of reading skills becomes more complicated and it is not successful without struggle and speech therapist's intervention. It is especially for children with phonological impairment and developmental language disorders (DLD), because undeveloped phonematic perception (analysis and synthesis) is one of the most important barriers in acquiring reading skills. Phonematic perception is highly developed skill (Филичева, Орлова, & Туманова, 2015; Чиркина, 2002) to analyse phonemes and their relevance in words; skill to synthesize phonemes in syllables and syllables in words (Lüse, Miltiņa, & Tūbele, 2012; Weinrich & Zehner, 2017). These skills are not always highly developed in first grade students and speech therapist's help is needed. As mentioned before, speech therapist's sessions mostly are carried out twice a week and it is not enough to fortify newly acquired skills. Teacher and especially family support is needed. Without encouragement and advice family doesn't know what to do, how to support and train a child; therefore the task of a speech therapist is to promote this activity.

One of the possibilities is to have a conversation; for this adequate environment, conditions and mutual involvement is needed. Some authors have investigated this topic and created several stages for productive communication between family and speech therapist (Бачина & Самородова, 2009), but they are revised according to other researchers (Allen & Marsall, 2011; Frydkova, 2013; Rozenfelde & Čarkeviča, 2016; Чиркина, 2002).

- Look for the contacts on the first meeting, be patient, tolerant and follow ethical aspects; more listen to parents, you will speak later.
- You can discuss, what are the aims to reach; to develop taking into account child's individuality; if it is necessary, you can gently talk about unacceptable behaviour.

- You can state common demands in the upbringing process; you have to listen carefully about parent's point of view, even you think it is wrong; don't say, that these methods are incorrect, but give your suggestions and help.
- You have to strengthen the cooperation to gain common goals; you have to precise the possibilities and responsibilities, tasks; quarrels, different opinions can be, but it must not influence the further cooperation.
- Individual approach will be realised; speech therapist is not the king, you have to talk about difficulties, doubts; ask advice to parents and listen to their storey.
- The improvement of pedagogical cooperation is going on during all process and is based on conversations, questionnaires and all possible research and action course.

There are different forms of cooperation with family: conferences, parent meetings, sport activities, concerts, class parties, individual consultations, discussion clubs, participation in the class or school board, "open door" events, participation on speech therapy sessions, information on report desks, cooperation copybooks, and other (Černova, 2003; Lūse et al., 2012; Rozenfelde & Čapkeviča, 2016; Бачина & Самородова, 2009; Филичева et al., 2015). Not all possibilities were used, choice depends on real situation, parent's engagement and speech therapist's personality.

Research Results

This research was carried out to emphasize the effectiveness and importance of cooperation in intervention process to promote reading skills in first grade students with speech and language impairment. Questionnaires for parents/families were used and evaluation of pupil's phonological awareness and reading skills was carried out.

28 first grade students with phonematic perception disorders were selected and evaluated. Criteria for phonematic analysis and synthesis were used, and the results of evaluation before intervention and cooperation and after intervention and cooperation are presented in figure 1 and figure 2.

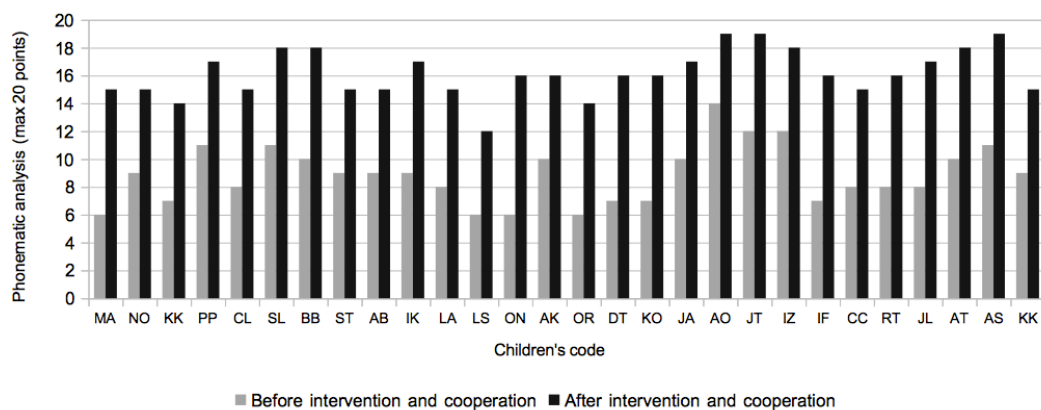


Figure 1 Phonematic Analysis

There were different tasks to evaluate phonematic concepts and phonematic analysis: to recognise specific word among other words; to recognise specific speech sound among other sounds; to determine the first sound in the word; to split the word in syllables; to define the speech sound sequence in the word. There are more tasks and exercises, but only some of them are presented here. Points for each task are 4, one point, if a child has difficulties to perform the task; two points, if a child can do the task with strong help; three points, if a child can do the task with small help; four points, if a child can perform the task by himself. The maximum for these tasks was 20 points, the minimum 4 points. The lowest performance was 6 points (in four children), but only one child performed pretty high level – 14 points. After intervention and cooperation activities level was higher in all children, nevertheless the maximum points were not reached.

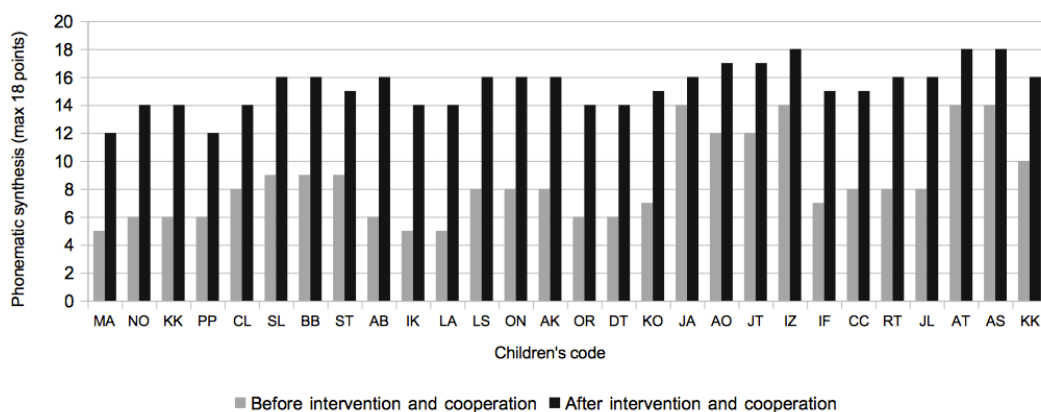


Figure 2 Phonematic Synthesis

Phonematic synthesis was evaluated by 3 tasks: to merge speech sounds in syllables; to merge syllables in words, and to merge speech sounds in words. For each task maximum points were 6, and minimum one point. This was complicated task for these children; 5-6 points from 18 reached 9 children, it is one third of all

participants. Phonematic synthesis is crucial indicator for acquiring reading skills. After intervention and cooperation results are good, three children reached maximum – 18 points and 12 children got 16-17 points.

Some aspects of reading skills were evaluated: reading technique, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (figure 3, figure 4 and figure 5).

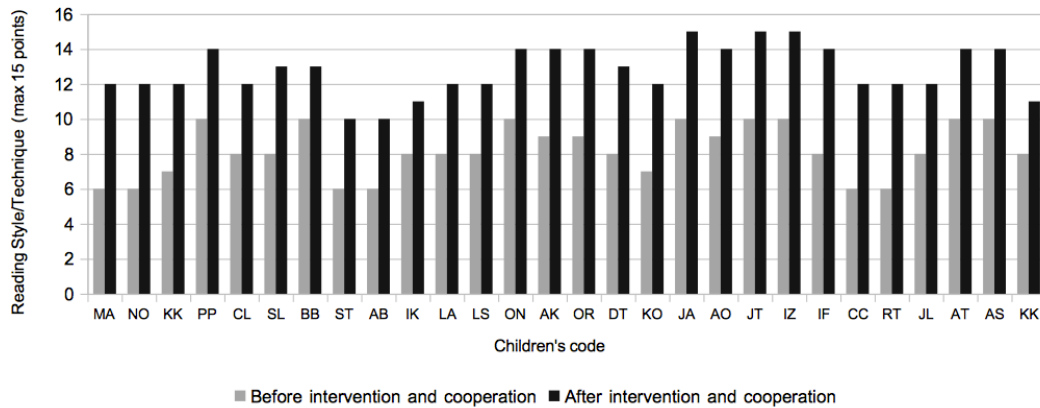


Figure 3 Reading Techniques

As we can see, reading technique is not on a high level and observed mistakes are mostly on phonological basis according to their oral speech difficulties. Children’s reading style and propriety was observed; in these indicators minimum 2 points and maximum 15 points were given; before intervention and cooperation children got 6-10 points. After intervention and cooperation some children reached high level and their reading is almost without mistakes.

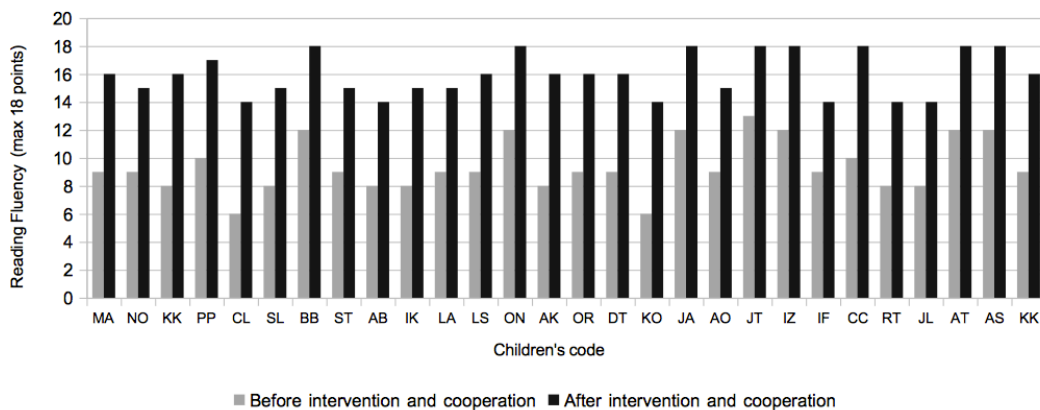


Figure 4 Reading Fluency

Observation of reading fluency gave children 6-13 points before intervention and cooperation, it is low level, because these children mostly read letter by letter, only some of them read by syllables and more complicated words they still read

letter by letter. After intervention and cooperation their reading fluency is better, and 8 children have reached very high level – 18 points.

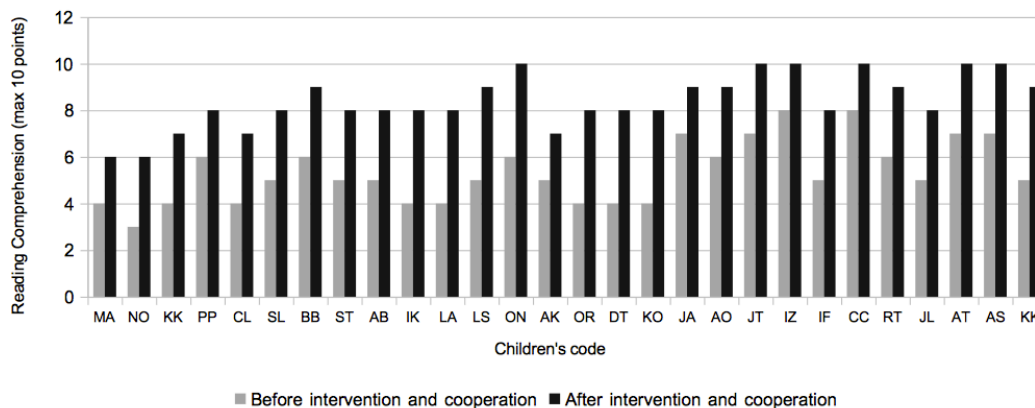


Figure 5 Reading comprehensions

Points for reading comprehension were given for possibility to retell the text, if no – answer to the questions or point to the appropriate picture. No one of these 28 children could retell the text, only answers on questions were performed and these answers were regarding the content; no hidden ideas were revealed; results were 3-8 points out of 10. After intervention and cooperation some of children started to retell the text, and answers on speech therapist’s questions were with full sentences and also some (6) revealing hidden idea.

Questionnaires for families were distributed among all 28 involved students, but there were only 23 answers.

There were questions about awareness about their children’s speech and language development (5 noticed problems in pre-school, but did nothing; 7 were attending speech therapist’s sessions, but were not involved in process; 8 didn’t notice anything; 3 were told, that there are problems, but they didn’t take it into account). Unfortunately these children didn’t get adequate intervention and their situation is not very good. They have mistakes in reading as well as in writing.

There was a question about the willingness to cooperate (4 told, that they have no time; 12 – they would like to do something, but they don’t know how and what to do; 7 – will participate and want to help their children). So 19 families wanted to be active participants and cooperate with speech therapist.

There were also questions about family members, age, and other experience (it is not analysed in this article). And then question about the time family is spending with their children and what are activities. Answers were very different – sports, cinema, video games, excursions, cooking and dancing. Only 4 families told, that they are reading together.

Cooperation and intervention

Based on this, cooperation copybooks were created and there were different tasks for families. Some of these tasks were given for the development of phonological awareness, some of them for reading.

As it is stated, that reading interest is one of the crucial components in acquiring reading skills and developing them, there were tasks for parents to find books or stories in which their children are interested in. They had to read them together, talk about it, make some paintings or other activities to share interest.

For those children, whose phonological awareness (analysis and synthesis) was on lower level, language games were presented (find the first sound; split the word on syllables, sounds; connect letters or sounds to create syllables, words etc.).

After these activities another questionnaires were distributed and there were questions about the time spent together with their children. All 23 families responded positively and two more families participated, because of conversations among participating parents and children. The evaluation of 28 first grade students showed the improvement of phonological awareness and also improved reading skills. The activity of first grade students was fantastic and during sessions they wanted to speak about their home tasks and deal with the activities at home with their families. Family members also responded, that from now they will follow up their children's activities and achievements; and they will participate in different activities, play language and other games, and reading will be a part of their daily activities.

Speech therapist's activities were based on the tasks stated for children with phonological impairment and reading. Due to the length of article, only steps will be presented: specification of articulation; differentiation of sounds mixed by pronunciation; development of phonological awareness – analysis and synthesis; reading tasks. Intervention of phonological analysis and synthesis was carried out in the form of games, handouts, working sheets, and tasks. Time was devoted also to speak about activities at home with parents or other family members. In total this research was carried out in a period of 7 months.

Conclusions

Speech therapist's work with children with developmental language disorder and reading problems is necessary and important. Specific help is needed for these children.

Cooperation with family improves the outcome and child's involvement in intervention process.

Phonological awareness and reading skills developed, and from observations – children want to read and deal their success with family.

Family involvement makes family stronger, raise the responsibility about child's development and achievements in school and everyday life.

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